

Embracing Our Calling, Culture, and Commission **by R. Scott Pace and David Wheeler**

When I (the author) began serving in ministry, a church member invited me to join him for a business trip. As an accountant who was going to perform an audit, he thought he could use some help. Since I had graduated from college with a degree in accounting and had worked in the field before surrendering to the ministry, he asked me if I'd like to come. As a young youth pastor, newly married, and still in seminary, any extra income was a blessing. So, I agreed.

My friend was financially successful. He had a loving family, a beautiful home, a comfortable life, and he loved the Lord. One night as we took a break for supper, he admitted that as a younger man he had felt called to ministry. Based on his current life situation, I assumed he had concluded that his ministry would be in the field of accounting. After all, God's calling is not limited to vocational ministry; he uses all types of careers for his kingdom purposes. But as he explained that evening, he had taken a step back from ministry to work as an accountant and had never returned to his true calling. When I probed further, he confessed that it would be "impossible" for him at this stage to abandon his career, alter his lifestyle, and pursue vocational ministry. It was too late, he said. He had resigned himself to living with the knowledge that he had abandoned his calling.

The sad reality is that many believers fall into this same category. Some decisions to walk away are intentional, as believers count the cost and are unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices to follow God's will for their lives.

1. How many of us settled for what was most accepted, easiest, available, or what others thought you should do, when it came to our careers?

I took the easy route. It was convenient to become an electrician since my dad owned an electrical company and I had already been working there. The issue was that I was called to the ministry at a very young age. Being a blue collar family and my mother and father Sunday Christians who, like most of us, struggle with applying the Bible to our daily lives.

2. In your opinion, what are the cost and sacrifice for you personally when you are willing to obey Jesus' calling for your life?

I would presume mostly monetary gain would be the cost of pursuing Christ, but that doesn't hold true in every situation. I think maybe I would have known less about the worldly ways and not able to understand as many of the problems that come with that way of life as I do now.

3. What are the cost and sacrifices, again for your personally, when you are not willing to obey Jesus' calling on your life?

Contentment, peace, fulfillment, are some I believe I would have gained more readily if I had followed my calling. I know that I would hopefully made some better choice in my life, sin leaves a scar.

4. Is there a difference between simply ignoring Jesus' calling for you or not actively searching for your calling?

I think it is roughly the same thing ignoring is direct and not searching is passive, but both have the same result – one less Christian doing what he or she is supposed to do.

Galatians 1:11–24 (NKJV)

Call to Apostleship

11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Contacts at Jerusalem

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

21 Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. 23 But they were hearing only, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.” 24 And they glorified God in me.

READ: Galatians 1:11-24, Acts 9:1-19, Jeremiah 1:1-5, Ephesians 1:11, Psalm 139:13,16 Act 9:19-25

1. Who did Paul receive His call from?

Galatians 1:15–16 (NKJV)

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

Acts 9:3–6 (NIV)

³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶ “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

Paul’s called from God through Christ Jesus

2. How do we know that Paul was called by Jesus?

It is written in Act 9, 1 Tim. 1, and Gal. 1

1 Timothy 1:12–13 (NIV)

The Lord’s Grace to Paul

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. 13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

The way Paul was called was not unusual for God.
Jeremiah 1:4–5 (NIV)

The Call of Jeremiah

4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

3. How did Paul “check out” his calling to be sure He was correct?

In Gal 1:16-19 Paul did not go through the apostles to confirm his appointment to teacher.

In fact, Paul didn’t really check-out his calling. Rather, Jesus validated or revealed it to be a true calling through others and Paul to the hint.

Acts 9:6–19 (NIV)

⁶“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

⁷The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

¹³“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

4. What was Paul sacrificing?

Paul lost his relationship with his contemporaries. Paul lost his “advanced” position in Judaism. He was also suffering his own safety.

2 Corinthians 11:22–28 (NIV)

22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

5. What did Paul gain?

2 Timothy 4:6–8 (NIV)

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord,

the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

6. What did we gain by Paul's commitment to his calling?

We gained, as gentiles, the door to salvation. Think of how many millions of people were saved through Paul's obedience to his calling to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles and the rest of the world.

7. Does God have a plan for our lives?

First and foremost to come to know Jesus Christ as our Saviour and lead others to Christ.

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, **not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Psalms 139:13–16 (NKJV)

¹³ For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And *that* my soul knows very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
**And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,**
When *as yet there were* none of them.

