

My Calling to Ministry

REFORMED  THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A mind for truth. A heart for God.

Chances are, if you are considering enrolling in seminary or are trying to decide exactly which course of study to pursue now that you are here, you already have a pretty strong sense of God's calling on your life. Yet even after you have taken that first bold stride toward the new territory into which God is leading, you may still struggle with knowing exactly where to place that next decisive step. You know you want to live a life of ministry and that a graduate degree will help equip and train you for what lies ahead, but you are unclear about many of the specific tools you will need as you journey forward. If this is where you find yourself today, read on. The purpose of this booklet is to briefly explore the importance of knowing your calling, the essential elements of finding that calling, and more specifically, how to decide whether the M.Div. program at RTS is the best course for you to follow now that you have decided to pursue higher education.

CALLING IS CRUCIAL

Martin Luther said it as clearly as it could be said. "Here I stand. I can do no other." How wonderful it would be if we always felt as certain of God's will as Luther did in that moment. True, we do at times know our personal calling with the same clarity. When this happens, it is as though heaven's windows have opened and God's will is so plainly written in the clouds that we could not miss it even if our eyes were closed. And then there's the rest of life.

Discerning God's will is rarely as simple as seeing a personal message in the sky. Nor does the path to understanding his calling usually take us along a predictable course. It is more likely to meander through valleys, down into ravines, and across the desert—at least for a little distance. There are days of confusion, and nights of uncertainty. We hesitate, pace this way and that. And in those moments we would gladly trade the grey haze of ambiguity for some old-fashioned, black and white answers.

Often our hesitation isn't born from a lack of trust in God, or from a heart resistant to commitment. We just aren't sure how God wants us to serve him. It's confusing. It's frustrating. When this happens, don't you just wish you could just pick up your cell phone, hit speed dial, and hear God's voice loud and clear, like a twenty-first-century Urim and Thummim? Or maybe you would settle for the automated voice telling you, "Please press #1 for youth pastor, press #2 for senior pastor ... and #9 for a spiritual tranquilizer that will end all further thinking about calling." That would really make everything so much easier.

This doesn't happen, of course. And the process of seeking God for direction can be agonizing. The reason being that we recognize the importance of our calling. As a matter of fact, in ministry calling is crucial. We may not need a burning bush experience like Moses (Exodus 3:2), or a heavenly throne room vision like Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1ff). If that were required there would be a lot fewer people in ministry! But we are looking for our unique calling; one tuned to fit our special gifts, personalities, and circumstances as we seek to serve him.

So, as you travel onward, keep in mind that you may hear God's voice in a single moment of clarity, or you may discover his will through a gradual dawning of conviction. It may be revealed as the result of a career change, at the moment of conversion in high school, or in countless other ways. Sometimes God whispers. Sometimes he shouts. He always calls. It is crucial that we know his voice because only the call of God will keep us persevering throughout the trials and the pitfalls of a lifelong ministry. Few things will sustain you through the dark days of ministry or give you greater joy, confidence and boldness in serving him than a sure knowledge that your Creator knows you, is speaking to you, and has called you to the ministry in front of you. Calling is crucial. It is crucial because it is God who calls.

HOW CAN I KNOW IF I'M CALLED

Calling and Wisdom

With all this in mind, how should we pursue God's calling? Christians seem to stumble around when it comes to seeking God's will. This is not as much of a surprise to God as it is for us. In fact, God knew we would flounder. That is one reason the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to tell the Colossian Christians how he prayed for them when they needed to know God's will. "We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:9,10). You

see, Paul prayed for something even better than an instruction-giving burning bush. He prayed for wisdom given by the Holy Spirit, wisdom from within that would shape their daily lives. Paul had the confidence that believers with that kind of life shaping wisdom wouldn't go wrong.

So, how should you pursue God's will? First, by recognizing your need for spiritual wisdom and understanding, and then by asking God to supply what you need through your relationship with him in a way that will mold your daily life into one that is pleasing to him. In time, he will make clear to you the specific shape of His calling on your life.

Calling and Sanctification

Is God calling you to serve in Christ's Church? How can you be sure? There is no easy answer to this question. Remember we don't have the Urim and Thummim. That, as we have already concluded, is good because it means Christ has come and the Holy Spirit has been shed abroad in Christ's Church. We have something better now—the wisdom and power of God's Spirit. So let's reframe the question to ask, "How can the Holy Spirit help me pursue God's will for my calling?"

