

# Called Out

Convocation Theme and Teaching Vision  
Houston Christian University  
2026–27



*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,  
that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

*Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people;  
once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

(1 Peter 2:9-10)

## **THEME: CALLED OUT**

*Who am I? What gives my life purpose, dignity, and value?*

Young adults today confront the challenge of answering these core questions in a cultural context that casts the burden back onto them. In a world that admits no universal truths and omits any reality beyond the material and measurable, these questions have no stable, objective answer to be found. But fundamental questions demand answers, and we can't live long without stumbling into a response—even if it is ultimately implausible. When we live in a worldview without a Creator, the existential urge to forge our own identities pressures and tempts us to attempt to create ourselves in our own image, to define ourselves without reference to any fixed reality outside ourselves, to manufacture self-worth *ex nihilo* in a kind of self-defrauding spiritual Ponzi scheme. "To thine own self be true" proves an unhelpful tautology and a false hope. Following the passions of our hearts just leads us in circles, swirling inescapably downward into a vortex from which we cannot save ourselves (Num 15:39).

But the gospel of Jesus Christ announces that we have been called out of the darkness of the anti-gospel of expressive individualism and into the marvelous light of being chosen by God, living acceptably in his holy presence, beloved and belonging intimately to him. The Lord Jesus's call liberates us from the crushing weight of determining our own identity, purpose, and value that we were never intended to shoulder. We don't have to become our own creators, author our own

stories, sculpt our own identities, or shape our own destinies. Our identity, worth, and purpose are defined by our union with Christ and secured in the sufficiency of his atonement for us.

And the gospel calls us into much more than the empty, negative freedom to express our self-defined sense of identity and purpose without any constraints. Instead, Christ invests us with a positive purpose—the purpose for which we were created in God’s image in the first place: to glorify God and serve others in every sphere of life (Col 3:17; Gal 5:13). And not only does Jesus grace us with this purpose, but he also liberates us to pursue it. Jesus calls us out of the paralysis and insecurity of our improvised identities to receive from him the life we long for.

When Jesus Christ defines who we are and what gives us purpose, dignity, and value, our lives are decisively realigned toward the glory of God and the coming of his kingdom. With Paul, we find the value of our lives not in ourselves nor in advancing our self-appointed purposes but in magnifying God’s grace to us in the gospel and completing the calling that God gives to us (Acts 20:24). We find our purpose not in living for ourselves, but in living for the one who died for us so that we might know true life in him (2Co 5:14–15). We come to know that our identities and our very life itself are not in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ who loved each of us and gave himself for us (Gal 2:20; Col 3:3–4).

## **CALLED OUT TEACHING SERIES**

This year’s five teaching series for Convocation develop different dimensions of the annual theme, and each series aims to teach at least one of the key learning aims selected from the Convocation teaching vision (see [HCU Convocation Mission and Vision](#) for a complete list of the 19 learning aims grouped in five emphases—*gospel, Scripture, wisdom, vocation, and mission*).

### **Called Out**

*But now thus says the LORD,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine...  
everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made.” (Isa 43:1, 7)*

*For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10)*

A calling, or vocation, is a *charge from an authority outside oneself to pursue a purpose greater than oneself* (Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, p. 2). A person’s callings are not self-directed—I *don’t choose my vocations but am under some kind of external obligation to fulfill them*. A person’s callings are not

compelled by self-interest—I carry out my callings faithfully because I understand that my life finds its meaning in Someone bigger than myself, and I only find peace when he is at the center of my life.

Even before we are commissioned out into our diverse vocations, we recognize first that we are called into union with Jesus Christ. We have been called by the Triune God out of darkness into a radiant life lived in the illumination of his glory. But this calling to Christ in the gospel is not constrained to select parts of life with everything else left to our own discretion and decisions. The foundational Christian confession is “Jesus Christ is Lord of all,” and so the calling placed on us by the universal Lord is comprehensive and multidimensional. Our vocations are more than only our professions. They encompass all of life—the full matrix of relationships, roles, and responsibilities God’s providence has given us in the world, in which God calls us to love him and love others: image-bearer, disciple, temple of the Holy Spirit, member of Christ’s body, spouse, parent, friend, neighbor, citizen, and more.

