

The Call of the Lord

PAUL CALDARELLA

Good morning, brothers and sisters. I first want to thank the Brigham Young University administration for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. It is always a pleasure to meet with the Saints. I also commend you for attending and watching these devotionals. When I first began my employment at BYU, a colleague of mine told me that if I attended devotionals, my work at the university would be blessed. I have certainly found that to be true. It is an honor to speak to you today, and I pray that the Holy Spirit will attend to help edify and uplift all of us.

Since beginning employment at BYU, one of my greatest fears has been giving a devotional talk. However, when I prayed about the invitation to speak to you, I not only received confirmation to give this talk, but I also received the topic to cover.

I thought I would start by telling you a little bit more about myself. I am originally from Rhode Island. I joined the Church as a graduate student in Logan, Utah, and I was fortunate enough to meet my wife, Andrea, while in graduate school. We have two boys: AJ, age twelve, and Andrew, age seven. My family is the love of my life, and I am extremely grateful that the Lord has blessed me with them.

I also want to wish you all a happy Pioneer Day. I had not heard of this holiday before moving to Utah, but it is a day for which I am grateful. It is so important to remember our ancestors and

the sacrifices they made for us. I am from a family of immigrants, so I can relate to the story of the pioneers, who traveled great distances and bore up under hardships seeking a better life.

My grandfather Emilio Caldarella immigrated to the United States on the *Gerty*, a steamship from Pachino, Sicily, on June 28, 1906, at the age of eleven with his fourteen-year-old sister, Maria, and his forty-nine-year-old mother, Concetta. They had just twenty dollars between the three of them when they arrived. The voyage by steamship across the Atlantic took nearly three weeks. They first settled in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and eventually moved to Providence, Rhode Island.

As I was preparing this talk, I began to wonder what had led people like my grandfather and the early pioneers to leave their homes and loved ones and travel long distances at great personal expense and sacrifice. As I pondered this question, I began to realize that they had heeded the call of the Lord. How else could they have made those long treks and withstood the hardships that often accompanied those experiences? When we are called of the Lord, we can withstand such challenges.

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I am a pioneer of sorts in that I am the first and only member of my family so far to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In my devotional talk today, I am going to use scriptures, hymns, art, quotes from Church leaders, and some of my own personal experiences.

Being Called of God

The title of my talk today is “The Call of the Lord.” The Lord calls us in different ways to do different things at different times in our lives—but always with the same purpose: to serve Him. In serving Him we are blessed, and so are those around us. Examples of ways I have felt the call of the Lord include feeling called to repent, to enter a profession, to move to a new place, to be baptized, to obtain the priesthood, to marry, and to serve in the Church. I also feel called to future full-time missionary service. Perhaps you can recall ways you have felt called by the Lord or how He may be calling to you now.

According to the Guide to the Scriptures, “To be called of God is to receive an appointment or invitation from Him or His duly authorized Church leaders to serve Him in a particular way” (s.v. “call, called of God, calling,” scriptures.lds.org). So the Lord can directly call to us or we can be called by our Church leaders to serve Him.

Examples of the Lord calling individuals to follow Him are found throughout the scriptures. The first mention of someone being called of the Lord is found in Genesis 3:9–10:

And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

It is interesting that this occurred just after Adam had partaken of the forbidden fruit and was afraid.

I believe this passage shows Heavenly Father’s love for us. He calls to us at various times in our lives, both when we are living worthily and when we sin, make mistakes, or are fearful. As we learn in Romans 11:29, “For the gifts and calling of God

are without repentance.” Indeed, His calls to us at such times may be particularly important, as they often prompt us to get back on the path that leads to true happiness, joy, and peace.

I can relate to this. When I was in my twenties, I was not a member of the Church but was an inactive member of another faith. I was going to college and associating with some friends who were not living gospel standards but who were instead focused on carousing and having a “good time.” This lifestyle, while bringing some temporary pleasure, did not leave me with a feeling of lasting happiness, joy, or peace. I tried explaining to these friends my desire to serve and help others in meaningful ways, but they did not want to abandon their pleasure-seeking lifestyle. Over time I began to feel that I should not continue my association with them because they were not going in a direction I wanted to go. It took great effort to separate myself from these friends, but with the help of some trusted others who supported the change I was trying to make, I was able to do so.

