

**The Family:  
God's Call Upon Your Life  
Galatians 1:11-24  
Englewood Baptist Church  
Sunday Morning, May 2, 2010**

Open your Bible to Galatians 1.

With today being Graduate Recognition Sunday, I felt the Lord leading me to preach a message to those who are preparing for ministry. To those in our families who are entering new seasons of their lives, who are graduating.

Notice I said ministry. You are preparing for ministry. I have exciting news for you, graduates. God is calling every single one of you into some form of the ministry. But one of you says, "I don't public speaking." That's OK, there's more to the ministry than proclamation. And someone says, "I don't sing in tune." That's OK. There's far more to the ministry than music. And someone says, "But I don't like crowds of people. I'm an introvert." That's excellent. The ministry is full of secret services with high rewards. Every single saint is called to build Christ's church, no matter what profession you choose.

But I offer you large caution this morning, for there are many gospels alive in the world today. There are many people preaching "good news" messages, but there is only one dream that is worthy of your pursuit, only one call that you should be looking to answer, only one treasure at the end of your rainbow. That treasure is the sound of these words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." It has been said, "Only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

So if you are declaring a major in the coming days, you will declare the platform for your ministry.

- Maybe you will be pre-pharmacy. As a pharmacist, you will show the compassion of Christ for the sick.
- Maybe you will enroll in the school of business. As a business owner, you will offer services to people that will bless and enhance their lives.
- Maybe you will choose education. As a teacher, you will instruct pupils on the truth of creation...that 6-3=3 because God set it up that way, and the center of every cell is nucleus, because every God created the brain of the cell. You will present the truth and you will model the Christian life for the kids who look up to you. It's a ministry.

Whatever platform God builds for you, you will have ample opportunity to boast of Christ in it. You will also have plenty of temptation toward idolatry. Using that platform to build your own name and to profit yourself.

So what's it gonna be? Is it gonna be all about you and your dream, or is it about God and His dream?

Today, in Galatians 1, we meet up with Paul, the apostle, the persecutor turned preacher. God had completely changed his life. A total turnaround.

A few weeks ago, I was driving in Memphis, TN, and I was searching for a particular place that I had never been. I thought I knew where I was going, but as I was traveling down the road, the little GPS woman said, "Recalculating." That's code for "You just missed your turn." So I made a quick U-turn at the next light. I turned around.

That's what happened to Paul. As a young man, a student, he was advancing, he was chasing a dream and making good headway. He was recognized as one of the "Who's Who Among Good Jewish Legalists." Paul was a rule keeper and a really good one. And one day on a road headed north, his little dream of success came to a screeching halt. He did a 180. God called for a U-turn. Look what Paul says about his call to salvation and to ministry in 1:11-20.

Read 1:11-20.

In this passage, the apostle Paul is defending the credibility of his ministry and he is attempting to prove that the hand of God was upon his ministry. It's not some man-made, money-making scheme. There are 3 truths that Paul presents concerning his call to ministry. Let me lead you through those and then I'll help you understand how they apply to us today, especially to graduates.

## **Paul and His Call to Ministry**

### **1. Paul thought he knew what God had planned for him. (vv.13-14).**

Look at vv.13-14...

Paul was not a rebel. He was following the tradition of his fathers. He was trying to do what he thought was right. It's just so sad that what he thought was right was actually dead wrong. Paul says, "I was totally consumed by the traditional plan for Jewish graduates." Now, we know that Paul went on to become an outstanding missionary, theologian, and writer. **(Image of Paul writing)** He wrote 13 epistles in the New Testament.

- Romans
- 1,2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1,2 Thessalonians
- 1,2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

All these books were written by Paul. Altogether, they comprise almost ¼ of the NT you have in your hand. In addition to the books he authored, Luke devotes almost 16 chapters of his book called Acts focusing on the ministry and work of the Apostle Paul. This man became a Jesus machine, the most influential Christ-follower of all time. Long before there were podcasts, and itunes, and You Tube videos, there was Paul preaching the gospel and changing peoples' lives.

And it seems that the Lord had a special plan for Paul, even from birth. V. 15, says he was “set apart from birth.” Paul did not believe that he was an accident.

Now we all know the story of the Saul to Paul conversion. He was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. **(Image of Saul's Conversion)**. But long before that dramatic day, the Lord was working behind the scenes in his life, just like God is working behind the scenes in your life.

A little history here...Paul was born, it seems, with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was born of a Jewish blood, of the tribe of Benjamin, and named after the most famous member of that tribe—king Saul. He probably came from a long line of tentmakers or leatherworkers, and learned the trade of his father. Apparently, the family business was fruitful, because Paul lived in Tarsus, a well-to-do city on the ancient map with high standards of living. According to historical records, it cost a man a year a half's wages just to be a citizen of Tarsus. But not just that, Paul was a Roman citizen, which brought him a long list of perks and privileges. He was a blessed man.

