

Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-16

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Last summer, for the 4th of July, my 3 siblings and I, with all of our children and spouses, made the trek to East Tennessee and descended on my parents’ property.

My parents live on a 100 acre farm in a cove on the lake. My maiden name is Bingham, and in high school my friends called our house Binghamland....because it is the greatest place on earth. Last summer then, you can imagine our anticipation as we all drove in. We LOVE each other. I am talking about major, all in, I will punch you if you criticize them, delusions of each other's grandeur, loud, racousy kind of love. We gather at least twice a year, and each visit is better than the last. We feed each other's kids, we learn to swim, we tell hilarious stories, we interrupt each other telling stories...a lot..., we cook, and we create games.

Games is not a word that accurately describes these activities. One summer we were in to croquet. But tea and biscuits croquet is not really our style, so we got creative. In normal croquet, someone can knock you out of bounds, severely limiting your chances to advance through the archy thingys at an aggressive pace. We decided getting knocked out was not punishing enough. In the Binghamland version, the victim of a knock out had to run into my parents' gigantic garden, pick and eat a piece of raw okra, go jump in the pool, and get back in time to take their next turn. Getting back in time was usually not difficult because all of us would be chanting, "Okra! Okra!", falling down laughing, and generally dancing with glee at the poor shmuck who got knocked out. Another summer we drew teams and created a 9-event relay race. There was running, biking, crab walking, fence climbing, kayaking, and swimming involved...there were bonus points for dramatic costume changes mid relay, and for batons, we used...you guessed it, okra. Knowing

what you now know about the Bingham, you can imagine how much we looked forward to spending the 4th together last summer.

Instead of games and laughter though, my 4 year old nephew was diagnosed with a brain tumor the day after we arrived. My sister's son, Judah Finn, is a sweet, precious, brilliant, loyal, funny little boy, and he is now in his 11th month of chemo. Sometimes we anticipate great things, we anticipate joyful relationships, we anticipate abundance on multiple levels, we anticipate profoundly meaningful lives. But sometimes, the reality we are living seems to fall wildly short of our anticipation.

This morning I want to spend some time looking at the Word together, asking God what it takes to live an abundant, meaning-filled life for each of us. I am here to spur you to reflect on your life, to search the Scripture, and to ask God, together, to renew His purpose for you. From day 1, our pastor Scott Sauls has reminded us God makes all things new. Many of you have been hanging on, but maybe you have mostly wondered why God wants to make the schedule new, or the music new, or the paint color new. Many of you, in the face of a new thing, decide to cling all the more desperately to the old, longing for the comfort of what has been, even if what was falls dreadfully short of what you might call an abundant life in Christ. And many of you, in the quiet spaces in your heart, feel deep or vague disappointment with the status quo, and intrinsically long for the new. You are desperate for God not to make all things new, but to make you new. I have good news. God is a creator, and

He is creating in you and calling you to a life of abundance that only comes when you allow Him to use you in His family, in His church, in His city, and in His kingdom. Will you spend some time with me asking God what He has for you? Instead of thinking about how God makes ALL things new, how is He renewing you?

We have a model in Scripture already for this type of inquiry. When Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, for a dinner party, what does he find? Many of you know this story well, never fear, this is just a pit stop...not our final destination! In the Bible, Jesus loves a good dinner party. We have many records of Him eating with people, sometimes with strangers, and often with friends. In this instance, He is eating dinner at one of His buddy's houses named Lazarus. Lazarus had two sisters named Mary and Martha. When Jesus arrives, He finds Martha working hard to pull off this event. Yes, maybe partially because she is a control-freak, or type A, or addicted to performance and people pleasing, but I have a feeling the MAIN reason she was so consumed with the doing of details was because she loved Jesus and her brother and she wanted to HONOR him with a lovely evening. Am I right?

Mary, in the meantime, is simply hanging out, being present with people, immersed in conversation with guests and listening to Jesus. Yes, maybe she was lazy and indulgent and selfish and suffering from FOMO (fear of missing out), but I have a feeling the MAIN reason she was so consumed with being present with people was

because she loved Jesus and her brother and she wanted to HONOR him with a lovely evening.

