

The
Missionary
Call

Now that God has called you to be a missionary, exactly what does that mean. The Bible talks about the call to salvation, the call to serve the Lord, and calls to specific service. But what is the missionary call.

The Need:

Some sincere, tenderhearted believers mistakenly assume that a burden for the need is the missionary call. God brings an awareness of the needs in the world to many Christians, but the need is not the call. Still, there are great needs and God often uses an awareness of the need to burden us to action. One-third of the planet's population, over two billion people, has never heard the gospel. One should not be driven by the need alone, but God often uses the need as a starting place to awaken us to His call.

The Commands of Christ:

Of course, an awareness of the commands of Christ motivates every sincere Christian. Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples of the ethnic groups of the world. **Read Matthew**

28:18-20. Jesus said to make disciples in **panta ta ethne** in the original Greek version of the Great Commission. Panta is a word that means “all”, ta is the definite article “the”, and ethne is the word we translate “nation”. Christ’s Great Commission is for the Church to be involved in reaching and teaching the nations. Every believer is to pray for the nations and support the cause of missions, but not every believer is called to leave his homeland and go overseas. Some will help send and support, and others will go and tell.

A Passionate Desire Leading to Action

In every church, about 20 percent of the people give 80 percent of the funds, about 20 percent of the people perform 80 percent of the work and ministry, and about 20 percent of the people cause about 80 percent of the problems-hopefully, not the same 20 percent! The good 20 percent are the faithfully committed few. Pastors know the men and women in their churches who can always be depended on to help out in times of need. Their attitude is, “Yes, of course, Pastor, I will help, Now, what is it that you need me to do? That should always be our attitude when we approach the Lord. It should already be a settled determination to do His perfect will, whatever it may be. Our only desire should be to know clearly what it is. Only a person who is committed to Gods will can receive His call.

The people whom God is calling to missions are the ones who have an awareness of the needs of the nations and an awareness of the needs that they see, and they are committed to do whatever the Lord tells them to do. Whether or not to follow Him is never in doubt. When God calls His Child to live the life of a missionary, He gives him or her desire with the calling. While a passionate desire and commitment to be a missionary is an indicator of God's guidance in that direction, a true call will have other markers. The believer in your home church should also see God's leading in your life.

Church Support

In addition to the awareness, the commands, and a passionate desire and commitment, those who have a missionary call should also have the blessing of their local church. These fellow believers in your local church will recognize the gifts and calling in your life if God is calling you to missions.

In light of everything discussed above, we should understand the missionary call as a combination of all of these aspects: an awareness of the needs and commands, a passionate concern for the lost, a commitment to God, the Spirit's gifting, and your churches affirmation, blessing, and commissioning. In addition, one must include another essential aspect of the missionary call: an indescribable yearning that motivates beyond all understanding.

God seems to call some to a particular kind of missions service, others to a people group, others to a region, others to a country, others to a city and others to a life purpose (such as rescuing young girls from prostitution or dealing with homeless). Missionary callings like snowflakes are each unique in that God gives all of us something different to do. Amazingly, God uses people to take His saving gospel message to a lost world and is pleased to save souls through their preaching.

So what is the missionary call? How are we to understand it?

The missionary call includes an awareness of the needs of a lost world, the commands of Christ's, a concern for the lost, a radical commitment to God, your churches affirmation, blessing and commissioning, a passionate desire, the Spirit's gifting and an indescribable yearning that motivates beyond all understanding.

I believe that God has called every Christian to the task of international missions. Of course I do not think we are all to sell the farm and go. If we all did, there would be none left to send.

Romans 10:13 is a verse that we love to preach and hear preached. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". Yet Paul goes on to say something just as important in 10:14-15, "But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how are they to preach unless they

are sent? Some of us are senders and some of us are goers. Neither is more important than the other. Neither is possible without the other. The lost cannot be one without the Gospel, and the missionaries cannot go preach unless we send them. We all have a role to play in missions. That means we all have a missionary call of some sort. What is yours?

