

DEDICATIONS

from Grant

I dedicate this book to Jill, Keegan, and Darby for their amazing support and love. I don't deserve you.

I would also like to dedicate it to two godly men who helped guide me as I began the journey called ministry: Wilton (Bro. Tony) Anthony and Buddy Fortenberry. You put up with me (and my shenanigans), and saw something in me that few could. Thank you for your wisdom and direction.

I want to thank Second Baptist Church of Baytown, Texas and First Baptist Church, McKinney, Texas. These two great churches allowed me to fail and grow as a minister, and for that I am grateful.

from Rusty

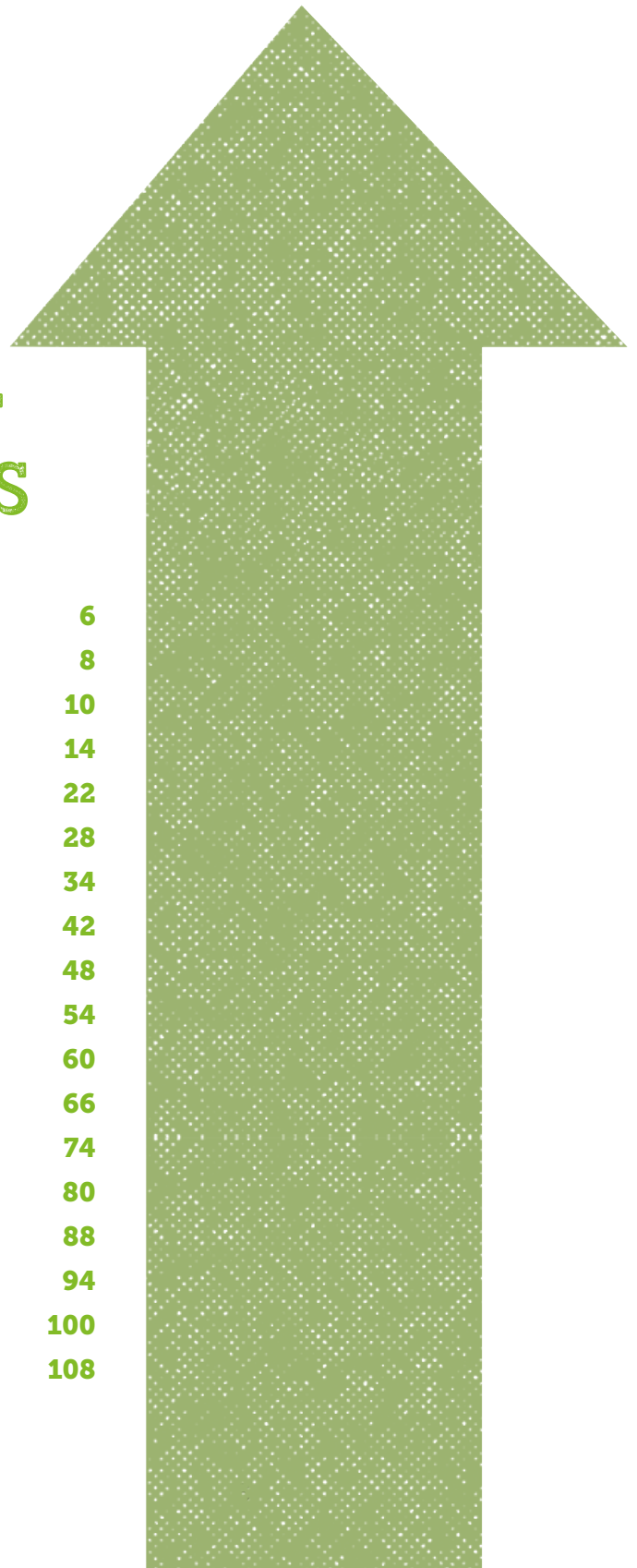
I dedicate this book to my wife, Laurie, and our sons, Caleb and Nathan. What an amazing journey we are on together. Y'all are the best.

I would also like to dedicate this work to the youth, parents, and youth workers of High Pointe Baptist Church, Cedar Hill, Texas and Raleigh Baptist Church/Bartlett Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh/Bartlett, Tennessee. What a joy and blessing to serve alongside you. You have taught me so much; lessons I am still learning.

Finally, a big thank-you to Wayne McAfee and Scott Ward who walked me through so many of the truths and challenges in this book.

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MEET THE

Grant Byrd

A youth ministry veteran, Grant began his academic career at Texas A&M University and completed a Bachelor's degree from East Texas Baptist University in Business and Religion in 1984. He earned a Master of Arts degree in Religious Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1986, as well as the Doctor of Educational Ministry Leadership in 2003. A native of Port Neches, Texas, Grant has been the Minister with Students at First Baptist Church in McKinney, Texas since 1991. He also served at Second Baptist Church in Baytown, Texas from 1986 to 1991.