God has created each of us and all of us with callings to fulfill in this world, including our work but also broader and deeper than only our professions. We each have our various callings under the charge of God’s authority, and we carry them out for the sake of his glory and for the good of our neighbors. All of these diverse callings across every sphere of life find their coherence in a singular mission: to declare the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. Finding your calling is not about following your passion but being swept up in God’s passion for his glory in the world.

Across the fall semester, we will explore what the Bible says about the nature and focus of common callings that God has given to us in Christ:

- **Children of God in Union with Christ:** Before we are called into any task or mission, we are first called into a reconciled relationship with God and adoption by him through our union with Christ. God’s common grace places a calling on every person made in God’s image, but God’s perfect design is that the new identity we have received as a gift in the gospel will redefine every relationship, role, and responsibility in our lives to the glory of God. Our worth and value are secure because our identity is secure in Christ and not dependent on our performance or success in any sphere of life. (1Jo 3:1–2; Eph 2:4–10; Gal 2:20)
- **Member of Christ’s Body:** Often when we think about callings, we think about what makes us distinctive. But even our individual vocations are inseparable from the communal nature of our life in Christ. We are each called out but also called together to be interdependent members of Christ’s body, the church. Every disciple of Jesus has a calling to commit ourselves in membership to a local community of fellow disciples and to serve them in the gospel with the gifts the Spirit entrusts to us. (1Co 12:12–27; Eph 2:19–22; Rom 12:4–5)
- **Student:** In nearly every situation, the reality of the current circumstances and responsibilities in which God has placed us constitute a calling from him. That means being a student at HCU doesn’t just prepare us for a future calling. Our studies themselves are a calling now. Because God calls us to love him with our minds,

academic study has intrinsic worth as we seek to understand and appreciate God, his creation, and his image-bearers. And because “the only Christian work is good work well done” (Dorothy Sayers, “Why Work?”), we should pursue our academic and professional development with spiritual excellence as an expression of our worship and devotion to God. (Mark 12:28–31; Col 3:17, 23–24)

- **Witness:** Those who have been called to reconciliation to God in Christ now live to see others reconciled to him as well. But our calling as ambassadors of the crucified King is not an entitlement to ease and honor but requires that we be willing to imitate Jesus’s sufferings in order that all others might find life in his death and resurrection. (Matt 28:18–20; 2Co 5:16–6:10)
- **Citizen:** Those who are in Christ Jesus know ultimate freedom as citizens of his kingdom—and yet the purpose of this freedom is not to assert ourselves or dominate others but to offer our lives gladly as servants of God who work for the good of our neighbors and our nation. Understanding our greater freedom in Christ allows us to submit in humility and holiness to human institutions, which God has established to promote justice and well-being, while we live as faithful ambassadors who labor for the fuller inbreaking of God’s kingdom. (Jer 29:4–7; Phil 1:27; 3:20–21; Rom 13; Mark 12:13–17; Gal 5:13)
- **Profession:** A *profession* can actually be a *vocation* when we recognize that God is the one who directs us to do it, who graciously enables us to do it, and who himself works through it to cause his kingdom to grow and his creation to flourish. As image-bearers, all our work is an invitation to imitate God’s work, following his creative pattern of forming the world with order and filling it with abundance and goodness. Through the callings we express through our professional careers, God works through our work in the world. (Gen 1:26–28; Ps 104:14–15; Eph 2:10)
- **Temples of the Holy Spirit:** One of our most fundamental human callings is to steward well in holiness the bodies God gives to us. We are made alive by Christ in the Spirit to offer embodied worship and obedience to God, honoring the particularities of our personal bodies and humbly submitting to the creaturely limits our bodies entail. We love God with all our strength as we yield our full physical lives to his will in our world. (1Co 6:19–20; 2Co 4:7; cf. 1Co 3:17)
- **Marriage:** For most people, one of life’s central callings is to marriage. But for marriage to be what it was designed to be, we have to pursue it according to God’s purpose for it. Marriage invites us to companionship and intimacy, but its greater purpose is to welcome new life into the world and to transform us as we come to understand better the covenant of love between Christ and the church. Ultimately, marriage is not about self-fulfillment but self-submission, even self-sacrifice. (Gen 1:26–31; 2:18–25; Eph 5:21–33)

