

FOREWORD

As I began to go through the contents of this book and examined some of the core principles of the Vocations 4Life program, I believe I was faced with the most Biblical as well as theological and practical explanation I have ever been given concerning our identity in Christ and the call of God in our lives. It is easy-to-read, thoroughly informative and I simply could not put it down; I wish it had formed part of my “essential resources list” when I was still involved in residential pastoring.

Over the years I have read many books and attended endless courses on “knowing your motivational and spiritual gifts”. I have taught such courses in many different settings. In many respects they benefited both the people I pastored and me personally. However, I always felt that there was something “missing”. It was as if we were “compartmentalizing” people into pre-set assumptions of identity and purpose, and not fully taking into account the uniqueness of the individual’s personality and nature. As I read the contents of this book and studied the program it supports, suddenly I realized I had found the missing ingredient!

What Ben Gray has given to us is a working blueprint plan for both discovering who we really are in Christ — and also identifying and describing God’s uniqueness in each of our lives, especially in terms of our motivations, gifts and abilities which are waiting to be discovered and released.

It explains and then defines our being fearfully and wonderfully made — and how He has established us to be one of His wonderful works. (cf. Psalm 139:14) Ben is a student of Scripture but also a practitioner of Biblical principles and over the years has modeled ministry with infectious enthusiasm and well-attested fruitfulness. He has carefully observed the

relationship and challenge of contemporary society and people and their calling for many years.

Most leaders know that every person has their uniqueness and calling — but the danger has been in developing curricula and programs that, in the end, result in people having to slot into pre-determined templates and structures of organizations that may not necessarily be the right “fit” for them. Consequently, they have not always really experienced the “Abundant Life” of their uniqueness. (cf. John 10:10)

That is why I thoroughly recommend this program! Primarily it has been designed by someone who has not just “talked the talk” — but who has also “walked the walk” — and done so with integrity and humility. Earthed in Scripture and rich in testimony, this book contains numerous examples of people who, after reading the book and going through the Vocations 4Life program, were profoundly impacted and changed in their life and work. It is practical, engaging, totally eye-opening and penetrating.

As you read this book and go through the Vocations 4Life program, prepare to become informed, challenged, refreshed and positioned for a life that will bear abundant fruit.

That is God’s vocation for us all.

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INTRODUCTION

YOU ARE PART OF GOD'S DREAM

Human resource experts are suggesting that people need to get more in tune with their own emotional intelligence, calling it “personal branding”. Personal branding is how you market yourself to others consciously or unconsciously.

We all have this presentation of self — whether we like to call it “personal branding” or not. People think about you when you are not around and how they can best relate, connect or work with you; for them, this presentation of self seems to be who you are. Often without realizing it, we create this perception around ourselves. For those who do realize it, some seek to find ways to leverage this personal branding to get ahead. Recently I read where one business manager had to work hard to be recognized as an accomplished leader in her industry. Describing herself as an introvert, she says she worked on her personal growth for a long time to reach her current management position. She credits reaching this position to three factors: building on her authenticity; holding to the motivations, values and ethics she held dear; and making sure she did not violate her true self in the process.

God has a dream for you! His preferred best for your life, His personal branding if you will. It is His desire to see this dream fulfilled in and through you — He’s committed to that! Your part is to connect to it the best way you can. Vocations 4Life has been designed to do just that.

A vast number of people, Christians included, feel frustrated, disconnected and out of sync with their own sense of purpose. They have dreams, but little understanding of why those deep stirrings reside within them. They are unable to express who they really are and to allow these dreams come to fruition. They

are unsure how to connect with God's purpose and desire for their life. People need help to connect their dreams and passions, along with their gifts and abilities, to the heart of God.

Mike was such a person; frustrated and unable to connect his dreams and desires to the purposes of God. A casual conversation at a wedding reception eventually changed all that for him. Here Mike tells his own story of how this all changed.

“Like many men entering their 40s, several years ago I found myself in a frustrating season of re-assessment regarding the direction my life had taken me. While ability in the area of graphic design had provided me with a successful career, I had come to the realization that I had settled for giving my life to merely working for a paycheck rather than engaging in a purpose that lined up with the passions of my heart. In fact I found that, much to my frustration, I had denied that passion for so long that my efforts to get in touch with what it was only led to confusion about just who and what I was meant to be... I just knew there must be more to life.

