

Calling Out the Called

**Discipling
Those
Called to
Ministry
Leadership**

**SCOTT PACE
SHANE PRUITT**

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To all the faithful servants who are calling out and disciplining
those called to ministry leadership.

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To my beloved Savior and exalted King, Jesus Christ: may you receive the honor and glory for any fruit born by this labor of love given as an offering to you!

Scott Pace

Wake Forest, North Carolina

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Shane Pruitt
Rockwall, Texas

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INTRODUCTION

Calling Out the Callers

Hard Questions and Honest Answers

Have you ever had a sinking feeling that a big problem is lurking around the corner? Maybe you've noticed drops of oil on your garage floor or a growing water stain on your ceiling. These scenarios are examples of small symptoms behind much larger problems. Whether they are the result of unintentional oversights or reveal negligence on our part, you can be certain that the cost and collateral damage will be far greater if you don't confront the issue head-on.

In many ways, we face a similar situation related to ministry leadership. Concerning indicators demand our attention. In 1992, Barna reported that the median age for Protestant pastors was forty-four. Approximately one-third of pastors were under the age of forty, and more than 75 percent of pastors were under the age

of fifty-five. Twenty-five years later, in 2017, Barna revealed that the median age had increased to fifty-four with only 50 percent of pastors being younger than fifty-five. Perhaps the most staggering number was the steep decline of pastors under the age of forty that plummeted to less than 15 percent! As David Kinnaman, president of Barna Research, observed, these numbers represent a “substantial crisis” since “there are now more full-time senior pastors over the age of sixty-five than under the age of forty.”¹

Although a variety of dynamics contribute to these concerning trends, the combination of a reduced emphasis on ministerial calling and a corresponding lack of interest among younger believers are two of the primary factors. Supporting Barna’s results, Lifeway Research reported that 70 percent of pastors believe young leaders view “other kinds of work” as more important than vocational ministry, and 69 percent of pastors indicated that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find mature young Christians who aspire to be in vocational ministry.²

These statistics go well beyond the caution level of oil drops and water stains. They are blaring alarms of the catastrophic consequences if we fail to address them with anything less than a zealous and concerted effort. In response to these alarming trends, Kinnaman concludes, “It is urgent that denominations, networks and independent churches determine how to best motivate, mobilize, resource and deploy more younger pastors.”³ In other words, we must renew our commitment to passionately and persistently “calling out the called”!

But before we do, we must consider three foundational aspects of the conversation: (1) the concept of “calling” and what we believe

about its nature; (2) the current state of the ministry landscape, including obstacles and objections to promoting a ministerial calling; and (3) practical ways we can cultivate a ministry climate that helps people discern a call to ministry. Three questions will help us address each of these foundational issues.

How Should We Think about Calling?

To answer this question, we must begin by asking and answering the question of whether a “call to ministry” even exists. As you reflect on your own personal testimony (or current ministry position!), that probing thought may create some angst. But we cannot afford to build a conversation on a presumed premise that is largely based on conventional thought or subjective experience. Therefore, we must look to the Scriptures to determine if God calls some people to vocational ministry.

Throughout the Bible, God has identified and set apart certain individuals for specific purposes. Old Testament examples abound, including Noah (Gen. 6), Abram (Gen. 12), Moses (Exod. 3), Deborah (Judges 4), Samuel (1 Sam. 3), David (1 Sam. 16), Nehemiah (Neh. 1), Esther (Esther 4), Isaiah (Isa. 6), Jeremiah (Jer. 1), and countless other prophets, priests, and kings. Hebrews 11 recounts even more testimonies of those who played a particular role within God’s redemptive plan, including those who lack substantial notoriety. Likewise, the New Testament includes strategically appointed individuals, such as the twelve apostles (Matt. 10), Steven (Acts 7), Philip (Acts 8), Saul (Acts 9), Barnabas (Acts 11), Silas (Acts 15), Lydia (Acts 16), Phoebe (Rom. 16), Epaphroditus

(Phil. 3), and a variety of other faithful servants of varying levels of recognition mentioned throughout the epistles.

While this assures us that God uses everyday individuals to accomplish his extraordinary plans, these biblical examples by themselves do not definitively validate the notion of a ministerial calling. However, the personal nature of God's will that these testimonies demonstrate is a crucial part of the concept.

