



FOREWORD BY PETE GREIG

JOINING
GOD'S
ADVENTUROUS
CALL TO
LOVE
THE WORLD

HERE
I AM

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FOREWORD

These three words, “Here I am”, describe Andy Hawthorne’s life and message perfectly. It was more than thirty years ago that he first said, “Here I am. Send me!” and he’s still saying it today. The results of this simple act of obedience have been incredible. Countless lives have been changed, broken hearts have been mended, eternal destinies have been rewritten. Andy’s home city of Manchester (and many other places too) would be profoundly different if he had not said “Here I am” all those years ago. In this brilliant resource, written out of decades of hard-won experience, Andy shares the insights that will challenge you to respond in the same way.

One of the many things I like about Andy is that he’s never pretended to be perfect. But then again, neither did the prophet Isaiah, who first spoke these words thousands of years ago. He said, “Woe to

me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King!” Don’t write yourself off because you think you’re too broken, or too bad, or too boring. God is calling you, and this book will help you respond.

Some people think it’s a scary thing, a brave thing, and a miserable thing to respond to God’s call. But they’re flat-out wrong. The stupidest, most dangerous thing you can ever do is to say no to the One who knows you best, loves you best, and only wants the best for your life. The safest, most sensible, and most exciting thing you can ever do (and okay, I admit that it can be a bit scary too) is to stand before God—whose heart is breaking for the world—and say: “Here I am.”

Pete Greig

Emmaus Rd, Guildford and 24-7 Prayer International

AWAKENED TO THE CALL

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted,
seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.*

Isaiah 6:1

We don't know if this was a dream Isaiah had while lying in bed or a vision that came to him as he stood in the temple. But either way, I have to imagine that it came as a shock to Isaiah. There he was, having pleasant dreams or a nice day praying in the temple, and *boom*, God is there, throne and all, with a robe like a billowing cloud filling more and more of the space.

So it is with us. Before we came to Christ, we probably operated more or less blissfully with almost no communication with—or

even awareness of—God. We went our separate ways. But then we became aware of Him somehow, and this eventually led to us believing in our hearts and confessing with our mouths that He is Lord (Romans 10:9). First, we were unaware of His proximity to us, and then we became very aware of it, as happened with Isaiah.

But this is also the sequence when we, as Christians already, begin to sense that God might be calling us to something else, to some higher or deeper work, in His service. We'd been going along happily, doing what we do, even serving the Lord to the best of our ability. And then something enters our thoughts or our awareness, and we start to see Him filling the temple again and coming near in a special way for a special reason.

It often occurs to us as a feeling of growing discontent. Not that we're tiring of walking on the narrow way. It's not greed or unhappiness but a sort of holy discontentment. The sense that God is up to something and it might possibly involve us, but when, oh when, will He reveal it to us? It's a feeling you can't shake that tells you something is wrong with the world that someone should do something about, and that maybe that someone should be you.

I suspect that may be why you're reading this book. I suspect you've got an itch you can't scratch. Some thought or need has come into your mind about what God might be calling you to—or you desire that He *would* call you to such a task. You sense (or hope) that God has some new work that is yours to do, but you can't quite reach it yet.

God *is* really calling you. There is a deeper work He's beckoning you into.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the problem isn't that He's not calling but that we're not yet following.

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

Most of us are not actively looking for ways to avoid God's call. Quite the opposite! What holds us back more often is that we're just too busy doing other things. We are living distracted lives, and sometimes that whisper of holy discontent can be shouted down by the ordinary stuff of life, much like the thorns that choke the good seed in Jesus' parable (Matthew 13:1–8; Mark 4:1–9).

Modern, Western consumer culture, with its smartphones and on-demand programming, is perfectly calibrated to fill all our available space. It's a marvellous distraction that can and will drown out the "still small voice" of God.

The key drivers of our society are easy to see: self-centredness, consumerism, and celebrity obsession. If we're not careful, those characteristics can even leak into our worship when we gather as God's people.

Is there anything more blasphemous than walking out at the end of a Sunday morning service and saying, "I didn't get much out of the worship today"? But I bet you've said it—I have too. So easily we can forget that it's not about us. It's about Him.

How about consumerism in God's people? You can see it as people flit from church to church because one place doesn't give them what they want or what they think they need, or the leader

says something that upsets them, or they don't like the music style, or they don't get on with this person or that pastor.

