

Understanding the Call of God on your Life

By Mark Stewart

“I believe God is calling me to move to China,” or “God is calling me to work with youth.” How many times have you heard people talk about what they believe God is calling them to? Sometimes they say it in a way so there is no more discussion to be had. It is as if God has “told them” what to do. And yet, we hear these same people later say, “It didn’t work out,” or “God is calling me back to America,” or whatever endeavor they were on. You may find yourself questioning if they were ever really “called.” Especially when looking at **Romans 11:29 which says, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (NASB).**

How do we make sense of all of this? How do you discern the “call” of God in your own life? Does God call one day, and then remove that call another time? If God calls you to go to a country or a type of ministry, does that mean you will see fruitfulness? If you don’t, was it a misreading of His call? What if you believe God is calling you to a particular ministry but there is nothing but problems and it doesn’t work out? Did you discern His “call” right the first time? How do you know if God is telling you it is time to move on to something else?

How many times have we prayed *Lord, please show me what You want me to do. Where do You want me to go?*

All of these are legitimate questions but perhaps are not the best questions we can ask God.

There is a great deal of teaching about the “call” of God today but also considerable misunderstanding. The best way to clarify the call of God is to examine Scripture.

In the New Testament, there are three different Greek words that are translated in English for the word “call, called, or calling.” Understanding the meanings and how they are used will remove much of the ambiguity of what it means for God to call us.

The Three Greek Words for “Calling”

The first Greek word, and perhaps the most important, is the word klésis.

The Grand Call: (The Grand Plan)

It is defined as a permanent position or condition.

Nothing changes or can change this “call.” This word is used in several significant passages. It is the word used in Romans 11:29, which says, **“For**

God's gifts and His call are irrevocable” (NIV). In other words, the spiritual gifts God has given you and this “call” on your life will never be revoked.

What is this permanent calling?

- ***We have a permanent relationship with Christ. Romans 1:6 says, “And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (NIV).*** We are called to belong to Christ. Once we are His, He will not remove this relationship, which is our most important one in life.
- ***We have a permanent position. 1 Corinthians 1:2 says, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling...”*** We are a “saint” or “holy one” (set aside for God’s specific use). This is why we are called to live as a “worthy” believer in Ephesians 4:1.
- ***We have a permanent hope. Ephesians 1:18 says, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling...”*** We have a hope that can never be taken away and should be evident in our lives as people who are never without hope.
- ***We have a permanent purpose. Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*** This means, as a believer, we have are part of a grand purpose and cannot be separated from this wonderful purpose of God.
- ***We are called to a holy life. 2 Timothy 1:9 says, “Who has saved us and called us to a holy life-- not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace” (NIV).*** The call to live a holy life everyday is one thing we can be sure that will never change!

Summary: This call is permanent from God and permanent on us once we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord.

The second Greek word is the word is kaléo.

The Daily Call:

(The Daily Plan for your life)

It is an invitation to a relationship or a way of life. This invitation is from God and is a choice on our part to respond or not. It is the word used

when the king invited people to his wedding feast in Matthew 22:9. “So go into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”

What are these invitations God extends to us?

- ***An invitation to fellowship daily with Christ.*** 1 Corinthians 1:9 says, “***God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***”
- ***An invitation to live freely.*** Galatians 5:13 says, “***For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.***”
- ***An invitation to live by the faithfulness of God.*** 1 Thessalonians 5:24 says, “***Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.***” This has significant relevance when it comes to raising financial support. If you are putting Christ first in your life, then this verse is inviting you to live by the faithfulness of God to provide your support or income.
- ***An invitation to live an extraordinary life (a life of destiny).*** Ephesians 4:1 says, “***Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the [permanent] calling (klésis) with which you have been called [invited] (kaléo).***” In this passage, Paul uses both kinds of callings on our lives. One is what we are permanently called to and the other is an invitation (choice on our part) to live out that calling.

Summary: This is a permanent, ongoing call from God but is a daily choice on our part as to whether we respond to that calling or not.

The third Greek word is pros-kaléo.

The Short-term Changing Call:

(The Short-term Plans God has for you to do)

This third calling is perhaps the calling most people think about when they think of God’s calling on their lives but perhaps the least significant. It is a “calling” to action (to do something or go somewhere). It is a summons.

It is a combination of the word “pros” meaning “towards” and “kaléo” (calling/invitation). It is used the least of the three.

This calling is always temporary. It is for a limited time and for a specific assignment. It has a beginning and an end. An example of this is when Jesus “summoned” (*pros-kaléo*) His twelve disciples to go into the towns for a specific ministry that had a beginning and an end.

Matthew 10:1 says, “Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.”