Same desire. Same justification. Different actions.

When Martha complains and asks Jesus to weigh in on why Mary's approach is wrong, Jesus simply says, "Martha. Martha, you are anxious about so many things." In other words, Martha, do not waste your energy trying to correct your sister. She has chosen the right path for herself. I want to speak to you about your choices.

This brings me to my first point, which is simply this:

- If you want to live an abundant and meaningful life in which you boldly pursue God's calling for you, stop glaring at others, and look at Jesus.

We believe that God made each of us with different gifts, right? We know that God has shown incredible creativity in the human race, right? We celebrate the differences in our kids and teach them not to follow the crowd, right? We see the diversified giftedness in our heroes, Biblical and otherwise, right? Then WHY ON EARTH do we expect God's calling on each of us to look the same? Right now, this very instant, take a minute to confess the energy you spend looking at the way others live. Ask God to call you to himself, to train your ears and eyes and tongue and hands and feet to come alive to YOUR CALLING.

*****STOP and REFLECT*****

When Paul wrote his letter, from which I quoted our passage of scripture, to the church at Ephesus, about a generation after Christ had died and been resurrected, believing in Christ was a dangerous business. In fact, Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. He knew that his days were most likely numbered, and more importantly he knew that these early believers were already on the endangered species list! So what are the “majors” for Paul? From Romans, we know Paul’s credo is that our sin destroys us but that the righteousness of Christ becomes ours because of his sacrificial death and resurrection. So Paul’s #1 thought: Christ’s perfect standing before God becomes ours through our Faith in what He has already done for us. The second major point for Paul is this: Christ’s gift is not just for Jews, but for Gentiles. Paul, the perfect Jew, understood his calling to be for him to pursue Gentiles. This was shocking and even blasphemous back in the day. The takeaway here is that no one else could understand or would have predicted Paul’s calling; this is why he had to go directly to God for it! Do not look to others for your calling; look to Jesus. The 2nd takeaway here is that Paul knew that in order for Christianity to survive AND for believers to grow in Christ, they had to invest in Kingdom work.

This is our 2nd Big Point:

- If you want to live an abundant and meaningful life in which you boldly pursue God's calling for you, you must see yourself and others with Kingdom eyes.

In order to understand what this means, let's turn to our primary Scripture for today: In Ephesians 4, verses 1-4 & 7, Paul "urges you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call...Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift."

In order to live life fully alive and in our best selves, we need Kingdom eyes. What does that mean? It is right here in Ephesians. Because of Christ, in God's Kingdom we "are worthy of the calling to which we have been called!"

Kingdom eyes see you as worthy!

Paul says because of Christ we can live with "humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love."

Kingdom eyes are humble and gentle with ourselves. How do we get these Kingdom eyes? Develop the discipline of listening to the voices in your head.

What kinds of messages do you tell yourself each day? Are you gentle or critical with yourselves? I don't know about you, but I am like a crazy person with a bad case of road rage. I say HORRIBLE things to myself about my intentions, my motives, my hypocrisy, my abilities, my belongingness... Stop and take a moment right now. Write down the refrains you often say to yourself.

*****STOP and REFLECT*****

Now confess those to God. Read the list to Him and say, "God, give me kingdom eyes to see myself with gentleness."

Kingdom eyes are GENTLE with ourselves. A quick note here, Paul also says kingdom eyes are humble. It is worth saying out loud that not all of us need to be gentler with ourselves. Some of us always give ourselves the benefit of the doubt! When you live like that there is often not room to give others the benefit of the doubt. Am I right? If you are so busy justifying yourself, defending yourself to imagined critics, convinced of the unique purity of your own intentions, you often do not have the eyes to notice the need for grace in those around you. Kingdom eyes are humble AND gentle. With yourself AND others.

This scripture also says kingdom eyes are "patient, bearing one another in love." Paul knows that God did not call us to himself in a vacuum. He called us first to himself and then to others. Our kingdom eyes therefore don't just need to see

ourselves with God's vision; we need to view others in the same light. For those of you who already have the discipline of taking off your own vision and taking up kingdom eyes, you know that when you view yourself with humility and gentleness, you are predisposed to bear one another patiently and in love!

