



MISSION PRECISION

DEFINING TRUTHS EVERY
DISCIPLE NEEDS TO KNOW

“Calling”

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CALLING

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The call to salvation is the gracious act of God by which He draws people to become disciples of Jesus and members of His church.

The call to salvation includes a call to mission, for every person who responds to God's call as a disciple of Jesus receives Christ's command to make disciples of Jesus.

Christ calls disciples to specific stations in and through which they exalt Him on mission.

The call to service is the gracious act of God by which He directs disciples to make disciples in a certain way, at a certain time, among a certain people, in a certain location, or through a certain vocation.

CALLING

When we think about God’s *calling*, we normally think of important life and ministry decisions. Those looking to serve cross-culturally, for example, often speak of a “missionary call.” Similarly, Christians who want to make disciples in their own communities often talk of finding God’s *call* on their life. However, before we think about the call to serve in a particular role, job, or location, or even before we consider whether God is calling us to be missionaries, we need to recognize that Scripture speaks of God’s call in much more foundational and important ways.

In this chapter we will examine four different ways Scripture speaks of God’s calling in our lives. We’ll begin with the most foundational aspect of God’s call—the call to salvation.

1. The Call to Salvation

The call to salvation is the gracious act of God by which He draws people to become disciples of Jesus and members of His church.

This is the predominant way the word call or calling is used in Scripture. For example, Paul refers to the Corinthian believers as those who are “*called to be saints*” and “*called into the fellowship of his [God’s] Son*” (1 Corinthians 1:2, 9, emphasis added). This calling distinguishes believers from unbelievers, for it enables sinners to see and embrace Jesus by faith:

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are *called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (23–24, emphasis added)

This saving call is the way God draws people to Himself, and it is found throughout Scripture.¹³ But how does this call happen? The

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call to salvation comes through the proclamation of God's Word in the power of God's Spirit. In other words, this call comes through the church's obedience to Christ's command to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). As we share the gospel, we are the means by which God is calling people to salvation. What a privilege!

As God calls people to salvation, He is also calling them to a new way of life. For example, every follower of Christ is called to "freedom" (Galatians 5:13), to "holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7), and to "suffer" for Christ (1 Peter 2:20–21). This latter call, the call to suffer, is sobering. It reminds us that following Jesus is costly, both for us and for those with whom we share the gospel. However, we can't lose sight of the big picture. Suffering makes us more like Christ, and it prepares us for our eternal reward (Romans 8:17). The call to salvation forms the unshakeable foundation of a disciple's primary identity now and forever:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are *called* according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also *called*, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:28–30, emphasis added)

Those whom God called, He justified, and those whom God justified, He glorified. Notice that Paul speaks of our glorification in the past tense, as if it's a sure thing, a done deal. Those whom God calls don't just *hope* that He will bring them to glory one day; they know He will. Our identity, then, is not intended to be found in a position we hold, a place we live, or the kind of work we do. For when these things change, we are shaken to the core. Far more important than any job or ministry calling, God has called you to be in Christ.

2. The Call to Mission

The call to salvation includes a call to mission, for every person who responds to God's call as a disciple of Jesus receives Christ's command to make disciples of Jesus.

Every disciple of Christ is called to mission. As we saw in Chapter 4, disciple making is not the job of a few staff members in a church. It is the God-given, Christ-enabled, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple, regardless of his or her station, location, or vocation. Every disciple plays an integral part in the eternal purpose of God to glorify His name through disciples made in every nation. This is what it means to be called to mission.

Some people talk about how God is working in their lives, giving them a strong desire to lead people to Christ. And churches sometimes view this evangelistic passion as a call to ministry, or maybe even a call to be a missionary. However, if being a disciple of Jesus means making disciples of Jesus, and if the essence of following Christ is fishing for men (Matthew 4:19), then there's no special call needed in order to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, having a desire to lead people to Christ and see disciples made in all nations doesn't make someone a missionary. That makes someone a Christian.

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In Chapter 7 we will see what it means for God to call someone to be a missionary, which is not the case for every Christian. However, Christ's mission is not a compartmentalized program in the church for a select few. It is the foundational purpose in the church for which every disciple was created.

Christian, you have the Spirit of Christ in you, and the Spirit of Christ is passionate about the glory of Christ in all nations. So why wouldn't you be passionate about the glory of Christ in all nations?

3. The Call to Station

Christ calls disciples to specific stations in and through which they exalt Him on mission.

A station is simply a role, relationship, or responsibility in life in which God has placed us. One such station is the family, where Christians are called to be faithful sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers, all for the spread of God's gospel and the display of God's glory. Scripture also speaks of a divine call to singleness for the sake of the gospel, either for a temporary period or for the entirety of one's life (1 Corinthians 7). Christ's call to meaningful membership in a local church is another example of a call to station for every disciple, as is the call to responsible citizenship in one's community (Romans 13:1–7).

So what's the connection between this call to a specific station in life and the other calls we've looked at? When God calls us to salvation, He is also calling us to honor Him in each of these stations. Likewise, God's call to mission means that we should see these various stations as the ways God has chosen to spread His gospel through us. However, we need to think through how to prioritize these various stations.

Some fathers, for example, put more effort into leading in the workplace than they do into leading their own families. But more foundational than a call to a specific job is God's call on men to love and lead their wives and children for the sake of the gospel (Ephesians 5:25–6:4). The call to vocation should not take precedence over one's spouse or children.

