

Did Jesus Really Say? A review of 'Jesus Calling'

[reformation21](#) ^ | November 11, 2013 | Todd Pruitt

I keep hoping that the fascination with Sarah Young's bestseller Jesus Calling will fade away. If you are not familiar with Jesus Calling, it is a book of 365 daily devotions that the author claims are messages from Jesus spoken directly to her. In fact the book is written in the first person from Jesus. If this troubles you at all then you are not alone. If you have spoken up about it you have very likely encountered the wrath of well meaning brothers and sisters who no doubt wonder how in the world you could speak against such a sincere offering.

For the sake of clarity allow me to make a few things clear. First, I do not know Sara Young and therefore gladly assume that her motives are good. I do not believe that she wrote Jesus Calling to confuse anyone or cause division in the church. I believe that she believes Jesus speaks directly to her outside of the Bible.

Second, I have not spoken to Sara Young and do not plan on contacting her personally. She has not sinned against me. I point this out so that no one will misapply Matthew 18. Miss Young has written an enormous bestseller. Her books are read by millions of men and women around the world. Therefore it is appropriate for critiques to be offered publically. And since I believe Jesus Calling to be unhelpful, misleading, and even dangerous, it is my responsibility as a pastor to say so.

As I see it Sarah Young commits at least three errors in Jesus Calling:

1. She distorts the biblical doctrines of revelation and inspiration.

Miss Young claims a kind of direct revelation that even the apostles did not claim. While Paul gives evidence that he knew at times that what he was writing was by way of revelation he does not write with the claim of direct dictation from Jesus as Young does. That is why I am confused by what she writes in the introduction that her book is not inerrant as is the Bible. Follow me here. She claims that Jesus has given her the words she has written. She is, in her mind, quite literally quoting Jesus. Why in the world is her book, then, not inerrant or authoritative? Has she not claimed divine inspiration, indeed dictation? When does Jesus speak in a way that is errant and un-

authoritative? This is a troubling and confused view of revelation and inspiration.

At a church where I previously served, an elder expressed concern to me that an adult Sunday School class was using Jesus Calling as "a supplement to the Bible." But if we believe Miss Young's claims we should not only use Jesus Calling as a supplement to our Bibles but as the next testament.

2. She undermines the sufficiency of Scripture.

In the introduction of Jesus Calling Miss Young states that while she had the Bible, she desired more. She desired a voice from God that was more direct, more immediate, more tailor made for her. Sadly, what she does not understand is that God does not promise us unmediated access. Indeed we have no unmediated access to God. God has given us his divinely appointed means of grace by which we hear him speak and experience his presence. The means of grace are the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments. It seems that Miss Young desires an experience of God (and encourages her readers to seek an experience of God) that is outside his promised means.

God is a speaking God to be sure. He has spoken and continues to speak to his people. In past days of redemptive history God spoke in various ways through the prophets and apostles (Heb 1:1-2). But the canon is now closed. We live in that privileged age of redemptive history where we possess God's completed and inscripturated Word. It is a living and active Word. It is an unerring and authoritative Word. It is also a sufficient Word not needing to be supplemented by extra-biblical voices, messages, revelations, or vague murmurings.

How about we try this: Once we fully exhaust the vast revelation of God given to us in the Scriptures we can then worry about finding additional messages from Jesus.

3. She misrepresents Jesus.

The Jesus of Jesus Calling does not sound like the Jesus of the Bible. His messages to Miss Young are largely therapeutic. The Jesus of Jesus Calling never commands. He never preaches God's holy law. It should be no surprise that Miss Young's Jesus sounds much like a 21st century American woman with 21st century western concerns. This is not meant as a slight against

Young. Indeed, if I began writing messages from Jesus I imagine he would sound a lot like a balding middle-aged American man.

In this way Jesus Calling comes dangerously close to blasphemy. That is, admittedly, a serious charge. I thought about it and decided the charge was appropriate. After all, if Sarah Young is not receiving direct revelation from Jesus; if she is not quoting Jesus then she is putting words in his mouth. She is attributing to Jesus 365 days worth of messages that he never spoke. And that is a serious error. It is bad enough to put words in the mouths of a friend or stranger. It is bad enough to say, "My neighbor said so-and-so" when they said nothing of the kind. That is bearing false witness. It is, in a word, lying. It seems to me the offense is infinitely magnified if we put words in the mouth of our Lord. Is it not a serious matter to say, "Jesus said," when he most certainly did not?

No doubt Miss Young did not intend her book to be divisive. But it has become quite divisive. I know of many pastors and elders who have spoken about their concerns only to be met with sharp criticism as a result. These faithful men have been excoriated and accused of being unloving because they take seriously their calling to watch over the flock of God. Miss Young bears a level of responsibility in this. She has written a book that claims direct revelation from Jesus. The true believers therefore are understandably upset, angry, etc. when a pastor or elder criticizes these supposed words from our Lord. Paul makes it clear in Romans 16 that those who cause division within the church are not those who cling to sound doctrine but those who depart from it.

As I wrote above, I keep hoping the Jesus Calling phenomena will fade. But that does not seem to be happening. Indeed there are a variety of spin-off publications. Miss Young's messages from Jesus have become a big business. At the risk of sounding cynical, the good folks at Thomas Nelson have made a lot of money on Jesus Calling and its various spin-offs. They no doubt want the messages to keep coming. It is simple supply and demand. There is a demand among evangelicals for direct encounters with God, extra-biblical messages, and a Jesus who sounds like us. I will not try to discern the motives of Sarah Young. To do so would be a sin. But is there any doubt that the publishing company has a wonderful plan for Young's life? It is a rare thing for a book to sell as well as Jesus Calling. Every publishing house, particularly a Christian publishing house dreams of such

success. It only makes sense for Thomas Nelson to want lightning to strike twice.