**My Call to Preach**

This subject is what is known as “God-called Ministry.” I have become acutely aware that while those pastors and evangelists that I knew in my youth all testified to a call to ministry through the Holy Spirit, that this has not been the case among many of my friends. I especially became concerned as I sat on Ministerial Credentialing Board and heard stories from young ministers as to what they thought was their “call”. For me, my story of a personal call to ministry has been something that was invaluable to me when I faced times of crisis.

I was at the end of my Junior year at Pasadena College. I had been travelling for the past two years in a very successful quartet for the college, but we learned at the end of the school year that the quartet would not continue because one of our members would be getting married that fall and would not be able to travel for the year. I had finished a chemistry/science major at the time with a good grade average and had been selected by my chemistry professor to be the project leader for a $25,000 grant from Chevron Oil Company to study a particular unstable carbon molecule and write a report. The college’s first spectrometer had already been bought with the money, and that report was going to be under the authorship of my chemistry professor’s name, with my name as a subtitle. The hope was that this study would get me a scholarship for graduate work and begin my life as a research chemist with some company.

Our summer had been particularly anointed. We had Dr. James Dobson, Sr. as the college representative with the quartet who preached each night. It seemed as if we were unusually used by God in those services. At the end of July, when our travel for the college was about a month away from ending, we came to the youth camp at the New Mexico Campground. Going to the youth camps, providing music for the camp, and building relationships with the high school students was one of the major purposes the college had sent us: to attempt to increase the number of students that would apply to the college this year and next.

The camp was again a wonderful time in the Lord. Dr. Curtis Smith, president of Mid-America College in Olathe, Kansas was the speaker, and we had a lot of fun joking with each other during the services as to where the teens should apply to go to college. He was an excellent speaker, and God used him in many ways to help the teens make spiritual decisions.

It was the Friday morning chapel service when God began to speak to me after the quartet had sung, and Dr. Smith began preaching. I could not tell you a thing that he said, but I began to suddenly realize that I was called to preach and to become a local church pastor. I cannot recall all that was revealed to me that morning, but I have tried to write down some of the ways the Spirit dealt with me. I would be happy to email them to you if you email me your address.

Was I frightened. I immediately thought of the commitment that I had made to my chemistry professor. How could I fail him and the school? I also thought of my dad. He was a pastor and had begun to be discouraged with the church and his own ministry. I knew he would be extremely upset that I would go into the ministry—and that proved to be true. I also had developed quite a serious relationship with a girl at school who thought I was going to be a research chemist. How would all of this be handled if I were to acknowledge my call to the ministry?

But God would not let up in His focus of my attention on His calling for me. It was like one of those pictures that many of us have seen that when you look at it, you see one thing, but as you continue to look, you see something else. I could not go back and see the original picture of my life, God had revealed to me a new picture, and I could not deny it. I would either obey, or refuse. I finally said to God, “I know you don’t change your mind, and if you continue to press this issue with me this afternoon, then I will testify to it tonight at the campfire service.”

God did not relent, and so with fear and trepidation, even concern over what my fellow quartet members might say, I announced it that night at the campfire. Some of you have been in camps where on the last night around a campfire, persons are encouraged to take a stick, throw it into the fire, and announce to the crowd the commitment you have made to God during the camp. My commitment was that I believed that God had called me to preach that morning during chapel, and I was going to change the direction of my life to go into the ministry.

I will never forget what happened next. Dr. Gunstream, District Superintendent of the New Mexico District, came up to me and said to me while others were making commitments, “My spirit bears witness with your spirit that this is of the Lord!” I will never forget those words. I have so often gone back to remember them. The next day we packed up and moved on to our quartet schedule. The quartet surprised me by supporting my testimony. One of them even said that he often thought that perhaps I should be a preacher. We sang in services Saturday night, Sunday morning, Sunday night, and then came to a church to sing on Monday evening. When we arrived, the pastor came out and met us at the car. He asked if we had heard what had happened at the camp. We had not. He then told us that Dr. Gunstream had been underneath a cabin working on the foundation and the cabin had shifted and fell on him and he had died.

I have used this illustration often to illustrate what I call “Gap Time,” the time between when you know what God wants you to do and when you actually begin to do it. For some that time is short, for others it is almost their whole life. I will always believe that I would have been called if I had postponed my announcement at the campfire that night, but I would have missed the sustaining testimony from one of my heroes, Dr Gunstream. Don’t miss the encouragement God has planned for you by postponing your response. My girlfriend was overjoyed that I had received a call to the ministry. She told me that she had always wanted to be a pastor’s wife. We were married at the end of the next year. My chemistry professor looked me straight in the eye and said, “Are you sure that this is of the Lord?” I said yes, I was sure. He said he would find another student to do the project, and he was always my supportive mentor. My father, on the other hand, was severely disappointed in me, and did all he could to discourage me in choosing to begin to study for the ministry.

One of the surprises for me was that during this next month of August while the quartet was still traveling, a pastor that I had never met contacted me at school to see if I would be willing to be a part-time minister of Music and Youth at the church he pastored in Brea. This was a wonderful opportunity for me, and proved to be excellent preparation in my ministry, and a confirmation to me of my call.

I urge you, the reader, not to fail to walk in the leadership of the Spirit in your life. You may not know how it will work out, but if God is leading, then it will be a success from eternity’s point of view.

*Romans 8:14 “…for as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, they are the*

*sons of God.”*