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BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 7
Know Your Calling

By

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Father, how thankful we are that we have this opportunity of gathering together to spend this time with You and with one another. John said that he wrote that they might have fellowship with us, and truly, our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. As we gather together we want to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives and over the church. We recognize that Christ is the head of the church. We look to the Holy Spirit for the guiding and directing of the church's ministry and activities. Lord, what a privilege and blessing it is for us to be instruments through whom You can accomplish Your purposes.

And so Lord, again today, afresh and anew, we want to present our bodies to You as living sacrifices. We want to yield our members to You as instruments of righteousness. Lord, we want You to know that we love You and because of our love for You, we want to serve You. Lord that same desire and commitment that we felt in the beginning is still there in our hearts today. Lord, as with Peter, we have no place to turn because You have the words of life. And so Lord, we thank You and we praise You that You have counted us worthy of the ministry. We thank You, Lord, that we can enter into that area of ministry to which You have called us, realizing that it is necessary for the steward to be faithful. Lord, help us to be faithful to the ministry that You have given to us.

Now Lord, bless this time that we share together. Let the Word of God dwell in our hearts richly through faith, and help us, Lord, with all the saints, to be able to comprehend the length, the breadth, the depth, the height of Your love for us as You reveal it to us during this time that we share together. Lord, we want to just commit this whole thing to You. We have an agenda, but if You have a different one, Lord, just toss ours out and do Your work in our midst while we are here. Lord, we have gathered to honor You and to hear from You what the Spirit would say to the churches in these days. We are looking to You for the guidance and the direction of our ministries. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What we plan to do in the sessions here is to look at the ministry through the book of Nehemiah. We will discover in Nehemiah, instruction on the building of the church and the work of the ministry. I noticed that I have been given the title, "The Burden for the Ministry" and I will be talking about that because I think that there is a very close tie between the burden for the ministry and the call to the ministry. In talking about any ministry at all, the first thing on the agenda is whether you are called to the ministry. It is important that you have a true calling to the ministry.

Paul, in the opening of his various epistles, makes mention that he is "called to be an apostle by the will of God." In one of the epistles he declares, "I am an apostle by the commandment of God" (1 Timothy 1:1). He knew his calling was that of being an apostle. He knew that that was the will of God for him.

The most difficult and frustrating thing in all the world is trying to be something that God has not made you, or trying to do the ministry without a call. There are many people who are in the ministry today because someone has said to them, "Oh, you would make a great minister." That planted a bug in their ear and they thought, "Hmm, maybe I should be in the ministry." There are men in the ministry today because they were not happy in the work that they were doing. They felt that they could be happy in the ministry.

Now there are many different ministries within the church. Paul was called to be an apostle by the will of God, but even Paul said, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all evangelists? Are all pastor/teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all speak in tongues?" (1 Corinthians 12:29-30). He recognized that there are different callings as far as the ministry is concerned. God has set into the church, first of all apostles, then the prophets, then the evangelists, and the pastor/teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry (cf. Ephesians 4:11-12).

It is not only important that I am called to the ministry, but that I know what my calling is in the ministry. Has God called you to be an evangelist? Has God called you to be a prophet? Has God called you to be a pastor/teacher? What is your calling in the ministry?

We are told, concerning the calling and the gifts of the Spirit, "that it is the Holy Spirit who divides to each man severally as He wills" (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:11). Our calling is not something that is by the will of man, but by the will of God. I cannot determine what I am going to be for the Lord. I cannot determine what ministry I am going to have and then learn how to minister.

I think that we make a real mistake in thinking that we can teach people how to heal or we can teach people how to be a prophet and go through the various degrees of prophetic proficiency. I thoroughly reject prophets of the fourth order, who have a partial percentage of prophecy coming to pass. Prophets of the third order are accurate about fifty percent of the time. Prophets of the second order get about seventy-five percent right. Prophets of the first order they claim have become infallible. I do not read of that anywhere in the Scripture, nor do I read that you should just say whatever comes into your head and see if it comes to pass. I do not think you can be taught how to be a prophet. I do not think you can be taught how to be an evangelist or how to be a minister. I think you have to be called.

