

Misunderstandings about the Missionary Call

Many wrong ideas about the missionary call are found among Christians today. It will help to identify them and respond to each one before seeing what the Scriptures have to say.

I. Misunderstanding 1: The Call is a Definite Event

Some think the call always come at a certain point in time; that you hear a definite voice. That is not always how it happens. Many times God simply gives you the unmistakable realization that you are to do a certain thing or go to a particular or certain people.

HOW DOES GOD CALL TO MISSIONARY SERVICE?

1- Sometimes guidance comes in a flash of light, a dramatic insight, or a miracle such as a vision or dream.

2-

HOW DOES THIS CALL BEGIN?

1- Growing interest in a current event.

2-

3- It sometimes happens that a friend mentions something in a way that strikes you, and you can't forget it or let go of it as it grows in importance in your thinking.

Note:

To limit it to a dramatic event, however, is to limit God and how he actually deals with His people.

II. Misunderstanding 2: Paul's Macedonian Call (Acts 16:9-10) is a Model of the Missionary Call

Acts 16:9-10

9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

On his second journey Paul had a vision in which a man from Macedonia appeared to him and asked him to come over. This event certainly was an important step in God's guidance of Paul on the journey.

It showed Paul the next step to take in his full-time service of bringing the gospel to the gentiles. It most definitely was not a call to missionary service—Paul was already a missionary.

III. Misunderstanding 3: Calls to Missionary Service Always Come through Mystical Experiences

“Mystical”-relating to or involving mysterious religious or spiritual power
This misunderstanding frames the call in a mystical or emotional border.

What is the weakness of this way of thinking?

In some Christian circles the teaching of a need for this type of call puts pressure on people who may very well (consciously or unconsciously) build themselves up and even manufacture an experience that they then mislabel a "call."
This might be labeled as generating your own experience.

IV. Misunderstanding 4: You Cannot Become a Successful Missionary without a "Call"

Many factors determine the success of a missionary.

In response to the belief in the necessity of a call, we point to the many believers who have served successfully in new cultural settings on the basis of deeply held biblical convictions rather than a well-defined experience of a call.

Such convictions include:

- 1- the need of the lost to hear the gospel,
- 2-
- 3- the privilege of serving as Christ's ambassadors.

These convictions have impelled many into fruitful mission service.

How can this be a greater anchor than an emotional experience?

V. Misunderstanding 5: A Call Is the Best Test of Fitness for Missionary Service

In fact, a misguided sense of call may be the worst test of fitness for missionary service.

An alleged call that is based on guilt or manipulation, the desire for significance or adventure, or simply a wish to escape a bad home situation probably will not stand the test of time. Such motivations must be transformed by God or they will fall apart.

A test of fitness also will include:

- 1- an assessment of the candidate's understanding of God's heart for the nations,
- 2-
- 3- the ability to adapt to new settings, flexibility,
- 4- a sense of what can be accomplished in ministry.

VI. Misunderstanding 6: A Call to Full-Time Christian Service Is Given Only to Especially Gifted People

The missionary is no super saint. God is the One in charge of who is called to full-time Christian service and who is not. With God's calling comes the equipping to accomplish what he has called a person to do.

Peter and John, were are described by the Jewish leaders as "ignorant and unlearned men"(Acts 4:13).

VII. Misunderstanding 7: A Call Is Completely Irrelevant to Becoming a Missionary

God calls all Christians into witnessing service for his kingdom. No one who claims allegiance to Christ escapes the Great Commission.

At the same time, God also leads some of those who have come to Christ into full-time service for the sake of the kingdom. A call is not irrelevant, but it is not the final test of fitness.

VIII. Misunderstanding 8: A Call Involves Only God and the One Who Is Called

God has given to every Christiana community of believers who have mutual responsibilities toward one another. The community confirms God's leading, as it did with Paul and Barnabas.

Some might argue that at times Paul went against the directions of the church, such as when he ignored the community's exhortations not to go to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey (Acts 21:7-14). It is true that in this case Paul overrode the will of the community, and there still are times today when God's leading is so clear that a person may have to do the same thing.

Barnabas introduced Paul to the church in Jerusalem, easing their fears (9:26-28). Barnabas later came to Tarsus and brought Paul to Antioch to help with the church there (11:19-26).

The misunderstanding says, "God and I make a majority." The truth is that God gives every Christian the body of Christ as a resource to confirm his or her calling and leading. Whoever ignores this tremendous resource does so at his or her own risk!

Calling in the Bible

Perhaps you sense that you have been called.

Maybe you have had a visionary experience, or

maybe you grew up simply knowing that you were to become a missionary.

Or perhaps you have been feeling a growing conviction that you ought to be involved in God's work but aren't quite sure how that will be worked out. What are the ways God calls people into service?

The best place to look for an answer is the Bible.

I. God Calls Through The Bible

Though there are several examples of calling, and various types of calling, there seems to be no single pattern or experience that fits them all.

A. Some are miraculous.

Give 3 OT examples:

- 1-
- 2-
- 3-

B. Some calls come from divinely inspired but *humanly made choices*.

Examples:

1- Nehemiah was distressed on hearing of the plight of Jews in Jerusalem and poured out his heart to God (Neh. 1).

2- _____ was sent by the Jerusalem church to Antioch (Acts 11:22);

3- _____ accompanied Paul as a traveling companion because Paul wanted him to do so (Acts 16:3).

II. Four types of calls seen in the Scriptures:

A. The Call to Salvation

Through Jesus, God calls people to enter into a relationship with him through salvation. Jesus came to call sinners to salvation (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32), and the writers of the New Testament use the same language to speak of our salvation experience (Acts 2:39; Rom. 1:5-6; 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:9, 24-26; 7:15-24; Gal. 1:6; 5:13; Eph. 1:18; 4:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:12; Heb. 3:1; 9:15; 1 Pet. 2:9; 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:10; Jude 1).

