

Title The Call of the Father
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In preaching at these meetings, some people have said to me, "Oh, good! It's a great experience for a person after it's over," implying it's not so great at the time. "Tim, do you know how frightening it is to speak in front of 300+ Beachy preachers?" There's comfort in knowing most deal with the same human issues in a time like this. It is only by the power and strength of God that all my human fears can be defeated. This morning, I trust in that source of power.

I extend greetings in the name of Christ, who is contently focusing on this gathering. Imagine Jesus saying, "Father, come look at what is going on down there. I'd like to strengthen their faith, renew their commitment." "Go," says the Father, "these are people we call to our work. Go meet their need."

It is my desire Christ would walk among us today, and that he would touch the very core of our lives.

Three points:

- 1) Our call comes from God.
- 2) Recognizing God's work
- 3) What is it we're called to do

The call of the Father

I found it necessary to ponder my own life's journey, where I was then and how I responded to the call of God, where I am now in my journey, and how I am answering God's call. The call of the Father is life altering. It demands sacrifices of us, depleting our energy and resources. The Father's hull is not the easiest path to tread in life, but it is unique in its spiritual blessing and rewards, providing the motivation to continue the pursuit of the Father's call. Isaiah 43:1b.

The Father's call is not just exclusive to ministerial position, but applies to many other people in role responsibilities. Is it not God that calls the missionary, the teacher the doctor, the counselor, the translator, the minister, and multiple other roles in life? Our theme is focused on the Father's call to the ministerial role, and I would like to explore that role with you. It would be fascinating to listen to each of your "calling" stories: how did God call you to the ministry, how did you

respond, what was your primary spiritual battle then, and what is it now? How has it molded you into the person you have become today, and what is it you are today, and what does God know as the real person inside of you. These are all tough questions we'd rather not ponder, because it is a bit disturbing. Yet, it is an important part of our personal calling experience. I supposed the majority of our ordination procedures were by the lot, modeled after Acts. Is it the only calling method God honors? Without creating division and controversy among us, I much prefer a constructed dialogue in our varied positions. Let's not put God inside a box that does not fit and limits what he could potentially do among us.

Paul's experience in Acts is not a conventional method of calling among liberal people. God personally chose Paul, and then he involved the church which had some serious reservations about this. Ananias showed an incredible trust in God though his instincts objected. God knew all about it, just as he knew all about our particular environment when he called you and me to be His. Whatever method we employ, paramount in the choosing method is that it is the Father who calls and chooses whom he will.

Two basic core elements should not be bypassed in whatever procedure is used. It is God and only God that looks into the heart of man and chooses whom he wants for that particular time. It's the human manipulation that must be eliminated in any ordination for leadership. In John 15:16, ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. I believe this is a key to our acceptance and our embrace of the Father's calling to our own lives. Paul said in Galatians 1:1, an apostle, not by man, but by Jesus Christ. Paul was convinced it was God and only God that called him to minister. Equally, we need the same affirmation in our calling to the ministry. Anything else leads room for doubt and second guessing. May I suggest God is not looking for perfection as much as he is looking for someone who embraces His call. So often, it is my own will that is so difficult to subject at a time like that.

I for the most part have always been a preacher's son. That is not some elitist status. Being a preacher's child can be very tough. I know the difficulties, pressures, spotlight, expectations of other people of preacher's offspring, and far too often it is not a pleasant thing. Early in my youth stages of life, I observed that a preacher's life was a dog's life, and I wanted nothing to ever do with being a preacher. One of the statistics that bothered me was the percentage of preacher's offspring that are ordained ministers. But I can honestly say that in all that, I never felt or in any way sensed God calling me to be a minister at any *point* in my life. That was fine with me. I thought God always forewarned people through a revelation of his Holy Spirit, but that's not always the case.

My greatest struggles had to do with the acceptance of the call. What do you grab a hold of when your life changes so drastically, to bring a sense of stability back into your life? That's how I felt. Within myself, I felt this desperate need for something secure, something like bedrock that didn't move when everything else did.

Here's what I latched on to that helped me accept it:

Anchor #1: God is in control of my life, not me. No matter what happens, I have to believe that. If I don't believe that, then my life has no reliable steering mechanism, and no matter what happens, I have to believe in God. Can I control the direction of my life? Can I say 'no' to God

and be in God's will?

Anchor#2: God doesn't make mistakes in my life. We stumble, we fall, we mess up, not God! God's ways are not littered with mistakes and bad choices. I had to believe this was not some mistake in spite of how it felt.

Anchor #3: It was God who called me to be a minister; he just let 'em know it was through the lot method. This method provided affirmation that it was God who chose this role for my life, not anyone else. Now, it's up to me what I do with his call. How will I respond to the Father's call?

Let's compare different responses:

Samuel said "Speak, for thy servant heareth," an incredible response for us to duplicate. Perhaps it's been your response. At some point in time, we need to recognize the necessity of this type of response in our own lives to the Lord's calling. Not only is it important for us men, but for you wives. Sometimes, it does take us awhile to get there, but the Lord does understand and gives us that time.

There was an eighth century BC prophet. Jonah responded with "I don't think so; I want to do things my way." He headed for a location of his own choosing. Not a smart thing to do by boat, or any other method for that matter. So often I want to do the Jonah thing, but then God sets me back on the straight and narrow way. God has a unique way of changing perspectives as we mature in life. I'm so glad he doesn't need to use whales every time. Honestly, only in the last two of the past 12 years have I fought God's call, then embraced it. How have you responded to the call of the Father in your life? Where are you and the Father at this juncture? Have you embraced the call of the Father in your life? Perhaps, that's still necessary for you to do.

