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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

6 Distinguishing Marks of a Call to Gospel Ministry

If there is anything else a man can do other than preach, Martyn Lloyd-Jones maintained, he ought to do it. The pulpit is no place for him. The ministry is not merely something an individual can do, but what he must do. To enter the pulpit, that necessity must be laid upon him. A God-called man, he believed, would rather die than live without preaching. Lloyd-Jones often quoted the famed British pastor Charles H. Spurgeon: “*If you can do anything else do it. If you can stay out of the ministry, stay out of the ministry.*” In other words, only those who believe they are chosen by God for the pulpit should proceed in undertaking this sacred task.

“*Preachers are born, not made,*” Lloyd-Jones asserted. “*This is an absolute. You will never teach a man to be a preacher if he is not already one.*” It was clearly the case in the life of Lloyd-Jones. He realized he was not joining a volunteer army.

What constitutes this call to preach? Lloyd-Jones identified *six* distinguishing marks of this divine summons to the pulpit. He himself had felt the gravity of each of these realities weighing heavily upon his own soul. He believed the same spiritual forces should come to bear on all preachers.

First, Lloyd-Jones affirmed there must be an inner compulsion within the one called to preach the Word. He stated there must be “*a consciousness within one’s own spirit, an awareness of a kind of pressure being brought to bear upon one’s spirit.*” He identified this as an irresistible impulse, as “*some disturbance in the realm of the spirit*” that “*your mind is directed to the whole question of preaching.*” This inner coercion becomes “*the most dominant force in their lives.*” Lloyd-Jones explained, “*This is something that happens to you, and God acting upon you by His Spirit, it is something you become aware of rather than what you do.*” In other words, the drive to preach becomes a burden upon the heart that must be fulfilled. It is a holy preoccupation within the soul that causes the one called to step out in faith and embrace the work.

This divine calling, Lloyd-Jones believed, grips the soul and governs the spirit. It becomes an overwhelming obsession that cannot be discarded. It will not go away nor leave a man to himself. He explained that there becomes no way of escape. Such a strong force lays hold of the man that he is held captive. Lloyd-Jones recognizes this when he states:

You do your utmost to push back and to rid yourself of this disturbance in your spirit which comes in these various ways. But you reach the point when you cannot do so any longer. It almost becomes an obsession, and so overwhelming that in the end you say, “*I can do nothing else, I cannot resist any longer.*”

Second, Lloyd-Jones emphasized there will be an outside influence that will come to the one called. The input and counsel of other believers becomes influential to the one destined for the ministry. It may be the feedback of a pastor or the affirmation of an elder. It could be the encouragement of another believer. When they hear this person speak the Word, perhaps in a class or Bible study, they are often the best discerners of the man who is called into the ministry.



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In other words, observant people often recognize the hand of God upon that person before he senses it. Those who best know God and most love His Word often can detect who is being set apart for this work. They give insightful affirmation to the individual being called.

Third, Lloyd-Jones asserted the one called will experience a loving concern for others. God gives to the one chosen to preach an overwhelming compassion for the people. As part of this divine choice, the Holy Spirit imparts a consuming desire for the spiritual welfare of others. Lloyd-Jones wrote: *“The true call always includes a concern about others, an interest in them, a realization of their lost estate and condition, and a desire to do something about them, and to tell them the message and point them to the way of salvation.”* This love for others includes the distinct realization that countless people are perishing without Christ. What is more, there is a concern that many of these lost souls are in the church. The one called to preach feels compelled to awaken them to their need for Christ. He is constrained to reach them with the saving message of the gospel.

In Lloyd-Jones’ life, he experienced this growing concern for others. He said, *“I used to be struck almost dumb sometimes in London at night when I stood watching the cars passing, taking people to the theatres and other places with all their talk and excitement, as I suddenly realized that what all this meant was that these people were looking for peace, peace from themselves.”* His growing concern was now not for their physical health, but for their spiritual welfare.

Fourth, Lloyd-Jones affirmed there is an overwhelming constraint within the one called to do this work. He maintained there will be *“a sense of constraint,”* meaning he feels hemmed in to do this work. It is as though God will not let him be released from his duty to preach. There is nothing else he can do but pursue this inner drive to preach. Necessity is laid upon him, and he must preach regardless of what others may say. He must minister the Word, no matter what obstacles must be overcome.

