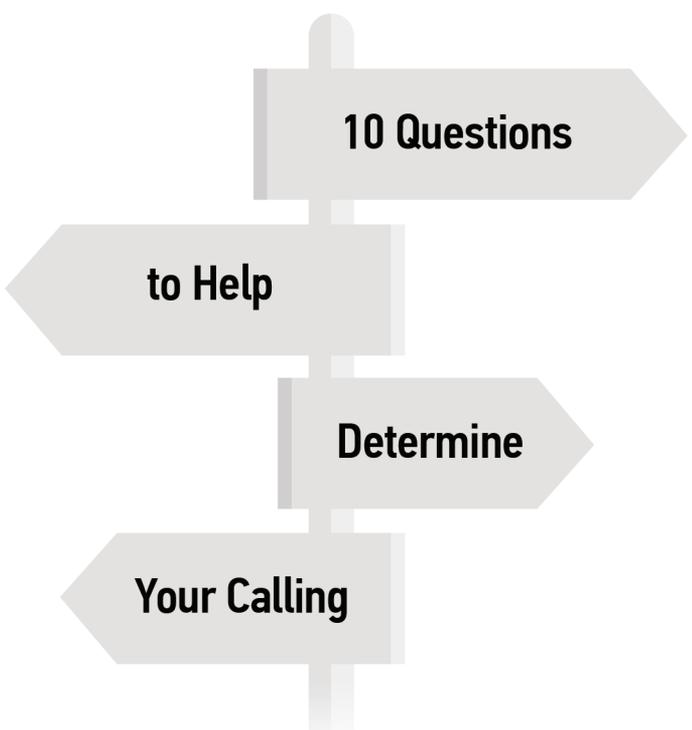


C A L E B S U K O

Is God Calling Me to Missions?



10 Questions

to Help

Determine

Your Calling

Dovare Publishing

Is God Calling Me to Missions? 10 Questions to Help Determine Your Calling

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Cover and interior design: Sergium

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Print edition ISBN: 978-0-9994157-0-2

Thank you Duane Howe for letting me see first hand the work of a faithful missionary!

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Introduction



“Is God calling me into missions?”

Young people often ask me how they can know if God is calling them into missions. It’s a great question for anyone to ask themselves. Your understanding of this question and your answer to this question can dramatically affect the direction of your life.

There are few things sadder than to see a man or woman who heard God’s call to missions early on in life, then either because they ignored that call, they fell into sin, or they found a spouse who didn’t share their call they never went through with it. I pray that you will react and act quickly on God’s call in your life. He may not be calling you to missions in a far off land but he is certainly calling you to some great and lasting work in his name!

Let’s explore ten questions to help you understand the call and better determine how God is working in your life. This book is a tool to help you clarify the call on your life personally. Also I pray that in reading this material you will find a greater understanding of the call and you will develop a deeper passion to live out the call in your life. While I write this mainly with the call to missions in mind, certainly there are many aspects to the call that are general for all believers. For instance, we are all called to preach the gospel and make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). However, we are not all called to cross borders and bring the gospel to foreign people. Whether or not God has called you into missions specifically I hope you’ll find this book useful in understanding the call to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ.

While there are many instances in Scripture when God calls someone to go out as His representative and preach his truth, let’s focus on the call of Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah’s calling gives us unique insight to the heart of God and the task we are called to as missionaries. That being said, I do understand that Isaiah was more of a “home missionary.” He was called to his own people, to his own culture. Isaiah didn’t have to

struggle with learning a new language or culture, but his task was at its core the same as every missionary whom God calls.

It's also helpful to look at someone else's life on a practical level to see how these stories play out in a modern-day context. While I recognize our story is not as significant or shocking as Isaiah's, I share my family's story of being called into missions. Christina and I did not receive a direct revelation like Isaiah did, but God did call us to Ukraine. I hope that by reading it you will also find some common factors and be able to more clearly see God's calling in your life.

Importance of calling

Often young people make one of three mistakes when it comes to calling. The first mistake I call "follow the herd." They simply follow the masses. Their approach to the future isn't especially thought out but in general it goes like this:

1. Go to college and get a degree
2. Find a good job
3. Get married and have a family
4. Try to pay the bills for the rest of my life

While few would admit to "following the herd" the sad reality shows us that on a practical level many follow this pattern with no special purpose other than to get by, hopefully avoid trouble, and stay out of deep debt. Since you're reading this book I assume you have much higher aspirations.