Now, once called, then I believe that you can enhance yourself for that calling through study. The calling is essential—without the calling you are spinning your wheels. We have to know the call of God upon our hearts.

The question concerning the call of the ministry is: Have you been called? Do you know what your ministry gift is? I speak out of personal experience because for years I felt the call to the ministry but I did not know what my calling was. I knew I was called of God to the ministry but I did not realize that there are many different ministries. Because evangelism was the chief thrust of the group that I was associated with, I sought to be an evangelist. I was totally unsuccessful as an evangelist. My churches that I pastored suffered greatly as the result of my desire to be evangelistic when I was not called as an evangelist in the body of Christ. In fact my book, *Charisma vs. Charismania*, was dedicated to the people I pastored in the early years of ministry. I apologized to them and thanked them for bearing with me during the frustrations of the early years of the pastorate. I was trying to be something that God did not make me. I was frustrated in it and these blessed, dear saints put up with my frustrations. It was years down the road in the ministry when I realized my calling in the ministry was that of a pastor/teacher and I began to fulfill my calling as a pastor/teacher.

Now the interesting thing is that when I began to fulfill my calling as a pastor/teacher, I was no longer frustrated in the ministry. No longer was it a pressure or a push; it became a blessing.

You feel called to the ministry and that is good. What is your calling? What has God gifted you to be? You need to get a little more specific than just, "I am called to the ministry." Everybody is called to the ministry. What are you called to do in the ministry? We are all called to be servants of Jesus.

He has called me to be a pastor/teacher. Now the interesting thing is that when I did begin to fulfill my calling as a pastor/teacher, I began to see evangelistic results through the ministry. I began to see hundreds, thousands of people coming to Jesus Christ. I had the privilege and continue to have the privilege of baptizing hundreds of people, though I disclaim being an evangelist. That is not my calling. My calling is a pastor/teacher.

Know your calling. There are fellows whom God has called to be evangelists, and they are having a struggle being pastors and teachers. Now I do believe they can be combined. I think that Greg Laurie does a great job of combining those gifts. Mike MacIntosh does a great job of combining them. I think that both of these guys have evangelism on the heart. At a drop of a hat, they will go over to Africa or any place else if there is a chance to preach to a crowd. Evangelism is part of their being and it is their calling. I recognize that. And yet they are able also to be pastors and teachers. I think that is wonderful.

It could be that God does give crossover networks in the calling that a man can have. "He divides to each man severally as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11). It does not mean that you just have one gift. You can have a multiplicity of gifts and a capacity in many areas. I feel completely out of place trying to be an evangelist. That is one of the most difficult things in the world for me. I quit trying. I used to accept invitations to go and speak at big rallies and I absolutely hated it. I was uncomfortable. I knew going in that they were going to be disappointed. I knew they wanted to get all hyped-up and excited. They wanted the kids to all go marching out of there looking for someone to collar so they could witness to them about their need for the Lord. I knew that this was what they were looking for and I am not that type. That is just not my ministry. Now there are many other men who can go in and do it, but that was not my gift. Know your place. Know your calling.

How do you know the call of God? The glorious thing about the Lord, and the thing I love so much is that there are diversities of gifts and there are diversities of operations but there is one Lord, one Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:4–6). And God does not get locked into a pattern. We are so often trying to lock God in or we want to formulate God. Be careful of spiritual formulas because God will not be confined to just one method or one way of accomplishing His purposes. Here is a true formula—most of the disciples were called by just an invitation from the Lord. "Come, follow Me," Jesus said to Peter and John as they were mending their nets. "Come, follow Me. I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). To Matthew, sitting at the receipt of customs, the Lord said, "Come, follow Me" (Matthew 9:9). Your calling to the ministry can be unexciting—if you want to call that unexciting. To me it is very exciting. Jesus said, "Hey, follow Me." That is an exciting thing but there may not be any big kind of emotional experience, just the call of the Lord—"Come and follow Me."

