

# FOLLOW THE CALL

TO HIM  
FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR  
INTO NEW LIFE  
TO BE KINGDOM PEOPLE





*Lord Creator God,*

*You know who we are before we are even born.*

*Please give me clarity, cast vision, and bring discernment as only You can.*

*Reveal Your heart and will for me*

*so I may live every moment fully alive in Your Kingdom,*

*knowing and walking with Jesus as my truest friend.*

*Father in heaven,  
Your holy name is what we want to glorify  
help the reflections from this reading to bring the me closer to You,  
deepening my walk while furthering Your kingdom  
Please bring me into alignment with Your love for the world,  
using my gifts ,abilities, and weaknesses to reveal Your glory.  
Lead and direct next steps, and as always, lead me to Your Son's face  
to be made more into His image*



# FOLLOW THE CALL

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# THIS WILL

You might forget who was speaking on the platform. Or the face of whoever handed you this book. Or what song was playing during worship. Or what you were wearing in that moment. Or who was sitting next to you.

## *Memories fade.*

You might find yourself “doubting and questioning whether it was God or the subwoofers that spoke to you.” Or whether that strange feeling in your chest was really just last night’s pizza. Others may claim you just got swept up in the moment. Saying you said *yes* to something you didn’t fully understand.

And that last part would be right. You don’t understand what you are saying *yes* to. But neither did any of us. God’s call doesn’t arrive with any paperwork. No legal documents dropped from heaven detailing what you should expect. Calling doesn’t come with a contract.

Calling comes for many of us before we even know what that word means. The moment we finally admit there’s nowhere else to run. When we realize the God of the universe isn’t going to stop chasing us until we say *yes*.

Maybe you’re confident in that moment. Whether it was loud or quiet, you are full of faith that God spoke to you. And we say to you:

## **YOU ARE CALLED.**

Maybe you’re full of doubt. Wishing you had a moment with God that might end your uncertainty. A burning bush, a voice from heaven, a sign—anything. We say to you:

## **YOU ARE CALLED.**

**God has already decided.** If your confidence can’t create calling, your lack of confidence sure can’t undo it either. Your memory of a moment will fade, but God’s call will not.

The question is not: are you called?

The question is: will you follow?

You won’t find a *mathematical formula* for calling in these pages. God doesn’t seem interested in cookie-cutter people, so it probably wouldn’t help much. But what you’ll find here is solid ground for your journey.

# THE CALL

# WILL NOT

It begins with understanding the **Call of Everyone**. We believe Jesus calls every person: To Him, For Your Neighbor, Into New Life, and To Be Kingdom People. And through the stories of Mary, Steven, and Paul—you'll see a God who calls out to all of us—and yet invites each of us to **live out** that calling uniquely.

This is the Holy Spirit's **Call to You**.

Each of us is invited into a **lifetime** of active listening to the voice of God and obedience to his leading. This is the holy space of *discernment*. No one can predict what God might ask of you. The kind of *makes-no-sense* steps of faith he'll ask you to take.

I don't know whether he'll ask you to express the call *to love your neighbor* by moving across the world or walking across the street with a meal for a stranger. You may be asked to live into the call *to be a citizen of God's Kingdom* by starting a non-profit, or turning the culture of a cutthroat business upside down.

No one knows all the surprising and beautiful ways God will use your story to show a hurting world the love of Jesus.

Your temptation may be to seek shortcuts when the journey of discernment seems long. But stay in it. Dive beyond the surface. Wrestle with these stories and questions. And let the Holy Spirit speak. Let Him reveal the way you are being uniquely prepared to live out the call of Jesus. In the miraculous and the mundane. In every moment of your life.

But don't wrestle alone. **Community** is the soil where God designed you to grow. We find understanding and empowerment to live out God's call in Spirit-filled community.

If you're serious about discerning God's call on your life, find someone who is living the kind of life with God you're after. A pastor, a mentor, a spiritual father or mother. And invite them onto this journey with you.

This is someone to read alongside you, discuss honestly, and ask you the hard questions. To pray with and for you. In the back, you'll find discussion prompts and a link to the online version of the book. I may not know you. But I know God has called you. Nothing can change that truth. Follow The Call.

# WILL NOT

# YOU ARE CALLED

*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)*

The apostle Paul knew his first calling.

The call from which every call is birthed. The call that will continue when there are no more people to tell about Jesus. The call that endures after He returns, and there are no more sick, poor, and oppressed.

