



HELLO GOD? IT'S ME, CALLING JUST TO CHAT ABOUT MY CALL BECAUSE I'VE HAD SOME THOUGHTS ON THIS ONE AND I'VE BEEN THINKING THAT I SHOULD...

WHAT'S THAT?... SHOULD I CALL BACK? ...

OH... RIGHT. YOU'LL CALL ME. HOW?... WHEN?... WHERE?...

GOD?...

...HELLO?!

# GOD'S CALL OR NOT GOD'S CALL IS THERE A QUESTION?

BY CARYN ROGERS

As someone who's recently re-entered the growing pack of job-hunters, I've had to think pretty seriously about God's call on my life. It's a tough climate in which to lose your job; it's an even tougher time to sit on your hands waiting.

And I've started wondering, is the call of God a luxury I can't afford to consider?

Harsh, I know, and yes, His eye is on the sparrow, I know calling isn't just about your job etc etc – you're preaching to the converted. But when there's bills to pay, limited job opportunities and potential to sink under a weight of tertiary-educated-debt, working out God's call for my life seems like time that could be better spent sending out resumes and making calls to woo potential employers.

Have I missed the point? Or, more importantly, have I missed the call of God? Is my redundancy a just retribution?

**The panic sets in.** (see also: spiritual hyperventilation)

Am I spiritual enough? Do I have the skills in God's job description? Should I pop out to the local Christian bookshop and get some more books to get more smarter-er?

Is the series of coincidental encounters, scriptural surmisements and relational inputs a call? Have I heard God at all or have I just interpreted the dial tone?!

What if I think I followed God's will... but I didn't... and then I'm stuck here for-e-v-e-r?!?!?

**CAN I PASS OR FAIL THE CALL OF GOD?**

**For most of us, the jury is still out deciding what it means to hear the call of God, what the call of God actually is and who should respond to it.**

It seems these spiritual choices have mature, grown-up Christians anxious, if not clutching our Bibles to our chests and rocking back and forth, sobbing and muttering, "I thought I heard him, I thought I heard him."

You might think I'm exaggerating, but if you want to see someone panic, ask your average Aussie young adult Christian whether they have heard the call of God and if they have, how they're living it out. Go on. I dare you.

The issue is confusing so let's not pretend otherwise.

In a recent nationwide survey<sup>1</sup> 83% of Christian young adults stated their number one motivator for being involved in cross-cultural mission was a clear call from God, predominantly through a sense of conviction by the Holy Spirit. So it's simple then isn't it, just a little of conviction from the Holy Spirit and we're done here?

**My suspicion is that the call of God is not limited to a certain style or format. Different people hear in different ways.** It's a suspicion confirmed by some cross-cultural team members who've loaned me their thoughts. I've also employed some fine (and some not-so-fine) lyricists to help unpack the issue, to highlight the many and varied views we take of it. **I like to think of the call of God like a soundtrack for my life – always there throughout the story yet I don't often appreciate the entire setlist.**

## 1 THE LIGHTENING BOLT

Some people think a call of God needs to be audible or visual, using a voice, a more-than-coincidental street sign, lightning bolts or other exceptional (and often extreme) turns of events. Without one or all of these facets – they think God has not spoken.

Like the guy who expects to see his future wife's name in the sky, or the girl who won't give up compulsively shopping until God personally shows up at the checkout to stop her.

Generally, this thinking means getting a very clear, sometimes conventional, sometimes kooky, sign. Take it away Ryan Adams,

*"You could give me anything tonight  
Just a wink or even just a sigh  
Be ok... cos I been waiting for a sign to come...are you the one?"<sup>2</sup>*

For Robyn Hughes, a community health worker with the Global Interaction team in Malawi, she wouldn't define the call of God as lightning-bolt-only but it certainly is how she has experienced it. Twice.

"The second time [God called] it took a number of steps; a growing heart for Africa and gentle directions of preparation," Robyn notes. "I then had two visions as I was driving down the Cumberland Highway in West Sydney."

**"The first vision was literally of a sign that said, 'Why not?' and the second, some minutes later was of a decorated gasket (yes, the car engine part) that was tipped upside down, just as my life and plans would be."**

## 2 THE ALGEBRAIC EQUATION

Some view call as a semi-algebraic equation based on a combination of common sense, intuition and gut reactions. For example, we feel the call of God through our passion for certain work, a sequence of Bible passages and/or an assessment of choices in light of our gifting. 'If Circumstance A merges with Bible Verses B and I have Feeling C then it must be a call...'