Paul was also one of those lucky lads who was able to get a first-rate education. Under the tutelage, of Gamaliel, he was trained and schooled. Gamaliel is listed as one of the 13 most famous rabbis in Judaism. One history book says, “when Rabbi Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased.” This teacher was one of the most famous of the land...to learn under him would be like attending Harvard or Yale for us. Paul was educated in the highest halls of learning. He was protected and sheltered from the influence of those pagan, liberal Gentiles, and was a proud recipient of the great traditions of his ancestors, and the high moral standards of classic Judaism. Let me sum all this up by saying that Paul was one high phalootin Jew. He even confesses this in Phil. 3, he said,

*If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. Phil. 3:4-6*

Saul was a pristine Jew. So it's safe to say that he had a bright future in his culture, well on his way to Jewish fame and affluence. He was on track to sit at the table with the players, with the movers and shakers one day, of his country. He was graduating to greater things.

And one day...it all changed. Paul bumped into Jesus, and realized that the sum of his higher learning was quite small compared to the all-knowing, powerful God. His traditions collapsed like a house of cards. He lost his eyesight and he was restored by a stranger on Straight Street named Ananias. **(Enter Image of Ananias)**

Everything changed for Paul, in that moment, when he knew that Christ was Lord. What are you going to do on the day when Christ crashes into your traditional way of thinking? When you look down the tunnel of your life, and you visualize the future, you see a long straight path. What you fail to see, however, are the major detours and turns off the path. You can't see them from here, but they are on HIS map.

And God told Jeremiah, *"I know the plan I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

The same is true for you today. God knows the plans He has for you, and he has a future in store for each of his servants. But don't think that He's going to follow your preconceived ideas of success. God is going to shake it all up one day.

Now, a word of encouragement to all of you graduates pertaining the rest of your life. Be prepared for quick stops. Be prepared for detours. Be ready for sudden changes in direction. This is the way Jesus prefers to drive. Life is going to twist and turn, but it's all part of his plan. Everything that Paul had come to rely on, was pulled out from under him like a rug on the floor.

In Acts 9:6, when Paul was forced to ask the question: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" No longer was it about what Paul wanted, or what Gamaliel wanted for his prized student, or what his well-to-do parents had planned for his career. Only one thing mattered that day when Paul met Jesus: what is God calling me to do?

And that's the only question that matters to you today: What does God want you to do? Not, what does Dad or mom want you to do? Not, what does your coach or your teacher or your counselor want you to do? The rest of your life comes down to seeking out this one question: what does God want you to do?

Paul had one plan; the Lord had another. And Paul was no match for the Lord.

## **2. Paul came to realize the power of the call. (v.15-16)**

Read vv.15-16...

Paul had been like a runaway freight train that crushes everything in its path until Christ called out to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Now Paul had never laid a hand on Jesus, just his followers. But Jesus calls the church his body and any man that hurts his body, also comes after him. And he stops Saul dead in his tracks, and converts him to Paul with overpowering grace. Paul had been chosen to be a church leader. God had handpicked him.

This same sovereign selection is seen all through the Bible. God chose Abraham from a far off land, then he choose Isaac. Isaac had two boys: Jacob and Esau. Romans says that before any one of them were born, God had selected Jacob as the heir of his promise. God set him apart. Carry that sovereign plan down to King David. This is what David says in 1 Chronicles 28:

***“The Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever,” he said. “For He has chosen Judah to be a leader; and in the house of Judah, my father’s house, and among the sons of my father He took pleasure in me to make me king overall Israel. And of all my sons (for the Lord has given me many sons), He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel.” 1 Chron. 28:4-5***

What does David say there? He states the sovereign plan of God. It was God’s plan to choose Israel among all the nations of the earth. And inside the nation of Israel, God chose the tribe of Judah. And inside the tribe of Judah, he selected the family of Jesse. And inside the family of Jesse, God walked past 7 of Jesse’s sons and picked the scrappy one on the end, David, the shepherd boy. David was God’s providential choice for King. And of all David’s children, the Lord gave the kingdom to Solomon, who sat on his father’s throne.

And it brought David great joy to know that God had a unique plan for him and that he was anointed for a special task. In the same way, Paul says this in v. 15, *“I was set apart from birth, by his grace.”*

Paul says, “I didn’t earn the title of apostle. I didn’t apply for it. I didn’t plan for it. But God has called me to this post, and I didn’t consult any man.”

Now let’s talk about call for a moment. There are two different calls that every Christian experiences in this life. First, there is the call to salvation, the most important of all. Jesus said, *“if any man would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross.”* He calls you to leave the well worn path that you know, and begin the journey with him. He calls you to discipleship.

The second call is the call to a kingdom assignment. He has, from birth, planned for you to fill a major role in the advancement of his church. Like Paul, you have been consecrated for or set aside for sacred duties. This call is not offered to those with superior skill, talent, or temperament. You haven’t earned the spot like a boy on his baseball team. You have, instead, been called by the grace of God, and that call is what moved Peter from his nets, Matthew from his tax booth, and Saul from his synagogue.

God is still calling out people today. Are you listening for the call?