We shouldn't be miserable in the place we choose to worship, and we shouldn't stay with a church that is deviating from God's path. But neither should we adopt a please-me-or-else attitude that has us "shopping" for churches. Find one that is pretty good and plant yourself in it. Work from the inside to make it the church you'd like it to be. Build relationships and pursue God there. Commit.

And of course, we're far from immune from celebrity culture. Who's the hottest celebrity worship leader or preacher these days? What festival, event, or conference do we need to travel to just to see them? In so many ways, God's people end up mimicking what we see in the world.

You might be surprised to hear that these things are not new. This is what was going on in Isaiah's day too. Look at this from Isaiah chapter 1:

“The multitude of your sacrifices—
 what are they to me?” says the LORD.
 “I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
 of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
 I have no pleasure
 in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats ...
 Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
 Your incense is detestable to me.
 New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—
 I cannot bear your worthless assemblies ...

Wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
stop doing wrong.” (Isaiah 1:11, 13, 16)

Apparently, the people were really going for it. They were bringing a multitude of bulls, lambs, and goats for sacrifice. The language implies that they were giving way beyond what was required by the law. There was such a lavishness about their gatherings that we might think God would be pleased with them. And yet, the Lord tells them to stop! He calls their offerings *meaningless* (verse 13).

That must have confused the people. They were hosting extravagant festivals and feasts, new moon sabbaths, convocations ... the lot. In our day, we might say they were spending their entire summer travelling from festival to festival, having a great time, thinking that they were praising the Lord. But He calls it all “a burden.” He even says, “I hate these festivals” (see verse 14).

Why? Because while celebrating these festivals, they were harbouring sin. They themselves were still “doing wrong” and committing “evil deeds,” so until they decided to “wash and make [themselves] clean,” He wouldn’t receive their offerings, and those sacrifices would remain detestable, worthless, and meaningless.

If you and I aren’t hearing God’s call to a deeper walk with Him or His invitation to important work, it might be because we’ve become similar to the people of Isaiah’s day. It may be that we’ve let self-centredness, consumerism, and celebrity obsession distract us.

Well, if that’s what’s happened, then there is a remedy! It’s never too late, while we still live, to get right with Jesus.

GETTING OUR EARS CHECKED

The very fact that you're reading this book gives me every confidence that, one, God *is* calling you to a deeper work, and two, there's a part of you that wants to do whatever He asks and whatever must be done to hear His call.

The Lord, throne and all, is filling the temple of your heart. You've had your awakening and you've sensed that God has come near. Here are some ideas for making sure you can see and hear Him fully.

First, deal with any known sin in your life. Sin will keep us separated from the voice of God and will cause our "sacrifices" to become meaningless while it stands between ourselves and the Lord. Sin causes us to be cut off from the power of the vine. So ask His forgiveness! Why wait? He is always pleased to give it to all who ask. Then we will see His robe filling the temple like a cloud.

Second, stay alert. The people of God should, as John Stott once said, have one eye on the Word and one eye on the world. We should come to the morning news headlines saying, "Lord, help me understand what's going on from Your perspective." If we do this, maybe God will build a greater expectancy in our hearts.

What a good thing it would be for the people of God if we thought, "Wow, Jesus may just return very soon." I think it would change everything. It would affect the fact that we play games with sin. It would affect the way we spend our money. Maybe it would even affect our evangelism—if we thought that we'd soon be with Jesus for all eternity and we had a part to play in getting other people

there. It's a bit of a wake-up call for us, isn't it? So as you listen for the voice of God, do so with an eye on Christ's Second Coming, which—you never know—might happen a lot sooner than some people think (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Third, identify what it is that made you start suspecting that God might be calling you to a new work or a new level of partnership with Him. Isaiah was going along fine as a preacher *before* he had this encounter with God. His first inkling that God was about to change his direction was the vision and his sudden awareness that God was coming near.

What was your awakening to this change? Was it, indeed, a holy discontent with your current situation? Was it a trauma or crisis in your life or in the life of someone you love? Was it a setback or disappointment that showed you that your expectations were not in line with reality? Was it a word from God Himself? Identify this, because it will become part of your story when you tell people what caused you to make the big change I suspect you could be about to make.

Fourth, take inventory of how the Lord has made and gifted you. There is a chance God might call you into an area in which you have virtually no natural or spiritual ability, if only to cause you to rely exclusively upon His enabling. But it's perhaps more likely that He will call you into work that makes use of your spiritual gifts, your personal passions, and your training and skills. He made you on purpose, after all.

