

Vocation

We are looking to develop a 'grid' through which to process and evaluate decisions. This grid is not a substitute for listening to God – indeed it won't work unless you hear God! Often, however, we don't hear because we don't know what we are listening for! You can be so open minded... Its function is to help you *interpret* what you hear and, after that, to *action* what God is speaking about.

1. Defining vocation

The English word *vocation* comes from the Latin word *vocation* which means 'calling'. Calling is sometimes used of pastors and missionaries, while vocation(al guidance) is usually used in regard to secular work. This confusion is really unhelpful – calling/vocation is all about the 'work' that God has put us on earth to complete.

"Experiencing and living by a calling provides a fundamental orientation to everyday life... A calling in scripture is neither limited to nor equated with work. Moreover, a calling is to someone, not to something or somewhere."
(Paul Stevens)

"Calling means that our lives are so lived as a summons of Christ that the expression of our personalities and the exercise of our spiritual gifts and natural talents are given direction and power precisely because they are not done for ourselves, our families, our businesses or even humankind but for the lord, who will hold us accountable for them."
(Os Guinness)

If we were to summarise this:

- We are called (a call comes to us) – this challenges our drivenness.
- Calling means our everyday life has meaning because God is firmly involved.
- This internal sense gives meaning and direction to our lives – we are responding to the way God has created us).
- Our gifts and talents have meaning because they are to be used to fulfil our calling (we can use our gifts but neglect our calling).
- We balance a few callings (in marriage, family, work, community)
- We are hardwired with purpose and destiny – life is a process of discovery.

"We ask to know the will of God without guessing that his will is written into our very beings"
(Elizabeth O'Connor)

2. Career versus calling

We live in a world that has reduced vocation to work and career. Work is either meaningless toil or all we live for. We place a lot of pressure on our children on their career choices – so they will earn plenty of money and get

somewhere in life. But the world of work is seen as secular or unspiritual. It is not valued as having inherent worth, as a critical part of our identity.

- Career is about progress, calling is about identity
- Career is material, calling is about our whole life
- Career uses work, calling values work
- Career is something a person pursues, calling is something a person discovers

We need to explore the Biblical view of work to gain a broader view of vocation.

- The Biblical narrative begins with God working (and then having a day of rest – the Sabbath reminds us we live in god’s work and not our own)
- Adam, pre-fall, was to put to work in the garden (Gen 1:29, 2:19)
- Work, after the fall, became meaningless toil (Gen 3:17-18)
- Although we live in a less than perfect world we remain image bearers. We are wired to create, to transform, to make a difference
- The parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30)
- Three kinds of faithfulness (Lk 16:10-12)
- The Father is working (John 5:17)
- The work (Act 13:1-2, 14:26. See also Matt 25:31-46)

"Prayer should not be hindered by work, but neither should work be hindered by prayer... prayer is entitled to its time. But the bulk of the day belongs to work... Without the burden and the labour of the day, prayer is not prayer, and without prayer, work is not work."
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

The purpose of work

- It reveals all of life has worth, for life requires all to play their part
- Work gives us the opportunity to externalise what is in us, our inward life is revealed in the external world through our work
- Work is an opportunity to serve others
- Through work we create wealth and an inheritance for those who come after us
- Work provides our primary context for building relationships
- Work is our involvement in earth-keeping (because the earth was entrusted into our care)

Reconnecting our faith and work

- We need a spirituality that links our work and spirituality
- The church *gathered* and the church *scattered* (Bonhoeffer)
- The church is called into every sphere of the world to live and redeem, we evangelise in the world of work – the kingdom is also revealed by the way we live in the world
- Reconciling Martha and Mary
- 'work produced by faith... laboured prompted by love...' (1 Thes 1:3)

While all of us share a general calling – to love our neighbour, to care for our brothers and sisters, there is more than this. We have a specific calling – that may not appear spectacular, but it is significant!

"All vocations are kingdom vocations. All Christians are people of the

kingdom within their vocations, as Christ uses all as His instruments of light, as His ambassadors of reconciliation. Consequently, it is critical that we assist all Christians in discerning their vocations, and then through the ministry of the church, equip them to fulfil their callings."
(Gordon Smith p92)

3. Uncovering our calling

A few Biblical stories of calling

- Abraham (Gen 11-12)
- Joseph (Gen 37:1-11)
- Moses (Ex 1-3)
- David (1 Sam 16)
- Jeremiah (Jer 1:1-13)

The story of Albert Schweitzer (Gore p65-66)

"There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets in the future"
(Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*)

Recognising God's personal call

- We recognise God's personal call – and see our task in this world – as a fulfilment of a divine call

"Vocation is the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership. The shaping of vocation as total response of the self to the address of God involves the orchestration of our leisure, our relationships, our work, our private life, our public life and of the resources we steward, so as to put it all at the disposal of God's purposes in the services of God and neighbour."
(James Fowler in Smith p94)

- We humbly accept who we are – humbly and courageously (we reject hierarchy and other compromises)
- The importance of the prophetic
- We trust the discernment of the community around us

"Vocation is not so much found as it is negotiated as one carves a place within the greater community. We shape our purposes in terms of the needs and purposes of the community."
(Fowler in Smith p95)

- We listen to our history, our heritage, the whispers of God

Vocation must play a crucial role in the way we understand our lives.

Without a clear sense of being called we will live in activity rather than live out of identity. Without a sense of calling our lives will have no shape or pattern.

A few pointers for young players

- We don't begin with a clear sense of calling – it is slowly revealed as we can handle it!
- We start doing a bit of everything – we are meant to learn about ourselves through doing (but don't get lost in the doing).
- As we learn to serve we are starting to get the heart of God. If we do not embrace service we will not be trustworthy as a person – our calling will be about us
- You do an apprenticeship before you become a tradesman
- Progress in your calling will feel like loss at times. You will give up good things for what god considers best for you (you can't do everything – you get narrowed).

Work and ministry development are meant to go together (it is not either or)