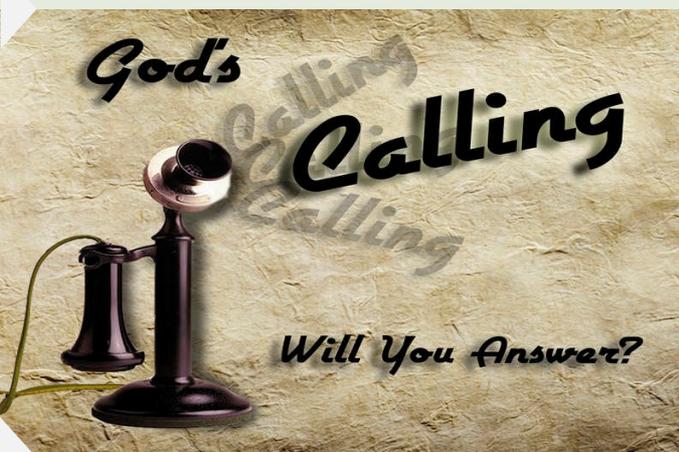


LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT *Journal*



EMPOWER | INNOVATE | DEVELOP | EVOLVE

"If you ask me what I came to do in this world, I, an artist, will answer you: I am here to live out loud."

Émile Zola

"Your profession is not what brings home your weekly pay check, your profession is what you're put here on earth to do, with such passion and such intensity that it becomes spiritual in calling."

Vincent van Gogh

"God has not called us to success but to faithfulness."

Oswald Chambers

"If God gives you something you can do, why in God's name wouldn't you do it?"

Stephen King

Hearing the Call

by Lowell C Cooper, Vice-President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"¹

The ancient prophet is caught up in a dazzling display of light and sound. Riveting in its intensity. Frightening in its majesty. He feels awful and awe-filled at the same time. His call, though couched in generality, is unmistakable, his response unequivocal.

Most people experience the call of God in less dramatic ways. In whatever way it comes a call from God can be a fearful thing. If it strikes us as strange, unusual or difficult the response might be, "Here am I. Send my sister." On the other hand, a person can rush ahead of God, conjure up a call based on imagination and then perform a self-appointment.

Mark Buchanan² identifies several questions for thoughtful reflection about hearing and heeding God's call. These include: Am I running from something? Is it a genuine call or simply a desire? Does this fit who I am and how God shaped me? Is it for now or later? Do others independently perceive it? Is it rooted in the deeper call of God?

The reality is that all are called. Called first to a life that glorifies God, a life that proceeds out of committed discipleship to Jesus Christ. Within that calling there may come something more specific dealing with a career, a ministry, a temporary role or simply a once-in-a-lifetime act. But all of these are cradled in God's call to holiness and service. So, whoever you are, wherever you are, you have been called by God.

God's general call is for everyone. God's specific calls cover a vast array of roles and persons. Consider for a moment a short list to illustrate the variety of God's calls:

Abraham—a man with no possessions and no progeny called to be the father of the faithful

Moses—an 80-year old shepherd called to lead a band of slaves to nationhood

Samuel—a little child commissioned to bear the message of God to the one in highest spiritual office of the day

Daniel and his friends—captives in a heathen empire called to bear unflinching witness to the King of the universe

Lydia—a businesswoman provides housing for the evangelistic team in Philippi

Paul and Silas—whose suffering as prisoners in Philippi leads to the jailor's conversion

And then there is a nameless slave girl³, kidnapped from her home, forced into domestic service for the wife of a military commander, caught in circumstances she did not choose and could not change. Then one day she learns that the master of the house is himself caught in circumstances he did not choose and could not change—Naaman has leprosy! And instead of rejoicing at his misfortune this little maid merely voices a wish that her master might find healing at the house of the prophet. Naaman goes, is healed and becomes a worshipper of God.