Fifth, Lloyd-Jones believed the man who is called to preach comes under a sobering humility. He believed that this person is overwhelmed with a deep sense of his own personal unworthiness for such a high and holy task and is often hesitant to move forward to preach for fear of his own inadequacies. Lloyd-Jones writes, *“The man who is called by God is a man who realizes what he is called to do, and he so realizes the awfulness of the task that he shrinks from it.”* Though he is compelled to preach, he is at the same time fearful of doing so. He is sobered by this weighty assignment to speak on behalf of God. He trembles at this stewardship entrusted to him and the accountability that comes with it.

Sixth, Lloyd-Jones added that a corporate confirmation must come to the one called to preach. The man who is chosen by God to preach, he argued, must be observed and tested by others in the church. Only then may he be sent from the church. Lloyd-Jones reasoned from Romans 10:13–15 that preachers are *“sent,”* which he understands to mean a formal commissioning by a sending church. The leaders of the church must examine the qualifications of the one set apart to preach and affirm the validity of this call. Hands must be laid upon him in recognition of what God is doing in his life.

According to Lloyd-Jones, these are the distinguishing marks of a call to gospel ministry. To one extent or another, each of these **six** realities must be present in the life of one who has been set apart by God to preach. Each of these factors is necessary in order to ascertain one’s call to preach. Lloyd-Jones had experienced each one of these in his life. Further, he encouraged others to discern the presence of these hallmarks in their lives.

~ **Dr. Steven J. Lawson**



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God's Covenant People

God's covenant commitment to His people, made in successive promise-bonds, forms the scaffolding within which He builds His church; its shape and growth are determined by it. But like a medieval cathedral, the church is built over centuries; and like a great book, its story is divided into chapters.

The word covenant (Hebrew *berith*, Greek *diathēkē*) first occurs in the context of the judgment-flood from which only Noah and his family were saved: “*I will establish my covenant with you,*” God promised (Genesis 6:18). While God brought judgment-curse on the earth (vv. 11–13), by contrast He promised to bless Noah and his seed (9:1).

“*Establish*” here reflects an earlier promise-bond. God's command to Noah to “*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*” (v. 1) echoes His command to Adam (1:28) and hints at an earlier covenant. Certainly, the Lord's bond with Adam included essential covenant ingredients: His commitment to Adam would lead to blessing for faith and obedience (1:28; 2:3), but mistrust and disobedience would result in judgment-curse (2:17; 3:17).

This “*new*” covenant with Noah, however, was soon despised at Babel. The blessing was forfeited; now the curse fell on disobedience. Yet, mercifully, God came again, establishing another “*new*” covenant-bond with Abraham. The promised Deliverer-Seed (3:15) would come specifically through his seed and would bring blessing to the nations (12:1–3). This was confirmed in a dramatic night scene. In symbolic form, God passed through two lines of dismembered animals, indicating His commitment unto death to His “*new*” covenant promise (15:1–21). Abraham believed, and despite sometimes stumbling, he obeyed. Blessings followed.

But then came Egypt, slavery, and bondage. Once more, God revealed Himself specifically as the same covenant-making and covenant-keeping God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who comes to help His people (Exodus 3:6, 13–17; 6:2–9). He inaugurated a new epoch, through another “*new*” covenant. He redeemed His people and called them to trust and obey Him, warning them that faithlessness and disobedience would again lead only to judgment-curse (Deuteronomy 28:1–68). Later, He would promise David that the Deliverer-Seed would come specifically from his line (2 Samuel 7; Ps. 89:19–37). When He came, a final “*new covenant*” would be established (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:8–12; 10:15–17). Jesus is the Deliverer-Seed who forges “*the new covenant in my blood*” (Luke 22:20). Thus, from Adam to Christ, this unified series of divine covenants created a single family tree (Luke 4:23–38).

It is sometimes said that now everything has changed: “*covenant*” virtually disappears. It is rarely mentioned again outside of the letter to the Hebrews. But this is to miss the point. For when Jesus speaks about the “*new covenant in my blood,*” He means that He Himself is the covenant. The Lord had already hinted at this: “*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. ... I will give you as a covenant for the people*” (Isaiah 42:1, 6–7). The final “*new covenant*” is no longer a promise waiting to be fulfilled but a person who embodies its fulfillment. God's covenant word is now the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

Thus, from Adam through Noah, from Abraham through Moses, and from David to Christ, God's people have been defined, united, and shaped through an ever-renewed and developed covenant bond. This is why the fathers of the church spoke about *ecclesia ab Adam* (the church from Adam) or *ecclesia ab Abel* (the church from Abel)—one people, in different epochs, living at different covenant stages of the unveiling of God's promise, and, from the fall of Adam and Eve, always sinners who “*found favor in the eyes of the Lord*” (Gen. 6:8), always justified by faith alone, not by works, always trusting the promise of God, always conscious that they were one family.