Paul goes on to say, be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body," and, Paul says, one Spirit, one hope. The point is that when we view ourselves with Kingdom eyes, we are naturally drawn to see others with Kingdom eyes, and when we view others with Kingdom eyes, we supernaturally become part of one body, one spirit, one hope!

This brings me to our third and final point:

- If you want to live an abundant and meaningful life in which you boldly pursue God's calling for you, you must give your life away.

Let me explain what I mean. In this passage in Ephesians, Paul has reminded us to live a life worthy of our calling by viewing ourselves and others with Kingdom eyes. He has reminded us that this will lead us to unity with the church and with Jesus.

Listen to what he says next:

In speaking of Christ, he says we have all been given various gifts and callings, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature

manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” A bit later he says “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

In other words, God did not call you to himself in a vacuum. He also did not call you to Himself without giving you gifts not just valuable, but CRUCIAL to the building up of the body of Christ and to the unity of the faith.

God did not create you, die for you, give you all his righteousness, and bless you with distinct talents so you could wait in the wings and be an understudy. God has made YOU the star of your own narrative. Please hear me, I am NOT calling us to selfishness or more attention-seeking behavior! I am reading this scripture, in which Paul says the whole body will only find unity, growth, health, and maturity if we all get in the game! If you want to live an abundant and meaningful life in which you boldly pursue God’s calling for you, you must give your life away!

Paul is not saying, “it would be really sweet, like that coloring book where all the colors have to be themselves in order to make the beautiful picture [you know then one I’m talking about].” He is not saying, “it is okay if you were not born a man and so your calling is to be whatever stereotype of ‘woman’ will work for you.” God, through Paul, is promising that when we stop glaring at others and instead look at

Jesus, when we all see ourselves and others with Kingdom eyes, and when we give our lives away, the entire body of believers will mature “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!” Together, each living out the mission God has given us, we can have the same fullness, and reach the same stature, as Christ! The Son of God. This is what John means when he says we have been adopted as sons and daughters of God, as brothers and sisters of Christ. Do you hear this good news? God did not call you to a disappointing life without meaning. He called you to abundance! Your call is meaningful and it matters to the whole community!

In case you are not convinced, let me tell you why it matters. When we ignore the calling on our lives we hurt ourselves AND the entire body of Christ, because the *body* can't reach its full maturity if *you* are not maturing in Christ! There is more. Let's look back at Scripture: Paul calls us to this “so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

Aren't you tired of responding to life like a child? Pouting when you don't get your way? Being controlled by fear or dread or instagram likes? Holding a grudge? Constantly analyzing your status among your friends, within your church or school, at your job, before your mother, before your mother-in-law, within your own marriage? Are you exhausted from the effort of resisting the cunning or craftiness of your peers...or children? Not to mention resisting the evil onslaught of media and advertisers who lie to you about what will give you an abundant life full of meaning.

Paul is promising us a DIFFERENT PATH! It is to a life focused on Jesus instead, where you see yourselves and others with God's eyes, and where you give your life away.

Some of you get this. You are completely with me, hopefully doing jumping jacks in your heart, because you know, if we all get this vision, this church, this town, this region, will change. Some of you, though, might be afraid of the word calling. At this church we often say "go find your missional community," and that might confuse you. That is why, with our remaining time, I'd like for us to spend time thinking through what "calling" is and what "calling" isn't in a practical, accessible way.

Os Guinness wrote a great book 16 years ago called *The Call*. In it, he makes a couple of really important distinctions that are helpful here.

- 1) Our Primary Calling is to Christ. It is by Him, for Him, to Him. It is to a relationship with him, manifested in studying and memorizing scripture, in fellowship with other believers, and in prayer and worship to the Triune God.

If you feel a panic attack coming on every time we talk about calling or mission, I urge you to focus on Christ. Your main calling is not to a thing, but to a person. Jesus

Allow me to give you some practical pointers. If you want to secure and understand your calling from God, write these ideas down:

- a) Make a discipline out of starting your day with Jesus. Read *Jesus Calling* and meditate on His words to you.
- b) Read a story from the book of Mark every day and notice how Jesus treats people. Listen to his words. Put yourself in the story as various characters and explore who Jesus is and how he interacts with people.
- c) Before your day takes off, talk out loud about your schedule with Jesus and ask him to be a part of each thing. In that meeting, in this time with your mom, in those hours at work, at this time at the pool in those moments with your grandchildren. Then when your day is over, review your day with the Lord and notice where he showed up!

