

When You're Looking for a Calling, Not Just a Job

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<http://www.christiancareercenter.com/advice-and-resources/career-and-calling-articles/looking-for-a-calling-not-just-a-job>

"Most of us are looking for a calling, not a job," says Nora Watson in her interview for Studs Terkel's classic book *Working*. "Most of us...have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people." She compared her job with that of her father, who had felt his work was "a profession of himself" and a calling.

Many people feel trapped in work that provides a paycheck but little else. They find they have little opportunity to use their gifts or do anything that is personally meaningful. Have you reached a point in your life where you know that what you are doing is not enough? Are *you* looking for your calling rather than settling for just another job?

Understanding Your "Primary Calling" vs. Your "Secondary Callings"

Most of us spend 60% or more of our lives working. The right job can give you opportunities to use your unique gifts and abilities to make a positive difference in the world. Being in the wrong job can be agonizing, affecting every area of your life.

As you seek to find work that is a calling, however, it is important to realize that your work is *not* your most important calling. There is a critical distinction between your "primary calling" to follow Jesus and your "secondary callings," or life roles, which include your work:

The Bible...reveals that work is *not* our central calling. There are no biblical examples of someone being called to paid employment.... Before being called to something, we are called to Someone. Before being called to *do*, we are called to *be*.

Our *primary calling* is to be in a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that God has *called* us into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ....Our primary calling is not tied to our employment.... God values us for who we are, not for what we can produce or achieve within work. God's call to us is an eternal one that encompasses and transcends our temporal activities....

Your work, or *vocational calling*, is one of your *secondary callings*.... Your vocational calling is a summons from God to use your gifts in the world, whether it be within paid employment, the home, or volunteer activities. [As Os Guinness says,] "But these and other things are always the secondary, never the primary calling. They are 'callings' rather than the 'calling.' They are our personal answer to God's address, our response to God's summons. Secondary callings matter, but only because the primary calling matters most." (*Live Your Calling*, pp. 5-8)

Therefore, if you are a Christian who is seeking to follow Jesus each and every day, you have already found your most important calling! (For more information about the primary calling, see [Your Most Important Calling](http://www.LiveYourCalling.com) at www.LiveYourCalling.com.) You can live this calling even if you are unemployed or in work that doesn't fit you well. The more diligently you are seeking to live your *primary calling*, the more effectively the Lord can guide you in finding your *vocational calling* (that is, work that fits your gifts and brings a deep sense of purpose and significance.)

What Should I Do with My Life?

God prods us into action in many ways. He can even use negative feelings such as discontentment and confusion, or positive emotions like energy and enthusiasm about doing something new in our lives. There also are several natural "choice points" in our lives in which we find ourselves asking questions like "Who am I?" and "What is God calling me to do next?" For example,

- Jacqueline, age 21, said: *"I'll finish college this year, and I really want to do something significant with my life. I know God has given me gifts, but I don't know exactly what they are or what I should do when I graduate. I'm trying to figure it all out, but I'm feeling pretty confused."*
- Bill, age 35, experienced a wake-up call in his life: *"My job pays well, but it's really stressful. I recently took a hard look at my work, and realized that I have been sacrificing not only my health, but also my family, for a job that really isn't making much of a positive contribution in this world. Success isn't what I thought it would be. I need to find out what God put me on earth to do, but I don't know how to go about figuring that out."*
- At 45, Linda entered a new chapter of life: *"My children are out of the house now, and I'm finding I don't really know who I am and what the Lord wants me to do with my time. Raising kids was my calling, but there's got to be more He has for me to do now. I'm just not sure what to do!"*

These types of life situations, as well as many others, create a sense of needing to "do something" to find work that fits and brings a sense of purpose to our lives. You may be feeling a restless energy that is propelling you to take action. The problem, however, is that often the actions people take end up creating more confusion or getting them into jobs that don't fit them well, thus deepening their sense of dissatisfaction.

Many people haven't been exposed to a systematic, pro-active approach to career planning, and they're not sure exactly what they should be doing. So they get busy doing what they can to find work that they will like. They may scour Internet job postings, ask others for suggestions on what they should do for work, see what opportunities come their way, and maybe even take a job-or series of jobs-to see what fits. Their actions often end up becoming a "pinball approach" to making career choices: they bounce around looking at job options and hope that somehow they will fall into something they like.

Occasionally people do find jobs that fit them with these types of actions. Many more times, however, they end up even more frustrated than before. They hit dead ends or find themselves in a job that is worse than the one they left. The desire to find God's

"calling" may fade; they just want a job that doesn't make them miserable. They may become frustrated with God, as well, especially if they have been praying for guidance along the way. *Isn't He listening? Doesn't He care? Why won't He do something when all they want is to do something for Him?*

Partnering with God to Discover Your Calling

What should you do if you find yourself feeling you were created to do "something more" with your life; if you sense the Lord prodding you to do something different; if you are in a time of career change, choice, and transition? Perhaps you have tried a variety of unsuccessful things to find the work God designed you to do. You are tired of bouncing around and not finding work that fits your gifts. So how can you find work that is a calling, not just a job?

First, recognize that finding your vocational calling is a partnership effort between you and God. God is ready and willing to do His part to guide you into the work He designed you to do. But you need to do your part, as well. St. Augustine, a fifth-century theologian, said that we should pray as though everything depends on God and work as though everything depends on us. Praying for the Lord to guide your footsteps will be ineffective unless you are willing to move your feet!

