

# (A Spiritual Leader) 1. Called by God

by Zac Poonen

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*A spiritual leader must be called by God, not just a profession, to truly serve the Lord and care for their flock.*

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 2:7

**Topics:** "Spiritual Leadership", "Gods Calling"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of being called by God to serve as a spiritual leader, rather than pursuing it as a profession for personal gain. He contrasts the dedication of a mother to her child with that of a nurse to illustrate the difference between a calling and a profession in ministry. Poonen shares his personal experience of being called by God and highlights the unwavering commitment and trust in God's provision that comes with answering that call.

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## Transcript

A spiritual leader will first and foremost, have a calling from God. His work will not be his profession, but his calling.

No-one can appoint himself as a spiritual leader. "He has to be called by God for this work" (Heb.5:4-Living). This is a principle that cannot be changed. The next verse goes on to say that even Jesus did not appoint Himself as our High Priest. The Father appointed Him. If that be the case, how much more this should be true of us, in our calling.

The tragedy today is that the vast majority of "Christian workers" in India are working to earn their living. It is a profession for them. They have not been called by God.

There is a lot of difference between "a profession" and "a calling". Let me explain what I mean. Suppose there's a sick child in a hospital and a nurse looks after it for 8 hours on her shift-duty. That nurse then goes home and forgets all about that child. Her concern for that child was only for 8 hours. Now she has other things to do, such as going to the movies and watching television. She doesn't have to think about that child again until the next day when she goes back to work. But the mother of that child doesn't work 8-hour shifts! She can't go to the movies when her child is sick. That's the difference between a profession and a calling.

If you apply that illustration to the way you care for the believers in your church, you'll discover whether you're a nurse or a mother!

Paul said, in 1 Thessalonians 2:7, "We proved to be gentle among you as a mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well pleased to impart you not only the gospel but also our own lives because you've become very dear to us".

Paul not only imparted the gospel of God to those Christians but his life as well. Any ministry that is not done in this way is not really Christian ministry. Paul served God like that because he had a calling to the ministry. He didn't take it up as a profession.

It's wonderful to serve the Lord. It is the greatest thing in the world. Nothing on earth can be compared with it - but only if you're called. It cannot be reduced to a profession.

God called me to serve Him (full-time) on May 6, 1964 when I was an officer in the Indian Navy. I handed in my resignation then to the naval authorities. But it was like Moses asking Pharaoh to let the Israelites go! The Indian Navy wouldn't release me. It took two years and repeated applications before they finally released me - miraculously - in God's perfect time.

Being called of God has made all the difference in my life.

First of all, it doesn't matter to me now, what people think about me or my ministry, because Someone Else is my Master and I have to answer only to Him.

Secondly, I can trust God to stand by me and give me grace whenever I face any trial or opposition in my ministry - and that happens often.

Thirdly, it doesn't matter to me whether I receive any money or not, and whether I get any food to eat or not. If I receive food and money, well and good. If I don't get any food or money, that's fine with me too. I cannot stop serving the Lord, just because I didn't get money or food - because God has called me.

I can't get rid of my calling. I'm not a salaried employee who can stop working when I'm not paid or fed! It's like the case of the mother and her child. A nurse will stop working if her salary is not paid one month. But a mother can never stop. She doesn't get a salary in any case! And she'll look after her baby even if she doesn't get any food or money! That's how the apostles served the Lord.

What a glorious thing it is to be called of God!

You can never do the Lord's work, the way God wants you to do it, if you do it as a profession. It has to be a calling or nothing. Every other job in the world can be done as a profession. But not a mother's, or a father's, or that of a servant of the Lord! All these are the result of a calling. Paul told the Corinthian Christians that even if they had 10,000 teachers, they still had only one father (1 Cor.4:15). Paul was both a spiritual father and a mother to his flock. His was not a profession but a calling.

"Take this child and nurse him for me and I shall give you your wages" is what the Lord has said to me (Exod.2:9). He said that to me first of all concerning my own physical children. And then He said that to me concerning my spiritual children too. When we take care of God's children He's the One Who is responsible to give us our wages, not man. If we serve men, then let us look to men to pay us. But if we serve the Lord, then let us look to Him alone to provide us our needs, in whatever way He sees fit. And let Him also decide how much we should receive each month. There is a dignity about a true servant of the Lord.

But it is possible that you as an elder feel no such sense of responsibility for the people in your church. You may content yourself with teaching the Bible every Sunday. But you may get a surprise when Jesus comes again and evaluates your ministry and you discover that your entire earthly ministry was only wood, hay and straw, fit only for being burnt (1 Cor.3:12,13). Think of the tragedy that will be! If you take this warning seriously now, it could reduce your regret at the judgment seat of Christ.

All of us are going to have some degree of regret when Christ comes again, concerning the way we lived and served the Lord. But we can reduce that regret by examining our ways and judging ourselves now. We must evaluate our ministry and see how it will look in the light of that day.

"Take these children and nurse them for Me", says the Lord, "Bring them up for me and I will give you your wages". Those wages will not be in terms of money, primarily. I believe the Lord takes care of our earthly needs, since He taught us to pray for our daily bread and He has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. So He will take care of all our earthly needs. But there'll be a far greater spiritual reward, in addition.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica that they were going to be his crown and his joy when the Lord returned (1 Thess.2:19). He found his delight in them, just as a father finds his delight in his children.

An elder (who is a spiritual father) will be delighted when he sees that believers, who came as raw material to his church once, have now become men of God. This is something akin to the delight a sculptor has when he has fashioned a shapeless rock into a human form. He had to chip away at that block for many months and years before the face and figure of the man came out of it! That is the work that God has given us to do too. We must never be satisfied with merely having instructed people correctly. If the image of Christ has not come forth in their lives, we have accomplished nothing at all.

An earthly father is also delighted when his children can stand on their own feet. He doesn't want them to be perpetually dependent on him. A true spiritual father will be like that too. He'll make himself dispensable - less and less needed by his spiritual children as they grow and mature.

Consider a home where there are 12 children. You may wonder how any mother can manage twelve children, when your wife finds it difficult with even two! But amazingly, in the long run, the mother of twelve has less work to do than the mother of two! That's because the mother of 12 trains her older children to help her in the home. Ultimately the children do all the work and the mother is totally free! This is what we must do as shepherds in our churches too - delegate.

But what do we see in most churches? Overburdened pastors are becoming nervous wrecks because they have to do everything themselves. (That mother of 12 would become a nervous wreck too, if she had to take care of all her children herself.) Many churches are like orphanages where

hundreds of babies lie on the floor, kicking their legs, wailing and holding on to their feeding-bottles. This is the result of a one-man ministry. The believers never grow up, because they are never given any responsibility. In the Body of Christ, each member has a task to fulfil.

Jesus disciplined only twelve people and I don't think any man can handle more than that number effectively, at a time. So by that reckoning, a church of 120 people should have at least ten pastors taking care of the flock. By "pastors", I do not mean full-time workers, but brothers working in a secular job, who have been gifted with a shepherd's heart to care for the sheep and encourage them.

The harvest is plenteous today. But the true shepherds are few. If you serve the Lord, let it be because God has called you to serve Him, and not because you want to earn a living, or for the sake of man's honour!

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/a-spiritual-leader-1-called-by-god/>

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