# SO YOU WANT TO BE A MISSIONARY: THE CALL

*Posted on November 24, 2014 by Eddie*

Of course, there are lots of mission stories about great men and women of faith who did step out on their own, ignoring the advice of their church leadership and who did great things for God as a result. However, there are far more examples of people who stepped out on their own and crashed and burned completely - but these people don't get books written about them. If you believe that God is calling you to do something that your church and your colleagues don't agree with, you had better be very, very sure that you are right; cases like this are the exception, not the rule.
**Category:** Observations

*â€œI think what you do is wonderful and wish I could go and do something like that myself, but I canâ€™t. Iâ€™ve not had the call. You have to have the call, donâ€™t you?â€*

I donâ€™t know how many times Iâ€™ve heard people say things like this, but the truth is a little more complex. Not everyone who is a missionary has a deep sense of personal call and, to be brutally honest, not everyone who feels that they have a call should be a missionary. The truth is that we are all different and that God works in our lives in different ways. Equally, we are quite capable of fooling ourselves and our call may be nothing more than wishful thinking. In the end, a call is a subjective experience which needs some sort of confirmation.

The New Testament doesn't actually talk a great deal about a call to mission, it much prefers to talk about sending. God the Father sent Jesus into the world and Jesus sends his church out in his footsteps (John 20:21). In that sense, we are all sent. Some of us are sent to the ends of the earth and some of us are sent down the street; but we are all sent. Sitting around waiting for a mystical missionary call is an exercise in futility - you have already been sent, so get on with what you are supposed to be doing.

However, this doesn't mean that God doesn't call people to mission; he does. Perhaps the best example is the Apostle Paul who received three different calls to mission.

**The Personal Call:Â** When Paul first became a Christian, God spoke to him and told him that he was to be a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). This comes out at numerous points in Paul's teaching (for example, 1 Timothy 2:7) and was clearly very important to him.

I had a very similar experience; very early in my Christian life, I felt that God was calling me to work in a French speaking country. I assumed that this meant France or Belgium; I didn't even know that they spoke French in Africa, at that point.

What is really interesting about this is what Paul did next. Nothing. Well, not quite nothing, he got very involved with the Christian community in Antioch, but he didn't immediately head off into the wide blue yonder on a mission trip.

**The Church Call:Â** Paul didn't actually start his missionary career until the leadership of his home church wereÂ prompted by the Holy Spirit to send him off (along with his friend Barnabas). Paul is one of the most important people in the whole history of Christianity. A towering writer, thinker, intellectual and missionary, but he submitted to the leadership of his church as they were guided by the Spirit (Acts 13:2,3).

This is really important. Our subjective sense of calling is proved and affirmed through the leadership of our local church. They are the ones who have seen us at work, who know our character, our strengths and our weaknesses and who can prayerfully assess our suitability for different forms of Christian ministry.

Paul and Barnabas stayed in touch with their 'sending 'church'. After their first missionary trip, they came back to Antioch and shared what God had been doing (Acts 14:21). These days, they could have sent a few emails or had a Skype chat, but staying in contact is important.

**The Strategic Call:Â** In Acts 16, Paul we read that Paul was planning to go to Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented him from doing so. One night, he had a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to go and help the people there. Paul and his companions decided that this was a call from God to head into Europe and set off westwards. Paul had the dream, but the decision to go to Macedonia was made by the whole team (Acts 16:9,10).

The book of Acts is not a template that we all have to follow. God works in different ways with different people. However, the principles are important. God calls individuals, but the details of that call are worked out in community; with a home church and with colleagues on the mission field. Mission isn't about Lone Rangers doing their own thing, it is about teams and church families working things through prayerfully and patiently.

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## Implications for You

If you feel you have a call to mission work, then the next steps are very clear and very simple.

- Throw yourself wholeheartedly into the life of your home church. Get involved in serving in different ways. This is the best way to learn about your own abilities and for your leadership to learn how best to serve and support you in the future.
- Talk to your leadership. Let them know about your sense of call. Ask their advice. Ask them to pray with you and for you. They are the ones who are responsible for confirming your call, so make sure that they are able to do so.