

# Discerning God's Call on Your Life

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*A mind for truth. A heart for God.*

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Exodus 3:10-12

One of my favorite stories about calling comes from south Louisiana. A Pentecostal preacher was having some chest pains and was rushed to the hospital. It was quickly determined by the medical personnel that he needed open-heart surgery. So they put him on a gurney and started off for the O.R. On the way he looked up at the nurse, grabbed hold of her arm, and asked, "What are they going to do to me?" She said, "Well they're going to perform open-heart surgery on you. Your wife has approved everything and we're taking you into the operating room right now." With that he pleaded, "Will you just make sure of one thing? Make sure that when they get in there they don't take my *unction* out!"

She didn't know what unction was (maybe you don't either). It's an old King James kind of word for "my spirit, my calling, my identity, the anointing of God on me." So he was saying, "Don't let them take the calling in my heart out!"

Next thing you know, he woke up, looked around the room and saw a nurse. He called the nurse over and said, "I wish you would reach in that desk drawer and see if there's one of those Gideon Bibles in there." As she was pulling the Bible out he said, "Would you turn to 1 Samuel 17:40 and read it to me?" She smiled and read,

*Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.*

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“Now how is that?” she said as she put the Bible back in the drawer. He said, “Just stand there for a minute.” And he kind of raised himself up on his elbow as much as he could and he said, “Five smooth stones. Five smooth stones are all David needed to kill and bring down that one giant. All we need is what God has given us: His Word – all we need is a Savior.” About that time, his stitches and chest began hurting and he lay back down and said, “Thank you for listening. I just wanted to make sure that y’all didn’t take my unction out.”

I want to challenge you to examine your heart to see if God’s calling is there. As we come to study the call of God on the life of Moses, we see that when God wants to do something great in the world, God calls men and women to do it. When God wanted to raise up a people for Himself He called Abram and He said,

*Abram, I want you to follow Me.*

Abraham didn’t even know where God was sending him. And from Abraham there was going to come a Savior who would bless the world – and you being saved – because Abraham followed God’s call.

When God wanted to liberate His people, He called this man Moses, and Moses answered the call.

When God wanted to raise up a leader at the very pinnacle of the Israelite nation’s history – as God wanted to raise up one who would lead them in the worship of God – God raised up the shepherd boy David who wrote the sweet Psalms of Israel. And David answered the call.

When God wanted to reach the Gentile world and reach Europe with the gospel, He called Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of the church of Jesus. And Saul of Tarsus became the greatest preacher, the greatest missionary, and the greatest church-planter there ever has been. He laid the foundation for western civilization and for the gospel to be taken to the ends of the earth.

When God wanted to reform the excesses and the problems that had arisen in the medieval church, He raised up a professor of theology named Martin Luther. And Martin Luther answered the call.

When God wanted to show how a worldview could touch every area of life and transform an entire city, He called up a Frenchman by the name of John Calvin of Geneva. And there at that Swiss church in St Pierre's a reformation began unlike any other.

Sitting under John Calvin was a man named John Knox who was on the run from Scotland. And John Knox heard that gospel and he brought the gospel back to Scotland. God called him to take a stand. John Knox stood in the midst of Scotland and all of the opposition and he screamed though all of his life, "Give me Scotland or I die!"

When God wanted to lay the moral foundation for a nation that was beginning – just decades before our Declaration of Independence – God raised up a very academic pastor by the name of Jonathan Edwards. God led a Great Awakening in our nation through this man who read his sermons line-by-line, and at whose soft spoken preaching people fell on the floor, repented of their sins, and cried out to God. And Jonathan Edwards answered the call.

But let's move from those stories to your life. Somebody answered a call and shared the gospel with you. It may have been your mother or your father. It may have been a pastor – or perhaps it was a teacher. Maybe it was an evangelist, a teacher, a coach, or a friend. Someone answered the call to come into your life.

When we look at the life and the call of Moses we see things in that call that remind us of the way God works. And our call looks like Moses' call in several ways.

I want to talk about a call for just a few moments. In the Bible, there are different kinds of calls. There's a general call. The general call goes out into the entire world. It is a call to repent and receive the gospel. It is a call that goes out into the whole world through the heavens. Romans chapter 1 tells us that creation itself declares there is a God. Paul goes on in Romans to say that internally the Gentiles understood the law and were convicted by it though they had never received the law. And Calvin called this the *sensus divinitatis*, the sense of the Divine in human beings – that we realize there is a Creator and we are creatures. It's the general call. That call incidentally is going out today: "Repent and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ; follow the Lord Jesus Christ; trust in Him and not in your own works."

