NOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN CALLED TO MINISTRY



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Now That You've Been Called to Ministry
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Introduction

"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. . ." (1 Timothy 1:12, ESV)

What does it mean to be called into ministry?

In an article for LeadershipJournal.net, Dave Stone writes: "To keep Christ at the center, we must remember why we do what we do. In the midst of the pressure of sermon prep, sometimes I have to pause and reflect on my calling. I often think back to a summer camp during my sophomore year of college. I was lying atop a smelly bunk bed in the early morning hours when I scribbled this entry in my journal:

> "I preached at campfire tonight—I didn't get to run through it beforehand. I had notes in my Bible and a flashlight, but I didn't end up using either. The Holy Spirit was in me, and I could feel Him. I preached with more power than I ever had before. In the background on a hill were three illuminated crosses that everyone could see. Five people came forward and made decisions. There is no doubt in my mind that I will preach the gospel until the day I die."

"I wrote that over 25 years ago, but nothing has changed. I still desire to preach the gospel until the day I die. It is a sense of calling that I can't entirely explain. As Bob Shank says, 'Career is what you're paid for, but a calling is what you're made for.' Remembering God's call helps us persevere in the pulpit, and it keeps Christ at the center."

In these brief pages, the faculty of the College of Christian Studies at Anderson University will help you think through the concept of a call to ministry, and how to explore the implications of that call in your life. We pray it will be a useful tool as God leads you toward the place where He would have you invest your life. I'd like to thank members of our Strategic Faculty who have contributed personal testimonies about their own call to ministry. Our own Professor Jim Motes also contributed a personal testimony.

If we can help you further consider these questions, or assist in some

other way, please call on us. You can email us at ministry@auministry.com, or write to us at:

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You can also visit our website at www.auministry.com. At that site you'll find a downloadable copy of this booklet, in case you'd like to get a copy for yourself or share one with a friend.

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The Joy of Ministry

Bob Cline

I have a special phrase posted near the top of my Facebook profile page that reads: "The happiest people in the world are those who have discovered what God wants them to do with their lives." This is much more than a feel-good saying; it is a deep conviction that drives me as I work with students and pastors.

When a person begins experiencing God's call, one of the first things he or she realizes is that "I need some help with this and some training in order to do it well!" When I talk with people who are experiencing God's call and wondering what to do next, I encourage them to get some training, as I say it: "in Word and deed" – in Word, meaning biblical and theological grounding, and in deed, meaning to learn strategies and sharpen skills.

As you consider God's call and His plans for your life – as you anticipate the exciting experiences and carefully prepare for the challenges that await you in ministry – here are some key things to consider:

First, your calling is simply what God wants you to do with your life, and it is the key to life's deepest level of contentment and satisfaction. I

hope one of your primary goals is to eventually look back on your life and be able to say that you did what God created you to do. Long time pastor Rick Ezell told me recently that no higher place of service exists than doing what God has called you to do.

The calling into ministry can be something that is both extremely rewarding and immensely challenging. Those difficult days will come. That is when you are likely to see someone working 9 to 5 and think, "That would be a lot easier and a lot less stressful than what I'm doing." But despite the highs and lows of ministry, at the end of the day a called minister of the Gospel can reflect and conclude: "I am doing exactly what God put me on this earth to do, and as long as I'm faithful, God can use it to impact lives all over the world." Ministers are the most powerful communicators in the world because their words are backed by the Holy Spirit. It brings me incredible joy to know that when I minister the Word, then the words I speak are not empty or void, but have life changing potential and power.

I emailed several pastors I know to get their take on what it means to experience joy in ministry. Jamie Duncan, a young pastor, told me, "The greatest joy in ministry (for me) is sharing God's Word with His people. The closest I feel to God is when I stand up in front of a group of people to share what He has taught me. Anyone can come up with a sermon, but
sharing a message that you have received from God is exhilarating!"

Another young pastor (and my son), Nathan Cline, said, "The joy of ministry is knowing that you're making a difference, that your labor and toil are not done in vain, and that you have the opportunity to convey the life changing message of Jesus to a world that desperately needs to hear it."

What's more, the joy of ministry is knowing that no matter how good or bad you did that day, when you put your head on the pillow at night, you are assured that God is sufficient and can take your menial service and use it to change the world and bring Him glory.

Second, there is joy in knowing the reward of our work goes beyond tangible results… it has eternal benefits. While the
ministry requires us to be tough and resilient, the rewards have a greater significance than any other profession on the planet!

As a minister what you do impacts people's lives for eternity. You can

spend your life building up a business and when you die, it's gone. You can make a lot of money, but when your time is up, it will simply be passed on to someone else. However, when we minister the Word and invest it in people's lives, we are doing things that will last forever. We have a role in changing people's lives and thereby changing the world!

Third, when I speak of joy in ministry, it is important to keep in mind the difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is the feeling we get when our circumstances are good; joy is the sense of contentment we have when we are at peace with our purpose. Happiness can be primarily a surface experience, while joy is something deep – so deep that surface issues can't take it away or overcome it.

Focusing on joy over happiness helps you maintain balance when ministry hurts you, people resist you, and spiritual leadership is hard. Joy is that deep sense of contentment and satisfaction that comes from obeying God and fulfilling your calling as opposed to a fleeting sense of happiness that comes and goes, depending on the circumstances around you.

Hebrews 12:2 states that "for the joy set before him, (Christ) endured the cross…" While this is referring to Christ's willingness to suffer during His time here on earth for the sake of far greater rewards in heaven, it still expresses a great truth that we should be highly motivated because there is joy set before us too. It is the joy of hearing God's divine approval and the joy of seeing our ministry make a real difference in someone's life.

The joy of ministry is not in a life that is pain-free, unobstructed, with no hard decisions, and where bigger is always better. It is in knowing that faith and obedience matter more to Him than duty and performance. It is celebrating what God has done more than what you have done. It is seeing Jesus increase even as we decrease. It is in knowing that from the beginning in your mother's womb, God called you to this task (Isaiah 49:1). It is pressing on toward the prize of the upward calling of God (Philippians 3:14).

True joy is found in being in the center of God's will. Matthew 10 talks about that when it speaks of the gospel making enemies even within the close ties of family and the radical call to turn your back on anyone or anything that would come before Jesus. Where's the happiness

in that? Just because it doesn't make you happy doesn't mean there is no joy in it. I suppose that's why James 1 challenges us to consider it pure joy when we face trials. We don't have to walk around with a smile on our face while we're being persecuted. Joy is an inner peace and calm that exists in spite of what happens, not based on what happens.

I remember some times in ministry when I wanted to quit because doing what I felt God calling me to do was so difficult and some of the people He put in my life were so hard. I'm not trying to make ministry out to be something you would dread, but neither can I sugar coat it to seem so sweet until you get into it and reality slaps you in the face.

I will never forget one of the most significant spiritual markers in my life occurred when I was making a decision about a big change in my ministry. It was more than twenty years ago when I was considering a move to a new place. I believed I was experiencing God's call as clearly as any time in my life. The inner conviction and passion were there. The open door and positive affirmation of others were there. When I told these things to a wise and trusted friend, he responded, "Perhaps God is giving you such a clear sense of call now because He knows one day you will need it." Truer words have never been spoken!

Maybe that's why Moses experienced the burning bush and, to our knowledge, it has never been duplicated quite like it was for him. I could certainly see how something like that helped him later on to overcome the repeated testing of Pharaoh's ever-hardening heart and the discouragement of the droning complaints of his own people.

As I look back on more than three decades of pastoral ministry, I can honestly say that what I remember most are the joys of ministry. This is not to say that joy is all that came my way. The fact is that nearly every day brought some kind of challenge in working with people and obeying God's directives. Let me tell you as plainly as I know how to say it – if anyone thinks the ministry is easy or always pleasant, successful and free of stress or anxiety, they are wrong!

Pastor Rick Ezell often tells people who are thinking about entering the ministry: "Don't do it unless you are called; otherwise you will quit at the first crisis. And, in pastoral ministry you are always in a crisis – either in the middle of one, coming out of one, or going into one."

The joy of ministry is rooted in knowing you are following Jesus

Christ in His plan for you – that you are doing what He created you to do. You are never happier than when you're doing God's will for your life. That makes the difference in good times when you are privileged to see tangible evidence of the blessing of God upon your service, and in difficult times when all the world's success indicators are pointing south... times that may even require some suffering. Joy is like a wellspring that tempers pain and is an important factor in overcoming failure.

Best of all, the joy before us in ministry is Jesus – more of Him in our lives when there may be less of other things we considered important. Our joy is in walking with Him, obeying Him, serving Him, seeing Him make a difference in somebody through us – moving through life toward that day when we lay down our crowns of gold (successes) and of thorns (suffering) at His feet, and hope to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

As I reflect on the joy of ministry across the years in several venues, here are the most important elements:

Relationships along the way

No matter the form or style of your ministry, relationships are everything! Is this not what Jesus meant when he responded to the lawyer's testing question about the greatest commandment of all? Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all you strength . . . (and) Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:28-31).

