

Missions Starting Point

The Missionary's Call

Key Questions: *How do I know if I'm called to missions? How do I discern the call?*

Defining Calling

- **Common Misconceptions**

- The “supernatural” approach
 - *I'm waiting for God to show up in some supernatural way, like an audible voice from heaven, to tell me where to go.*
- The “tingly feeling” approach
 - *I just haven't gotten that tingly feeling to tell me “yes” yet. So, I'm holding off.*
- The “mysterious signs” approach
 - *I'm waiting for some unexplained coincidences to occur in a particular way such that a call missions is the only answer.*
- The “fleece” approach
 - *God, if you want me to go on mission, make the clouds in the sky look like Japan. Then I'll know!*
- The “all are called” approach
 - *The great commission is given to every Christian! You shouldn't be asking why you should go...you should be asking why you should stay!*
- The “guilty conscience” approach
 - *Well, I heard about the lost, and I feel guilty that I have so much access to wealth and the gospel here; I suppose I should go.*
- The “emotional high” approach
 - *That missions conference was AWESOME! I'm definitely going. No doubt about it. I've never trained and never even thought about evangelism, but I'm POSITIVE I'm moving to India next week.*

- **Layers of Questions**

- Am I called to go? If so, where?
- Within that location, what people group?
- Among that people group, what job?
- In that job, which patterns of life and ministry?
- In that ministry, how should I allocate my time?

- **Importance of Definitions**

- The basis of the aforementioned misconceptions relates to our definition of calling.
- When some hear calling, they sometimes mean “the unmistakable, unchanging, distinct and clear directive from God for me to cross cultures for the sake of the gospel.”
- Because of this definition, often “paralysis by analysis” sets in. It’s difficult to discern clarity and distinctness of the call against any objective standard.
- Of course, God can do as he pleases, and he has in fact used direct and supernatural communication to direct his servants in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. This is not outside his ability to do.
- However, God most often works through obedience and the normal means of grace to place it on the heart of some to go.

- **Defining Calling – A Layered Reality**

- **Matthew 28:18-20** // ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- **Call to Salvation** – The gracious act of God by which he draws people to become disciples of Jesus and members of his church. Salvation comes through the proclamation of God’s Word in the power of God’s Spirit. Accompanying the call to salvation in Christ is a call to freedom, holiness, and suffering in Christ. This call provides the unshakable foundation of every believer’s identity.¹
- **Call to Mission** – The call to salvation induces a call to mission, for every person who responds to God’s call receives Christ’s command to make disciples of Jesus. Disciple-making is thus the God-given, Christ-enabled, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple whatever his or her station, location, or vocation. In this way, every disciple plays an integral part in the eternal purpose of God to glorify his name through disciples made among every nation.²
- **Call to Station** – Christ calls specific disciples to specific stations in and through which they exalt him on mission. For example, within the family Christians are called to be faithful sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers for the spread of God’s glory. Some are called to singleness for the sake of mission. All are called to meaningful membership within his church.³
- **Call to Service** – 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. Calls to service may be fluid, operating at varying levels and open to varying assignments from God.⁴
- **Question Remains:** How do these calls become clear in my life?

¹ Adapted from the IMB’s *Foundations*, pg. 65.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Adapted from the IMB’s *Foundations*, pg. 66.

Discerning the Call

- **Hearing God's Voice in His Word**

- **Hebrews 1:1-2** // Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
- **John 1:14** // And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** // ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- It's through God's Word that we hear his voice and that he transforms our affections. The more we know his Word, the more we understand his grand redemptive narrative. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to convict our hearts of sin and call us to patterns of obedience.

- **Depending on God in Prayer**

- **Acts 13:1-3** // Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.
- Prayer is evidence of a faith that's dependent on God. We cannot obey God through our own strength, and we need him to fill us with his Spirit. It's through prayer that we express our humility and see God work in ways we could have never expected.