In addition to the individual purpose God has for each of his people, there is also biblical precedent for those who are set apart specifically for the purpose of spiritual service and leadership. In the Old Testament, prophets were designated to declare the word of the Lord to God's people and were also set apart for God's spiritual purposes. For example, Jeremiah's testimony affirms that he was chosen, "set apart," and "appointed" as a "prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). Likewise, Aaron and his sons (the Levites) were chosen to serve the Lord as priests in the tabernacle and temple (Exod. 28–29; Num. 18:2–6).

Another appointed office of spiritual leadership in the Old Testament was the king. Although his role could not supersede the work of priests (1 Sam. 13), kings were responsible for the spiritual health of God's people and were intended to lead them according to God's law. King Josiah exhibited this godly leadership in implementing his spiritual reforms that renewed God's covenant with his people (2 Kings 23). These offices were God's representatives who ultimately foreshadowed Jesus as the true Prophet, Priest, and King.

Similarly, in the New Testament, the Lord designated spiritual leaders for his covenant people. God provided personified gifts (i.e., pastors, evangelists, teachers) to the church "to equip the saints for

the work of ministry” and “to build up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12). It is also noteworthy that the offices of church leadership, pastors and deacons, have prescribed standards that reserve them for appointed individuals (1 Tim. 3:8–13; 1 Tim. 1:5–9). And Peter provided specific instruction to church elders regarding their designated responsibility to “shepherd God’s flock” (1 Pet. 5:1–4). In doing so, these spiritual leaders ultimately represent Jesus, the chief Shepherd and Overseer (1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4), as they serve and minister to God’s people.

While these passages do not limit spiritual leadership to a particular office or role, they effectively demonstrate the reality of qualified individuals set apart to serve in specific ministerial capacities. In addition, Scripture affirms the vocational nature of such roles by compensating those who dedicate their lives to spiritual service and leadership. In the Old Testament, the Levites were supported through designated provisions (Num. 18:21) while the New Testament advocates for spiritual leaders to receive financial support from the church (1 Cor. 9:6–12; 1 Tim. 5:17–18).

The combination of God’s individual purpose for believers, designated spiritual leadership among his people, and affirmation of vocational service capacities collectively support the concept of ministerial calling. But the “call” must also be affirmed as that which can be personally discerned as God’s purpose for certain individuals to surrender their lives to vocational ministry.

While those who are “called” typically refers to all believers (Jude 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:2), the gracious salvation we all share (1 Cor. 1:9), and God’s sanctifying purpose for all of his people (1 Thess. 4:3, 7), other scriptural references affirm the ministerial aspect of “calling”

as well. For instance, the author of Hebrews references Aaron's role as a priest not as one that he assumed but one he was assigned and "*called by God*" to perform (Heb. 5:4, emphasis added). Likewise, he refers to Abraham's faith and obedience to follow God's plan "when he was *called*" (Heb. 11:8, emphasis added).

Paul speaks of his own experience as a calling that echoes the prophet Jeremiah's testimony, that he was "set apart" from his "mother's womb" and "*called*" by God's grace for the purpose of preaching Christ among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15–16, emphasis added; cf. Jer. 1:5). The term Paul uses, *called*, clearly includes God's call to salvation (cf. Gal. 1:6), but it also involves a designated ministry role for which he was "set apart" within God's plan. In other letters he references his calling according to his ministerial role, identifying himself as "Paul, *called* as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will" (1 Cor. 1:1, emphasis added).

In his final epistle, he encourages Timothy as the young pastor of the church of Ephesus: "[God] has saved us and *called* us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9, emphasis added). And as he prepares for his impending execution, Paul clings to God's specific purpose for his life in dedication to the gospel as one who was "*appointed* a herald, apostle, and teacher" (2 Tim. 1:11, emphasis added). Correspondingly, throughout the letter Paul offers personal instruction to Timothy in his leadership role as "the Lord's servant" (2 Tim. 2:24) and exhorts him to perform his ministerial responsibilities in order to "*fulfill your ministry*" (2 Tim. 4:5, emphasis added).