How can I know God's will?

How can you know God's will? You find God's will by getting as close to Jesus as you can and staying there. As you walk with God daily, staying in step with the Holy Spirit you can hear the still small voice saying, this is the way, walk in it. God will fill your heart with desires to do what he wills for your life. That is the only way to know His will. Therefore, the dot does exist, but you find it by following the desires of your heart when it delights in God.

How can you know God's will?

1. Know God

When people ask me how can I know God will? My best answer to that question is have a personal relationship with Him.

Elisabeth Elliot wrote "What we really ought to have is the Guide himself." **Proverbs 1:7** teaches us, "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: fools despise wisdom and instruction.**" "Wisdom from God guides us to the answers for all the essential questions in life. **James 1:5** says "**If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.**"

We grow into an intimate relationship with God through many years of walking with Him. An old Tsez proverb says, "You cannot know a man until you eat a pound of salt with him." That proverb sounds a little strange when you also consider that the ancient Chinese committed suicide by eating pound of salt. While it is true that eating a pound of salt at one sitting would be lethal, the point of the proverb is that this must happen over a long period of time. Spending many days together and sharing many meals (each of which includes a bit of salt), conversations, and life experiences will result in a close relationship. The same principle applies to our relationship with God.

2. Know God's Word

The first step to truly knowing God is to know His Word. J. Herbert Kane points out, "It is impossible to know God's specific will unless we are willing to bring our lives into conformity with His general will." As you study the Bible, you will come to understand how He dealt with His people to guide them, to correct them when they strayed, and to enable them to do what they recognized was impossible for them by their own power. The Bible teaches us how God guided His people safely out of slavery, through decades of wandering in the desert, and into the Promised Land. As you recognize the repeated biblical patterns throughout the history of His people, you begin to understand how He compares His people to a flock of sheep who are dependent upon their Shepherd to guide, protect, provide for, and love them.

God teaches us in His Word that we should be wise in our choices and how we invest our lives. However, we should rest in the sure knowledge that He is sovereign over every detail. **Proverbs 16:9** teaches, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." When we need guidance, the path of wisdom is to trust Him, not our own devices. **Proverbs 3:5-6** states, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." The wisdom in God's Word gives great guidance and great peace in the process of seeking His will.

3. Prayer

Prayer is simply talking to God. Bible reading and prayer go together in this conversation. Of course, it is also true that God speaks to us as we pray, but the illustration still stands: Bible reading and prayer should be inseparable twin pillar in the daily life of a sincere disciple of Christ.

Many definitions of and studies about prayer have been provided through the centuries. An oft-repeated principle is that prayer does not change God; prayer changes us. Prayer brings our heartbeat in tune with God's own. In prayer, we come to God in worship. During times of praise and adoration, we are keenly aware of who He is, what He has done, and what His perfection and holiness. Like Isaiah, when we see the Lord high and lifted up, we are humbled and profoundly convicted of our sinfulness. How could such a holy God allow us to come into His presence? Mindful of His complete knowledge of all things, including our failures, we agree with Him that we are sinners. We confess and renounce our sins. At this moment the truth of **1 John 1:9** is so precious to us, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** When we pour out our thanks to God for His forgiveness and many blessings, He is pleased. Someone has said that when a child says thank you for the first

time without being prompted, he is well on his way to spiritual maturity.

We pray for the sick, for the lost, for the hungry, for the nations, and for our own needs as well. We pray for our children, spouses, work, churches, and pastor. Of course, in crises moments, many people rush into God's presence blurting out their request without adoration, confession, or thanksgiving, and God does not push them away. However, these elements of prayer are a part of the normal prayer life of a disciple. The requests that are a natural part of praying to our God include the need to know what He would have us to do. This was Paul's experience when Christ came into his life.

