

Series: AS YOU PLAN YOUR YEAR... August 17, 2008

**LIVE YOUR CALLING!
1 Peter 2:4-12**

I. INTRO

A. I have always been totally fascinated by planes. I got my first ride in a private plane at the age of about 14—and I was hooked. I started building and flying model planes. I thought, “There **must** be some way to do this for a living!” I had already sensed this tug toward serving God in some way—perhaps in another land. I **loved** nature—being out in wild places. Then I heard this guy speak who was a jungle pilot in the country of Burma—Myanmar.

-And I thought, “That’s it! That’s my calling! I’ll be a jungle pilot!” Then I found out that to be a jungle pilot, you have to fix your own plane. In the process of thinking this through, I learned something that really helped me. All through life you and I have to decide, “Is this going to be a **hobby** or my **life’s work**?”

1. I’ll bet you’ve done this too. Anyone here who played hockey—and dreamed that you would be the star of an NHL team? Anyone **still** hoping for that? At some point you realize, “Okay—this is a **great** hobby for me—until I lose my knees!”
2. Anyone watched **American Idol** or **Canadian Idol**? You see people who’ve been told most of their lives that they’re really good—they ought to be a music star. Then they meet Simon Cowell—or some other person who pricks their balloon.
3. Being **able** to do something—and being **really** good at it are two different things. Sometimes this has to do with ability—and sometimes it has to do with working at it.
-This is really clear in when it comes to having children. Conceiving them is quite fun; raising them—being a really **good** parent is one of the toughest callings in life. Being a **good** parent doesn’t just happen; it’s a **choice** that’s sometimes painful—stretches you to the breaking point. You **choose** it because being a **bad** parent is an unthinkable option.

B. Now, here’s where I’m going with this. Choosing to follow Jesus and finding grace instead of judgment—living forever—is, in my humble opinion, a no-brainer.
-When you make that decision to simply invite Jesus to forgive you and lead your life—incredible things happen. You are actually adopted into the family of Jesus.

You receive the Holy Spirit as God’s gift to you—who starts working in you to give you spiritual power—to say **yes** to what’s good and right, and **no** to what will destroy you. You become part of what God is doing to renew and restore everything around us and make what is **wrong...right!** And you receive the gifts and calling to help change the world, one person at a time.

-But then you have to decide what kind of difference you're going to make with your life. You can't live out your calling in your spare time—as a hobby. To follow Jesus in a way that makes a difference in the world and accomplishes your calling takes time, thought and ongoing personal growth. Sometimes it lifts your soul to the highest highs; sometimes it's just hard slugging. But you stay faithful, you keep moving forward—because you know what's at stake.

- **Everyone** has a mission. You have one. And it's **the** most important thing you will do with your life.

II. WHO YOU ARE

- A. How many of you have ever seen the movie, *The Princess Diaries*. It's every little girl's dream. Julie Andrews plays the grandmother queen who comes to visit—and tells her that she's actually a princess—and next in line for the throne. What makes the movie interesting is the reality check in it; being a princess and **acting** like a princess are two different things!

-Today I want to take a shot at telling you **who** you are because of Jesus—if you've chosen to follow Him. Peter, the one Jesus asked to lead his Church describes who we are in a letter he wrote to some very ordinary people.

1. Let me give you some background. Peter, I'm quite certain, **never** thought of himself as a leader who would make a difference on this planet. That is, until he met Jesus.

He'd very likely been passed over by all the Rabbi's looking only for the best and brightest students—and so he would be a fisherman--the son of a fisherman. He thought, "I'll die with hands that stink like fish!"

-But one day Jesus showed up and said, "Follow me!" and changed his life—and his vision for what God could do through him. His calling would be greater than what he did to make money.

-In this letter, he first gives the starting point—the same one Jesus gave. **Love**. He says

You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. (1 Peter 1:22 NLT)

-At the core, transformation is about **who we are**. God has **called** us to be loving people—people who actually love their neighbors as themselves.

2. For that to happen, there needs to be a renovation. If you renovate your kitchen or your bathroom—what's the first think you have to do? Get rid of the **old** stuff, right? **Then** put in the new.

