

A grayscale photograph of a person's legs from the knees down, wearing dark pants and light-colored sneakers with white soles. The person is walking on a cobblestone path. The background is a bright, hazy outdoor setting, possibly a beach or a park, with a fence visible in the distance. The overall tone is motivational and active.

Understanding Your Calling

7 Step
Actionable
Study

Understanding Your Calling 7-Step Actionable Study

Note: Before you get started, you may want to glance through the first exercise. It's likely that it will take you a few days to work through it. On average, each additional exercise takes no more than an hour to complete; however, this supplemental section is something you can take at your own pace.

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Understanding Your Calling

God wants you to take ownership of your life. He wants you to live proactively rather than reactively.

Holley Gerth, *You're Already Amazing*

It's difficult to live a proactive life when much of the day, we feel like we're running from one fire to the next, accomplishing very little. When I began to narrow the focus of my ministry and calling only to include the things God is calling me to do rather than all the things that were on my calendar, I quickly discovered I was able to balance everything without feeling overwhelmed or burned out.

This process wasn't easy; it required me, first, to admit I'm not able to spend days on end multi-tasking and also be an excellent wife, mom, and employee. It also meant I needed to stop using busyness as an excuse for complete obedience. There were things God was calling me to dive into more deeply, which felt hard and scary. Things like writing and speaking publicly.

Being busy seemed like the perfect rationale for saying *no* to God. But here's the thing. God is never satisfied with *part* of our hearts. He loves us too much to allow us to settle. In the Propel study, *Growth*, Christine Caine talks about the physical practice of stretching and points out that when we stretch to loosen tight muscles, we lengthen them effectively and in doing so, expand our reach. This same practice applies to our spiritual lives.¹

As an athletic training major, stretching athletes was an everyday discipline. One of the most interesting things about muscles is that they have excellent memory. Another interesting fact is that in some cases, tight muscles will cause you to feel referred pain. For example, many people experience lower back discomfort and assume they need to massage or stretch their backs when tight hamstring muscles are the real cause of their issues.

Here are a few things you may not know about stretching:

- It improves your joint range of motion
- It improves your athletic performance
- It decreases your risk of injury
- It helps your joints move through their full range of motion
- It enables your muscles to work most effectively
- Uneven stretching can cause harm. You need to stretch both sides of your body equally

¹ "Growth Workbook - Propel Women", Propelwomen.Org, 2020, <https://www.propelwomen.org/offer.php?intid=1071>.

- Tension when stretching is good; pain when stretching is dangerous and can cause harm
- Stretches should be held for longer than you likely prefer to be most effective
- A partner stretch is an excellent way of encouraging your muscles to lengthen more than can be accomplished when you stretch alone.
- Most muscle injuries could be prevented with consistent stretching ²

In general, it was my experience that most athletes hated stretching. The best ones understood the necessity and disciplined themselves to make it a part of their routines, but every day, we would chase them down and remind them to stretch. Many times, they would skip the process and get away with it for a while. But the thing about stretching is that avoiding it always catches up with you.

Eventually, a pulled hamstring, quad, or calf would sideline someone for a week or longer. Do you know the most ironic part of these injuries? The treatment in most cases is rest with a protocol of heating and icing, followed by gentle stretching. That's right. The way to heal an injury from not stretching is to stretch.

I, too, fall into the category of disliking stretching. It takes time away from my workout, forces me to be still when I prefer activity, and causes some discomfort—just like most hard things in life.

Ordell often reminds his teams that we gain success when we focus on controlling the things we can control instead of the things we *wish* we had power over.

The following exercises are to help you control the thing you can best control: your response.

The journey of finding your sweet spot is an exercise in stretching your mental muscles. You're unlikely to enjoy every stage, but in the end, you'll be further down the road toward understanding your calling.

Before we begin to explore your journey, let's look at two stories in the Bible. The thing about discovering our calling is that sometimes it isn't until we spend time reflecting on where we started that the full picture is clearer.

² "Stretching Is Not A Warm Up! Find Out Why", Mayo Clinic, 2020, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/stretching/art-20047931>.

Step 1

Note: I am intentionally giving you as little instruction as possible with this first exercise. You will read my reflections in the Living on Mission chapter.

- Read the Books of Ruth and Jonah in the Old Testament of the Bible.
- Summarize the Book of Ruth.
- Summarize the Book of Jonah.
- What is similar about Ruth and Jonah?
- What is different about Ruth and Jonah?
- What key verses stand out to you?
- What key lessons do you learn?
- What do you think God is teaching you through this exercise?
- What did you learn about surrender through this exercise?

Self-Discovery

What was true for me has also been true for dozens of women who have taken the time to understand their callings. As you've read, you may have noticed that not everyone took the same steps in their journeys, and we are all still works in progress. The common thread that defines our experiences is that we have all discovered what makes us thrive. Remember, we learned from Anne that your competence does not equal your calling.