I believe that this experience illustrates how the Lord was prompting me to change my life and to better serve Him by serving others and how I came to experience more lasting happiness, joy, and peace. Perhaps you can relate to times in your life when the Lord similarly called you to make such a change, or perhaps you are feeling the call of the Lord to do so now.

After graduating from college and breaking away from these friends, I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to work and live. I also began taking part-time graduate classes to determine what I wanted to study in graduate school and which school I might want to attend. As part of this process, I met with one of my professors to discuss graduate school options, and he suggested that I consider schools in Utah. I was not sure why my professor suggested Utah, but I did look at schools there and eventually decided to attend Utah State University. I can still remember landing at the Salt Lake City airport and driving to Logan for graduate school interviews. It felt good to be in Utah. After meeting with faculty and students there, I knew I wanted to move to Utah to attend

graduate school. I did not realize it at the time, but I was again feeling the call of the Lord, this time to move to Utah and to begin my new life as a graduate student.

The call of the Lord is also illustrated in Mary's miraculous birth of the Savior. In Luke 1:28–38 we read:

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

And when [Mary] saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

For with God nothing shall be impossible.

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

The angel also visited Joseph in a dream, saying:

Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. [Matthew 1:20–22]

Joseph similarly accepted his call of the Lord.

I have always been impressed with this story and with the faith Mary and Joseph showed. They had received singular callings from the Lord, delivered by heavenly messengers, and while they both had some fears and doubts, they nevertheless responded, “Be it unto me according to thy word.” This is a good example for all of us for when we are called of the Lord. We may have some fears and doubts, but if we have faith and heed the call, all will work out.

Fulfilling His Divine Calling

From the Guide to the Scriptures we learn:

Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of the Father in the spirit (Heb. 1:6; D&C 93:21). He is the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh (John 1:14; 3:16). He is Jehovah (D&C 110:3–4) and was foreordained to His great calling before the creation of the world. [s.v. “Jesus Christ,” scriptures.lds.org]

An example of Jesus knowing of His pre-ordained calling is found in Luke 2:40–49:

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus

dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

Later Jesus also had to go through trials and temptations to fulfill His divine calling as He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. We learn in Alma 7:11–12 that Jesus had to experience all of the challenges that beset us here on earth in order to be able to serve us:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

This is important to know and remember as the Lord calls us to serve Him. He knows our weaknesses and infirmities and will help us in our callings. This brings to mind one of my favorite hymns, “Be Thou Humble,” from which I quote:

*Be thou humble in thy weakness, and the Lord thy God shall lead thee,
Shall lead thee by the hand and give thee answer to thy prayers. . . .*

*Be thou humble in thy calling, and the Lord thy God shall teach thee
To serve his children gladly with a pure and gentle love.
[Hymns, 2002, no. 130]*

So humility is needed to help us respond to the feelings of weakness we often experience when we receive and heed the call of the Lord. The Lord is there to help us as we strive to follow Him. President Thomas S. Monson has stated, “Remember that whom the Lord calls, the Lord qualifies” (“Duty Calls,” *Ensign*, May 1996).

Responding to the Call of the Lord

I have often felt feelings of fear or weakness as I have been called of the Lord. One example is when I was out of town at a professional conference and received a phone call from a Church leader asking if I would be willing to serve as the ward clerk. I remember thinking, “Can I really do this?” I had not grown up in the Church and had very little knowledge of how the clerk’s office operated, though the clerk seemed to do many important things. However, when I got down on my knees and prayed to know how I should respond, I felt a confirming witness that I was to accept this Church calling and that I would be able to perform the duties associated with it—and that is exactly what happened. The Lord did qualify me, and He did send others to help me.

We also learn from the scriptures how Jesus called His early disciples and how they responded:

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. [Matthew 4:18–20]

I have always found this to be a remarkable event. Here were these seemingly ordinary men at work, fishing for a living, yet Jesus knew their true potential and called them to fill the measure of their creation. They recognized that the Savior was offering them a better life, and they immediately accepted His invitation to follow Him. In the same way the Lord knows us and calls us to fill the measure of our creation that we might have joy by following Him. I have experienced this in my own life.