-Listen to how these verses follow that pattern:

So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. (the cleaning out of the old) Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full

experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness. (1 Peter 2:1-3 NLT)

-Peter had personally experienced a massive transformation. God's plan through Jesus is to make us *like* Jesus. Then as little Christ's—**Christians** we go into our world as salt and light.

People who are different in a good way—and have a good influence on people around them. So. How is it that so many people choose to follow Jesus—and end up really no different than anyone around them? Well, it's a **choice** we make.

3. Peter is quite clear here about **who** we become in Jesus when we choose Him to save us and lead us. It's pretty amazing. Let me read part of it—then grab some of the ideas for us:

-Peter starts with how the religious professionals—with all their laws, pomp and circumstance totally rejected Jesus as the cornerstone of what God is building in this world. Then, these words:

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy, now you have received God's mercy." Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. (1 Peter 2:9-12 NLT)

-Remember the transformation Peter talked about above—how it changes who we are and how we act? Jesus described it as being **born from above** or **born again**.

The Bible further says that when this happens, we are adopted as God's children—sons and daughters of the best, kindest, most powerful and generous Father in the universe!

- a. First, we get a brand new start. We move from death to life, from darkness to light. The **Spirit of God**, when He takes up residence does this in us—just like He raised Jesus from the dead! We now have spiritual power to say **no** to what is destructive, and **yes** to what will transform us and help others. It's an internal extreme makeover that helps us look and act like God's representatives. But **you** have to cooperate--allow Him to train you.

b. If you're a parent, you can identify with what God **longs** for in your life. You want your children to be healthy; to have a great relational world; to use their potential—and find meaning and joy in doing that. And nobody better mess with them—not when you're around! That's what it means to be God's child.

4. There's more! In the old system, all the dealings with God had to be done in a temple with special people—priests—coming to God on our behalf. Not any more. Our bodies are now the temple of God's Spirit—and God's people on this planet make up the greater temple where God dwells. An early leader, Paul, says:

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT)

-That is a **profound** statement. Think about your home. How many of you don't get too upset if there's garbage on the floor--if the doors unlocked and strangers can come in and out and take stuff.

Most people try to keep their homes clean--they have to live there.

-Well, the Spirit has made your heart and my heart His home. And He's not doing the Martha Stewart thing—you know, with ceramic nameplates and napkins folded into little ducks. He's interested in the structural integrity of your heart—creating a heart and soul big and strong enough to know get crushed by life.

5. Peter's imagery of who we are gets even **more** profound. Let me read from a different translation.

But you are a CHOSEN PEOPLE, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, a HOLY NATION, a PEOPLE BELONGING TO GOD, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the PEOPLE OF GOD; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10 NIV)

-As followers of Jesus—and Canadians—we are kind of a nation within a nation. Strategically placed by Jesus all over to love people—to show compassion—to make a difference.

But there's another system—a world system that is mainly about consuming. If you choose to be a part of **God's** people—but swear your allegiance to another system that has little to do with God—it will mess you up! You can't play both sides!

B. The story gets better. As followers of Jesus, we don't need priests to do business with God on our behalf, **we** are the priests—an integral part of what God is building. Vs. 5 of this same chapter says:

And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. (1 Peter 2:5 NLT)

1. Before Jesus, there was no way to deal with sin, come to God, or even express your gratitude—unless you did it through a priest at the temple. **They**—and they alone were God's representatives.

-Anyone know who it is who can come right into God's presence and represent Him right here, right now—on August 17, 2008? It's **you**. What Jesus did for us on the cross is absolutely amazing. **We don't need someone special to approach God on our behalf.** We pray to **Jesus** because He alone is the One who goes to the Father on our behalf; not Mary, not a priest, not a pastor. -By the way, how well do you think we've done on this since Jesus? It would appear that for at least 1500 years we turned to **special** people with special education. They became **reverends, priests, Fathers**—the only ones authorized to handle holy things—when Jesus made it clear that we could go directly to the Father by coming to Him!

2. Now. If you and I are God's people, a holy nation—his priesthood—his representatives--who do you think He's using to accomplish His purposes in this world? How many of you think it's primarily pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and other religious professionals? How many of you think it's **you**? Well, the correct answer would be--**you**.