A witness to God and His kingdom can arise from any occupation. There is no hierarchy of spiritual professions. The preacher or Bible worker is not more important than the taxi driver, housewife, or parking lot attendant when it comes to being light. It is not your place in the wage scale, nor your place in the organization; it is not your brains nor your beauty; it is not your degrees nor your seniority that qualifies you to be light. It is your connection with Jesus Christ.

Remember the challenge of Jesus: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”⁴

Perhaps what is urgently needed in the Church today is the realization that every kind of work done for the sake of human community and the mission of God is a consecrated calling. We must reject the idea that ministerial work is more holy than teaching math or fixing machinery. We reject this idea because it masks the assumption that if I am unable, unfit or uncalled to ministerial work my role is basically that of a bystander in the mission of God.

Martin Luther strongly opposed the view of vocation prevalent during his time—the idea that only work in and for the church could qualify as God’s calling.

“It is pure invention [fiction] that Pope, bishops, priests and monks are called to the ‘spiritual estate’ while princes, lords, artisans and farmers are called to the ‘temporal estate.’ This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and that for the reason: *all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate*, and there is no difference among them except that of office....We are all consecrated priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: ‘You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm’ (1 Pet. 2:9).

The Apocalypse says: ‘Thou hast made us to be kings and priests by thy blood’ (Rev 5:9-10)”⁵

We must take care lest we fall victim to the idea that we serve God best when we are in church, when we are praying or reading the Bible, or giving Bible studies or handing out tracts and that our work is merely a necessity to provide resources to serve Him when we have completed our allotted task or shift of duty. Our daily work is ultimately an act of worship to the God who called us and who equipped us to do it.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”⁶

These three ideas form the context for a Christian’s sense of calling: 1) We are called first to be children of God, 2) The means by which we earn a living is the platform from which we honour God and advance His mission, 3) Doing our work faithfully and well, whatever it be, is our way of transforming a career into a calling.

Eugene Peterson recounts the story of the fourth century church father Gregory of Nyssa whose brother Basil had arranged for him to be made bishop of Cappadocia.

“Gregory objected,” Peterson writes. “He didn’t want to be stuck in such an out-of-the-way place. His brother told him he didn’t want Gregory to obtain distinction from his church but to confer distinction upon it.” Is this not what Christ wants for us as well? To seek the good of the small places in which he has placed us and to confer distinction upon them by serving him with humility there? The path of glory is often an obscure one. It is the way of the cross.”⁷ ^a

¹ Isaiah 6:8, NKJV

² *Leadership Journal* (ISSN 0199-7661), Winter 2013, p. 96

³ 2 Kings 5, NKJV

⁴ John 7:37, 38, NKJV

⁵ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Fortress, 1970), p.12.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:58, NKJV

⁷ John Koessler, “George Bailey Lassos the Moon,” on his blog *A Stranger in the House of God* (3-18-10). Cited in *Leadership Journal*, Fall 2010, p. 57.



Where Have All the Leaders Gone?

By Bertil Wiklander

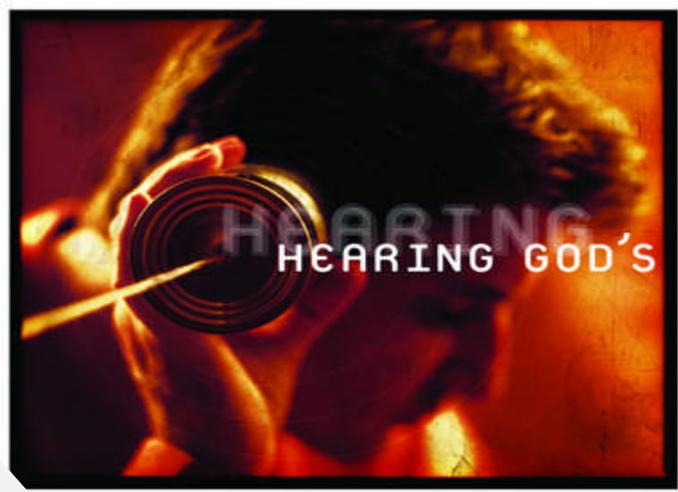
The question used as title above is used in the Introduction to *Leadership Next* by Eddie Gibbs. He is Professor of Church Growth at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