As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And I answered, "Who are you Lord"? And he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do." (Acts 22:6-10)

4. Seek Counsel

The Bible teaches us that there is great safety and wisdom in seeking godly counsel. Two verses in the book of Proverbs make this clear:

- **Proverbs 11:14** *“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”*
- **Proverbs 24:6** *“For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.”*

God has placed people in our lives who have watched us grow as believers. They have been able to observe the gifts and abilities that we have shown in our Christian service. These people provide a balance and objectivity that we sometimes lack when we are on an emotional high about a new idea.

Perhaps the new idea is indeed God’s plan for our lives and perhaps it is not. Mission’s trip team members often return from a trip overwhelmed by the needs that they have witnessed, still hurting from saying good bye to new friends that they made among the nationals and missionaries, and longing to go back and stay. This emotional roller coaster is often interpreted as an urgent call for immediate obedience. Sometimes it is: certainly, God can and does use such experiences to call people to the field. However, before you sell the farm, pack your bags, and buy a ticket, seek the counsel of a godly friend who has watched your life through the years. He may have noticed a pattern of emotionally based decisions that

have waned over time and counsel you to wait awhile. He may affirm you to this exciting new direction, but getting more education before you rush back to the field. There is great wisdom in laying your situation before such a counselor, asking for insight and wisdom.

As you consider people from whom you could ask wise counsel, think about those who know you well and who have shown wisdom in the choices of their own lives. The convergence of these two attributes can provide sound guidance in times of major life decisions. Beware of the tendency most of us have to seek out counselors who will tell us what we want to hear. Ultimately, what we want to hear is the truth. Godly friends with a proven track record of discerning God's will and making wise decisions in their own lives should have watched you grow and exercise your spiritual gifts and who love you are God's blessing in your life. Seek out their counsel and listen carefully to what they tell you.

5. Life Experiences

Your life experiences, or what Henry Blackaby called spiritual markers, are important considerations for discerning God's will. Since God is sovereign, He has sent or allowed everything that has come into your life. He has done so for a reason and He works everything together for your good and His glory. He has allowed you these life experiences to make you the person that

you are. As you look over your shoulder and consider the gifts, talents, abilities, personality, preferences, education, travels, friends, work experiences, and family that make up the composite picture of your life, you can ask yourself a question: Why has God allowed this mix of experiences? Is there a pattern that may help me see how mix of experiences? Is there a pattern that may help me see how He is preparing me for the future? God knows what you need in order to do what He has made you to do. He knows the skills or gifts that will enable the ministry and guarantee fruit in the future you cannot yet imagine. Many pastors wondered why God called them to local church ministry after a career in business until they were actually in the pastorate! Once in their church ministries, they saw the value of accounting management, and people skills. When God calls missionaries from secular careers, they sometimes think that their skills will be wasted on the mission field. However, they quickly learn that God can and does use all their skills and abilities in missions.

6. Circumstances

The next step in seeking guidance should be circumstances. Many believers who are seeking God's will mistakenly believe that an open door or a closed door must be clear guidance from God. Of course, sometimes it is. Our sovereign God can certainly open and close doors, and does so daily. However, this

is a fallen world and circumstances are not always what they appear to be.

God warns us in His Word when He refers to Satan as the god of this world ([2 Corinthians 4:4](#)). And the “prince of the power of the air” ([Ephesians 2:2](#)). Paul says that we should not be ignorant of Satan’s tactics ([2 Corinthians 2:11](#)), Forget that he masquerades as an angel of light” ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#)), or forget that his activity may be marked by “signs and wonders” ([2 Thessalonians 2:9](#)). [Revelation 12:9](#) calls him “the deceiver of the whole world.” With these passages clearly teaching you about the tactics of the one who would love to sidetrack you from finding and fulfilling the best use of your life, it is obvious that circumstances may not necessarily be a road map from the Lord.

Of course, circumstances are important components of God’s guidance. God has a plan in the many paths that we walk throughout our lives. The path you walk right now may not be of your choosing or desire, but there is reason for it.