There is a second mistake that others often make when it comes to calling; I call this mistake "stuck on the fence." These are the people who think God may be calling them but aren't quite sure. Since they can't yet determine God's clear direction they wait and do nothing. Not doing anything is one sure way to avoid ever seeing God's leading in your life. It's impossible to steer a boat that's dead in the water! Even Jonah could see God's hand pushing him toward Nineveh when he ran in the opposite direction.

We cannot ignore our calling or sit on the fence waiting for God to send us a calling engraved on stone tablets. In order to determine calling we need to carefully examine God's leading in our lives while actively pursuing ministry.

The third mistake when it comes to calling is the "lone ranger." The lone rangers are those who are so convinced they are called to a specific ministry in a specific place that they lack the patience and wisdom to listen to others around them who may be saying otherwise. Just as it would be a grave mistake to ignore God's calling in your life to missions, so also, it can be dangerous to pursue a ministry and calling that God has not given you.

Just as calling is important to the young as they set out to pursue God's lead in their life, so also calling is vital for those with years of experience. If you can investigate your calling now it will serve you well in the future. To be sure of your calling now means a much greater chance of long term service and faithfulness over decades rather than just a few years or months.

Many missionaries leave the field within the first 4-5 years. Often this is at least partly due to problems with their calling. Either they weren't called and decided to go anyway, or they were called but failed to see their calling clearly and when things got difficult on the mission field they grew discouraged and returned home.

When you have confidence in your calling it changes the way you view troubles and trials in ministry. Those who have forgotten how God called them will often see those trials as evidence that maybe God hasn't called them after all. On the other hand those who clearly saw God's calling will see the troubles as mere bumps in the road in their pursuit of that call.

On at least two occasions Paul reminded Timothy of the gifts God had given him and the laying on of hands from the elders as evidence of his calling to be a pastor and faithfully preach the gospel (1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6). Paul knew this was a reminder Timothy needed on the tough days. Often it is this little reminder that will help us to push forward when ministry pushes us back and Satan tries to discourage us.

As a young man I didn't think that much about calling. I certainly didn't value calling as I do now, and I rarely took time to stop and exam-

ine God’s working in my life in order to better follow His leading and hear His calling. The older I get and the more experience I receive in ministry, the more I value calling and see the significance of knowing your calling and following your calling over the long-term. I owe thanks to many people in my life especially my parents and members of my home church for helping me to see how God was calling me even as a teenager and then giving me the encouragement to pursue that calling. As I look back it’s clear to me now how God was leading me but back then I was just taking a step at a time and hoping that I was going in the right direction.

Later on we will look in detail at Isaiah’s call to missions which played a vital role in Isaiah’s life and set the foundation for many decades of faithful ministry during difficult times. Isaiah’s ministry was not “big and successful,” yet he was faithful and never gave up. It is more likely God will call you to a ministry like Isaiah than to a “successful” ministry as man sees it. If we preach the gospel faithfully and accurately not many of us will see thousands or hundreds coming to Christ, not many of us will hear positive words of encouragement from the world around us. Most of us will be faced with great cause for discouragement; we will hear the disgust and anger of many; we will be asked to stop preaching; and we will be told that our message is insignificant, untrue, and lacks power. This is the reality of preaching the Gospel to a dying world.

Isaiah faced this reality head-on and remained faithful; he preached for 50-60 years with little success as man would define it! And yet, he continued to preach because he was confident in his God and secure in his calling! When we remember the God who called us and the calling he gave us, it changes everything; it gives us strength, endurance, and produces faithful missionaries in the face of adversity!

Our Story



Worlds Apart

I didn't really have a choice about going to church as a kid; my dad was the pastor so it was just something our family did. I'm thankful that God put me in a family where I often found myself surrounded by people who love Jesus. Certainly those men and women impacted my life positively in ways I still do not completely recognize.

My journey as a disciple of Jesus began shortly after my grandfather was diagnosed with cancer and given a short time to live. As a result I began asking my parents about what happens after death. They carefully and simply explained to me how I am a sinner and how Jesus died on the cross and rose again so that I could receive forgiveness. Although I had heard much about Jesus and the Bible I had never put faith in Jesus as God and Savior. At that time I realized the significance of Jesus sacrifice for me and I believed. It was the simple faith of a child that would grow in depth with time.

As a teenager I began to take on a few responsibilities in church. One of the first I remember was leading songs. I wasn't particularly gifted as a musician but I was willing. On Saturday evenings we would pick out the slides (literal slides that had to be organized and inserted into the projector). Then on Sunday mornings I would swing my arms to the beat and lead the worship.