-See, we have this strange concept that some people receive a mysterious calling from God--and if you don't get the calling, then you're off the hook. And that is simply not true.

-Now, please don't miss what I'm saying. Jesus called Peter to lead his church—and He still calls people to give leadership to the church and other groups as a vocation. I felt that sense of calling-- when I was only about 10. But that calling is not necessarily more holy or more worthy. It doesn't make me or anyone else **reverend**, with better connections--you know, to clear up weather for parties and soccer games. It is **just as important that you follow YOUR calling as it is that I follow MY calling.**

-You have a calling on your life. I want you to think about the word **minister** or **pastor** or maybe **priest**, depending on what tradition you come from. What image comes to your mind? Maybe it's someone offering counsel and hope, or showing compassion to a person who's in the hospital, or baptizing.

-Now, I want you to put **yourself** in that place. That's precisely how the people reading this letter would've felt. "**Me?** But you have to be a certain kind of person to do that. You need get a call on the **red** phone from God, go to seminary, be—**religious! Not me!** I could never be that."

-And the very one writing these words, Peter, would've felt precisely like that. Mr. *hands-smell-like fish!* That's clear in his first encounter with the power of Jesus when he said, "Better stay away from me! I've got a bad case of potty

mouth!" But over time—after hanging with Jesus a lot—sometimes tripping over his own feet—he can say these words; ***You are priests—God's holy, special representatives!***

-Here's my encouragement for you. You have ***no idea*** what God has placed in you--and what He could do through your life--if you would just ***see yourself through HIS eyes.*** And that's what this is all about. Seeing yourself as God sees you. A beloved child of His. Clean and pure. An important part of what He is building on this planet. And ***you can begin to see*** that. But it will take faith.

III. ...SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT?

- A. I have a confession to make to you before I go on. I am not the minister of this congregation. ***You*** are! And if you accepted a role in caring for others—whether it's kids or teens, adults, or those in need--***you*** are the pastors! My prayers, baptisms, and conversations are no more effective than yours!

-Now, does that mean that we really shouldn't have people like me on staff--full-time teachers and leaders for this congregation? That maybe I should just go out and get a real job? What do you think? You're scaring me--you don't sound very convincing!
-My role here, according to the Bible, is not to do all the ministry--but to oversee the ministry, help protect God's work here, and prepare the ***ministers God has already placed in this congregation.***

1. I want you to just get the picture of this if you can. Look around you this morning for just a minute. Maybe someone's been kicking the back of your seat, or snoring—and you're dying to see who it is. Or maybe they're just good looking and you need an excuse to look.

-Think about our community. Think about our city. Think about the huge need in our world. Imagine what would happen if every single person here saw themselves as God's representatives—with the power and authority of Heaven behind them—to make things right, to counsel, to show compassion, to bring the influence of Jesus wherever they are. Whether it's in a university classroom, at Canadian Tire, in a tower someplace, a neighborhood—or tucked away in cubicle-land. Fully engaged in God's work of making ***all*** things right!

2. Right now, ***this*** is the vision that's capturing the hearts of Jesus' followers all over this planet. That means that everything we do—even basic, ordinary stuff—has significance!

-Think about it. As God's representatives, as God's nation, God's priests—what we do is ultimately more important than what goes on in the halls of government buildings and around expensive wooden tables in corporate strategy sessions in the steel and glass towers of major cities. And God chose ***you***, and He chose ***me*** for this mission—fully aware of our limitations and flaws!

-Now, if ***this*** is true—can anyone explain to me why someone would go back to the old system Jesus abolished where only special people can do special things?