The reason for his book was an interview on the web-site of *Christianity Today* regarding the topic of the emerging church – a concept of church which changes and adapts to the ever changing culture around us. He was asked a question that torments (or should torment) Seventh-day Adventist leaders today: ‘What are the reasons that so many young people under thirty-five leave the church?’ His answer was: ‘One factor is that they are reacting against a culture of control’. The editorial director of InterVarsity Press thought that this answer contained the seed for a book and prodded Gibbs to write. *Leadership Next* is the result.

‘The youth are reacting against a culture of control’. The statement kept me thinking. I had just presented a paper to the General Conference Global Mission Issues Committee on ‘Mission Challenges in a Post-Christian World’. In my research I had found numerous indications to support Gibb’s answer.

It is an uncomfortable truth that Adventist youth are being born, growing up and living in a post-Christian society (and where this is not yet the case in Europe, the signs indicate that it is on its way). People in this society erroneously think that Christianity is something of the past and a looser. Although we know they are mistaken, their beliefs form a powerful context which exposes young people to the mixed values of ever-changing ‘secular’ (‘there is evidence that God does not exist’) or ‘post-modern’ (‘we don’t know and can never know’) kinds of reasoning about the world and our place in it.

The changing culture today has certain constancies: a growing individualism and longing for freedom from authorities, be they parents, teachers, police, government, church, Bible, or



HEARING GOD'S CALL

God. Our youth are not immune to this. They, too, 'react against a culture of control'. Church leaders today need to understand this and learn to communicate the invitation to leadership in a different way. Thus, young people will not respond to invitations to assume leadership if the church organisation simply tells them 'we need more leaders', or 'this is what you have to be and do', or 'this is what the GC has decided', or 'this is what you need to learn at the Theological Seminary'.

What is it, then, that may bring good leaders in the future? Maybe it is their *experience* of being called by God. Maybe it is their *experience* of being called by Christ to be his disciples and followers. Maybe it is their *experience* of being grasped by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If so, how are we as leaders to encourage and empower them to *seek* these experiences, to *acknowledge* them, and to *act* on them? Modern youth respond to *authentic* people. Thus, a fundamental condition for being heard and trusted is that we – ourselves – have these daily and ongoing spiritual experiences and that we – ourselves – embody and demonstrate – with profound humility – a Christian leadership based on such foundations? Part of the new generation's mind-set is a 'reaction against a culture of control'. It means, among other things, that you will not be trusted as a leader because of your position or title (control), but because of your life and genuine personal experiences with God.

I take comfort from thinking that God owns the church and he has the power to make it into what he wants it to be. So, the plan of redemption or the mission of God will not fail. The key issue is a different one. It is personal: Will you and I fail as leaders, because we fail to know the mind-set of our youth and thus talk past them?

Recently, I was privileged to take part in the GC celebration of 150 years of the organised Seventh-day Adventist Church in Battle Creek, Michigan (1863-2013). It was stated repeatedly that this is a 'sad' occasion – because we are still here and Christ has not yet come. I tend to leave this with God, however. If my Saviour has not yet come, God will have his reasons for allowing that to happen. Another way to look at our 150th anniversary is to ask ourselves this important question:

What is it in the structures we have built up in our church over the past 150 years that is now an obstruction for the gospel to be received by our youth and the world around us?

Many Adventists of all ages are now asking this question. I noticed how strong such sentiments were at the meeting of The One Project in Chicago (11-12 February, 2013), both from the pulpit and in the group discussions. Some answers to this vital question came to me as I read Gibbs' thoughts on leaders being 'called by God' (pp. 131-134). This theme is what pastor Lowell Cooper is sharing with us this month and I believe that the following reflections will connect well with what says to us.