## IGNITE: *Called Into Marvelous Light*

...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1Pe 2:9b)

God's calling for our lives is not merely pragmatic, only commissioning us *out* to discharge certain responsibilities through specific roles particular to each of us. First and foremost, our calling is *to* Jesus Christ and *into* the marvelous light of new life through union with him. It is this radical reorientation to resurrection that defines our identities as Christians and that infuses our diverse vocations with a common character and the camaraderie of shared purpose.

First Peter not only boldly announces the reality of our calling out of darkness and into marvelous light, but it also offers a vision for the shared shape of our personal discipleship to Jesus as we live our whole lives illuminated by his glory.

- ***Into Holiness:*** Christ calls us to leave behind the passions we pursue only because of ignorance, the impurities that corrupt us, and our obsessions with what has futile and perishable value. Christ calls us instead to holiness and a sincere love—he calls us to himself. (1Pe 1:13–25; cf. 4:1–5)
- ***Into Church-Community:*** While each follower of Christ has a unique array of callings to live out, all of us share a common calling to Christ and to all others who trust in him. Our vocations are deeply personal (living stones), but we experience them in a richly communal way (spiritual house, chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people for God's own possession). As we seek God's grace for our lives, we will find it in the shared life of the church-community we have been called into. (1Pe 2:4–10; cf. 4:8–11; 5:1–5)
- ***Into Salvation:*** All that God calls us to depends on the new birth into a living hope that we have through the resurrection of Jesus. Before we are called *for* anything, we are called *to Jesus Christ* and to an eternal salvation in him. The assurance of this imperishable identity and inheritance gives us inexpressible joy even in the midst of refining trials. (1Pe 1:1–9)
- ***Into Endurance in Suffering:*** As we are called into relationship with Jesus Christ, we are invited to imitate his example in all things—including suffering unjustly as we obey God and do good in the world. This is what we have been called to, but we have the comfort and companionship of Christ as our model as we follow in his steps. (1Pe 2:18–25; 4:12–19)
- ***Into Blessing Others:*** The privilege of our election and vocation in Christ is not for our exclusive benefit. We are called into blessing in Christ so that we may live our lives as blessings for others, zealously motivated not by our own advancement but by love and a desire for others to join us in new life in Christ. (1Pe 3:8–16; 4:7–9)
- ***Into Eternal Glory:*** Living faithfully in our calling to Christ involves facing soberly the sufferings and temptations that will challenge us. But rather than be sidetracked by an empty hope for ease in this present life, we entrust our anxieties to God's care for us, and we press forward in the confidence that we have been called into eternal glory, when God will finally and fully restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. (1Pe 5:6–11)

## **GOD AT WORK: Expressing Our Vocations through Our Professions**

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.... Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*  
(Col 3:17, 23–24)

Our callings from God are more comprehensive and multifaceted than just our jobs and what we do for money. But God gives us vocations in our professions because God wants to work through the work of his image-bearers in the world—whatever sort of work it is—to bring order and flourishing into the world (Ps 104:14–15). As Martin Luther memorably put it in a sermon on Psalm 147, “God milks the cows through the vocation of the milk maids.”

This dynamic is perhaps most intuitive in the provision of our essential physical or spiritual needs, but God’s common grace operates in a more wide-ranging scope. Finding dignity and purpose in the professions we prepare for on campus requires cultivating our theological imaginations to visualize how our future work can be a channel for God’s work in the world.

