

# Servanthood - Know Your Calling

by Chuck Smith

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*Knowing your calling and having a burden for the people is essential to being effective in the ministry.*

**Duration:** 43:51

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 30:1-5, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 139:23-24, Proverbs 3:5-6, John 6:68, 1 Corinthians 9:16, 2 Corinthians 13:5

**Topics:** "Servanthood"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Nehemiah and the challenges he faced in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was deeply moved by the condition of the city and had a burden to do something about it. He wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed before God, showing his selflessness and dedication to the task. The speaker emphasizes the importance of knowing one's calling and not comparing oneself to others. The sermon also highlights the reaction of Jesus towards the lost and the need for shepherds to have compassion and broken hearts for their flock. The speaker concludes by mentioning Ezra's attempt to bring spiritual renewal to the city, but after 14 years, the situation is still dire and the people are demoralized.

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## Transcript

Father, how thankful we are that we have this opportunity of again gathering together to spend this time with you and with one another. As 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. And so we, as we gather together, 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 and we look to the Holy Spirit for the guiding and the directing of the church's ministry and activities. Lord, what a privilege and blessing it is for us to be instruments through which you can accomplish your purposes. And so Lord, again today, fresh and anew, we want to present our bodies to you as living sacrifices.

We want to yield to you our members 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. And 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 for the ministry. And we just thank you, Lord, that

again we can just enter into that area of ministry to which you have called us, realizing that it is necessary for the faithful, that 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, Lord. And we've got an agenda, but if you've got a different one, Lord, just toss ours out and you do your work in our midst while we're here.

Lord, we have gathered to honor you and to hear from you what the Spirit would say to the churches in these days. And looking to you, Lord, 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. And so, if you'll turn to Nehemiah, the building of the church, the work of the ministry, as we discover it in Nehemiah. 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's a very close tie between the burden of the ministry and the call to the ministry. And in talking about any ministry at all, the first thing that's on the agenda is, are you called to the ministry? It's important that you have a true calling to the ministry. Paul, in writing his various epistles, in the opening of the epistles, makes mention of his being 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. And so, he knew his calling, 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. Trying to do the ministry without a call. There are many people in the ministry today because someone has said to them, oh, you would make a great minister.

And so, that planted a bug in their ear and they thought, 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 very many different ministries within the church. Paul 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.

And he recognizes that there are different callings as far as the ministry is concerned. God has said into the church, first of all, apostles, then the prophets, and then the evangelists, and then the pastor-teachers for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry. So, it's not only important that I am called to the ministry, but I know what my calling is in the ministry.

As God calls you to be an evangelist, as God calls you to be a prophet, as God calls you to be a pastor-teacher, what is your calling in the ministry? Now, we are told concerning the callings and the gifts of the Spirit, that it is the Holy Spirit that divides to each man severally as he will. So, it's not something, as Paul again said concerning his calling, Paul, an apostle, not 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 I'll learn how to minister. I think that we make a real mistake in thinking that we can teach people how to heal. 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 prophecies coming to pass. Prophets of the third order, who come about 50 percent. Prophets of the second order, who get about 75 percent.

And prophets of the first order, who become infallible popes. I don't read of that anywhere in the Scripture, nor do I read of, you know, just say whatever comes into your head and see if it comes to pass. I don't think you can be taught how to be a prophet.

I don't think you can be taught how to be an evangelist, 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.

But the calling is essential. Without the calling, you're spinning your wheel. We have to know the call of God upon our heart.

So, the question is concerning the call of the ministry, have you been called? And you know what your ministry gift is? For years, and I speak out of personal experience, because for years, and I've shared this before, I felt the call to the ministry, but I didn't know what my calling was. I know I was called of God to the ministry, but not realizing that there are many different ministries, and having evangelism as the chief thrust of the group that I was associated with, I sought to be an evangelist. And I was totally unsuccessful as an evangelist.

And my churches that I pastored suffered greatly as the result of my desire to be evangelistic when I wasn't called as an evangelist in the body of Christ. In fact, my book, Charisma vs. Charismania, I dedicated to the people who I pastored in the early pastorate, apologizing to them and thanking them for their bearing with me during the frustrations of the early years of ministry as I was trying to be something that God didn't make me.

And I was frustrated in it. And these blessed dear saints put up with my frustration. 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 when I began to fulfill my calling as a pastor teacher, no longer was I frustrated in the ministry. No longer was it a pressure, a push.

