

The book *Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters* was written by Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger. Sullenberger was hailed as a national hero when he successfully executed an emergency water landing of US Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009. The book also relays the story of how Captain Sullenberger became a pilot.

“For a few months when I was four years old, I wanted to be a policeman and then a fireman. By the time I was five, however, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life—and that was to fly. I never wavered once this possibility came into my head...

I built my first model airplane when I was six years old. It was a replica of Charles Lindbergh’s Spirit of St. Louis. I read a lot about “Lucky Lindy” and understood that his flight across the Atlantic wasn’t really about luck. He planned. He prepared. He endured. That’s what made him heroic to me.

By 1962, when I was eleven years old, I was already reading every book and magazine I could find that talked about flying. That was also the year I took my first plane ride. My mom, a first-grade teacher, invited me to accompany her to a statewide PTA convention in Austin, and it was her first plane ride, too. The airport, Dallas Love Field, was seventy-five miles south of our house, and when we got there, it seemed like a magical place filled with larger-than-life people. Pilots. Stewardesses. Well-dressed passengers with somewhere to go.

Our seats were on the right side of the aircraft. My mom would have loved to look out the window, but she knew me. “You take the window seat,” she said, and even before the plane had moved an inch, my face was pressed against the glass, taking everything in. As the plane sped down the runway and began to rise, I was wide-eyed. My first thought was that everything on the ground looked like a model railroad layout. My second thought was that I wanted this life in the air.” Inspiring story, isn’t it? In the opening lines of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes an inspiring story, thanking God for the grace given to the Corinthian church.

In these verses Paul identifies himself in terms of an appointment from God. Paul reminds his readers they are “*the church of God in Corinth.*” Their local church is a part of the ecumenical church “*called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.*” Moreover, in these opening sentences, Paul puts his finger on the problem in the Corinthian church that he directly addresses later on: spiritual gifts. He says, “*For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge such as ‘all speech and knowledge’*” which most probably meant Gnosticism and speaking in tongues. While they are waiting for Jesus’ return, Paul assures them of God’s faithfulness in sustaining and purifying them.

We, like the Corinthians, are called to be Christians. We do not call, but Christ calls us. We do not choose, or accept Christ; he chooses us and invites us to be his disciples. Our part is in hearing the call and responding to the call in repentance and faith. We are made Christians; we are not born Christians; nor are we self-made Christians. Our need is to see the grace of God at work on our behalf by calling us to follow Jesus.

In the first chapter of his book *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg describes being *disappointed* with himself. He says that our feeling of disappointment is not the real problem, however. The deeper problem is our failure to be the person God had in mind when he created us. Our disappointment is a kind of ache that comes from wandering through life alone while God is waiting for us to find our way home.

Ortberg spells out the word “disappointing” this way: DIS-APPOINTING God. He says, “The word itself is apt. I am in a state of disappointment. I am missing the life that I was appointed by God to live—missing my calling. And I have dis-appointed God. I have removed him from the central role he longs to play in my life; I have refused to let God be God and I have appointed myself in his place” (p. 19). That’s why Paul writes to the Corinthians asking them to *consider their calling*, and why I ask you this morning to *consider your calling*.

The Scripture boldly declares that Paul was *called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* in verse 1. Literally that means that he was *one who was sent*. Verse 2 speaks to and about the church that is *called to be his holy people* (or saints), together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, in the closing verse, verse 9, he states that God has *called [the Corinthians and us] into the fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord*.

If we go back a few verses to verse 7 we read, “*Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*” Part of what we do when we consider our calling, is to identify the spiritual gifts that God has given us to witness to God’s love. We have made efforts to help our congregation do that on several occasions and we ask new members to do that by completing a Spiritual Gifts Inventory. Peter put it this way in 1 Peter 4:10: “*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.*”

While the real-life story of what happened on Jan. 15, 2009 after a flock of birds struck US Airways Flight 1549, disabling both engines, makes for a fascinating book and a feel-good film, we can’t all be Sully Sullenbergers. We’re not all called to an adventurous line of work where we might save 155 souls rescued from the frigid waters of the Hudson. Sully Sullenger, we can agree, had a *calling* from God to become a pilot.