“After much desperate prayer and a providential meeting with Ben Gray, I was given the opportunity to participate in the ‘Vocations 4Life’ program. This provided me with a unique opportunity to see myself through a variety of lenses and perspectives which reflected not only my spiritual dimension, but also the areas of my personality, desires and social relationships, enabling me to begin to piece together a comprehensive picture of who God had made me and just how I had been ‘wired up’ by Him. The valuable insights gained during the program were the very tools I needed to understand more clearly the patterns and passions of my heart, giving me an essential foundation stone in my journey to discover and pursue the destiny I felt the Lord calling me to embrace.

Since completing ‘Vocations 4Life’, I have gone on to complete a degree in Social Science, commence a counseling practice and work as a relationships counselor; recently moving to another country to take up a position as pastor in a church. I now enjoy the satisfaction of giving my life to a purpose that lines up with

the purpose and desires God placed in my heart.”

As it did for Mike, Vocations 4Life will enable you to grasp afresh the reality of God’s best for you, facilitating the changes required in connecting with your vocational purpose.

This is an exciting journey of discovery for many as they get to see themselves as kingdom people, called to have an effect on society and all of creation. In this book you will get to meet others whose lives have been impacted, changed and then released, because they took the Vocations 4Life journey.

One young man studying at college, who didn’t have a clear sense of his vocation or direction in life, did Vocations 4Life seeking to discover more of God’s dream and desire for him. After completing the program he had this to say... *I really enjoyed it and think Vocations 4Life is a great program as it really gives you a greater understanding of your gifts, graces and personality, and why you enjoy the things you do! It really gave me more direction as to what careers might be better suited to me and explained why. It was very relevant to my life and how I can be most productive in the future.*

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines vocation as: *“a divine call to, a strong inclination towards, or to have a sense of fitness to a particular service, function or station in life; a career or occupation, employment, trade or profession.”*¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, a 19th century American philosopher, once said that *“each man has his own vocation. The talent is the call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him.”*²

When I use the word “vocation”, I am essentially referring to a person’s disposition, motivations, abilities and qualities which come together in an individual’s life and are then “worked out” in various settings to form the contribution they make to others, society and to creation. However economic necessities or family responsibilities may require you to work for a season outside the area of your vocational core strengths. Just don’t settle there. Seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance, discover and sharpen your

giftedness, attributes and abilities, be patient and resolute and God will open doors for you.

In his book, *Surprised by Hope*, N.T. Wright makes this statement regarding a person's vocation in life.

“What you do with your body in the present matters, because God has a great future in store for it. And if this applies to ethics, as in 1 Corinthians 6, it certainly also applies to the various vocations to which God's people are called. What you do in the present — by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbour as yourself — all these things will last into God's future. They are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether ... They are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom.”³

Vocations 4Life assists this reality. It's about embracing and collaborating with God's kingdom and fulfilling your vocational calling in all of life. It will enable you to see and understand not only yourself but how others, who are also made in God's image, function in life.

In rounding out this introduction, let me introduce you to a 19 year old, a participant in Vocations 4Life: *“Vocations 4Life was an excellent and profoundly insightful experience. Before I completed the program my vocational direction was hazy and I was unsure in which career environment I would potentially function and thrive in. Throughout the program my gifts and abilities were assessed to a professional standard. From the assessment and evaluation, potential vocational areas were promoted and discussed in a brilliant consultancy session providing direction and purpose for me, and my career. At my age, Vocations 4Life couldn't have come at a better time and has greatly encouraged me as to my vocational calling at this critical time of my life.”*

As this young man did, I invite you to engage with me in the ideas contained in this book and the Vocations 4Life program

positioning yourself to better discover God's dream — His best for you!

Ben F. Gray

¹ *The Little Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Australia Melbourne, 1995.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th century American philosopher, *Spiritual Laws*, Essay, First Series 1841.

³ N.T.Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007, page 205.