Your first priority is your relationship with the God who has saved you and called you. What greater joy could there be than abiding in your own relationship with God through a close walk with Christ and helping connect others to God through your ministry?

Relationships with people who have crossed your path become a storehouse of treasures in your heart, more valuable than any possession, lasting a lifetime. Those same relationships that bring you joy will sometimes cause you pain when people have unreal expectations or you let them down. But that is where growth in character and skills takes place. That is where your own life is changed. That is where the

truth is realized as you discover everything He says is real and everything He does is motivated by love.

Putting your gifts to work

A spiritual gift is something that God gives you the ability to do better than you are normally capable of doing. It's probably something other people can and should be doing (such as evangelism, giving or mercy), but God uniquely "gifts" you with an effectiveness and passion in doing it. There is an indescribable joy in serving God with an enablement that you know is beyond your ability. And the joy only increases as your ministry is fulfilled in a way that brings God glory, helps people, strengthens the church, and fulfills your calling.

Seeing life transformation happen

God calls us to serve Him with the primary focus of our attention on Him. This means serving Him first, listening to His voice above others, trusting His commands when they don't make sense to us, and being confident in results when we don't see any. But when God allows us to see people's lives changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, that is indeed special! When you have suffered the pain of empathy over someone else's brokenness – whether it's by their own bad decisions or the evil wrongdoing of someone else – when you see God work supernaturally to heal and restore them by His grace and power, it brings incredible joy.

One of the most impressive figures in history is King Solomon, considered to be one of the wisest people of all time. Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:22 (NLT), "So I saw that there is nothing better for people than to be happy in their work. That is why they are here!" The "work" of which he speaks certainly includes the toil of ministry and his words surely affirm its joy in the countless lives God has called to service across the centuries – including you!

The great evangelist Billy Graham once said that he believes he did the one thing God called him to do – preach the gospel. The ultimate joy in your ministry will be to look back one day and say the same thing – that you did what God called you to do.

My call to ministry is somewhat unusual and in fact, some would consider it to be backwards from the normal sequence of events. The truth is I was saved at age 9 in Greensboro, North Carolina. Being raised in a non-Christian home, I found the church to be a place of great joy, peace, and love. Having found a ride to church, I sat by myself but still God called me into a relationship with him.

The truth is I already knew that God wanted me to be a Baptist preacher. In fact, when I was four year old, at Vacation Bible School commencement service I shared with the pastor that I was going to be a Baptist preacher when I grew up. He shared this publicly that night. Truth is that I have no conscious memory of not knowing God's call upon my life. One kind woman in a former pastorate said that I was "born to preach". It is a comfort to know with certainty from the very beginning God's plan and call for one's life. As I said, my call to ministry is a little different because it actually occurred before salvation. However, it is the truth of God's plan for my life.

Frank Page
President and Chief Executive Officer
Executive Committee, Southern Baptist Convention
Nashville, TN

What is a Call to Ministry?

Kristopher Barnett

The mascot for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta was Izzy. Being the first computer generated mascot, Izzy didn't look like any animal, person or place. The mascot didn't convey the image of any existing object, so people, many in their Southern drawls, asked, "What iz it?" Eventually, the question was shortened and the mascot was appropriately nicknamed Izzy.

That amorphous blue mascot is like the call to ministry in that the call is difficult to describe. Dividing the call into two distinct categories, general and specific, can illuminate our understanding.

General and Specific Call

All believers are under the general call of God. They are called to follow and obey. This call demands humility and holiness. In addition, each and every believer is invited to join God in His redemptive activity in the world. They are called to make disciples and be witnesses. This is a broad call that applies to any who claim the name of Christ.

God also calls individuals to specific tasks within His redemptive activity in the world. Surrendering to God's general call places a believer on God's team; surrendering to God's specific call places a believer in a specific role on that team. For example, in the early church God called Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles while Peter primarily proclaimed Jesus to the Jews. Both fulfilled the general call of God by carrying out God's specific call in their lives.

This chapter will focus on the specific call of God while attempting to answer, "What is the call?" One way to address that question is to consider the call of an unlikely warrior named Gideon. His story will provide perspective on God's call.

Brave and Mighty Warrior

Gideon raised his eyes from the wheat in the winepress to mop the perspiration from his brow. For the first time, he noticed the mysterious stranger sitting quietly under the oak. The sight of a stranger initially frightened Gideon, but the farmer relaxed when he realized that the man was not a Midianite. The marauding Midianites had ravaged the land of Israel for years. Gideon's people hid from their oppressors. Some even abandoned their homes and retreated to mountain caves.

Gideon had not taken to the hills but he had retreated to a winepress. Typically threshing occurred on the threshing floor, out in the open so that the wind could carry away the chaff. The fear of Midianite raiders had driven Gideon to the winepress. Too many times the Midianites had descended on unsuspecting Israelites, robbing Israel of crops and dignity. "Would God ever send someone to rescue His people?" Gideon dropped his eyes in shame as he considered the plight of his people.

It is unlikely you have felt the oppression of Midianite raiders, but it is probable that you have felt the shame of God's people. Sin saturates the church just as it saturates the world. The people of God still resemble the crowds that Jesus encountered, "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Have you ever wondered if God will send someone to rescue his people? Have you ever wondered if God is sending you?

Interrupting the Silence

The stranger's confident voice interrupted Gideon's silence. "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior" (Judges 6:12). Gideon stifled a laugh. He couldn't decide which part of the statement was more comical. Gideon was anything but a mighty warrior. He was a farmer so filled with fear that he wouldn't even thresh his wheat at the threshing floor. Instead of accepting the assistance of the wind on the spacious threshing floor, Gideon worked on his wheat in the enclosed winepress.

He wouldn't describe himself as a "brave and mighty warrior." He could think of a few other descriptions: a slinking provider, a conquered

coward, or a frightened father. But as much as the label "brave and mighty warrior" humored Gideon, the assurance that God would be with him seemed even more preposterous. The preposterous assertion prompted Gideon to question the stranger. Gideon peppered the pilgrim with questions. "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?" (Judges 6:13)

Gideon could not harmonize God's presence with the presence of the Midianite marauders. Gideon recounted the stories of God's activity in the past. He could affirm that God had been with Israel, but Gideon saw no evidence of God's activity in the present. "Where is He now?" Gideon inquired. "Look around, do you see the Lord working among us? Look at the camels of the Midianites, resting on our land and destroying our crops! Look at the bloated bellies of the babies dying from dehydration. Look at the heavy yoke of oppression that constantly drags Israel down."

Gideon couldn't see the battlefield for the winepress. He couldn't envision himself as a brave and mighty warrior because he could see the chaff stuck to his sweat-stained skin. He couldn't taste victory because of the ever present after-taste of oppression. It is easy to bemoan the lack of God's activity in the present but it is much more difficult to be a part of God's activity in the present. If you want to see God's activity today, then report for duty. If you want to see God work like He did in the lives of Moses, Gideon and Paul, then say, "Here am I, Lord, send me!"

"Am I Not Sending You?"

The stranger walked over to the winepress and spoke to Gideon: "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out if Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:14). The mysterious stranger unnerved Gideon. How could this man commission Gideon? Was it possible that he was more than just a mysterious pilgrim? Was Gideon receiving a message that would change his story and the history of Israel? Was this a delusional stranger or a Godly messenger?

While Gideon considered the potential implications, he replied to the

stranger's command, lamenting with his own question: "How can I save Israel?" (Judges 6:15). Gideon pulled out the mental mirror and said, "You must be crazy. I know me and I am not up to this task. I know me and I'm not man enough for this job. There must be someone stronger, someone smarter, someone younger, or maybe even someone older." Gideon knew his status, or lack of status. He was not a warrior and his people were not warriors. Gideon said, "Let me introduce myself to you, God; my family is the weakest in the tribe (and it isn't a very strong tribe at that), and I am the weakest of all in the family."

Gideon is certain that God, or maybe this stranger, or perhaps both, have taken a wrong turn somewhere. Perhaps they were looking for Gideon's cousin. He was a big guy, good with a sword. He could be a great and mighty warrior!

Faced with God's vision of the future, excuses abound. Like Gideon, you can probably fill notebooks with reasons why God's call must be wrong. Surely you aren't equipped for this task. You stammer when you speak and your mind drifts when you try to study. Certainly you don't have the financial resources to make this work. Education costs money which is in short supply around your house. Perhaps, like Gideon, your pedigree isn't conducive to ministry. Maybe your family would disown you if you seriously pursued God's vision for your life. Opposite your excuses, you can make a lengthy list of others more competent or more qualified than you. God should talk to them, right?

Gideon couldn't see himself as a "brave and mighty warrior," but God could. How does God see you? Has He provided a glimpse of your future that seems unrecognizable in the present? Sometimes we balk at God's vision for our lives because our vision is skewed by sin. Our past prohibits our ability to see the future with any clarity. We can't see ourselves as one sent by God to shepherd His people because past failures and current struggles impair our vision. Remember, God has future focused x-ray vision. He sees us for who we will be and His vision is always accurate. Trust His vision for your life!