Recognizing it is God's work

I believe all Christians are called to be in God's work, whatever their role, integrating the work of God into their involvement, and it does not require an ordination to do that. It is good to do the Lord's work, but better yet to do His will. The basic difference is when we're doing God's will, then God is working through us to do his work. I like that. The call to ministry is our directive from God into our specific arena of involvement doing God's will first and then his work.

John 4:34, "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me."

Luke 2:49, "I must be about my father's business."

Yet, it was 18 years before he pursued that mission. His obedience to his parents was the will of his Father for that time, and that's what he submitted himself to do. What is the security of God's will? Consider God's infinite knowledge and his devotion to your highest good.

This forces a conclusion, when God asks you to do something, he is renting you the privilege of tapping into the greatest mind of the universe. Instead of saying, 'Lord, this is what I'm going to do for you,' we should say, 'Lord, what will you have me to do for you?'

Too often there is a gap between God's will and our will. God's work must never be replaced with our own agenda. If my focus becomes the doing of God's work, then I rely on my own strength and abilities, and it results in spiritual failure and burnout. What is God's work for you?

I believe the Lord's work involves every facet of our lives, our marriage, work, family, church.

The question becomes too much, how do I achieve a proper balance in all these areas? Is it ever justifiable to sacrifice something important for something considered more important? I'd like to create a word picture for you.

I have in my hands two things [a tray and a glass of water]. How am I supposed to hold both adequately when one tray is calling for both hands? What am I to do with the glass of water in this hand? Do I drop it and break it so I can hold the tray with both hands? Far too often we drop the glass and we use both hands to hold the tray. What am I to do about the broken glass? Somehow, we need to realize the glass we are holding is the Lord's work and what we do with it is very important. Do we honor God to labor in his vineyard and neglect the vines which he has given us? Is there anything we can do with the glass?

I like the answer of my 14 year old son. "That's simple, dad! Set the glass on the tray first, then you can hold the tray with both hands!" It's not the sacrificing of one thing, but rather the inclusion of all areas in my life. A proper perspective often involves the attitude of John the Baptist. "There comes one after who is mightier than I." John 3:30, John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease." It's not about the legacy you leave, but the promotion of Jesus Christ. Let's not lose touch with this important reality. What we're called to do is the Lord's work and not our own. After the people are exposed to your ministry, are they left thinking about you or about Jesus. Our identity should not supersede our Lord.

What are we called to do?

We are called by God to do his work. Allow me to read the ministerial charge at my ordination, and yours may vary, but this is standard. [Excerpts:] "Upon this confession and these promises which thou hast now made before God and these witnesses, I herewith charge thee to go forth and... Be instant in season and out of season.... Make full use of thy ministry. Likewise, give heed to thyself.... Pray without ceasing, and in all these things, seek to be a faithful laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. Continue in these things..."

Out of curiosity, how often have you read your ministerial charge since you've been ordained? I believe there just might be value in pondering our charge occasionally. It might be an excellent means of refocus for us, of not losing perspective of what our involvement is all about, doing God's work. Permit me to showcase several points in this charge in what we are called to do.

The first point of 'doing,' be a faithful laborer. Jesus, in John 15:16, "Ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Of doing, 'bring forth fruit.' The idea is effective fruit production, and that's only going to happen one way. Jesus said in John 15:4-5, [excerpts:] "Abide in me and I in you, except the branch... no more can ye accept lest ye abide in me... for without me, ye can do nothing." God has called us to provide fruit for him, and the only way to do that is to be attached securely to him. Whatever the fruit is for you, whether it is souls saved, relationships restored, church leadership, team work, mission field, etc., it is to have eternal value. What does it mean to you to bring forth fruit in God's kingdom? The second point in this verse, that your fruit should remain; eternal preservation, not popularity, when our fruit is eternal fruit. It's preservation is eternal in God's kingdom.

Colossians 1:10, [excerpt:] "...being fruitful in every good work..." That's what fruit

preservation is all about. Increasing in the knowledge prevents shrinking and disillusion.

The second point in our charge, 'make full use in your ministry.' 2 Timothy 4:5 "Watch thou in all things." God has given us a responsibility to be alert to elements that are destructive to the souls of God's people. Proper identification of these elements are crucial. Too often we are hung up on the external evidences, and we fix the evidences, but neglect the inner. To make full use of the ministry may mean that you don't choose the easy route when the hard is called for. You detect our people's struggles under the surface before they rage openly. 'Make full use of thy ministry' is to develop your talents and gifts for the greatest usage, not function on a plateau of mediocrity.

The third part, 'give heed to yourself.' There's no greater sadness than one who teaches how to live the Christian life but doesn't do it himself. As God's chosen, we soon discover the intensity of Satan's attack. Galatians 6:9. Jesus repeatedly took time away to communicate with the Father. It's a necessity. A track star does not run a 10K at full speed, else he depletes his energy prematurely. A good man knows his limitations. As ministers, we are not immune to the stresses of people-relations and the demands of pressure situations. Don't give up and neglect your own spiritual welfare. Isaiah 40:31, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up..."

In the ancient Greek games, there was a race where the contestants carried a burning torch. The winner was not who crossed first, but the winner was the one who crossed the finish line with his torch still burning. May God bless.