After arriving in Logan to attend graduate school, I began to notice that most of my neighbors were young, married Mormon couples who seemed happy and content. Their example impressed me, and I began to think that perhaps I wanted that in my own life. I also found myself gravitating toward faculty members whom I later

learned were members of the Church. I began to realize that I wanted to learn more about the culture of these Latter-day Saints, though I was not consciously looking to join a new religion.

I had a particularly friendly neighbor who was a returned missionary. I can still remember the look on his face when I asked him if he had a copy of the Book of Mormon that I could borrow.

His eyes got very wide, and he seemed very pleased and excited. He returned to my apartment within minutes with a copy of the book.

I was surprised that he had been able to provide me with a copy so quickly! I said I would return the book to him when I had finished reading it, but he said that I could keep it. I thanked him and accepted, asking if I could pay him for it.

He said, “Oh, no,” and reiterated that it was mine to keep.

Upon reading the Book of Mormon, I did not have an immediate experience of the truthfulness of the book; instead this developed “line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:12), as we are taught in the scriptures.

My first experience of beginning to feel a call from the Lord regarding potentially joining the Church came during the first sacrament meeting I attended several weeks later. My neighbor invited me to attend services with him and his wife. What impressed me the most during that meeting was the way the Church members sang the hymns—they seemed to really believe what they were singing—and I felt the Spirit quite strongly. I have had a love of Church hymns ever since.

Eventually I began attending Church services more regularly and started taking the missionary discussions. I was later baptized after putting Moroni’s promise to the test:

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. [Moroni 10:4–5]

I can still remember driving to the outskirts of Logan on a moonlit spring night, getting on my knees, asking God if the Book of Mormon was true, feeling the warmth of His love, and getting a clear answer that it was true. We can use this same process when we feel called of the Lord.

It was not an easy thing to be baptized. My loving parents were very much against my converting to a different religion. This was difficult for me, and I also had some behaviors and habits that I needed to change. However, with the help of the Lord and the people He provided to help me, I was able to be baptized and to feel the cleansing power of that ordinance.

Bearing Difficult Burdens

Often the Lord calls us to do difficult things that we may not be sure we want to do but that will bring great blessings. This is illustrated in the early life of President David O. McKay.

When [he] was eight years of age, his father [also named David] received a call to go on a mission. To accept such a call for two or three years away from home was no easy decision to make. Another baby was on its way, and plans had been made to enlarge the house and furnishings. The responsibilities of running the farm were too great to be left to his wife, so when David showed the letter calling him to a mission, he said: “Of course it is impossible for me to go.” Jennette read the letter, looked at her husband, and said decisively: “Of course you must accept; you need not worry about me. David O. and I will manage things nicely!” . . .

. . . In the absence of his father, the boy David quickly redirected his energies to chores and farm work. Circumstances thus helped to produce a maturity beyond his physical years. [Llewelyn R. McKay, Home Memories of President David O. McKay (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 5–6]

The life of the Savior is the ultimate example of doing hard things while responding to the call of the Lord. When Christ was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not

my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). We can learn from His example and similarly call to the Lord for help as we strive to follow Him. He will provide help to us—often in the form of another person. As stated by President Monson, “When we are on the Lord’s errand, we are entitled to the Lord’s help” (“Duty Calls”).

One great source of help the Lord has provided me is my wife and helpmate, Andrea. She is a special daughter of Heavenly Father, whom I am lucky to have as my eternal companion. I met Andrea in Logan at a church dance that I was not planning to attend. However, a returned-missionary roommate of mine persisted in asking me to go, so I relented and there met my future wife.

I can still remember the special feeling I had when we first embraced. It was the same warm, tender feeling I felt when I prayed asking if the Book of Mormon was true; the Spirit testified to me that Andrea was the woman I was to marry. She has brought blessings into my life for which I am eternally grateful. I share this in the hope that it may be of help to those of you searching for *your* eternal companion. I know how difficult that search can be. If you heed the call of the Lord, He will lead you through the difficult burdens you will encounter and on to the path leading to happiness, joy, and peace.