7. Timing

Many Christians know God, study His Word, spend time in prayer, seek the counsel of godly friends, factor in their life experiences, consider their circumstances, and believe that they know what God is leading them to do. And, even though everything seems to point to a particular path, they have no

peace in following it. God's word tells us that open doors do not always mean we are to walk through them. **Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11.**

8. The Desire of Your Heart

One more crucial element a question really remains in the process of finding the will of God. And it sounds strange to many: "What do you want to do?" It strikes some as strange because they think that God's will cannot be fun or that the more distasteful the task, the more God is pleased with us. If you have children, you will understand how wrong that perspective is. Nothing pleases a parent more than to see a child desire that which coincides perfectly with the parents desire.

God gives us desires in the direction He wants us to go, and then he fulfills those desires by allowing them to find expression and fulfillment in our lives. **Psalms 139:16** says, "***All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.***" God began to form in you a personality with preferences before your first breath. He has given you life experiences, education, skill, gifts, and talents to make you exactly who you are so that you can be, do, and say all that He desires for you. And He is giving you desires for the same. Our heavenly Father gives us our heart's desire when we delight ourselves in Him (**Psalms 37:4**). This biblical principal is

clear that some teachers simply stress that God guides us through our affections. In other words, what do you want to do?

However, there is a necessary warning that must accompany this teaching: be careful to guard your heart. **Proverbs 4:23** teaches, ***“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”*** If you delight in the world, you should not seek guidance by following your affections. I do not teach people to find God’s will merely by following their heart because of the truth of **Jeremiah 17:9**, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”*** and the worst thing about being deceived is that you do not know that you are. To delight yourself in God, you must know Him, know His word, spend time in prayer, and enjoy godly counsel. Finding God’s will and the way to delight in Him are not discovered by following one or two of these components; all of these are important to consider.

9. Knowing God will

The way to find God’s will is to become so close to Him that your heartbeat resonates with His own. Study His Word. Spend time in prayer communing with Him. Ask godly men and women to counsel you and listen very carefully to what they say. Consider the life experiences that God has given you to make you who you are. Examine your circumstances and factor

them into your decision. Unfortunately, God does not always hang traffic lights at the crossroads of your life decisions to tell you when to go, stop, or slow down. Yet, God's timing is a crucial element to consider in finding and following His will for your life. Finally, remember that God loves you. ***Jesus said that the Son of Man came that we might have life and have more abundantly (John 10:10).*** To enjoy the abundant life He has for you, consider carefully the desires God has placed in your heart.

By loving Him and doing what He commands," Oswald Chambers wrote in his classic devotional book. "The aim of the missionary is to do God's will, not to be useful, not to win the heathen; he is useful and he does win the heathen, but that is not his aim. His aim is to do the will of his Lord." What do you want to do?"

**IS THERE A
BIBLICAL BASIS
FOR THE
MISSIONARY CALL?**

To say that there is a biblical basis for missions is to understate the entire message of the Bible. Rather than arguing for a biblical basis of missions, we should view it the other way around the work of missions is the reason for the Bible. God's Word teaches that He is a missionary God with a heartbeat for the nations. As you study His Word and know Him more, you will see the Missio Dei (mission of God) woven throughout it from beginning to end.

Despite this clear picture of His heart for the nations, God does not clearly define the missionary call anywhere in the Bible.

The Missionary Mandate

God was the first Preacher of Good News to fallen man. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, rather than run to God and seek a remedy for the crises they had created, they hid themselves. God came to them and confronted them with their sin. He also gave hope to them in what we call the protoevangelion, the first gospel. Genesis 3:15 states, "I will put enmity between you

and the women, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Granted, this version of the Good News is still in the shadows of early revelation, but it is the promise of God that the seed of the woman would overcome the serpent and his strategies.

John Piper has written an excellent book that calls Christians everywhere to recognize that God desires the nations to worship Him in order to bring Him glory. He says, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t.....Missions begins and ends in worship.