One evening when I was 16 years old a missionary couple who served in Togo, West Africa came to speak in our church. Something about what they shared sparked a flame in my heart. After the service I asked them if there were any opportunities for missions that summer in Togo.

"I won't be there this summer," he told me, "But if you're interested I can find out if there are any other opportunities." I agreed; he would get

1. Are you in the right place?

God often calls into missions those who have placed themselves in the middle of God's will and who are passionately pursuing God's presence.

Look at where we find Isaiah when God called him.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Isa 6:1

Isaiah was in the temple. The temple was the center for worship, it was also the place where God showed his mercy to man, and it was a reminder of God's saving power.

We don't know if Isaiah was literally in the temple. It could be that he just saw a vision of the temple; however, he gives us no reason to believe that he was not literally in the temple. Even if he wasn't in the temple, we can tell that Isaiah was very familiar with the temple and its furnishings. It was likely a place that he frequented in order to make his sacrifices and to worship his God.

What we find is that Isaiah put himself into a good position for God to call him. He put himself in place where God's presence uniquely dwelled, a place where worship, sacrifice, and prayer took place. He pursued God actively even when it wasn't popular in Judah.

What would that look like today? I think if Isaiah lived today he would have been active in his church, a present member who participated in ministry and engaged in the fellowship. The fact that Isaiah was in the temple tells us that he took his personal relationship with God seriously. He was familiar with God's Word and aware of the vital need of prayer.

We can look at this in two ways in our own lives. First, how are you placing yourself in God's presence personally? That is, are you taking your relationship with God seriously? Are you pursuing the Almighty through in-depth study of His Word and personal prayer? These ele-

ments of your spiritual life are vital now in order to build a strong foundation for future ministry.

In a personal letter Spurgeon gave this invaluable advice to a new missionary, which is just as valid for prospective missionaries:

“The Lord will be with you. Take special care to be much with HIM. Without the means of grace in the lone land as you will probably ere long, ‘give attention to reading’ the one and only book, and be often carried away to heaven on the wings of prayer and meditation.”¹

I find that God often leads those best who are with Him most! A calling to missions will only be solidified and strengthened through regular personal Bible Study and prayer. Those who ignore this foundational aspect of the Christian life may feel a call but they will be less likely to listen and even if they do respond, they will find that the passion won’t last.

The second aspect to be being in the right place, is finding yourself in the place of ministry even now. If you want to be successful on the mission field first learn to successfully minister on the home field. Look at how you can serve God in your local church and in your immediate context!

Every time I meet a young man or woman who tells me, “I want to serve the Lord in missions,” I ask them, “How are you serving now? What kind of involvement do you have in your current church?” Sadly the answer is often underwhelming.

“My church is small; there are no opportunities for ministry.”

“I’m not a member of the church where I go yet.”

“I would but I’m just very busy with other things.”

“Our church doesn’t really do missions, so there’s nothing for me to do.”

“They asked me to be involved in _____ but that’s not my gift.”

You can be sure that the difficulty of the task and the barriers you’ll

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, ed. Iain H. Murray (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992)

face in a foreign country and culture will be many times greater than those at home.

Have you ever met a professional football player who didn't start playing football until he was signed to a professional team? Of course not! Most of them spend years in training in amateur leagues refining their skills before they become professional. This principle is the same in missions, God often refines our character and strengthens our faith as we serve him in seemingly "insignificant" ministries.

This was an important part of my own calling. Even before I went on my first mission trip I began to serve in whatever capacity I could in our church. I participated in small groups, served as a leader in Awana, led music on Sunday mornings, and helped with the upkeep of the church facility. It seemed at the time that these were all small things but each experience was leading me in the right direction and making it easier for me to see God's will in my life.

If you want to serve badly enough you will find a place to serve in your church. If you believe God has called you to missions you must start by serving right here and right now! You need to stop waiting for that one big opportunity and start making use of the many small opportunities that God has placed right before you.

Friend, let me ask you, are you in the right place? Have you found a place for ministry where you are now? Are you in a place where there is worship, are you personally pursuing God's presence?

Follow up:

1. How are you currently involved in ministry?
2. How can you see your current ministry involvement as preparation for future missions service?
3. What are you doing to regularly pursue the presence of God in your life?
4. Talk with your pastor about opportunities for ministry in your local church.