It became a blessing. So, you feel called to the ministry. Good.

What is your calling? What has God gifted you to be? You need to get a little more specific than just I'm called to the ministry. Everybody's called to the ministry. What have you called to do in the ministry? We're all called to be servants of Jesus.

So, he's called me to be a pastor teacher. Now, the interesting thing that when I did begin to fulfill my call as a pastor teacher, I began to see evangelistic results through the ministry. And so, I began to see hundreds, thousands of people coming to Jesus Christ and have the privilege and continue to have the privilege of baptizing hundreds of people.

Though I disclaim being an evangelist, that's not my calling. My calling is a pastor teacher. So, know your calling.

There are fellows here that God has called to be evangelists, and you're having a struggle being a pastor and a teacher. I do believe they can be combined. I think that Greg Laurie does a great job of combining.

Mike McIntosh does a great job of combining. I think that both these guys have evangelism on the heart. They'll, at a drop of the hat, go over to Africa or anyplace else, chance to preach to crowds.

Evangelism is part of their being, and it's their calling. I recognize that. And yet, they're able also to be a pastor and a teacher, and that's great.

I think that's wonderful, and it could be that God does give crossover networks in the calling that a man can have, even as he divides to each man severally as he will. It doesn't mean that you just have one gift. You can have a multiplicity of gifts and a capacity in those areas.

I don't. I feel completely out of place trying to be an evangelist. One of the most difficult things in all the world for me is to try, and I used to accept the invitations to go and speak for this big rally or something, and I absolutely hated it.

I was uncomfortable. I knew going in they were going to be disappointed. I knew they wanted to get all hyped up, all excited.

They want the kids to all go marching out of there looking for someone to call or to witness to them about their need for the Lord. I knew that that's what they were looking for, and I'm not that type. That's just not my ministry.

Now, Mike can go in and do it. Greg can go in and do it, and others of you can. Know your place.

Know your calling. Now, 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's one Lord, one Spirit, and God doesn't get locked to a pattern. We're so often trying to lock God.

We want to formulate God. Now, here's the formula, friend, and be careful of spiritual formulas because God will not be confined to just one method or one way of accomplishing his purposes. Most of the disciples were called by just an invitation from the Lord, come, follow me.

Peter and John mending their nests. Jesus said, come, follow me. I'll make your fish as a net.

Matthew sitting at the receipt of customs. The Lord said, come, follow me. And your calling to the ministry can be as unexciting, if you want to call that unexciting.

And to me, it's very exciting. Jesus says, hey, follow me. That's an exciting thing.

But there may not be any big kind of emotional experience or whatever. It's just the call of the Lord. Come and follow me.

Paul the apostle had a little more exciting experience that was a bright light, brighter than the noonday sun. And there lying on the ground, he got his calling. And that was an exciting call, no doubt.

And there are some people who speak of their call to the ministry and they've had visions. They've seen fire in the sky and different things. And that's fine.

That's good. I don't discount that at all. I think it's wonderful.

There are other people whose calling is no more than just a burden, a heavy burden that the Lord has placed upon their hearts to do a particular work for the Lord. My calling was quite unique, as I believe they all are, and different. There were no lights.

There was no bright light from heaven. There was no falling on the ground. There was no handwritings on the wall.

There was just a simple logic. My ambition and desire was to be a neurosurgeon. I was taking courses to prepare me for that fulfillment of that ambition.

And at a time in just seeking the Lord, seeking the fullness of the Spirit in my life, the Lord impressed me with the thought, you can go ahead and you can become a neurosurgeon and you can tie off the aneurysms and so forth, and you can help people physically, but at best, it'll be temporary. They're going to die. Ultimately, there is a deadly malady that has struck mankind and it is fatal and it is permanent, and that's 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? Now, that's just the thought that came to my heart in prayer.

While I was praying and I said, Lord, I want to invest my life in something that is eternal. A fellow had been speaking and he had made this statement, you have only one life, it will soon be past and only what's done for Christ will last. And that hit me hard.

And from that, this logic came. I have only one life to live. It's short at best.

And from my life, the only thing that is 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. 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. And so, 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 that he would provide. And if he didn't provide, then I figured he wasn't guiding. That simple.

I figured that God wasn't dependent upon man, that man was dependent upon God. And I would never represent God as 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 that people could identify with as not some holy person that's untouchable, but as a very normal person, just like they are.