Chapter one

POSITION

Focus ... people and destiny

Introduction

I'm sure that many of us have been frustrated and felt limited by the options available to use our gifts, talents and experiences in serving the Lord in a meaningful way. Often wondering about the best way to serve His purpose in our life, desiring to be able to make a real difference. Many of us have also felt hindered and ineffective, unable to exercise their particular talents, gifts and abilities more fully within their church world, often becoming discouraged.

Others have struggled in society as a whole because they have taken on roles that are not suited to their God-given nature or purpose, their sense of vocation and calling. Because of this and a variety of other work-life experiences, many felt hurt, disappointed and annoyed.

Deep down all of us carry a desire to connect with a genuine expression of kingdom purpose and calling. To be positioned in Christ with each other and within society, so that our creative energy and mission sees God's purposes fulfilled "on our watch". We want to know and experience our godly calling and mission in life.

Chosen for a purpose

It is clear that God has chosen a specific time and place for each person to exist, and the special contribution that each brings to the fore is connected to God's kingdom at work in all of creation. What a fantastic thought! Everyone on earth has been made in the image of God and is part of His divine purpose.

In Genesis we see that before God gave Adam a wife or family, He gave him a purpose — a mandate — to be fruitful, work the “*garden...to cultivate...and keep it.*” (Genesis 2:15) God deems our work — where we connect in life and make a meaningful contribution — a part of what it means to gather our kingdom inheritance.

As the Bible says, “*...there is nothing better than to...find satisfaction in work...these pleasures are from the hand of God.*”^{NLT} (Ecclesiastes 2:24) Jesus said in John’s gospel, “*My Father never stops working...so I keep working, too.*”^{NCV} (John 5:17) That is because work, what we do, matters to God; society and cities need commerce, government and maintenance, while people need community, goods and services.

It is true that God takes ordinary people and gives them power to do extraordinary things. It does not matter to Him what work they might have: accounting, home duties, serving in a department store or driving a cab. Therefore, we should “*...work heartily, as for the Lord.*” (Colossians 3:23)

Imagine if everyone had a wholehearted devotion to God and lived under the Lordship of Christ filling out His creation with this amazing revelation. What a picture this would represent! This creative, divine and loving image of God, liberated to fill all creation with His glory. Wasn’t that the purpose behind the Garden of Eden? So use your uniqueness, the special person that you are, to make a kingdom statement everyday and enjoy ministering unto the Lord in all things.

On completing *Vocations 4Life*, Margaret discovered afresh her purpose and motivation; through it, she was released to more fully enter into her calling and mission in God.

“In doing Vocations 4Life I found that quite a few things fell into place for me, like pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle. For the first time I was able to see a much bigger picture of how God had put me together and how he had placed me in MY garden to fulfill a purpose. This realization has given me such liberty and release. One of the most helpful clarifications, however, was in

understanding my particular ministry grace or purpose, and how God had graced me to carry a particular deposit of His grace as a nurturer.

I am beginning to see just how all my relationships, be they family, friends, at work, in my local church, the community or anywhere, are places of ministry, places to be impacted and influenced through the nature and purpose God has graced me with. This has given me a new confidence and energy to engage with society in a more holistic way.”

Calling

The calling upon humanity is to be God’s image-bearers and to impact our world and all of creation with His love. It’s as simple and profound as that. It’s about His love! (1 John 4:8,16)

This image-bearing reality is gifted to us and we are encouraged to discover its nature and purpose — our vocational motivation. This motivating influence is a calling upon each of us to engage in and to accomplish particular work, whether it is in a paid or unpaid capacity, in the home or workplace. This concept of calling is brought out in Ephesians 2:10, which says: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

From Genesis we learn that this calling involves a balance between work, rest and relationships. Originally placed in the Garden, humanity was given a home with the expressed commission of making the whole earth a place where God could be “at home”. Adam and Eve cared for the Garden; they enjoyed each other, rested from their work and walked with God in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). They had a calling!

Speaking of our calling in Christ, Paul says that God will *“fulfill every desire [we have] for goodness and the work of faith with power.”* (2 Thessalonians 1:11) He then goes on to say that this focus on the good desires of the person you are by birth, upbringing, re-birth and redemption is all about *“the name of our Lord Jesus [being] glorified in you, and you in Him,*

according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 1:12) God created you in His image, and He’s at work to bring that same created image into the fullness of His eternal purpose.