A point of controversy over the extent of this calling arises between those who follow the teaching of John Calvin and those who follow the teaching of Jakob Arminius.

Calvinists believe what?

Arminians believe what?

One thing is sure, this call is the broadest of the four types of calls given by God.

B. The Call to Discipleship or Holiness

Those who have responded to God's call to salvation have a deeper call given by God: they are called to discipleship or holiness. The call to a Christlike life is emphasized most clearly in the letters of Paul and Peter (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 4:7; 2 Thess. 2:13-15; 2 Tim.1:9; 1 Pet. 2:21; 3:8-9; 2 Pet. 1:3).

In being called to become more like Christ, Christians have the responsibility to teach others to obey all that Jesus taught (Matt. 28:20).

A commitment to follow Christ involves _____.

C. The Call to Full-Time Ministry

God calls some Christians to serve him as their full-time vocation. Again, examples of various types of "full-time," lifelong calls can be found throughout the Scriptures.

1- _____ was called to leave his home, to go to a new land that God would show him, and to be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; cf. Acts 7:4; Heb. 11:8).

2- _____ was called to join with God in setting the Israelites free from bondage in Egypt (Exod. 3).

3- _____ was called as a prophet to the nations before he was formed in his mother's womb (Jer. 1:4-10).

4- _____ was called through an awesome vision that rendered him prostrate before God (Ezek. 1).

5- The apostles were called by Jesus to leave their jobs and join him (Matt. 4:19; 9:9; Mark 1:17).

6- Paul was calling as an apostle (Rom. L•1; 1 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:15).

Remembering that missionaries are "sent ones," we find that an examination of the term send sheds light on the concept of call.

Jesus was himself sent by God (Luke 4:18), and likewise he sends his followers (John 20:21).

Christ also encourages the disciples to pray that God send laborers into the harvest field (Matt. 9:35-38).

Matthew 9:35-38

35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

Mark comments that the apostles were appointed so that they could be with Jesus and be sent to preach (Mark 3:14), and Paul notes that people will not hear the gospel unless preachers are sent (Rom. 10:14-15).

Two parables in particular also express the idea of God sending someone in service. In the parable of the vineyard, the owner (God) sends his servants (the prophets and, eventually, Jesus) to collect the fruit harvested by the tenants (Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11).

The king in the parable of the wedding banquet likewise sends servants to call the people to come to his son's wedding banquet (Matt. 22:1-14).

Notice:

A call to full-time service for Christ does not exclude the possibility that at times the one called may need to pursue vocational opportunities that generate income.

Paul's work as a tentmaker while in Athens (Acts 18:1-3) is a case in point. The call to full-time ministry can unfold slowly.

D. The Call to a Specific Assignment or Task

In addition to the call to full-time service for God, Scripture contains cases in which God provides more-specific calls to people who are assigned limited duties or tasks. For example,

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Jesus sent the disciples out on a specific preaching mission after telling them to pray for laborers.

Peter and John were sent by the Jerusalem church to investigate what was happening in Samaria under Philip's ministry (Acts 8:14).

Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch to follow up on the church that had been planted there (Acts 11:22).

Barnabas and Paul were sent to Jerusalem with an offering from Antioch (Acts 11:27-30; 12:25). God set apart Barnabas and Paul from the church in Antioch as full-time workers among the gentiles (Acts 13:2).

Paul was sent with Barnabas to be part of the Jerusalem Council's dealing with the question of circumcising gentiles prior to inclusion in the church (15:2).

Once Barnabas and Paul split up over John Mark, Paul chose Silas to join him on his second missionary journey (15:40). Early in the journey Paul added Timothy to the team simply because he wanted Timothy to join him (16:3).

As we mentioned previously, the Macedonian vision (16:10) was not a call to missionary service but a specific guidance or calling from God leading Paul away from Asia and into Europe as the next step of his ministry to the gentiles.

III. Guidelines on the Call

In light of this discussion, what guidelines will help Christians understand the call to missionary service? We are going to consider four of them.

God's Call Comes in many ways- there is no single method used by God to endorse his call on an individual.

Calling and sending can come through a specific experience such as a dream or vision, but it can also come through a settled conviction that God places on the hearts) of the ones) being sent or through a local body of believers assigning a task to a person or a team.

1- All Are Called, Some Are Assigned

All Christians are called to engage in discipleship as a way of life.

At the same time, God does set apart some Christians for full-time, lifelong service to the kingdom.

He also gives people specific assignments or tasks of a temporary nature to be carried out, often perceived and assigned through a local body of Christians.

2-Assignments Are Not Permanent, Even When Calling Is

As seen in the examples of temporary assignments found in the Bible, missionaries are not required to sign up for life. This is an important issue to people today, especially when the idea of a permanent assignment seems overwhelming.

One should be willing to accept short term assignments as part of the means God uses to fulfill his call in their lives.

God leads step-by-step along the way. Many missionaries accept their assignments from God one term at a time, whether that term is a few weeks or several years.

The explosion of short-term missionaries shows that interest in mission is still strong, but the focus on a so-called career orientation has shifted dramatically in the past few decades.

C. The Body of Christ Plays an Important Role in the Call

Although the One who ultimately calls or sends is God, often in the immediate context it is a local body of believers who sense or confirm a call and delegate the associated assignment or responsibility to an individual or team.

As did the church at Antioch, they confirm and enact on behalf of God what the calling entails.

The local body of believers, who usually best know the individual or team, should be able to affirm the call or leading and play a key role in helping the call to be fulfilled.