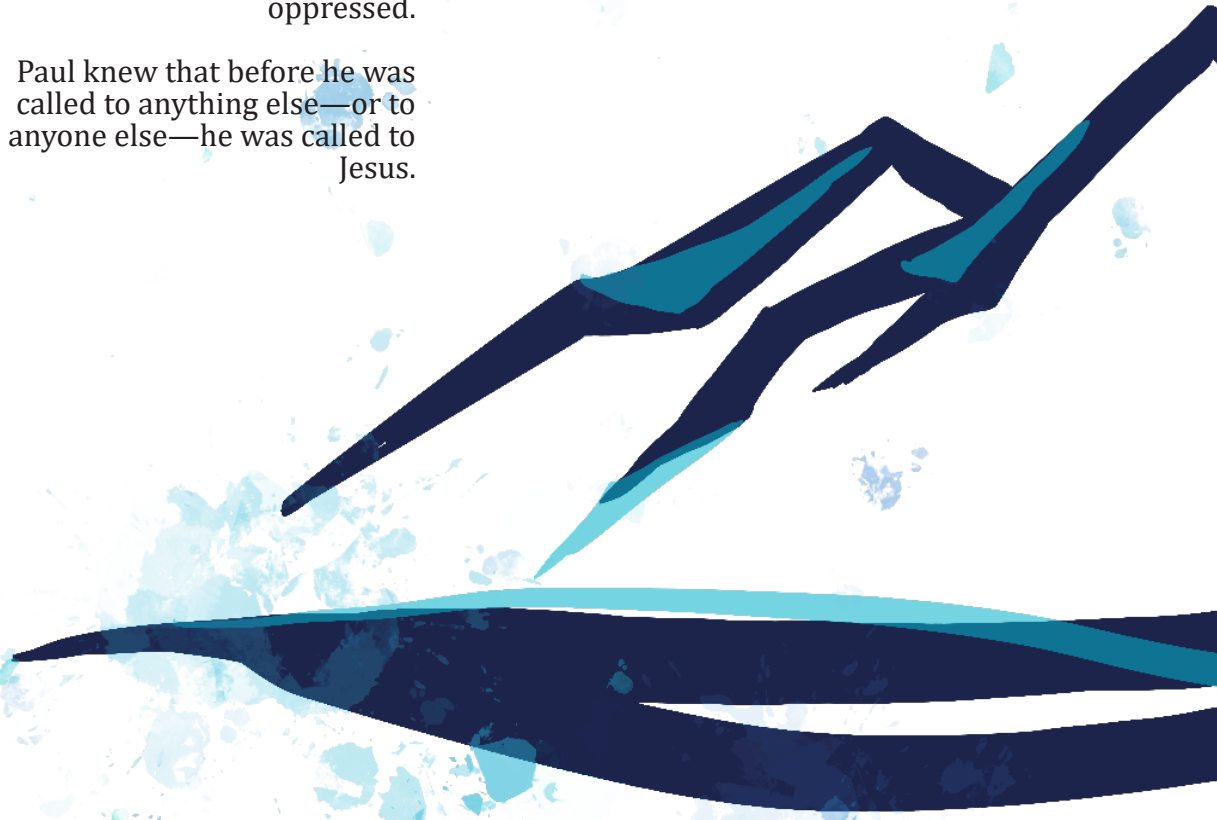
Paul knew that before he was called to anything else—or to anyone else—he was called to Jesus.

**TO KNOW AND BE KNOWN BY GOD.  
TO DELIGHT IN HIM.  
TO LOVE AND BE LOVED.**

You were loved before you were born. Before you'd done anything, the God of the universe held you in everlasting love.

He didn't need servants.

The Father, Son, and Spirit weren't lonely.



# TO HIM

## THIS IS THE CENTRAL TRUTH: YOU WERE MADE TO SHARE IN THE OVERFLOWING LOVE OF GOD.

You must hold this truth in your mind every moment you possibly can. The world will not speak this truth over you. The world will always sell its version of your life's purpose.

To be successful.

To be adored.

To just seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Yes, there is a mission. But that is not your foundation. To love and be loved by the God who made you—to know and be known—this is your foundation.

There's nothing you can achieve or accomplish for God to make Him love you one ounce more.

Let that be the truth that sets you free into the world with the love of God.

Every part of **The Call of Jesus** flows from his love.

## YOU CAN'T SHARE WHAT YOU DON'T HAVE.



# YOU ARE CALLED



*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* (Matthew 22:34-40)

Did you notice what the religious leaders tried to do?—They tried to compartmentalize **The Call**.

They tried to force Jesus to elevate one part of God's Word above the rest. Encourage Jesus to make a hierarchy of God's commands. They tried to back Jesus into a corner.

Instead of ranking a tier list of do's and don'ts—Jesus cuts straight to the heart of God's message that unifies the whole story.

To love God and your neighbor. Jesus refuses to tear apart these commands. He refuses to put these commands in separate boxes. He tells the truth—there's no pretending that we can love God and hate our neighbor at the same time.

Jesus makes it clear: the call to love our neighbor is not less than our first call to love and be loved by God. That's the wrong way to think about it. **The call to love and care for our neighbor flows from our first call to God.**

## NOBODY PUTS JESUS IN A CORNER

# FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR

Once we recognize our own identity as beloved masterworks of God, created in his image, we inevitably begin to see others in a whole new way! People we once viewed as outsiders, "others," or even beyond God's grace. Now we see them truly for the first time. We are called to see even the worst sinner as a child created in the image of God.

This is not an easy calling. In his famous parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus makes clear that loving our "neighbor" must include the people you despise. The people you fear. The people who mock you. The people who curse God.

God calls us to love our enemies because that's his business. God never stops chasing lost sheep. His nature is to love those who reject him. To love his enemies. Even to die for them.

God doesn't need us to fight flesh and blood humans for Him (Ephesians 6:12). God doesn't need culture warriors.

## GOD IS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO WILL GO SEARCHING FOR LOST SHEEP.

God is looking for men and women who will be brave enough to do more than fight their enemies—and die for them instead.