Gibbs brings seven areas of concern:

1. Discipleship: The essential deficit of the church today: its failure to adequately *disciple* the church members. Thus, he opens the brief section 'Called by God' by linking church leadership with the biblical concept of discipleship: 'The concept of calling is essential to the life of discipleship'.

2. Christ's Call is On-Going and Life-Changing: Gibbs says that 'the call of Christ is not a once in a lifetime experience, but rather represents the ongoing response of the disciple' and it is therefore the key to the ongoing growth as a disciple which generates new enthusiasm for continuing. 'A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all others – the Audience of One'. This principle applies to all followers of Christ, but especially to leaders 'for God's calling is the key to igniting a passion for the deepest growth and highest heroism in life'.

3. The Individual Calling Is Part of a Communal Calling.

Gibbs then looks at how we abuse our calling: 'Some leaders are so obsessed with their own sense of calling that they marginalize those around them or simply use them to serve their own ends'. This is of course contrary to the Bible, where disciples are called, not in isolation, but as part of 'a community of the called'. Every leader must address the reverse side of being called by God, namely conceit, envy and greed.

4. The Unfortunate Distinction between Clergy and Laity Must Be Reformed from the Teaching of the Bible. God's calling applies to the totality of God's people. *It is not restricted to the leaders.* The myth of the 'restricted call' has crippled the church's mission in the world. Traditionally, Gibbs says, ordained ministry or the mission field (more broadly labelled 'full-time service') has been regarded as 'the highest calling'. Over time this has led to two distinct classes of Christians (Adventists): the clergy, those ordained to the pastorate, and the laity, the majority from which the few were selected.

'Clergy' means 'called' (*kleros*), and the term carries the unspoken implication that the laity is not called by God. As a result, the church is built around the call and gifting of this elite group surrounded by a marginalised laity. Such a separation breeds, on one hand, resentment and struggles for power and influence and, on the other hand, passivity and the avoidance of responsibility over spiritual issues which are regarded as the domain of the clergy. I see this in my beloved Adventist church today, and I hear the many lay people who feel marginalised by the ordained clergy – for example, in a break-out group discussion within the TED Executive Committee in 2006.

Thus, we must change our view of ordination and clergy, coming more into harmony with the Bible, if we want to mobilise the whole church for mission. We must change it for another reason, too: The young people of today, especially those who are leaving us, 'react against a culture of control'. If they live and work in a church where all are called and sent on the mission of God – being ordained by their faith and baptism – they will see that the ordained pastor is one of them, that he leads them to seriously impact the world out there, not to benefit his own programs.

Gibbs says that 'as we come to appreciate the comprehensive nature of God's call, we must recognise that lay people are not amateur contributors within the structures of the institutional church. They must not be regarded as volunteers who support and run clergy-controlled programs. The term laity (*laos*) has to be restored to its original meaning – the people of God called to a priestly and apostolic ministry (2 Cor. 6:16; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). We are all members of the laity, including those who are ordained as pastors. We have all been sent by our ascended Lord

... you will not be trusted as a leader because of your position or title (control), but because of your life and genuine personal experiences with God.

into the world to represent his present reign, herald his anticipated coming and invite people to join us in following him. In this view of the church, the people of God become culture-creating teams dispersed throughout society as salt, yeast and light.'

In this view of the church, there is no place for struggling with 'how to activate the church members'. This is an issue created by the clergy-laity distinction! Neither would we see so many young people leave us, because they would be acknowledged as called by Christ already and their engagement in ministry to change the world would be their life!

Leaders in the church are formed among disciples of Christ, among a mobilised community of Christ, where young people, men and women are expected, encouraged and equipped to be ministers, with our without imposition of hands. And therefore, the attitude, life and leadership that you and I display as leaders will have an impact on where the new leaders will come from.

