

Finding God's Calling for Your Life



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How to Find God's Calling for Your Life

Introduction

It never entered my mind that God would want to use my life. I suppose the main reason I never thought about it was because I rarely thought about God. God and his will for my life was not something I was interested in. But a deeper reason I never considered God might have a plan for me was because I knew I was not the right sort of person. In December 1979 when I finally surrendered my life to Jesus, I said to him, "Whatever you would like to do with my life you may do." I cannot describe to you what it was like for me to feel clean. It had been a long time since I had felt that way. The joy of God's approval overwhelmed me. Not long after that I came to believe God wanted me to become a minister. God would want to use me? I couldn't believe it. Jesus' parable of the "Pearl of Great Price" made complete sense to me (Matthew 13:44-46). Joy that God would want to use me - of all people - made any cost involved seem insignificant.

While I was a student at Clemson University, I used to feel annoyed seeing small groups of students eating together in the dining hall with their Bibles open. Why annoyed? I don't know. Maybe I felt they thought they were better than me. It used to anger me when students from Campus Crusade for Christ would come to my dorm room with their little gospel tracts and ask if I had been born again. What business was that of theirs? I grew up going to church and was as good a Christian as they were, thank you very much! But why did it anger me? Was I aware I lacked something I wanted but yet did not want?

My junior year at Clemson, two of my fraternity brothers, Bill Taylor and Morgan Mellette, invited me to listen to an audio tape message from a Christian speaker named Josh McDowell. I'm not sure why I agreed to do so. Maybe I was just bored. Sitting on a bed in my fraternity house, along with a few other fraternity brothers, I listened. As Josh McDowell described how the tomb stone of Jesus had been sealed and guarded by soldiers at the risk of their lives, yet three days later was unexpectedly empty, with the stone rolled away, I suddenly knew it was true. Jesus really had risen from the dead. All those stories I had heard in church and Sunday School as a kid suddenly became real. At the time I didn't realize I was being born-again. All I knew was resurrection was real, that Jesus was real and offering himself to me, and I was embarrassing myself, sitting on my fraternity brother's bed, tears running down my face. But it was a good kind of embarrassment.

Jesus came into my life that night in the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity house. It took me another three years to get to that place of quiet desperation and longing when I fully surrendered and said to Jesus, "Whatever you would like to do with my life, you may do." Now, 40 years later, I am grateful beyond ability to express for Jesus coming into my life and for those two fraternity brothers who led me to Christ. "Thank you God, for the resurrection of Jesus Christ!"

A. CALLED TO LIVE LIFE WITH GOD

There are many good reasons to seek God's calling for your life. The most practical reason is so your life WORKS. "Doing the best you can" is not a pathway for living. You and I were never intended to strike out on our own and struggle to do the best we can apart from God. Years ago my son and I found a feral dog while backpacking. This little dog was about the size and shape of a Chihuahua, extremely malnourished and skittish. He would not come close. We would leave some food and walk away and he would sneak over, grab the food, and run away. It was very sad. Chihuahuas are not meant to live alone in the woods. Chihuahuas are meant to live in a house under the protection, provision, guidance, and discipline of a kind human being. So, too, with human beings. We are meant to live WITH God, under His care, discipline, guidance, protection, and provision.

God is interested in living with us in the course of our ordinary life. He will, if invited. He is God, so of course he will be in charge. But once we have surrendered our will so that we might follow Christ, wherever he leads, then we will be led.

This booklet is meant to help you find where God may be calling.

B. MISCONCEPTIONS

Most are familiar with language of being "called" by God. But we tend to think that refers to a special calling, such as a pastor or missionary. Rarely does one hear others say they were called by God to be a dental hygienist, or a husband, or a lawyer. For that reason, many Christians think it presumptuous to consider themselves "called" to something special and unique. But you are called to something special and unique! And you can find out what that is.

God created you in his mind's eye BEFORE he created this universe. When he planned you, it was with specific and noble purposes in mind. But many of those purposes must be sought in order to discover them. Just because God designed you with a specific plan in mind does not mean it will automatically happen. You must seek after those callings and then choose to walk in them.

