



# What is a Missionary Calling?

The idea of a missionary “calling” is an important reality for God’s people and for the mission of the church. Many “sent-out” ones can testify to the stabilizing power of a missionary calling. The crucial question, however, is how does the Bible speak about missionary calling and what does that mean for “sent ones,” churches, and leaders as they navigate their responsibility to the nations? While the Bible most often speaks of “calling” as it relates to salvation, a few key passages speak to the idea of a missionary “calling.” In this study, we’ll zero in on those passages and see what God has in mind for a missionary calling and how it operates today.

In three key passages, Paul’s missionary calling is described in distinctive language. The initial text is that powerful scene of Saul and Barnabas’ calling at Antioch where the Holy Spirit says, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:3). In both Romans 1 and Galatians 1 Paul returns to those words to describe how he was called and set apart for a particular work.

The foundational observation from this initial survey of these three passages is that God sets apart some disciples for the “work” of missions. This is a basic but very important point. In the Bible, there is such a thing as “missionary work,” and there is also a calling from God to be a part of it. The work of missions—pioneering evangelism and church planting among unreached peoples—is not the work of every believer. Despite many well-meaning statements to the contrary, not all Christians are missionaries. Some are “set apart” to go. How, then, do we determine who those people are? Or whether you may be one of them?

Let’s look more deeply at these three passages in the New Testament to better understand what a missionary calling is and how it happens. Read through the following passages and answer the questions that follow:

Read Acts 13:1-3:

1. Who called Saul and Barnabas? What were they called to do?
2. What was the church's role in Saul and Barnabas' "sending?"
3. What had Saul and Barnabas been doing prior to their calling (Acts 11:19-30)?

Read Rom. 1:1-15:

1. How does Paul describe his calling?
2. Why did Paul want to go to Rome?
3. How does Paul describe his desire to do the ministry?

Read Gal. 1:15-17:

1. How does Paul describe his calling?
2. What was he called to do?

From this study, some foundational truths about the missionary calling emerge:

- The missionary call comes from an encounter with God and His heart for the nations.
- The missionary call comes through faithful engagement in God's work where we are.
- The missionary call produces a godly ambition to be a part of God's mission among the nations.
- The missionary call is affirmed through God's people and through abiding in Him.

With these foundational Biblical truths in place, let's apply these principles to practical questions of calling:

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Encounter

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- How would you describe biblically God's desire for the salvation of the nations?
- What does the Bible say about the unreached? About the missionary task?
- How much do you know about the progress of the Gospel around the world?

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Engage

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- How are you being faithful where you are in making disciples of the nations?
- All churches are called to be a part of sending workers to the nations. How are you involved in that process right now in your local church?
- How does praying for the nations form a part of your prayer life?

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Aspire

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- How do the truths about God's heart for the nations and the state of the Gospel affect you personally?
- Do you have a burden for the lost? Does lostness trouble you?
- Do you desire to be a part of this work? Do you aspire to be a sent-one?

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Affirm

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- How have your church leaders or others affirmed this calling in your life?

- How has the Spirit led you toward relationships or openings that point you to the nations?
- How does your daily walk with the Lord affirm your calling?
- What are next steps for you in the process of either being sent or being a sender?

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## Resources

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### Encounter:

*Let the Nations Be Glad!* by John Piper

*Paul the Missionary* by Eckhard Schnabel

*Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* by Roland Allen

IMB Prayer [app](#)

[Joshua Project](#)

[Pray ASAP](#)

[NPL Prayer app](#)

### Engage:

[Three Circles EV Tool](#)

Help your church expand missions [opportunities](#)

### Affirm:

Talk with your church leadership about opportunities to go and/or to equip goers.

Talk with a missionary leader about opportunities on the field.