The first and most fundamental part of the answer to this question is that the Holy Spirit will do what he does in all of God's children—he will help conform you to the image of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul makes it crystal clear that in its most foundational sense, the will of God is our sanctification. The great Puritan theologian, John Owen, built on this thought and noted that the qualifications for understanding the will of God are "meek-

ness, humility, godly fear, reverence, submission of the soul and conscience under the authority of God, with a resolution and readiness for and unto all that obedience which he requires of us.” That is, it is clearly God’s will for us to be sanctified through Christ. There is no mystery here. Therefore, we have no reason to expect that he will reveal his specific calling for our lives if we are not already seeking out his will through submitting to his work of sanctification. One of the best ways to develop the spiritual sensitivity to hear God’s call is by nurturing godly character and habits under the influence of the Spirit. This is a particular application of the principle that Jesus expressed in John 7:17 which states, “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will he will know whether the teaching is from God.” Cultivating the *desire to do* God’s will as he has already revealed it is the surest path to learning more about God’s will. By cultivating, I mean tending to the soil of our hearts. I do not mean that we are to somehow make our desire grow by wanting or commanding it to sprout. God will give us everything we need to nurture and protect the seedling desire that he has given us if we ask. And as we wait for him to act, we will begin to recognize his will and discern in what direction he is calling us.

Calling and Humble Servanthood

As you begin to pursue the question of your calling more specifically, you need to begin praying more specifically as well. Pray that the Holy Spirit will open your heart to hear what God has already said about the ways in which he calls his people to serve him. As we look to scripture for examples, a couple of things

become apparent fairly quickly.

For starters, if God is calling you to minister to his people you will need to have a deep, heart desire for humble servanthood. Ministry is service. As Jesus put it, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:26, 27). Both of those words in “humble servanthood” are important.

Serving

First, the call to ministry involves a growing desire to serve the people of God. Do you love God’s children? Do you sense a growing compulsion to care for them, to bring God’s word close to them, to bring God himself near to their hearts? Do you long to see God’s children growing in their own love and devotion to him? The call to ministry is a call to relationships, a relationship with God and relationships with God’s children.

All relationships, however, are not equal. And not everyone who desires relationships is called to the ministry. People can crave relationships to satisfy their own sinful desires. It may show up in a desire to control others through knowledge and position. Or it may be an almost unconscious manner of using people to fill emptiness in one’s own soul. This is not what is meant by a “call to relationships.” Therefore, in trying to figure this out, it’s helpful to reflect on the *humility* aspect of “humble servanthood.”

Humility

Ask yourself if you are willing to get your hands dirty and your heart broken by the pain of serving. Ever since the Fall, life in this world involves pain and suffering. Anyone who is committed to serving God's children in the midst of life in this world will experience not only the struggle of their own pain and suffering, but also the pain and suffering of God's little ones to whom they are ministering. Our Savior humbled himself in meeting our needs; and our calling to follow him in service is also a call to humility (Philippians 2:5-8). Like Jesus we must be willing to wash the feet of our brothers and sisters in the faith (John 13:14-16).

But it isn't enough simply to be willing to be a humble servant. Too many leaders in the Church have burned out because they were willing to put up with being a servant for a while, but could never embrace a life of servanthood. Are you ready to follow Jesus by embracing a life of humbling service while never losing a deep joy in our Father's care? The great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon emphasized this as much as anyone else. His exhortation was that if you can do anything other than preach you ought to do it; but if the passion to preach God's word burns so hotly in your heart that you can only preach or die, by all means, preach. So if you are willing to answer God's call to a humble servanthood, but are not able to joyfully embrace that calling, pursue some other line of employment. But if God has captured your heart and if serving him by serving others is the only life that will satisfy the thirst of your soul, pursue the ministry with all your strength.

