

LIVING A LIFE OF MEANING AND PURPOSE

An hour-long immersive experience for small groups, centered around one section of The Power of Calling documentary—flexible for in-person and online use. If you're in-person, you'll need a whiteboard or flip-pad and markers. If you're online on Zoom or another platform, post responses in the Chat. Give or post the Participant Handout for each person in the gathering and pass out pens or pencils for those who don't have them. You'll also need a notecard for each person.

INTRODUCTION (3 Minutes)

SAY: Let's revisit an important story about Jesus and Peter, from Matthew 16. After Peter declares, for the first time, that Jesus is the Messiah—naming Him publicly for the first time—Jesus celebrates his accuracy: "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being." And then Jesus returns the favor, naming Simon with a deeper name (Peter) publicly for the first time: "Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." In Jesus's response to Peter, He answers two big questions: *Who am I?* and *What am I doing here?* Our "true name"—the name that describes our meaning and purpose in life—is really important...

Experience (Pairs, 4 Minutes): Find a partner and face each other at arm's length. (*Pause*) Now, the person wearing the most blue will be Person 1—decide who that is. (*Pause*) Let's have Person 1 in each Pair now hold your right arm straight out in front of you, palm down. Now Person 2, hold your arm directly above Person 1's arm, just an inch or two above. Now, when I say "Go!" Person 2 is going to try to push down Person 1's arm with steady pressure. Person 1 will try to keep your arm from going down while continuously repeating, "My name is [Name]." I'll tell you when to stop, but one of you will be trying to keep your arm from going down, and one of you will be trying to push your partner's arm down. Person 1—remember to repeat "My name is [Name] over and over. Ready? Go! (*After 15 seconds tell Pairs to stop.*) Now we'll do this again. But this time Person 1 will say, over and over, "My name is Kermit the Frog." So, get your arms in position again. Person 1, remember to repeat "My name is Kermit the Frog" over and over. Ready? Go! (*After 15 seconds tell Pairs to stop.*)

Debrief (2 Minutes): How many Person 1's noticed your arm seemed weaker in Round 2? (*Pause—usually about half of the Person 1's will raise their hand.*) Why do you think your body responded the way it did? I'll tell you the secret to this experience in just a moment...

SAY (3 Minutes): First, I'd like you to switch roles and do the same thing all over again, but Person 2 will be trying to keep their arm from going down while Person 1 tries to push it down. We'll do two rounds, just as before. In round 1 Person 2 will say "My name is [Name] over and over. In round 2 Person 2 will repeat "My name is Kermit the frog" over and over. Ready? Go! (*Repeat the entire experience, with partners switching roles.*)

SAY (1 Minute): Neuroscientist and researchers have discovered that our bodies respond physically to our real name. When we identify ourselves as someone other than who we are, we have a physiological response that weakens our strength. God has hard-wired us to live out of our true nature, our "true name"—when we do, we operate out of greater strength. When we embrace our true name, discovering our meaning and purpose in life, power is released.

SAY (1 Minute): Jesus begins His public ministry by quoting the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, proclaiming: "I have come to set captives free." Our broken, twisted identity is our greatest captivity, and Jesus intends to set us free from it—to release us into our true name, just as He did with Peter... Let's follow Peter's progression, focusing on what Jesus does, and why He does it.

QUESTION (Whole Group, 6 Minutes): Read aloud Matthew 16:13-19. In this part of Peter's story, how is Jesus helping him find freedom from the captivity of his broken identity, and discover the truth about himself? (*Write responses on your whiteboard or flip-pad*)

Experience (Trios, 4 Minutes): (Give each person a notecard, and make sure they each have something to write with.) Get into a Trio right now—sit close to each other in a circle, so you’re facing each other. (Pause) Now, in just a moment you’re going to be completely quiet for one full minute. During the quiet, I’d like you to notice everything you can about one other person in your Trio. Sherlock Holmes solved crimes by paying ridiculous attention to details in other people. Let’s do the same—pay ridiculous attention to one other person in your Trio. As you notice things, write down some predictions about who they are and what they’re like. For example, if you notice a person in your Trio is wearing Toms Shoes, you might predict that this person has a social consciousness and cares about supporting the poor and marginalized. Take notes about that person in your Trio, making as many predictions as you can based on what you observe. Based on noticing small details, what do you know about that person? This will be an awkward 60 seconds, but it’s only 60 seconds—you can do it! Alright, ready? Go! (Pause in silence for 60 seconds.)