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Moses and Paul (and therefore we) belong to one family. “*To them*” (the old covenant people), Paul says, “*belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises*” (Romans 9:4). The same is true for Paul (and for us) in the new covenant—only more so: we are the sons of God by adoption (8:14–17); we are being changed from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18); by the Spirit the commandments of the law are fulfilled in us (Romans 8:3–4); we are the true circumcision who worship in the Spirit (Philippians 3:3); and we trust in the One in whom all the promises of God have found their “*yes*” (2 Corinthians 1:20). We live in different epochs, but we are one people, one family.

This unity is expressed very clearly in Hebrews’ description of Moses, who “*By faith ... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God. ... He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the riches of Egypt*” (Hebrews 11:25–26). Throughout the covenant ages, there is one faith, one Christ, one people.

Hebrews 3:1–6 puts it this way: in both the old and the new covenant epochs, believers have belonged to the same household and the same family. They have occupied the same house, even though changes have taken place. And now Moses the servant has given way to Jesus the Son. Restrictions have been lifted (we are no longer heirs who are underage). Now, believers live in the fullness of grace and truth and cry, “*Abba, Father!*” (Galatians 4:1–7). But the ancestral home remains one and the same.

What a privilege it is to belong to this millennia-old covenant family. If the Corinthians could be told that “*Paul ... Apollos ... Cephas ... the world ... are yours*” (1 Corinthians 3:22), then we can surely add, “*and Abraham ... Elijah ... Isaiah ... Daniel ... are also ours,*” because we “*are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*” So, whenever we read the Old and New Testaments, we are looking at our family album. Learning about church history is simply visiting our relatives. Assembling for worship is going to the weekly family reunion where we “*come to ... innumerable angels ... the assembly of the firstborn.*” More than that, we come “*to the spirits of the righteous made perfect*” - some of whom once sat beside us in church. And all this because through faith we, like them—including those who lived under the old covenant—have come “*to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant*” (Hebrews 12:22–24). You belong to a “*megachurch.*” The congregation is much bigger than you thought.

This covenant perspective thrills our hearts because we realize that we have been caught up into Christ’s grand, ages-long project. It gives us a sense of identity—we know our roots. It also brings us a sense of stability—we know that the gates of Hades will never prevail against God’s covenant people. ~ *Dr. Sinclair Ferguson*



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A Strange Encounter on Sacred Ground

The woman at the well is a familiar figure to most churchgoers. This poor Samaritan woman from John chapter 4 has managed to gain a semi-regular role in many Sunday sermons and Wednesday night Bible studies. She has been held up as a poster child for everything from social justice to stylistic worship preferences. Yet a careful examination of the passage reveals one of the most profound theological lessons in all of history—one that every true Christian must grasp.

At first glance, little about the scene seems worthy of note. An anonymous woman performs the most mundane of everyday tasks: She comes to draw her household's daily ration of water. She comes alone, and at an hour she expected to find no one else at the well. (That likely indicated her status as an outcast.) Jesus, traveling through the region on His way to Jerusalem, was resting near the well, His disciples away on an errand. Having no means by which to draw water, Jesus asked the woman for a drink. It was not the stuff of great drama, and this was certainly not a scene which would lead us to expect the staggering revelation that lay just ahead.

[Jesus] left Judea and went away again into Galilee. And He had to pass through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "*Give Me a drink.*" For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "*How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?*" (John 4:3–9)

A Remarkable Setting

Look closer, however, and it turns out that many details in this picture are enormously significant.

In the first place this was Jacob's well, located on a plot of land well known to students of the Old Testament. It was a field that Jacob purchased so he could pitch his tent in the land of Canaan (Genesis 33:18–19). He built an altar on the site and called it *El-Elohe-Israel* (Genesis 33:20), meaning "*the God of Israel.*" This very field was the first inhabitable piece of real estate recorded in Scripture that any Israelite ever owned in the Promised Land. Abraham had previously purchased the field of Ephron, which contained a cave that became his and Sarah's burial place (Genesis 23:17–18; 25:9–10). But this property actually became Jacob's home base.

John 4:5 reminds us that this was the same parcel of ground Jacob deeded to his favorite son, Joseph (Genesis 48:21–22). It later became the very place where Joseph's bones were finally put to rest (Joshua 24:32). Remember that when Moses left Egypt, he took Joseph's coffin (Genesis 50:24–26; Exodus 13:19). The Israelites carried Joseph's remains around with them for forty years in the wilderness. One of their first acts after conquering the Promised Land was the final interment of those bones. This was all done at Joseph's own behest (Hebrews 11:22). To the Israelites, the tale of Joseph's bones was a significant reminder of God's faithfulness (Acts 7:15–16).