This leads to another misconception. People assume God will speak loudly to them about their calling if indeed they have a calling. Not true. God's ways are usually subtle. He tends to speak in a whisper, not a shout. Many times I have pleaded with God to just TELL me what he wanted me to do. Yes, I do at times hear the inner voice of God. But there have been many, many times I felt desperate to hear him speak, but nothing came. Why was that? Why does God not make his desires known in more obvious, compelling ways? I don't know. But I suspect it is so God and I can both know how serious we are (or are not) about finding God's will. Since obeying God always costs us something, there is no need to find his will if we aren't prepared to do it. I also believe the search itself brings honor to God. When Jesus returns, faith will not be necessary. Everyone will SEE. Now, though, we are surrounded by temptations, difficulties, prey to our emotional ups and downs, subject to the opposition of evil spirits, and distracted by the obvious busyness of our visible world. Yet many still learn to live by faith in this invisible God, finding his callings and walking in them. Why not you?

Nothing pleases God more than living by faith in him (see John 6:29, Hebrews 11:6).

C. WHERE DO YOU START?

People have asked me over the years, "How do I find God's will for my life?" I've always given the same answer. Be faithful doing what God has given you to do today. God is a "one step at a time" God. Yes, there are distinct, unusual, even "exotic" callings from God. But those are not discovered by neglecting our present callings. We must not despise our daily duties. Many are tedious, some even painful. Who likes doing household chores? Who feels motivated to do one's duty at work when the boss is unpleasant? But faithful attendance to duty, serving Jesus Christ in the midst of those duties, is the foundation for receiving other callings. Character is built in the doing of those duties. What would be the point of being called to some extraordinary task if one is not faithful in the lesser task? Jesus taught, **"He who is faithful in little will be faithful in much."** And Jesus went on to say our reward for being faithful in little is that one day we will be placed over much (see Matthew 25:21).

D. THE FOUR CALLINGS

There are at least four distinct "callings" for every believer. The first and most important is the calling to be a DISCIPLE of Jesus. The second is the calling to MARRIAGE or SINGLENESS. The third is the calling to an OCCUPATION. The fourth is the calling to MINISTRY. All believers have all four callings.

1. Called to be a Disciple

The kingdom of God has come in the presence of Jesus Christ. It is available to all people. The kingdom of God is “God in action” such that what God desires is actually done here on earth. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are asking and believing for heaven to come to earth. In the person of Jesus Christ we find love, forgiveness, healing, deliverance from evil, righteousness and justice, peace, joy, and good will towards all. “Salvation” is a matter of entering the kingdom of God NOW by placing our faith in Jesus Christ and following him as a disciple.

To follow Jesus as his disciple is to learn how to do the things he taught and believe the things he believed. It is to learn how to live life in the kingdom of God. It is to take the life we have been given and LEARN how to live our life as Jesus himself would live our life. We are not called to imitate the life he has already lived, but to learn to live the life WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN as Jesus would live it. For example, in my case, I am learning from Jesus how to live my life as he would live it if he were my age, had my physical attributes, personality, education, family life, occupation, ministry, and had my strengths and limitations. My nephew Luke has lived all his life with significant cerebral palsy. He is smart and has a wonderful personality but he cannot do for himself. Luke is not called to live the life I am called to live. But he is still called to live his life as a disciple of Jesus, learning from Jesus how he would live Luke’s life given his limitations. And Luke is a disciple of Jesus.

To live as a disciple of Jesus we must live filled with the Holy Spirit and regularly practice spiritual disciplines (such as prayer, contemplation, Bible study, worship) that will enable us to be transformed from the inside out. We learn to live in the love of God, not by trying hard to “act lovingly” but by receiving love as the SOURCE of all our actions.

All the other callings will one day end. But the calling to follow Jesus as his disciple will never end. This is the primary calling.