"I Can't, He Can"

The mysterious stranger interrupts Gideon's excuses. With a note of authority this messenger of God reveals God's reality, "I will be with you and you will strike down all the Midianites together" (Judges 6:16). The messenger promises God's presence. He reveals to Gideon that God's activity is not limited to past tense participation; it also includes present tense reality. In addition, the messenger promises victory. The key for Gideon is to recognize the relationship between the two promises. Victory only comes in the power of God's presence.

Gideon said, "I can't do it." God agreed with Gideon's assessment. God recognized Gideon's limitations even more acutely than Gideon. So, God says to Gideon, "I will be with you and you will strike down the Midianites. Gideon, this isn't about you trying harder, this isn't about you doing better, and this isn't even about you in me. No, this is about Me in you. This is about what I can do through you!"

Gideon's excuses revealed a lack of faith. Ours do the same. False humility actually belies a fragile faith in God. When you pretend that your skills are insufficient or your abilities are incomplete, you imply that God has made a mistake. You imply that God doesn't know what He is doing. You act as if God does not possess the ability to equip and empower His servants. Playing up your inability actually questions God's ability. God knows that you can't accomplish the task on your own. It is arrogant for us to think that we can. God assures Gideon that he will win the victory. God's assurance is the same for you. If God has revealed His vision of your future, He will enable you to realize it.

What does God see in you? He sees Himself in You! He doesn't look at you as you are; He looks at you as you will be filled with His power. Maybe you are hearing the voice of God calling you to a task, but the task doesn't fit with your mental image of yourself. You are not really a student of the Word, but for some reason God calls you skilled teacher. You can't see through your own pain, but God calls you kind comforter. You don't have patience with church people, but God calls you a gentle shepherd. You don't have any extra time for teens, but God calls you student pastor. You've never traveled on foreign soil, but God calls you vocational missionary. You've only been a part of one church your entire life, but God calls you a church planter.

Remember that God's perspective is different. He isn't looking at what you are but rather at what you are becoming with His strength. God's call is not an affirmation of your abilities; it is an acknowledgement of His activity in your life. Gideon was a mighty warrior because God was with him. So as crazy as it might sound, God's greeting is appropriate:

The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.

The Lord is with you, skilled teacher.

The Lord is with you, kind comforter.

The Lord is with you, gentle shepherd.

The Lord is with you, student pastor.

The Lord is with you, vocational missionary.

The Lord is with you, church planter.

The Call of God

What is the call of God? The specific call of God acknowledges your place on the team and asserts your role in God's redemptive plan. God offers His vision of your future and invites you to participate. The call invites you to accept God's perspective on your potential. So, quit threshing wheat in the winepress and join God on the battlefield. There's a job just for you!

I was born and raised in South Africa. After an adventurous young life and time in the army I ran headlong into Jesus with my wife at my side. Even though my plans were to pursue a Ph.D. in England or Australia, the Lord dramatically called me into full-time Christian ministry. He changed my plans and altered my perspective. In obedience to His call my wife and I sold all we owned and arrived in New York with two suitcases and $1400 in our pockets.

At no time have we ever decided where we would serve Him. The call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-4 lead us to pack up, sell out and move out with an open heart to the guiding Hand of the Savior who had called us. Today God has blessed my ministry across the world but the seat I occupy is but the place I sit at His command. The world is God's parish and I am but his pawn. He alone is King!

Don Wilton
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church
Spartanburg, SC

How Do You Know if You Are Called to Ministry?

Chuck Fuller

Without hesitation he replied, "If you can do anything else and be happy, do it." His sobering advice was not what I expected to hear upon sharing my call to ministry with my boyhood pastor. Brother Danny had moved from our church some years earlier, but returned for a revival service. He was the man who had baptized me, preached to me, and shepherded my soul during my most formative years. He was the man that, except for my own father, I admired more than anyone in the world. When I told him my big news, I thought he would respond with delight, encouragement, and affirmation.

What I received felt awkward, disheartening, and even harsh — causing my eager, youthful heart to sink. At first, his counsel caused me to question him — perhaps he had lost his passion for ministry or had become disgruntled with the work. Then, his counsel caused me to question, well, me. Maybe he thought I wasn't qualified. Maybe I was lying to myself or putting too much trust in the encouragement received from others.

It took some years for me to understand, and appreciate, his intent.

He did not mean to frighten or discourage me. He meant to refine me — to cause me to consider my calling carefully before embarking on the journey. Over time, I found his somber words to be a most helpful piece of wisdom. He knew that if I was not completely sure of my calling, then I would completely fail in ministry.

A clear call to ministry isn't optional—it's essential. Only a clear call from God kept Isaiah true to his task to render hearts dull, ears heavy, and eyes blind (Isaiah 6:10). Only a supernatural call drove the apostle Paul to remain faithful even as he suffered for the sake of Christ (Acts 9:16; 2 Corinthians 11:24-12:10). Indeed, gospel ministry is a grueling task that involves great personal sacrifices. Dealing firsthand with the realities of sin, wrestling with fallen souls, and pleading for salvation is not for the weak of heart. Only a sure calling will sustain a minister through it. Erwin Lutzer wisely claims,

> I don't see how anyone could survive in the ministry if he felt it was just his own choice. Some ministers scarcely have two good days back to back. They are sustained by the knowledge that God has placed them where they are. Ministers without such conviction often lack courage and carry their resignation letter in their coat pocket. At the slightest hint of difficulty, they're gone.[1]

If a sure calling is prerequisite to Christian ministry, how then does one know that he is called? Although other factors sometimes exist, it seems that a genuine call to ministry involves two necessary components: an internal compulsion for the task, and external confirmation by the church.

Internal Compulsion

Charles Spurgeon claimed that the "first sign" of the calling is "an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work."[2] Indeed, a deep, irresistible urge for gospel ministry represents one component of a genuine call. In Jeremiah 20:9, the prophet says, "there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:16, claims, "For necessity is laid upon

me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

What the prophet and the apostle experienced finds repetition in every generation of Christian ministers. John Stott, the stalwart evangelical pastor and theologian in the Church of England, surrendered to a call to ministry during his college days. His parents were seemingly unhappy with his decision and, in reply to them, he wrote,

> Whatever you may think of it, I have had a definite and irresistible call from God to serve Him in the Church. During the last three years I have become increasingly conscious of this call, and my life now could be summed up in the words "separated unto the gospel of God." There is no higher service; I ask no other.[3]

A genuine call to Christian ministry can withstand the challenge of my boyhood pastor ("if you can do anything else and be happy, do it") because one called to ministry simply cannot do anything else. A holy constraint binds him. In his famous *Lectures to My Students*, Charles Spurgeon asserts,

> If any student . . . could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fullness, for a man so filled with God would utterly weary of any pursuit but that for which his inmost soul pants.[4]

This internal compulsion to enter ministry, though, must not be merely impulsive or reactionary. A fleeting thought, a single pondering, a convicting encounter, or a "what if" moment does not constitute a call to gospel work. Compulsion has roots. In most cases (though not all), a sense of call rises from intense personal Bible study, exposure to biblical preaching, and connection to a faithful, local church. Kevin Smith was the 2009-2010 president of the Kentucky Baptist Pastor's Conference, and is pastor of Watson Memorial Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He describes his call to ministry in terms of internal compulsion rooted in Scripture and church ministry. He says,

> I knew I was called to "preach the Gospel" as I began to be discipled under the expository ministry of my local church in my mid-twenties. . . . After having a season of Isaiah 6 exposures to God (from His word), I sensed the burden to share His word (and subsequently His glory) with others as my purpose in life. I knew I could pursue nothing else and have the peace and joy of the Lord.[5]

In other words, Pastor Kevin knew that he could do nothing else and be happy. The gospel constrained him. He had an irresistible, internal compulsion toward Christian ministry, rooted in Bible study, prayer, preaching, and local church discipleship.

External Confirmation

All of us are prone to misinterpret our feelings and experiences, so none one of us can infallibly distinguish our own call to ministry. "It is not enough to feel that we may possibly have a call to the ministry," according to Derek Prime and Alistair Begg. "Such uncertainty leads to tragic mistakes."[6] Others must help one to confirm God's call.

In Acts, the church plays a crucial role in affirming gospel ministers, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 13:1-3, the Spirit calls upon the Antioch church to "set apart" Barnabas and Saul for gospel work. After praying and fasting, the church lays hands on them and sends them off. Acts 16 provides another example. Paul enters Derbe and Lystra, and finds a man named Timothy. The Christian brothers there spoke highly of Timothy, so Paul "wanted Timothy to accompany him" (Acts 16:3). We know little of Timothy's personal experience of a call, but we do know that the church's confirmation was a major factor in his ministry.

In my early days as a pastor, a young man in his twenties came to Christ and quickly expressed a call to ministry. The church supported him with prayer and financial assistance, but many had honest, if unexpressed, reservations — including me. It wasn't a flaw in his character. Rather, we perceived an utter lack of giftedness and a few

personality issues that might stifle his effectiveness. Personally, I feared that the joyful emotion of coming to Christ might have led him to a premature sense of calling to ministry. Not wanting to hinder or discourage, though, we kept our doubts private. Unwittingly, we left the poor fellow to suffer alone in frustration, despair, and failure. Less than a year into Bible college, he dropped out and returned home — without work and with mounting personal debt. Our church failed him. In truth, he was the only person that believed that he was called to ministry, but we lacked the courage to test him, refine him, and even correct him.