I didn't want to put myself on any kind of a pedestal before the people. I had seen too many fall from pedestals. I wanted to just be me, to be natural, and not to try to be something that was unnatural to me, though I did fall into that category of trying to be an evangelist, which wasn't me.

Wearing suits really isn't me. Obviously, it isn't you either, and that makes me comfortable. Now, for some people it is, you know, and I have no objection.

And the thing is, what I am seeking to say is that what is right for me may not be right for the next guy. God made us all as individuals, and God calls us not as a mob, but he calls us as separate individuals, and God relates to us in an individual way, and God relates to us according to our temperament, according to our nature. And that's the glorious thing 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 there was the burden that God gave me for the ministry. At this point, I'd like you to turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 1. Nehemiah, he's a neat guy. In verse 2, he says that certain men of Judah, some of his brethren, had come back from Jerusalem, and 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 to 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. They told him of the sad and tragic conditions. The people were greatly afflicted, discouraged.

They're under pressure and duress and strain, and the walls of the city were destroyed. The gates were burned with fire. And it came to pass, he said, as I heard these words, that I sat down and I wept, and I mourned for days, and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Hearing the need, hearing the condition, his heart was touched. He had a tremendous burden for the people. This burden that he had constituted really 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 wasn't thinking about himself. It wasn't searching for a job.

It wasn't, well, I wonder if I belong in the ministry, or I think maybe I'd like to be a minister. But it was such a deep burden and concern for these people and their needs that it was ripping him up inside. He couldn't think about them without weeping.

He was being torn because of the report that he had received. And he just, well, in his prayer he said, I was praying night and day, mourning, fasting, praying. That's the basis for the ministry, to have such a burden for the need that is there.

That you weep, that you mourn, that you fast, that you pray. It's not, well, I got fired from my job. I wasn't really crazy about it anyhow, and I'm not very happy.

Maybe I would be happier in the ministry. Wasn't that at all? It wasn't directed towards himself. You know, I think I'd want to be in the ministry.

That looks like a good profession. It was, oh, there's a need. God, help those poor people.

Oh, God, you promised that if your people would turn back to you, you would bring them back into the land and you would bless them. They're Lord. They're in need of your help.

Oh, God. No doubt he had watched Ezra. About 14 years earlier, Ezra had taken some priests and some people to go back and to sort of encourage those that were in the land.

It had been almost 90 years since the first expedition went back from the Babylonian captivity and Zerubbabel and Joshua and these fellows rebuilt the temple. But Haggai was encouraging them, and yet the people had become discouraged. They had sort of forsaken the temple.

They started putting together their own little houses. You remember Haggai sort of rebuked them and said, is it time for you to forsake the house of God while you're giving yourself to your own places and so forth? And he rebuked them. He said, this is why you're not being blessed.

This is why you're not prospering. You're not putting God first. You're putting your own interests and desires first.

And let me tell you, that'll always stop the blessing of God from your life or from your ministry. And so Ezra, and probably he was there to wave Ezra goodbye. He had collected a lot of money and he had the commandments of the king and all to give to the governors that were harassing the people.

And he went on back with the priest and they were again seeking to bring some kind of a spiritual renewal. But now 14 years later, how's it going? How's it going? And oh man, Nehemiah, it's a mess. Oh, the city is just, you know, the enemy comes in and they harass the people.

They don't have walls to protect them. And the people are so discouraged and so demoralized and it's not a pleasant place. It's just really a place of misery.

The people are just sort of surviving as best they can. It was more than he could bear. He had such a great burden.

He began to weep and mourn over it. How great a burden do you have for the people that you are ministering to? How long has it been since you've wept over the people, over the condition of the church? I've seen many pastors get angry with their sheep. I've heard them say cutting things to their sheep.

I've seen them whip the sheep. I've watched them as they use the rod against the sheep because perhaps they were saying something negative about the pastor and he got word of it and he used the pulpit for his exercising of his rod. But I've rarely seen pastors weep over the sad plight of the sheep.

We become reactors. We react to the criticism. We react to the straying of the sheep.

Our reaction should be in prayer. Weeping. 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. That's the reaction of a true shepherd.

He mourned for days. The burden was so heavy on his heart that it just wouldn't leave. Then he fasted and he prayed.

Though it doesn't 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. For his prayer basically, and as you read his prayer, and he does give us his prayer there in chapter one, and it is interesting to me, so many times petitions are the first and the most part of our prayers are just straight petitions.