Discovering your calling takes prayerful action. God will not do for you what He wants you to do for yourself. Your faith, trust, and maturity will deepen and grow as you risk taking action. The process of taking action steps also shapes you into the person God needs for you to be for the mission He has chosen specifically for you.

Taking Prayerful Action Steps to Discover Your Calling

There *is* a sequence of action steps that is a proven path for discovering your vocational calling. God calls you to become the person He created you to be, and to do the things He designed you to do. He will partner with you as you prayerfully move forward. This process is a spiritual journey in which you will learn new things about yourself and about your relationship with the Lord!

As you look at the steps, determine your starting point in the journey of discovering and living your calling. Then identify a specific action step you can take TODAY to get started!

1. Identify the key dimensions, or "puzzle pieces," of your unique God-given design. There are several important components of your design, including your *most-enjoyed transferable skills, core values, personality traits, preferred roles, compelling interests, and spiritual gifts.*

People learn about their design through life experiences, feedback from others, and from career tests and assessments. Using good career assessments is one of the most expedient ways of identifying and organizing information about your design.

2. Allow yourself to envision a God-sized calling. Most people have dreams for their lives that are too small. Their goals for their lives are limited by a lack of vision,

fear, and everyday concerns. God calls us to undertake tasks and roles in our lives that we cannot accomplish on our own so that we can see His power at work.

Take intentional steps to widen your vision. Brainstorm with others how you might use your gifts in the world. Challenge yourself to come up with some big dreams for your life that you can only accomplish with God's power. Investigate careers and people of interest to expand your vision of what God is calling you to do in the world.

3. Learn how to make good decisions within God's will for your life and gifts. Your calling doesn't "just happen" without your participation. Partnering with God to live your calling requires making decisions. Learning to make wise, biblically-grounded decisions is an essential part of spiritual maturity.

4. Take prayerful action! Learning how to take appropriate actions that get you where you want to go is a key part of becoming a person God can fully use. Tools that will help you "get going" in living your calling include developing personal mission statements, setting achievable goals that you are motivated to reach, and devising an action plan for creating the life God is calling you to live.

5. Identify and overcome any "calling blockers" in your life. "Calling blockers" are obstacles that hinder you in discovering and living your calling. Fear is one of the most common calling blockers, and is the number one reason most people aren't doing what God calls them to do. While fear is normal when you are contemplating making changes in your life, it is not an excuse for inaction. God never calls us to camp out indefinitely in our comfort zone!

Other common calling blockers are money, busyness, negative thinking, childhood wounds, and isolation. To move forward in discovering and living your calling, you need to identify any calling blockers that are getting in your way, and start using some "calling catalysts" for overcoming hindrances to living the life God created you to enjoy!

Planning for Your Journey

Is God calling you to move ahead on the journey of discovering your vocational calling? Are you ready to live the exciting life God is calling you to live? If the steps above make sense to you, you need a resource that will help you expediently and effectively move through each of them. We recommend that you use our book, *Live Your Calling: A Practical Guide to Finding and Fulfilling Your Mission in Life* as a guidebook and toolbox in your journey. We have seen its power in transforming the lives of those who have used it! You can "travel" with *Live Your Calling* in a variety of ways, so determine which of the following will work best for you:

Traveling Solo: *Live Your Calling* can be used on your own. Decide where to start, and pick the tools you need from the book along the way. You can travel at your own speed, and, if you desire, you can make it a private spiritual experience along the way. (Think through ahead of time, however, what you will do if you find yourself not making enough progress because of busyness, fear, or some other calling blocker. You may find that you want to find a "traveling companion" at some point in your journey.)

Traveling with Others: Change is difficult for most of us. We have seen the value of using *Live Your Calling* with one other person, or in a small group setting. Some of the benefits of going through the book with others are that you can: 1) get feedback about gifts you may not realize you have; 2) brainstorm about ideas and resources if you feel stuck or uncertain what to do next; 3) receive support, accountability, and encouragement when needed; and, 4) experience the Body of Christ in action! (<http://www.LiveYourCalling.com> provides free resources for starting and running a small group.)

Traveling with a Professional Guide: You may be a person who desires to go through this process with a professional guide to personalize and expedite the journey for you. As National Certified Career Counselors and Career & Life Calling CoachesSM, we work one-on-one (via phone) with motivated people who want to find purposeful work that uses their gifts. If you are ready to get started, learn more about working with a professional career counselor / coach who will guide you personally from where you are to where God is calling you to go.

Seizing the Day

One day we each will stand before the Lord to account for what we have done with our lives. The book of Hebrews, chapter 12, has been called the "roll call of faith." It chronicles those who have finished their journey on earth, completing the work for which God created them. They each discovered and lived their calling.

From the perspective of eternity, we will waste our lives unless we become the people God created us to be and do the things He designed us to do:

God's epic drama of redemption and reconciliation continues, and each of us has the privilege of taking part and adding a verse. In the roll call of faith, what will your verse be? ...It is not too late to begin. God loves you and wants you to be included in the work of his kingdom. Listen to the voices all around that urge you to accept the challenge to live your calling: *Seize the day. Make your life count for eternity. Walk worthy of your calling because nothing else truly matters.* (*Live Your Calling*, p. 242).

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