One who feels an internal call to ministry should seek the external confirmation of the local church, and every local church should test and refine such a person. The church is the body of Christ, and through the Spirit of Christ it expresses the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 1-2). Its collective wisdom must be engaged when one believes that he is called to ministry. "The will of the Lord concerning pastors is made known through the prayerful judgment of his church," Spurgeon claims. "It is needful as a proof of your vocation that your preaching should be acceptable to the people of God."[7] The accountability, discernment, and encouragement of a local church (Hebrews 10:24-25) are essential for confirming a genuine call.

Many times, when a person begins to consider ministry, he or she will submit to the church's leadership for counsel. It could be that the person has exhibited signs of a call for some time, and the church can quickly affirm the calling. It could be that more time is needed. For example, if a man desires to be a pastor, but has little evidence of giftedness, then his pastor should begin to mentor him. The candidate should demonstrate growth in biblical knowledge, teaching and preaching ability, leadership skills, spiritual maturity, and desire for the work. At some point, and upon the pastor's recommendation, the person should be affirmed by the church and, perhaps, ordained.

The membership and leadership of a local church should help a person discern and refine a call to ministry in each of the following ways:

- Identifying specific flaws in character that, if not purged, would subvert ministry.

- Detecting spiritual maturity and overall readiness for service.

- Discerning what gifts for ministry a person possesses, and what types of ministries those particular gifts would best serve.

- Refining skills in leadership and working with people.

- Developing skills in preaching and public communication.

- Gaining experience in teaching and pastoral ministries.

What comes first, the compulsion or the confirmation?

In many cases, the internal compulsion precedes the external confirmation. As a called person sits under the sound teaching of the Word, prays, and becomes involved in ministry, the call becomes radically clear and that person cannot help but share it. Then, after sharing it, the church agrees and affirms. Often, though, the process is deeply intertwined. Because of the spiritually intimate nature of the local church, by the time a person acknowledges an internal compulsion toward ministry, many others have already sensed it coming and have been praying in anticipation.

A few years ago, I led a teenager to Christ at our church's annual Fall Festival event. He had visited for a few weeks, and I had noticed his attentiveness. After trusting Christ for salvation, he blossomed in spiritual maturity. He absorbed the Bible and preaching like a sponge. He began spending enormous amounts of time with our youth minister, receiving counsel and building friendship. Soon, he was volunteering in various ministries, assisting in the church office, and mentoring his siblings and friends for Christ. At a Valentine's banquet one year, he stood to give his testimony. As he shared his love for Christ and love for the church, I sensed the Spirit of the Lord on him, as did others. Unknown to him, we began to pray for him concerning his future.

After some time passed, he began contemplating a call to ministry, and sought help and prayer from me and the youth minister. When, after even more time passed, he came forward at the end of a worship service to announce his call to ministry and ask for the church's affirmation,

it was a moment of great celebration. The internal call and external confirmation were woven together in a beautiful, worshipful way.

Sometimes, however, a church will recognize a person's call to ministry before he does. Feelings of inadequacy, worldly distractions, and discouragement from detractors can hinder a person from considering a call, and it takes the prodding of a church to kindle the inner compulsion. Derek Prime's call to ministry happened in such a way. He writes,

> It surfaced when it was my turn to give the talk at the young people's meeting of the church through whose witness I had been brought to Christ. The pastor was present, and afterward he turned to me and asked, "Derek, have you ever thought of the ministry?" At age sixteen I had thought that to have such a desire so early was rather presumptuous, and yet it was wonderful to me that it was not I who raised the subject but my pastor. . . .
>
> Coming from a non-Christian background, my parents opposed my going into the ministry, even though they consented to my switching to theology in my third year at university. And so I taught first history and then religious knowledge for three and a half years in a boys' grammar school. During this time opportunities for preaching multiplied, and I became an elder of the church where I had been converted. To my surprise, during a pastoral vacancy, one of the elders intimated to me after a church prayer meeting that he and the other elders had come to the conclusion that it was God's will that I should become the pastor of the church, and that they would share that conviction with the church if I felt an answering conviction. . . .
>
> I have gained immeasurable strength from remembering that my decision to obey God's call was confirmed initially by the elders as I submitted myself to their direction, and then underlined the clear call of God's people in a situation in which I had no hand.[8]

Whether the internal compulsion or the external confirmation comes first—or whether the two are deeply intertwined — the matter of timing

has no final consequence. What remains critically important, though, is that both components do exist and, at some point, come together. When that happens, the one sensing a call to ministry is ready to move forward with intense preparation — preparation through academic study and ministry experience.

Are you contemplating a call to ministry? Then, heed the advice I so reluctantly received. If you can do anything else and be happy, then do it. If, however, you cannot — if ministry is your all-consuming passion in life, then seek the counsel of other believers in the context of a local church. Be patient and submissive as your call is tested and your gifts are refined. Seek to prepare as thoroughly as possible. Then, serve "by the strength that God supplies" (1 Peter 4:11), and "fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5).

End Notes

1. Erwin W. Lutzer, "Still Called to the Ministry," *Moody Monthly* 83, no 7 (March 1983): 133.
2. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: Complete & Unabridged* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 26.
3. Timothy Dudley Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 87, 165.
4. Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 27
5. Kevin Smith, personal interview, September 24, 2010.
6. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 24.
7. Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 29.
8. Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 26-27.

I have a large picture of a cow pasture that hangs behind my desk. It was during a prayer walk through that cow pasture in Alexandria, Minnesota that I felt called to ministry. I had no idea when or where I'd serve. And it'd be years before God revealed those details. But that calling in that cow pasture changed the trajectory of my life. I made the decision to give up a full ride scholarship at the University of Chicago and transfer to a Bible college. I changed majors from pre-law to pastoral ministries. And I started preaching every opportunity I could get. I preached in nursing homes. I preached in youth groups. And I cut my teeth in a little church that averaged twelve people in attendance. And I loved every minute of it.

A few years ago I hired a photographer to go back to that cow pasture and take pictures. Why? Because I never want to forget that I am called by Christ. I serve at His pleasure! And it is a pleasure and a privilege that I never want to take for granted. So on my difficult days I turn around in my chair, look at the picture that hangs behind me, and remember the pure joy of God's calling.

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What the Bible Says About the Call to Ministry

Bryan H. Cribb

The synagogue in Antioch was in a state of pandemonium. A mob had formed. Lynching was on its mind. Raised fists, stomping feet and cries of "blasphemy" had kicked up a cloud of dust, fury and deadly intentions.

In the midst of the mob stood one man — now quiet, almost peaceful, yet determined. The first rock hit Stephen. Suddenly, a barrage of boulders flew from the angry rabble. Within minutes, one of the leaders of the early church breathed his last.

A young Pharisee in the back nodded his head "in hearty agreement" (Acts 8:1). He began to gather the garments of the mob — returning them to their rightful owners. Saul was happy. Joyous. Another heretic had been exterminated. Judaism was being purified. Indeed, as Paul would later write of himself, "He was advancing in his faith" (Gal. 1:14). He believed he was doing right by persecuting a church that he thought to be false, foolish and far from God's will.

How can it be that one like this could receive the "call" to become God's minister to the very church he once persecuted? How could Saul

the persecutor become Paul the servant of God?

Those who receive God's call into the ministry today rarely claim such radical "Damascus Road" experiences. Yet, we can learn something of how God works to summon to divine service today from the many examples of "callings" — like that of Paul and others — which fill the Scriptures.

This chapter will briefly consider biblical illustrations of God's call to ministry. One could take two approaches to this task. In a comprehensive and inductive fashion, one could examine key "callings" one by one throughout the Scriptures. But such an exhaustive study could prove scattered and, well, exhausting.

The tact I shall take is more synchronic and systematic. In other words, I will examine general and enduring principles gleaned from how God works in most "callings" throughout the Scriptures.

One caution is in order as I begin my survey. One should avoid making one-to-one correspondences between Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles with modern day God-called ministers and preachers. While overlap exists between the modern and ancient, there is also dissonance. So, for instance, while the prophets and apostles often received visionary and verbal calls from God the Father or Christ Himself, such is not the norm today. In addition, God chose the apostles and prophets to serve a specific function in salvation history. Today, we are at a different stage in salvation history and have different offices to serve the church.

Still, God does call in the Bible in a way that is consistent with today. And we can learn much from the general principles derived from these biblical illustrations. While there undoubtedly could be more, the following will present ten such principles.

First, the call of God to minister goes to all Christians, but God commissions some for special service.

The church in America has largely professionalized the ministry — misunderstanding servants and equippers as those we pay to do the work of the ministry for us. Tithes have become remuneration for services rendered, and sideline Christians have ignored the very clear teaching

for all who have experienced salvation to obey the Great Commission. Every-member ministry needs recovery.

