

Live Your Calling Reflection

Student: Joanne Cheung [cheungj@allianceu.edu](mailto:cheungj@allianceu.edu)

Program: Masters of Intercultural Studies

Alliance University

February 22, 2023

## **Live Your Calling Reflection**

### **Define your Calling**

My primary calling mission statement is to partner with God in bringing forth kingdom restoration and wholeness by connecting, growing, and caring for my neighbors wherever I am planted. As to my personal answer to this primary calling, I feel deeply led by God to serve vulnerable children and families via education and family strengthening. While I currently have my heart in Asia, I'm aware that location and people group are variables that can change, whereas my unique calling is eternal and unchanging. As I have yet to discern the specifics of what God is calling me to do, I'm currently in a season of asking, waiting, and being attentive to His voice.

The Life Calling Map exercise affirmed that God's calling for me is both need-driven and design-driven. Early in my walk with the Lord, He opened my eyes to the vast injustice that exists between the privileged and the marginalized, especially vulnerable children who barely stand a chance at life because of the circumstances they're born into. Knowing that access to quality education can be a game-changer in terms of empowerment and opportunity, I sensed a deep conviction to work with "vulnerable children" and "education" in some capacity in the future – these were the first two puzzle pieces the Lord gave me. While I didn't pursue God's call immediately (I worked in advertising for years), God faithfully grew my capacity to work with vulnerable children over time via mission trips, Sunday school with low-income neighborhood kids, afterschool programs in the slums, etc. His training was constant even when I was "running away" from His call.

As for my God-given design, the Life Calling assessments revealed that, across the board, helping/service was a recurring theme:

- Skills: Listening, diagnosing issues, mentoring/coaching to assist people in their personal and spiritual development, and finding solutions

- Spiritual Gifts: Exhortation/encouragement, helps/service, mercy
- Core values: Helping others, knowledge and truth, excellence in my work
- Preferred Roles: Mentor/coach, mediator, caretaker (people), supporter/helper
- Personality: ISFJ and 9w1, peacemaker. I tend to seek harmony and cooperation, value relatedness between people, have established procedures, and be task-oriented. I thrive in work that involves nurturing or healing others: “their sense of duty, personal commitment, and practicality often draw them to careers in which they can support and be of service to others” (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 3)

If I dig a little deeper, the area of helping/serving that I resonate with most involves bringing about harmony and healing in broken families and empowering those on the underside to make practical steps toward wholeness, whether economically, relationally, mentally, or spiritually. When I reflect on how God created me, I find a lot of synergy with family strengthening work, which involves empowering families in poverty with financial and educational opportunities, basic resources, support services, and counseling, so that children can grow up in safe and loving homes. Sharing about Jesus in word, deed, and sign would undergird everything I do as I firmly believe the gospel is about holistic renewal. As I gather more pieces for my puzzle, I have a deepening sense of gladness and satisfaction that God has specifically chosen *me* – with my unique combination of skills, spiritual gifts, and personality – for the *specific* purpose of family-based care in His overarching plan for Kingdom restoration.

### **How does this impact how you are currently doing ministry?**

I’m currently involved with two organizations: Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH), which ministers to women in the slums through vocational training and social enterprises, and Envision Bangkok, which ministers to university students and young professionals through relational evangelism and church planting. While both are not explicitly family-strengthening

ministries, both are incredibly relational and involve close interaction with children and women from low-income families. Moreover, some of the work we already do coincides with key family-strengthening strategies. For instance, we offer meaningful employment opportunities (i.e. jewelry making) to meet material needs, English and Bible lessons for educational needs, and small group mentoring/discipleship to support emotional, mental, and spiritual growth. Understanding that the “kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done,” I believe God has already been preparing me in the here and now to serve faithfully where I am, even if I haven’t yet stepped into the fullness of His calling (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 2).