Matthew 28:19–20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.

8. Does your calling need to be affirmed? If so by who?

Absolutely our calling is affirmed / declared to us by Jesus.

Galatians 1:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:15–16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace, ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

Ephesians 1:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

God’s Presence Overcomes Our Inadequacy

Exodus 3:11–12 (NKJV)

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

¹² So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

“Who am I that I should go?” (Exod 3:11). Moses knew his past. He had killed an Egyptian. He had run from his problems and fled to the wilderness (2:11-15). He was not courageous; he was a coward! But God did not respond by attempting to convince Moses that he was somehow qualified or simply needed more self-confidence. Instead, he assured him, “I will certainly be with you” (3:12).

God's Promise Overcomes Our Insecurity.

Exodus 4:1–5 (NKJV)

Miraculous Signs for Pharaoh

4 Then Moses answered and said, “But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’ ”

² So the LORD said to him, “What *is* that in your hand?”

He said, “A rod.”

³ And He said, “Cast it on the ground.” So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Reach out your hand and take *it* by the tail” (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), ⁵ “that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

Moses struggled with self-doubt. Any confidence he had based on his previous status in Pharaoh's house or his ability to confront an Egyptian guard had been deflated long ago. His insecurity was revealed through his next response to God, “What if they won't believe me?”

God's Power Overcomes Our Inability

Exodus 4:10–12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Then Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue.”

¹¹ So the LORD said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the LORD? ¹² Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

Moses continued to wrestle with his calling, and his next response revealed his personal inability. He was not simply making an excuse. In a moment of desperate transparency, Moses pleaded with God, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent... because my mouth and my tongue are sluggish” (4:10).

Chapter 3

Confirming God's Call on Your Life

When I began serving in ministry, a church member invited me to join him for a business trip. As an accountant who was going to perform an audit, he thought he could use some help. Since I had graduated from college with a degree in accounting and had worked in the field before surrendering to the ministry, he asked me if I'd like to come. As a young youth pastor, newly married, and still in seminary, any extra income was a blessing. So, I agreed.

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The sad reality is that many believers fall into this same category. Some decisions to walk away are intentional, as believers count the cost and are unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices to follow God's will for their lives. But the cost and sacrifice of not obeying Christ is far greater. They are haunted by regret and are left to wonder "what if?" for the rest of their lives. Others don't intentionally disobey God; they simply never discern their calling and end up pursuing what seems most natural, enjoyable, or comfortable. They often live with an unnoticed void and never quite identify the source of their discontent.

The disappointing truth of a Christian failing to fulfill God's plan as a result of ignorance or disobedience is tragic and far too common. But the Scriptures provide us the counsel we need to confirm our calling. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he defended his calling in order to validate the message of the gospel and his ministry. His description of his personal experience provides for us a deeper understanding of the nature of God's calling and how it can be confirmed.

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human source and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who from my mother's womb set me apart and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia and came back to Damascus.

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him fifteen days. But I didn't see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. I declare in the sight of God: I am not lying in what I write to you. Afterward, I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. I remained personally unknown to the Judean churches that are in Christ. They simply kept hearing: "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me. (Gal 1:11-24)

Your Calling Must Be Authentic

Whenever we hear unbelievable news about a friend or read a startling report on social media, our immediate response is typically, is this true?! Our willingness to accept the reliability of the information largely depends on the credibility of the source. If we know the person we heard it from or can verify that the source is valid, then we will trust it. However, if the source is one that is unfamiliar or unreliable, we are likely to dismiss the information.

Similarly, the first aspect of confirming God's call on your life must be to verify the source. Is your calling authentic? The false teachers who were deceiving the Galatians were attempting to discredit Paul. If they could undermine his credibility, they would be able to discount his message and his ministry. Paul defended the authenticity of his calling in order to validate the unbelievable good news of the gospel. His defense of his ministry provides us with a model of how our own calling can be authenticated.

Paul's experience teaches us that a genuine calling is received from Christ. While traveling on the road to Damascus to secure warrants for the persecution of Christians, Paul was confronted by a glorious appearance of Christ (Acts 9:1-5). In this encounter, he was converted and would subsequently receive his calling. The Lord said, "This man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites" (v. 15). To authenticate his message and his ministry, he specifically told the Galatians that the gospel he preached was not received from an unreliable or secondary source, but from Jesus Christ himself (Gal 1:11-12).

