

Is God Calling me? Answering the Question Every Believer Asks

By Jeff Iorg

Chapter-by-Chapter Summary by Miles Mullin

Introduction – “A Conversation about the Question”

“Is God Calling Me?” is a question for every Christian, not just those considering full-time, paid, Christian ministry. It is *the question* to answer when choosing (any) career or entering a ministry assignment (volunteer or paid). It is a question that should be asked and answered many times throughout a Christian’s life.

Iorg believes that God is calling “a new generation of passionate kingdom leaders who will accelerate the fulfillment of the Great Commission (3),” regardless of their employment, and we need to believe that and embrace it, calling out the called, so to speak.

Chapter 1 – Defining the Concept of Call

“Called” is used in many ways in our culture—and not just Christian circles.

Iorg believes that a Christian call does two things in a believer’s life: 1) it brings new information from God regarding how to live, and 2) the assignment of a new responsibility in his Kingdom.

Even though he recognizes it has been abused by some, Iorg does not shy away from the internal, experiential, subjective aspect of the call, but insists that an internal sense of calling is critical.

He defines a call as “a profound impression from God that establishes parameters for your life and can be altered only by a subsequent, superseding impression from God (8).” A call gives parameters to a person’s life, directing not only their yes-es, but also their no-es. A call means that a person both 1) pursues ministry as a calling, and 2) perseveres through tough times (14).

Chapter 2 – “Three Types of Call Experiences”

According to Iorg, there are three types of call experiences in the Bible — “one experienced by every believer and the other two reserved for people called to ministry leadership (17).” Although “distinct” they are “related to one another” and, in my (Miles’s) estimation, build on each other. The three calls that Iorg identifies are:

1. *Universal Call* – to service and growth; all believers
2. *General Call* – to ministry leadership; some believers; sometimes paid position
3. *Specific Call* – to a unique/particular ministry assignment position

In the **Universal Call**, upon their conversion, all believers are called to a changed life that involves growth and service. In terms of vocation, every believer’s work is a “an avenue for Christian service (20).” Iorg helpfully reminds us that, “God wants *most* believers employed secularly, living the gospel among the people with whom they work. A vital part of answering God’s universal call to Christian service and growth is serving God through your work—whatever your vocation may be (21).” Hobbies and social activities should be the same.

The **General Call** is a call to **ministry leadership**. Iorg reminds us that this is not properly termed “full-time Christian service” because all Christians are called to that. Neither is it “vocational Christian service” as many may be called to serve co-vocationally or without pay at all (e.g. lay elders). Iorg also encourages us to avoid the terms “gospel ministry” (all are called to this) and “called to preach” (not all ministry callings are to preaching.) Iorg uses the term **ministry leadership**, which is more generalized. [Note: Here, I (Miles) think we can expand this to include a general call to non-pastoral service in the church. Those folks should likewise be called in a general sense before the specificity of that call is clear.] This section (pp. 22-26) is very helpful in expanding the idea of ministry calling beyond just “the preacher.”

The **Specific Call** has to do with a particular ministry assignment. This involves a specific role (or job) that is a narrower expression of the general call that a person experiences. It involves both an internal call (~sense of God’s leading) and external call (affirmation by others). [Note: Here, I (Miles) think we also see (non-paid) callings to serve within the church in specific ways, like deacons, worship leaders, women in ministry leadership, etc. Folks serving in those roles should likewise be called.]

Chapter 3 – “Three Ways God Calls”

Although we should not expect a calling to ministry leadership to look exactly like various callings we see in the Bible, those examples indicate that there are “patterns to how God calls (31).” Iorg identifies three general patterns of calling: 1) sudden experiences, 2) reasoned decisions, and 3) the prompting of others. Iorg notes that these patterns can be “blended” in a particular instance.

1. *Sudden Experience* (a crisis) – like Moses or Paul
2. *Reasoned Decision* (contemplation) – the Macedonian Call (Acts 16)
3. *Prompting of Others* (community) – David Anointed or Paul and Barnabas set aside (Acts 13)

Iorg argues that, while the manner of calling may vary, each is a supernatural experience in which what is most important is “the source and purpose,” not the “circumstances (32).”