Another issue is the lack of priority some Christians give to membership in the local church. They attempt to grow as disciples, and even make disciples, apart from a commitment to a local body of believers. However, growth in Christ and making disciples should be pursued in submission to biblical leadership and within the covenant community of a local church.

Finally, the call to be a responsible citizen does not mean we can ignore our ultimate allegiance to Christ. In the early church, followers of Christ had to wrestle with how to carry out Christ's mission as citizens of the Roman Empire. The Roman emperor was not ultimately supreme, but believers were nevertheless commanded to honor, obey, respect, and submit to civic authority as an extension of their submission to Christ (Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17). Only when the political authorities command us to disobey God or prohibit us from obeying Him should we refuse to submit. In such cases, we are compelled to say with Peter and John, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

4. The Call to Service

The call to service is the gracious act of God by which He directs disciples to make disciples in a certain way, at a certain time, among a certain people, in a certain location, or through a certain vocation.

Of the four calls discussed in this chapter, the call to service is the most specific in terms of how a particular disciple is called to carry out his or her mission. For instance, God may lead a businessman to go overseas to a context where there are few Christians in order to make the gospel known by serving in a local church in that city. It should be noted that calls to service may be fluid. They operate at varying levels, and every follower of Christ should be open to varying assignments from God. What must be constant in a disciple's life, however, is faithfulness to God's call, no matter the cost, until God calls the disciple to a different service. One's call to service is discerned and affirmed not just individually, but as a member of a local church on mission in the world.

We see several examples of a call to service in Scripture. For example, the Spirit told the church at Antioch to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the spread of the gospel (Acts 13:1–4). We also see the

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Spirit using a vision to call Paul and Timothy to take the gospel to Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10; see also Acts 20:22–24). Paul’s call to be the apostle to the Gentiles was also a call to a particular service (Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:15–16). God’s call to service may even involve a certain vocation, for Paul himself used tentmaking as he proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ (Acts 18:1–4).

Unfortunately, it is common for some vocations to be viewed as superior to others. A missionary, for example, is often viewed as more important in God’s kingdom than a man who works in sales or a lady who works in a restaurant as a waitress. However, it is God who graciously calls men and women to various vocations, so there is no room for boasting or for creating our own hierarchy of important occupations. All work is significant when it is done to the glory of God. Here’s how William Tyndale put it:

If we look externally, there is difference between washing dishes and preaching the Word of God, but as touching to please God, there is no difference at all. That’s a biblical view of work, that there’s no difference when done to the honor of the Lord between preaching and washing the dishes.¹⁴

Have you thought of what it would be like if everyone in your community was a pastor? Sure, you would know how to teach the Bible and shepherd the church, but the community wouldn’t know how to do anything else. The same holds true for other vocations; if we were all in sales, then we wouldn’t have any products to sell; if we were all police officers, then we’d be safe, but we would also be hungry.

We need each other. Similar to the way the body of Christ has different parts, all of which are important (1 Corinthians 12:12–31), God has created us to work in a variety of different vocations in the world, and each of us benefits. This view of vocation was an important part of the Protestant Reformation. If, as Luther contended, we are justified by God solely through faith in the finished work of Christ, then there is no work—not even religious work—that can increase our status before God.

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It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office . . . A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his work or office . . .¹⁵

Once we affirm that all vocations are significant before the Lord, there is a question that naturally arises: *How do I know what the Lord is leading me to do?* There is no fool-proof method to figuring out your vocation, but when you are surrendered to God, there are some questions that can get you started in the right direction. Consider your desires, gifts, abilities and opportunities:

- **Desires:** Do I have the desire to do this?
- **Gifts:** Is this a good stewardship of the gifts God has given me?
- **Abilities:** Do I have the education, training, and expertise to carry out this job?
- **Opportunities:** Has the Lord opened up the opportunity for me to serve in this role?

Ask trusted members of your church to help you answer these questions. You may still have a sense of uncertainty about a particular vocational decision, but that's no reason to panic. If you are surrendered to the Lord, abiding in His Word, and resting in the gospel as your only hope, then you don't have to be anxious about missing God's will for you. God is a good Father, and His sovereignty is such that He can orchestrate even our wrong decisions for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). His calls to salvation, mission, station, and service should bring us hope in the midst of trials and trouble, doubt and discouragement, pressure and persecution.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

C H A P T E R 6

1

When most people speak of the “missionary calling,” what are they referring to?

2

Besides God’s call to a particular “station” for making disciples, what other ways does Scripture speak of God’s calling?

3

What’s the danger of thinking of God’s calling primarily as an internal prompting or an inner voice we hear in our hearts?

4

Why is it so crucial that a Christian’s identity is found in his or her calling in Christ, i.e., the call to salvation, and not in a particular role of service?

5

How might a church discern whether God is calling a person to serve as a cross-cultural missionary? How should the church respond to someone they deem to be unqualified who says, “But I know in my heart God is calling me”?

Christ has commanded His church to “make disciples of all nations,” and every disciple of Jesus needs to know how to be faithful to this mission. In this resource, David Platt examines eight truths that are crucial to the church’s mission:

GOSPEL

EVANGELISM AND CONVERSION

DISCIPLE

DISCIPLE MAKING

CHURCH

CALLING

MISSIONARY AND MISSIONARY TEAM

UNREACHED PEOPLE AND PLACES

For the sake of our churches, our communities, and the nations, we must proclaim Christ’s gospel with mission precision.