An avid fan of the Dallas Cowboys, Grant can be found working in his shop, which he calls the "Byrd House," building or refinishing a variety of projects. He is passionate about seeing students come to faith in Christ and growing in their faith through intentional discipleship. Grant is a sought after speaker at student ministry conferences and will quickly tell you the best thing about him is his wife, Jill, and their two children, Keegan and Darby.

WRITERS

Rusty Wheelington

After completing a degree in Visual Communications from The Art Institute of Dallas and working in the animation/illustration field, Rusty responded to a call to ministry. He served as a youth minister while finishing a Bachelor's degree in Art and Pastoral Ministries from Dallas Baptist University. He then went on to finish a Master's degree in Religious Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1996. While serving as the Minister of Students and Missions in Bartlett (Memphis), Tennessee, Rusty completed a doctoral degree in Church Leadership and Christian Education from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He joined the Christian Studies faculty at Howard Payne University in January of 2006, where he serves as an associate professor.

Rusty currently serves as a teaching pastor and small group leader at Southside Church in Brownwood, Texas, while also enjoying the opportunity to preach occasionally at area churches. He also serves on Southside's missions team.

Having grown up in Texarkana, Texas, Rusty and his wife, Laurie, now call Brownwood, Texas home. They have two sons, Caleb and Nathan, two dogs, Nacho and Honey, and a cat named Kevin (even though Kevin is a girl). Rusty enjoys spending time with his wife and sons, competing in triathlons, reading, and drawing.

FOREWORD

FOREWORD



DOUG FIELDS

Youth Ministry Veteran

Author of 50+ books including *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*

Co-founder, Downloadyouthministry.com

Most everyone likes to receive a call. It usually means someone wants to talk with you, needs your wisdom, or simply wants you to know you are valued. In most cases, being called is a good thing.

God has a calling on your life and while that's a good thing, it can also be frightening. In *Ready. Recognizing and Responding to God's Call*, you're invited to learn from the wisdom of two men who understand God's calling on their lives and have faithfully followed it for many years. In this book, veteran followers of God's call, Grant Byrd and Rusty Wheelington, seek to help you see more clearly God's call on your life.

Over the years, I have worked with hundreds of students who have sensed God calling them into vocational ministry. I wish this concise, helpful resource had been available to them. It's truly a gift to the next generation of youth workers. Get this valuable book into the hands of anyone questioning their future as a follower of Jesus, and you will help them understand God's call on their life.



PREFACE

Vocational ministry—a career in which someone is paid for working in a Christian organizational setting. Pastors, ministers, missionaries, professors, etc. are examples of people involved in vocational ministry.

Feeling like God may be calling you into vocational ministry? We hope this book will encourage you and answer some of your questions. Its purpose is to help you pursue God’s call in your life and to guide you through prayer, Bible study, and reflection on where he is leading you. It’s our desire to walk with you a few steps along the road God is unfolding before you. Ephesians 2:10 tells us it’s a road full of good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do for him.

As you read the following chapters, view them through the lens of what God is saying to you through his word and your experiences with him. Engage in a “conversation” with the book as you encounter the material and questions found in each chapter. Take notes and write down questions in the page margins as they come to mind.

If you’re hoping to find an easy, step-by-step process for pursuing your call to ministry, you won’t find it here. God’s processes and timelines look radically different from our own. Your call to ministry is as unique as God has uniquely created you, and yet there are some things you have in common with others who have experienced a call to vocational ministry.

God is a revealing God and he will provide you with the resources you need to recognize and respond to his call. If you need to talk with someone about your calling, go to the ministers who serve on your church staff and ask them about their call to ministry. Speak to denominational leaders and professors at Christian colleges or seminaries for biblical insight and wisdom on this important topic.

Over the past few years, we have had the opportunity to lead seminars and conferences on guiding individuals who have sensed a

call to ministry. We have often asked ministers, “What, if any, guidance did you receive after you said ‘yes’ to the call of God?” The most common answer was, “Nothing. I felt like I was on my own to figure it out for myself!” Unfortunately, most people receive little (if any) guidance when they tell those in their church about their calling. We desire to address this problem.

I (Grant) vividly remember being fifteen-years-old and feeling like God was calling me into vocational ministry. I was traveling with my youth choir from Southeast Texas to Alabama and Florida, when we stopped in a little town to perform our musical. I was on the platform with our choir and during the invitation, I knew God was calling me.