So make some lists. We've included a blank Venn diagram in appendix 2. Use it to list, in the circles, your passions, your gifts,

your training, your temperament, your skills, your experience, your connections, and the sorts of things God has used you to do in the past. Look for the overlapping of things you love to do and things you're gifted and/or trained to do.

It's not our job to winnow out the good works God has prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). That's God's department. But it doesn't hurt to turn your mind to these characteristics of your life, because God often calls us to do further work in areas where He's already had us honing our skills. Maybe, with your eyes scanning about in this way, you'll more rapidly detect the manner in which He may be calling you.

WAKING UP TO YOUR DESTINY

Sometimes it takes another person to wake us up to our destiny. Sometimes an entire group can sense God's calling on our lives, even if we don't, and they can invite us to see for ourselves what is clear to them.

That's what happened to Natasha Pollitt, a young woman in the neighbourhood of Hattersley in inner-city Manchester.

The Message has developed groups of believers who move into low-income districts—called “estates”—with the purpose of reaching at-risk young people, many of whom are already deep into addictions and crime, for the gospel. We call these groups *Eden teams*. It was the “Eden Hattersley” team that encountered young Natasha and was used by God to bring about her awakening. Here is Natasha's story in her own words:



Natasha Pollitt's Story

Before the Eden team came to Hattersley, my family life was quite chaotic. There was quite a lot of physical and emotional abuse growing up. As I became a teenager, at the most crucial point of

trying to figure life out, I still felt a lot of fear and anger. I wasn't the most well-behaved, due to the environment I was in. So at the age of 14, when the Eden team arrived, I was at a point where I was suffering depression. My parents had just split up, as well. I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I had no plans for the future. I just thought I'd be on benefits for the rest of my life. As a coping mechanism, I was drinking and taking drugs to try and get rid of what I was feeling. I just didn't feel confident without taking something.

I remember meeting the Eden team for the first time and feeling quite excited. I could see something in them that was different and very appealing. On the other hand, I was in a different world. My friends thought they were brainwashing me with the faith side of stuff. It wasn't until later on that I was able to grasp the Christian faith. Before then, I'd had no great experience of faith. Sometimes I'd gone to church just because we'd get a Sunday dinner afterwards. But I'd never really thought about it.

Initially, I tested them with my behaviour because I found it difficult to trust anyone. I wasn't disruptive, but I was quite cheeky. I desperately wanted to hear more about their Christian faith, but I didn't trust what they had to say. My mum also said she didn't want me to be any part of them. But when I was with them, I felt different and wanted to know more. They seemed to see something in me, some worth or purpose, that I didn't see in myself. So I kept going to their youth meetings.

Over the next five years, they became a major part of my world. They didn't just invite me to church and chat to me, either—they

stepped in at a time when I needed major medical surgery. It wasn't my parents taking me to these appointments; it was the Eden team. They became family. They became people I wanted to be like.

When I was 19, the Eden team leader, Sharon Murphy, said I should get out of the area where I lived so I could be free from my friends, who were still taking drugs. It was the lifestyle that I couldn't get out of. So I moved to Old Trafford to be part of Message Academy (at that time, called Genetik) run by The Message Trust. But even then, I was scared to trust God. The turning point came when I went on a six-month mission trip to Zimbabwe with The Message.

When I told my mum I wanted to go to Africa for half a year, she said if I went there I couldn't come home. But for the first time, I felt like God was calling me to do something. Being away in a different country is where I found my faith. When I was there helping others, I was free to be who I was. No one was taking drugs or drinking alcohol. I left the airport a smoker, but over there we weren't able to smoke. So a lot of my lifestyle changed, and that's when I grasped God fully. I awakened to the reality that there was a God, and I could see Him in other people's lives.

When I came back from Africa, I moved back into Hattersley Estate and, unfortunately, the same cycle began as the same temptations came back. Then Sharon told me they were creating an Eden team in Sheffield, and she asked me if I'd become one of their youth workers. I took the opportunity to get out of Manchester.

But I soon discovered I couldn't run away from all the hurt and pain. One evening, I was sexually assaulted by two men. I remember

walking the streets afterwards just crying. I had never felt so alone. I didn't know what to do or who would help me.

Then I remembered that the Eden team was always there, so I called Sharon. She came with her husband and brought me back to her house. I never spoke to her about what happened. I didn't tell anyone, because I believed at that time that it was my fault. When I was with her, I knew I was safe. She arranged for the team to be with me the next day.

