

Called and Confused

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"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," observed Henry David Thoreau, sitting in his makeshift cabin on the shores of Walden Pond. Though he penned those words more than 150 years ago, they still haunt our thoughts today.

Deep down, we all know what "*quiet desperation*" is and where it comes from. It's the unanswered longing for purpose — the echoing question in our souls that never quite fades away: "**Why am I here? Who am I called to be? What's the point of my life?**" These are questions of the human soul that matter more than any others.



Perhaps it's the importance of these questions that has led many Christians to battle intensely with the issue of "**calling**." Why did God place me here in this particular location at this particular time in history? What's His specific purpose for me?

What's a "Calling" Anyway?

One great difficulty we face in discerning God's "call" on our lives is in understanding the terms and questions involved. **What exactly is a calling?** Is God's call restricted to those in vocational ministry, or does He also call people to be engineers or auto-shop mechanics? Is the call of God a one-time event, or can it change from one season to the next? How do we recognize the call from God when (or if) it comes?

For some Christians, questions like these lead to even more confusing dilemmas. How specific is God's call on our lives? Does His call include directing where we should live? Whom we should marry (or if we should marry at all)? Which church we should join? Too often, our frustration over trying to answer these questions leads us to a spiritual paralysis. Not wanting to disobey God's call, we end up heaping all of our questions together in a convoluted pile and dumping them, en masse, into God's divine lap. Then we sit in a long, aching silence, resolving to do nothing but wait for His answer.

But is it really God's will to dictate to us what direction to take in major decisions we face? If so, then why does the Bible seem so vague on God's role in many of the specific decisions His followers made? For example, did God call Paul to remain a tent-maker, or did Paul make that choice on his own? Did God call Lydia to be a maker of purple cloth? The Scriptures don't tell us one way or the other.

Not that the Bible is silent on the topic of God's call on our lives — far from it. There are

many verses in the Bible concerning our calling as Christians which are abundantly clear.

Fulfilling God's Grand Story

Perhaps the struggle to define God's calling on our lives isn't because God is failing to answer our questions, but because we're asking the wrong questions from the start. Instead of fretting over the question, "What is God's call for me?" perhaps we should be asking the simpler question: "**What is God's call?**" Could it be that our perspective is too self-centered, too focused on "me" and "my personal fulfillment"? Maybe this whole business of discerning God's call on our lives isn't so much about defining the details of our individual stories *as it is about fulfilling God's grand story of salvation and eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

The New Testament is full of divine revelation concerning God's call on our lives as followers of Christ. When it comes to how we are to live, God's call for each of us is crystal clear. But is that all there is? What can we know about God's purpose for us as individuals? Certainly the Old Testament is rich with examples of God calling individuals to a specific ministry or task. Just think about Moses, David, Jeremiah, and Gideon, to name a few. And in the New Testament, there's Paul and Barnabas, who were clearly "**set apart**" by God for a specific work to which he had "**called**" them ([Acts 13:2](#)).

Your Calling is Unique

It's clear that God calls some people to a specific vocation such as king, apostle, or prophet. With certain people, such as Hosea, God's call went so far as to tell the prophet whom he should marry. But there's no indication that God worked that way with everyone. In fact, Scripture seems to more strongly support the notion that God didn't work that way in the lives of the vast majority of people. Moses received a specific call, but what about the millions of Israelites who followed him through the desert? Are we to assume that God's call on their lives was equally specific? There's no evidence to say we should.

Does that mean God is showing preference to some over others? Of course not, God loves us equally and longs for intimacy with each of us equally. But Scripture would seem to indicate the way that intimacy develops between our hearts and God's can vary from person to person. Each of our relationships with God is unique.

What's Our Part?

Even so, there are some insights about God's will and His call on our lives that apply to all of His children. The following truths speak more directly to the issue of God's specific calling on us as individuals.

1. God created us to have a free will, and He calls us to use it. His commands never coerce us into erasing our free will; instead, He calls us to subjugate our will to His. Many times, God may provide us with specific direction as to what He wants us to do, where He wants us to go, what He wants us to say, and so forth. But not always, often, He leaves those choices up to us.

2. God calls us to take responsibility for our choices in life. Sometimes people hide behind the veil of "following God's specific call" in their lives as a way to deflect taking responsibility for

the outcomes of their choices. "I won't pursue any ministry, any job, or any relationship unless I feel God is leading me to do it." Though seemingly noble on the surface, that sort of attitude can effectively keep us from growing into mature men and women of God.

3. God calls us to become well-rounded, mature Christian men and women. God wants us to develop spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and physically in all areas of our lives, not just the ones we feel called to. That doesn't mean you can't set priorities in life, such as choosing to focus on one type of Christian ministry more than others. But neither does it mean you can casually ignore certain biblical mandates just because you don't feel called to pursue them.

When Jesus called His twelve disciples, He didn't provide them with intricate timelines or "life maps" detailing all the specific things they would do the rest of their days. He said simply, **"Follow Me."** When it comes right down to it, perhaps the bulk of our angst over personal calling stems from our self-focused, human craving to add to Jesus' words. ***Maybe we should simply start by following Him.***