2. Called to Marriage or Singleness

People tend to assume they should get married. Not necessarily. The Bible teaches that marriage AND singleness are distinct callings from God (see 1 Corinthians 7). Both callings have joy and pain. And both callings are blessed of God. The calling to singleness is not just a default position if one can’t find someone to marry, but a uniquely blessed calling so as to be more available for ministry. When married,

your time and loyalties are more divided than when single. But as the Apostle Paul wrote, some have one calling, others another.

How can you know to which you are called? I plan to deal with specific ways of hearing from God later on in this booklet, but in brief, the calling to singleness comes with the desire to be more available for ministry. Those persons find in themselves the ability to bear with the discomfort of unmet sexual desire and loneliness. It is hard to be single. It is also hard to be married. You must find God's calling for you. There was a brief time following my conversion when I considered the monastic life. I had a friend who was a Benedictine monk, living in a monastery in downtown Boston. The idea of living a simple, contemplative life, with active ministry to the urban poor was very appealing to me. But I also knew I wanted to get married one day and have a family. Down deep, I knew the monastic calling was not for me. And I was very grateful to eventually find my wife Anne and then to have our children Katie and Nathan!

In terms of the married life, our culture does a terrible job preparing young people to be married. Getting married has little to do with finding "THE ONE" despite what movies and novels project upon us. Marriage has more to do with OUR becoming "the one." In other words, am I becoming the kind of person who will make a good spouse? Or am I marrying because I hope my needs will be met in this person? If so, then what happens when your spouse becomes less pleasing to you and is not "meeting your needs?"

My favorite marriage story is about Lucille Holstrom. Lucille was an older member of my church in California who asked me one Sunday to visit her husband with her in a nursing home across the street. I agreed and we went to see her husband. "He won't know you," she said. "He doesn't know me either." After the visit, I asked her how long it had been since he had recognized her. "About 5 years," she said. "How often do you come to visit him?" I then asked. "Every day," she said.

That, to me, is what marriage is all about. Committing yourself to another human being to love and to cherish until you are parted by death. The question should not be, "Will this person meet my needs?" but instead, "Am I the kind of person who is willing to commit for the rest of my life to live in love towards this other person who is entrusting herself or himself to me?"

If you are sexually involved with the person you are contemplating marriage with it will be very difficult to make the kind of objective evaluation of a calling from God to marriage. God is very strict about sex for many good reasons. The freer you

are from sexual involvement, the more able you will be to hear from God as to whether to marry this person or not. In addition, do everything you can to stay clear of pornography. TIME magazine just published (at the time of this writing) a cover story article on pornography. Their research shows that many young men who have been raised viewing internet porn have great difficulty with their sexual response to live women. And young women exposed to pornography wonder if they are supposed to act out male fantasies through sexual intercourse. No, no, no. Sexual intercourse is given by God to express LOVE to our spouse and to produce children. It is not given us so we can simply find sexual stimulation and release.

I also must put in a note here about the wedding itself. The way we do weddings in the United States is just awful. Couples spend a YEAR planning a “fantasy wedding” and may only spend an HOUR planning the marriage. What good then does a \$40,000 event lasting thirty minutes followed by a three-hour party do except provide lots of pictures to show your family and friends?

A Christian wedding, simply put, is a man and a woman entering a covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ in front of witnesses, with benefit of clergy. That is a Christian wedding. Certainly, we celebrate the happy occasion with friends and family. But keep in mind what counts is not the wedding but the MARRIAGE.

Our “fantasy wedding” culture also leaves out God’s plan for children. The calling to Christian marriage usually involves the call to establish a godly dynasty. Young couples err trying too hard to “plan” the birth of children. Not long ago, I ran into the mother of a female student I once taught. The mom confided to me that her daughter was expecting, but whispered to me that it was an “accident.” I laughed and said “Well, all of us born before 1960 and the Pill were accidents too!” Most human beings who have ever been born were “accidents,” though not in the mind of God. Generally speaking, God intends marriage to produce children who will grow up to follow Christ, who will in turn produce Christ-following children after them. And so on. The Bible command “be fruitful and multiply” means just that – the raising up of godly dynasties of human beings who will love and serve God.