The truth is, the more we understand about how our Creator uniquely designed us, the easier it is to walk confidently in our calling. The activities here are what worked for me. I've created these actionable steps based on years of experience and will lay them out for you in a concise order. You may find that you need to pause and do a deep dive in a specific section. If that is the case, go for it!

This is your journey; you don't have a timeline. As Kristen's story taught us, when we prayerfully take each step, God will guide us.

Consider Your History

Reflect on Deb's and Robyn's stories. They both shared milestones in their pasts that lined up in a way that seems to create a path toward finding their calling. Let's take time to look at the unique thread connecting your passions and gifts as Robyn described.

Step 2

Build a resume of significant life events and memories.

- What did you dream of being when you were younger?
- Where did you want to live?
- Which jobs sounded the most exciting?
- Did you volunteer in high school? College?
- How have athletics, music, or the arts played a role in your life?
- What has brought you the most joy?
- When have you felt most out of your element or like you were a fake?

Step 3

List the best parts of yourself.

- What do other people say about you?
- What are some of the most fulfilling compliments you've received?
- Do you make an amazing chocolate cake? Send me the recipe and add it to the list.
- After you create your list, walk away for a few days, and then come back. Start again.

This is a difficult exercise for most women because we rarely give ourselves enough credit. Be honest with yourself, remember your strengths and gifts are important. God has created you with them for a purpose.

Think of it this way. If the whole body were just an eyeball, how could it hear sounds? And if the whole body were just an ear, how could it smell different fragrances? But God has carefully designed each member and placed it in the body to function as he desires. *A diversity is required*, for if the body consisted of one single part, there wouldn't be a body at all! (1 Cor. 12:17-19 TPT)

Step 4

This is my favorite exercise. If you haven't yet taken a personality test, please take a few. Ordell and I both have found the Enneagram test to be the most helpful for understanding why we see the world the way we do and how we respond instinctively as individuals. It's also provided insight into why we work together the way we do, but you may find another test offers more insight. *You can find information on these tests in the Resources section of my book Lessons from the Sidelines.*

Choose a few:

- Gary Chapman's 5 Love Languages
- The Enneagram
- StrengthsFinder
- DISC
- Spiritual Gifts Assessment

You may want to print out your results and keep them somewhere safe, so you have them to refer to or record the information you gather here.

Step 5

One of the talks Ordell consistently gives his teams is that life is lived in the dash between the dates on a tombstone. This concept is one presented in many leadership seminars because it is important to remember. Consider your "dash."

- What legacy do you want to leave?
- How do you want to be remembered?
- Who do you want to remember you?
- How do you NOT want to be remembered?

Step 6

It's time to take a serious look at your calendar and take some time to pray about what God is asking you to remove. This isn't likely to happen immediately. In fact, if you have made a commitment to chair a PTA committee or lead a small group at church, I expect you will follow through with your commitment rather than leave people hanging.

You can also use this time to begin planning your *nos*. Reflect back on Step 4 and 5. From now on, if the request before you doesn't connect with the answers you've listed, prioritize saying *no*. Furthermore, if any request aligns with how you answered the question "How do you NOT want to be remembered?", from now on you answer with an automatic *no*.

This is where your block calendar will come in very handy. If you are a visual person, create a current version and an ideal version of your weekly calendar. Compare them.

Notice your physical and emotional responses as you go through this exercise. What I know to be true for me is that when I am pulling off and adding the right things there is a calmness in my soul. See chapter 3 for an example of a completed block calendar. You can print a blank version of a block calendar at lessonsfromthesidelines.com/book-resources. It's one of the *Thriving in Your Sweet Spot Action Plan* downloadable worksheets.

Step 7

Once you begin to gain a better understanding of how God has uniquely created you, what gives you energy, what drains you, and where you feel the most like yourself, you won't want to veer too far off course. Especially after all this hard work you've been doing!

The likelihood is you've gathered a significant amount of information about yourself in this process. I shared before that in the past, I've used Powersheets to keep myself organized and on track. If you are a chronic overcommitter, this is one system to consider investing in as you figure out what you want to prioritize. I have a set of free downloadable worksheets to help you get started with goal setting. Check the Resources section of this book for more information.

I've summarized what I understand as my life's calling into a life statement. This is on my website and in my planner. It's my reminder that as I structure my day, set goals, and choose my yeses and no's, there are important boundaries I need to stay within so I can accomplish what God is calling me to do for him.

Here's my Life Statement:

My Life Statement:

I am created and called to express my faith through love especially by:

- Partnering with my husband to serve and mentor those whom God places in our path.
- Opening our home and providing a safe and welcoming environment.
- Raising our sons to glorify God and follow him first.
- Writing and speaking truth and encouragement into the hearts of those God places in my path, meeting them where they are and walking alongside them until our journeys part.
- Loving deeply, living fully, hoping wildly, so that I will enter heaven and hear, "My child, your obedience delighted me daily."

As you can see, my life statement (above) is multifaceted. It includes who I want to be remembered by as well as how I want to most be remembered. It also includes what I am most passionate about accomplishing. Yours may be similar or it may look completely different. Either way is great because it's between you and God.

Write Your Own Life Statement: