

Finding Your Calling

John Bradley, IDAK Group, for the Finishers Project

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Knowing that we have found our calling can be one of the biggest issues in many decisions we make, including that of mission involvement. We hope you will find this information helpful as you think and pray about what your future will hold and how God has been preparing and guiding you.

As a student of the Bible and as a practitioner advising thousands of mid-career adults in future ministry options, I believe there are three basic parts to finding God's calling for our lives. Furthermore, each of us at midlife and beyond can determine that calling without mystery or need for the right "feeling" to guide us. These three parts are:

- 1) Understanding the call of God
- 2) Knowing the difference between
your learned skills,
your motivation/passion, and
your innate skills
- 3) Matching your aptitudes to ministry options

Part One: Understanding the call of God

There are three factors to understanding God's calling in our lives.

- A. God's divine prompting
- B. Confirmation from the community
- C. God's gifting

A. God's divine prompting

When it comes to making vocational decisions, we need to address the divine intervention of God in our lives. Some may experience a dramatic event as did the Apostle Paul on the way to Damascus in Acts 9:3-6. On the other hand, most Christians refer to an inner conviction regarding the biblical imperative to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19-20) or other Bible references. We want to acknowledge that God can prompt individuals in different ways. There are many examples in the Old and New Testaments of how God and Jesus prompted men and women to action.

We also need to be careful of the subjective "trap" of saying, "I don't feel called" or, "I'm waiting to be called, but it hasn't happened yet."

The issue is that we have but one life to live, and each of us has a unique contribution we can make during these few years of our life. Are we pursuing that course; are we attempting to give our very best to glorify God? If yes, then we have been sufficiently "prompted," and can at any time be directed by God as he so chooses. Giving our best includes both secular and sacred service.

"But," you may ask, "what if one senses God's leading to go somewhere or do something so unusual that it requires major risk as well as financial commitment?" Fortunately, there are good biblical guidelines to prevent anyone from going off the deep end. This leads us to the second part of understanding the call - confirmation from the community.

B. Confirmation from the community

To help us stay on track and not be led astray, God has provided a multitude of counselors, advisors, family and friends. One of the many advantages of being an active and transparent member of a church body is that we can seek a reality check when considering life-changing decisions. Asking three or more individuals who know you well to express their views regarding your interpretation of God's prompting in your life provides a good bench mark. This is called "confirmation from the community". Several key examples from the Bible illustrate how God used the community to guide a person's vocational decision. We see the selection of Steven and the others in the early church (Acts 6:1-3). We note Paul's advice to Timothy to be careful in selecting leaders

(I Timothy 5:22). We are also familiar with the standard for selecting leaders (elders) who were above reproach, which was determined by the community who knew the individuals (Titus 1:5 and I Timothy 3).

C. God's gifting

A third part of understanding the calling of God is to acknowledge that we have each been created by Him in such a way that He knows the most minute detail of our makeup (Psalm 139:13-16). Part of that detail includes His choice **of our** aptitudes and temperament characteristics. God states that He has placed innate skills within men and women in order to build his tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-6) and also His temple (I Kings 7:14, II Chronicles 2:14).

We are also instructed that "mediocre" or "average" is not sufficient. We are encouraged to not grow weary but to perform well above average with the talents the Lord has given us. Matthew's gospel states that we should let our light so shine before men that they can see our good works and give the glory to God (Matthew 5:16). The word for "works" is not limited to charity or ministry, but includes our vocation. In Ephesians we are admonished to walk in the good work for which we were created (Ephesians 2:10).

Another performance standard is offered in Proverbs. "One who is skilled (highly proficient) in his works will stand before kings" (Proverbs 22:29). Being acknowledged by the king was the ultimate standard of career mastery. If it was good enough for the king and the community, then it would be glorifying to God.

All of these verses testify that not only are we gifted by God, but that focusing on that gifting should bring about a lifetime of quality productivity which brings glory to God. So as you contemplate and pray about a new venture which God has placed on your heart, it is important to ask, does it fit your gifting? Your gifting is clearly part of God's will for your life.

In summary, there are three important parts to evaluating one's calling. First, is there a prompting from God either through the leading of the Holy Spirit or the revelation of His Word? Second, is the calling confirmed by the community of saints who know you well? Third, is the calling compatible with your gifting?

Part Two: Knowing the difference between your learned skills, your motivation/passion, and your innate skills

Within the profession of aptitude assessment, there is a common understanding that most people don't know the difference between their learned skills and their innate skills. This means that a high school English teacher probably will not know if his/her job skills are based on a teaching degree along with on-the-job experience, or because of a God-given talent for teaching (most people say both).

A natural talent is something God-given. Each of us has at least five unique talents which give us the capacity to intuitively understand the work we do rather than just go through the motions.

Natural talents are very transferable and can predict success in a future job. Ironically, in the early years of one's career, the difference between learned skills and innate skills (talents) is not noticeable. In our early years, job performance can be just a repetition of what we know and have done. But once we age beyond 35, stress can begin to occur; and this stress can come, in part, from job performance which is based only on learned skills rather than our innate skill or natural talent.