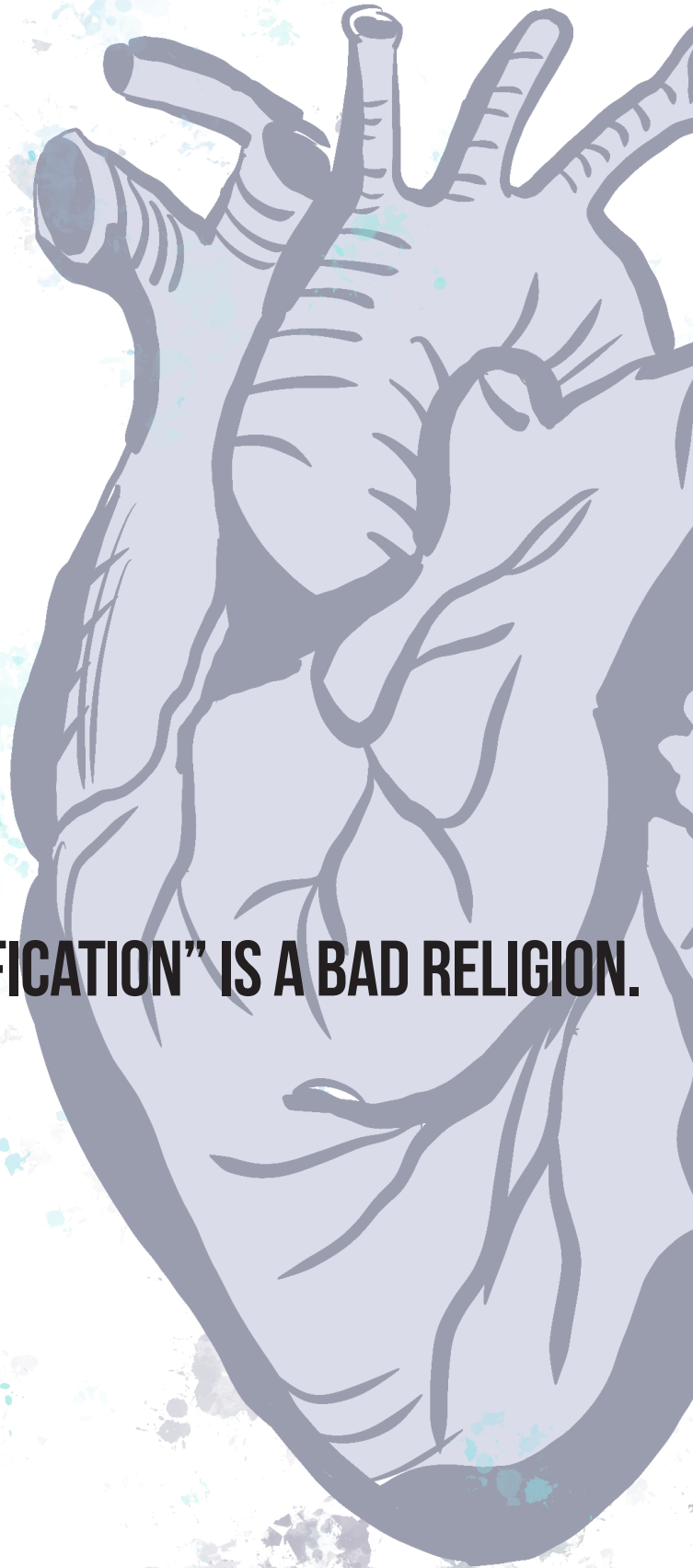


# YOU ARE CALLED

*“But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him... For you who welcome him, in whom He dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God’s terms. It stands to reason, doesn’t it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, He’ll do the same thing in you that He did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and He does, as surely as He did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ’s!” (Romans 8:9-11, MSG)*

**“BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION” IS A BAD RELIGION.**

The religion of “behavior modification” goes something like this: *“The important part is accepting that Jesus died to forgive your sins—then after that, it’s just about holding on tight and trying not to do all the bad things you naturally want to do. And if you work hard enough, maybe you can willpower your way to doing fewer bad things! Rinse and repeat till you die.”*



# INTO NEW LIFE

I don't know about you, but that sounds like a depressing life I don't want anything to do with.

There's so much better news. The Gospel is not just nice words. The Gospel is power. God knows how deep our brokenness goes.

He knows that we need more than forgiveness—we need completely new hearts. We don't just need new behaviors; we need new desires! God knows our brokenness goes all the way down.

**GOD WENT STRAIGHT TO THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM. LITERALLY.**

The Son of God was born as a human. Where humans have failed again and again to trust God—Jesus lived a perfect life of trust in God.

Where humans have failed again and again to follow God's commands and love their neighbors—Jesus perfectly loved both his friends and enemies.

His life of trust and love led Him to be crucified on the cross and confront the ultimate enemy. And three days later, He rose again and defeated the power of death over all humanity.

Fully God and fully human—Jesus opened the way for us to experience new life.

And today, through His Holy Spirit, the power and life of Jesus is available to us.

**We are called** to surrender to the loving work of the Spirit. **The Call of Everyone** to be transformed from the inside out. Not the appearance of new life. Not just nice-looking behaviors.

Real.

Transformed.

Life.



# YOU ARE CALLED

*Again, Jesus said, "What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." (Mark 4:30-32)*

*One day, the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come?" Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you." (Luke 17:20-21 NLT)*

This doesn't make much sense.  
Especially to Jesus's listeners.

Imagine waiting your whole life for the Messiah to rescue you. Waiting for God's chosen king. Watching for any sign of his Kingdom. Waiting for Him to conquer your Roman oppressors. Waiting for your home to be free and your children to be safe. Waiting to live in a kingdom where you wouldn't be powerless anymore. And then, to your great disappointment, Jesus says you must live in the Kingdom of God before you can see it.