These basic disciplines (and they take DISCIPLINE) will help you secure your primary calling to be with Jesus.

- 2) Guinness says our Secondary Calling is simply to live, think, speak and act entirely for Him. It is born out of a response to your primary calling. It elevates everything. Practically, your secondary calling is the intentional use of your gifts and passions to restore the people, places and things around you to God's creative vision for them. Let me say that one more time. I can be more plain: it is to an activity, a "mission" if you will, or a group of people who bring you joy. It is a pleasure to do this thing, and while you are doing it time seems to fly. You feel an intrinsic desire, or curiosity to be more involved with these people or in this task.

I would actually like to spend the rest of our time talking about how to discover and pursue our secondary callings. But before I do there is one more nugget we need to glean from Os Guinness. It concerns distorted views of calling. Guinness teaches our church traditions have often so jacked up our understanding of calling that it is no wonder we are ineffective and unfulfilled.

First, The Catholic distortion: This view, in the extreme, says that the only holy calling anyone can have is to the priesthood. In other words, if you are not in the full time service of the church, you get a free pass, and there is no missional, or kingdom calling on your life. Hear me. This is a lie from the pit of hell. God has gifted you with his spirit in unique ways. How dare you keep it to yourself!? He gave it to you to share!

Before we protestants get too smug, the Protestant Distortion is a view in which every activity has been elevated to "calling." In this view, work, and having an intense work ethic, become a holy task. This sort of view justifies people who basically desert their families because they are "called to provide." Or others who become totally obsessed with a task to the detriment of the other parts of their lives because they were "called" to this busy season. Hear me. This is a lie from the pit of hell. God has not called you to replace worship of him with worship of work or busyness.

As women who love Jesus and try to live lives for Him, I think we have added a few more distortions. Many women I know fall into 2 extreme camps:

First Camp: The Mom Distortion. These women are mothers who feel called to raise their children. This is a great and holy calling! In fact, if you are a mother, this is your calling. God gave you these children to raise, train, protect and teach. To love and nurture. To lead and guide. Doing this well takes a LOT of energy. It is demanding and tough and Godly and rewarding. The distortion comes in when we start to mistake the calling to raise children as

- A) our ONLY calling.
- B) THE only calling for anyone with kids.

This perspective elevates Motherhood over any other role a woman could have. As if this is the only holy calling. It creates an environment in which women who are NOT mothers (by choice or by nature) feel inadequate, as if they have missed out on the ONLY thing women can do to be fulfilled. This perspective often assumes that Motherhood and any other time consuming task or job are mutually exclusive. In other words, if you want to be a good mom, you cannot engage in any other long or short term work. And if you do, it means you are not satisfied with where God has called you to be...as a MOTHER. Have you ever felt inadequate because of this distortion of calling? I think what I call the Mom Distortion single-handedly discourages more women than just about any consistent perspective I have heard.

This perspective tells many women that they either do not love their kids or Jesus enough to be satisfied at home. If Christian women live in a community where any work outside the home is considered shameful, less-than-God's-best, or a sign of discontentment and a hunger for power, then we have chosen a community that is not God's best. Kingdom Eyes see all of God's children, men and women, mothers and not mothers, as people uniquely gifted to bless all others, not just their own children.

Aslan, in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, tells Edmund's siblings, "I will talk to you about your story, not Edmund's." CS Lewis is reminding us that we should not try to write the script for any other woman! Even worse, don't try to revise, or edit the script God has written for any other person! Ladies, if you see raising your kids as THE THING God wants all your energy poured into, then give your life away to THAT THING! DO invest only in your kids with joy, patience, compassion, attention to detail, focus and energy. DO NOT judge and condemn and question women who raise their kids in an environment where they pursue other passions as well.