After finishing their assignment in the various towns, they no longer had these abilities.

When the Holy Spirit had a job for Paul and Barnabas to do He let them know. **Acts 13:2 says, “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”**

This word is used when God wanted Paul and Luke to do a specific job at a specific location. Acts 16:10 says, “When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”

This wasn’t a permanent call for Paul as he was not to remain in Macedonia. As it turned out, on their way to Macedonia, they met Lydia on the city’s outskirts and led her to the Lord. It was there at her house that they started a church. When they got to Macedonia, they were thrown in jail (so much for things going well) and then after being freed, left for Thessalonica. Often times when God calls us to a place or job, He may use this “call” to accomplish something different as we are in the process to fulfill it.

Summary: This is not a permanent calling from God and is not permanent for us.

IV. The Purpose (Ambition) Driven Call (The “What drives me Call)

Romans 15: ²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Ambition: Goal, driving force, passion. (Ie: “what is your passion?)
Φιλοτιμέομαι *philotimeomai* To love or seek after honor. To honor someone. In this case, it is the love of Paul to honor his Lord by pleasing Him and doing what is assigned to him.

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

1. To reach teenagers for Christ.

2. To help stop the sex trade.
3. To educate the un-educated in 3rd world countries.
4. To feed the poor and destitute (Gain)
5. MS: To be like my Creator and to teach the Bible to those who want to learn and use my spiritual gifts to help other individuals build the Kingdom.

2 Corinthians 5:9 ⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Making sense of all of this:

Which one of these callings do most Christians focus on? Usually it is *God, what do You want me to do?* Scripturally, this is really not the only question God wants us to ask. He will clearly reveal His next assignment when the time is right. What He wants us to focus on is *“God, help me to be Christ-like to all those around me even though I am going through a transition. Help me to live a life trusting in Your faithfulness during this time in my life.”*

Once we understand the differences of the three different Greek words, then we have a clearer direction from God. In reality, God is not so concerned with what we do but who we are. I am convinced that if we are fellowshiping with Christ daily, living out the other callings, then we will always be “doing” what God wants us to do. This is why He created us.

Have you ever experienced or heard of a person who believes he or she has a calling from God to do something but make everyone’s lives around them miserable? They may want to reach a city but leave destruction, pain and bitterness in their wake? Would you say this person is living out his or her calling from God? No one would.

If you are looking for direction from God, test what you think He may be calling you to. Often times it is not a ministry but a refining of our character that God is working on. Sometimes the call is to “sit by the baggage”(1 Samuel 25:13).

I experienced this in my own life. I had burned-out as a senior pastor and had been sensing God had a different ministry He wanted me to be in. The next day after I resigned, I was asking God, *“What do You want me to do?”* I asked this question thinking that if I knew what He wanted me to do my problems would be solved. God did not answer that prayer for over a year. But what He did want me to do during that very difficult time, when I found myself lacking direction, very little income to provide for my family

and no ministry in which to be involved, *was to live out one of the most important callings in my life*. It was to the call of fellowshiping daily with the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Corinthians 1:9).

I remember nights when I would go to bed and say, *God, I did nothing productive in my life today but I did walk with Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ*. I knew I had done all that God had asked of me that day and I would sleep peacefully because of it.

During that time God freed me up from being driven. He showed me it was His kingdom He was building and He could build it without me. He freed me up from needing a title to give me my identity, from needing to prove my worthiness or live by what I accomplish (at that time I was accomplishing nothing!) He freed me from the “fear of poverty” that had become an idol and controlled my life, and from the “fear of failure.” He also showed me what was most important in life, which was walking daily with Christ, being loving to my family, living by faith and simply enjoying the call to be His.

When these lessons were completed, God graciously brought me back into ministry, but with a new heart, attitude, and compassion for the struggles others face. (I began an evangelistic media organization that used TV, radio and internet to reach several hundreds of thousands with the offer to hear the Gospel. Later Jan and I joined the staff of Cru).

I am not worried anymore about what I “do.” My focus daily is showing up for assignment, being filled with His Spirit and being a reflection of the God who created me on everyone whom I encounter each day. I still get up every day with one main goal in life which is to walk with the King of kings and Lord of lords and enjoy my fellowship with Him. That has been the most fulfilling “calling” of my life.

Summary:

Three visions God has clearly given for our lives:

- Permanent: A vision for what God has done.
- Daily: A vision for who we can be.
- Occasionally: A vision for what God wants us to do.

Another way to look at this is:

- A lifetime call.
- A lifestyle call
- A limited call.

Questions:

- Which “calling” do you focus on the most?
- Which “calling” is God most concerned about?

- How do you live out our “calling” every day?

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