Now, I want to be clear about his call that God places on our lives. Sometimes that call comes quickly and it is crystal clear. I know that Dr. Jett received a call from God one night as he was awakened in his bed. For me, though, the call of God on my life took time and introspection and wrestling. I had to wrestle with the Lord about what He wanted me to do. And it seems from this text that even though Paul had seen the bright light one day, he also went through a period of prayer over what God wanted him to do. He didn’t figure it out overnight. If you will notice v.17, Paul tells us about his travels.

V.17-18...

Paul says, “After I was saved and called to ministry, I didn’t jump right into Jerusalem to get his feet wet in ministry. I went immediately to Arabia.” What’s in Arabia? Let me tell you. Desert. That’s wilderness desert territory. And it says that three years later, Paul left the desert to go and find Peter and to make his ministry public. Paul spent three years in solitude and in searching the will of God for his life.

God prepares his people for their call. Moses spent 40 years in a desert. David spent many years in a pasture. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. Paul spent three years preparing for the purposes of God in his life. Those of you who are students, those of you who are entering into college, you are slipping in to a sacred season of refining and purifying.

It’s a special time. Take preparation seriously and you will not be sorry. Paul prepared himself for service. So should you and I. Get yourself ready for the call. If you are going to college, then go to class, and do everything you can to get the highest grade you can. If you are entering the work force, then work hard, and wait for God to open up doors for you. Be patient and be listening for the call. For the call of God is a powerful thing.

### **3. Paul did not try to plagiarize the ministry of others. (v.18-20)**

Look at these verses...

What Paul is trying to prove here is the call of God on his life. This gospel, given to him on the road to Damascus, was the Lord’s Gospel. Not his, not Peter’s, not James’. The three of them did not sit down and string together the idea that salvation comes by faith and not by circumcision. This was the Lord’s ministry and the Lord’s message. Skip back up to v..11-12 and you see that again...

Paul said, “The Lord spoke to me.” I receive a word from God.

Young people, you can pray for wisdom to make solid decisions. You can pray for a spouse that will come alongside you for life. You can pray for provision, that the Lord would give you money to buy food for your family. You can pray for energy, that you would not lose heart. Those are all good things to pray for, but if you can pray for just one thing over the next few years, pray for a word from God. Pray that the Lord would speak directly to your heart. You need a word from God.

This is a stack of books be some really smart people. I’ve read these books...

(list and discuss the books)

I believe there’s much to learn from other Christians, other pastors, other leaders. But at the end of the day, I’ve got to remember that God set apart Ben Mandrell at birth for a special call. And it’s not the same call as these writers.

And I say to every one of you graduates today, as you continue to learn and study and grow and wrestle with your call, never forget this truth. God has set you a part for a sacred and special

work. Glean wisdom from others, but don't plagiarize the path God has placed them on. Advance on the path he has carved out for you.

Look one more time in your Bible. In v.14, Paul says this... *"I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age."* Do you know what that word "advancing" means in the Greek? It means, "to chop ahead, like cutting down a trail through a forest." Paul was cutting a path of his own until that day when Jesus called him to ministry. From that moment on, Paul began cutting a new path that the Lord had put him on.

And God is going to call you to cut a trail in the future and to advance upon it. Don't hop onto another man's trail. You will be tempted to copycat the ministry and gifting of others. Don't do it. Go to the Lord, get the call, and never look back. He will lead you and he will guide you to a future beyond your own wild imaginations.

Now, with my time remaining, I want to deal with a question that I receive often concerning a call. People often ask, "How do I know if I am called into the ministry?" I want to make a distinction here. While all Christians are called to serve in the church, some are called to be full-time pastors, ministers, and missionaries. Here are two things I would say to anyone who thinks they might be called into full-time Christian ministry.

## **Are You Called to Ministry?**

### **1. Is your heart set on the ministry?**

Is there a little fire burning in your heart for the work of the church? Is that fire burning brighter with time? Charles Spurgeon identified that first sign as an "intense, all-absorbing desire for the work." It's like an invisible magnet that pulls you into the ministry. Paul said this to Timothy,

*"If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." 1 Tim. 3:1*

So God lays it on your heart first. Do you have a desire to be a pastor or a missionary? That's where it starts.

### **2. Does the congregation affirm the call?**

If you are called to ministry, God will use other people to confirm that call. As Baptists, we believe that the congregation has a powerful role in "calling out the called," in recognizing the gift of leadership and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

I was called to be a pastor right here at Englewood. As I began teaching and preaching on Sunday nights over 5 years ago, it was the witness of many of you, so many Sunday nights when people hang around afterwards just to pat me on the back and say, "Son, I believe you are doing what you're supposed to do." Those words had life shaping power over me and the Lord gave me increasing confidence that I was called. There was an internal call, but also an external call.

So, if you are here today, and you think that God might be calling you to be a pastor or staff member, then I say to you: get your feet wet in the ministry and see if God uses you to edify and build up the saints.

Whether you serve as a pastor or as a plumber, I can tell you this: he has a special purpose for your life.