If we are considering a change of career at midlife and beyond, it is important to have some predictability of success. Motivation or passion can make the first 6-12 months in a new position appear to be a good fit. Beyond that point, intuitive know-how resulting from natural talent will become important. Unfortunately, learned skills are not easily transferable as they operate best within the organizational structure where they have been learned. An English teacher who is not naturally gifted in teaching will have difficulty transferring skills to a mission school in Kenya, for example. On the other hand, one who intuitively understands teaching (has a talent) and works easily with children or adolescents can make the switch with ease.

In addition, the talented person's job performance will not experience a setback with a career change, but will continue to grow through self-improvement. Unfortunately, many are confused and think that passion plus work experience is all one needs to predict future success in ministry service or any other career. Talent is not always authenticated by passion and work experience.

Spiritual Gifts

When the subject of God's gifting or one's innate gifts are discussed, the topic of spiritual gifts usually arises. There are two major references to spiritual gifts in the New Testament: Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12. Interpretation of how these gifts were intended for use during the first century of the early church versus how they are intended to be used today varies widely. Unfortunately, differences of opinion on the use of the gifts have caused some heated opposition among members of the body.

The good news is that both natural talents and spiritual gifts are given by the same Creator. Therefore, in His plan they work together to do His will. We understand that spiritual gifts are given to each person at the time he/she makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ (I Peter 4:10). At that time three gifts are received: 1) we receive salvation and become born again spiritually (II Corinthians 5:17); 2) we receive the Holy Spirit (the helper) who will teach us about the truth (John 14:16-17, 26); and 3) we also receive a spiritual gift. All three of these gifts provide for each of us an incredible new perspective on ourselves, the world, and spiritual things. They enable us to discern spiritual things where earlier we were blind to them.

Clearly, spiritual gifts are important and of a higher order than natural talents as they are part of our new spiritual identity. However, they do not invalidate the talents or replace them. Many recorded expressions of the spiritual gifts in the New Testament evidenced supernatural activity which gave a type of authenticity to the leader. Some believe that these supernatural activities occur today through the expression of spiritual gifts. However, being able to name one's spiritual gift does not appear to be a priority for spiritual leadership.

The two classic passages which list the qualities for elders in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 give no mention of identifying one's spiritual gifts as a prerequisite for leadership. (The only exception are the words "able to teach" which includes the role of explaining, by conversation to another, one's faith). So it appears that whatever one's gift is, it is sufficient; and, perhaps the more varied the gifts, the better, in order to provide a well-rounded leadership team for the body. Therefore, the key issue about spiritual gifts is that each believer in Christ has at least one, and it is most valuable. However, there does not appear to be an emphasis on knowing one's spiritual gift(s) in order to be matched to a type of ministry service or for a specific leadership role.

One final issue. With over thirty years of assessing individual's aptitudes, identifying natural talents is much easier to measure than the supernatural, spiritual activity of the gifts. Also, when it comes to matching aptitudes to ministry options, talents are more definitive and, therefore, easier to match to job duties.

For those who are caught in the tension between talents and spiritual gifts, I encourage them to first assess their talents since they are the easiest to identify. Being obedient to these will then allow the believer to be used of God through their spiritual gifts. The spiritual gift(s) will express itself in whatever job or role a person has as long as they are walking in obedience to Christ.

Part Three: Matching your aptitudes to ministry options.

Having given a large part of your life to your career, what would a “right fit” be for you in a ministry organization in the future? Most adults at 50+ don’t want to start at the bottom. They are looking for a good fit that gives them a sense of value and is also a help to the ministry organization.

Most ministry organizations do not have the staff or the expertise to match your 25 plus years of experience with a job in their ministry organization. Therefore, you need to provide the information regarding your transferable talent strengths as well as define your recommended job fit.

This is not as complicated as it sounds.

Select the Organization:

Let's consider what your final goal looks like. It isn't missionary or teacher or counselor. That is too vague. You want to work with an organization that you feel is performing the type of cutting-edge ministry which will make a difference. This might be disaster relief, water sanitation consulting, an English-as-a-second-language school, shelter for orphans, banking systems for self-employment, medical care on wheels, etc. The selection of the type of ministry organization you want is half of your ultimate goal. This decision is usually based upon your passion, compassion, interests or values.

Select the Job Title:

The second half of the goal is the job title. What do you propose to do? Titles could include radio broadcaster (D.J.), consultant, fund raiser, music director, children's teacher, engineer, etc. There is no set list or special inventory of job titles to choose from because no one yet knows you and what you propose to do.

In summary, to select your ideal “Finisher” ministry career target, you need to make two decisions. Which ministry organizations do I feel are on the cutting edge? And, second, what job duties fit my natural talents (transferable strengths)?

Where to go from here? (Note from SWN)

Don't scratch your head too long over this. Go back to the website, www.secondwind.net.au and log onto your Personal Main Menu page. Here you will find a preliminary match with organizations that fit your interests, as you entered them in your Personal Profile. You may modify your profile, and re-run the matching process at any time. You may also run “super-searches” for agencies based on your own criteria, apart from those in your registered Profile. From our Opportunities page, you may also view the “5 Top Opportunities” supplied by partner agencies.