- a. Want to know why? ***I DON'T KNOW!*** Maybe people felt too overwhelmed by the mission—and too busy with other stuff to engage? Maybe being a ***special*** person appealed to the egos of the religious professionals. That happens you know.
- b. I sometimes wonder if this way of doing things let others off the hook. I mean, it's actually more convenient system to fearful people. "I ***can't*** do that" gets us out of doing the messy, hard stuff.
 -Lori has been one of my primary motivators around the house in fixing things, building things. To be honest, I'm a chicken. When something goes wrong, my line is—or ***was***, "Let's talk to someone who ***knows*** something about this." Her line is, "How ***hard can it be.***" As you can tell, there is a gap between those lines. So, over time I've tackled messy, scary jobs. I've ***really*** screwed some up. I once blew 2 head gaskets and warped the engine head on an old Datsun before I realized that I had put the thermostat in backwards. Duh!
 -See, as a kid, I was the family clutz who spilled something at ***every*** meal. But Lori...***believes in me...I'll never know just what she sees in me...and maybe on some special night, when my song is right...*** Sorry. Got carried away. But, I have learned to do things I never thought I could do. Drywall, hardwood flooring, electric work, plumbing. I would've ***never*** tried it if Lori had not convinced me that I was part of the priesthood of plumbers, carpenters, electricians, and appliance repair persons.
- c. Let me try Lori's words on you. ***Try it! You've got the Holy Spirit! How hard can it be?***
3. So, this morning, I have an announcement for you. ***It's a new day!*** You are ***God's Child.*** You have gifts, passions and dreams for difference-making for a reason. God has called you—and sent His Powerful Spirit into you to influence everywhere you go in this world for the better. You ***can*** make a difference! You are free—and ***called*** to be what you've always dreamed of being for His glory. You are free to start new, bold ventures that scare you to death! God is the giver of dreams--and the Power behind them. God is the One who calls us to give a voice to those who have none, to free captives, bring healing—to do things that are ***way*** beyond what we can imagine!
4. But, there are sticking points that stop people in their tracks! One is the ***sacrifice*** it requires. And that sacrifice is...***you!*** God wants ***you!*** All of you. Paul, early church leader, says to the Roman Christ-followers:
...I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him...Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.
(Romans 12:1, 2b NLT)

-Why so drastic? Well, how can God use all of your life if He doesn't **have** all of your life? You can cheat around the edges of this—but ultimately you will have to say, "Okay, God, I'm not going to wimp out on this."

I want you to have all of me--and then show me, for the rest of my life, what that means. You be in charge. I'll follow."

-I'm not messing with you on this! Living out your calling as a minister--being a player is one of the most amazing, meaningful things you will ever do. But there's a price tag. But then, **anything** worthwhile has a price tag, doesn't it?

5. There's another barrier. Becoming a **servant**. **All** followers of Jesus are called to be servants. Jesus made it crystal clear that the only path to any greatness is to serve. He said, "I didn't come to **be** served; I came to **serve**--and give my life away."

-This **totally** contradicts our culture. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, we live in the culture of the ultimate **consumer**. We're always shopping for deals and service. This is such an **ingrained part of our lives** that we don't even see it. -When Jesus says, "Will you **serve?**" it's a lot easier to say, "Uhhh...I think I like the **old** system where **I** come in, help pay the bills—and people serve **me!**" And we can do that—but we can't do that and, be like Jesus, live out our calling and grow. Jesus set the standard, both by how He lived and what He said. "In the church, **everybody** serves." And that's why we challenge people to engage here and in our community—just **servicing!** Over time, you find out what you're best at—what you're gifted at. But the entry point is to—just **serve!**

- 6.. One more barrier I think you can relate to. Fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of failure. Fear of what you might lose. Fear of something that seems so big and unfamiliar. If you've failed or gotten hurt--fear of trying again.
 - Fear is intended to keep you from doing stupid things--not the things you **want** to do and **need** to do. Just ask yourself the question: What is there in this calling thing to be afraid of? Really? I think that might be enlightening.
 - I continually find myself in scary situations where I don't know what to do or say. Years ago, I got called late one night to the home of a family whose teenage son had just shot himself in the head in the parents bedroom. Know which course in university and seminary and post-graduate work prepared me for that? **NONE OF THEM!** I can't begin to tell you how many times in messes like that, I've had to say, "SOS! God—**HELP!**" And **He does!** See, that's what's cool about all this. God pours on **His** Almighty power. You are **never** alone!

- B. I think the price tag thing is that most effective barrier that keeps us from our calling, however. We have this 1990 Cutlass Ciera that now belongs to Kelly. I told her, "If you leave it dirty, it will be a junker. If you keep it clean, it will be a classic!" Someone who was using the car a number of years ago--I won't say who it was, but **she** broke the cup-holder right off of the armrest. So. I called about a new one. **\$58.50!** I told the guy, "I don't need a new engine --just the cup-holder." I got one for a buck at the dollar store that pins onto the carpet!

