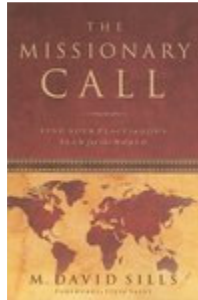


Review

M. David Sills

THE MISSIONARY CALL



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The discernment of God's will for one's life is one of the most common difficulties nearly every follower of Christ struggles with at some point throughout their journey. In *The Missionary Call*, M. David Sills offers his expertise to Christians as they seek to discern God's leading, particularly in regards to service as a missionary. Sills is qualified to offer guidance in this area as he has guided his own family in discerning the "missionary call." This call has lead Sills to serve as church planter and professor in Ecuador to his current position as the A.P. and Faye Stone Professor of Christian Missions and Cultural Anthropology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

The best asset to Sills book is that it has little to no contemporary counterpart. Pastors, missionaries, professors, etc., regularly speak of a call to missions yet rarely define what is

meant by that. As Sills laments, “In the journey to discern whether God has placed a missionary call on our lives, we often encounter a maze of paths to follow. Conflicting opinions and exhortations often leave us with more questions than answers” (16-17). Sills seeks to provide a guide through the conflicting maze by seeing “what God’s Word teaches about the missionary call,” examining “biblical and historical examples of God’s call,” and learning “how to bring this knowledge to bear on personal experience” (17). He accomplishes his goal through a three-part division of the book. The first addresses, “What is the Missionary Call?” Part two focuses on “Understanding the Missionary Call,” while the final part deals with “Fulfilling the Missionary Call.”

The first two parts of the book are the most helpful, as they deal with issues that few other resources do. They provide a solid guide for the believer seeking to discern God’s will, while at the same time leaving adequate room for the unique role of the Holy Spirit in each believer’s life. The final section proves to be a good summation or introduction to a variety of mission field issues and past mission figures. For the reader who is pressed for time, the final chapter provides an excellent summary and review of the previous chapters and covers all of Sills’ major points and exhortations.

In addition to the aforementioned asset, *The Missionary Call* has two additional major strongpoints. The first is its readability and practicality. Sills carefully avoids unnecessary academic jargon and any surface-level three-step formula that reduces the Spirit’s leading to a checklist. The result is a product that is easily accessible to the non-seminary-trained Christian in the church pew who may be wrestling with discerning God’s call in his/her life. The care in which Sills takes with the flow of the book leads the reader to easily imagine himself relaxed in Sills’ office receiving wise counsel on seeking God’s leading. It is biblically grounded and

practically applicable. This is not to suggest that Sills work would be unbeneficial to the highly trained seminarian or professor, for it would be. Difficulty discerning God's leading knows no educational boundaries. The book's practicality goes beyond those that are seeking to be missionaries. It is a beneficial read for every pastor, missions mobilizer, or anyone else who has the possibility of being in a situation where they would be providing counsel for someone struggling with discerning God's leading in regard to missions. In fact, the author's opening chapters which deal with calling prove to be beneficial for discerning God's vocational call for any specialization, not just missions.

Sills' exploration into the diverse ways in which the missionary call is fulfilled is an additional strongpoint. The author seeks to eliminate unnecessary guilt that some may struggle with if their missionary call does not lead them to a remote village for the rest of their lives. He writes, "The ways in which you may fulfill [the missionary call] will vary throughout your life" (97). He goes on to add concerning the missionary call, "It does not revert to something else when a two-year missions stint is completed; rather it morphs into another expression of the call" (100). Sills points out that one of the results of globalization is that some missionary calls can be and are fulfilled while continuing to live in the United States. A helpful distinction the author offers to clear confusion through times of transition for missionaries is distinguishing between God's call and God's guidance. Sills argues that the call is irrevocable, though God will likely guide you through a variety of different expressions of the missionary call.

The most glaring weakness in *The Missionary Call* is the failure to clearly define or set forth what is a missionary. The "call" aspect is dealt with in detail, but little attention is given to defining "missionary". Sills offers a definition of a missionary in the glossary as "an individual who crosses cultural and/or linguistic barriers for the purpose of making disciples" (209).

However, he is not as limited in his definition in the opening chapter when he writes, “We all have a role to play in international missions. That means we all have a missionary call of some sort” (30). Does the biblical mandate to play a role (going or sending) in international missions mean that each has a missionary call? Does the sender need a missionary call? If so, does existence of that missionary call make that person a missionary? The exploration of these questions and the diversity of views on what exactly constitutes a missionary would strengthen what is already a needed, useful, and beneficial read.