Please hear me: I want us to be a community who celebrate the role of mothers. I also want us to be a community who celebrate God's unique calling, whether that includes a call to focus all your energy on your kids or to a different model of mothering AND pursuing other callings.

The Second Camp is the Working Woman Distortion. These women feel called to work outside the home. This is a great and holy calling! In fact, if you are a woman, you are called to work both in your home and in your community. Whether you have kids or not, God calls all of us to pursue God's kingdom, making all things new here on earth in our communities. The distortion comes in when we start to mistake the calling to work, or career, as more valuable than women who are not pursuing a career.

You know the drill. These women often place their value in their professional reputations. They assume that they are more productive, more disciplined, and probably more valuable than women who "sit" at home. This perspective elevates work outside the home over any other role a woman could have. As if this is the only holy calling. This kind of thinking creates an environment in which women who do not work outside the home feel inadequate, as if they are missing out on the ONLY thing women can do to be fulfilled. This perspective places a woman's value in her productivity in her career, and martyrs many women as they try to prove their worth. It also makes busy-ness the norm, and can make women who don't work at 100 miles an hour feel worthless. Have you ever felt inadequate around women who are invested in their careers?

We have just spent a half hour talking through what the body of Christ should and could look like in us. God never intended us to live in a vacuum, each of us having sweet quiet times in which we confirm our own calling, and then get up and destroy

anyone who dares to pursue a different type of calling. Paul instead lays out a vision in which we encourage one another in our diverse gifts!

Both the Mom and the Career Distortions are hurtful, exclusive and contrary to God's calling of us into His Kingdom. Do you fall into one of these camps? I'm sure all of you are thinking, "no, I'm not that extreme." But most of us lean one way or the other. Even if we think we are not that extreme, many of us have thought, gossiped about, or directly said dismissive things about the way other women spend their time. It doesn't have to be an attack. It can appear to be an innocent question.

"Now that your kids are in school or away at college what do you do with all your time? I wish I could have so much free time! How do you see your kids if you work such long hours? Don't you get stir crazy at home all day? Wow, you sure are busy. You always have something going on..."

Can we just be real for a minute? All of us, sitting in this room, have the power to encourage each other, looking with kingdom eyes and celebrating God's distinct work in others. We were made to know and celebrate God in each other. If that is the case then WHY oh why do we instead spend so much energy judging each others' choices? How many times have you felt shamed by others who seem to know God likes their life choices better than yours? How many times have you let someone bully another rather than celebrate the different choices she has made? We are often dismissive when we could be supportive. We are often defensive about our own choices when we should be at peace. We are often harsh when we

should be gentle. We are often critical of others when we should be reflective about ourselves. We are often self-aggrandizing when we should be listening. We often shoot someone down who is trying to find her way instead of being a safe place for her to explore options.

Shame on us. We can do better. Jesus died so we would be better. There are not only 2 options; there are as many options as there are women God created! Let's celebrate the ways God is making us new! Let's celebrate the diversity of the way God has created and is developing all of us! The only way to do this is to remind ourselves of our earlier points:

- 1) Don't look around, look to Jesus
- 2) View yourselves and others with Kingdom Eyes
- 3) Give your life away

As I wrap up, I'd like to talk about how we give our lives away. A great place to start is with those disciplines I mentioned earlier. To go further, I want to take us back to scripture, to Colossians 4. In verse 2, Paul instructs: "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." We have no doubt all read this verse many times, and if you're like me you have glossed over it. I think the secret to an abundant and meaningful life, in other words, to discovering the new thing God might be doing in you, is hidden in these 8 words though!

If you would like to, write down these spiritually practical points on how to discover what God is doing new in you:

First, devote yourselves to prayer. Develop the discipline of asking God where you are and where you are headed. God did not create you to be confused!! He loves making us whole! He loves showing us how we were made to live. He is the resurrection and the abundant life! Go to him with your questions about how you spend your time and what you were made for. This means you need some margin in your life. You need space and time at the beginning of your day to develop the disciplines we discussed earlier. You also need space at the end of your day to reflect. A good place to start with reflection is to ask yourself these questions as your day winds down:

- a) When was I most joyful today? What did I enjoy?
- b) What caused me stress today? Why?
- c) What did I spend most of my time on? Should I have spent most of my time there? Did God create me to spend most of my time there?
- d) If I could have done anything today what would I have done?
- e) When was I at my best today? In the past 10 years?
- f) When did I feel the most helpful?

