The Missionary Call

by Oswald J. Smith

What constitutes a Call? Is there any way of knowing the will of God? How can one be sure?

I think there is. In fact, I am certain. God would not leave His servants in darkness.

But let me give you James Gilmour’s experience. It is well worth quoting. How was he called, and why did he go to the Mongols? This is how he puts it:

Â“Is the Kingdom a harvest field? Then I thought it reasonable that I should seek to work where the work was most abundant and the workers fewest. Laborers say they are overtaxed at home; what, then, must be the case abroad, where the re are wide-stretching plains already white to harvest with scarcely here and there a solitary reaper?

Â“To me the soul of an Indian seemed as precious as the soul of an Englishman, and the Gospel as much for the Chinese as for the European; and the band of missionaries was few compared with the company of ministers at home, it seemed to me clearly to be my duty to go abroad.

Â“But I go out as a missionary, not that I may follow the dictates of common sense, but that I may obey that command of Christ, Â‘Go into all the world and preach.Â’ This command seems to be strictly a missionary injunction; so that, apart altogether from choice and other lower reason, my going forth is a matter of obedience to a plain command: and in place of seeking to assign a reason for going abroad, I would prefer to say that I have failed to discover any reason why I should stay at home.Â”

Gilmour went in response to the Great Commission. His Captain ordered him to Â“goÂ” and he went. He went because he could find no adequate reason for staying at home. He went to the foreign field because, as he says, there the workers were fewest. What a heroic decision!

What was Charles T. StuddÂ’s reason for going? Studd, you remember, gave away a fortuneÂ—$145,000. He could have lived at home in great luxury, but he chose rather to give away all that he had and go to China as a missionary. Why? Strange as it may seem, it was the statement of an atheist that started him on his way. It so gripped him when he read it that he felt he must leave all and follow Jesus Christ. Here it is:

Â“Did I firmly believe, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, religion would mean to me everything. I would cast away earthly enjoyment as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought, and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I would labor in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of Eternity only. I would esteem one soul gained for Heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences should never stay my hand, nor shall my lips. Earth, its joys and griefs, would occupy no moment in my thoughts. I would strive to look upon Eternity alone, and on the immortal Souls around me, soon to be everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable. I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be, Â‘What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?Â’

Is that the way you feel? Have you, too, felt the urge? Does the Word of God burn like a fire in your heart? Have you no rest day or night because you do not go?

Â“When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soulÂ” (Ez. 33:8-9).
The Need and the Urge

That means, of course, that the need is the Call. Men are dying. You have the Message of Life. Are you going to withhold it from them? The responsibility rests upon you... To me the Call is that divine urge, that compelling impulse, that passion within that makes it impossible for me to resist. There is something within that is calling, ever calling. I am restless. I am like a hunter's dog on the leash, straining to get away. It is that irresistible Â‘must.Â’ The divine fire burns within my heart. I rise from my desk and rapidly pace the floor, praying, crying to God. My mind is not on what I am doing. I see the distant fields. I feel that, come what may, I have no choice but to go. I am not satisfied to settle down where I am. One time I expressed it like this:

Hark! Â‘tis a Voice that calls to me Out of the depths of mystery.

It was that inner Voice that spoke to my soul and called me into the ministry and to the mission fields of the world. I cannot explain it, except to speak of it as an Â‘urgeÂ’ that was with me night and day. That urge I followed, and I have never been disappointed.

Stir me, Oh! stir me, LordÂ— I care not how, But stir my heart in passion for the world. Stir me to give, to go, but most to pray. Stir, till the Blood-red banner be unfurled OÂ’er lands that still in heathen darkness lie, OÂ’er deserts where no Cross is lifted high.

If you really want to hear GodÂ’s voice, and if you want to do His will, I can tell you how you may find out whether or not He has called you to the foreign field. Just do two things.

First, start praying about your lifeÂ’s work, and pray every day. Set aside a time to wait on God about it. Pray Â‘Lord, what would you have me to do?Â’ Every day talk to God about it.

Second, as you pray, read missionary biographies. When I was a student I purchased a whole shelf of biographies and read two or three chapters each day. You young women should be perfectly familiar with the life stories of Ann Judson, Mary Slessor, and other missionary heroines. You young men should know the lives of Livingstone, Moffat, MacKay, Gilmour, Morrison, Taylor and other great missionary heroes.

Why do I tell you to study biographies? Because in this twentieth century you are living in an atmosphere in which God cannot speak to you. If you will read missionary biographies, you will be putting yourself into an atmosphere where God can talk to you.

Hence as you read biographies, and then pray about your lifeÂ’s work day by day, you will hear the voice of God. Before long you will be burdened for some particular field, after you have finished your training, you will find yourself in the place of GodÂ’s choosing for you.

That is the way most missionaries have heard GodÂ’s Call. As I said before, it is the Divine urge. It is the voice of the Holy Spirit telling you to go, and if you disobey you will do so at your peril. You can never be happy except in the center of GodÂ’s will.

SatanÂ’s Opposition

But no sooner will you decide to become a missionary than Satan will do everything in his power to discourage you. He may make it difficult for you to get the money you need to secure your training. He may turn the members of your own family against you. If he cannot succeed in any other way, he will do what he has done in hundreds of cases. He will get you young women interested in some young man who has no idea of ever becoming a missionary, and if you marry him, you will never be a missionary. He will get you young men interested in some young woman who is not planning upon going to the foreign field, and if you marry her that will be the end of your missionary work forever.

I cannot tell you how many have come to me in the middle age and have said, Â‘Dr. Smith, God called me to be a missionary, but I married a man who was not going, and now we have a family. We are in middle life and it is too late. I have missed GodÂ’s best and now I must take His second best.Â’ And I have had them break down and weep. Listen, young people, if God has called you and you have become an active volunteer, then you have no right to ever keep company with anyone except someone who is traveling in your direction, and if you do that you will both reach the same destination.
Thus, you will be called, and thus you will be guided, and if you will faithfully follow these suggestions, God will lead you into the most glorious work ever committed to man. You will become a missionary, your life will be invested in a worthwhile work, and, conscious of the leading of the Lord, you will never be disappointed. You can do what millions of others have done if you want to. You can settle down to the monotony of American life, get married, raise children, work, retire, die and be forgotten, or— you can become a pioneer, a trail-blazer, invest your life in a great adventure for God, and be the first to give some unreached tribe the Gospel, and be re-membered forever. Which is it to be? It is for you to decide.

John G. Paton argued this way: “I clearly saw that all at home had free access to the Bible and the means of Grace, with Gospel light shining all around them, while the poor heathen were perishing without even the chance of knowing all God’s love and mercy to men.”

Will you then listen to His voice and answer, “Here am I, Lord, send me?”