Paul the Apostle had a little more exciting experience in Acts 22:11. There was a bright light, brighter than the noonday sun, and there lying on the ground, he got his calling. That was an exciting calling, no doubt. There are some people who speak of their call to the ministry and they have had visions. Some have seen fire in the sky and different things, and that is fine. That is

good. I do not discount that at all. I think it is wonderful. There are other people whose calling is no more than just a burden, a heavy burden that the Lord has placed upon their heart to do a particular work for Him.

My calling was quite unique, as I believe they all are. There were no lights. There was no bright light from heaven. There was no falling on the ground. There was no handwriting on the wall. It was just simple logic. My ambition and desire was to be a neurosurgeon. I was taking courses to prepare me for the fulfillment of that ambition. And at a time in just seeking the Lord and seeking the fullness of the Spirit in my life, the Lord impressed me with the thought; "You can go ahead and become a neurosurgeon. You can tie off the aneurysms and so forth and help people physically, but at best it will be temporary. They are going to die, ultimately. There is a deadly malady that has struck mankind and it is fatal and permanent. That is the malady of sin. So in healing men's bodies, at best it will be a temporal healing. In the healing of men's souls, it will be eternal. Do you want to invest your life in something that is temporary or something that is eternal?" Those were the thoughts that came to my heart while I was praying. And I said, "Lord, I want to invest my life in something that is eternal."

A fellow made this statement: "You have only one life. It will soon be past and only what is done for Christ will last." That hit me hard. And from that, this logic came. I have only one life to live. It is short at best. And from my life, the only things that are going to last are those things that I do for Jesus Christ. And so, that was my call to the ministry. As I said, it took me a long time to define just what God had called me to do. I spent years struggling with the second part.

I had a burden for people. I had a burden to share with people. I had seen abuses in the ministry and I was troubled by many things that I saw. I saw a heavy emphasis placed upon money by so many of the evangelists. It was there that I developed my first proverb: "If God guides, God provides." I made a covenant with God that I would never make money an issue in the ministry. I would never ask people to give. I would trust God to guide and if He did guide I knew He would provide. And if He did not provide, then I figured He was not guiding. It was that simple. I figured that God was not dependent upon man; man was dependent upon God. I would never represent God as being on the verge of bankruptcy or ready to go to the poor house unless people would come in and bail Him out.

I wanted to be a minister who people could identify with and not think of as some holy person that is untouchable, but a very normal person just like them. I did not want to put myself on any kind of a pedestal before the people. I had seen too many men fall from pedestals. I wanted to just be me and to be natural. I did not want to try to be something that was unnatural to me—though I did fall into that category of trying to be an evangelist, which was not me. Wearing suits really is not me. Obviously, it is not you either and that makes it comfortable.

I am saying what is right for me, may not be right for the next guy. God made us all as individuals. God calls us not as a mob, but He calls us as separate individuals. God relates to us in an individual way, according to our temperament and our nature. One of the glorious things that I love about God is that He relates to us where we are and how we are, and then He seeks to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. So it is God who gave me a burden for the ministry.

At this point I would like you to turn with me to Nehemiah 1:2-3. Nehemiah says that certain men of Judah, some of his brethren, had come back from Jerusalem. He said,

> I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped which were left of the captivity and I asked them about Jerusalem. And they

> said unto me, "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:2-3, KJV)

They told them of the sad and tragic condition. The people were greatly afflicted and discouraged. They were under pressure, duress, and strain. The walls of the city were destroyed and the gates were burned with fire.

> And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. (Nehemiah 1:4, KJV)

Hearing the need, hearing the condition, Nehemiah's heart was touched. He had a tremendous burden for the people. This burden that he had constituted the call of God upon his heart to do something about it. He was weeping. He mourned for days. He fasted. He prayed. Note that he was not thinking about himself. It was not searching for a job. It was not, "Well, I wonder if I belong in the ministry. I think maybe I would like to be a minister." It was such a deep burden and concern for these people and their needs that it was ripping him up inside. He could not think about them without weeping. He was being torn because of the report that he had received. He said, "I was praying night and day." Nehemiah was mourning, fasting, and praying.