The outcome of the equation is an answer to the sum of its parts. The Lemonheads sang about a guy who added up all sorts of functions to discover what he really *wasn't* called to.

**"Couldn't build a fire to save my life... Never learned to swim, can't grow a beard or even fight. I lied about being the Outdoor Type."<sup>3</sup>**

Pip Miner, another Global Interaction team member, wanted to live in an armpit. More accurately, she felt called to live and work in Poipet, the place known as the 'armpit of Cambodia' because it is sweaty-hot and far away from places you'd prefer to be.

**"I decided if I wanted to be involved in new faith communities anywhere in the world, I'd like to do it in Poipet."**

Over several months while she was living in Phnom Penh she researched, visited the area, conducted interviews and was soon convinced that there was a need for more people to get involved in development and church work in Poipet.

She then heard voices, well, a voice, quite literally calling her out.

"One evening I bumped into one of the directors of the Youth Commission at the gym," Pip remembers. "Between repetitions he asked, 'Pip, would you be willing to move out of Phnom Penh to work?'"

"I said I would.

**"He asked specifically, 'Would you consider moving to Poipet?'"**

Pip considered her research, her passion and the director's question – the end result being a call to Poipet.

### 3 'TODAY WE GO THROUGH THE ROUND WINDOW...'

Remember back to the days of Playschool when you would journey through the square, arch or round windows into a magical new place? Well, some believe that 'when God shuts a door, he opens a window'.

Andrew and Wendy are no strangers to doors slamming in their face. They discovered that it wasn't enough to *feel* called – the calling needed to take shape and have direction. **Several years ago they discerned a call to cross-cultural work, then Andrew was offered a dream job in Australia. He took the job.**

The immediate reaction is to tut-tut Andrew and Wendy for hearing the call to cross-cultural work and ignoring it. "While this might have seemed like a selfish alternative, I think in hindsight taking the job was part of God's plan for us," Andrew notes.

Ben Folds can't help but agree. "Who will make the first last mistake. Good things come to those who wait. **Well, I can't wait.**"<sup>4</sup>

**"After some time I remember telling my church pastor that I felt like Jonah, like I was in the belly of a whale. I wasn't happy in my job, I knew something had to change,"** Andrew recalls.

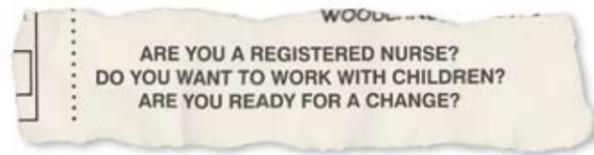
They tested the waters several times, but the doors still didn't seem to open. This year, however, they're heading out through the round window, preparing to join a Global Interaction team in South East Asia. At last, it feels right.

### 4 HEARING VOICES

Sometimes people 'hear voices' (not creepy, think other people's) to discern the call. Surely given the nature of God and His heart for community (think church in its proper context), Oasis might actually have it right.

**"Because we need each other  
We believe in one another  
And I know we're going to uncover  
What's sleepin' in our soul."**<sup>5</sup>

For nurse Elise Rolfs, the call to cross-cultural work was a long-term process, but part of it was as simple as opening up the newspaper. Spotting an advertisement that ticked all the boxes of her personal sense of mission amongst the poor, Elise immediately sprang into action; well, sort of. She cut out the ad and, without telling anyone, hid it under her pillow.



The following Saturday she saw the ad again. This time it wasn't just her that spotted it. "Two of my closest friends rang to say there was a job in the paper that was perfect for me," Elise remembers.

**"I knew that God had spoken; a voice confirmed by my two good friends!**

"Since that time, it's taken me a lot of day-to-day listening and obedience to God to get to this point – it wasn't as easy as, 'there's a job I'll take it.' But I am very excited to be moving to a remote Aboriginal community to get involved in a community based program that's already contributing greatly to the people and families in the local area."

### 5 NAVIGATING THE CALL

Many people talk about the call of God as a single path with various challenges to negotiate – kind of like a map, but a whole lot weirder. Think Neverending Story meets Bourne Identity crossed with Lord of the Rings.

After comparing speed versus tollways on whereis.com it's pretty easy to find our way. But when we view the map of call – it's not so easy.

What if we choose Path A, but take a wrong turn? What if we choose Path C, only to discover it's a dead end? What if all of the paths close, until you find yourself at Path Z and very unhappy with life? Is God only tracking on Path A, and if we miss it are we doomed?

Or (oh please, oh please) am I 'safe' from the path of call because I don't 'feel' called to be a pastor, missionary, Sunday School teacher or martyr?