Still, Scripture clearly demonstrates that some receive a special calling to serve God in a more consuming fashion — as "workers in His harvest" (Matt. 9:38). This principle is evident from the beginning of God's salvation history. For instance, though all Israelites were to participate in the national missional goal of being a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6), God called the prophets, priests, and especially the Davidic kings to lead in this illuminative effort. And though Jesus called all His followers to "go therefore and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19), Paul asserts that God "gave" specific roles to some in service of those disciples (Eph. 4:11).

The church's role in the process is to set persons apart "for the work which I [God] have called them" — as with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2).

Second, the call of God has no vocational or experiential prerequisites.

As the editor of my seminary's newspaper for several years, I had the opportunity to interview many fellow classmates about their testimonies. The array of past experiences was astonishing. I wrote stories about a former performer for World Championship Wrestling who gave into God's call after rasslin' with it for years. A power company worker was literally shocked into the ministry after grabbing a live cable. There were former firefighters and pharmacists, drug dealers and doctors, schoolteachers and soldiers, bikers and bankers, even a hippie and a harpist.

Scriptures attest to a similar variety among the called. Among the prophets, Amos was a farmer, Ezekiel a priest, Jonah, well, a runner! Of course, perhaps the greatest examples of this principle are the Twelve. A revolutionary Zealot, a reviled tax collector, regular-guy fishermen? These aren't necessarily search-committee material.

Why does God work this way? Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 gives an indication. God uses "the things that are not" to shame the things that are (1 Cor. 1:28). Such variety also demonstrates that you do not need remarkable gifts or extensive previous experience. If anything, the prerequisites seem to have more to do with your character — as shown

in the qualifications lists of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Amazingly, many times, the Scriptures are completely silent about the past lives of the called. This is especially true of the prophets, like Joel and Obadiah, who appear as nothing more than voices for the Divine. The focus becomes the message and the subject of the message (God), not the messenger.

This does not mean that we are to put our past out of sight and out of mind. Indeed, God often uses these experiences providentially to communicate His message. For instance, Isaiah's status as a relative of the king gave him access to the throne at crucial moments in Judah's history — particularly when the mighty Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem in the late 700s BC. Ezekiel's past as a priest gave him significant insight into the corruption of Judah's religious leadership. Paul's experience as a Pharisee gave him extensive knowledge of the Old Testament, on which he based much of his gospel proclamation.

Third, the call of God can come at any stage in life.

Graduate programs in ministry today are a melting pot of characters, coming from all stages of life. I can remember graduates walking across the stage to receive their divinity degrees who appeared too young to drive, much less lead a church; others had received an Abrahamic call at an advanced age. God's call is not restricted to the very young. Indeed, my Ph.D. supervisor — the man who made more of an impact on my life than anyone — did not receive his Ph.D. until age 40.

Scriptural examples validate this principle. Of course, there are the stalwarts of the senior circuit, Abraham and Moses. On the other hand, timid Timothy and junior Jeremiah seem to have entered God's service early in life. Again, the variety of life experiences are all part of God's providential equipping of individuals for their specific roles within the Kingdom.

Fourth, the call of God requires a commissioning from God Himself.

A former professor of mine used to say that you can no more send yourself into the ministry than you can send yourself to China as an official ambassador from the U.S. Every person must receive some kind of commissioning from God Himself.

Our experience will differ from that of the prophets and apostles who often received visionary experiences of God and His glory as part of their calling (like Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Paul). Still, what we do receive — such as the confirmation of church elders and the internal assurance of the Spirit that leads to a holy aspiration for the ministry — is clearly God-given. Like the prophets and apostles, such a commissioning gives confidence and authority and even definition to one's ministry.

Fifth, the call of God does not require immediate acceptance, but does require eventual certainty.

In my experience, I have encountered students who have known God's calling seemingly from the moment of salvation, and they have never strayed in their pursuit of this purpose. Countless others, though, have wavered and wondered about the whethers and whys of God's calling. Some have even postponed ultimate commitment for many years.

This mirrors the initial reluctance of many biblical characters. At times, this reluctance stemmed from a perceived personal inadequacy — as with Moses (speech impairment) and Jeremiah and Timothy (both were young). Other times, knowledge of the difficulty of the mission and of future trials and persecutions caused some hesitation — as with Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

However, if the calling is true, fears and vacillation should soon give way to ardent and steadfast service. Indeed, ministers need such God-given certainty to persevere amid inevitable ministerial trials and tribulations. As with Jeremiah, we need a conviction of the calling that is like a fire in the bones (Jer. 20:9), which cannot be quenched. These prophetic flames helped him to endure the bitter shunning of his own

people, the Babylonia demolition of Jerusalem, and his subsequent ejection to Egypt against his will.

Uncomfortable deacons' meetings and unkind gossip aren't quite to this level — though at times some church members may seem downright Mesopotamian in their behavior towards ministers. Regardless, a minister needs assurance of God's call to face whatever challenge comes his or her way. And this does not mean that doubts will not arise. Elijah is a clear example of this, as he experienced extreme depression after his Mount Carmel experience. But when doubts do surface, we may revisit our past experiences of grace and use them as an impetus to press on through these periods of uncertainty.

Sixth, the call of God requires a clear sense of God's character and mission.

Do you ever wonder why God revealed Himself in such visually shocking ways to the "called" in Scripture? Ezekiel's vision of God leaves him writing about the experience with choppy Hebrew in Ezekiel 1 — almost as if his hand is shaking. Isaiah believes he's going to die in Isaiah 6. Paul is blinded by his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road.

Undoubtedly, such experiences gave validation to the ministry of these individuals and led to a certainty of their calling. But the visions accomplished something else. They gave the individuals a clear and certain conviction regarding the character and nature of God Himself. The brightness of God's eminence made an imprint on their minds, such that the very messages of prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel center around God's character as revealed in their callings. For instance, Isaiah was so impressed by the Seraphims' cry of "Holy, Holy, Holy," that his prophecies include more references to God as the Holy One of Israel than all the other prophets put together.

We may not have such visionary experiences, but the revelation of God's character in the Scriptures to us is just as clear and powerful. There are many good reasons for God-called individuals to pursue biblical and theological training. But perhaps studying God's character as revealed in the Bible is the most important of these reasons. It is

through this study that our ministries will be defined, validated, and strengthened.

Seventh, the call of God requires proper preparation.

Christians will often speak of having a "life-verse" — something that encapsulates their ministry and gives them focus and purpose in life. If I had to choose one, for me that verse would be Ezra 7:10 — "For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel."

Ezra was a religious leader living in the era following the Babylonian exile of the Jews. During his early life, he lived in ancient Persia, before he led a group of Jews back to the Promised Land around 459 BC. He became the towering figure among all the post-exilic Jewish leaders, leading in a revival of the people based upon God's revealed Word.

How did God use him in such amazing ways? I believe it is because Ezra had devoted himself to preparation before he even left Persia. Each part of the verse above was crucial in this preparation, but of special significance is the sequence — study and practice, then teach.

So, how do you prepare to be an evangelist or a missionary or a pastor? You must first study the Bible you will proclaim and practice its principles, then you will be properly prepared. So, I am a huge proponent of ministerial training — as much as you can get.

I have a question that I ask my students, many of whom are young and eager to get on the field as quickly as possible (particularly those called to the mission field). Let's say they have 60 years of ministry ahead of them. Would they rather have 50-55 years of substantive ministry or 60 years of ministry that may not be as fruitful as it could have been with proper study and practice first?

Eighth, the call of God requires an abandonment of self and self-interest.

Human nature and ministry sometimes make a volatile combination.

Every generation spawns those who deem the ministry as a way to feed egos, line pockets, and gather acclaim.

The prophets of the Old Testament dealt with such self-called and self-interested individuals, and we have examples of false prophets going back all the way to Balaam. Like the so-called prophets of the ancient world surrounding them, they praised kings and ensured their own self-preservation through popular messages. Even in New Testament times, Paul talks of teachers who accumulate audiences of eager itching ears (2 Tim. 4:3).

However, the true ministers of the Bible always spoke out of a sense of compulsion and mission (1 Cor. 9:16; Jer. 5:14) and not out of a desire for personal gain (Micah 3:5) or acceptance. In fact, true ministry often results in the opposite of what human nature desires — rejection, poverty, and toiling in anonymity. A minister should be ready and willing to serve selflessly his or her entire life, even if no one ever notices or recognizes the efforts. The call of God is to serve God's people, not self.

Ninth, the call of God requires a resolve to base one's ministry on God's Word and a refusal to compromise on this revelatory truth.

Many denominations, including my own (the Southern Baptist Convention), have fought battles over the Bible in the last few decades. In the case of the SBC, the churches actually succeeded in reasserting and reestablishing the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy as foundational for seminary training, denominational work, and the life of the church.

However, while we have waved the banner hailing the Bible's truthfulness and trustworthiness, in many cases, we have failed to recognize in practice Scripture's sufficiency and authority for our ministries. So we base our messages, ministries, and methodologies on what the world wants and on how the world wants it.

