

“Am I Called?”: Next Steps in Missions
Week 12
Slightly edited from CHBC’s Core Seminar

Introduction

This morning in our last class we’ll be thinking about the topic: “Am I Called?” Here we turn from the biblical and theological foundations for missions inwardly to consider ourselves personally. What role has God called each of us to individually in this work of world evangelization?

I hope that this is a question you’ve been asking yourself over the last twelve weeks. But before we dive in, let’s do a quick review.

In the first few weeks of this class, we talked about the foundation of missions; we concluded that this foundation was to glorify God. We saw from scripture that God has a passion to see His name glorified by showing mercy to sinners. And this has been God’s plan all along! In God’s grace, His glory and our good are not at odds, because he has seen fit to redeem fallen sinners and restore them to a relationship to him. Praise God that he is glorified in the redemption of rebels!

We also talked about the urgency of taking the Gospel to the nations and about various ways to do this. Last week, we talked about getting started by doing cross-cultural ministry here in N.C.

→ **Discussion Question:** Before we turn to the content of this class, any testimonies of how you have tried to put any of last week’s class into practice?

This week we’re thinking about the question— “Am I Called?” and about the next steps we should take personally in obeying the Great Commission. We’ll do this in four sections. First, we’ll examine the Bible’s teaching on this question of ‘calling’ and see how it is often used in unbiblical and unhelpful ways. Second, we’ll propose the language of ‘aspiration’ instead. Third, we’ll look at the biblical qualifications for a missionary. Fourth, we’ll think about how to cultivate practical competencies for missions. Finally, we’ll look at GRBC’s process of sending missionaries and specific vision for missions.

And let me just say up front: this class is especially targeting those of you who have a desire to *go* and serve the Lord vocationally in missions. If that's not you, thank you for being here. I hope that this class will help you think about how to support, counsel, and encourage those considering missions. But I also think you'll find that much of what I say here will apply to you as well. Just because you're not going doesn't mean you're not being faithful right where God has you.

With that in mind, let's dive in!

I. Am I “Called” to Missions?

Perhaps you've heard someone talk about “feeling called” or “being called” to missions. I know I have. Usually when people say this they mean that they have a constraining, settled, deeply rooted desire to serve the Lord in some capacity or another.¹ As Andy Johnson once put it to me, a “call” in this sense refers to “a sense of desire or willingness to undertake a particular work; a conviction that God has placed on your heart a particular course of action.”

But there are some downsides to this kind of language. First, it can tend to mythologize or mysticize the missionary experience in unhelpful ways. It reminds me of how Elisabeth Elliot satirized the way some people talk about missionaries:

“We all know that missionaries don't go, they ‘go forth,’ they don't walk, they ‘tread the burning sands,’ they don't die, they ‘lay down their lives.’”²

Second, it can wrongly excuse those who ought to otherwise be engaged in missions. You tell me you got the call. Why didn't I get it?

Instead we need to think biblically about this language of “calling,” and when we do, we should note that there are four primary, unambiguous uses of “calling” in the New Testament.

Four New Testament Approaches to Calling

First, and especially emphasized is the general call that goes out to all people, to repent of sin and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. Acts 17:30

¹ Jamieson, *Path to Being a Pastor*, p. 19

² Elisabeth Elliot, *The Gatekeeper*

declares: “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” In Matthew 22:14, Jesus likewise uses the language of “calling” to describe this general summons that the gospel issues to every person.

Second, and similarly emphasized, is the specific, effectual call of God that enables sinners to respond in faith to that more general gospel declaration or call. Romans 8:30 declares – “And those whom he [God] predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

So are you called? Yes, to repent and believe the gospel! If by God’s grace, you have done that, then thank God that he has made you alive and called you to himself.

Third, is the reference to the call of God to all Christians to live a new life of holiness and ongoing, loving repentance toward God. As 1 Peter 1:15-16 reminds us, “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Similarly in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, “For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”

Fourth, and far less common, is the reference to God’s providential call to place us in the general circumstances of life in which we find ourselves. 1 Corinthians 7:17 reminds us, “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.”

And that’s pretty much all that the Bible tells us about calling, using that specific word. Over the years Christians have fallen into the habit of using the word “calling” with special reference to the choice to engage in vocational ministry. How should we think about that?

Well, as I mentioned earlier, it can confuse us. It’s true that along with those clear uses of calling, we know that all Christians are “called” in a more general sense to aid in the spread of Christ’s kingdom.