While subsequent chapters will further clarify the nature of God's call to ministry, how it differs from other vocational callings, and how it can be discerned, this brief overview of biblical evidence

at least provides the necessary support to validate the concept of a “call to ministry” as typically understood. It also raises some other important questions we must consider regarding the responsibility of ministry leaders in “calling out the called.”

Why Don't We Teach about Calling?

In recent decades, the focus has shifted away from intentionally inviting believers to consider vocational ministry as a calling. There are a variety of reasons for this trend, and in identifying some of them, we can navigate the hurdles that have kept us from “calling out the called.”

One of the primary obstacles in this endeavor has been the drift from public invitations in general. Understandably, ministry leaders want to avoid manipulation and any practice that may mislead or confuse those who sit under their teaching. But the possibility of this and even patterns of exploiting the invitation do not justify its elimination. We must be careful to trust the Spirit to work through the power of the gospel and truth of God's Word in leading hearers to respond. We should be clear instead of being clever. We should invite rather than intimidate. As we strive for balance, we must also affirm that an urgent and passionate appeal corresponds with the gravity of the gospel and does not automatically equate with spiritual coercion. Therefore, we must regularly provide opportunities for listeners to respond to the life-changing power of the gospel. And these invitations should span the full spectrum of gospel implications, from initial conversion to ministerial calling and everything in between.

Another challenge we face in “calling out the called” is the unfortunate mischaracterization of what it means to be in vocational ministry. This multifaceted obstacle includes several sources of skewed perspective. For instance, the role of ministry leaders within our communities has gone from a traditional position of respect and esteem to one of scrutiny and maligning. This results from faithful leaders who have refused to compromise the truth of God’s Word by bowing to the hostility of the world and the pressure to conform. It has also resulted from the failures of prominent ministry leaders who have seemingly validated the world’s persistent accusations of hypocrisy. Along with the culture celebrating these moral collapses, these instances have also disenchanted a generation of young believers within the church who now question ministry leaders, their authenticity and integrity, and wonder what it even means to be “in ministry.”

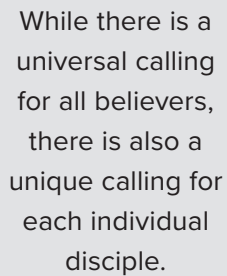
In addition to the unfortunate and the unfounded obstacles, perhaps the greatest obstacle we face is an unintended one. In recent decades the desire to mobilize the church, emphasize spiritual community, and authorize every member to live on mission has essentially neutralized a call to vocational ministry. It is important for us to affirm that, indeed, in the church there is no spiritual “varsity” team of leaders and “junior varsity” team of laity. God calls all believers to serve the local church and fulfill the Great Commission. All Christians have

It is important for us to affirm that, indeed, in the church there is no spiritual “varsity” team of leaders and “junior varsity” team of laity.

the responsibility and privilege of sharing the gospel and standing on the truth of God's Word. In this sense, there is a "universal calling" for *all* believers to serve the Lord and actively participate in his mission. So-called "secular" vocations are intended by God to be missional platforms in our culture and communities. These vocational callings are essential to the gospel mission's being accomplished!

These realities must not only be acknowledged but also asserted within the church. At the same time, we must be careful that we do not undermine the ministerial calling of some in a well-intended (and biblically accurate!) effort to affirm the value of every believer in God's kingdom. While there is a universal calling for all believers, there is also a unique calling for each individual disciple. When we consider the missional heart of our heavenly Father and the size of the task at hand, we can recognize the need for all believers, regardless of their vocational capacity, to leverage their unique calling for the cause of Christ.

Jesus modeled this balanced approach. As he traveled, teaching and preaching the gospel, he was moved with compassion when he considered the lostness of the world around him. As a result, he instructed his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:37–38). In the following chapter, Jesus anointed the twelve apostles and sent them



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out for this purpose. In the same way, we must pray for God to send out workers in all capacities to participate in the harvest while we simultaneously train and mobilize those who are called to serve in vocational roles of ministry leadership.

How Can We Talk about Calling?

