



# Called:?!

FOLLOWING A FUTURE FILLED WITH THE POSSIBLE

J.D. WALT

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Printed in the United States of America

Print ISBN: 978-1-62824-124-2

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-62824-125-9

ePub ISBN: 978-1-62824-126-6

uPDF ISBN: 978-1-62824-043-6

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Cover and page design by Stephanie Wright



SEEDBED PUBLISHING

Franklin, Tennessee

Seedbed.com

Sowing for a Great Awakening

# Contents

PREFACE	ix
1. From Darkness to Light	3
2. From Death to Life	5
3. To a Life of Extraordinary Epiphany	9
4. From Ladder-Climbing to Cross-Descending	11
5. From “How Much Do I Give?” to “How Much Do I Keep?”	13
6. From Dutiful Discipline to an “Abiding Desire”	15
7. From “Saving the World” to “Serving My Friends”	17
8. From a Predictable Life to “Leaving the Building”	21
9. To a Continuous Process Filled with Moments of Crisis	25
10. To Believe the Impossible	27
11. From Self-Assuredness to God-Confidence	31
12. From a Power Position to a Humble Place	33
13. From One who Talks to One who Hears	37
14. From Outward Appearances to Inner Person	39
15. From Disillusionment to Insight	43
16. From “I Can’t Do It’ to “There’s a Fire in My Bones”	47
17. From a Static Job Description to a Series of Divine Assignments	51
18. From a Hopeless Situation to a Hopeful Preparation	55
19. From Ordinary Faithfulness to Extravagant Obedience	59
20. From the Scripted Life to the Stories that Matter	61
21. To the Future of the Possible	65
EPILOGUE	69
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	70

# Called:

## FOLLOWING A FUTURE FILLED WITH THE POSSIBLE

This little book will help you because we designed it for you. Like so many others, you hold deep within you a sense of purpose for your life, even a sense of destiny. Something tucked away in the recesses of your soul will not be quiet. Even the whisper of this voice reminds you that your life was meant for “something more.”

## You are called.

I remember wrestling with this as a law student. My career plans were unfolding nicely. My resume shined with promise. All seemed right on track, but something told me I was on the wrong track. A new song stirred in my heart and I had no idea what to do with it.

I made an appointment with the pastor of the church I attended. After listening to me talk for five or six minutes, a look came over his face—one that said, “I know exactly what you need.” He made a beeline for the bookshelf, where he pulled a gigantic three-ring binder and set it in my lap. *OMG!* I thought. He told me I would need to enter into a process where I would be assigned a “mentor” (that would not be him) who would supervise me as I answered all the questions in this gauntlet of a manual. After that would come a two- or three-year process of waiting, which would likely involve a graduate degree in theological education.

I left his office scratching my head. He validated the sense of calling happening within me. But he wrongly assumed this necessarily meant I wanted to do what he was doing. Because of my strong spiritual pulse, I guess he assumed I was called to be an ordained minister.

In retrospect, I guess he was right. Today I serve as an ordained minister. His approach to me, however, was all wrong. I needed my pastor to be a mentor. Instead, he gave me a manual that came with an institutional supervisor.

Somewhere in the ensuing season I met a campus minister who invited me into a journey which looked a lot more like the landscape of this little book. He knew I wasn't searching for a career path. He understood I was responding to something much deeper. He helped me take those first steps into a “called” life.

A “called” life means many things for many people. It can literally take the form of any job under the sun. It might mean serving as the pastor of a church. It might mean serving as a member of Congress. To embrace the “called” life does not narrow the scope of the future. It opens up the horizon.

Stephen Johnson, an author and thinker, researches and writes about where ideas come from. He coined the term, “the adjacent possible.” Here’s how he describes it:

*The adjacent possible is a kind of shadow future, hovering on the edges of the present state of things, a map of all the ways in which the present can reinvent itself.*

The twenty-one-day journey ahead invites you to walk on the pathway that leads to the “adjacent possible.” As you already know, this journey looks more like Jacob wrestling (see Gen. 32:22–29) than career counseling. It’s more about finding a posture from which to behold the future, rather than a place to brainstorm on a whiteboard. **The “called” life chiefly involves learning to behold God—Jesus Christ—in such a fashion that you become his protégé in the making.**

In the final analysis, the adjacent possible is the Kingdom of God—the future of the possible. It hovers on the edges of the present state of things. Those who embrace this life become demonstration plots of the adjacent possible, “on earth as it is in heaven,” in the real world.

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# Called: From Darkness to Light

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. GENESIS 1:1–3

And so it began. The story of Creation and the plot of Redemption masterfully narrate us into the epic movement from darkness to light.

The bedtime rituals at our home, on good nights, close out with exuberant, raucous worship. One memory stands out from a few years back. We were singing and dancing to my friend David Crowder’s rendition of *I Saw the Light*. You may recognize it as the work of the late great gospel theologian, Hank Williams Sr.

*I saw the Light. I saw the Light.  
No more darkness. No more night.  
Now I’m so happy, no trouble in sight.  
Praise the Lord! I saw the Light!*

Can you see it? *I Saw the Light* blaring, the Lord Jesus Christ shining, and five of us jubilantly dancing. (This was the BS period—before our son Sam—we had a five-year-old, three-year-old, and twenty-month-old.) In the midst of that irrational exuberance I began to point to a large painting of Jesus on the wall.

