



Understanding God's call for your life

BY MARK STEWART ■ ILLUSTRATION BY NEIL TASKER



The word “call” is a buzzword in Christian circles today. How many times have you heard people talk about God’s specific calling to something? “I believe God is calling me to move to China,” or “God is calling me to work with youth.”

Sometimes they say it in such a way that there is no more discussion to be had. It’s as if God has told them what to do.

But those who haven’t heard a clear “call” from God may wonder if they are missing something. What does it mean to be called? Is it only for a few special Christians? How do I discern the call of God in my life?

I’ve found the best way to clarify God’s call on a person’s life is to examine Scripture.

There are three Greek words in the New Testament that have been lumped into the English word for call. Studying these three words is helpful in my walk with God and my questions about His *calling* for me.

Pres-Kaleo



The first Greek word is *pros-kaléo*. It means a call to action, a summons to do something or go somewhere. Of the three words, this one is used least in Scripture. But its meaning is the most familiar to us. We often attach this word's meaning to the question of "Where is God calling me?"

In Greek, this type of calling is always temporary, for a limited time or for a specific assignment. It has a beginning and an end.

This is the calling Paul received in Acts 16:10: "When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Paul did not spend the rest of his life in Macedonia. There were other assignments he received from God.

Several years ago, I went through a rough time personally. After 14 years of serving as a senior pastor, I was burned out and sensed God transitioning me away from my "calling" as a pastor.

After I resigned, I found myself with a lot of time on my hands. I felt aimless without a specific ministry and had very little income to provide for

my family of six. Anxious to move on to the next thing, I prayed, "Lord, what do You want me to do now?"

I now know that the answer to that prayer was not what I really needed. In the year that followed, God unveiled the depth of a more satisfying calling on my life through the last two Greek words.

The second Greek word for call is *klésis*, meaning a permanent position or condition. Nothing changes this call. This word is the most important of the three, and it shows up in several key Scripture passages that speak to our identity. It's an adoption relationship—my relationship to Christ is binding.

The apostle Paul uses this word several times in his letters. To the church in Rome he says, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus he prays, "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling" (Ephesians 1:18).

The days turned into months as I still struggled



for clear direction in what God wanted me to “do” next. I chose to take comfort in the truth that God’s call on my life is permanent [*klésis*]. I am His. He loves me. And His purposes, even these trials in my life, are for good (Romans 8:28).

The last of the three Greek words, *kaléo*, is an invitation to a relationship or a way of life. This invitation from God offers us a choice to respond or not. It is the word used when the king invited people to his wedding feast in Matthew 22:9.

Elsewhere in Scripture, this word is used as an invitation to fellowship daily with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9), an invitation to freedom (Galatians 5:13) and an invitation to live daily by His promises (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Paul uses two of the three words for calling in Ephesians 4:1 which says, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling [permanent position] with which you have been called [invited]” (translation added).

After my transition out of pastoral ministry, I began to see that God is not as concerned with what I do but rather in who I am. If I meet with Christ daily and say yes to His invitations along the way, then I will always be doing what God has called me to do.

I remember going to bed many nights praying,

God, I did nothing productive in my life today, but I did walk with Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I knew I had done all God had asked of me that day. I could sleep peacefully because of that.

During that year, God showed me He could build His kingdom without me. He freed me from the need for titles, identity and the pressure to prove my worthiness through accomplishments. These truths sank deep into my heart.

Today, I have more depth and a greater heart of compassion for others and their struggles. With my new heart attitude, He graciously extended a new ministry career (*pros-kaléo*) to me again. In 2009, my wife and I became staff members of Cru.

I am free today to minister out of who I am in Christ. I no longer ask, “Lord, what do You want me to do,” or worry about what is next. I simply ask, “Lord, help me to enjoy Your promises and be the person You want me to be.” ■

////////////////////////////////////
Contact the writer at XXXXXXXXXXXX.

ACTION POINT

Which of these three callings requires more attention in your prayer life and daily decisions?



*"After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had **called** us to preach the gospel to them."*

ACTS 16:10

**AD
TK**

CALLING: A BIBLE STUDY

1. POSITIONAL CALLING (*pros-kaléo*)

This call is permanent from God:

- Permanent relationship (Romans 1:6)
- Permanent position (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- Permanent hope (Ephesians 1:18)
- Permanent purpose (Romans 8:28,29)
- Permanent life-style (2 Timothy 1:9)

2. INVITATIONAL CALLING (*klésis*)

This call is one God invites us to choose every day to live by:

- An invitation to fellowship daily with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9)
- An invitation to live freely (Galatians 5:13)
- An invitation to live by the promises of God (1 Thessalonians 5:24)
- An invitation to experience an extraordinary life (Ephesians 4:1)

3. TEMPORARY CALLING (*kaléo*)

This call is always limited in time and scope:

- Disciples sent out on a short-term mission (Matthew 10:1)
- Paul and Barnabas sent on a short-term mission (Acts 13:2)
- Paul and Luke sent on a short-term mission (Acts 16:10)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Which "calling" do Christians focus on the most?
- Which "calling" is God most concerned about?
- How do we live out our "calling" every day?
- Which "calling" requires your fullest attention?