But that call has to be effective. It has to go into your soul. It has to go to work. And the Holy Spirit has to open up your soul and that is an effectual call. That is what Paul was talking about when he wrote to Timothy. He talked about how God has called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace that He gave us in Christ Jesus before

the ages began. And then we read Ephesians 2:10, “We are His workmanship...” We get the idea that it is God who has done this calling. He’s made it *effectual*. He’s opened up our hearts so that we can receive Him.

But there’s also in the word of God specific calls. That is where a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, realizes that “I am here, I am God’s workmanship, I am here for a purpose. I’m here to give my life to God!” A lot of times people come in to my office and they’ll say, “I want to know God’s will for my life.” What they’re asking is, “I want to know what to do with my life.” A lot of times it’s asked by young people. Sometimes it’s people in transition. Sometimes it’s middle-aged people. Sometimes it’s retired people who are asking: “What should I do with my life?”

I believe in the call of Moses found in Exodus 3 we can see features of the call of God in our own life in four ways:

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***The first way: Moses had to understand a burden.***

Not his burden. Moses had a burden. That’s why he killed the Egyptian. He had a burden to see those people set free. What he had to understand is that God had a burden. Our call is like Moses’ call in that first God’s burden must become your burden. What is your burden? Is your burden God’s burden? If you ask me about God’s will for your life, one of the first things I want to know is what God has burdened you with in your life.

Now you don't know who Cindy Lightner is (maybe you do), but in 1980 her daughter, Cari, was killed by a drunk driver—a repeat offender. So she founded Mother's Against Drunk Driving (MADD). She has saved perhaps thousands upon thousands of lives through her activity. She had a burden and that burden moved her to a call.

God's burden is saving human beings from the drunken consequences of sin. His burden came to life through this man Moses. His burden came to life through Jesus Christ ultimately. The apostle John said in 1 John 2:8 that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. We often think of Jesus coming to save, and He did, but He also came to destroy. He came to liberate. He came to set free. What is God's will for your life? Well, what is your burden? What has God put on your heart? Identify that and you're on your way to a better understanding how you are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.

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***The second way: God's enemy is our enemy.***

In the passage God told Moses that he had to go to Pharaoh because Pharaoh was holding His people from establishing the nation from which the Savior of the world would come. Pharaoh was standing in the way because he was holding God's people captive. He was the target for Moses. Remember, the enemy that we

have today is not some dictator in the world. No, the enemy of your soul is the devil. And thank God that Jesus Christ, our great Liberator, came to destroy the work of Satan. And He did! On the cross He liberated humanity. All those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

It is true, as Peter says, that the Devil goes about like the roaring lion. But my beloved, he cannot stop the forward advance of the gospel! Satan cannot hold our nation captive when believers stand with the gospel of Jesus Christ because “greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.” Our nation in many ways is drunk today with the materialism of our country, stumbling along disgracefully. But thank God we have a Savior who has defeated the Devil. And when you know that truth, you can turn to Christ and know that there will be victory in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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***A third way: God’s people become your people.***

God told Moses, “I’m sending you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel out of Egypt.” God loves His people and so must we. God loves people in bondage and people in slavery and so must we. God loves sinners – thank God, or I wouldn’t be here. If God loves sinners, I must love sinners too. But here’s what I want you to see that God was doing in redemptive history: God was building up His church.

Remember Jesus Christ said that He was going to build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

It's very interesting that Stephen, the great deacon, when he was being martyred was preaching the gospel to those who were killing him, and he says (in Acts 7:38), "This is He (speaking about Jesus) that was in the Church in the wilderness with the angel which spoke to him in the Mount Sinai." That was Jesus. So what was God doing when He was sending Moses? He was sending Moses to build up His people who would become the worldwide movement of God, embracing all races. In that time the Jewish people, and from them all people, would be engrafted who would believe and trust in Jesus Christ, who had become part of the Church in the wilderness.

What am I saying? I'm saying that just as Moses had to love those people, you and I have got to love the church. I believe that if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you love the Church and you also love the lost, those who are in bondage. Are you using your gifts to build up the body of Christ? Do you love the church?

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***The fourth and final way:***  
**God's power must become your provision.**

God's power must be your provision. Moses asked the question rightly. Moses, after God said *I'm sending you to*

*Pharaoh*, asked, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Well, good question, Moses. I mean, number one, you’re a murderer. Number two, you’re a fugitive. Number three, you’re a man with a tremendous identity crisis. Are you a Hebrew or are you an Egyptian? You’re married to an unclean Midianite daughter of a desert dweller. Exactly who are you? And because of what happened, how could you ever go back?