A little bit of Eminem's logic slips into our thinking.

**"You only get one shot, do not miss your chance to blow  
This opportunity comes once in a lifetime yo..."**<sup>6</sup>

For mother of five, Heather Crane, call looked a lot different from how she thought it would, and it's meant a lot of mindset-adjusting along the way.

**"When I was growing up I felt I had to be 'somebody'; whatever I dreamed, making my mark on the world or making lots of money, or reaching for the stars (whatever that is!),"** Heather laughs. "All the things I was encouraged to be when I was growing up were about ME.

"For quite some time I felt like I could (and should) do lots of things outside the home and still be the main carer for my family. But that has changed now and it doesn't mean I've settled for Path B. I do feel 'called' to my role of wife and mother, even though some people may view my role as 'removed from the action' - the action being village work in Mozambique.

**"I may not be the one directly doing that job, but I am part of the team which is going for that goal."**

### NOWWHAT?

Often when we call out to God for direction, for guidance, for clarity, it feels like He is so far away. Death Cab for Cutie understands what I mean,

**"The distance is quite simply much too far for me to row  
it seems farther than ever before, oh no.  
I need you so much closer."**<sup>7</sup>

How do we go about following God's call for us when His silence is sometimes deafening?

Sadly, our questioning leads us to a dead end or a plateau - because we didn't hear Him when we called Him, we assume He doesn't exist, or if He does exist He doesn't care.

If all you're hearing is the dial tone, don't hang up the line just yet. Over to you Coldplay, **"so you lost your trust and you never should have, no you never should have."**<sup>8</sup>

There's a great deal of difference between us being called *by* God, and us calling *on* God. We expect God to hear us anytime we open our mouths, but when he speaks – whenever that might be and whatever that might look like – are we ready and willing to listen – wherever that might take us?

**Let's not get too hung up on the specifics – otherwise we'll soon be comatose with the fear of missing God's 'best' plans. His best plan is Jesus, so for you, your best plan is to understand His call to relationship with Jesus.**

**What if God's call for you is not about your job, your partner or where you will live, what if you're called simply to relationship with Jesus? What if, "this calling is to someone not to something or somewhere?"**<sup>9</sup>

Global Interaction's Victorian State Director, Mark Holt, notes that, "acknowledging that there is a caller and a called, we can say that call is first and finally about relationship. Vocation is a call to relationship with God. This call is at the centre of who we are."

**Clue: If you're acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with your God<sup>10</sup> – whatever that looks like – consider yourself to have the found the magical, the mythical, the frightening, but oh - so - delighting call of God.**

So before you start singing out the Blondie hit from the 80s: **"call me on the line. Call me, call me, any anytime,"**<sup>11</sup> remember that the call of God can, and most likely will, turn things on their heads, and it's not always a grand gesture or heroic pursuit. The experience of call to cross-cultural work for many people is a simple, not-so-dazzling obedience to God's command to share His love with the world. You don't need to wait for the bells and whistles. It's often easier to feel called if we're playing the hero, but the call to everyday faithfulness is just as much the call of God – be it here or overseas.

And here I wait, safe in the call of a relationship with Jesus. While I wait for the great opportunity or the 'God-moment' of clarity, I'll keep pushing on doors and flogging my resume out to everybody under the sun. (Say, if you're looking for a copywriter ... call me.)

<sup>1</sup> Global Interaction Survey, 2007 with 250 participants

<sup>2</sup> Gimme A Sign, Demolition, Ryan Adams

<sup>3</sup> The Outdoor Type, Car Button Cloth, The Lemonheads

<sup>4</sup> Bruised, Supersunny Speed Graphic, Ben Folds

<sup>5</sup> Acquiesce, The Masterplan, Oasis

<sup>6</sup> Lose Yourself, 8 Mile Soundtrack, Eminem

<sup>7</sup> Transatlanticism, Transatlanticism, Death Cab for Cutie

<sup>8</sup> See You Soon, Parachutes [UK Edition Bonus Disc], Coldplay

<sup>9</sup> Banks, R and Stevens, R (1997) The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity, IVP: Illinois, p.97

<sup>10</sup> Micah 6:8

<sup>11</sup> Call Me, American Gigolo Soundtrack, Blondie

...HELLO?!

GOD?...

### WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Head to [www.globalinteraction.org.au](http://www.globalinteraction.org.au) for:

- Details of people in your state who would love to shout you a coffee and chat with you about your call
- Discussion questions about this article
- Full stories of the cross-cultural workers in this article (and then some...)
- Details about the new Global Interaction DVD that's coming soon to help unpack this issue further