You are significant in God’s plan.

In a moment, God can do it all and get the job done, but He chooses not to do that. Why? Because He wants you with all of your faults and failings, struggles, good and not-so-good desires, to be glorified in Christ and thereby come into your full inheritance as adopted children of God.

We all are called of God!

Calling is not just about “doing stuff” or the task given to us—it is primarily about what we are called to be! We are called to be ministers of God’s nature and purpose *every* moment of *every* day in *everything* we do. In essence we are — His Presence Carriers! Our sense of calling — our vocational motivation — should be guided, directed and empowered by the grace of God.

Positioned for Impact

For many Christians, the word “ministry”, which is linked to “our sense of calling”, has been linked with religious activity and the activities of that organization. This has often meant that gifted and passionate people are left without an outlet for their God-given works of service. Someone like Margaret with the ability to express the compassionate heart of the Father is drawn again and again to the hurting. Callings such as hers are often outside the ministry mandate of organized religion. People like Margaret don’t have a ministry, they “are” a ministry, wherever they go, whatever they do they can minister the heart of the Father. As Paul states in Colossians 3:17: *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”*

As God’s people we are called to a worldview that is holistic in nature. Where life is lived as a dynamic unity under God. Here the context for our vocational calling becomes the society, all of

creation, as we embrace and collaborate with God's kingdom activity in the earth. (Matthew 11:12)

When we function in line with God's nature and purpose, this relationship to God caused heaven to touch earth in unique demonstrations of grace, overcoming natural and, from time to time, supernatural obstacles as we live out His calling in us.

We are encouraged to engage the world and its systems, being one with the people of the world, but keeping our distinction within the world's systems. From this standpoint there is no spiritual or natural divide, no sacred or secular. We can actually bring Christ, in whom the Scripture says, "*all things* [of creation] *hold together*," (Colossians 1:17) into clearer focus. [emphasis added] Your life, your calling, is who you are 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's connected to an all-creation mandate that was given to Adam in the Garden and redeemed through the death and resurrection of Christ.

It's each person's birthright!

Finding your place

As the people of God, the place and focus of our vocational motivation — our ministry — is in the everyday life, work and relationships in society. In fact, we are to gather our eternal inheritance, one that God wants to give His children, from within this present reality.

Today across the globe, Christians in every sphere of life are once again rediscovering new energy and fruitfulness. Their faith is no longer confined to just a religious domain. Instead it is becoming one with their lifestyle. Their good works are creating a powerful movement in the earth. God's people, in a revolutionary way, are forging new and creative engagements with their abilities, motivations and calling in God. Guided by God's prophetic declaration in Psalm 2:8, "*Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession*," many are finding their inheritance in the earth.

Vocations 4Life has seen hundreds discover this reality. It serves to equip them in their engagement of the particular spheres they are called to impact. As one writer put it, God wants “*to be at the center of a mobile where everything in life, friends, family, occupation, thoughts, activities, is connected to God but moves with the wind, in and out and back and forth, in an incredible dance of being.*”¹ God’s desire therefore is to be at the center of everything.

Matthew was a young man (a leader) in his twenties when he did Vocation 4Life; his story highlights its uniqueness.

“WOW! The Vocations 4Life program opened my eyes. It highlighted to me my giftedness and character, who I am, my likes, dislikes and what I am geared toward. I suppose it is hard to truly know true self when you are so caught in yourself, but this program helps draw out your God-given gifts, abilities, personality and character, and presents it back to you in a practical and comprehensive fashion. It helped me understand my God design; why I am who I am and why I like doing certain things, it also reflected why I get frustrated with other aspects of life. It all made sense after doing Vocations 4Life.

“I would strongly recommend this vocations program to anyone wanting to discover more about themselves, seek God’s understanding and future direction for their life and vocation, or to learn how best to fit into their current situation.”

Gifted for fruitfulness

Only God knows who you really are.

It is essential that you gain a strong sense of the person and purpose of the Triune God in your life.