We understand that from verses such as Mathew 28:18, the Great Commission, even though it doesn’t use this word “call.” This general biblical call to assist in the advance of Christ’s kingdom requires no specific calling. Rather,

merely by being Christians we are commanded to share the good news of the gospel.

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.’” (Mathew 28:18)³

So as we saw in 3rd John a few weeks ago, whether we are the “goers” or the “senders,” as Christians, we are called to participate in missions.

So am I “called” to missions?

The unmistakable biblical answer is... Yes! The Bible’s command that ALL believers “go and make disciples” means that none of us require a sense of calling to know God’s will for our lives, just as all of us are commanded to read and obey God’s Word. No faithful believer would ever say “I don’t feel CALLED live a holy life, so it must be okay for me to sin.” The call to personal holiness sounds throughout Scripture. Whether you personally “feel called” to that aspect of the Christian life is irrelevant. We are called to holiness by the written, unchanging word of God. The call, in that sense, to the churches to share in the spread of the gospel is similarly universal in its general application to all believers.

So in one sense, if your question is merely am I called to care about the work of global evangelism, we can just cut to the case and say yes, you are! Go read your Bible if you have questions about that. Next question?

But the more narrow question that some of you may be wondering about this morning is *am I called to be a missionary?*

For the purposes of this class, I want to suggest using the language “I aspire to be a missionary” rather than “I am called” better fits the biblical pattern.

³ See also: Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8; the pattern of the history of the early church in Acts; and Romans 10:14 (how will they hear if there are no preachers).

II. Better to say “I Aspire.”

Much of what follows comes from Bobby Jamieson’s excellent book, *The Path to Being a Pastor*. There he points out a few downsides with language of “calling.” While he’s talking specifically about a call to pastoral ministry, much of what he says there applies to missions as well.

What’s wrong with saying “I am called to missions”?

The first downside is presumption. Saying “I am called” has an air of definitiveness to it. If God has called you to be a missionary, who can tell you he hasn’t?

The second downside is exegesis. As we saw earlier, the Bible just doesn’t speak of ‘calling’ this way.

Third, is entitlement. Saying “I’m called” assumes not only that you are qualified; it presumes that someone ought to pay you to do it.

Instead, it’s better to talk about an “aspiration” to be a missionary or serve the Lord full-time vocationally. This is the language Paul uses in 1 Timothy 3:1 to commend those who “aspire” to the office of elder. Such language is humble and open to correction. It is more theologically accurate and it does not presume secret knowledge of God’s will.

Moreover, the language of “aspiring” is consistent with the New Testament’s teaching that it is the church corporately that appoints missionaries. Turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 13:1-4:

¹ 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. ² While 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.” ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4)

What is so amazing in this passage is how the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the church in selecting, appointing, and sending Paul and Barnabas as missionaries is laid out side by side.

→ **Ask Class:** According to Acts 13:1-4, who sent out Paul and Barnabas?

The answer is not either or! In verse 3, we see that it was the church's corporate act to send out Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. It wasn't just Paul's or Barnabas's idea. The whole church was behind it, signified by the laying on of hands. So verse three says, they "sent them off." But then look at verse 4: "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit" (13:4).

Here's the point. God's Word refuses to separate the work of the Holy Spirit and the local church. When God the Holy Spirit appoints someone to the mission field as to the ministry, He does so through the local church.

And let me just share one reason why this matters. If your confidence for why you should uproot your life, move overseas, learn a new language, subject yourself to countless hardships is rooted in nothing deeper than a subjective sense of desire, what do you do when things get really difficult? When things get hard—as they inevitably will, you need a firmer foundation than *desire*. Knowing that God has you where He has you because He has made it clear—not just to you—but to the church that sent you, is part of how He will help you persevere on the mission field.

Ultimately, the responsibility to assess, select, and send lies with the local church.

→ **Pause for discussion:** So we've talked a lot about the language of calling, and aspiration. Why else is it important to recognize that the Holy Spirit works through the church in appointing missionaries?

If you are experiencing an *internal desire* for missions, you should be asking yourself two questions:

1. First, are you biblically qualified to serve as a missionary? (Qualified)
2. Second, should serving as a missionary be your job? (Competent)

We'll spend the rest of this class looking at these two areas: qualifications and competencies.

III. The Qualifications for Missionary Work: *Make the Biblical qualifications your compass.*

→ **Ask the class:** Where would you suggest turning to in Scripture in order to identify the biblical qualifications for missionary service?