Chapter 4 – “Who God Calls”

In this chapter, Iorg makes the case that God calls whomever He chooses to salvation, growth, and ministry leadership. People are called based on “who they can become by His grace, not for who they already are (50).” God calls:

1. *Unexpected people* – like younger brothers in the OT
2. *Immoral people* – like those who have previously engaged in sexual immorality
3. *Anonymous people* – who will do great Kingdom work but remain unknown
4. *Inconsistent people* – who will make mistakes and not always live up to their calling; we are all “works in progress.”

In our current cultural context, it is especially important to note regarding #2 (immorality) Iorg argues that neither past sexual immorality nor a history of having been abused “make a person ineligible for God’s call.” He insists that “If you have immorality in you past, God can still use you. If you have been

victimized by another person's immoral choices, God can still use you. Listen for his call and don't use your past as an excuse to ignore God and miss the future he has for you (53)."

At the same time, he gives a strong warning about serious nature of sexual immorality for ministry leaders, writing, "Still, be clear about this: once God calls you, he expects you to uphold the high standard of moral purity expected of ministry leaders... Sure, sin is the same for all people, but the consequences of sexual sin in a ministry leader's life are far more devastating than the same failure by a follower (53)."

The last paragraph in this chapter is a great summary:

"God calls all kind of people to serve him. Don't ignore God's call because you don't think you are the kind of person that God can use. Don't disqualify yourself because of past sin. Realize that God calls all kinds of people to a variety of roles, including some obscure but important assignments that matter a great deal to him. Accept your frailty. God does. Accept your role no matter how insignificant it seems to you. God will use you despite your weaknesses, inadequacies, and inconsistencies.

Don't make excuses based on your past or perceived inadequacies. Obey God's call in your life—whoever you are and wherever he assigns you. (57-58)."

Note: By taking this position, Iorg is NOT arguing that sexual abusers should be qualified for ministry. He is talking about sexual immorality, not abuse or assault.

Chapter 5 – “Discerning God’s Call”

Discerning God's call can be a challenge, but Iorg highlights five “signposts” that can help discern a call to ministry leadership.

1. *Inner Peace* – there should be an inner peace or quiet confidence that God is leading you into ministry leadership (in general) or a specific ministry assignment (in particular)
2. *Confirmation by Others* – God often uses others to help confirm a call to ministry leadership. This can be either an informal process (like conversations) or a formal process (like a mission board process). Iorg highlights several groups of people whose opinions ought to be given weight:
 - a. Spiritual Leaders
 - b. Family
 - c. Spouse
3. *Effectiveness in Ministry* – a person who is called to ministry leadership is often already effective in ministry. This does not mean success as the world defines it, but that “you have seen God work through you, appropriate to your skill level and opportunity, to effect spiritual result in people's lives (66).” Some other indicators may be a) if people always seem to want to follow you and b) if you see spiritual results in your efforts.
4. *Joy in the Ministry* – those called to ministry leadership should have a joy in the ministry they find when passion and opportunity intersect. Since ministry is about people, this should involve an honest assessment of how you feel about working with people—especially the hard ones.
5. *Realistic Expectations about Ministry* – someone called to ministry will not do it to meet personal needs, to make money, earn respect, or to please others but simply to obey and serve the Lord.

Chapter 6 – “The Effects of God’s Call”

Although God gives all believers confidence, perseverance, authority, and humility, those called to ministry leadership will receive an “extra measure of them (73).”

1. *Confidence* – God’s call gives you confidence that you are suited for this work. Iorg also reminds readers that no one is strong in every area of leadership; he exhorts leaders to “Play to their strengths.”
2. *Perseverance* – God’s call means a leader is placed in a position by God. They will not want to disappoint Him.
3. *Appropriate Authority* – if called to ministry leadership, leaders should lead. Being called infuses a person with authority, i.e. people expect them to lead in whatever position to which they are called, but... not in a despotic “thus says the Lord through me and only me” (76) sort of approach. Preparation is necessary for leadership.
 - a. Calling is not enough to empower for ministry. Preparation is necessary as well.
 - b. Preparation is biblical (David, Moses, Paul, etc.) and should not be short-circuited.
 - c. “A call to lead is always a call to prepare (80).”
 - d. Informal training is necessary, but not sufficient. “Informal training needs to be balanced by the discipline and perspective more formal training provides (81).”
 - e. Iorg gives 5 advantages to formal training and addresses 4 common objections to it (82-83).
4. *Humility* – “God’s call produces humility, not pride.” Everything we have, including a calling and giftedness, is something we received. 1 Cor. 4.7
 - a. Ministry leaders are not superior to anyone, even those they lead
 - b. Ministry leadership is a “received ministry, not an achieved ministry (85).”

