

Finding God's Calling For Your Work

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Romans

With the understanding that the ultimate image of calling in the Bible is the calling to follow Jesus, we can explore callings to particular kinds of work.

If by “calling,” we mean a direct, unmistakable command from God to take up a particular task, job, or profession, then very few people in the Bible received an individual call from God to a specific kind of work.

Although God does not give most people a direct, individual, unmistakable call to a particular job or profession, God does give guidance to people in less dramatic forms, including Bible study, prayer, Christian community and individual reflection. For discerning God's vocational guidance, there are three major considerations: 1) the needs of the world, 2) your skills and gifts, and 3) your truest desires.

The first consideration is the needs of the world. The single strongest indicator of what God wants you to do is probably your awareness of what needs to get done to make the world more like what God intends. This doesn't necessarily mean huge, global problems, but simply anything in the world that needs to be done. Earning a living to support yourself and your family is one example mentioned in the Bible. “The good leave an inheritance to their children's children.” (Proverbs 13:22)

Another biblical example is working so as to meet the needs of individuals around you besides your family:

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

(Matthew 25:34-36)

Working to serve the good of the larger society is also a biblical imperative:

“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce... seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

Of course, it is impossible for you to meet every need of the world, so you have to narrow it down a bit. Start with the needs for which you are personally responsible, such as raising your children or paying your debts. Beyond that, pay attention to needs that you are in a good position to meet, or that few other people are willing to address, or that you find especially pressing. You might be in a good position to run for an elected office in your own city or town, for example, compared to moving away to find work. On the other hand, you might be one of the few people willing to document human rights abuses in a country halfway around the world. Moreover, it might become clear that something in your life other than your job or career is the most important way you are helping to meet the

world's needs. It would be pointless to get a job counseling troubled youth, only to neglect your own children.

The point is that God has given everyone the ability to recognize something of what the world needs. He seems to expect us to notice it and get to work, rather than waiting for a special call from him.

The second consideration is your skills and gifts. God gives people gifts for accomplishing the work he wants them to do. The Bible names some of the gifts and skills that God imparts:

“We have gifts that differ, according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.” (Romans 12:6-8)

When Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit, he is usually referring to their use in the church. But if all work done by Christians is done for the Lord, then we can infer that the Spirit's gifts are also given for use in the workplace.

Finally, the Bible says that your truest or deepest desires are also important to God. “Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

Christians sometimes expect that if God calls them to some job, it will be something they hate. Otherwise, why would God have to call them to it? One morbid Christian fantasy is to think of one country you would hate

living in, and then suppose that God is calling you to be a missionary there. But the best missionaries have a great desire for the place and people they serve. Besides, who says God wants you to be a missionary? If God is guiding you towards some kind of job or profession, it's more likely that you may find a deep desire for it in your heart.

These three considerations — the needs of the world, your skills and gifts, and your truest desires — are guides, but they are not absolutes. In Christ, believers have perfect freedom. “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

That means you have the freedom to take risks, to fail, and to make mistakes. God might lead you to a job that you know nothing about, have no present knack for, and don't think you'd like. Conversely, you might discover late in life that you missed God's professional calling for you. Take heart, at the end, you will not be judged on getting the right job or fulfilling your God-given potential. You will be judged on the merits of Jesus Christ, applied to you only by God's grace in giving you faith. The calling to belong to Christ is God's only indispensable calling.