The Call Of God

The Old Testament provides numerous instances of God calling. On some occasions, He called some to Himself with no immediate assignment, while on others He was clearly calling someone both to Himself and to specific service. For instance, He initially called Abram with no specific service attached except to go where He led, and promised to bless him greatly. On the other hand, consider Moses, whom God called to go and lead the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, or the prophets, judges, and kings whom He called and set apart for His service.

Even as you continue your journey to learn about the missionary call and discern its role in your life, you must

cried out for his blood. He told them that while he was still face down on the road, he asked, "What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, "Ride, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do" (Acts 22:10). Later, in his defense before Agrippa, Paul revealed even more details of his encounter with Christ, demonstrating that Christ called him to salvation and specific service in the same wonderful experience. Read Acts 26:15-18. Clearly, the Bible teaches that God may call some to both Himself and specific service in the same experience while others walk faithfully for years before He calls them to the next step.

The Great Commission, The Great Commandment, And The Great Compassion

The Great Commission

The Great Commission is the command of Jesus to go to the nations and make disciples. Every Gospel and the book of Acts records it (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Matthew's version is a favorite passage for many. Read Matthew 28:18-20

With these words, Jesus commanded His followers to go to the nations and proclaim the gospel message. The imperative verb in the passage is the word "make disciples", not "go", as it appears to be in English; "going" is assumed in the command. We have already observed that Jesus emphasis is not on

prepare yourself to answer wisely when He calls. Samuel heard God calling his name and said, "Speak, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:10). He chose wisely. However, when Jonah heard God calling him, he booked passage to get as far away as he could (Jonah 1:3). He learned through a painful experience that he chose poorly. How will you choose when God calls?

Our call to salvation is sometimes accompanied by a clear understanding of what God wants us to do, or the call to service comes closely after it. For me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). After his healing and salvation, the Gadarene demonic was so thankful that he longed to join with the disciples and serve the, Yet, Jesus gave him a different ministry: go home and tell your family and friends how the Lord has saved you and how much He has done for you (Mark 5:19-20).

Paul's Damascus road experience included a call to both salvation and service. The Lord revealed that Paul was His chosen instrument to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts :15), clearly revealing that he was called for a purpose. This precious awareness invigorated Paul in his missionary work: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me"(Philippians 3:12). Later in his ministry, Paul recounted his salvation experience to a crowd in Jerusalem that

UNDERSTANDING

MISSIONARY

HISTORY

Applying History

Missionaries throughout history have defined and described the missionary call in many ways. Some remind us that the Bible mentions no such call and all could go. Others stress that

the Bible mentions no call and so all should go. Still others have said that the road is so dangerous that you had better make sure of your personal missionary calling before you attempt to go. Some have insisted that you go where God leads, others say the call is to go where there is no gospel witness, while others have urged you to join the harvest, and all of them cite biblical evidence for their argument.

The Bible speaks about Gods heartbeat for the nations from beginning to end. Gds Word is replete with examples of His people being led to impact the nations for Gods glory. Although the words missionary and missions do not occur, cross cultural boundaries in order to share the gospel is clearly seen and taught. In fact, the Bible is clear that some are to go and others are to send. The entire church at Antioch did not join Barnabas and Paul when the Holy Spirit appointed them for their missionary journey. Additionally, the apostle Paul states clearly in Romans 10:13-15 that the nations must hear the gospel to be saved and that witness must be sent to preach it. The Great Commission is not a universal missionary call to every believer that they should pack up and move across the globe. The truth that there is indeed a missionary call must be understood, and while the majority of the church believers in the missionary call today, very few actually understand what they mean by the term. The confusion that results from a myriad of definitions of

the missionary call results in many Christians doubting that God has spoken to them.

This brief glance through some of the pages of mission's history shows that there has never been a single definition of the missionary call. Some have asserted that the Great Commission is call enough.