



## **Send Me and Provide a Place for Me to Minister** **Jessica Wilkerson**

Like most call stories, mine is a complicated tapestry. I started my college career convinced I was going into ministry. I did an internship at a church, I joined a college Christian group and became part of the leadership team and went on summer-long mission trips across the United States. However, at the end of my senior year at Bethel University, I felt burned out on church and did not see myself in the ministry any longer. Most of this stemmed from fear of raising financial support (I wanted to work for the Christian college organization Campus Crusade for Christ), feelings of inadequacy, and being impatient with God. Not really knowing what to do next, I moved to Nashville and earned my Master of Science Degree in social work.

After several years of not understanding my call or direction in life, I reunited with a college sweetheart. Patrick and I married in 2013. Shortly after we married, Patrick was scheduled to go on a young adult mission trip to Colombia to help lead the young adult conference Connectados. I was able to join the mission team and go on this trip. This experience was a pivotal moment for our family. It was here I fell in love with Colombia, the people, and the churches of Medellín. After returning home, Patrick and I were both very excited about our trip and I learned for the first time of Patrick's deep desire to do missions, specifically in Colombia. Patrick went annually to El Corro near Cali, Colombia with a work crew. As soon as he heard my excitement about missions, he really got excited. For many months, we were not sure if this calling was from God or if it was just a romanticized dream of ours. However, it continued to draw our attention like a dripping faucet.

In the fall of 2014, we had our first child, Bella Grace. About one week after she was born, Patrick received a call from Lynn Thomas, Director of Global Missions. Lynn wanted to meet with us to discuss our interest in missions. That meeting, and the ones that followed, helped us affirm our calling as a family to go to the mission field. What a wild and exciting time it has been in this process of becoming missionaries! In October 2016, we went on our preview trip to Colombia to meet with pastors and to research housing. I was feeling a little discouraged because I was still struggling with my personal calling on the mission field. I knew what Patrick would be doing; he even had a job description. I'm not an ordained minister; I'm a social worker. What was God's plan for me?

It was then we visited a mission point in a small city in the mountains, about an hour outside of the big city of Medellín. We were meeting with the pastor and church leaders to discuss their needs and to get an idea of how we could be helpful. The problems and needs the pastor listed were all social or mental health needs. My ears perked up and I felt passion. Almost everything the pastor had mentioned I had direct clinical experience with in my career. I shared this with the pastor, and he told Patrick, "Sorry pastor, we don't need you! We need Jessica!" Of course, we all laughed, but I felt reassurance and relief because my calling continues to be re-

affirmed. I'm slowly learning to be patient, and to know that God reveals His plans and His callings in His perfect time.

## Reflections

1. Read Exodus 3:10, 4:1-17. When Moses heard God's call, he did not believe he had the resources or the gifts needed to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. When Jessica heard God's call to go to Colombia, she was not sure she had the qualifications because she was a social worker, not a minister. How did God convince Moses that God would provide all that Moses needed to lead his people? How did God convince Jessica that she already had the gifts needed because God had been preparing her for this call?
2. When has God called you to do something and you felt you were not the one for the task? Tell how looking in the rear-view mirror of your life, you realized God had prepared you and continued to meet your needs.

## Call to Action

It is usually difficult for many of us to list our own gifts and talents. We see them in others but tend to see our own shortcomings better than our gifts. In twos, share with a partner a spiritual gift you see in each other. Then the two of you may discuss ways you both have, and can, share your gifts in your church and community. After a few minutes, each person may call out a gift her partner saw in her. Remember that if God calls you, God will provide, and you will be blessed.

## Prayer

*God of love and light, guide us on our path through life. We thank you for Jessica and her family who have answered your call to love and serve the people of Colombia. Continue to surround her with patience and wisdom. Keep her family safe and meet all their needs. Help us to recognize that you are omnipotent and omnipresent, that you call us to be your hands and feet, and you give us the tools we need to fulfill your call. Help us to be willing to say, "Here am I, send me." Amen.*