And God went to Moses and told him, *Here’s the proof that I’ve called you. You’ve got My call on you. You’ve got My anointing on you. And more than that, you’re going to come back to this mountain.* Look what it says, “I have sent you and when you have brought up the people out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain.” Moses was standing before that mountain and God says *I’m going to bring you back here.* Do you know what God was doing with Moses? God was saying *I’m going to use this as a testimony in your life. The very place where you’ve questioned Me, I’m going to bring you back.* In Exodus 19 Moses came down from hearing God and seeing millions of people on that very same mountain. God was faithful to His calling.

I love to see the boyhood homes of our presidents. I’ve seen Eisenhower’s home in Abilene, KS; Nixon’s home in Yorba Linda, CA; Truman’s home in Independence, MS. I haven’t been to Dixon, IL (I’d

love to go); I haven't been to Hope, AR. But if you go to those places, those are the places where some boys ran barefoot and maybe plowed in the field. But now presidential libraries are there. Something happened in those lives.

And that is what God is saying to Moses. Listen: that is what God is saying to you. You see how God works. God is going to use some of you struggling with depression to be good listeners to others who are struggling with depression. It wouldn't surprise me that those of you who are going through a divorce may one day be leading a divorce-care group at your church.

"I'm going to lead you back to this mountain." *How will they know? How will I know? Look at my baggage. Look at my background!* You need to hear God saying to you, "The very area that you're questioning Me about is going to become your testimony."

Maybe you are asking, "How can I serve God?" It's not by works. It's not by your strength. I'd say the very place of your questioning can become the testimony that God uses to say to you, *It's My power, not yours.*

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort who comforts us in our affliction, that we may be

able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” (2 Corinthians 1:4)

Your calling is not dependent upon your gifts, but upon God’s greatness. It’s not dependent upon your passion, but upon God’s power.

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## **Conclusion**

So in the call of Moses, we’ve seen a specific calling, and it teaches us about having God’s burden, understanding God’s enemy – that this is spiritual warfare, whatever it is that we’re doing – that we love God’s people, that we minister in God’s power. And listen: one of the great reformation truths is that whether God is calling you to the ordained ministry or to be a missionary – or whether God is calling you to be a teacher, a doctor, a homemaker, or a wife, a great reformation truth is that all of these are holy callings, if you give them up to the Lord and say, “God use me!”

Sometime ago I visited Walker, LA. Walker, LA used to have a much greater name. It was once called Milton Old Field. Those were the good old days in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. But then a guy named Walker came around who was a state Senator. He got a post office put there, and Milton Old Field became “Walker.” There used to be a school there named Milton Academy that’s now Walker School. There is a Walker Methodist Church there. I visited that church and wanted to see the records. I flipped back through the records until I came to entries in 1906.

I noticed in 1906 there were a bunch of professions of faith of young children. There was an entry of Reverend So-and-so, a Methodist circuit rider, an evangelist. When this pastor came through, there were people who confessed Jesus Christ. I held my breath and was gripped by the Holy Spirit when I read one of those names. "Mary Eva Milton, 9 years old." This was my Aunt Eva. From her, because she heard a call, I heard a call - a general call because she preached the gospel in our home; an effectual call, because the Holy Spirit used that to open up my heart; and even a specific call, because she prayed for me to preach the gospel.

You know when I get to heaven, I want to see my Aunt Eva, I want to see her immediately, but I will look for the Reverend So-and-so, because he answered God's call.

Mary Eva Milton, at 9 years old, received the gospel. Now I'm called. Now I'm standing here and I'm calling you. Is there a holy calling on your heart?

I challenge you today with these words: Consider Christ's call on your own life.



ATLANTA

CHARLOTTE

JACKSON

ORLANDO

WASHINGTON DC

VIRTUAL

## MICHAEL ANTHONY MILTON

Dr. Michael A. Milton accepted the call to become president and professor of practical theology of Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte in December, 2007. He began his duties in February 2008. Dr. Milton assumed the presidency of RTS Charlotte after serving as senior pastor of the historic First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga. He was the 12th pastor there in 173 years and conducted a ministry that included a radio and television ministry called **Faith for Living**.

Prior to answering the call as president, RTS Charlotte, Dr. Milton served sixteen years in the business world (Dow Chemical and Ashland Chemical) and was also a top secret Navy linguist. He interned under D. James Kennedy at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and after seminary planted two churches: Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Overland Park, Kansas; and Kirk O' the Isles Church in Savannah, Georgia. A graduate of Mid America Nazarene University (Kansas) and Knox Theological Seminary, in 1998 he earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree in theology and religious studies from The University of Wales (UK).

Dr. Milton is prolific author of such books as, *What God Starts, God Completes, Cooperation without Compromise: Faithful Gospel Witness in a Pluralistic Setting Following Ben: Expository Preaching for Frail Followers of Pulpit Giants, Giving as an Act of Worship and Small Things, Big Things: Inspiring Stories of God's Grace* (P&R Publisher).



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