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So, does having a desire to grow in spiritual wisdom, be conformed to the will of God, and live from a heart of humble servanthood mean you should become a pastor? Not necessarily. Some of God's humble servants are called to be pastors, but others are needed to serve as lay people. Since every believer is called to a life of ministry, how can you know whether or not vocational ministry or ordination is for you? How will the Spirit make your calling clear? Here are some things to consider:

Calling and Giftedness

There is the story of a young Iowa farmer who began to sense that God was calling him to the ministry. He enrolled in seminary and committed himself to the difficult task of training. Unfortunately, he just couldn't seem to master the knowledge, habits of life, and skills that are necessary in the ministry. One day he sought the counsel of a wise older Christian and poured out his heart. After listening patiently his godly counselor suggested that maybe God wasn't calling him to the ministry. The young man quickly replied, "But what about the message?" "What message," asked his friend? He blurted out, "The one in the clouds. I prayed and asked God for a sign. Then the next day I saw his answer in the clouds. They spelled 'PC.' It meant I was supposed to Preach Christ." The old man sat silently for a moment, then gently put his hand on his young friend's shoulder, and slowly and firmly said, "Maybe God meant Plant Corn."

Sometimes, even with the best of intentions and with hearts that are set on serving Christ, we can misinterpret God's calling. If you have any doubt about your growing desire to humbly serve the Church and wonder if it means you are called to seminary and the Gospel ministry, take time to test your gifts. God does not give gifts just for the sake of giving gifts. God gives gifts for the purpose of feeding his people (Ephesians 4:11-13).

How do we test our gifts? Stop a moment. Take a little time to consider what gifts you've been given. What are your talents? Are there some things that seem to come more easily to you than to others? What do you enjoy? What do other people say they see in you? Think about how detail oriented you are, or how driven you are by seeing the bigger picture; look at how much you enjoy teaching, writing, researching, or sharing your faith; have you noticed that you are a natural leader, or whether you excel in supportive roles? Consider what energizes you and what depletes you. Find out what other people with your skill set tend to pursue in life. Be careful not to mistake what you think you should be doing with what you love and can do well. Whatever your gifts, God wants you to develop them and test them. Begin "testing" your gifts in a quiet corner, on the small scale. As you grow and mature, use your gifts in gradually expanding circles of influence and see what happens. This is what Jesus is talking about in Luke 12:43, 44 when he says, "Blessed is the servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions." Test your gifts.

Calling and The Family Of God

This process of exploration, discovery and testing of gifts is not something God intends for us to do alone. We need others in the body of Christ to help evaluate the ways in which God has blessed us. Don't be afraid of testing your gifts in this way. The last thing you want to do is spend three years in seminary only to find out in a post-seminary internship that you really don't have the gifts for serving God in a pastoral ministry.

The Apostle Paul urged his young disciple Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God that is in you” (2 Tim 1:6), and “Do not neglect the gift you have ... practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress (1 Tim 4:14, 15). You need to practice and test your gifts in the Church under the watchful eye of godly leaders who love you and can see your progress. The honest encouragement of God's people is an indispensable gauge of whether you are really called to serve. Then, when the leaders of God's people send you to seminary, you can come with confidence that you really should be here.

With this in mind, it's helpful to remember that very few seminary students avoid passing through some dark moments of doubt as they decide whether or not they should attend seminary. Satan attacks those training for leadership in Christ's Church. If you come with the assurance that Christ's Church has sent you to seminary, those attacks will shrivel up and shrink away much more quickly than without such certainty. RTS has provided an academic and spiritual environment for a generation of pastors seeking to nurture and pursue their calling in

ministry during the past 40 years. They have, by God's grace, overcome the enemy's attacks and are continuing to experience God's blessing and protection as they serve him around the globe. Our hope is the same for every RTS graduate.

MY CALLING AND THE MASTER OF DIVINITY

So now you may be saying, "I believe I am called to ministry and know the next step is seminary." If this is the case, you will need tools. When God calls a person to serve, he provides the nurturing, mentoring, or training needed to fulfill that calling. More often than not, God uses Christ-centered seminaries to train his humble servants. RTS is grateful to be part of God's plan in this respect. Therefore we seek to guide our students wisely toward the course of study that will best equip them for serving the Lord wherever he leads. In addition to the Master of Divinity, RTS offers additional Master's programs to meet this need. Still, the Master of Divinity at RTS is the most popular program for ministerial preparation as it is at most other seminaries. This is the direction in which we point students who are seeking to be pastors and ordained ministers.

HOW TO KNOW IF THE M.DIV. IS FOR YOU

The controlling focus of everything we do in the M.Div. program at Reformed Theological Seminary is God himself. This is not an accident. The dominating center of our Reformed Theology is God and his glory. God reigns and blesses his Church from his eternal throne. That's why the heart of ministry in the Church is grounded on, and in him.