That is the basis for the ministry—to have such a burden for the need that you weep, that you mourn, that you fast, and that you pray. It is not, "Well, I got fired from my job. I was not really crazy about it anyhow and I am not very happy. Maybe I would be happier in the ministry." Nehemiah's call was not like that at all. It was not directed towards himself. "I think I want to be in the ministry. That looks like a good profession." It was, "Oh there is a need. God, help those poor people. Oh God, You have promised that if Your people would turn back to You, You would bring them back into the land and You would bless them there. Lord, they are in need of Your help."

No doubt Nehemiah had watched Ezra. About fourteen years earlier, Ezra had taken some priests and some people to go back and encourage those who were in the land. It had been almost ninety years since the first expedition went back from the Babylonian captivity. Zerubbabel, Jeshua and other fellows rebuilt the temple. Haggai was encouraging them and yet the people had become discouraged. They had forsaken the temple. They had started putting together their own little houses. You remember Haggai rebuked them and said, "Is it time for you to forsake the house of God while you are giving yourself to your own places?" He said, "This is why you are not being blessed. This is why you are not prospering. You are not putting God first. You are putting your own interests and desires first" (cf. Haggai 1:1-11). And let me tell you that it will always stop the blessing of God from your life or from your ministry.

Nehemiah was probably there to wave good-bye to Ezra. He had collected a lot of money and he had the commandments of the king to give to the governors who were harassing the people. So Nehemiah and the priests were going to join them, seeking to bring some kind of a spiritual renewal.

Now fourteen years later he asks them, "How is it going?" They tell him, "Nehemiah, it is a mess. The enemy comes in and harasses the people. They do not have walls to protect them. The people are so discouraged and so demoralized. It is not a pleasant place. It is just really a place of misery.

The people are just sort of surviving as best they can." And it was more than he could bear. He had such a great burden that Nehemiah began to weep and mourn.

How great of a burden do you have for the people that you are ministering to? How long has it been since you have wept over the people and over the condition of the church? I have seen many pastors get angry at their sheep. I have heard them say cutting things to their sheep. I have seen them whip the sheep. I have watched them as they have used the rod against the sheep because perhaps they were saying something negative about the pastor. He got word of it and he used the pulpit for exercising his rod. But I have rarely seen pastors weep over the sad plight of the sheep. We have become reactors. We react to the criticism. We react to the strain of the sheep. Our reaction should be in prayer, weeping, with hearts broken.

What was the reaction of Jesus when He saw the people who were just sort of wandering as sheep without a shepherd? They were going astray. What was His reaction? "And being moved with great compassion towards them…" (Matthew 9:36). That is the reaction of the true shepherd.

Nehemiah mourned for days. The burden was so heavy on his heart that it just would not leave. And then he fasted and he prayed. Though it does not declare it, yet it surely is inferred in the whole context, that his prayer was the offering of himself as an instrument that God might use. His desire was that he might go to Jerusalem and head up a group of people to rebuild the walls. This is his prayer, basically, as it is recorded for us in Nehemiah 1:3-11.

It is interesting to me that so many times the major part of our prayers is just straight petitions. "Oh God, this is what I need today." And I have my list out and I lay out my petition. It is also interesting to note that in the Bible, personal petitions really come way later in the prayer, usually toward the end. They do not really form the bulk or the major part of the prayer.

So Nehemiah, as he is praying, says,

> You are the God that keeps covenants and mercy to those that love You and observe Your commandments. Now I ask You, Lord, to listen to me, because I have been praying day and night for the children of Israel. I confess their sins. What they have is what was coming. I am not challenging or questioning the justice of God in this. Lord, we have all sinned. We are guilty. And You even said to Moses that, if the people would forsake You that they would be scattered. We are wrong. We are guilty. We were dispersed and You were faithful. You keep Your covenant and that is a part of the covenant that You made. And You are faithful God. But You also said that if they would turn and begin to keep Your commandments and do them, though they were cast out to the uttermost parts of the earth, You would bring them back into the place that You have chosen to set Your name. Now, I want You to remember, Lord, these are Your servants. They are Your people whom You redeemed with Your great power and by Your strong hand. (cf. Nehemiah 1:3-10)

And now he finally gets to the petition. The rest of it is just talking to God about the faithfulness of God but now he gets to it.