This is what Jesus's most famous sermon is about! In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus lays out the roadmap to being a citizen of God's Kingdom. It touches every part of life. Our money. Our sexuality. Our prayer life. Our enemies. There's nothing that's off limits.

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ALREADY AMONG YOU



# TO BE KINGDOM PEOPLE

Jesus proclaims: to live in the Kingdom means we live every part of life in a way that recognizes who is King. Our Call as the church is to be a Kingdom people. People who recognize the reality that Jesus is King. To live the truth that there's no part of life where Jesus isn't already king.

**YOU AREN'T CALLED TO BUILD THE KINGDOM. YOU ARE CALLED TO LIVE IN THE KINGDOM RIGHT NOW.**

But until God's Kingdom comes in full power when Jesus returns—people can still choose to reject the Kingdom. In every space. In every home. School. Soccer field. Bar. Courtroom. And political office. In all places, people must choose whether they will live by the values of Jesus and his Kingdom—or decide good and evil for themselves.

They can choose to make laws that harm the vulnerable. To use whatever influence they have to protect themselves and tear down others. To love self over God and neighbor. In this broken world, the Church is God's "Plan A". You are a member of that Church. We are ambassadors of God's Kingdom. Take confidence in that. Until He returns, we are the hands and feet of Jesus.

**WILL WE FOLLOW GOD'S CALL TO LIVE LIKE JESUS IS KING?**

When we are tempted to decide good and evil for ourselves—will we trust his rule over our lives instead? When others leave the poor behind—will we join Jesus in lifting them up? When others value getting ahead and the false sense of security that comes from hoarding wealth—will we pursue love that really lasts?

This is the **call of everyone.**



# MARY MAGDALENE

*Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her,*

*"Woman, why are you crying?"  
"They have taken my Lord away," she said,  
"and I don't know where they have put him."*

*"At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking He was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that He had said these things to her. (John 20:11-18)*

**MARY WAS  
NEVER GIVEN THE  
TITLE "PASTOR"  
OR "MISSIONARY."  
BUT THOSE ARE  
THE VERY THINGS  
SHE DID.**

When we look at Mary's life, I sense that she lived out "calling" in its truest form. Mary didn't need her culture or a religious title to help identify her.

**Jesus did that for her.**

Mary's story reveals that your identity will never just be in the things you do, but in who you are. We are sons and daughters of the Most High. You are his beloved. He is your Heavenly Father. Jesus lived, died, and rose again because He loves you and wants to see you made whole. This is where we start when understanding calling.



Jesus meets Mary outside the tomb after the worst weekend she's ever had (*You might think you've had a bad weekend, but imagine watching your best friend be tortured and crucified*).

But with one word, everything changed.

*"Mary..."* In that single moment, she knows that everything that was lost has been found. She knows Jesus, and He's standing alive right in front of her.

What Jesus says next is scandalous. In a time when the world was not ready to accept the word of a woman, Jesus chose her to be the one to first share the good news, the gospel.

When we have been called by God—it changes everything. It changes the way we view ourselves. It overturns the boxes we have been placed in. It dismantles the hold our past life may have on us. Before Mary was sent by Jesus—she'd already responded to Him in the most beautiful way possible. Instantly, she shouts and leaps to embrace him!

See, Mary was able to live this bold life following Jesus because she first lived in the truth that Jesus was calling her first to know and be known by Him.

This was the foundation of the missional ministry she lived out..


Mary's life before Jesus was not easy. Just like you and I have things we are trying to heal from or deal with, Mary was also fighting her own demons. Literally. (*She was possessed and had 7 demons come out of her—Luke 8:2*).

It was the real and genuine relationship she had with Jesus that changed her. It not only physically healed her from the torment of her life, but it blossomed into something more than she could ever think or imagine.

Living in that freedom is accessible to you as well. Walking in your calling where your present is not determined by the past. God adores mending where we have been broken. His healing love restores us and overflows even onto the ones around us.

**YOU ARE HIS BELOVED.**





Mary had lived Psalm 34:8, *"Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him."*

Then, she followed Him and dedicated her life and resources to sharing the gospel. She traveled along with Jesus as a disciple, using her own personal money and abilities to support the ministry of Jesus.

Mary was devoted. She was the last at the cross and the first one to the tomb. Not because she was given an impressive title by her religious leaders, but because she was simply living a life fully devoted to Jesus. Even to the end. When others had abandoned Him, Mary knew her life had been called to Jesus.

Calling comes from God. He alone is who we live out our calling for. Funny enough, it's now the church that has given her a title—*"Apostles to the Apostles."* Think about this. The Apostles were mostly known as the 12 men that Jesus chose as his closest followers, appointed to share his word and teachings. And

Mary was called to be **THE** one who got to share with them that The Lord is risen!

## MARY WAS DEVOTED

For those of us who are striving to understand God's call on our lives, look at Mary's story and take a deep breath. Mary had to live out of belief and obedience, rarely out of certainty or complete understanding.

So be encouraged. You don't have to have the details of your calling figured out!

Jesus honored her as Apostle to the Apostles. Missionary to the Missionaries. Woven into these titles, first and foremost, is a humble servant of God.

I highly doubt Mary knew that by her faithful serving and following, she would be the one to usher in the greatest news known to mankind. She shows up at the tomb asking for his body with no insight into how she will carry his body away.

