

Pursuing God's call on your life

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May 7, 2016

Foundational observations:

1. God's call on your life came before your pursuit of him or of his will for your life.

Mark 1:14-20

2 Thess. 2:13-15

2. God's call on your life is a call to himself (Acts 2:39), to his kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12), to belong to Jesus (Rom. 1:6), to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7; 2 Thess. 2:13-15; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Peter 1:15-16), i.e., to be saints (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2), out of darkness and into light as a people (1 Peter 2:9-10), to hope (Eph. 1:18), to his eternal glory (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Peter 5:10), and excellence (2 Peter 1:3) and to live worthily of this calling (2 Thess. 1:11). He calls us to eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12). His call is not restricted by our prior status or lack of it (1 Cor. 1:26). He calls us through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14); he calls us in "in Christ" (1 Peter 5:10). He who calls is faithful to enable us to fulfill his calling (1 Thess. 5:24). He calls us to follow Jesus' example of obedience despite suffering (1 Peter 2:21). These facets of the call are our first and main calling.

God's call often comes in the form of a command. Think of Abram or Moses. Or it may be in terms of a commission such as in the case of Joshua (Nu.27:15-23). See also Acts 14:23. Only rarely, as in Isaiah 6 or Acts 9, is it a vision, yet both of these emphasize sending as opposed to calling. God's command and calling converge instructively in Exodus 31:1-11. As Walter Liefeld puts it, God not only calls, he sends. See Matt. 9:38 and John 20:21.

The calling to live up to our calling includes obediently using one's spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:7-16) [pas 7X in these verses]

3. Discernment concerning your unique path of obedience to his call begins with a sober assessment of what he has entrusted to you, of what he has made you a steward. These include:

a) The gospel. Like Paul and Timothy, we are entrusted with the gospel. Our primary duty is to guard it by giving it away. (1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 1:13-2:7)

b) "Antecedent autobiographical realities." God gave you a heritage, a body, a personality before you turned to him in faith. Having called you to himself before the foundation of the earth, he created you to be a certain way. These provisions are not unrelated to other things he has given you by virtue of your union with Christ. *Sometimes*

he calls people to ministries that utilize personality traits he has given. Think of Billy Graham or John Stott. Other times, perhaps more rarely, he gets more glory for himself by equipping people to do things that they seem ill suited for by personality or demeanor. William Carey: “I can plod.” As Mark Labberton says, “God’s strategy is to use unexpected people to embody unexpected love.” (*Called*, p. 59)

c) New life in Christ. God granted you the new birth by his Holy Spirit. Without life in him, God’s call on your life would be impossible to pursue meaningfully.

d) Spiritual gifts. You have at least one; you may have several; probably at least one of these is an energizing gift.

e) Experience. You have a track record of ministry, and if not, a primary aim should be to establish one. Where do you begin? What do you see in your church that needs doing? The fact that you see a need—where perhaps others do not—*could* indicate it is something God wants you to do.

f) Passion. God has given you a burden or zeal for certain undertakings, or “works.”

g) Opportunity. God opens and closes doors for ministry. Because he is sovereign and knows you perfectly, he opens opportunities for us that fit his purposes and our giftings.

h) Freedom. Some apparently open doors we may not feel free to go through because of our personal circumstances such as gender, marital status, family constraints, indebtedness, etc. In such cases, we need extra discernment because walking through a door may be a matter of faith—trusting God to supply—or of disobedience—wanting to make a name for ourselves, for instance, as a missionary at the expense of others.

Strategies:

- Reaffirm your identity in Jesus and what he has done for you, not in what you have done or will do for him. (1 Cor. 15:10)

- Pray that God would direct you and then listen to him. (Matt. 9:35-38; Eph. 3:16-19; Phil. 1:9-11)
- Enlist prayer partners (2 Thes. 1: 11-12).
- Submit to God's will. The Lordship of Christ means nothing without daily obedience to his known will. Obey now, not some time in the future when you have an imagined or hoped-for opportunity. Use the gifts God has given you where you are now.
- Practice trusting God in little things to develop confidence that he is trustworthy in larger things.
- Saturate your mind with Scripture as a way of knowing God's mind (Rom. 12:1-3).
- Renounce all strongholds of the enemy of our souls (Eph. 4:27; 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:6-7; Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8).
- Know yourself and get help in this process. Invite those who know you well to share what wisdom God has given them for you. Listen to your spouse, church leaders, friends, relatives.

Case studies:

1. The apostle Paul. If anyone ever pursued God's will for his life, it was Paul. Read Phil. 3:1-20 and seek to discern what shaped Paul's pursuit of God's will. Other passages spell out various aspects of Paul's call and calling: Acts 9:1-19; 11:25-26; 13:1-3; 22:10; Gal. 1:15-16; 1 Tim. 1:12-17; Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 1:1.
2. Charles Simeon of Cambridge. What would you do if faced with determined opposition for the first 11 years of your ministry?
3. A couple consisting of a husband who feels called to cross-cultural work and a wife who does not, wants to discern God's call on their life together that they may pursue it.

A helpful resource:

Walter L. Liefeld, Direction: *a Biblical Perspective on Being Called and Sent by God*. (Bloomington, IN: West Bow, 2014).