Similarly, our worship is all about God—it is a response to our exalted and all-glorious Lord. Our evangelism is all about God working in and through us as reconcilers in drawing his lost children to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18). Our mercy ministries are a reflection of God’s mercy and an expression of “the comfort with which we have been comforted” (2 Corinthians 1:4). Our ministries of education are a reflection of the way God builds his Church and nourishes his children. The entire ministry of a healthy church is focused on God. Therefore, RTS seeks to produce graduates whose lives and service are centered on God. In fact, the whole cluster of experiences that compose the M.Div. program is rooted in a vision of God. We are in agreement with the Church of the Reformation when we proclaim: *Soli Deo Gloria*. “Glory to God alone.” Our M.Div. aspires to that same goal.

What to Expect of the M.Div. Program

The formal RTS M.Div. curriculum consists of 106 credit hours of courses. The precise courses and their sequence varies slightly between each of our M.Div. granting campuses, but the essential curricular approach to preparation for ministry in the Church is the same on all three campuses. Biblical languages, biblical studies, theological studies, church history, practical ministry, and supervised experience in ministry are the core of the M.Div. experience in each case.

Biblical Languages

Reformed Theological Seminary is committed to the authority and the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, precisely because they are God’s covenant word for his people. Because your training must be focused on God, it must also be focused on God’s Word.

Every section of the Bible is studied in the RTS program. You will be given the tools and perspectives that are vital for interpreting and applying God's unchanging word to the varying and often puzzling circumstances of daily life in this century. Early in your seminary experience you will be introduced to the study of Greek and Hebrew. These courses are designed to help equip our students to handle God's word competently and faithfully. Your use of the biblical languages will not be some golden key that instantly solves all the exegetical problems with which the Church has struggled for centuries, but it will protect you from the false claims of those who press the significance of the language beyond the load it can bear. And it will open up for you genuine doors of understanding that are not open to those who are limited to our English versions. Additionally, it will help you weigh the merits and claims of competing commentators. In short, it will keep you from an unfortunate dependence on the opinions of others, and help you interpret and apply God's word in order to nourish your own life and the lives of God's people. RTS gives you the opportunity to use the biblical languages because God and God's word are at the heart of our service in Christ's Church.

Biblical Studies

As important as they are, the training in biblical languages is only a portion of what you will receive as an RTS M.Div. student. In your biblical studies courses you will also trace the grand themes of the history of God's grace in redemption through the entire Bible. From Genesis to Revelation you will see the unfolding of God's plan for salvation. Particular emphasis will be given

to exegetical methods. Our goal is not to fill your head with overly simplistic, pat answers to yesterday's questions. We want to see your heart filled with a love for God's word and a mind trained to frame his word into a lifetime of responses to tomorrow's challenges.

As you study God's word, its beauty will unfold in various ways. One is through the actual structure of his loving letter to us. Just look, for instance, at the incredible variety of literature we find in the Bible. But that beautiful variety makes interpreting scripture a more difficult task. We can't interpret every genre exactly the same as every other genre without missing something essential. It is for this reason that your study of the Bible in the M.Div. program will be aimed at developing your interpretive methods as you work with each type of biblical literature. Every genre of scripture, the history of Exodus, Nehemiah, Mark, and Acts, the hymns and laments of Psalms, the wisdom of Proverbs and James, the epistles of Paul and Peter, the apocalypse of Daniel and Revelation, will become a part of your ministerial repertoire. You will grow in your understanding of the history, culture, and religious settings in which the biblical writers penned God's word so you can accurately apply that eternal word to our own day.

Theological Studies

Clearly, theology is all about God. And God is at the center of ministry. Because RTS is committed to preparing men and women for ministry, theological studies are a major part of the RTS M.Div. program. Though some seem to think otherwise, good theology is not merely an accumulation of abstract defini-

tions and listing of sterile propositions. From a biblical perspective, the knowledge of God is experiencing him through a vital, personal relationship. It involves knowing, and being known by him. Of course we try to express that knowledge of God in coherent language, but the language we use is never an end in itself. The difficult academic study of theology is always aimed beyond this point. Instead, its purpose is to draw us deeply into relationship with the One who created and loves us with an everlasting love. Then, from our position as his beloved people, he calls us to proclaim his glory to all nations.