One way for me to lean into my calling, even if I’m not currently involved in a family strengthening ministry, is to continue “using [my] gifts to meet needs, and being a proactive steward of [my] gifts” (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 3). In practice, this means abiding in the Lord for guidance and intentionally seeking out ways to develop my God-given abilities (i.e. offering comfort and encouragement, reconciling conflict, or listening without judgment). Many people in our church have endured losses in recent years, so I’ve had a burden to start and co-lead a community group on how to grieve well. It is a relatively low-risk, yet timely, opportunity where I can try, fail, and grow in my ability to minister compassionately. Considering “spiritual gifts develop through training and use” I also hope to shadow and learn from current ministry partners in the church and in the slums who have a special anointing in mercy work and exhortation (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 3).

### **What implications does this calling have for future leading in a church or ministry?**

As I look ahead to completing seminary, I imagine partnering with a faith-based family-strengthening ministry and being sent out by my home church in NYC to serve in a low-income neighborhood in Southeast Asia. My husband shares the same vision to serve in Southeast Asia and work with “vulnerable children” and “education”; however, we currently

diverge in the specifics – I feel called towards family-based care while he feels led to education training and media work. As life partners in ministry, I think it's important that we share the same conviction about our call so that we can make decisions in unity. In the midst of wrestling with God for clarity, we're learning to abide. To be comfortable with moving forward without the full picture in tow. To listen to His voice as we go. Indeed, the Lord "knows each of us as a unique individual and guides us as we uniquely need to be shepherded," whether that is through His Word, prayer, or a gentle whisper – my husband's and my role is to be expectant, open-handed, and attentive (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 7).

When my husband's green card gets approved and we temporarily move back to NYC to finish my schooling, my approach to seeking new ministry opportunities will be very purposeful as I plan to evaluate every role through the lens of whether or not it is in line with God's vocational calling for me. For instance, my home church in NYC has already voiced they'd love to have me help lead their children's ministry, which I'm keen on because working with hundreds of children and their parents will positively impact my growth trajectory in the long run. Even now, I'm learning to make Spirit-led decisions instead of Joanne-led ones. Recently, my husband was presented with an opportunity to serve as a Missions Pastor and Media Lead at a prominent international church in Bangkok – the role would come with a robust salary, housing, education costs for our kids, and plenty of other tempting benefits. While the role promised financial stability and convenience, we both did not feel at peace as it didn't align with God's call for us to serve amongst the lost and marginalized who are not yet part of the church. As God continues to unfold His plan, I anticipate there will be "different kinds of voices calling [us] to all different kinds of work...the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest" (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 2). I refuse to just let life happen to me and aim to live intentionally toward my unique, God-given purpose.

**What needs to change in your life to align yourself with this calling?**

One of my co-workers at UNOH is actually very involved with family-based care and has been such a great resource for me. After I shared my desire to grow in this area, he connected me with an organization that offers mentoring/coaching, psychosocial support, foster care, and other services to families living in marginalized communities. I'm currently waiting to hear back on part-time opportunities to volunteer and shadow experts in the field. So long as I'm moving in the direction God is leading me and developing the gifts He's given me, I don't mind being a novice! Beyond the online courses, podcasts, and articles I've already poured into, I agree that by "spending time in a particular work environment, watching one or more people do their jobs...you can learn more about the specifics of a job and also observe the physical work environment" (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 6). The depth of learning is just so much richer. That my co-worker at UNOH also has a passion for empowering vulnerable families is not a coincidence – this is one of many examples of God's providence and how He has faithfully beckoned me forward, revealing one new puzzle piece at a time.

By saying yes to God, I also have to say no to other things. It is easy for me to overschedule and overcommit to any ministry needs that arise, but not all urgent asks are important. Truly, "His power within us enables us to exchange our frenetic life of achievement, acquisition, and activity for a life centered on pleasing the Audience of One" (Brennfleck, 2005, Chp. 11). To combat my performance tendencies, I aim to implement Brennfleck's strategy of evaluating my current weekly activities against my calling statement and adjusting based on God's priorities in my life. This might mean removing social events from my calendar and adding in regular times of silence and solitude. Ultimately, morning to morning, I shall commit my plans to the Lord, asking Him to give me the wisdom to live each day in the fullness of my calling.

**References:**

Brennfleck, K., & Brennfleck, K. M. (2005). *Live Your Calling: A Practical Guide to Finding and Fulfilling Your Mission in Life*. Jossey-Bass.