Her eyes just yearned to see him.  
Her heart to be with him.  
So keep your eyes on Jesus.  
Keep your heart close to him.  
Stay devoted, even when things  
are yet to be seen or understood.

## KEEP YOUR HEART CLOSE TO HIM

**Devotion to Jesus** allows us to be confident that He will put the plans into place when they are needed.

Devotion to Jesus is where your calling discernment begins and will always return. King Jesus is devoted to you. He will never leave you or forsake you. If you listen closely, I know you can hear Him calling your name.



# STEPHEN

This little group of followers has experienced the depths of despair when Jesus was crucified, and the highest joys when He rose from the dead. Can you imagine their excitement and delight as the resurrected Jesus appears to over 500 people over 40 days? And then, all of a sudden, they are navigating a new normal. Jesus has gone back to Heaven, leaving the Holy Spirit to empower and guide them. Their task is introducing the rest of the world to the will, ways, and working presence of God. As this incredibly diverse group of people from different walks of life comes together to form this new community, something predictable happens. **It doesn't go smoothly.**

## PEOPLE ARE GOING WITHOUT, BEING LEFT OUT, AND ON THE VERGE OF BEING PUSHED OUT

This is **normal** throughout history, but Jesus showed that **it isn't normal in his presence**. So, the people of God do something so radical that it makes the news forever. In fact, even those who despise God's people can't help but respect them for it. A man named Stephen is asked to help people live out **the new version of humanity** Jesus has given them. The mission changes Stephen's life, the community, and eventually the entire course of human history. It all starts when he chooses to become a waiter... well...sort of...

As the church is growing, they are trying to figure out how to care for the most vulnerable members of the group—widows. Widows lacked family or support structures, so they often went without food and care. In the early church, some widows were given food and care, but others were overlooked. The Disciples were concerned about this problem, so they tasked the church with a wise solution. You can read about it in Acts 6:3-6:

*Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose **Stephen**, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

Did you notice what set Stephen apart within this team? He is full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. It is fascinating to note what is on the list and what is not. Qualities like leadership, intelligence, charisma, communication skills, and personality **don't make the list**.

But Stephen's confidence in Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit make him a perfect member of the team. Something interesting happens when this team is commissioned to wait tables with equity.

Acts 6:7 says,  
*“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”*

**The faithful service of Stephen’s team worked.**

First, it freed others up to do what they were specifically called to do—spread the word of God through preaching and prayer. Second, it spread the word of God by meeting the needs of people with justice and compassion. The result?

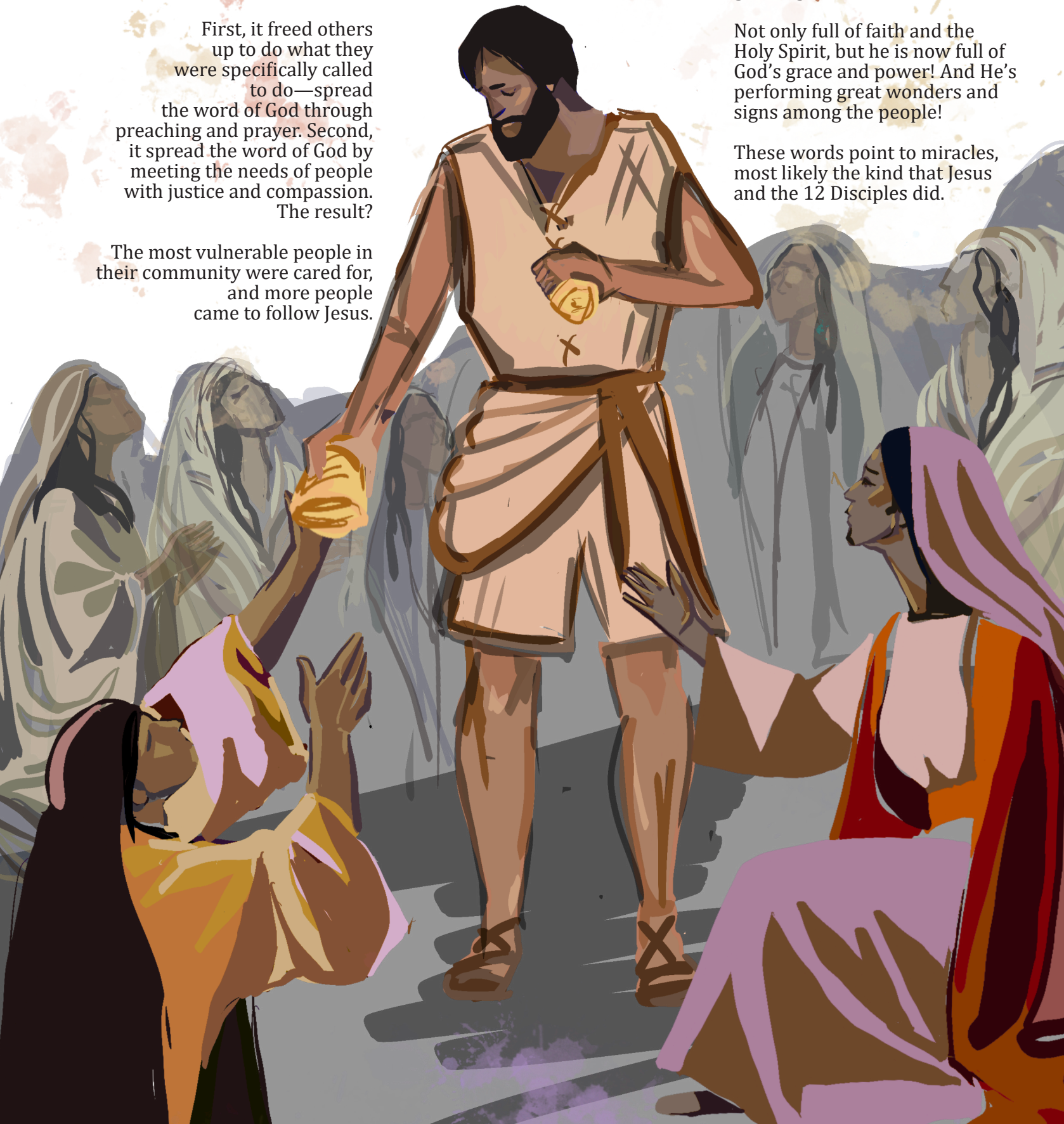
The most vulnerable people in their community were cared for, and more people came to follow Jesus.