The answer to these questions, over TIME (this is not one stop shopping), might help you discover what God is doing new in you as you pursue God's kingdom alongside others.

Paul then tells us to be watchful and thankful. This might seem innocent, but I have to warn you, if you obey these commands, they will wreck your life AND show you a new beautiful way to live. The second point is to be watchful. In other words, be attentive to your life, your surroundings, your gifts and how they might be used, new opportunities, needs around you. To be watchful and hopeful, looking for places to give your life away in fulfilling your calling!

God, through Paul, is also calling us to our third point: to be thankful. In other words, to be content, satisfied, appreciative, and aware of the good God has done and is doing.

For the past year I have been asking God how in the heck I can do both of these things each day! Here is what I have learned: In order to discover the new thing God is doing in me, I have had to practice, and I mean PRACTICE, the discipline of thankfulness. To observe what God has already done in me. To notice and praise Him for the gifts he has given me. Then, I have to ask Him to open my eyes, to help me WATCH, for places to use those gifts for his kingdom. It is not watchful *or* thankful. It is both. Be content where you are *and* look for the new thing God is doing in you!

It is very hard, even complicated, and also incredibly simple! Just pay attention to your life! This is related to calling because God never just gives one calling and walks away. He is a creator, and He is always creating new things in us. If you are

20 or 85, God is not done with you. He calls you to himself and then He continually gives you chances to grow and to bless others.

Let me give you an example. About 5 years ago, I was coming to the end of a LONG commitment to graduate school. It would have been easy to hang up my hat and say, I'm done having kids, my career path is pretty clear, my husband's job is intense, my plate is full. In other words, I am closed for business and cannot do anything else. But I was thankful and watchful. And over a year, God began to remind me that I love teaching the Bible. I love teenagers and twenty-something women. I started to feel some energy to lead a Bible study, and I thought I would start a study for my peers. However, at the same time, I was sad about the fact that God had chosen to give me boys to raise, with no daughters. As I worked to be thankful for the kids He had given me, I also began to realize that God had placed tons of surrogate daughters around me. I had babysitters in and out of my house twice a week. I was around young women all the time. And so God showed me a new thing in my life. I decided I was going to start giving my life away to my babysitters.

Is there a place of chronic pain or disappointment in your life? On the days when you are tempted to indulge in a pity party, which wounds do you nurse? If something comes to mind then write it down right now. Now stop and ask God to enter that broken place. God is able to transform a place of pain into a place of ministry. Wouldn't it just be so like God to redeem and bring healing to one of the

most painful places in your life? What if God wants to make you new by bringing ministry and healing along side your place of deep pain and disappointment?

****STOP and REFLECT****

God replaced my lack of daughter with a vision for every single young woman I encountered. Instead of coming home and sending babysitters away, I came home with the attitude that they were my surrogate daughters. I began investing in them, inviting them to stay and chat, asking them about their lives and listening to their answers. Each young woman I knew was so hungry for an older woman to pay attention. To make herself available. And in this decision I made to give my life away, God gave me a purpose outside myself and reminded me that I was not forgotten. He had heard the desires of my heart for a daughter, he just had a unique way of fulfilling that in me.

This “calling” was not a drastic, life changing decision. And yet, it WAS life changing for me! God used my desire and my love of this age group to show me how I could be a part of his kingdom. God’s new thing in my life met both of our needs. All I had to do was “devote myself to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” All I had to do was refuse to close myself off from a new thing God might be doing in me. What new thing, what mission, might God be giving you?

God did not stop there though. As I spent time with these ladies after they babysat, God continued to stir up a desire and to create the space for me to start a Bible

Study. As I said, I thought it would be for my peers. As I prayed though, it suddenly made sense: I came home one day and my babysitter told me she and her friends wanted to ask me if I would lead a Bible Study for them! It quickly became clear that this is what God had been making “new” all along. For 4 years, every Tuesday night, between 5-10 women pile on my couch to study God’s Word. We have walked through breakups, grad schools, job changes, moves, engagements, weddings, pregnancies, miscarriages, 7 books of the Bible, and figuring out how to be a grown up woman of God who has been called to an abundant and meaningful life!! This “mission” has turned out to be one of the biggest blessings of my life, and I am so incredibly grateful!

