

EXPLORING YOUR PERSONAL CALL

What does it mean to be called to international missions? Can a person be assured of God's calling? These questions are central for those considering involvement in missions.

The concept of calling is one of the most significant biblical teachings. The doctrine of calling has its roots in the Old Testament. Abraham was the first person with an explicit call. There are 195 references to calling in the New Testament, 73 having strictly theological meaning. Biblical references to calling include such phrases as being "called," "given this task" and "sent by God." People today attempt to express this same truth by using different phrases such as "assurance of God's leading," "sense of direction" or "the Lord's leadership."

Through the years, Southern Baptists have expected their international missionaries to be God-called men and women. For the missionary, the call of God needs to be experienced as personal and purposeful. The assurance of God's calling and leadership is vital to one's ability to persevere and serve effectively overseas. The conviction that enables one to say, "God has placed me here," is essential.

GOD'S CALL IS TO SALVATION, DISCIPLESHIP AND SERVICE

God's call is directed toward making us into a unique people. When Jesus met Zaccheus, he made a significant announcement concerning His mission in the world. Jesus said, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, NASB). This call to salvation is a call to become a new person. We are called to be people characterized by repentance, faith and service. As a new person in Christ, one must seek to bring all one's life into line with the purposes of God.

Have you thought seriously about what God's purpose for your life might be? Are you willing to seek prayerfully His will for your life? Are you willing to make the changes that might be necessary to follow Christ?

Christ came to be involved in the world. This is the heart of the incarnation—God being involved in the human situation. Our task is to participate with Jesus in His mission. The mission for all Christians is to bring people to a personal experience of faith in Christ and to

lead them to participate with Christ in His mission in this world. The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:19-20, is stated, "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that (Christ) commanded" (NASB). The mission for those who follow Christ is the conversion of humankind. The whole person, individually and socially, must be changed by the power of the gospel, and this is accomplished through baptism, discipleship and ministry.

In responding to God's call, how can you involve yourself more effectively in the mission of Christ in the world? Pray daily that God will reveal new ways for you to become involved in His mission in the world.

GOD'S CALL IS IN HARMONY WITH HIS WORK OF CREATION

God calls us to an awareness and understanding of how He has made us. "Know that the Lord Himself is God; it is He who has made us" (Psalm 100:3, NASB). God has made us and we belong to Him. The God who calls us is none other than the God who created us. He has given us gifts, talents and capabilities. God wants us to use these talents and gifts in His service, in the work of the church and for the good of humankind. God does not always call people to be bricklayers, teachers, doctors or computer technicians. But God *does* always call people to be Christian ministers, regardless of their occupations in life. In a real sense, the Christian's secular work is not an end in itself, but a means for the work of Christ.

In this complex world, people are confronted with a great variety of things to be done. A baffling array of occupations is out there! Since the Christian calling to serve God and neighbor takes concrete form in vocation, it is important for all people to examine their chosen occupation.

Does your chosen profession utilize the gifts and capabilities the Creator God gave you? Are you truly aware of your gifts and talents? Are you utilizing them in your service to Christ? Are you willing to prepare more fully for ministry?

GOD'S CALL IS INWARD AND PERSONAL

God's call involves a personal response to the witness of the Holy Spirit within us. In this sense, the call of God is inward, personal and even secret. People accurately say, "God has laid this on my heart." There is a sense of "oughtness" or divine compulsion toward a task or occupation. This kind of conviction led Isaiah to utter the memorable words, "Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:8). This inward call can come in a variety of ways: through reading Scripture, through concentrated prayer, through special events or a special person, or through life's experiences. However this personal call comes, it must be followed by a commitment to do that which God intends.

Are you willing to tune into God's inner voice? Are you willing to follow God as He opens and closes doors in accordance with His calling?

Many who have heard a missionary call have asked God to show them where He needs them most. They have been willing to let Christ settle the place of service, no matter where. While the specifics vary, each missionary has given a testimony of a genuine, divine compulsion to follow wherever He leads! Some who have heard this calling to missions began their pilgrimage in another fashion. For them, God's call came in focus because of the many needs in our world. A calling is often born when a person becomes aware of the need "out there" and of the fact that he or she is equipped to meet that need. This type of calling grows into an overwhelming oughtness to follow God's leading.

Are you willing to be in the place of service where God Himself most desires you to be? Are you willing to sacrifice in order to follow anywhere God might direct? Are you keeping aware of the needs of the world? Is God guiding you to a particular part of the world?

GOD'S CALL INVOLVES OTHER CHRISTIANS

While God's call may come to us in a private experience, our understanding of His calling may be clarified through talking to fellow Christians. Decisions about Christian service are best made in fellowship with other Christians, not in secret or in isolation. This dimension of the call of God can be described as the corporate dimension. Calling is recognized and affirmed by others. Such confirmation may involve a pastor, church members, family or fellow Christians.

It was for this purpose that the Holy Spirit spoke to the church leaders at Antioch to "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2, NASB). Many people have a definite feeling that God is calling them to some task or place, but some often do not see clearly. We are not always the best judge of how qualified we might be. Others can help! Questions about a person's health, commitment to acquire another language, capacity for faithful service and strength to endure hardship can best be confirmed by a Christ-centered community. The International Mission Board is the missions agency commissioned by Southern Baptists to confirm and support those who are called to international missions.

Have you talked to others about your feelings related to God's calling in your life? Who can you depend on to be forthright in discerning God's will for you? Take advantage of the various programs and personnel available through your local church, state office and the North American and International Mission boards.

For those who are active in the process of missionary appointment, God's call must be well examined. A priceless diamond is best appreciated when every facet can be clearly seen in the light. The great personal gem of God's calling is multifaceted and should be considered carefully. The experience of salvation and demonstrated commitment to service, the developed gifts and talents for missionary life, the discovered sense of oughtness and the firm confirmation by other Christians all form a vital basis for appointment as a Southern Baptist missionary.