Then...things get even more interesting. Acts 6:8 tells us,  
*“Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.”*

Do you notice Stephen’s resume growing?

Not only full of faith and the Holy Spirit, but he is now full of God’s grace and power! And He’s performing great wonders and signs among the people!

These words point to miracles, most likely the kind that Jesus and the 12 Disciples did.





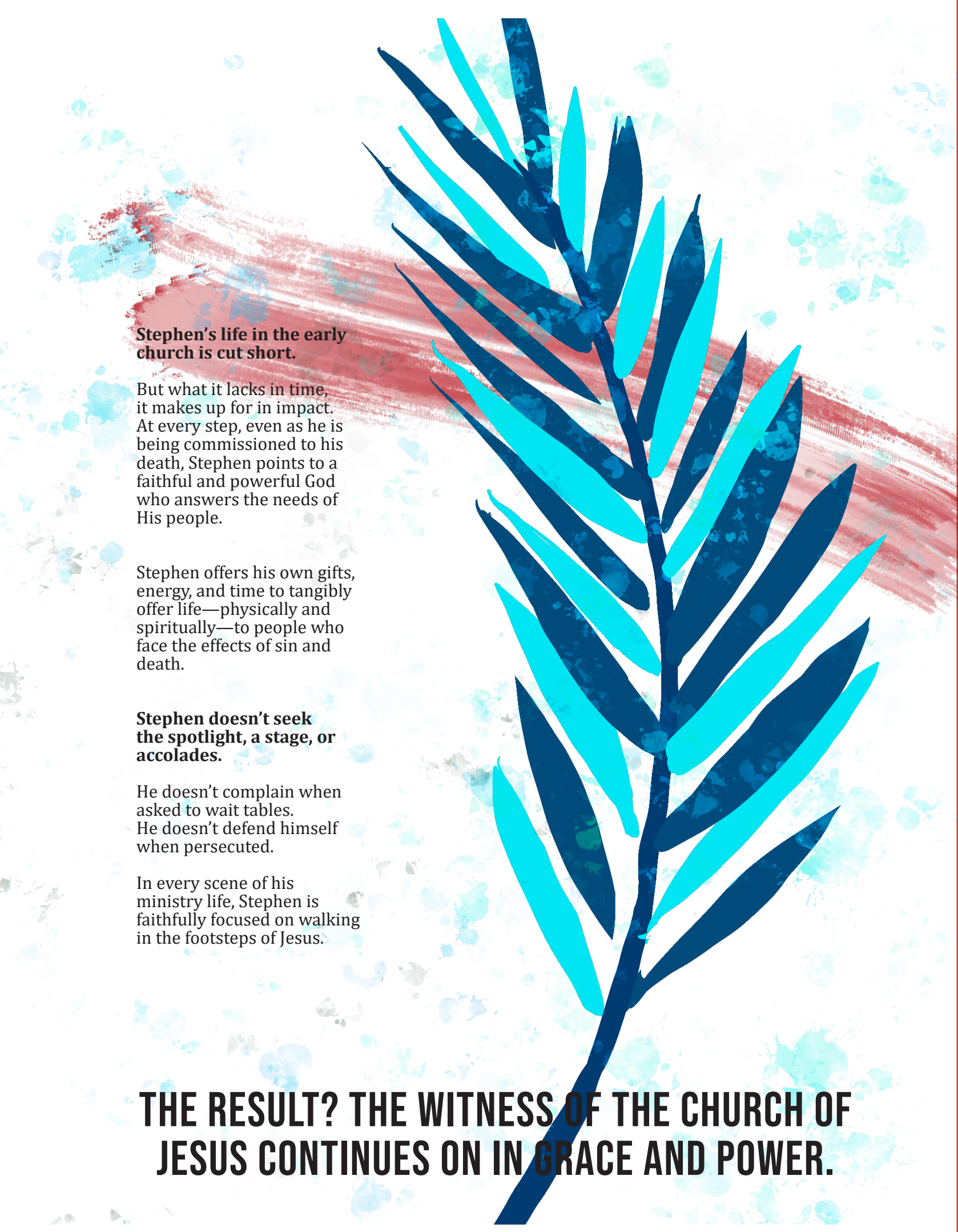
Sadly, there are those outside the church who don't appreciate all they are seeing. They start to antagonize and argue with Stephen. But God is at work so powerfully in Stephen's life that he wisely defeats all of their arguments. This is the beginning of the end for Stephen. These troublemakers make false accusations against Stephen and put him on trial.