Although Jesus may not physically appear to us in a "Damascus road" experience, our calling must be received from him. This means that our calling will be spiritually discerned within the context of our own personal relationship with Christ. To receive his calling, we must first be confronted with our sinfulness and converted by saving faith in Christ as our sacrificial substitute. Through his death, burial, and resurrection, we can be forgiven for our sin, rescued from his judgment, and redeemed for his glory. His payment for our sin restores our relationship with God, adopts us into his family, and enlists us in his mission.

As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, he will reveal his specific calling for our lives. But we must be careful to discern the nature of that calling. Oftentimes Christians who sincerely desire to serve the Lord, who are compelled by grace and gratitude, and who want to make a difference for Christ can surrender to a "calling" that seems to be more spiritual or more significant. Sometimes believers embrace a perceived calling that is imposed on them by well-meaning parents, friends, or spiritual leaders. Others who genuinely want what is best for us can pressure us into making decisions. They have good intentions, but they may not be God's intentions. Although both of these scenarios can sometimes be part of what God uses to call us, the ultimate authority for our calling comes from Christ.

The apostle's testimony also teaches us that a genuine calling results in change. Galatians 1 describes the radical change that resulted from his calling. He recounts his "former way of life" that was characterized by his persecution of the church in his zeal for his religious heritage (vv. 13-14). But God's call changed everything. To speak of it as his "former" way of life not only describes it as a previous lifestyle, but it also indicates that his new life is definitively and dramatically different. He went from punishing the cause of Christ to promoting the cause of Christ!

God's calling on our lives should also produce a drastic change. For those who previously indulged in blatant and rebellious sin, conversion will produce an obvious transformation. For others who lived a moral lifestyle, salvation may not

significantly alter their social behavior or personal demeanor. However, the change that Christ makes when you receive your calling always results in a change of direction. The trajectory of your life—its purpose, its motivation, its path, and its destination—is substantially altered. These fundamental aspects of your life are completely redefined by your calling.

As with the apostle Paul, our calling must be authenticated. We must discern God's call on our lives through our personal relationship with Christ. We must listen for and recognize the voice of our Shepherd and distinguish his calling from other voices (John 10:4-5). As we authenticate our calling from him, we should recognize the shift in the direction of our lives. Our passions and pursuits will begin to flow from our calling and saturate our lives with a desire to fulfill it.

Your Calling Must Have Authority

When our calling is authenticated as coming from the Lord, it automatically means that it should have authority over our lives. But, as Paul goes on to describe his calling, he reveals in greater detail the definitive nature of its authority and the practical implications.

God's will for our lives has authority because our calling is a divine plan. Paul states that God "set [him] apart" for his plan before he was born (Gal 1:15). This mirrors Jeremiah's description of God's calling on his life, "I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). In his providence, God, who works all things according to the purpose of his will (Eph 1:11), also has a divine plan for each of us. The One who knit you together in your mother's womb foresees each one of your days before you ever live the first one (Ps 139:13, 16)! His divine calling on our life possesses an inherent authority that deserves and demands our submission to it.

As we surrender to his plan, we are also assured that our calling is accomplished by divine power. Paul indicates that God set him apart for this calling "by his grace" (Gal 1:15). He recognized that the compelling nature of God's calling does not obligate us against our wills, but his grace enables and empowers us to fulfill it. Paul cooperated with God's divine strength to accomplish everything God called him to do. He reflected, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor 15:10).

In Christ, God graciously provides everything you need to accomplish his calling on your life (2 Pet 1:3; cf. Phil 4:13). But apart from him, you will not be able to fulfill

his plan (John 15:5). This means that if you devote yourself to something you can accomplish in your own strength, according to your own wisdom, and with your own ability, then you are achieving something less than God's will. His calling on your life will require his divine power. But, by his grace, he can accomplish "above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us" (Eph 3:20). In addition to these truths, Paul's testimony also teaches that our calling accomplishes a divine purpose. God had a specific goal for Paul's life, for him to "preach [Christ] among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:16). The nature of God's calling on our lives is decisively spiritual. We often view our calling through an earthly lens that finds meaning and value in what we achieve or acquire. But the authority of his call on our lives derives from the eternal purpose for which the Lord desires to use us.