Each person has been created in the image of the Triune God. All of His gifts find a natural and eternal “home” within each of us: they “fit” with who we are. It is the actual nature, desire and purpose of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit that is being given in and through the abilities and gifts of God.

People try to find out who they are in many and varied ways. They want to know who or what they should connect with in life. Although you will never fully grasp the significance of “you”, rest assured, God does. Paul reiterates this in Galatians 4:9 when he says, “*now that [we] have come to know God, or rather to be known by God.*” [emphasis added] The truth is we are fully known by God, at our worst and at our best. This is the starting point for understanding ourselves. As our maker, God has equipped us for the whole of our lives. He is able to supply whatever we need to accomplish our kingdom tasks or “good works” — our sense of calling.

In this, it is about discovering that “...*we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works... prepared in advance for us to do.*” NIV (Ephesians 2:10) God has made us, He has equipped us for life and He is able to supply what we need to accomplish our calling and mission. He has given us the gift of life — a gift that keeps on being refreshed with many other gifts.

To understand who we are, we need to know about all the gifts that God has given to us:

- our *nature* ... attributes and abilities
- our *purpose* ... vocational motivation

Different gifts of God for life

In the Bible there is a standout passage that helps us understand the kinds of gifts God gives to different people. This key teaching is one that will inform or enlighten our exploration of life and work. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, Paul the apostle reveals:

- “*there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.*” (1 Corinthians 12:4) “*to each one is given the manifestation.*” (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- “*there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord [Son].*” (1 Corinthians 12:5 [emphasis added]). “*He gave gifts to men.*” (Ephesians 4:8)

- *“there are varieties of effects, but the same God [Father] who works all things in all persons.”* (1 Corinthians 12:6 [emphasis added]) *“Since we have gifts...”* (Romans 12:6)

The three members of the one Godhead are seen here as contributing in different ways to our lives. Each has given, and continues to give into our lives special motivations, abilities, qualities, guidance and manifestations enabling us to be who we are and achieve what we are made to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

This understanding from 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 is what I describe as the “Trinitarian” concept of gifting and is crucially important. Why? It enables us to see and understand that all gifts are from God, but that each member of the Trinity gives them in different ways and at different times with, of course, one eternal purpose in mind. You cannot separate the Trinity. The three members of the Trinity are constantly at work gifting, gracing and manifesting in ordinary human beings across planet Earth.

At birth God created you in His image. At your very foundation, He bestowed divine attributes and abilities upon you so He could grow you up into His divine purpose.

God chooses you to partner with Him.

The Trinity of Gift Giving

With this important truth in mind, let’s proceed to the Triune gift list. We will not examine them in great detail here; we will do this in the following chapters.

– the Gifts of the Father God — (Nature)

The primary gift-list from the Father is found in Romans 12:6–8. There Paul says, that: *“since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”*

– the Gifts of the Son of God — Jesus Christ — (Purpose)

The primary gift-list from the Son is found in Ephesians 4:7. Paul says that: *“to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”* He then goes on say in verse 11 that Christ *“gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.”*

– the Gifts of the Spirit of God — (Power)

The primary gift-list of the Holy Spirit is found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10.

After saying in verse 4 of chapter 12 that *“there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit”*, Paul goes on to say that *“to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.”*

Different but related

Therefore we have different givers, different gifts, different members and one body. In each instance, these gifts are placed in the context of the body of Christ and its mission in society and all of creation. This clearly indicates to us the truth that these gifts are about how we relate together as individuals in creation. Just as the Trinity is one but three, so too are we one with that body, but distinct as individuals within it.

The more you know about the gifts the Triune God has given you, the more that you can work with Him, others and creation to become all He made you to be. Let’s be encouraged in the knowledge that *“the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”* (Romans 11:29)

Vocations 4Life enables us to enquire into our identity as individuals as well as who we are in our “relatedness” to others

in life. These graces were there, continue to be here and will go on being.

Destiny

It's time for us to grasp firmly that we are gifted by God to do "good work" in society and all of creation; He has given us a purposeful destiny.

As an integral part of Christ's body the church, you and I are privileged to discover, express and "*fulfill every desire for goodness.*" From this deep heart desire our "*work of faith with power*" will emerge, so that "*the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12)

It couldn't get any better than that!