

THE MISSIONARY CALL

The call to mission is not optional! It came from Jesus himself, and it is to and for every disciple. He instructed believers to go and make disciples of all the 'nations' (the Greek word used, '*ethne*', signifies: of all ethnic groups), baptising them and teaching them to observe all the things he had commanded. (See Matthew **28:19–20**.) Quite often, new believers begin to discover early on in their new life in Christ a strong desire to tell others what God has done for them through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This sense of 'mission' should grow, not diminish! If Christians mature (as the Lord intends) and become 'more like Jesus', the awareness of that call from their Lord should grow stronger, not weaker; there should be a continuing willingness to be sent out to serve, to witness and, above all, to tell others the gospel and make disciples. (Being 'sent out' may not always mean being sent to a different location, though it sometimes does). The words of Jesus "*Peace be with you! As my Father sent me, I am sending you*" (John **20:21**) begin to challenge, and to shape the vision of Christians, who are to fulfil God's plan that all should hear the good news.

It should be emphasised that every Christian is to be a witness to the person and work of Jesus. The words of Peter (1 Peter **3:15–16**) give a wonderful sense of purpose to every Christian. Regardless of status, age, location and gifting, each has this calling. It does not in any way run counter to that call to all believers that some have specific callings from God to serve in special ways. Paul lists five ministries in Ephesians **4:11** for which Jesus calls and equips particular Christians. In addition, Paul speaks of overseers/elders and deacons in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Paul also sets out the 'qualifications' and requirements for such ministries. (See, for example, 1 Timothy chapter **3** and Titus **1:5–9**).

At the heart of hearing God's call to us must be an openness and willingness to obey, alongside the ability to discern needs and opportunities in order to reach out in Jesus' name. Such openness and willingness is reflected in the calling of many within the Bible. However, there is often a struggle in coming to terms with God's call – for example, Moses (Exodus **2:12**), Isaiah (Isaiah **6:1–8**), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah **1:6**). The key is that the God who calls is the God who equips. All God's people are being prepared for works of service (Ephesians **4:12**), each is encouraged to live a sacrificial life (Romans **12:1–2**) and to be open to the gifting of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians chapters **12–14**) as well as our using 'natural' abilities and resources in God's work.

In seeking to respond to God's call, it is important to try and examine our motives for doing so. Sometimes, sadly, our motives (to please people, pride, fame, need for affirmation, etc.) can distort what we do.

In the person of Jesus, in his earthly ministry, we see the perfect example of responding to the call of God. Jesus ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit. He reached out in compassion. His focus was always upon his Father's will (Matthew **26:39**) which he always obeyed perfectly. He spoke the truth fearlessly. He rebuked those who had hardened their hearts and had rejected the truth (especially the hypocritical who used 'religion' as a cloak); he taught those who came to him genuinely seeking the truth. He taught faith in very practical ways; he proclaimed the kingdom (power and authority) of God. He healed the sick and delivered those affected by demons. With self-evident authority he taught his disciples to do things he had shown them. He was obedient even unto death, and he warned believers that they would suffer for their faith in him, yet he promised that he would be with them always.

It was at Pentecost that the promised Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, who had already witnessed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and the Spirit empowered them to fulfil the mission they had been given. The Holy Spirit has been empowering believers ever since, to go on witnessing in mission. Their message today is the same as it was for that first generation of disciples: it is good news which includes a call to repentance, and which proclaims the saving death and resurrection of Jesus, and it teaches of a righteousness that comes through faith, which will bear good fruit. The mission of the body of Christian believers includes both proclamation and teaching: both are necessary to make disciples who are to be in the 'Way', who will persevere and overcome and go on believing and trusting and obeying their Lord, no matter what challenges they may face.