But in the Bible, the word “call” is used most often to refer to God’s initiative to bring people to Christ and to participate in his redemptive work in the world. This sense of calling is especially prominent in the letters of Paul, such as we find here in 1 Corinthians chapter one.

The calling to belong to Christ goes deeper than the kinds of vocational “calling” that we think of with people like Sully Sullenger. For this reason, it is important for all Christians to keep focused on the call to follow Jesus. It is a call to a restored relationship with God and with other people and with the world around us. It encompasses all of a person’s being and doing. It reminds us that the call to a particular kind of work is secondary to the call to belong to Christ and to participate in his redemption of the world.

Our daily work must be an integral part of our participation in Christ himself. His work of creation underlies the acts of human creativity and production in the universe (John 1:1-3). His work of redemption can occur in every workplace through justice, healing, reconciliation, compassion, kindness, humility and patience (Colossians 3:12). Christ’s redemptive work is not limited to evangelism, but

encompasses everything necessary to make the world what God always intended it to be. This redemptive work occurs in harmony with the work of creation, production and sustenance that God delegated to humanity in the Garden of Eden. The Bible does not indicate that the work of redemption has superseded the work of creation. Christians are commanded to participate in the work of both creation and redemption.

When we get down to considering our own calling, we can see that:

1. Everyone is called to belong to Christ and to participate in his creative and redemptive work.
2. Everyone is commanded to work to the degree they are able.
3. God calls us to a whole life, not just to a job.

Truthfully our profession may not be God's highest concern for us. God is more concerned that we come under the saving grace of Christ and participate in his work of creation and redemption, whatever our job may be. Exactly what kind of work we do is a lower-level concern.

Although getting us into the right job or career is not God's highest concern, that doesn't mean it is of *no* concern. In fact, the distinctive work of the Holy Spirit is to guide and empower people for the life and work to which God leads them. In the Old Testament, God gave people the skills needed for their work on occasion, such as with Bezalel and Oholiab in the building of the tabernacle, or Nehemiah in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit routinely guides believers to particular work and gives them the skills they need (1 Corinthians 12:7-10). He provides guidance for both what kind of work people do and *how* they do that work.

Can a Christian simply dedicate his or her life to loving God and loving our neighbors, or does God demand from us a life that is extraordinary and heroic? Anthony Bradley at *The Acton Institute's Power Blog* writes, "I continue to be amazed by the number of youth and young adults who are stressed and burnt out from the regular shaming and feelings of inadequacy if they happen to not be doing something unique and special. Today's millennial generation is being fed the message that if they don't do something extraordinary in this life they are wasting their gifts and potential. The sad result is that many young adults feel ashamed if they 'settle' into ordinary jobs, get married early and start families, live in small towns, or as 1 Thessalonians 4:11 says, "*aspire to live quietly, and to mind [their] affairs, and to work with [their] hands.*" For too many young adults their greatest fear in this life is being an ordinary person with a non-glamorous job, living in the suburbs, and having nothing spectacular to boast about."

What Anthony Bradley is cautioning Christians about is that all the talk about "love for the city" and "missional incarnation" and "radical Christianity" loads a lot of shame onto Christians. This is what he calls a "new legalism," because it creates a man-made standard when what we are actually *called* to do is to love God and love our neighbor.

Bradley also states, "Maybe Christians are simply to pursue living well and invite others to do so according to how God has ordered the universe. An emphasis on human flourishing, ours and others, becomes important because it is characterized by a holistic concern for the spiritual, moral, physical, economic, material, political, psychological, and social context necessary for human beings to live according to [God's] design."

Why do so many of us struggle with this? We want the glory of the heroic. We want to be recognized. To rescue the child trapped in a smoke-filled house. To discover the next technological advance. To preach the next, best sermon—OK some of us. God may call us to do extraordinary things, but most of the time he calls us to do ordinary everyday things, by trusting in an extraordinary God. God bless each of you as you “consider your calling.” Amen.