In case you are thinking, I have no time, I don’t want God’s “new thing” for me if it requires more! I hear you. But I have to say this attitude of defensive living, protecting my time like an armed guard, is no way to live. The growth you experience in Christ and the abundance you live far outweigh the sacrifice you might make in time or energy. Let me encourage you by saying that God did not ask me to ignore my family so that I could lead a Bible Study. In fact, God’s calling always works, even if it takes some planning! I told the girls I could only do it if they came to my house after my kids were in bed, because that would be the least disruptive for my family. Other people might be totally stressed if 10 27 year olds came in your house every week. That is fine! The point is that God’s calling for you does not have to feel like a massive sacrifice. It does not have to be hard. It does not have to be

drastic. Then again, it might be, but you will be having so much fun living an abundant life that it won't bother you.

If you hear anything from this talk today, hear this: If you are alive and you love Jesus, then you have a calling to know Him AND to be invested in His Kingdom. Your calling might be to a job or to a person. It is most likely, though, to develop a way for you to live both watchfully and thankfully. Will you join me in letting God give you a new job in His Kingdom? Will you join me in looking for a way to be a minister of reconciliation, as scripture asks? It is very easy to feel overwhelmed and say "no more!" We just heard a wonderful talk on boundaries. But I am here to challenge you to give your life away. As you do this you will begin to see God calling you to a different way of life. As you recognize what you are good at, or what you enjoy, you will begin to see chances to use this giftedness to encourage others or to meet needs. God has gifted you uniquely to bless or serve other people, and if you don't do it then you are robbing them and yourself of God's best!

My hope is that today you have been reminded to PAY ATTENTION. To notice. And then to have the courage to walk down the road that God draws you to. I can promise you that we all create space for the things we care about. If you are committed to God's kingdom and to living a meaningful and abundant life, then the only path forward is to follow Him in making your perspective in life about His kingdom. Do not sit on the sidelines being exhausted and worn out. When you give your life away, using the gifts God has given you, and that you enjoy using, you

actually have more energy because you are living the abundant life Jesus promised us! I promise you that it works!

My family has had the hardest and most beautiful year of our lives as we have watched Judah go through massive brain surgery and a year of chemo. We have helped and cried and fed and supported and marveled at my sister and her husband as they bravely take each step ahead. Judah's tumor has not grown since he started chemo, and he will finish in two months. He hopes to start kindergarten before he even finishes chemo. And we will live scan to scan for his entire life, however long or short that may be. In the midst of this hard year though, God has started to do something new in my sister and her husband, as well. When they could have been completely devastated by the horribly unfair hand they have been dealt, they instead looked to Jesus and their world with Kingdom eyes. Their story with Judah has given them an incredibly powerful platform to model what it looks like to live authentically in pursuit of Christ in the midst of a nightmare. And to their credit, they have seen their own giftedness in the midst of their suffering, and have watched God for opportunities to pursue their calling and mission. For the first time in her life, my sister is facilitating a Bible Study and mentoring young women who have been drawn to her faith in this crisis. Instead of saying no, she recognized it was God's new thing for her and she said yes. Her husband has also given His life away to the Kingdom by using the gifts God has already given him. God is redeeming this tragedy even in the midst of it.

Whether you are a bit disappointed with your current state of life, or absolutely certain you are living the life God wants for you, I pray you would invite God into your everyday. Each of us has unique gifts God wants to use for his kingdom. As my sister's life shows, there is no right time to let God give you a new calling. There is simply right now.

Let's pray

Lord, help us stop looking at each other and instead look to you with watchful and thankful hearts. Help us view ourselves and others with kingdom eyes. Jesus, help us spend time with you and help us reflect on our lives so that we can hear the new things you are calling us to. Help us be brave enough to give our lives away, as we find the Kingdom of God thriving all around us. Give us abundant, meaningful lives that we use to bless others for you.