God's will for you is a privileged opportunity. He has invited you to be an integral part of his eternal plan. No matter what specific role you play, his call on your life is part of redemptive history and a plan that is larger than any one individual or group of people. He desires to use you in a strategic and significant way to reach the nations for Christ. And God will use your willingness and availability to serve according to your unique role to accomplish his divine purpose.

But God's calling on our lives will only be as effective as our submission to its authority. On September 2, 1945, Japan, as the final nation of the Axis powers, effectively ended World War II when it signed a declaration that conceded defeat to the Allies. In summation, the document stated, "We hereby surrender all forces under our control." This official pronouncement is historically known as the Instrument of Unconditional Surrender. In the same way, spiritually speaking, we must surrender control of all areas of our lives to him. His calling must have authority.

This means that our personal ambitions, desires, and life goals must be surrendered to God's calling on our lives. Although our calling may not always require us to abandon everything, the authority of our calling means that we must be willing to do so. God asked Abraham to leave his country and his extended family (Gen 12:1). God asked him to trust him for a miracle (Gen 17:15-21). He even asked him to sacrifice his son in faith and obedience (Gen 22:2). By faith, Abraham surrendered himself to God's plan (Heb 11:8-12, 17-19). Similarly, God will lead us to surrender everything to him until our submission to his calling is complete.

Although this submission will be difficult, it also will provide us with hope. There will be days in your ministry that you will feel lost and lonely. You will experience defeat and disappointment, and you will walk through seasons of hurt and heartache.

In those times, you will be tempted to explore other possibilities and will seriously consider walking away. But your calling will be the anchor that keeps you from drifting in the storms of doubt and despair. You won't give up, because you know you can't. You've been called. At times your calling will be all that you can cling to, all that you have to keep you going. But, be reassured, "He who calls you is faithful" (1 Thess 5:24). The good work that he has begun in you, he will continue it until his plan for you is ultimately fulfilled in Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). For we know the eyes of the Lord are surveying the earth, looking to support "those who are wholeheartedly devoted to him" (2 Chr 16:9).

Your Calling Must Be Affirmed

The final aspect of confirming your call is the affirmation process that cements it. Verifying God's calling involves three critical steps that are reflected in Paul's experience (Gal 1:16-24). Paul's calling was verified first through a personal affirmation. He explicitly states that when he received his calling he "did not immediately consult with anyone" (v. 16), including the apostles (v. 17). Instead, he spent three years in Arabia and Damascus. During this time, Paul sought the Lord's affirmation through personal devotion and solitude. But it was not merely a time of retreat or reflection. It was also his way of assessing his calling through personal experience. Since God had called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles, serving in these areas allowed him to explore and evaluate his calling to preach the gospel to them (see Acts 9:19-25).

In the same way, our calling must be affirmed through our personal experience. The prompting of the Spirit in our hearts through our devotional time will be verified as we begin serving according to our giftedness and calling. His presence and empowerment to fulfill our calling will confirm his will for our lives.

The next step in Paul's experience was a private affirmation. Following this season of personal evaluation, Paul sought out Peter (Cephas) in Jerusalem and spent fifteen days with him (Gal 1:18). He also visited with James but did not seek the counsel of any of the other apostles (vv. 19-20). In subsequent meetings, Paul makes it clear that he was not seeking their approval or authorization (2:6), although he did receive their affirmation as a fellow apostle (2:7-9).

As you explore your calling, it is necessary and beneficial to consult with other trusted believers who can offer wise counsel. But no one is better positioned to provide personal insight into your calling than someone who is already serving in that capacity. Those who have received a similar or identical calling and have years of experience fulfilling it can help verify your experience. They can also provide you

with guidance as you prepare, help you know what to expect, and recommend next steps for you to continue your pursuit.

Finally, the affirmation process includes a public affirmation. Paul's ministry had produced evidence of God's favor. He continued to follow the Lord's direction as he traveled to Syria and Cilicia (v. 21). Although he was still unknown to them by sight (v. 22), the word of his ministry preceded his arrival as they marveled, "he who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith he once tried to destroy" (v. 23). As a result, "they glorified God" because of Paul's witness and service to Christ (v. 24). Similarly, one of the most important elements of affirming your calling will be the spiritual fruit it produces. Your giftedness and effectiveness will be evident by how God uses your faithfulness in the lives of others. As others are influenced by your service to Christ, God will further confirm your calling. In addition to the personal verification you experience and the testimony of others you influence, godly leaders and spiritually mature believers will also recognize and affirm your giftedness and potential. Their encouragement and affirmation will be instrumental in your growth and confidence in the Lord.