We learn best how to imitate God’s work by imitating embodied examples of professionals already engaging in their work as a means of glorifying God and serving their neighbors. We’ll hear excellent professionals across a spectrum of fields—in business, in engineering and technology, in public service, in the arts—who can express a well-defined sense of personal calling and a confidence that their *work itself* is a means of God’s own providence and provision in the world. Their example will invite us to imagine how God could intervene through all of our work because of Jesus Christ to bring order, stability, health, flourishing, and fullness into our world.

### **IGNITE: *Hearing the Call***

*“The sheep hear [the good shepherd’s] voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”* (John 10:3b–4)

Even after we resolve to respond to each vocation the Lord places on us, we still face the challenge of hearing that call, confirming its source, and discerning what steps come next in our obedience. Our own ambitions and anxieties muddle our ability to hear clearly, and the cacophony of competing messages we hear from the world can drown out the Spirit’s whisper that draws us out in discipleship to the Lord Jesus. But God still speaks, and our Shepherd promises that his sheep will recognize and respond to his voice as he calls them—first into salvation, then throughout the journey to bring us safely home.

During our Spring IGNITE, we'll give attention to honing our ears to discern God's voice as he calls and guides us through:

- *the Scriptures,*
- *the promptings of the Holy Spirit,*
- *the counsel of others in our church-communities, and*
- *his providence in the circumstances of our lives.*

## The One Who Calls

*He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1Thess 5:24)*

There is a danger in giving excessive attention to one's calling. It can become a pious excuse for endless introspection or a spiritually justified fixation on self-actualization. We can become discouraged by our lack of perceived progress. We can be overwhelmed by the scope, complexity, and demands of the interlocking vocations placed on us.

The antidote to these is to regularly turn our attention from the callings we pursue to focus on the one who has called us. Knowing God allows us to proclaim his excellence, which is the end goal of all our callings. The glory of the Triune God is the driving impulse, the sustaining resource, and the assuring confidence to carry out our callings, whatever risk or sacrifice they entail.

Our concluding teaching series will consider key attributes of the God who calls us to ground our vocations in his soul-satisfying glory:

- ***Faithful:*** Our callings are inevitably more than we can personally accomplish; they are intended to be. Our confidence is rooted in the fact that God himself will accomplish all he wills through our vocations. (1Th 5:24; Ps 138:7–8; 1Co 1:9; 15:58; John 6:37–40)
- ***Holy:*** God is jealous for his glory, and so our callings, which we have been given to glorify him, must reflect God's radiant and life-giving uniqueness, uncompromised by ulterior motives and undistracted by self-serving pursuits. The singularity of our dedication should calibrate to the purity of his perfection. (1Th 4:7; 5:23; 1Pe 1:15–16; 2Ti 1:9)
- ***Glorious:*** Because our vocations call us into something greater than ourselves, our motivation will flag if we forget that the one who calls us is worthy of our lives, satisfying to our souls, sufficient and sovereign to accomplish all he has set us to. When we see God in proper proportion, he fills the frame of our lives, allowing us to be content and confident as we carry out our callings. (Isa 40:26; 41:4; 48:12; 55:8–11; 60:1–3; Amos 5:8; Job 42:2; 1Th 2:12; 2Th 2:14; 1Pe 5:10)
- ***Gracious:*** Brokenness in our world and in ourselves can make us lose heart as we pursue the callings God gives us. Our limits as creatures remind us that our callings not only come from outside us but also require more than we have within us. But the gospel reminds us that we have our callings *in Christ*, which means that we look to Jesus for our work to be worthy and fruitful. (2Pe 1:3–4; 2Co 2:14—4:18; Matt 10:28–30; Luke 12:32)

## **WEEKLY BENEDICTION**

To conclude our weekly gatherings more purposefully and to bless and commission all of us to go into the world affirmed in and animated by the gospel, we will close each service this year with the words of benediction that open Jude's epistle:

*To those who are called,  
beloved in God the Father  
and kept for Jesus Christ:  
May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. (Jude 1b-2)*