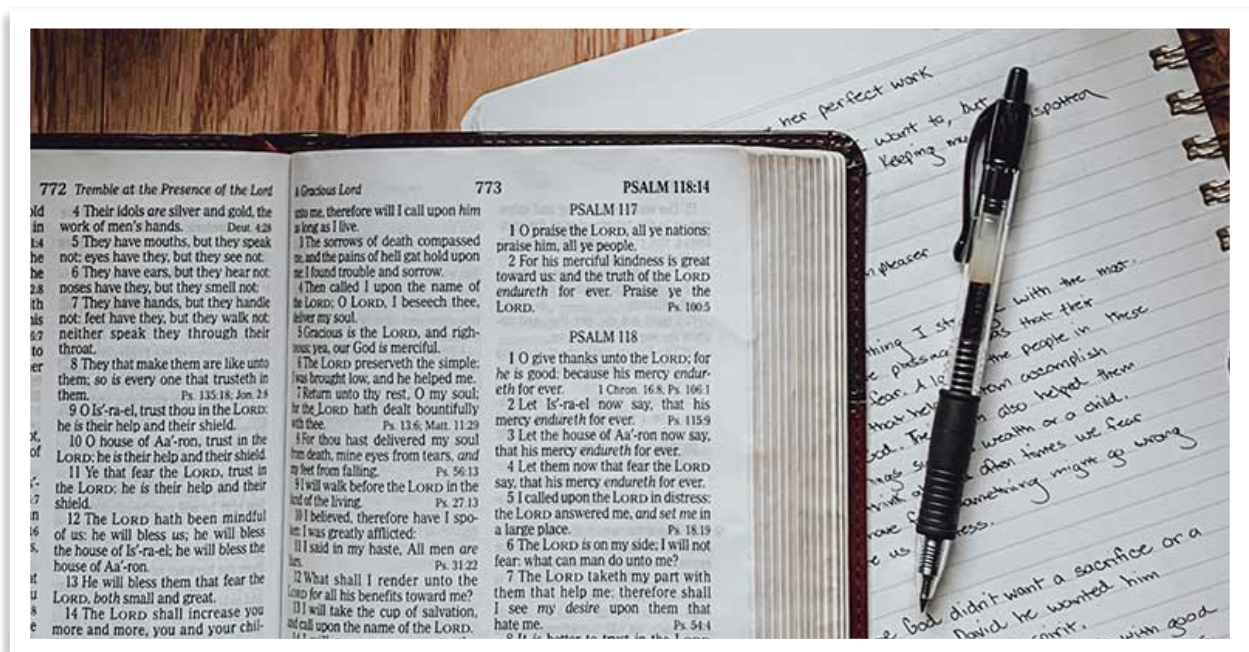


## Vocational Calling

# A Biblical Perspective

**W**hen Christians ask about calling, we usually mean, “Is God calling me to a particular job, profession or type of work?” This is a significant question, because work is important to God, and therefore it makes sense to ask what work God wants us to do, right?

In the Bible, God does indeed call people — some people, at least — to particular work, and gives various kinds of guidance for all people in their work. However, the biblical concept of a calling goes deeper than any one aspect of life, such as work. In fact, scripture uses the word “call” most often to refer to belonging to Christ and participating in his redemptive work in the world. In other words, our calling is firstly to belong to Christ through his redemptive work on the cross, and secondly to participate in his ongoing redemptive work with all that we are - including our work.



9 Teach slaves [someone who works for a master] to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, 10 and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive. 11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

- Titus 2.9-11

## The How vs The What of Work:

In Titus we have seen that our calling is firstly a call to Christ and his redemptive work on the cross, and secondly to participate in his ongoing redemptive work with all that we are - including our work. Here we see this again in Paul's instruction to Titus, as he stresses that how we work is far more important than what work we do. This is because how we work has a direct influence on the ongoing redemptive work of God. Notice the 'so that' of our work - So that in every way the teaching about God our saviour - not God our judge, not God our teacher - but so that the teaching about God our Saviour remains attractive. Paul is specific about the redemptive element of God that is made attractive through how we work. FOR, Paul says, the grace of God offers salvation even to your co-workers and clients and how we work either adds to or detracts from this message of the gospel!