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The well that was on the property was not mentioned in the Old Testament, but centuries of Jewish tradition attested to its location by Jesus' day, and the site remains a major landmark even today. The well is very deep (John 4:11), accessible only by a very long rope fed down a hole dug through a slab of soft limestone. The reservoir below is spring fed, so its water is always fresh, pure, and cold. It is the only well, and the finest water, in a vicinity where brackish springs abound. The existence of such a well on Jacob's property was deemed by the Israelites as a token of God's grace and goodness to their patriarch. Hence, the location had a lengthy and meaningful history in Jewish tradition.

But during Christ's time on earth, that plot of ground lay in Samaritan territory, and this is another surprising and significant detail about the setting in John 4. For Jesus to be in Samaria at all was unusual (and perhaps even somewhat scandalous). The Samaritans were considered unclean by the Israelites. Jesus was traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee (John 4:3). A look at any map reveals that the most direct route goes straight through Samaria; any self-respecting Jew living at that time would always travel a different way. The preferred route went east of the Jordan River, then north through Decapolis before crossing the Jordan again into Galilee. This alternate route went many miles out of the way, but it bypassed Samaria, and that was the whole point.

An Estranged History

Samaritans were a mixed-race people descended from pagans who had intermarried with the few remaining Israelites after the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom (722 BC). As early as Nehemiah's time (the mid-fifth century BC), the Samaritans posed a serious threat to the purity of Israel. Secular history records that Nehemiah's main nemesis, Sanballat, was an early governor of Samaria (Nehemiah 4:1–2). The Jewish high priest's grandson married Sanballat's daughter, incurring Nehemiah's wrath: "*I drove him away from me*" (Nehemiah 13:28). Such a marriage "*defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites*" (Nehemiah 13:29).

By the first century, the Samaritans had a distinct culture built around a syncretistic religion, blending aspects of Judaism and rank paganism. Their place of worship was on Mount Gerizim. Sanballat had built a temple there to rival the Temple in Jerusalem. And a false priesthood served in the Samaritan temple—the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom had already corrupted Judaism several centuries before by establishing this false priesthood. That defiled flavor of Judaism was precisely what gave birth to Samaritanism. So the Samaritan religion was twice removed from the truth. While holding to selected elements of Jewish doctrine—for example, Samaritans regarded the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) as Scripture—they rejected other key components, like failing to recognize the psalms and the prophets.

During the Maccabean period, less than a century and a half before the time of Christ, Jewish armies under John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple. Gerizim nevertheless remained sacred to the Samaritans and the center of worship for their religion. (A group of Samaritans still worships there even today.)

Jewish contempt for the Samaritans was so intense by the first century that most Jews simply refused to travel through Samaria, despite the importance of that land to their heritage.



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Christ's visit, however, was a deliberate break with that convention. John 4:4 says, "*He needed to go through Samaria*" (NKJV, emphasis added). He had a purpose to fulfill, and it required Him to travel through Samaria, stop at this historic well, talk to this troubled woman, and make an unprecedented disclosure of His true mission and identity.

Seen in that light, virtually everything about the setting of John 4 becomes remarkable. It is unusual to find Jesus alone. It is amazing to realize that God incarnate could grow physically weary (John 4:6) or become thirsty (John 4:7). It is startling that Jesus would intentionally seek out and initiate a conversation with a wretched Samaritan woman like this one. It was astonishing even to her that any Jewish man would speak to her (John 4:9). It was equally shocking for the disciples—they were "*amazed that He had been speaking with a woman*" (John 4:27). It would have been considered outrageous for Him to drink from an unclean vessel that belonged to an unclean woman.

But what is staggeringly unexpected about this whole fantastic account is that Jesus chose this time and this place and this woman to be part of the setting where He would (for the first time ever) formally and explicitly unveil His true identity as the Messiah. ~ *Dr. John MacArthur*

What does the Church Most Need Today?

What does the church most need today? In answering this important but rather general question, Psalm 81 is uniquely important and helpful. This psalm obviously contains beautiful promises and clear directions to help the people of God. But careful study of this psalm will deepen our appreciation of it, increase its value for us, and show us how distinctive it is for helping the church.