One of the great moments in the early church is when Peter and John stood before the Jewish leaders after boldly proclaiming salvation in Christ alone. Commanded to compromise by ceasing from such sermons, Peter and John answered, "We cannot but speak what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). The Old Testament prophets, too, refused to compromise on God's Word when others wanted them to hedge

on that commitment. For instance, when all the prophets "with one accord" were favorable to the king Ahab, Micaiah boldly proclaimed, "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak" (1 Kgs. 22:13-14).

We, too, have sufficient revelation for all aspects of ministry in God's Word. And we must enter ministry with a resolve not to compromise it — even if it means death, as it did for so many in Scripture.

Tenth, the call of God requires a commitment to personal integrity.

Most seminary graduates can point to at least one and probably many more examples of people who have fallen in some area after entering the ministry — whether the sin is moral, sexual, financial, or some combination in nature.

Each one of these graduated from seminary with no inclination that he or she would err in such a serious manner in the future. Usually, the slide happened gradually and the sin became eventually unmanageable. In each case, the harm of ministerial lapses in integrity extends not just to the minister, but also to his or her family, the church and the name of God.

In the Bible, the persons used most powerfully in God's service also displayed consistent integrity. Perhaps the best example is Daniel. Far away from family, in a foreign country and culture, and faced with temptations that would trip most, Daniel steadfastly refused any compromise, even at the cost of possible death. My three-year-old sings a song that should be a rallying cry to all those entering the ministry — "Dare to be a Daniel."

A closing thought. As I close this brief survey of biblical examples of the call to ministry, let me make one last observation and challenge. A friend of mine from seminary once told me his definition of a disciple — one who is willing to lay down his or her life for his Lord. I believe this characteristic should apply to those called to the ministry as well.

As we survey the Scriptures and even church history, we find many such disciples who become ministerial martyrs. Stephen and Paul, Isaiah and Zechariah, Polycarp and Wycliffe, and countless others willingly laid down their lives to serve God. If you are reading this today and

considering God's call, one question may answer whether or not you are in fact called. Are you willing to die for your Lord?

After finishing my first sermon in record time – a feat I now know is normal for first time sermons – I received several comments from members of the congregation. The most striking in my memory was, "that was a good talk young man."

I believed with all my heart that I was being called into the ministry; I just wasn't sure if was to be a pastor. After much good advice and the experience gained by continuing my education, I was exposed to the many different tasks needing attention in the local church beyond that of Pastor and Minister of Music.

After three years in college, I finally came to the point where I surrendered myself to God and prayed that His will be done in my life. I also came to the decision that it was in the church I was to find my place of service.

The call of God is both illusive and painfully clear at the same time. It involves first to be in a right relationship God through Christ. One must be willing to abandon all holds to this life and be willing to seek out His kingdom, its needs and no others. My pastor's advice years ago seems as relevant today as it was helpful to me back then: "Get as much education as you can" and "work hard at whatever the Lord opens to you." During the process of getting an education God opened many new venues of service to me. Among them I discovered that God has many ways of meeting the needs in a local church.

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You've Been Called to Ministry. Now What?

Ryan Neal

You've been called to ministry. The days ahead are important. You sense God has called you, and a flood of questions inevitably rises up: "Why? Where? When? How?" These are all good questions, and the answers will differ for each person called to ministry. While each of these is a useful question, I'm going to focus on a different one: "what now?" So, you've been called to ministry … what's next? There are many answers to this question, and your unique circumstances will help you determine what the next steps include specifically. But, in a more general way, an answer can be found, and it's the same for every person called into ministry. What's next is as simple as it is complex: preparation. It's simple because it's undoubtedly true, but complex because the specific steps may not be clear to you at this early stage.

Preparation can take on many forms, and certainly will be different for each person, depending on your calling, interests, talents, goals, plans, and place of service. In fact, different roles in ministry require different paths of preparation, so don't be surprised if yours looks different than someone

else's. Yet, still there are three areas of preparation that are vital regardless of your calling, location, age, stature, maturity, gender, or future place of service. Every minister needs to continually concentrate on these three areas (at least!): personal devotion, practical experience, and academic training.

As a focal point to guide my comments I'm going to use a short passage from one of Paul's letters to Timothy. When Paul wrote to Timothy (who was a pastor) he commended the importance of Scripture to him: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3.16-17).

I think these two verses combine for a strong basis of preparing for ministry. I recommend memorizing these verses. I am confident you'll find them helpful in your ministry. According to Paul, Scripture is highly valuable across many areas. As I explain the three vital areas that you need to concentrate on for your ministry preparation, I'll return to this passage.

Personal Devotion

As you begin taking steps to prepare yourself for life in full-time ministry you're going to both want and need to take some time to ensure your continued growth on a personal level. The other two steps will take a significant toll on your time, your energy, and your resources. You will begin spending more of your time in service to others. Additionally, once you begin your academic training you will spend many hours, weeks, months, and years on meeting deadlines, reading and writing, and completing projects.

It is important, in the midst of these other two areas of preparation that you remain focused on what led to your call to begin with: your personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and a desire to serve Him. It would be very unfortunate if you pursued with great zeal and passion practical experience in ministry and academic training, if in the end, the result is a wealth of experience a stronger mind, but a lack of spiritual devotion. Your goal should be to supplement your passion for God, his people, and ministry. To do this you need to actively and constantly aim

to grow spiritually. Using Paul's admonition to Timothy as a guide, you should begin reading, memorizing, and knowing Scripture. You will rely on it more than you can imagine.

Reading and studying Scripture will help you stay focused on your preparation. Scripture study can point out areas where you need to work harder. It will be, as Paul said, beneficial in "rebuking" and "correcting" you. As you prepare for ministry your focus needs to stay on your personal devotion. I would even go so far as to recommend Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* as a good way of working through developing a stronger devotional life.

You're going to want to set aside time for prayer and Bible study on a regular basis, so you can keep your personal relationship growing. As you serve others and add academic training to your daily life, there will be a strong temptation to lose sight of this relationship. Be proactive now and maintain daily habits and skills to guard against losing your zeal and passion.

Practical Experience

Beyond keeping a vital personal relationship with God, you'll also benefit from many experiences in different places of ministry. Volunteer in your local church; find ways to be involved in areas and ways that you are gifted, have talents, and have an interest. The goal here is to serve God, your fellow Christians, and fellow humanity while gaining experience, so that you can begin working through what area and type of ministry you will pursue.

You may already realize that you've been called to be a youth minister, or perhaps a pastor. If you have been led to a specific role, then begin now gaining experience in that area. But, most of you probably will not have that specific knowledge, yet. Although it might take months or years to identify, serving now will help you work through where your gifts are best put to use. Paul recommends Scripture to Timothy to prepare him. As you serve consider it another area of preparation. There is a place for you to serve. A ministry needs your guidance, input, and gifts.

Most people called to ministry take several years of preparation as they work through their place of service. They will serve in many

capacities determining their fit in God's kingdom. Some of these experiences are positive; some are negative; all will be beneficial. For example, I teach at a university and every summer college students leave campus and are interns in camps, churches, and other organizations. Every summer there are amazing opportunities both near and far where you can get plugged into a ministry.

Occasionally, though, one will return and say (with a grumbling sigh): "I had the worst summer. It was terrible. I wasted away my summer. I interned at a Christian Camp. I didn't like any part of it. After a week I wanted to return home, and give up." While I understand what they mean I immediately attempt to have the student think of the valuable lessons they have learned rather than the "terrible" experience they are convinced "wasted" their summer. For example, in this case the student didn't give up, quit, and return home. He stayed and gained valuable experience in camp life. This student was convinced that they hadn't learned anything. I disagreed. The fact that he stayed shows a trait that is vital in ministry: commitment. The student had committed to being a leader at the camp. What impression would it leave had the student left after one week? It would have harmed fellow staffers and campers. But in this case I think it would have also harmed the student. He would not have learned the value of perseverance and keeping commitments.

There's a further positive that resulted from this experience. At the beginning of the summer he thought his full time place of ministerial service was … camp. He wanted to work at this particular camp to gain experience for his future ministry. As a result of his summer "disaster" he learned something very valuable. He was not, in fact, suited for camp life in a full-time capacity. This example may not be yours. But, the very practice of serving in ministry does not mean you will "fit" in perfectly. Keep trying different areas of service. Prayerfully consider what position you can take, and exercise your gifts.

Academic Training

As Paul wrote to Timothy: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching…" (2 Timothy 3.16). A major area of your preparation will be understanding Scripture better so you can, in turn,

teach and lead others. Depending on your specific role in ministry, you'll want to be better equipped and educated for your role in ministry. Schools offer a variety of programs for different roles in ministry, including: pastors, youth leaders, worship leaders, to name just a few.

The 21st century has revolutionized ministerial training to great effect. In the past, one would typically leave their current location and move to a seminary or divinity school to pursue ministerial training. With current technological advances students can live almost anywhere, and still have access to some of the best library resources and teaching on the planet. In fact, entire degrees are completed "online," which in reality means you can be "virtually" anywhere. For example, rather than move to a particular city in a distant state, through the web you can access lecture material, read books, submit papers, take exams, have group discussions, and present a sermon or project live.