- **Trusting God in Obedience**

- **Proverbs 3:5-6** // ⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.
- **Matthew 25:23** // ²³His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'
- **Genesis 12:1-3** // Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
- **2 Peter 1:10-12** // ¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. ¹¹For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- God is often pleased to show us next steps through steps of faith in obedience to him. This not only builds our dependence on him for direction, but gives him the glory as he writes our story. As one pastor put it: "The best way to discern God's will for the next 15 years is to do his will for the next 15 minutes." Even the Macedonian Call (Acts 16:6-10) occurred in the context of faithful obedience.

Steps to Take

- **Consider Your Past.** God can call you to a completely new pattern of life and ministry, but don't forget that he's been sovereign over every point of your life thus far. What gifts, abilities, and patterns of ministry have you found fruitful in the past? It may be that God desires to use those in a particular way in the future.
- **Use Your Spiritual Gifts.** Scripture in multiple places (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4:7-16) affirms that all believers are given gifts to serve the church and advance the gospel. What gifts do you have? In what patterns have you seen fruit? These may be areas God will use to confirm your calling in specific ways.
- **Seek Church Affirmation.** In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are sent out from the church of Antioch with their affirmation and blessing. God has given the church and an abundance of counselors therein (Proverbs 15:22, 11:14) to help us discern our call and to hold us accountable in our walks. Lean into brothers, sisters, and pastors who know you who can join you in prayer.
- **Get Involved in Missions and Ministry.** The best way to grow in the knowledge of your giftings and calling is to get involved in patterns of ministry. Serving in internal and external journey ministries will not only give you valuable experience but will open doors and help with confidence and clarity in discerning your call. Specifically, consider taking a mission trip and getting involved in the international ministry at FBC. There is no better way to evaluate your giftings in reaching the nations than by participating in it. Even if a particular people group isn't present locally, serving, praying for, and evangelizing people from other cultures will be of immense value in stoking your affections for the Great Commission.
- **Count the Costs.** In Matthew 10:22, Matthew 10:16-18 and elsewhere, the New Testament makes plain that there is cost in obeying the call to overseas missions. Prayerfully ask God to help you work through those costs, and take those to him in prayer.
- **Count the Blessings.** Serving overseas is a difficult calling, but one filled with opportunities to see God's power at work as his kingdom advances. Meditate on the blessings of participating in that work, and let the joy of serving the Lord fill your mind and prayers as you consider next steps.
- **Redefine "Failure".** Too often, we've adopted the world's definition of failure as it relates to obedience, which stifles the discernment process. What if we start considering missions, but it doesn't work out? What if we get to the field, and then we have to come back? These and other questions could insinuate a fear of failure that's more rooted in fears of man or our earthly expectations rather than on God's wisdom. While we want to be wise in counting costs (and to think of ourselves with sober judgement, Romans 12:3), it's helpful to remember that steps of obedience are not wasted in God's economy.
- **Read and Learn.** Discover missionary biographies and be encouraged by their acts of obedience in the pattern of Hebrews 11. Read about missions, read about church planting, and prayerfully ask the Lord to use these studies to cement a potential calling.
- **Pray.** James 1:5 says that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God. Pray for God to give you wisdom in discerning your part in the mission, and also pray for missionaries, unreached people groups, and the persecuted church. God often uses the prayers of his people to stoke their affections in service to him.
- **Say "Yes" by Faith.** It may be that the Lord places an opportunity in your path that seems scary, difficult, or outside of your comfort zone. Prayerfully consider trying it by faith – you never know, God may use it to direct your path!

Lesson Summary

- All Christians are called to participate in disciple-making, for following Jesus means obeying his commands, and he's commanded his gospel to go forth through us.
- The specific calling to take the gospel overseas to unreached peoples and places is a unique directive by God given to some believers.
- Discerning the call to missions is multi-faceted and comes through knowledge of God's Word, dependency upon God in prayer, and faith-filled obedience through which he opens doors and closes others.
- Discerning the call was never intended to be done alone. Ask for the church to join you in praying for clarity and confidence even as you continue to pray, research, and learn yourself.
- If you feel called to missions, get involved in reaching the nations here. There's no better lab of preparation for overseas work than serving internationals in Durham.

...Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Matthew 6:32-34