> Oh Lord, I beseech Thee, let now Your ear be attentive to my prayer, to the prayer of Your servant, the prayer of Thy servants who desire and who fear Thy name. [And this is the prayer:] Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day by granting him mercy in the sight of the king. (cf. Nehemiah 1:11)

That is all he prayed. "God, give me mercy in the sight of the king because I was the king's cup bearer."

Now when the king observed his sad countenance and said, "What is wrong?" Nehemiah was sort of taken by surprise. He did not know that what he was feeling was showing. It was not good, it was not healthy to be sad in front of the king. And so when the king said, "What is your problem?" Nehemiah threw up a quick prayer and then he asked the king for permission to go back. That is the whole burden that he had. "I want to go back and help get this thing going."

Now at that time and at that point, Jerusalem was not the most desirable place in the world to live. I am always sort of amazed and shocked at the requirements that many people have for entering into the ministry. "It must be somewhere in the Sunbelt, Lord. I need a housing allowance and a car allowance. And I think my salary should be commensurate with the industry standard. For if I were a chief executive in an industry, then I would be making so much, and thus my salary should be commensurate." Well, I advise you to go get a job in industry and tithe to the church.

Nehemiah was willing to leave the comfort and the luxury of the Persian court, to make the long and arduous journey back to Jerusalem and put up with the primitive and dangerous conditions that existed there, in order to help these poor people of God. He was that burdened for them. He was willing to go and to share with them. It is like he said, "I sat where they sat." He was willing to do that.

No sacrifice is too great if God will just use me. It is sad and tragic how a little comfort and a little success can spoil us. "Yes, I will be glad to come and minister to your people. I require three motel suites with cable TV and a swimming pool. I will need a rented car, preferably a Lincoln Town Car and please arrange to have the food catered to the rooms. I will do no meetings Wednesday night because HBO is having a movie on that I have been wanting to see for a long time." Well, you would be better off to go do your act at a nightclub and forget the ministry. I resent it when these music groups or others write and give me the list of requirements. Whenever that happens I always write back and say, "Well, unfortunately we are not able to go ahead with your meetings here." I cancel them. I will not have them if they cannot come on faith. I am not going to starve anybody and I have never starved anybody. I have no intention of ever doing that. But when you start making demands, I am just independent enough to say, "Hey, go fly your kite someplace else, man."

When you have the true call of God and the burden of the ministry on your heart, you do not care where it is. It can be up in upstate Michigan where it gets cold in the winter. The burden for the ministry becomes such a heavy thing that you can relate to what Paul the Apostle said: "Woe is me if I preach not this gospel of Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Now let me say that there are a lot of fellows in the ministry who should not be. The Bible encourages us to examine ourselves. "For if we judge ourselves we will not be judged of God" (1 Corinthians 11:31). Take a look at your own life. Take a look at your own ministry. Let the Holy Spirit really search your heart. As David, pray: "Lord, search my heart. Know me. Try me, Oh Lord. See what is there. My heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? God,

Thou knowest the hearts. Thou searchest the reins. Search me, O God. Reveal to me, Lord, my motives. Lord, if my burden has somehow slackened, if other things have sort of crowded into my life and I am no longer excited and thrilled about the ministry, I no longer have that heavy burden, I am no longer weeping over the needs of the people, I am no longer spending nights and days in prayer, mourning, fasting, waiting on God, but my life and my schedule have become routine, then God, help me either to be revived or to give the people a break and get out."

The call of God is essential for the ministry. It says in 2 Peter 1:10 to "make your calling and election sure." In context, I am certain it is talking about salvation there, yet I think that it is important that we make our calling sure. Do I still feel called to the ministry today? Am I still burdened over the needs that are there? Am I willing to make any sacrifice necessary in a personal way in order to fulfill the calling and the burden on my heart?

> Father, we thank You for this opportunity of gathering and looking at our ministries and being better equipped to fulfill Your calling upon our hearts. Lord, we pray for a fresh vision, a fresh burden, a fresh calling of God, and a certainty in our hearts that we are where You would have us to be and doing what You want us to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.