Of course, many will still move to a new city and pursue ministerial training full-time in a campus setting. Increasingly, however, many more will take classes while remaining where they are, particularly at the graduate study level (ie, masters and doctoral degrees). This convenience is an important benefit. Some students will work part-time and go to school full-time, while others may work full-time and go to school part-time. Your academic training is important, and should be balanced by other needs like your family and your practical experience.

Whether you are planning on moving to pursue your ministerial training or whether you will remain in your location, the purpose and goals are still the same. As someone who will be serving and leading the body of Christ, you will wisely seek to gain knowledge, expertise, training, and an overall exposure to the academic elements of your Christian faith. Your academic training will include courses like:

- Biblical Studies & Languages
- Spiritual Formation
- Evangelism & Missions
- Preaching & Teaching
- Leadership
- Christian Ethics & Worldview
- Church History
- Theology & Philosophy

This education provides an important base of information and expertise in explaining God's kingdom, the Gospel message, the life and times of the Israelites, and the formation and teachings of the early church. In the 1st Century a major threat to the early church was false teaching. Paul's first letter to Timothy begins with instructions on countering false teachers (1 Timothy 1.3-7). And when Paul writes to Titus he demands that teachers "must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught … give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1.9).

It is imperative that ministers in churches are adequately prepared academically in a variety of ways. You'll want to be informed about the information in the Bible so you can adequately teach and lead others in the value of the Bible and its importance and authority. You'll want to study Scripture so you can be better equipped for your task in ministry.

These three areas are vital to your ministry preparation. God has called you into service. Now is the time to begin devoting yourself to his plans for your life and ministry. You may not know what the future holds, what role you will play, where you'll live, or go to school. But, if you'll consider these three areas, I am confident God will make clear His plans for you.

I guess I'm a strange one, but I have to admit there's never been a time in my life when I did not know God. He's simply always been there for me. There's never been a time when I didn't know that I was called. I've always known. I haven't always been obedient. But I've always known. I simply don't know what I would do or who I would be if I were not called to tell others God's story of Jesus.

Mike Glenn
Senior Pastor, Brentwood Baptist Church
Brentwood, TN

My Call to Ministry – Where Do I Go From Here?

Michael Duduit

I'll never forget that evening. I was Youth Pastor of a church in Tallahassee, Florida, and had taken a group of young people on a mission trip to lead Backyard Bible Clubs for a young church in Downingtown, Pennsylvania. One night we had arranged to take the whole group into Philadelphia for a Phillies baseball game.

It was daylight when we got to the ballpark, but well past dark when the game concluded and we piled onto the bus and lead van to head back to Downingtown. Somehow – perhaps my keen sense of navigational skills had something to do with it – we got lost in inner city Philadelphia. We pulled off the highway, pulled out the map, and discovered an important truth: maps don't help much unless you already know where you are! (Needless to say, I was never so glad to see a flashing blue light behind me as I was that night – the nice officer

helped us get back on the right road and out of our predicament.)

In this chapter, we want to talk a bit about a road map for your ministry call – where do I go from here? But the best map doesn't help if you don't know where you are now – so I am writing this with the assumption that you have a sense of God's call upon your life to serve in some kind of ministry. The reality is that there are many roads on which God might take you, and it's going to be an exciting adventure as you follow His direction for your life and ministry.

Getting Ready

On any journey, it's important to make preparations. If your family was heading out on a big trip, you'd make sure you had the items necessary for an enjoyable journey – gas for the car, clothes, copies of your hotel reservations and other arrangements, and so on.

On your journey toward God's call for your life, it's vital that you prepare. That preparation takes many forms.

Be Involved in Your Own Local Church. This goes under the heading: be faithful where you already are. There are at least two reasons why this is important. First, you need the fellowship and support of your own faith community. Your church is the place you worship, enjoy relationships with fellow believers, find encouragement from others in the joys and sorrows of life and ministry. Chances are, your church is the place God is using to help guide you in your own journey to spiritual maturity and the place from which He has called you to ministry.

Second, one day you will be calling on others to be active and faithful in their involvement in the local church. Now is your opportunity to set an example of such faithfulness, and to demonstrate that church involvement is not simply for those who are paid ministers, but for all believers.

Look for Ways to Serve. Right now you have a wonderful opportunity to gain valuable ministry experience in various areas of service. Whatever your stage in life – still in school, or already working in some other field – you can begin preparing for a life of ministry by serving right where you are.

There is no shortage of places that need the help of talented, faithful

believers. In your own church, there are Bible study classes that needs teachers and leaders, youth and children's ministries that can use help, outreach programs that can use committed workers and leaders. Your own church is a good place to gain useful experience in seeing how churches work as you assist with things like media and communications ministries, volunteer as a pastoral care associate, or even help as an usher or in some other place of service. Some day you may be encouraging others to take on such roles – why not do it yourself now?

The opportunity for service extends beyond your own church also. There are likely ministries in your community working with those who need a helping hand – rescue missions, shelters for abused women, children's homes, and many more. You'll be blessed by your faithful service in Christ's name, and the experience you gain will be of great value in your future ministry.

Begin Your Ministry Education.

An important part of your preparation is the formal part of your education, which can include your undergraduate degree in a college or university, plus graduate study in ministry. Such education will provide a foundation for your lifelong learning experience as a minister of the gospel.

If you have not yet started your college education, consider your options carefully when you begin to plan for college. As you prepare for years of vital ministry service, you will want the best foundation possible – one that will equip you to learn well, to think critically, and to communicate effectively.

Many students preparing for ministry will naturally choose to attend a Christian college or university. Be aware that just because a school has a church or denominational relationship does not mean that you will be receiving a Christ-centered higher education. At some schools, that church relationship means little more than weekly chapel services.

At an authentically Christ-centered college or university, that commitment will impact every element of life – from the residence hall to the classroom. You'll have Christian scholars in the classroom, integrating insights from a Christian worldview into your academic

disciplines. The application of Christian thinking into varied fields will be a great model for you as you prepare for the same challenge in your own ministry.

And as a future pastor or church leader, one of the other benefits of a Christian college or university is the relationships you will establish that will stay with you for the rest of your life and ministry. The friend you make in New Testament class or in the ministerial association may become a trusted friend and colleague with whom your life will intersect for decades to come.

One question that many students ask is: if I am going on to seminary, do I need to major in religion or Christian studies in my bachelor's degree? While some students do opt for other majors – such as history or English, for example – there are real benefits to doing an undergraduate major in college as well. One benefit is that it provides a solid basis for later excellence in graduate or seminary programs – in fact, you can sometimes take advanced courses in seminary in place of more basic courses you did in a strong Christian Studies program as an undergraduate. A benefit for those who may delay graduate study is that their undergraduate program provides the majority of their preparation for ministry service as they graduate and move into church or other ministry roles.

Beyond college, many ministers will seek additional preparation through study at a seminary or graduate school of ministry. Your choice of schools will depend on many factors: your personal situation and location, the likely direction of your ministry, your academic interests, denominational relationships, faculty preferences and more. For example, I think professors who have actually served full-time in church ministry positions bring a valuable extra dimension to the classroom – as you prepare for ministry, it can be a great advantage to study with those who have "been there, done that."

Consider carefully the place where you study for ministry – it can make an enormous difference in your own future service.

Which Road Do I Take?

You have been called and you are seeking to prepare. But then what?

What options are available for persons in ministry in the 21st century?

Of course, the most important factor is the call of God on your life and the direction He leads you. But part of that direction can come from an understanding of the many different types of ministry service in which people serve today. The reality is that there are multiplied ways in which you may be called to serve, based on your gifts, training and experience.

The best-known ministry role to most of us is the role of **Pastor** (or, in the larger church, the **Senior** or **Lead Pastor**). Since New Testament days, the pastor of a congregation has served as the shepherd, preacher, and leader of a local congregation of believers. In small churches the pastor may be the only paid staff position. (And in very small congregations, the pastor may be unpaid or may be bi-vocational – in that situation, the primary income may come from another job or vocation, and the pastoral service is considered part-time employment.) In larger congregations, the senior pastor may be the leader among multiple paid staff positions, and has a primary focus on things like preaching and leadership, with many other ministry duties delegated to various other pastors and staff members.

One particular type of pastor is the **Church Planter**. This is the pastor who "plants" or starts a new church, sometimes as a solo staff member and other times as part of a team. With the importance of starting new church work today, the church planter has become an extremely critical position. Some church planters work under the sponsorship of another congregation, or even a denominational agency; others plant new work independently of other churches or groups. The work of the church planter is challenging – many new churches do not survive, while others thrive and become great bases for ministry outreach. If God calls you to be a church planter, you'll work hard but find many rewards.

As churches grow in size, many churches add a position typically known as the **Executive Pastor**. The executive pastor takes a variety of administrative responsibilities off the senior pastor. For example, the executive pastor will probably serve as the primary administrative officer of the church, coordinator of the staff, and liaison to many of the committees and other church leaders. Sometimes churches will have a similar position known as the church business administrator; often such a position is filled by a lay leader who has worked in business and has

now shifted to a church-related role.