Practical Ministry and Church History

Practical ministry studies are a vital part of the RTS M.Div. program because of God's very character. The Bible makes it clear that God is both Creator and Redeemer. He made us in his own image to glorify and enjoy him. When man sinned, God stepped down into the reality of a frail human form to reconcile us to himself again. The gospel is of no value to mankind if it does not touch our broken lives or break powerfully into our private worlds. This is ministry—that through his people, God touches and restores the ordinary lives of those for whom Christ died. For ministry to be successful, it is essential that God be the Center of his Church. Our intellectual, musical, creative or oratorical skills are not sufficient to meet the demands of our calling. Neither are our doctrinal orthodoxies, or our administrative genius. God's blessing alone is sufficient. Thus, the M.Div. program is designed to help you engage with a wide range of issues in practical, godly ministry while simultaneously keeping the focus on

God and his grace for his Church.

The RTS M.Div. program seeks to stimulate the hearts and minds of all who enter with the desire of growing in faith and as ministers of the Gospel. The questions students consider are those with which former saints have wrestled as well. Such as, how do we become servants who faithfully preach the word of God through the power of the Spirit in a way that nurtures people around the world? How do we participate with God in shaping the hearts of congregations into a unified evangelistic presence that influences contemporary culture? How does Christ's body become an instrument of comfort to the hurting children of God who pretend that all is well with their souls? How can self-absorbed Americans be transformed into a missions-focused movement of God's Spirit? Is there a way for worship to be transformed so that we glorify God more fully? How can we invite the awesome presence and glory of God into our midst?

The practical ministry component of the RTS M.Div. addresses all these questions, and others, by building on the riches of our Reformed heritage in a way that is faithful to scripture and honestly deals with the challenges of life in this century.

Ministry Experience.

The M.Div. program provides opportunities to pursue these challenges in large and small group settings. Equally valuable are supervised ministry experiences that occur in real-life service in Christ's Church. Our education must transform us so that, as we move into the places where God's people walk every day, all of

life becomes a sacred experience. God is Lord of every moment and every place. All students in the M.Div. are required to fulfill this experiential component of the program. In fact, most students go far beyond these minimal requirements because they are already committed to a life of ministry to God's people.

One of the most valuable aspects of learning in ministry is that it is learning within the context of relationship. The God who created us is a relational God. He created us in his own image. In the deepest, most secret places of our DNA we have been designed for relationships. As our Redeemer, God has entered our personal histories and brought us back into relationship with him. When Christ returns, we will enjoy the consummation of a perfected relationship as we join him on our wedding day at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. We believe that this relational learning style modeled at RTS is a reflection of the character of God and our character as his redeemed people.

Of course, the whole seminary program is highly relational in nature, not just the supervised ministry program. Seminary graduates have found that the friendships they have built with other seminarians are far more enduring than those from high school and college. Time and time again, after leaving RTS ministering servants of God maintain their bonds in Christ over the decades and over the miles. Not only will you develop relationships with other students, but you will also develop relationships with godly faculty. Long after graduation faculty members are blessed by the phone calls of former students, sometimes asking for suggestions on what new commentaries to buy, other

times asking for prayer in the middle of pastoral or personal struggles. You will find that RTS is here for you today and will be here for you for years to come. Therefore, when considering a seminary it's important to ask yourself, "Is this group of students and faculty one with whom I want to be joined for years to come?" At RTS, our hope is that your answer will be, "Yes!"

MY CALLING AND MY UNCERTAINTY

Are you still feeling uncertain about your calling? As we noted before, coming to an understanding of your calling is often a long, slow process. There is a sense in which most of us need time to grow into our unique position in the Body of Christ. If that is your situation, then the question is, "What should I be doing during this period of time?" Is seminary the next best step? Or might this be a season for testing your gifts and growing in your understanding of how God has designed you? Wise and godly counsel from Christian leaders whom you know and respect will be essential as you wrestle through your questions.

On the other hand, you may be certain of your gifts and calling to seminary, but unclear about how God wants to use your giftedness. You may be trying to decide whether the M.Div. program is the best preparation for you, or if an MA or other degree program be a better choice. There certainly are a greater variety of degrees available at RTS and other seminaries than ever before! Maybe one of those programs would provide the training you need in less time and at a financial savings. These are all important considerations.