Debrief (Trios, 6 minutes): Now, in your Trio, share what you noticed about the person you studied, and what predictions you’ve made because of what you noticed.

Debrief (Whole Group, 7 Minutes): Who heard something about themselves just now that is actually true about you? (Pause) What was this experience like for you? How did it feel to be studied the way you were? And what did it feel like to hear someone make an accurate prediction about you because of something they saw?

SAY (2 Minutes): Let’s call what we did a “positive naming” experience—we study people in order to reflect back something true and good about them. This is actually a powerful act of giving in the Body of Christ—to humbly, but boldly, help others see callings in their life that they can’t see themselves. To see the beauty of another’s meaning and purpose in life, then reflect that back to the person. This is a powerful process, and we don’t take lightly. Isaiah 43:1 God says: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!” As we come to experience one another, as we pay ridiculous attention to one another, we help them see and embrace the callings of their true nature.

Prayer Activity (Whole Group, 5 Minutes): In the quiet, let’s ask Jesus’ question, but turn it around. We’ll simply ask Jesus: “Who do you say that I am?” We’ll be quiet, in a listening posture, trusting Him the way a child trusts. Write what you hear on your notecard. You won’t have to share what you write. First we’ll do two things—we’ll ask God to silence our own voices, and the voice of his enemy. (Pause to do that.) Now let’s be quiet—ask Jesus: “Who do you say that I am?” Then listen, then write what you sense from Him. (Play soft instrumental music if you can. After 3 minutes or so, end the time of silence.)

CLOSING - Guided Imaginary Experience (5 Minutes): (Have everyone close their eyes and relax.) Imagine for a moment you’re with the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus—at the Sea of Galilee, on the beach with Jesus after he calls you in from a night of frustrating fishing. You feel the warmth of the fire he’s built. You’ve had a good breakfast of freshly grilled fish and you can’t stop grinning because...it’s Jesus. He’s alive and smiling at you. A couple of your friends are putting the fire out now, and you can smell the smoke. You glance over at Jesus and realize He’s staring right at you...right through you. He asks you to take a little walk with him. You get up...you keep looking at Him because your soul is buzzing—you’re walking next to Jesus again. He turns, looks at you again, and asks a question that bites a little: “Do you *truly* love me more than any other?” A little startled, you tell him...what? Silently, tell Him your response right now... (Pause) In response, Jesus says: “Feed my lambs.” (Pause) Then you walk a little farther in silence. This time He doesn’t turn to you—His eyes are focused way down the beach. He asks again: “Do you truly love me?” And you respond...how? What do you say to Him now? (Pause) Now Jesus stops and turns—His face uncomfortably close to yours...He won’t take his eyes off you. “Take care of my sheep,” He says. (Pause) Then, leaning in slightly, he asks one more time, “Do you love me?” And you can’t hide your hurt anymore. You tell Him...what? (Pause) He backs away slightly and looks at you tenderly, fiercely. Then you see a grin just dawn on His face as he says, one more time, with gravity, “Feed my sheep.” There’s a long pause now....You have time to ponder what it means to feed Jesus’ sheep. (Longer pause) Then Jesus starts walking again. He gets a few yards ahead of you and you see Him glance back, then call you by name, using the same description He just revealed to you in the silence. You look at Him...He’s smiling. You rush to catch up....

Matthew 16:13-17 – Simon Names Jesus, Jesus Names Simon

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

¹⁵ Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”