-Cup-holders don't matter. But there **are** some things in life where the price-tag on **not** doing something is exorbitant. The price tag on parenting with courage, character, determination and wisdom is **huge**. But the price tag on **not** paying the price is **way** higher.

1. The price tag on living out your calling—using your gifts, taking what God is doing serious, being fully devoted to Jesus—is **really** high. Jesus never called his followers to a **safe** life. I'm not even going to try to hide that. We follow giants who have paid with their jobs, their reputations—and sometimes their lives—to follow Jesus. It'll cost you time, money, sleep, convenience. But have you ever thought about the price tag is on **not** living out your calling as a follower of Jesus, as a loving, compassionate, morally responsible representative of His in your world? I mean, how do you—how **can** you **ever** make up for missing your calling in life--what you were created to be?
 - Jesus was pretty honest about the price tag. He said, "This is not a hobby, a pastime, or a part-time deal. It will **cost** you. But...**but...**if you just try to save your own skin and shine up your own life—you will **lose everything!**"
 - We do it because the reward, the satisfaction, the deep sense that you're making a difference in a broken world—is so **absolutely** incredible. We serve as an act of worship to the One who **gladly** gave His life for us. We do it because God loves and values **every** person!

2. Engaging in Jesus' mission is worth it—not just because of the feelings it brings us—it's worth it because the Church is the hope of the world. Human institutions have failed miserably when it comes to permanently changing the hearts of people—from indifference to love. Show me another mission or cause that transforms people's hearts—even if they're hardened criminals--and offers them eternal life—and I'll sign up immediately. But—I don't see any.
 - And Jesus' cause is worth it because of the incredible hearts it grows inside those who engage. Look for the most magnificent people in the world—and find that they are not a group of people who have sat around—having life served up to them on a platter. Nope! They are people who have given their lives away to others--who have discovered their gifts as they've served, made courageous decisions, tried and failed, stepped out where they were terrified—and found God to be faithful! They **made** time to do it.
 - Wanna be **great**? This is the way. It's what you were created for. It's what God has called us to be.

3. There's one other reason to aggressively pursue your calling. God holds us accountable for all He's given us in terms of gifts, resources and opportunities. We have more of all of that than anyone else in the world. And we **dare** not bury it in the back yard! By the way—accountability has to do with what we give back, not how many message and Christian services and miracles we consume!
 - Accountability **always** centers around giving **back** in the power of Jesus. I think that's what you want--just like me. Would you let God use your life to help turn this old world around?

IV. CLOSING

- A. Most of you know that it was just a little over a year ago that my Mom died of cancer. It was on the anniversary of her death that Ginny, a woman who was helping care for her, gave some insight on how that final day unfolded. She wrote these words: The very last day I stayed with her was that Sunday she died. When she awoke that day she sat on the side of the bed for awhile. She then wanted to sit in the rocker and told me she felt a bit hungry...I asked her if she wanted me to feed her – “no”, she said...then closed her eyes and slept for a bit. When she awoke she told me to feed her.
- As I began to do that I felt the Lord enter the room – such holiness came upon that room. After she ate she began to talk of heaven and what a beautiful place it must be. She talked of your dad as well, telling how he was faithful in his service to the Lord. She then said, “I hope when I get to heaven I’ll hear, ‘well done, thou good and faithful servant’...I know Clyde heard those words.” I put my hands on her knees and got closer to her face and told her she would indeed hear those words for she had been faithful in serving the Lord and that Christ was pleased with her. She then looked at me, gave me the sweetest smile I’ve ever seen and with peace said, “Thank you Ginny”.
 - One hour later, she was gone.
 - I cried as I read that. The pain is still pretty fresh.
- B. One day it will be me drifting in and out of clarity--fading from this life to the next. One day it will be you. And when that day comes, a **lot** of things will no longer be important that seem so urgent now. One thing will be important on that day--and that is whether or not I ever lived out my calling—and whether or not I hear, “Well done...”
- Let’s agree to not let anything--**anything** keep us from that? Agreed?