You see, I’m trying to teach my children to worship, but in the moment about to unfold, everything would change. I became the student, and my children the teachers. David (five) danced over to the table and picked up an empty Communion chalice. He got my attention as he lifted it over his head, turned it upside down, and began to dance with unbridled joy. Mary Kathryn (three), not to be outdone, ran over to the window and grabbed a wooden cross she and David had hammered together, lifted it into the air over her head, and continued her dance. Now Lily (twenty months), who will not be outdone, ran over to the massive painting of Jesus crucified and rocketed both of her hands upward as though to signal a touchdown and she just stood still there, seemingly

mesmerized by what was happening.

It gets better. Mary Kathryn put the cross down and picked up the world, lifting the small globe from the table and over her head in triumphal dance. And there I was, thunderstruck, tears streaming down my face, all the images and ideas racing through my mind.

I saw the Light that night; pure illumination. And in the brightness I understood my calling in the simplest and profoundest terms: to *shine*.

**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.** JOHN 1:5

**For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.** 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6

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Have you seen the Light? Can you tell your own story in the framework of the movement from darkness to Light? Sketch out the movements the way a movie maker would caption the tracks on a DVD. Or you might try making two columns, one for “darkness” and the other “Light.” Now capture particular transformations in your own life through these contrasts.

## **Called: From Death to Life**

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

MATTHEW 3:13–17

It’s a fascinating mark of calling. In the water that day, the second person of the Trinity heard the adoring voice of the first person of the Trinity, while being embraced by the third person of the Trinity. Ever since, every person who ever lived is invited into this divine community through this ordinary water. The Spirit hovers over the waters ready to embrace. The Father speaks words of a gifted identity. The baptized becomes clothed in Christ. New Creation springs forth. The old life of sin and death is buried in the grave. The Risen Life of Christ literally springs forth in us.

This most fundamental calling echoes through the rest of the New Testament.

To the Romans:

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ROMANS 6:3–4

To the Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. GALATIANS 2:20

To the Ephesians:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. EPHESIANS 2:4–5

To the Colossians:

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. COLOSSIANS 3:3–4

Because of the presence of Jesus Christ, ordinary waters become living water. To be baptized in the Triune name means to literally stand “in Christ,” buried with him in his death and raised with him in his life. **The old life is “drowned.”**  
**The new life is risen.**

Here’s the best part. Those words the Father spoke over Jesus in the power of the Spirit, he speaks over you personally.

*(Insert your name)*, you are my son/daughter. You are my beloved. With you, I am well pleased. The quest for self-realization ends. The pilgrimage of “call actualization” begins.

# JOURNAL

Write that last sentence, inserting your name in your own handwriting. Speak it aloud over yourself repeatedly for the next twenty days as you begin the day's reading. Allow these words to pass through your ears to be heard in your deepest heart. Meditate, ponder, and sit in awe of the reality of your own baptism. Draw your deepest identity from those waters. This is where the gospel begins. To repent means simply to renounce and turn away from the lies spoken over you and to embrace the truth God speaks over you. Ask the Spirit to reveal what those lies may be and write them down. In time, they will be drowned in death.



# 3 Called: To a Life of Extraordinary Epiphany

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” MATTHEW 4:1–4

From the mountaintop experience of baptism, the Spirit leads Jesus into the arid valley of the desert. Calling works this way. Word and Spirit must do their refining work within us. As the songwriter David Baroni wrote:

*Lord, You took me out of Egypt  
Now take Egypt out of me.  
You delivered me from Pharaoh, now set me free from me.  
Let my heart become a promised land  
Where the desert used to be.  
Lord, You took me out of Egypt  
Now take Egypt out of me.\**

Note how the temptations attempt to get Jesus to disavow his God-given identity and validate himself. “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Some years back I sat in a weekly Bible study with a group of students. We focused on fasting together and feasting on God’s Word together through the forty days of Lent. One day one of the students shared a powerful epiphany he had about Jesus’ response to the first temptation concerning living on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Here’s what he said:

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\*From “Took Me Out of Egypt” by David Baroni (davidbaroni.com) on his album *Promised Land*, Kingdom Songs, Inc. 2007

“I think the word Jesus was living on in the desert was the word that had just literally come from the mouth of God at his baptism: ‘This is my Son, my beloved; with him I am well pleased.’”

This thought made perfect sense though it never occurred to me before. Jesus fasted from food such that this baptismal blessing word could nourish him in the deepest place.

**This is our calling—to eat this Word, until it literally becomes our identity, the shape of our deepest self.**

It gets better. When the Word of God becomes for us the Bread of Life, our lives become that bread in the hands of Christ, broken, multiplied, and given for others. Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning, “voice.” This voice of our Father creates us anew by the gift of this baptismal word of blessing. He gives us an identity rooted in the life of his Son. It doesn’t stop there, though. As this divine voice resonates in our mind and heart, it begins to shape our vocation—the way the voice of God gets expressed through our lives into the every day world. In this way, what we do springs from who we are rather than the more common scenario of an identity built around our performance.

It all comes full circle at the Lord’s Table, in the bread and wine. We pray, “Pour out your Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ *so that we may be for the world the Body of Christ redeemed by his blood.*”

“Do this,” he said, “in remembrance of me.”

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Examine your life to date and consider how you might have based your sense of self and identity on your job or your performance in some fashion. As you continue to feast on the baptismal blessing words of God over your life, consider how this kind of blessing flows through your life to others. Where do you experience the joy of your life becoming bread for others?