No matter what camp you feel you are in today, there are a couple things that may help clarify the issues for you as you pray through your decision. One has to do with the church, and the other is related to the ways in which God sometimes makes us smile.

First, the M.Div. still stands as the gold standard for ordination in the majority of denominations. Before you opt for a shorter path to ministry, be very sure you know to which church or churches God might eventually lead you to serve. Then do your research and find out what training they require of their ministers and leaders. You don't want any unhappy surprises when you draw near the end of your road of preparation.

Second, don't forget that our God has a great sense of humor. It is not unusual for God to move many of us into places of service at one stage in our lives that would have seemed strange to us—if not ridiculous—a number of years earlier. Sometimes we just look back and laugh. So keep in mind that some seminary programs are very specialized. You may want to study something less specific if you're not sure which way you intend to head upon graduation.

(For example, RTS has a couple of great programs for those interested in counseling. However, unless you are sure that you want to serve as a counselor in some capacity, you may not want to devote your entire program to this course of study and risk missing out on the scope of training offered to M.Div. students.)

Put succinctly, the M.Div. is the generalist degree for ministerial preparation. It allows for the greatest amount of flexibility and let's you move easily in the greatest number of directions.

Graduates can move easily into roles as solo, senior, associate, or assistant pastors. Others go into youth ministry. Some with a musical background become pastors of worship; and others with business experience become executive pastors. For the person who has a strong sense of being called to serve, but just isn't sure what that service may look like in three or five years, the M.Div. is usually the best choice of a path for preparation to serve God. Even if you know that you want to go into an area of service such as youth ministry when you graduate, and even if you are confident that you will never choose to be a senior pastor, you still want to be careful about bypassing the full-orbed training of the M.Div. in favor of a shorter route. Many youth ministers at 35 years of age after ten years of fruitfully serving Christ (and after 237 food fights) have discovered that they have developed amazing gifts for ministering to entire families. New doors for service begin to emerge. At that point in your life and service you will be thankful to have completed the full M.Div. program.

Often in life we can't see five, seven, or ten years down the road and God later opens up opportunities we never would have dreamed of at a younger age. Be careful not to limit your options too soon. The M.Div. provides maximum flexibility and keeps more ministerial doors open than most degree programs.

OVERCOMING ROADBLOCKS TO MY CALLING

So now you are certain you want to commit to seminary, but there are still a couple of obstacles in your way. The biggest is the financial hurdle. How can you possibly afford it? Great question! The first thing to remember is that ultimately the same God who calls his servants into ministry is the one who provides the way to get them there. Of course that pathway may involve great effort and sacrifice on your part; but finally it is God who will enable you and others to clear all the hurdles, including the financial ones.

Earlier we spoke about the testing of your gifts in the Church. Another reason that testing process is so important is because God's people are much more likely to help meet your financial needs if they have already seen in you a giftedness that is "shouting out" to be developed and used by God to lead the next generation. Because RTS is committed to the Church, we work closely with congregations that financially support the students they recommend. In this Church Partnership Program, RTS will help you and your church put together a package of resources for your time of seminary training.

MY CALLING AND GOD'S PRESENCE

One final thing needs to be said about God's calling. No human being can fulfill God's calling without his presence; and God's presence is always given with his calling. The call to ministry can be intimidating. In fact it should intimidate us, every one of us. But we can't stop there. God no more calls us to ministry to

leave us on our own than he called the world into existence and then left it on its own. When Jesus commissioned his disciples, it was truly a great commission. “Disciple all the nations ... teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20). It would have been a whole lot easier if he had said, “Disciple some people teaching them a few things.” He didn’t and he knew how difficult this calling was. That is why the Great Commission is followed immediately by the great promise. Jesus says, “I am with you always.” God’s presence is with his humble servants as they answer God’s call. That was God’s promise to Moses (Exodus 3:12), to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:8), to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:14, 4:22), Paul (Acts 9:17), and all the disciples. It is his promise to you too. Your gifts for fulfilling your calling are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit fans the ember of thanksgiving in your soul into a raging fire of desire to be a blessing to others. Then he empowers your service. No, you can’t fulfill God’s calling on your own, but you don’t have to do it on your own. God powerfully sweeps you up into his grand plan of redemption, one that spans the ages from creation to the marriage feast of the Lamb and beyond, and he uses you. Your calling is all about God. *Soli Deo Gloria.*



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