A good starting place for discerning whether or not you are biblically qualified to be sent out as a missionary is the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons. These can be found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. And let me just say, these are not mainly instructions for churches as opposed to missionaries. Timothy was a native of Lystra or Derbe (Acts 16:1) who traveled extensively as a missionary with Paul before being sent to pastor the church in Ephesus! Titus was another disciple of Paul's who was sent to Crete as a missionary to strengthen the churches. These are very much instructions to missionaries! (*Ask someone to read these*).

¹ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:5-9)

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as

deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

These qualifications are not exhaustive, but they should be the starting point of self-examination for anyone who aspires to missionary work or Christian service.

Let me just highlight a few details. Notice how Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:3 that an elder must not be quarrelsome. → Why would it be important for a missionary to not be “quarrelsome” but gentle?

Notice too Paul’s command, in each of these passages that an elder or deacon must manage their household well (1 Tim. 3:4; Titus 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:12). → Why would it be important for a missionary to have a demonstrated pattern of godly leadership in the home?

If you have a desire to serve the Lord here at home or abroad, make the Biblical qualifications your compass. Let them set the trajectory for your life and pursuit of godliness. Let me just briefly share three ways you can do this.

First, be an example to others.

In your personal life, set an example for others to follow in sharing the gospel, making disciples, crossing cultural boundaries, and serving the church. Paul says in Philippians 3:17: “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” Who is he talking about? He probably has in Timothy and Epaphroditus whom he had commended in chapter 2 for their concern for the interests of others (2:20) and willingness to selflessly serve in obscure ways. Paul is saying, be that kind of example to others.

Ask yourself this question: Who, if asked, would say that they are growing in godliness as a result of your example?

Bobby Jamieson asks in his book *Path to Being a Pastor*, “If everyone in your church studied Scripture the way you do, would they know God better and obey him more? If everyone in your church prayed the way you do, would their prayer life be richer or poorer than it is now?”⁴ If everyone followed your example in their use of time, money, consumption of entertainment, would they be more or less like Jesus?

Second, in your personal evangelism, strive to *be a missionary before you are sent as a missionary*. Like what we talked about last week in terms of doing the work of evangelism here at home. And if you tell me that you’re already doing all

⁴ Jamieson, *Path to Being a Pastor*, 64.

that, here's the next step: who are you bringing along with you in evangelism and thereby discipling them?

Third, *be patient*. One of the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 is not to be a recent convert (1 Tim. 3:6). "Be willing to submit to processes that seem inefficient. Quicker methods will not produce the same depth of character."⁵ All kinds of things go wrong if you insist on moving too quickly. In all of this:

Pursue godliness more than you pursue missions. If you are more passionate about being a missionary than you are about godliness, you are not qualified to be a missionary.

As Bobby has written, "Pursue godliness more than you pursue others' recognition of your godliness. Pursue godliness when no one is looking and no one cares. Pursue godliness when it seems like godliness is not getting you where you want to go."⁶

→ **Discussion Question:** Why is it so important for godliness to characterize missionaries? Are there dangers of over-emphasizing the holiness of missionaries?

IV. The Competencies for Missionary Work: *Cultivate Key Competencies for Missionary Work*

We've talked about having a desire for missionary work and about the importance of possessing the biblical qualifications for missionary work. Finally, we want to consider the question of competence. Should serving as a missionary be your job? Why should people pay *you* to be a missionary?

The competencies needed really depend on the kind of work that is needed on the ground. Here it may be helpful to distinguish between elder-type missionaries and deacon-type missionaries.

Deacon-Type Missionaries

There may be members whom we send out as missionaries whose primary function is to support an existing church or a church-planting team through

⁵ Jamieson, *Path to Being a Pastor*, 150.

⁶ Jamieson, *Path to Being a Pastor*, 53.

evangelism and discipling. They are not sent out as potential pastors and are thus generally sent to or with a team that has elder-qualified men.

In addition to the biblical qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3, we would be looking for specific skill sets to supplement the evangelistic and discipling work of local teams.

→ **Discussion question:** What do you think? What are examples of skill sets aspiring missionaries could seek to develop to be useful on the field?

Examples: Teaching ESL, construction, web-design, A/V skills. Paul made tents!

Elder-Type Missionaries

These are CHBC members whom we send out as missionaries whose primary function is to pastor a church. An example of this kind of missionary is Andy Johnson from CHBC who is church planting in Ankara.

In addition to the elder qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus, we would expect for them to have gifts in preaching, counseling, leadership, and so forth.

→ **Discussion Question:** What other competencies can an aspiring missionary seek to cultivate now in order to be more useful on the field?

V. The CHBC-sending process and general vision for missions

(This section was taught by Pastor Jones- so you might want to check with him to get his manuscript)