Some churches have pastoral staff positions linked to specific age groups. For example, a **Youth Pastor** or **Minister of Youth** is often the second or third staff position a church adds, which is evidence of what an emphasis many churches put on ministry to their students. A staff position that is growing rapidly in popularity is the **Minister to Children**; there appear to be far more churches interested in hiring such a staff person than there are ministers trained in this area. Larger churches often have pastoral staff positions directing work with various adult groups, such as single adults, young families, median adults, and senior adults. An older model – but still used in some churches – is the position of **Minister of Education**, who coordinates the educational ministries of the church across age groups. A newer approach is to have a **Minister of Discipleship** who helps coordinate the work of Sunday School, small groups, and other ministries relating to growing mature disciples within the church.

The **Minister of Music** or **Worship Leader** is a role found in most churches, whether as a full-time staff position or a part-time or volunteer role. This leader not only leads congregational worship through music, but also coordinates the work of accompanists, ensembles, age-graded choirs and other music-related ministries. In smaller churches the worship leader often helps with coordination of media tools used in worship; in larger churches, the **Media Minister** position is beginning to emerge as an important role, given the increasing presence of video and other media resources in worship.

There are many ministries that are not located within a single congregation, but work in roles that partner with local churches. For example, **Missionaries** are called to carry the gospel to specific areas. International missionaries are sent to evangelize, plant churches, or minister to other needs in locations outside the United States. There are also home missionaries who serve in a variety of roles within the U.S., such as seaport ministries, resort ministries, urban ministries and many more.

Pastoral Counselors sometimes work within a specific church, but often serve in counseling centers or ministry settings apart from a specific congregation. **Chaplains** minister to people in settings like the military or in hospitals; military chaplains are typically commissioned officers in one of the armed services, and they receive their ministerial

training prior to enlistment. There is also an increasing demand for chaplains to work in industrial or corporate settings, ministering to the needs of employees of that organization.

Evangelists are typically independent of a specific congregation, but find themselves preaching and leading programs in many churches each year. Although fewer churches today hold traditional revivals – which was the primary emphasis of vocational evangelists a generation ago – now many evangelists have developed a ministry dealing with specific needs within churches (such as families, youth, or other issues) and they carry out their evangelistic ministries through these new approaches.

Some ministers ultimately fulfill their calling by working with many churches through service as **Denominational Staff** at the local, state or national level. Within Southern Baptist life, for example, there are ministers who

- lead local associations of churches
- provide consulting help with churches through state conventions
- offer help and training for church planters
- lead institutions like children's homes or homes for the aging
- offer administrative support for missions agencies
- minister to church leaders through publishing and media

and many more possibilities. The 21st century will bring with it new roles and possibilities as the church and culture experience continuous change.

Finally, I would be remiss in not including **Faculty** and **Teachers** in Christian colleges, universities, seminaries and other schools. Those of us who have written this booklet have each sensed God's call to minister to students through the classroom, equipping new generations of Christian ministers and leaders. Many of us came to the classroom following years of service in local churches as pastors, Christian educators and other roles. We believe that the church and the Christian college should be partners in the Kingdom task of equipping those whom God has called.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of

God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13, NIV)

Wherever God leads you in ministry, hold firm to the assurance of His call. Where He calls you, He will go with you. And, ultimately, that is all that matters.

Learn Leadership and Apply Biblical Foundations to Practical and Effective Ministry

Solidly biblical. Intensely practical. The College of Christian Studies at Anderson University offers academic excellence in programs that emphasizes practical ministry training for a new generation of Kingdom leaders.

Preparing for ministry? You will find an exceptional level of preparation at Anderson University, with committed faculty who link classroom and real-life experience. Whether you plan to go on to seminary or to seek a ministry position right after college, you'll find AU offers a solid foundation and an outstanding opportunity for practical training.

Even if you're not entering vocational ministry but you'd still like to gain a better grasp of Biblical truth and theological understanding, you will find the College of Christian Studies to be a comfortable home while exploring God's truth.

Undergraduate majors in Christian Theology and Christian Ministry and a graduate programs including the Master of Ministry, Master of Divinity, and the Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Preaching enable students to pursue just the right type of practical training to achieve their goals.

Preparing You to Lead and Serve

Anderson University alumni are serving the Kingdom of God in a variety of ministry and missionary settings – as pastors and church planters, worship leaders and church educators, missionaries and denominational leaders, professors and campus ministers, and many other roles.

Study in the College of Christian Studies at AU will equip you to take the next step in your calling, whether that is planting a church, leading a ministry, or going on for additional preparation in seminary or graduate school. AU grads carry with them a solid foundation of biblical and

theological knowledge combined with practical training in hands-on ministry.

What is the College of Christian Studies?

The College of Christian Studies at Anderson University was created in May 2009 by uniting AU's outstanding undergraduate programs in Christian Theology and Christian Ministry with the new David T. Clamp Divinity School. Whether you are beginning your work or already in ministry and enhancing your training, you will find a program that meets your needs.

The dean of the College is Dr. Michael Duduit, Professor of Christian Ministry, who is founding editor of *Preaching* magazine and has spent more than two decades equipping pastors and church leaders for more effective service. His weekly newsletter, *Preaching Now*, goes to more than 30,000 pastors in the U.S. and around the world, and he regularly leads conferences and courses for church leaders across the U.S. Duduit is author or editor of more than a dozen books, including *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* and *Preaching With Power*.

Anderson University is an accredited university affiliated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention. AU is ranked in the top tier of private comprehensive universities in the Southeast by US News & World Report. The University is located in the city of Anderson in the Upstate region of South Carolina, thirty minutes from Greenville and approximately two hours from Atlanta or Charlotte.

Start Your Training at Anderson

Our outstanding undergraduate majors include Christian Theology and Christian Ministry, with additional concentrations available in Youth Ministry, Pastoral Ministry, Preaching, Biblical Studies, Missions, and Apologetics.

All undergraduates in the College of Christian Studies share in a core of foundational courses:

- Ministry Practicums
- Old Testament Survey
- New Testament Survey
- Hermeneutics (Biblical Interpretation)
- Systematic Theology
- History of Christianity
- Introduction to Ministry
- Senior Seminar

Choose the degree program that's right for you:

- Bachelor of Christian Studies (100% online)
- Bachelor of Arts in Christian Theology

Concentrations Available:

Biblical Studies
Apologetics and Worldview

- Bachelor of Arts in Christian Ministry

Concentrations Available:

Preaching
Pastoral Ministries
Youth Ministry
Missions
Applied Apologetics

- Fast Track BA + M.Div.

Allows strong students to save up to two years off the normal time required to earn both degrees.

Study completely online with our accredited Bachelor of Christian Studies degree

The BCS is designed to assist adult learners in receiving their undergraduate education. The 120-hour degree can be done completely online, or you can transfer previous college course work and complete your degree through Anderson's BCS degree program.

This program offers quality teaching not just in theology but practical

ministry as well. The convenience of the program makes it a great choice for church ministry leaders already serving on a church staff who don't want to pick up and move away to attend school or the Christian lay person.

The Master of Ministry Degree

Once you have your bachelor's degree completed, we can help you pursue additional training through our practical, leadership-based master's program on campus or online.

The 42-hour Master of Ministry starts with a biblical-theological foundation: a study of the Old and New Testament, plus learning how to use the best tools to work with scripture (hermeneutics & exegesis) and the skills needed for preaching and teaching God's Word. There's study in theology and church history, as well as a course in Christian philosophy that emphasizes Christian worldview and apologetics.

The Master of Divinity Degree

The M.Div. is the traditional graduate theological degree for ministers. The Clamp Master of Divinity is a 75-hour degree program that offers great flexibility, combined with academic excellence and equipping for effective kingdom service. Whether you are seeking a more traditional classroom experience or a more flexible online program – or some of each – our degree helps you craft the program that fits your needs and schedule.

The Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Preaching Degree

The D.Min. program is designed to enhance the practice of ministry among Christian leaders, with a particular focus on helping pastors enhance their knowledge and skills in the area of preaching. The goal is to equip Christian ministers for faithful service at a level of excellence.

Visit us online

We would love to talk with you more about any of our programs. Visit us at auministry.com or email us at ministry@auministry.com, or contact us at 864.328.1809.

NOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN CALLED TO MINISTRY

What defining characteristic did Moses, Gideon, and even Paul have in common? They all had significant questions as God began to speak into their lives and call them into His Service. Moses questioned his ability to serve. Gideon questioned the validity of the call and Paul questioned the preconceived notions of what was possible for God's church. If you want to see God work in your life as He did in the lives of Moses, Gideon and Paul, then say with Isaiah, "Here am I, Lord, send me!"

What is a call to ministry? How do you know when you've been called? What first steps should you take? *Now That You've Been Called To Ministry* is a valuable resource for anyone considering serving in ministry. In this brief book, the faculty of the College of Christian Studies at Anderson University will help you think through the concept of a call to ministry, and how to explore implications of that call in your life.

As you consider God's calling on your life and ministry, take a look at what Anderson University has to offer. Our ministry students find an exceptional level of preparation, with a committed faculty who link classroom and real-life experience. Whether you are planting a church, leading a ministry, or going on for additional education, you'll find AU offers a solid foundation and an outstanding opportunity for practical training.

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