The most difficult burden I have yet been asked to bear was when my father was diagnosed with leukemia in April 2011. Upon hearing of his diagnosis, I felt the confirmation from the Spirit that his time on earth was coming to an end. He had been sick for some time, but we did not yet know the extent of his illness. He and most of my family remained hopeful that he would not die of this disease.

In the weeks that passed, as he became weaker and stopped eating, I felt prompted that it was time for me to travel back to Rhode Island to be with him. When I arrived, he was quite thin and frail and very anxious about dying. I tried to console him the best I could, but his anxiety regarding his impending death was strong.

I then felt prompted to ask my father if he would like me to give him a priesthood blessing, and—somewhat to my surprise—he agreed.

I contacted the local bishop and asked if he could arrange for someone to help me perform this ordinance. He agreed to do this himself despite his busy schedule.

In the blessing I was prompted to tell my father that he would soon be passing through the veil and that he would be reunited with family members who had already made that journey and who were joyfully waiting to receive him and be reunited with him. This blessing calmed my father greatly, and his anxiety decreased remarkably as he accepted the fact that the Lord was calling him home. He passed peacefully through the veil later that evening.

I was so grateful that this local bishop came to the hospital to help me give my father that priesthood blessing. I did not know him at all prior to this, but he responded to my call for help by performing this sacred priesthood ordinance.

As stated by President Henry B. Eyring:

When we accepted the priesthood, we took upon us the responsibility to do our part in watching over the Church. None of us can escape accountability. . . .

*. . . A shepherd watches over sheep. . . . They need protection and nourishment. The Savior warns us that we must watch the sheep as He does. He gave His life for them. They are His. We cannot approach His standard if, like a hired servant, we watch only when it is convenient and only for a reward. [“Watch with Me,” *Ensign*, May 2001]*

This bishop demonstrated to me that he knew the responsibility and calling he carried and that he was willing to serve with me as my father prepared to pass through the veil.

Disregarding Our Calls

But what about the times when we choose to disregard the call of the Lord? There are many examples of this in the scriptures as well. I will share just one account.

We can probably all relate to the story of Jonah, the prophet who denied the call of the Lord. We read:

Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. [Jonah 1:1–3]

Jonah got on the ship, but a mighty tempest was stirred up by the Lord, forcing the sailors to cast Jonah into the sea, “for the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:10).

However, the Lord “prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah,” and he “was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17).

Jonah said:

I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. [Jonah 2:2–4]

Jonah was then released from the fish, and the Lord again called him to go to Nineveh to preach and warn the people. This time Jonah agreed, and the people of the city—even the king—believed the word of God they heard from him. They prayed, fasted, and repented, and the Lord spared them.

What a story! I used to think that the Lord had treated Jonah harshly, but now I see that He was trying to help Jonah fulfill his divine calling to preach to the people of Nineveh and save them—and himself. The message here seems to be that while we can choose to run from the call of the Lord, He will continue to try to help us turn to Him and serve those whom we are called to serve. As we do so, we can be blessed ourselves. I am grateful for this, as I am not always perfect in recognizing and heeding the Lord’s call.

President Eyring has reminded us:

Your call has eternal consequences for others and for you. In the world to come, thousands may call your name blessed, even more than the people you serve here. They will be the ancestors and the descendants of those who chose eternal life because of something you said or did, or even what you were. [“Rise to Your Call,” Ensign, November 2002]

I have seen this partially fulfilled in my own life as I have been engaged in family history and temple work for my ancestors, and I have personally experienced the great blessings that heeding the call of the Lord brings.

In closing, I would like to bear my testimony. I know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and that the gospel was restored through Joseph Smith. I know that the Lord is continually calling to each of us to follow Him, if we “have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to feel” (Monson, “Be Thou an Example,” *Ensign*, May 2005). I know that our lives and the lives of others are greatly blessed when we heed the call of the Lord. I leave this with you humbly in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.