5. Replace Self-Fulfilment with God's On-Going Call to Service. Gibbs calls attention to a serious consequence of an absence of a personal sense of call from God by church members: their focus on the need for *personal fulfilment* in order to find some sense of purpose for their lives.

Facts indicate a strong trend among secular and postmodern people towards self, and you have a keen interest in self-growth, self-development, self-realisation, and self-fulfilment. Even young Adventists being asked to serve often ask these days: 'What's in it for me?' This is the fruit of not being part of a community of disciples of Christ where *service* is the focus of everything. They don't understand what 'service' means because it has not been embodied by their church and it is virtually non-existent in the mass-media version of life. The deep and consistent teaching on 'service' in the Bible has not reached them.

Gibbs warns against looking within one-self and self-realisation and gives a quotation from J. E. White: 'When personal fulfilment is allowed to take the place of calling, our lives become little more than exercises in self-indulgence. Ironically, we were created such that our deepest fulfilment is found as we submit to God's calling on our life. The reason is



simple: we are first and foremost to Someone, not to something or to somewhere.'

6. Leaders Must Embody that the Entire Church is Called by God and Show it in their Leadership Style. In order for the entire church to be motivated by a sense of divine call, Gibbs says, 'it is imperative for its leaders to share this deep conviction, demonstrating their own personal call *and* God's call to the whole congregation. In fact, church leaders cannot merely share it; they must embody it to an extraordinary degree. For some, this will require a gigantic shift away from a controlling style of leadership to one of affirmation and empowerment.'

7. Demonstrate the Joy of Service. All leaders know that leadership seldom consists of moving from one exhausting test and exhilarating triumph to the next. Most days consist of dealing with an 'unending succession of mundane matters'. But the calling of God transforms life so that even the simple, everyday duties become invested with kingdom significance. For Adventist leaders, therefore, an essential ingredient in leadership should therefore be the joy of doing our work, because we are called by God.

In conclusion, as we step out in obedience to Christ's leading of our leadership, let us bear in mind the positive approach that God's call inspires in us by the Spirit:

- ◆ Look at the kingdom, not just your corner.
- ◆ See beyond our circumstances to the presence of Christ with us.
- ◆ Focus on successes, not problems.
- ◆ Beware of exaggerating problems and empowering failures.
- ◆ Keep a list of blessings and successes.
- ◆ Look at reality with all its imperfections, not just exceptions.
- ◆ Reconfirm your call rather than be swayed by complaints. **a**

¹ Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture*, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005, p. 9.

² Os Guinness, *The Call*, Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2003, p. 70.

³ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴ James Emery White, *Embracing the Mysterious God*, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003, p. 121.

⁵ Leith Anderson, *Leadership that Works*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999, pp. 164-174 (as summarised and quoted in Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, p. 194.

TO THINK ABOUT...

INVITATION TO LEAD

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth..." Genesis 1:26 (NIV)

God is the Ultimate Leader, and He calls every believer to lead others. God could have arranged His creation in any number of ways, but He chose to create human beings who possess spirits and the capacity to relate to Him and follow Him, yet who are not forced to do so.

When mankind fell into sin, God could have executed a plan of redemption that did not include sinful people, but He has called us to participate and to lead others as we follow Him. God made that clear from the beginning when He stated, "Have dominion" (Genesis 1:28).



The call to leadership is a consistent pattern in the Bible. When God decided to raise up a nation of His own, He didn't call upon the masses. He called out one leader—Abraham. When He wanted to deliver His people out of Egypt, He didn't guide them as a group. He raised up a leader to do it—Moses. When it came time for the people to cross into the Promised Land, they followed one man—Joshua.

Every time God desired to do something great, He called a leader to step forward. Today He still calls leaders to step forward for every work—both large and small. ■

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Questions or Comments?? E-mail us at: epujic@ted-adventist.org

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