When put on trial before the Sanhedrin (a group of Jewish leaders in authority), he is asked whether the charges were true.

What Stephen did next surprised everyone – he preached a thorough history of the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of God's people. He ends the sermon by showing how all Scripture points to Jesus as God.

This is a closing scene in the life of Stephen. He is dragged out and put to death by his accusers...but not before pronouncing one of the most radical messages of forgiveness in history with his last words,

**“LORD, DO NOT HOLD THIS SIN AGAINST THEM!” (ACTS 7:60)**

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**Stephen's life in the early church is cut short.**

But what it lacks in time, it makes up for in impact. At every step, even as he is being commissioned to his death, Stephen points to a faithful and powerful God who answers the needs of His people.

Stephen offers his own gifts, energy, and time to tangibly offer life—physically and spiritually—to people who face the effects of sin and death.

**Stephen doesn't seek the spotlight, a stage, or accolades.**

He doesn't complain when asked to wait tables. He doesn't defend himself when persecuted.

In every scene of his ministry life, Stephen is faithfully focused on walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

**THE RESULT? THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CONTINUES ON IN GRACE AND POWER.**

# P A U L

*"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' He replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything." (Acts 9:1-9)*

## THERE WAS A MAN WHO THOUGHT GOD WAS HIS MASCOT

Picture this: a brilliant, highly educated religious expert storms down the Damascus Road with official papers in hand, breathing threats against followers of Jesus. He's absolutely convinced he's doing God's work. Then, in one blinding moment, everything he thought he knew gets turned upside down.

Before his encounter with Jesus, Saul (Paul) had every reason to feel confident. Educated under Gamaliel, fluent in multiple languages, and well-versed in Hebrew law, he was the religious equivalent of having multiple advanced degrees. As a Pharisee from Benjamin's tribe and a Roman citizen, he occupied society's highest levels.

But here's what makes Paul's story so challenging: **he genuinely believed he was serving God by persecuting Christians.** Paul operated from deep conviction, using his considerable gifts in what he was certain was God's service. *How often do we assume our strong convictions or religious background automatically mean God is on our side?*

Paul's story warns us against treating God like our personal mascot who simply endorses whatever we're already doing.

Paul's transformation teaches us something profound about calling: to be called by God means being willing to be shepherded by God, even when that means discovering we've been going the wrong way.

*"Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'" (Acts 9:3-4).*

**PAUL'S RESPONSE REVEALS THE HEART OF CALLING: RADICAL SURRENDER**

Paul doesn't get a gentle suggestion; he gets knocked flat, blinded, and confronted with reality: in persecuting Jesus' followers, he's been persecuting Jesus himself. True calling often begins with disruption.

God's call doesn't necessarily validate our current direction; sometimes it completely redirects us.

Paul's response reveals the heart of calling:

**“SUDDENLY A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN FLASHED AROUND HIM. HE FELL TO THE GROUND AND HEARD A VOICE SAY TO HIM, ‘SAUL, SAUL, WHY DO YOU PERSECUTE ME?’” (ACTS 9:3-4)**



When Jesus identifies himself, Paul immediately asks, "What shall I do, Lord?" He doesn't argue or demand proof. A man supremely confident in his religious understanding suddenly becomes a student again.

This surrender becomes Paul's defining characteristic. Throughout his letters, he repeatedly calls himself a "servant" of Christ Jesus. The man who once operated with the high priest's authority now finds identity in submission to a higher authority.

Enter Ananias. A relatively unknown disciple who receives his own challenging call. God tells him to restore Paul's sight. Ananias's response is beautifully human: *"Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done"* (Acts 9:13).

Ananias doesn't want to shepherd someone who has persecuted people he loves. When Ananias obeys and calls Paul "Brother Saul," he demonstrates that we're called not just to be shepherded, but to shepherd others, even when it's uncomfortable.

Paul's transformation establishes a pattern that defines his entire ministry: **constant surrender to the Spirit's leading.** His life becomes a series of moments where he allows God to redirect him, preaching to Gentiles despite cultural assumptions, enduring suffering rather than seeking comfort, and mentoring others instead of hoarding influence.

This pattern becomes Paul's method for shepherding the communities he pastors. **He doesn't lead through domination** but by modeling what it looks like to be continually transformed by Jesus, **constantly open to correction and redirection.**



# WE GAIN AUTHORITY BY SURRENDERING IT

SOMETIMES BEING CALLED MEANS BECOMING A RELUCTANT SHEPHERD TO UNLIKELY PEOPLE.



**WE BECOME SHEPHERDS BY REMAINING SHEEP.**

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR CALLING

1. God calls everyone to know God by knowing and following Jesus. Paul's encounter reveals that learning about God isn't the same as knowing God personally through Jesus.
2. God calls His people to serve other people. Paul's ministry shifts from serving his religious agenda to serving others—Jews and Gentiles alike.
3. God calls people to fully surrender their lives to His will and ways. Paul's dramatic turnaround demonstrates complete surrender.
4. God calls people to offer their gifts to the local and global church. Paul's intellectual abilities and cultural background become tools for building up the church rather than advancing his position.

**Paul never graduates from being shepherded.** Even as he becomes one of history's most influential leaders, he maintains the posture of someone who can be corrected and transformed by God.