So what about our specific calling? If by "calling," we mean a direct, unmistakable command from God to take up a particular task, job, profession or type of work, then calling is very rare in the Bible. Very few people were called by God in this sense. God called Noah to build the ark. God called Moses and Aaron to their tasks. He called prophets to prophecy and placed people in political leadership including Joseph, Gideon, Saul and David. Jesus called the apostles and some of his other disciples and the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to be missionaries, and while the word "call" is not always used, we do see the unmistakable direction of God for a particular person to do a particular job in these cases.

However, aside from these, very few people in the Bible received an individual call from God. This strongly suggests that a direct calling from God to particular work is also very rare today. If God is calling you directly and unmistakably to particular work, you don't need guidance from me, except perhaps for the affirmation that, yes, this type of calling does occur in the Bible in rare instances.

Therefore, we must ask the question of whether God guides or leads people to particular types of work through less dramatic means?

Although getting us into the right job or career is not God's highest concern, that doesn't mean it is of no concern. And, 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. Developing a general attentiveness to God's guidance in life is fundamental to our walking in our 'call' while humbly trusting that although 'the heart of man plans his way, the Lord determines and establishes his steps - Prov 16.9

## Bible Study and Prayer:

If people can't see what God is doing they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed - Prov 29.18

Over the years I have seen how God simply uses His word to lead us, sometimes even surprising us with clarity or direction when we least expect it. There are times He opens doors or shuts them firmly in our face. This is where we start, how we journey through life and what sets our course - God's word! What sense do you have about your work, your season, your future? What has God confirmed through his word? Take these, and bathe them in prayer and trust God to light your way. Our place in all this is to simply attend to what God has revealed, and to respond to what he has said.

## Christian Community:

God's calling or leading is most often best discerned in dialogue within Christian community, not in isolation. In Acts we hear of the Holy Spirit's guidance when Paul and Barnabas were sent on mission by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:2-3) and when the Gentiles were accepted into the then largely Jewish church, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). Such corporate discernment, wrestling with one another and in mutual accountability, is a good model for our vocational discernment, though there is obviously individual liberty and responsibility also.

The Christian community would do well to equip people both to make choices about their profession, and to follow God's leading in whatever work we find ourselves doing. Whatever your job, God's gifts enable you to work for the common good, to find more contentment in your work, and to overcome or endure the negative aspects of your situation. Most importantly, God promises eventual liberation from work's toil, sweaty labor, and thorns, which simply means that God is with you wherever you work. It may be better to learn to like the job you have — and to find ways to participate in Christ's work in it — than to try to find a job you think you'll like better.

## Individual Reflection:

The point is that God has given everyone the ability to recognise 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. There is no biblical formula for translating the needs of the world into a precise job calling. That's why you need to seek God's guidance in the various forms of discernment available to you.

The gifts you already have may give you some indication about how to best meet the needs of the world. Career guidance via skills and gifts is a difficult balancing act, which is why it must be sought in the midst of relationship with God and fellow Christians.

## A higher calling?

Many Christians have the impression that church workers — especially evangelists, missionaries, pastors, ministers and the like — have a higher calling than other workers. While there is little in the Bible to support this impression, by the Middle Ages, “religious” life — as a monk or nun — was widely considered holier than ordinary life. Regrettably, this distortion remains influential in churches of all traditions, even though the doctrine of virtually every church today affirms the equal value of Mondays and Sundays.

When it comes to ministry, however, I would like to share some thoughts on Bible College and the option of studying specifically for ministry. If my son were to ask me if he should go to Bible College based on a desire he has to minister or a leading from God that full-time ministry was in his future, I would answer with a resounding 'NO!' What I have seen with those who go to seminary straight out of school is that one never fully appreciates or understands the world that our congregation live in every day of their lives. We don't grasp the stresses and strains of corporate life, while at the same time we personally avoid those deep valleys that work leads one into and God uses to help us grow strong in our faith. I know this is a very broad - and possibly unfair - statement, but I would highly recommend to my son that he get a job, that he pours himself into whatever opportunity he finds, being faithful in everything he does while at the same time studying the word for himself or with a bible school curriculum as and when he is able to - and when ministry doors open, to step into *those* moments until the time is right to make the change to ministry exclusively.