

The Purpose of God's Call

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Jonah

The purpose a call from God is to serve other people. When God calls Jonah, it is for the benefit of Nineveh. When Jonah rejects God's guidance, not only do the people he was called to serve languish, but the people surrounding him suffer. If we accept that we are all called to serve God in our work, then we recognize that failing to serve God in our work also diminishes our communities. The more powerful our gifts and talents, the greater the harm we are apt to do if we reject God's guidance.

Undoubtedly we can all bring to mind people whose prodigious abilities enabled them to do great harm in fields of business, government, society, science, religion, and all the rest. Imagine the good they could have done, and the evil they could have avoided, if they had submitted their skills first to the worship and service of the Lord. Our gifts may seem puny in comparison, yet imagine the good we could do and the evil we could avert if we did our work in service to God over the course of a lifetime.

Although Jonah initially refuses to participate in God's blessing for his adversaries, in the end his faithfulness to God overcomes his disobedience. Eventually he does warn Nineveh, and to his they respond passionately to his message. Even Jonah's small, halting moments of obedience to God lead to blessings for those around him.

If we recognize that our own work in God's service is hobbled by disobedience, resentment, laxity, fear, selfishness or other ailments, Jonah's experience may be an encouragement to us. Here we have a prophet who may be even more of a failure at faithful service than we are. Yet God accomplishes the fullness of his mission through Jonah's halting, flawed, intermittent service. By God's power, our poor service may accomplish everything that God intends.