If we are going to commit to calling out the called, we must also consider the practical ways we can do this in our ministries that are both biblically sound and personally responsible. While not every ministry context looks the same, some applicable principles and ongoing action points can help facilitate this work and fertilize the soil of any ministry. But it starts with a patient mindset and a humble faith that pursue more of a climate change in our ministries rather than creating lightning-strike moments. Calling should become a concept that is regularly talked about in our ministry in a variety of ways. By integrating some of these principles and practices, we can help facilitate healthy conversations with our people that can lead to prayerful consideration about their potential ministerial calling.

- ***Extend invitations.*** Perhaps the most obvious way we can cultivate this type of calling culture is to regularly include a ministerial calling and its possibility as part of our invitations for response. If our listeners are not aware or do not know that it is an option to prayerfully consider, it is difficult for them to

discern this type of calling as part of God's will for their lives. Our appeals for response, in whatever form is appropriate for your context, should not only provide opportunities for people to trust Christ for salvation, but they should also invite believers to consider vocational ministry and career missions as a possibility.

- ***Share testimonies.*** In any situation, some of the most difficult hurdles to overcome are the fear of the unknown and the misconception of the familiar. Personal testimonies of those who have been called into vocational ministry can help our people disarm their fears and clarify their understanding to consider what full-time ministry service really involves. We should regularly refer to our calling in order to exhort all believers toward obedience and surrender, regardless of their unique calling, and to help those who may be considering a ministerial calling.
- ***Celebrate the church.*** Many people are conditioned to have a negative view of the church. Whether through cultural influence or personal experiences, many believers have been disappointed and have become disenchanted with the church. Beyond the church itself, sometimes we can also be guilty

of bemoaning our ministry responsibilities or complaining about relational dynamics to garner sympathy and appreciation. But this cynical disposition can sour our people toward vocational ministry. While our goal should not be to shield people from the truth or promote a ministry façade, we should model a love for the church as the body and bride of Christ that is positive, affirming, and exhibits gratitude for the privilege of serving the Lord in a ministry capacity.

- ***Provide opportunities.*** A primary element of discerning a call to ministry involves discovering spiritual passions and gifts through service opportunities. We may be guilty, at times, of holding ministry responsibilities with a closed fist instead of an open hand. Whether the result of personal insecurity, a desire for control, a lack of trust in others, or an ego that craves credit, we must relinquish our selfish desires to encourage, enable, and empower others to do the work of the ministry. As people explore, exercise, and employ their spiritual gifts, they may also discern God's calling on their lives to serve in a similar vocational capacity.
- ***Train leaders.*** As we cultivate a ministry environment that cooperates with the Spirit

in calling out the called, we must be prepared to mentor those who discern a call to vocational ministry. There is no substitute for your personal involvement in their lives. In many ways the discipleship process is identical to what we would do for every follower of Christ. And yet, like any other vocational apprenticeship, particular skills, competencies, values, and character attributes are necessary for their success and are learned through experience. Whether we provide this training through a formal internship position or through an intentional mentoring relationship, we must be available to invest in these future leaders. As ministers, this is a weighty matter of personal stewardship because God entrusts us with their development as they discern, clarify, and pursue their calling.

What's Ahead?

In answering these three foundational questions, we prayerfully desire to see God burden the hearts of ministry leaders to join together in an effort to see him raise up a new generation of pastors, missionaries, and ministry leaders as workers in the harvest.

In looking ahead, it is important to recognize what this book is not intended to be. It is not meant to serve as a discipleship manual that develops the spiritual disciplines vital for every believer. Many

resources can provide far greater assistance in developing holy habits and deepening a Christian walk.

Our hope is to provide you with a resource designed with future vocational ministry leaders in mind that can help equip them to be faithful to their calling. If you're currently serving in ministry, how you use this book is completely based on your own gifts and experience, those entrusted to your care, and the calling they are pursuing. If you are one who is discerning your call to ministry, we hope this book will be an encouragement to you and a toolbox that provides you with the basic knowledge and skills essential for ministry success.

Ministry comes with many weighty responsibilities. Ministry leaders are called to teach, serve, and lead. But in leading those under their care, there comes a moment when they recognize the future leaders under their leadership. With this recognition comes an all too familiar question: *What comes next?*

In *Calling Out the Called*, Scott Pace and Shane Pruitt answer this question by giving direction, encouragement, and a charge for ministry leaders to recognize the future leaders in their midst and do what needs to be done for the future of ministry: the calling out of the called.

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