I didn’t understand what that meant. In fact, I didn’t have a clue about what was going on. I just felt an intense emotional and spiritual pressure, and I remember trying not to cry in front of all my friends. (You just don’t do that when you are a fifteen-year-old boy.) I couldn’t help it. All my friends thought I was feeling guilty for something I had done—which lets you know what type of rowdy kid I was.

After we finished the program, I told my trip leaders what was going on, or at least I tried to. I told them I felt like God was telling me to do something, but I didn’t know what it was. They couldn’t help me. One lady, whom I called “Miss Mary,” told me maybe God didn’t want me to do something right that instant, but possibly he was telling me about something later on. That sounded good to me, and I started thinking that way. She was right.

God wanted me to be in ministry as my life work. I told my church, and they were happy for me and congratulated me. That was about the

EPHESIANS 2:10

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

People in the Bible who received God's call—Look at these Scriptures to learn about how God called some of his servants in the Bible.

Abraham—Genesis 12:1–9

Moses—Exodus 3

Samuel—1 Samuel 3

Jeremiah—Jeremiah 1:4–10

Paul—Acts 9:1–22

extent of the help I received. They meant well, just like the adults I spoke to after my initial calling from God. They wanted to help but didn't know what to do or how to help me. My youth minister and pastor were great men of God, and both wished me well. They directed me toward a Christian college and seminary.

*Things didn't turn out badly, but I wish I could have been guided more when I was in high school. Maybe I could have been used more by God during those years. Maybe I could have learned how to start pursuing my call **right then**.*

Pastors or youth ministers, do you have individuals in your church and youth ministry called to vocational ministry? The answer, of course, is yes! This book is also for you. Use it as a jumping-off point (either in one-on-one conversations or with a small group) to discuss with students how they can respond to God's call in their lives. It has been created to serve as a tool for you in guiding those who are seeking to identify and understand God's call.

Many students hear God's call and don't have the slightest idea of what to do next. Youth workers long for assistance in guiding students along the path God has laid out before them. We put this book together to provide help and encouragement for students who are in the exciting process of recognizing and responding to God's call. We also encourage you to visit www.wearethecalled.com for additional resources.

PSALM 32:8

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Ready. Recognizing and Responding to God's Call

Let us introduce the format of this book. Each chapter consists of the following three sections:

1. **My Story**—Each chapter begins with a personal testimony from a minister about his or her call to ministry. This testimony provides an introduction and launch point for the content of each chapter.
2. **Margin Spaces**—The outside margins of each page will contain material to enhance and illustrate the main points of

each chapter. This content includes Bible verses, quotes, and space for you to write your thoughts and questions.

3. **Questions**—At the end of every chapter, questions will require your response. Your answers to these questions will be a good resource for you in the years ahead. They will help you recall what you were experiencing as you identified and explored the call of God on your life.

When you receive a call from a friend, it is an invitation to have a conversation. Perhaps you are sensing God inviting you into a conversation about serving him in ministry. We look forward to encouraging you in that conversation as we speak to you through the pages of this book.

GRANT & RUSTY

Questions

Here are questions to get you started.

1. When you think of “being called,” what does that mean to you?
2. Write out your “call” and when you believe God called you. (List dates, details, and significant people and memories.)

Exploring and identifying your call—Can you answer the following questions about your call from God?

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- How?
- Why?

JEREMIAH 29:11-13

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

1

HOW TO KNOW FOR SURE

My Story

The summer after my junior year of high school, our youth group went on a mission trip to Pascagoula, Mississippi. During that week, we served the homeless, hosted backyard Bible clubs, and worked to help clean a housing project. It was an incredible week, and God worked in my life during that trip.

At the time, I wasn't sure what I was sensing, but looking back I see how God used that trip to change the course of my life. On our last night, after sharing Christ with a guy, I told my buddies that this was what I was supposed to do with my life. They looked at me funny and told me everyone was supposed to share Christ. So, I clarified it wasn't just sharing Christ, but God was calling me to serve him with my life.

Up to that point, I had made plans to become a lawyer, but after that mission trip I never had another thought, desire, or plan to pursue a law career. Despite my excitement about God's call on my life, I was nervous because I didn't know what it meant. I went to my youth pastor to ask his advice. He asked me, "If you had to choose right now, what would you do?" I told him that I didn't know for sure, but maybe youth ministry.

He advised me to start serving God in youth ministry, and if at some later time God provided an opportunity to serve in another ministry, to give that a try. Fifteen years later, I'm still serving God by serving teenagers. In the next fifteen years, whether I'm serving teenagers, senior adults, spearheading a missions ministry, or leading worship; one thing is for certain: God has called me to serve him for life!