There were similar situations that my lifestyle led me into, as I continued on a cycle of drinking, drugs, suicide idolisation, and self-harm. I believed those "solutions" were helping me to cope with the emotional pain I had been carrying from childhood. But I finally realised they were harming me even more.

That was what made me decide to go into the City Hearts Restore programme in Sheffield, which helps vulnerable women deal with abuse and addictions. During my time with City Hearts Restore, I was able to talk about how it had been at home and what I'd been through, and I had the freedom to let everything out. After completing the programme, I found I was finally free from my past.

Over the years since then, I've been trained in counselling and dealing with people with addictive behaviours, and now I'm working there full-time. I'm an assistant coordinator for the City Hearts Restore programme, working with women with life-controlling issues such as self-harm, eating disorders, depression, and drug and alcohol abuse. Also, I'm a case worker for the anti-trafficking side of City Hearts Restore.

It's indescribable when I look back to how I was when I was in a place of wanting to end my life and having low self-worth. I can honestly say that all of that is now completely gone. When I sit with women, I just see it as such an honour and privilege to be in the place that I am at.

I'm so grateful that the Eden team came into my life. If they hadn't come to my estate, I'd still be where I was with no hope for a future. But they saw something in me and called it out in me. Now I am helping other women step out of fear and into the freedom I've found.



HERE I AM. SEND ME!

What was it that made you pick up this book? Was it that you have always loved this passage in Isaiah? (I love it too!) Was it that you sense God calling you to a bigger life—or you'd like to *have* Him call you to a bigger life? Was it that you've heard of me or The Message or The World Wide Message Tribe or our work in the UK or elsewhere? Did someone give it to you as a gift? In any case, I'm glad you're here.

Now let me ask a better question: What has God called you to do? God invites every one of His children into His work. Did you know that? You don't have to be a seminary-trained Bible scholar to be the very hands of Jesus on this earth.

There are many ways to answer the question of what God has called you to do. You can say that He's called you to love and serve Him, and that's absolutely true. You can say that He's called you to use your spiritual gifts in the local church, and that's true. You can say you must bloom where you're planted and shine your light wherever you are, which is surely so. You can say you must simply look around yourself and see what needs doing, or what Jesus would do, or where God is already working, and then do what your conscience compels you to do, and that would be brilliant.

But many people long for a larger work, a calling that will demand everything of them and be much, much too big for them, that only God's enabling will allow them to do.

Is that you? Do you long to hear God saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" Are you electrified by the very prospect of volunteering—sight unseen—for whatever God might call you to do?

How rarely do most of us enter into such a posture of willingness to be sent *wherever* to do *whatever*! And when we are in that posture, how we yearn for God to instantly hand over to us our orders, our itinerary, and our plane tickets.

In an upcoming chapter, you're going to read the story of a woman who says that you must "be quietly, stubbornly determined to use all your skills to bring justice, mercy, and kingdom" to the world. That's what we want, isn't it? We want to be all-in on a job that is epic and massive, holding on with all our strength to God's own hand as He leads us into the hurts and darkness of a lost world.

Isaiah had a dramatic awakening to the nearness of God. It's as if the veil grew thin and God's form could be seen pressing against it and His voice could be heard. It was a moment when the holiest of holies in the temple suddenly enveloped Isaiah, and he was in God's own fiery presence.

What is your level of awareness of God's nearness right now? Do you sense His closeness more than usual? Less than usual? About the same? Stop your activity, stop your thoughts, and dwell before the Lord. Ask Him to come near. Ask for eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart wide open to His will. Plead for your own awakening.

And just wait. Simply dwell in that stillness. Discipline your thoughts to be silent. Ignore the distractions. Sit. Wait. Abide.

Listen.

CHAPTER 1: GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What caused you to pick up this book? What caused your group to choose to go through it?

2. Is there an “itch you can’t scratch,” a holy discontentment, that is causing you to wonder if God might be calling you to something bigger than what you’re currently doing? Answer for yourself but also in terms of something your group might do together.

3. In what ways can you see self-centredness, consumerism, and/or celebrity obsession in the church? In what ways can you see those things in your own life?

4. What things have you seen in the news or the world around you that you think might indicate that we are closer (or perhaps *no* closer) to the Second Coming of Christ? What's the consensus in the group?

5. If you did a Venn diagram or inventory of your own life, gifts, skills, passions, education, and experience, what sort of thing would you venture to guess that God's calling on your life might involve? (Note that we have included a Venn diagram template in appendix 2.)