Oh God, this is what I need today. You know, I got my list out and I lay out my petition. It's interesting to me in the Bible that petitions usually come way down somewhere in the prayer, and usually towards the end, and they don't really form the bulk or the major part of the prayer.

So with Nehemiah, as he is praying, he just says, you know, you are the God that keeps covenant and mercy for those that love you and observe your commandments. Now I ask you, Lord, to listen to me because I've been praying day and night for the children of Israel, and I confess their sins. What they have is what was coming.

I'm not challenging or questioning the justice of God in this. Lord, we've all sinned. We are guilty, and you even said to Moses that, you know, if the people would forsake you that they would go, you know, we're wrong.

We're guilty. We were dispersed, and you were faithful. You keep your covenant, and that's a part of the covenant that you made, and you're faithful, God.

But you also said 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've chosen to set your name. Now I want you to remember, Lord, these are your servants. They're your people who you redeemed with your great power and by your strong hand.

And now he finally gets the petition. The rest of it is just talking to God about the faithfulness of God and all, but now he gets the petition. Oh, Lord, I beseech thee, let now your ear be attended to my prayer, to the prayer of your servants, 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. That's all he prayed.

God, give me mercy in the sight of the king. Because he said, I was the king's cupbearer. Now, when the king observed his sad countenance, he said, what's wrong? Nehemiah was sort of taken by surprise.

He didn't know that what he was feeling was showing and it wasn't good. It wasn't healthy to be sad in front of the king. And so when the king says, what's your problem? He threw up a quick prayer and then he asked the king for permission to go back.

That's 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 wasn't the most desirable place in the world to live.

I'm always sort of amazed and shocked at the requirements that many people have for entering into the ministry. Somewhere in the sunbelt, Lord, I need a housing and a car allowance. And I think my salary should be commensurate with the industry standards.

For if I were a chief executive in an industry, then I would be making, you know, 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. He 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 conditions, the dangerous conditions that existed there in order to help these poor people of God.

He was that burden for them. He was willing to go and to share with them. It's like he said, I sat where they sat.

He was willing to do that. And no sacrifice is too great if God will just use me. It's sort of sad and tragic how a little comfort and a little success can spoil us.

Yes, I'll be glad to come and minister to your people. I require three motel suites with cable TV and a swimming pool. I'll need a rented car, preferably a Lincoln town car, and please arrange to have the food catered to the rooms and no meetings Wednesday night because HBO is having a movie on that I've been wanting to see for a long time.

Well, you'd be better off to go do your act in the nightclub and forget the ministry. I resent it when these music groups or others, you know, write and give me the list of requirements. Whenever that happens, I always write back and say, well, unfortunately, we aren't able to go ahead with your meetings here.

I can't believe it. They can't come on faith. I'm not going to starve anybody.

And I've never starved anybody. I have no intention. But when you start making demands, I'm 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 don't care where it is. It can be up in upstate Michigan where it gets cold in the winter. Some of you from upstate Michigan, the burden for the ministry becomes such a heavy thing that you are as Paul the Apostle who said, woe is me if I preach not this.

Now, let me say that there are a lot of fellas in the ministry that shouldn't be. And the Bible encourages us to examine ourselves. For if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged of God.

Take a look at your own life. Take a look at your own ministry. Let the Holy Spirit really search your heart.

As David prayed, Lord, search my heart. Know me. Try me, oh Lord.

See what's there. My heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? God, thou knowest the heart.

Thou searchest the rain. Search me, oh God. Reveal to me, Lord, my motive.

Lord, if my burden has somehow slackened, if other things have sort of crowded into my life and I'm no longer excited and thrilled about the ministry, I no longer have that heavy burden. I'm no longer weeping over the needs of the people. I'm no longer spending nights and days in prayer, morning, fasting, waiting on God.

But it's become routine. My life, my schedule has become routine. Then God helped me either to be revived or to give the people a break and get out.

The call of God is essential for the ministry. Though it's out of context, out of Peter, make your calling and election sure. He's talking, I'm certain, about salvation there.

Yet I think that it's 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 call and the burden on my heart? Pray. Father, we thank you for this opportunity that we have of gathering and looking again at our ministries and being better equipped to fulfill your calling upon our hearts.

Bless, Lord, in the subsequent sessions, in the workshops. And Lord, we pray that when we pack up to leave on Thursday, it will be with a fresh vision, a fresh burden, a fresh calling of God, a certainty in our hearts that we are where God would have us to be and doing what God wants us to do. In Jesus' name, amen.

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