



Role & importance of the missionary call

In the article *What is the missionary call?* (found under “Key terms” on the “Missions info” tab of the WMA website), we have described this call as a particular, special, personal, and captivating call. But is it really all that important that every missionary have this type of a call before leaving for the mission field? How important is this type of a call? In order to answer these questions, we need to analyze four *basic functions* of the missionary call.

The identifying function. In the first place, the missionary call *identifies the future missionary* from among the other members of the congregation. It is expected that every believer will work in the Lord’s work, testify, evangelize, and become involved in one way or another in the Great Commission, regardless of his or her vocation. But, some will receive a special call to leave *everything* and dedicate themselves *completely* to the ministry (and in this case, the missionary ministry). They have been captivated for this ministry. God, through the missionary call, has taken them prisoners for this very purpose. As such,

the missionary call functions to *identify* (for both the local church and for the recipient of the call) who these individuals are. The case of Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13:1–2 is a classic example of this identifying function.

The accrediting function. In second place, the missionary call *shows that the recipient has been chosen by God for this task, and has also been divinely equipped by God for this work.* This divine selection and equipping are always important, regardless of the ministry area, but they become even more important when we are speaking of a missionary call to a cross-cultural context. Why? Because the person who has to work in a cross-cultural context will have to overcome many barriers. They will need to live in a different culture and be able to present the gospel in a radically different context (language, religion, etc.). Thus, it is very important to confirm that they have been divinely selected and equipped for this task. In other words, it would be neither wise nor safe to send a person to work as a cross-cultural missionary without first analyzing the evidence and verifying that God has

chosen them and equipped them for this ministry. The case of Bezalel in Exodus 31:1–5 is a classic example of this accrediting function of the call.

The justifying function. In the third place, the missionary call *justifies the local church in setting aside a currently productive individual and dedicating him or her to a ministry that in all likelihood does not even form a part of the local ministry of this church.* The local church is responsible to wisely administer the gifts and abilities that the Lord has given it through the members of its congregation, carefully involving them in the ministry according to these gifts and abilities. The church should neither squander nor lose these precious resources. Also, the local church is responsible to wisely administer the financial resources that the Lord has given it, investing them correctly in the Lord’s work. Therefore, it ought to be a very serious step for this local church to contemplate setting aside (or reserving) one of its productive members to be a missionary, and dedicating him or her to a ministry that may be very different from the one where this individual is currently experiencing the Lord’s blessing. It ought also to be a serious step for this local church to contemplate investing its financial resources in a missionary who will be ministering far from this local church. And in this church’s analysis of whether or not it should set aside this individual or support this ministry, the missionary call enters as a very important factor in determining the correct placement of resources. Through this call, God is showing that it is

correct and proper to set this productive individual aside for this other ministry. And through this call, God is also showing that it is correct and proper for the churches to support this missionary and this ministry. The case of Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13:1–2 illustrates this justifying function of the call.

The “captivating” or “committing” function. In fourth place, and this is very important, the missionary call *provides the strong personal conviction that underlies the strong and enduring commitment required by missionary work. The task of missions (and especially cross-cultural missions) cannot be achieved simply with a light or a merely emotional commitment.* Many, many times the success of the task of missions will require a commitment that is *very, very* durable on the part of the missionary and on the part of the local sending church. Missionary work is very difficult and exhausting, and if the missionary or the local church lack a firm, durable, long-lasting commitment to this work, then they run a great risk of “hanging up their gloves” before finishing the fight. Therefore, missionary work requires individuals with a personal conviction so strong that they can say: “This is the *only* ministry for me. I’m a prisoner in the Lord, and I really have no other choice. I’ll do this ministry, no matter what the cost. I’ll fulfill this ministry, no matter what the obstacles.” *This strong conviction and commitment come from only one source: the fact that this individual has been taken captive by Christ for this ministry, and then returned to the Church to fulfill this*

ministry. Therefore the call provides this “captivating” or “committing” function. Paul himself can serve as an example of this type of commitment. As we have seen, he considered himself to be a prisoner in the Lord for missionary work. In 1 Corinthians 9:15–16 Paul says “... it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast [of preaching the gospel] an empty one ... for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” Only a person with a very strong personal conviction and commitment can say something like this. Only a person who has been literally captivated for this ministry can talk this way. When the future missionary and the local church recognize that this future missionary has received this type of a captivating call, then they will be *convinced* that this individual *must* do this ministry. This is the “captivating” or “committing” function of the call.

An answer to our questions. Now we return to the two questions with which we opened this article. *How important is the missionary call?* The answer is: it is very important because it fulfills several important functions for both the sending churches and the

missionary. It *identifies* who should be missionaries. It *confirms* that God has chosen and equipped them. It *justifies* the church in setting them apart for this task and sending them out. And it *provides the strong conviction and commitment* required by missionary work.

And *is it really necessary that every missionary give evidence of having received this type of a particular, special, personal, and captivating call before leaving for the mission field?* The answer is: yes, it is very necessary that this call be evidenced prior to leaving for the mission field because without it we do not know whether or not this individual should be a missionary, we do not know whether or not they have been properly equipped by God, we do not know whether or not we should dedicate them to this type of work and support it with our finances, and we run a significant risk of lacking the conviction and commitment necessary to carry this work to its completion. Therefore, those who leave as missionaries and those who send them out are running very serious risks if they do so without analyzing and confirming the evidence of this type of a call.