Chapter 7 – “The Call to Missions”

God calls to all sorts of ministry leadership positions, but missions and pastoral ministry are each “so vital they deserve special consideration (87).”

“A call to missions—to be a missionary—is a call to invest your life communicating the gospel, making disciples, planting churches, and training leaders in a cross-cultural (often international) context (87).”

A call to missions is usually gradual and takes place over time.

The call to missions:

- Starts at conversion
 - All believers are “on mission” once they are converted
 - “When you were saved, you were sent on mission with the gospel. In that sense, every believer is called to missions, to living a missional lifestyle. Some, of course, are later called to a leadership role as missionary.” (90)
- Is a call to people, not places
 - Drawing on the biblical story of Paul, Iorg asks, “who are your Gentiles?” Who has God called you to restructure your life to reach.
 - In the 21st century this is more the case as national borders mean less, migration happens more often, and people groups can be found anywhere.

- Iorg gives the example of a couple called to work with Vietnamese people who ended up in Germany. Why? 100,000 ethnic Vietnamese folks in Germany.
 - o All of us should ask, “Who are my Gentiles” to help create intentionality about who we are called to reach. For some, “their answer is people in another cultural, ethnic, or language group (94).”
- Involves us in God’s Eternal Purpose – so much of life is temporal, but leading people to Jesus and helping establish His church(es) has eternal impact and value. The results are forever.
- Requires sacrifice – Paul even goes so far as to describe them as “afflictions” (Eph. 3.13)

Chapter 8 – The Call to Pastoral Ministry

Iorg dedicates a whole chapter to pastoral ministry which he defines as “anyone who is called to pastoral leadership. This primarily means being a senior pastor or lead pastor, but also includes the various kinds of site pastors in churches today (101).” [Note by Miles: here Iorg uses the term “pastoral leadership” but leaves it vaguely defined or undefined. Those using the book may want to be clearer about what is meant in their particular church.]

Iorg argues that this chapter is for everyone. Even if someone is not called to be a pastor, they should keep reading.

- First, they might be wrong.
- Second, they may be needed at some point to help their church call a pastor.
- Third (this is Miles’s addition), it will help them understand how to best relate to their pastor(s) who have been called to be a pastor.

“A specific call to pastoral leadership emerges from the general call to ministry leadership.” (102)

- Pastoral ministry is a “refinement of God’s general call, not the defining standard” (102)
- The calling of God, as Iorg has argued throughout the book, is progressive.
- This does not mean that the call to pastoral leadership is not unique and special. It is.

Iorg notes that too few people are willing to serve in ministry but not as a pastor. He expects that this will create a pastoral shortage. To help address this, we must once again “elevate” the “pastoral call to its appropriate role and importance (102).”

The Pastoral Call is a High Calling – it is the most clearly defined leadership role in the NT because it is so important. It is so important because the church, where pastoral leadership plays itself out, is so important. It is a “noble work.” “Pastors are important because of the value God places on the people they lead (105).”

The Pastoral Call is a Character Calling – the Bible most often focuses on the character of pastors, not competency. They are to be examples. This is one reason why some people avoid the pastoral call: “They don’t want the pressure of being a moral example in their church and community (106).”

People shouldn’t expect pastors to be perfect, but pastors should live exemplary lives. Iorg also notes the significant way in which pastoring tests character.

Being a pastor is tough!

The Pastoral Call is a Family Calling – you cannot escape the reality that the pastor’s family is significantly involved in ministry. A wife needs to be supportive, although there is not one model for what a pastor’s wife should be like.

lorg also warns against using “family” as an excuse not to enter pastoral ministry. He even points out the positives of being a pastor’s family (109-110).

The Pastoral Call is a Community Calling – “A pastoral calling is a community calling, a stewardship that must be protected and nurtured as part of the opportunity God gives pastors to impact the culture (111).”

Epilogue – “Continuing the Conversation”

lorg recognizes that a call cannot be discerned via answering questions but provides twelve questions as helps to readers considering whether they are being called to ministry leadership.