

CHAPTER 1

Discerning Our Calling

Cyndi Logsdon

From the General Editor

CYNDI LOGSDON WAS a name that I had heard for several years, always in the context of the most glowing enthusiasm. I was told by my friends who were on her team what a good leader she was. I was told by people who knew her how sharp of a mind she had, and anyone I met who talked about her always complimented her kind spirit and encouraging disposition.

It was no surprise, then, that when my husband and I got to spend time with Cyndi and her husband, Scott, we found ourselves admiring them and their ministry. We spent several days with them in a small group during a missions training event in Europe, and both Matt and I commented that we wished we could work on their team.

As with the other ladies in this book, I selfishly wish that we had more time to sit together, and I wish our paths crossed more often in life and ministry. However, I am grateful she has taken the time to lend her voice to an aspect of missions that desperately

needs to be central in our thinking. Cyndi and Scott have served throughout their ministry from a place of conviction that the church is central to missions. I hope that this chapter encourages you, dear sister, to treasure the Holy Spirit, the Word, and the church as you discern your call to missions. I pray that it will lead you to invest in your local church and to be invested in by it as you prepare to be sent and to go.

DISCERNING OUR CALLING

I'll never forget our stress and confusion as my husband, Scott, and I walked through the brightly colored booths that were scattered throughout the large room at a conference for missionary candidates. Tables were covered with scarves, miniature flags, and pictures of people from all around the world. Total information overload.

We attended this conference because we were trying to determine where we should serve overseas. A white-haired missionary from Africa played a video of his teammates traveling by canoe to the mud-floored hut where they lived, and we wondered: "Are we the right fit for ministry by canoe?" We prayerfully considered bustling cities in Europe where missionaries drank tea from porcelain cups with saucers. A team from the Middle East said that if we joined their work we'd live on a compound, and I imagined seeing the world through the veil of a burka.

We were willing to go anywhere, but we needed discernment and we longed to hear God tell us what He wanted us to do.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

As 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." Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.
(Acts 13:1–3)

While the church in Antioch was worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke. He told those gathered to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them. Can you imagine what that was like? I have heard sermons reminding us that we don't know exactly what it means when God's Word says that the Holy Spirit spoke. Did everyone in the church at Antioch hear an audible voice and understand the word of the Lord at the same time? Did the church even realize at the time that He had spoken? We don't know the details, but we do know that Luke wrote the book of Acts under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Himself. Therefore, if the Scripture says that He spoke, then rest assured, He spoke.

Saul and Barnabas were set apart by the Holy Spirit for the work to which they were called. At least in this one instance, we see that God called Saul and Barnabas in a corporate setting to do a specific work. "Calling" is a biblical concept. At the same time, calling may be one of the most misused and misunderstood terms Christians use when we talk about mission. When we use the term

calling as God uses it, we are helped to learn more about God and about ourselves. However, when we use the term differently than authors of Scripture, we might be perpetuating misunderstanding and confusion.

I remember the day when a wonderful couple joined the work in Central Asia where we were serving. They were excited that God had “called” them to serve as church planters in this part of the world. Not long after they committed to join the team, we read their autobiographical sketch where they explained that they felt God had specifically called them to serve in a different region of the world—not Central Asia. When asked about what they had written, they said, yes, God had called them to serve in that other location, then a door was shut, and now God had called them to serve in Central Asia. Only a couple of months after they arrived, we heard that they had purchased tickets back to America and were returning home to their family. They told us that God had called them back home. They informed their direct supervisor of their decision and shared that they were called by God to return to the States. As you might expect, after some time in America, they contacted us and said God was now calling them back to Central Asia. We responded gently, but said, “We do not believe He is calling you back to our team at this time.”

How could we turn them down when they believed they were called by God to join our team? We had been praying for the Lord of the harvest to send urgently needed laborers into the field. Shouldn’t we warmly welcome this family to rejoin what God was doing among us?

As Christians, we take our calling seriously because God takes it seriously. The language of “calling” is used throughout

DISCERNING OUR CALLING

Scripture, so we need to understand how the Bible describes and defines this term. We take it seriously because we have been given a specific command to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19) and we need to understand the part we are to play in that command. There’s an urgency to take the gospel to those who have not yet heard. There are currently more than three billion people in the world today with little to no access to the gospel. That means that many people live their entire lives without ever even hearing the name of Jesus. So, how do we discern our specific role in this mission?

WHAT IS OUR CALLING?

To understand biblical calling, we must first agree that the Word of God is our ultimate authority and guide. If that is true, then we can have complete confidence when we read God’s Word that we have heard the voice of God. We have actually heard God speak! We must also agree that the Bible is our only sure guide. The Bible tells us to seek godly counsel (Ps. 1:1) and pray for guidance (James 1:5)—but we must do these things in accordance with God’s Word. We judge and discern the soundness of what we hear and believe by God’s authoritative Word.

Therefore, what does the Bible tell us about our calling? The New Testament often uses the word *calling* to describe God’s work of bringing us to salvation.¹ If we are in Christ, then we have been called to salvation (Matt. 9:13; Rom. 1:6; 8:30; Gal. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:15–16). We also see in Scripture that a call to salvation always includes a call to mission (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:8).² The Bible

teaches that all who are in Christ are called, in some way, to make disciples of all nations.

After Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, He lived on earth for forty days and gave His disciples a mandate for how they were to spend the rest of their lives. This mandate is described in what we sometimes call the Great Commission passages of Scripture; the most familiar is Matthew 28:18–20. Jesus gave His final charge and commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations. David Platt reminds us, “The Great Commission is not just a general command to make disciples among as many people as possible. It is a specific command to make disciples among every people group in the world.”³ This is what the disciples were to spend their lives doing, and this is what we are to spend our lives doing as well. All followers of Jesus have been called to both salvation and to mission. These truths are clearly stated in God’s authoritative Word, and we can build our lives upon them.

Yet often the specific details of how we are to be individually involved in mission aren’t provided in Scripture. How do we know if God is calling us to be senders of missionaries like the church in Antioch? Or how do we know if God is calling us, like He called Saul and Barnabas, to be the ones who are sent by our local church? How do we choose a particular place of service when we are presented with so much need all around the world?

HOW DO WE DETERMINE GOD’S SPECIFIC WILL FOR OUR FUTURE?

This is the question we frequently ask when faced with important decisions; yet, this may be the wrong question. Christians sometimes think that to be obedient to God we need to first