If you believe yourself called to be married, how do you find the person God has for you? The truth is there are any number of people out there who would make an excellent spouse for you, and you for them. Your job is not to find “THE ONE” but to find a suitable person and then let God direct the matter. There is such a thing as “falling in love” and I don’t want to diminish it. But falling in love is NOT the basis for finding a spouse. You can fall in love with any number of people if you

permit yourself to do so. And not everyone you might fall in love with will be a person you should marry! Falling in love is not destiny.

But where can you find a suitable person? My own dating days were well before the internet. It seems to me that reputable dating sites are better than trying to find likely spouses in bars. Church, obviously, is a good place to look. And don't dismiss well-meaning friends and relatives who know someone they think might be a good match. Your family and friends have had time and objectivity to know this other person in a way you have not. All over this world, "arranged" marriages do quite well. I know that is not the American way, but our way is not working too well. To pursue this whole matter more fully, I recommend Tim Keller's book, *THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE*.

To close out this section, I want to emphasize that BOTH singleness and marriage are callings of God. Both conditions, if sought as God's calling, will be blessed by him.

3. Called to an Occupation

For most of us, our most visible public witness of Jesus Christ will be our occupation. Not just what we do, but even more important, HOW we do it. God calls us to occupations for two reasons: so we can meet the financial needs of our family AND provide a service for mankind. Any honorable occupation can be a calling. I'm particularly impressed with people called to start and manage businesses. How wonderful to be responsible for helping create jobs and livelihoods for others!

My favorite story of employment is that of the early Quakers in America. They were craftsmen and merchants, but at first, no one would buy from them because they were so odd. Over time though, people found even small children sent to Quaker merchants would come back with correct change. The honesty and excellence of the Quaker merchants caused their businesses to be in such demand many Quakers became quite wealthy. Given their commitment to a simple lifestyle, this wealth created an entirely new set of problems for them. Here is the point, though. We are all in need of trustworthy people to hire for their goods and services. Whether it is our doctor or automobile dealer or grocer, we rejoice when we find trustworthy and reliable people. Whatever your occupation, I hope you too will become one of those super-reliable people. And my strong suspicion is you will also prosper.

There is nothing wrong with making money. Money is a very important tool. Personally, I would rather have more money than less. But the exclusive desire to get rich will never be a part of God's calling for you. Certainly we choose an occupation in part because of the expected income. It will do us no good to try to write novels (for example) if we can't make a living doing so.

Four things should be kept in mind when seeking God's calling for an occupation:

- 1) Is it something you WANT to do?
- 2) Do you have the SKILLS to do it?
- 3) Can you make enough MONEY to support your family?
- 4) Does the occupation provide a BENEFIT for mankind?

All other things being equal, the follower of Jesus Christ will choose an occupation which best benefits humanity.

I've heard that Martin Luther said, "Even the hangman can do what he does for the glory of God." There is a point there. WHY we do something and HOW we do something can be more important to God than WHAT we are doing. I'm blessed to have two occupations, teaching and pastoring, both of which provide obvious service. But what if your job is, say, doing manufacturing technology for a business that makes ammunition? You can still do what you do for the sake of Jesus Christ, in his presence, and with his help. Not long ago I had a job evaluation from my principal. He said (to my relief) he was happy with the way I was doing my job as a teacher. I knew he was a man of faith, so I laughed and said to him, "And I want you to know you are a great principal to work for. But even if you were awful, I want to believe I would still do a good job because my real boss is Jesus Christ!" He laughed and agreed he hoped he would do the same.

No career, in itself, will make you happy. Happiness comes from living life in tandem with Jesus Christ, learning to trust and obey him. You are blessed if you have a choice of occupations. Most human beings, in most places in the world, at most times in history, have not had choices. They either did what their father did before them or whatever else they could find. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, work has not been about "fulfillment." Work has been about making a living. Many people are unhappy in their jobs. There is nothing wrong with seeking the mind of God about changing careers. There is no virtue in just doing unpleasant things. But the cure for misery at the workplace is to do what you do unto Jesus Christ.