As we study psalms, we soon learn that the central verse of a psalm is often significant as a key to its interpretation. The central line of Psalm 81 is the heart of that psalm, as the plaintive cry of God is heard: "*O Israel, if you would but listen to me!*" (v. 8b). The center of Psalm 81—indeed the whole psalm—is a reflection on the *Shema*.

The centrality of this line and its importance are underscored when we recognize that Psalm 81 is the central psalm of Book 3 of the Psalter. Book 3 (Psalms 73–89) principally concerns the crisis in Israel caused by the destruction of the temple (Psalm 74) and the apparent failure of God's promises that David's sons would forever sit on his throne (Psalm 89). Something of the cause and character of this crisis is contained in this central line of the central psalm.

Since Book 3 is the central book of the five books of the Psalter, Psalm 81:8b actually is the central line of the whole book of Psalms. It stands at the very heart of Israel's songbook. It calls Israel to deep reflection on her relationship to her God.

This psalm also appears to be central to Israel's liturgical calendar. The praise at new moon and full moon can refer only to the seventh month of the year, the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 10:10) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:26–32).



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Between these two feasts occurred the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27). As God called Israel to celebrate His great provisions as Creator and Deliverer, so He called His people to hear Him.

As the *Shema* was crucial to the Torah, so it is central to the Psalter and to the Christian life. God's people must hear His Word, particularly to reject false gods (v. 9) and to walk in His ways (v. 13). They must not follow their own wisdom (v. 12). How sad to contemplate that God might give us what we think is good for us.

The Lord reminds His people that in history He has been the Deliverer and now promises that when we open our mouths in prayer, He will hear us and meet our needs (v. 10). He is the God who preserves and provides for the needs of His own.

The failure of Israel to hear the Word of God was rectified by God's own Son. Jesus always heard and honored God's Word. His Father delighted in Him for that reason: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*" (Matthew 17:5). Jesus perfectly listened and followed so that His people would have a complete and perfect salvation. The Father continues to call His people to listen, now directing them to the words of His Son: "*listen to him*" (Matthew 17:5). The salvation and health of the church depend on it continuing to listen to God's Word.

Psalms 81 seems to reflect the time of exile, when God punished Israel with the loss of the temple, its king, and the land of promise. It also reminds us of an earlier time, when Israel doubted God and grumbled about Him (v. 7). At Meribah (Exodus 17), Israel tested the Lord, doubting that He was with His people, so the Lord tested Israel and found her wanting. Similarly, we can look at the history of the church and see many times and ways in which the church failed to listen to the Word of the Lord.

The time of the Reformation, of course, was one of the greatest times in which the church returned to the Word of God. The Reformation of the church occurred because Christians began again to study the Bible carefully. The Reformers studied Greek and Hebrew, provided the church with new translations of the Bible, used the new technology of the printing press to print Bibles, and prepared some of the finest commentaries and theologies in the history of the church.

Again in our time, the church must be called to listen to the Word of God. The churches of America too often seem interested in following other voices than the voice of God. For decades, some churches have taught that the Bible is not fully and truly the Word of God. Other churches formally recognize the Bible, but seem to have lost confidence that preaching and teaching the Bible is what will convert unbelievers and build the church. Many Christians today seem to practically ignore the Bible, and as a result, they are as worldly as their unbelieving neighbors.

God says to us today, as He said to Israel of old and says to every generation of His people: "*O Israel, if you would but listen to me!*" Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will open ears in our churches and throughout our land. And let us listen carefully and believingly. Such listening is what the church most needs today. ~ **Dr. W. Robert Godfrey**



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

If you have a September birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error, please e-mail Walt at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner September 2021

Birthdays

Ben P. (3) Jonathan D. (15)
Zachary A. (9) Ruth T. (23)
Rhydian H. (12) Lydia W. (30)

Anniversaries

Jeremy and Jesse W. (30)

A person does not need to read very much of the New Testament to realize that large portions are future-oriented. We are told of Christ’s past work, providing salvation for his people, but we are also told that he will return in power to subdue his enemies and subject all things to God. One of the earliest Christian prayers, reflected in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Revelation 22:20, is, “**Come, Lord Jesus.**” The church looks forward to that future day and longs for Christ’s victory.

Unfortunately, a concern for future things has often obscured for some Christ’s present exalted position in the universe. It is true, as the author of Hebrews writes, that “at present we do not see everything subject to him” (Hebrews 2:8). But, as he also writes, “We see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honor” (v. 9).

In speaking of Jesus’ present exaltation the Apostle Paul referred: (1) to his resurrection from the dead, (2) to his ascension and enthronement over evil, and (3) to his headship over the church, his body. ~ *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary - James Montgomery Boice*



***West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership***

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