MICHAEL CURL

High School Minister
Mobberly Baptist Church
Longview, Texas

HOW TO KNOW FOR SURE

God's Call—strong enough to **get you into ministry** and strong enough to **keep you there**

Those who enjoy long tenures in ministry are people who are convinced God has called them specifically to ministry as their vocation. There will be plenty of times when you will want to give up altogether, or begin to doubt whether or not you were truly called to ministry. That is why a call to ministry has to be strong enough to **get you into ministry** and strong enough to **keep you there!** Although God wants to clearly convey his perfect will for your life, at times it can be confusing.

Pete Fleming, a missionary to Ecuador, who died taking the gospel to a remote tribe, defined the idea of a “call” in this way: “A call is nothing more nor less than obedience to the will of God as God presses it home to the soul by whatever means He chooses.”¹ Your desire to understand how God wants you to serve him with your life is a step in the right direction in surrendering yourself to him.

Look for God to do one of four things as you work through a call to ministry:

1. Confirm a definite, specific calling for a definite, specific task
2. Confirm your calling without specific instruction, but with assurance that he will be specific in the future
3. Give you peace and patience to wait on him for further instruction
4. Grant you the realization that your place in the kingdom of God, your function within the body of Christ, is not traditionally defined as “full-time vocational ministry”²

Seven Words to Remember:
God chooses, the Spirit tests, people respond.

Here are seven words to keep close to you during this time of discovery: **God chooses, the Spirit tests, people respond.** Ask yourself this soul-searching question: “Why am I considering ministry?” There is incredible danger if one enters ministry under the wrong motives. Some of the most **miserable** people in the world are

those called to ministry who don't do it. Likewise, some of the most **dangerous** people in the world are individuals in vocational ministry who have not heard God's call.

The following statement contains wisdom regarding a call to ministry: If you can see yourself being happy doing something outside of ministry, then do that instead.

There are several things to know regarding God's call to ministry:

It is a holy calling—God calls you. He sets you apart from something and to something. He does not intend for you to change your mind or continually look back (Luke 9:62).

It is a heavenly calling—Your calling originated in God's heart, before you were even born! It's eternal and perfect. God's call to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4–5) was not based on his abilities, strengths, looks, or money, etc. Likewise, God's call on your life begins and ends with God, and it is for his purposes.

It is a progressive call—God will reveal your call in an unfolding manner. He may show you only one step at a time. You may never see the full scope of your call until you reach the end of your life and can look back, but that's part of the adventure! (Genesis 12:1).

It is a purposeful calling—God doesn't call you, then change his mind and revoke it (Romans 11:29). God knows what he's doing. If it makes you feel any better, he already knows all the ways you will fail him in the future, but he calls you anyway. God's call is part of his purposeful plan to bring reconciliation between him and the people he created.

It is a calling based entirely upon the zeal of the Lord—God will accomplish his purpose because of his passion to see his will worked out in people's lives. Take great comfort in that truth. He doesn't need you or me, but he chooses and wants to use us (Philippians 1:6).

Look for signposts and experiences of affirmation along the way as you pursue your calling. Proverbs 3:5–6 is a good passage to commit to memory: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean

JEREMIAH 1:4–5

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

GENESIS 12:1

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

JOHN 15:1-5

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

How Can You Know for Sure God is Calling You?

An inner desire will develop—When God calls, he supplies more than enough grace for the call (Romans 9:16). He will not call you to a task for which he will not supply the grace and power to accomplish it. He will not send you to Africa or the local soup kitchen without first putting within you a desire for that task, continent, or people.

There will be an abiding peace—Although unfamiliar circumstances can create uncertainty, God’s Spirit will give you the inner peace and courage to move forward in spite of your uncertainties (Philippians 4:6–7).

There will be spiritual fruit—You can know God has called you by the fruit of your life. It will take time for fruit to be produced. Inspect what comes out of your life as an indicator of God’s hand and his calling and anointing upon you. (John 15:1–5).

God will give you opportunities to serve within your calling—He wants you to succeed and he will put before you opportunities to explore and identify his call. Look for them. If you don’t see any, ask God to show them to you more clearly. As he opens doors of service, listen to his voice and the Holy Spirit directing you.

Questions

1. Has God confirmed a call on your life to vocational ministry?
How do you know God is calling you to ministry as a vocation?
Is there something else you can see yourself committing your life to and being fulfilled in its pursuit? If so, what?
2. Has God confirmed a call to a specific ministry? Is there currently an area of ministry that interests you? If so, what is it and why are you interested?

READY. RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL

3. In what ways have others affirmed a call of God on your life?

4. Have you received affirmation of your call in private times of prayer and listening to God? How has God spoken to you? What has he said?

5. Has God given you the peace and patience to wait on him? Do you currently have peace about your call to ministry or are you still wrestling with it? Explain.