Although these three aspects of affirmation—personal, private, and public—are fundamental to the discernment of any calling, their sequence is not always the same. When I discerned my calling, it was over a period of several months, but these forms of affirmation occurred in the reverse order. Through my voluntary service in the local church, others encouraged me to consider my calling by way of public affirmation. Then those who served in ministry offered me insights and counsel as private affirmation. Finally, through my devotional time with the Lord, these insights were personally affirmed. Your calling will also include each of these three essential steps of affirmation, and its certainty will be solidified through their consideration.

Living It Out

As we devote ourselves to answering God's call on our lives, we can confirm it through the authenticity of our calling as we receive it from Christ and it results in change. We can submit to the authority of our calling as we recognize it as God's divine plan, empowered by his strength, to accomplish his purpose. And we can find assurance in the affirmation of our calling as we verify it personally, privately, and publicly.

Yet confirming our calling also requires us to wrestle with the some hard realities of life. We fear failure; we are overwhelmed by the magnitude of serving God; and we are painfully aware of our weaknesses. These realities led Moses to try to convince

God to choose someone else for his calling, pleading, “Please, Lord, send someone else” (Exod 4:13). But God’s persistence in calling Moses and his faithfulness to use him can help us to overcome the reservations of our hearts.

God’s Presence Overcomes Our Inadequacy

When God first called him to be the deliverer of his people, Moses responded with the same question we often ask, “Who am I that I should go?” (Exod 3:11). Moses knew his past. He had killed an Egyptian. He had run from his problems and fled to the wilderness (2:11-15). He was not courageous; he was a coward! But God did not respond by attempting to convince Moses that he was somehow qualified or simply needed more self-confidence. Instead, he assured him, “I will certainly be with you” (3:12). God’s identity and his sufficiency as the great “I AM” would be the source of Moses’s strength and success (3:14). In the same way, fulfilling our calling does not depend on who we are, but on who he is! When we feel alone and inadequate for our calling, we can remember that he will be with us (Heb 13:5; Isa 43:1-3). When we feel like a nobody, we can rest on the fact that he is the ultimate somebody, the great I AM. And he has called us to serve him!

God’s Promise Overcomes Our Insecurity

Moses struggled with self-doubt. Any confidence he had based on his previous status in Pharaoh’s house or his ability to confront an Egyptian guard had been deflated long ago. His insecurity was revealed through his next response to God, “What if they won’t believe me?” (Exod 4:1). But, similar to Jeremiah and Paul’s recognition later, God had chosen Moses for this calling from his mother’s womb, long before he ever knew it. The Lord’s miraculous protection from Pharaoh’s execution of the Hebrew babies (2:1-10), his provision for Moses when he fled to Midian (2:11-22), and his preparation of Moses as he shepherded Jethro’s flock (3:1) had all been in anticipation of fulfilling God’s call on his life. What Moses viewed as random circumstances and personal failures had blended into paralyzing fear. Yet they were actually the providential opportunities God had woven together into his master plan for Moses’s life. At the right time, he would use Moses to be his messenger. Just as he overcame Moses’s insecurities by promising to accomplish spiritual wonders through him (4:2-9), God can overcome our emotional apprehensions with the reassurance of his desire and willingness to use us.

God’s Power Overcomes Our Inability

Moses continued to wrestle with his calling, and his next response revealed his personal inability. He was not simply making an excuse. In a moment of desperate transparency, Moses pleaded with God, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent... because my mouth and my tongue are sluggish” (4:10). But God reassured Moses that success in his calling would not be dependent on his ability. The Lord reminded Moses that he is the one who has the power to make someone speak, assuring him, “I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say” (4:12). More than anyone else, we are painfully aware of our own inabilities. But God’s strength is perfected in our weakness, and his power is displayed through our reliance on him (2 Cor 12:9). Therefore, the only ability God is concerned with is our availability!

Our relationship with God, from our conversion to our calling, is never about our personal ability or adequacy. It’s only through Christ’s atonement that we are accepted. It’s only through his sacrifice that we are made sufficient. And it’s only through his grace that we are gifted. In Jesus, we have everything we need to fulfill our calling (2 Pet 1:3). Therefore, we can embrace our calling with confidence, not because of our capability, but because of Christ!