This principle changed my life. Prior to teaching high school I had been a full-time Presbyterian minister for about 14 years. That had become my identity. I had gone through a lot to get there, believed myself distinctly called by God to be a pastor, and had reasonable success in doing so. But that all changed when my family and I moved to Charlotte, NC. I assumed I would find a position in a church right away and continue on as a pastor. That didn't happen and I needed a job. The high school I teach at had just opened and was desperate for additional math teachers. I qualified because of the math courses I had taken in college and so was hired as a "lateral entry" teacher, which meant I was paid while I taught, but had to take education courses at the same time. I honestly didn't know if I would last a week.

That first semester of teaching was the hardest and most discouraging time of my life. Not only was learning to be a high school teacher incredibly difficult, but inside, I felt like I had surely missed God's calling. In addition, I had not realized how much of my personal identity was caught up in being a pastor. I had grown used to people speaking respectfully to me. Now teenagers were cussing me out to my face! I felt depressed, under strain beyond my experience, and had almost no hope. But I will never forget the day when things turned around. Late one afternoon, standing and facing the back wall of my classroom, angry and frustrated about not being a pastor and doing a job I did not want to be doing, and feeling despair I had somehow "missed it," I said out loud to God, "I do not know if I missed your call or not. I may have. But there is not a darn thing I can do about it now. I cannot go back. So God, if you will help me, I am going to take this job which I do not like and I will do it for Jesus Christ."

Almost immediately, I felt peace and the presence of God in a way I had not felt for a really long time. Something changed. Within one month, I was given the opportunity at that school to teach a course on the Bible. Within two months I was called to serve as the pastor of the Banks Presbyterian Church, located just eight miles from my home. By the end of that year, I found myself actually enjoying being a teacher. Now, almost 20 years later, I continue to teach at the same school and pastor the same congregation. What I was convinced was a huge mistake, turned out to be the calling of God. I am very grateful.

But the turn-around came when I took my job and started doing it for Jesus Christ.

4. Called to Ministry

Each believer is also called to carry on the personal ministry of Jesus Christ on this planet. How did Jesus describe his ministry? **"The blind receive sight, the lame walk,**

those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Matthew 11:4-6). Well, you might say, that was Jesus, not me. But Jesus also gave this command to his disciples, **“As YOU go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give”** (Matthew 10:7-8).

Most of you reading this will never raise the dead. I haven’t either, except perhaps a few folks in the back pew hearing my sermons. Nor have I cleansed any lepers. But I have prayed for the sick, prayed against evil spirits, welcomed societal “lepers” and have brought the good news of Jesus to people with aching hearts. Those are things all of us are called to do IN SOME FORM OR FASHION. Jesus Christ bore witness to the kingdom of God and alleviated suffering. We are called to take part in that too.

This is why your job is not your ministry. You may find yourself doing ministry in the context of your job (praying with a co-worker) but your occupation is a separate calling. For example, if you work for Verizon Wireless, they will not be pleased if you begin your sales calls with “Have you accepted Jesus Christ?” Your occupational calling is to help your employer succeed and serve its customers. Your family is not your ministry, either. Obviously, you want the love of Jesus to flow in your family. You serve Jesus in the way you do your job and serve your family. But your ministry takes place in those moments when you choose to be God’s instrument to bless and help others – in the name of Jesus. Ministry happens when GOD REDEMPTIVELY TOUCHES ANOTHER HUMAN BEING THROUGH YOU as you choose to represent Jesus Christ to that person.