**This is the paradox of Christian calling: we become shepherds by remaining sheep.**

**We lead by modeling what it looks like to be led by Jesus.**

Paul's journey reminds us that God's calling isn't about finding a career that makes us happy. It's about allowing Jesus to transform us so completely that our lives become instruments of his love and grace.

The question isn't whether you're called, you are. The question is whether you're willing to be radically transformed by the One who calls you, even if it means discovering you've been heading in the wrong direction. Paul's life shows us that this willingness to be shepherded by God is the foundation of all authentic ministry and the beginning of truly understanding what it means to be called.

Sometimes I lie awake and wonder if I've missed the train. It's not a literal train (or at least I hope not).

**It's the train of my calling.**

Maybe I misheard God.  
Maybe I was supposed to go somewhere else.

Learn something else.

Do something else.

Serve someone else.

Be someone else.

In those moments, I imagine "calling" as a train. I'm desperately searching the station for that train marked with bright letters — *God's Will!*

If I can just know for sure that I'm on that train, then I can stop worrying that I've missed God's call.

# CONCLUSION:



Just when I finally started to believe God really **called me**—now He's content to be silent?

Why won't God just tell me which college is His will for me? Which career am I called to? Which relationship? Which church? Which ministry? Which mission field?

It seems that God is far less anxious about our calling than we are. We worry that we'll accidentally stumble out of God's plan—when, from God's perspective, a heart turned towards Him is never out of his will.

What if God's will isn't a train we catch, but a person we daily choose? The list goes on forever.

# WILL I MISS THE TRAIN?



And so, we worry. We worry that we've ruined it by something we've done or haven't done. We fear that our life choices have downgraded God's great plan for us. We missed our flight connection to Hawaii, so we're stuck in Boise, Idaho instead.

## BUT WHAT IF THERE'S NO "PLAN B"?

Christians have proclaimed for thousands of years this mystery too wonderful to understand. From God's perspective, everything—and I do mean everything—works together to become "Plan A".

The apostle Paul wrote it this way: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

# FOLLOW THE CALL

It seems that God is far less anxious about our calling than we are.

We worry that we'll accidentally stumble out of God's plan—when, from God's perspective, a heart turned towards Him is never out of his will.

What if God's will isn't a train we catch, but a person we daily choose?

The truth is: we should seek God's voice in all things.

With passion.

With perseverance.

With others.

Through the silence.

But walking with God doesn't require vocational or career certainty. It requires simple faithfulness.

When nothing is clear and life feels like it's going nowhere—the foundation of your life with God stays the same:

The details of your life will change. Where you live, where you work, where you serve.

But God loves you. He's sent you with His love for others.

He's transforming you in His image. To show what He is like to all the world.

You are called. You haven't missed the train.

Because God is good, your life is still "Plan A".

**FOLLOW THE CALL.**



# COMMUNITY IS THE SOIL OF OUR CALLING.


Where we find  
nourishment. Where  
our roots grow deep.  
Discernment on calling  
that is rooted in a  
faithful, Spirit-filled  
community is  
God's design.

This book is not a  
replacement for the  
wisdom of mentors,  
pastors, and spiritual  
mothers and fathers.  
Just the opposite.

# DON'T WALK



**GOD IS CALLING YOU—  
SO THAT MEANS  
HE'S ALSO CALLING  
OTHERS TO WALK WITH YOU.**



For some of you, this person already comes to mind. A youth pastor, leader, teacher, or someone whose spiritual wisdom you trust.

Your next step is to go right now and ask them very simply: I need a spiritual guide as I pursue God's calling. Would you start by reading and discussing this book with me?

# L K A L O N E

*Who do you see that is more than themselves?*

*Whose life doesn't make sense without believing Jesus lives in them?*

*Who lives and loves so radically that has to be the Holy Spirit working through them?*

# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Begin by praying with your mentor, asking God to guide in your conversation and speak clearly about His calling on your life.*

## THE CALL OF EVERYONE

Discuss with your mentor, what resonated with you about the four things we are all called to?

Which parts didn't make sense or were different from what you've heard about calling? What are you wrestling with?

*Take a moment to pray and listen for what the Lord might be revealing to you about your calling.*

## STEPHEN

Stephen's service to the church covers everything from serving food to performing signs and wonders to preaching before a crowd of preachers. But which moments of ministry does the Bible say God empowered Stephen for? What does that reveal to us?

Stephen's story is full of purpose connected to pain (i.e., widows, people needing miracles, and his own pain). How might experiencing pain in the world help us discover or understand God's calling in our lives?

How do we see Stephen answering God's calling to Jesus, For His Neighbor, Into New Life, and To Be part of God's Kingdom People?

## MARY

Have you ever felt like your past or future mistakes would cancel you out of God's call?

In what ways do you rely more on recognition and affirmation from others than on who God says you are?

What part of life are you tempted to believe that you need certainty in order to follow God? How do belief and obedience serve us more than certainty or complete understanding?

## PAUL

Am I willing to surrender my certainty and plans when God calls me in a different direction?

How is God using others to guide me, and how is he calling me to guide others, even when it feels uncomfortable?

How is God calling me to shepherd others in my life right now? Who are the people he has placed around me that I'm meant to guide, care for, and sacrificially serve?



MENTORS: SCAN HERE FOR A FULL DIGITAL COPY OF THIS BOOK AND RESOURCES FOR DISCERNING CALLING WITH YOUR STUDENTS!