God will bring about encounters for ministry to take place. Late one night, I pulled into a gas station. A man was standing by a table, near the gas pumps, selling something. He looked like he had seen better days. Wanting to bless the guy, I decided to buy whatever he was selling. When I told him I wanted two of the large cans of car cleaner he was selling, he got all excited, but said he had to get another can out of his car. As he hurriedly walked away, I noticed he was limping badly. So I began to ask God for an opportunity to pray for him. After the purchase I asked if there was anything I could pray for him about. Thinking he would mention his leg, instead he said, “Yes, my marriage. It’s really bad.” No one else was around, so I asked him if I could pray for him right then. He agreed. So we prayed for his marriage. Then I asked him if I could pray about his leg. He said he had bad knees, but yes, he would like prayer for that too. I laid hands on his knees and asked Jesus to heal him. I then asked him to do something that normally he could not do

without pain. He started slowly to do a deep knee bend. It didn't hurt him. Then he started doing another. And another. Up and down, deep knee bends. "Hey, that's cool!" he said. I agreed! We both departed rejoicing and thanking Jesus.

One of the great tragedies in Church history was the shift in ministry from normal followers of Jesus to ordained clergy only. Jesus had in mind ALL of his followers would participate in his ministry. I'm so grateful in my congregation there are many who speak up for Jesus in public, offer to pray for people, and are able to counsel those seeking to be saved.

In terms of gospel ministry, yes, there unique callings to offices and positions of ministry in the church. Callings as pastors, evangelists, missionaries, elders, Sunday School teachers, worship leaders, church administrators, and so on. But all these callings come forth from the two larger callings of first, following Jesus as his disciple, and second, following Jesus into his ministry of bearing witness to the kingdom and alleviating suffering.

How can you know if you have one of those unique callings mentioned above? God has so many ways of directing, I hesitate to say. But at least this will be true: something about being a pastor, a Sunday School teacher, an elder, a small group leader, a missionary, and so on, will captivate your attention. You will feel an "oughtness" about doing so. In fact, you will feel sure if you don't pursue it, you will have walked away from something quite important. Then, the proof will be in the pudding, as they say. When you begin in these sorts of ministries, it will become evident to you and others God is with you.

My father, Sam Hilborn, retired after over 30 years of teaching as a professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of South Carolina. The last 10 years of his life though, after retirement, he became the pastor of a small congregation and helped establish ministries to the poor in his community. I assure you his calling to gospel ministry in those last 10 years provided the greatest satisfaction of his life. My dad was born-again in his mid - 40's. Up until that time he was fully involved in advancing his career. After that, he became Christ's man. My dad told me later, "You know Scott, the biggest proof to me God came into my life was because I found myself loving people. Until I was born-again, people were just in my way." At my dad's funeral, I heard many, many testimonies of people in the community, both black and white, impacted by the love of God through my dad. What a great example he was for me!

E. HOW TO FIND GOD'S CALLINGS

I don't want to over-simplify the matter of "how to find God's callings." God is God, after all and he works in so many different ways it would be irresponsible for me to try to give "five easy ways to hear from God." An essential part of finding his call is the SEARCH. The search demonstrates how badly we want to know God's will. God is willing to be found and he blesses those who search for him (see Hebrews 11:6). There are many examples of people finding God's call from Scripture and from Church history. In this booklet I want to also present ways God has made his invitations known to me. I've been helped a lot by others' examples. Your experiences with God will be different from mine, but there will also be similarities, which I hope will be of help to you.

1. First, surrender

The Apostle Peter's life was forever changed the day he "left everything to follow Jesus." He had no idea what was going to happen. Somehow though he knew that following this magnetic man was more important than anything else in his life. And he kept at it.

As an ambitious young man, I had also reached the place where I wanted to give myself to Jesus. But there was something I wanted even more. I wanted to try to one day become president of the Dow Chemical Company. This fine company had hired me out of college, had treated me well and offered the promise of advancement. I was hooked into my desire to advance and succeed. But I also wanted to give myself to Jesus. I felt stuck, sensing I could not give my heart to both. One day, visiting my dad at home, I blurted out, "Dad, can't I be a Christian and also try to become president of Dow Chemical?" My dad paused and said the words that changed my life. "Scott, God may want you to become president of the Dow Chemical Company. But that is for him to decide. You need to follow Christ."

With those words from my dad, the choice became clear. The next day I offered myself unreservedly to Jesus. "Whatever you want to do with my life, Lord, you may do," was the essence of my prayer of surrender. Immediately, peace came into my soul. I knew I had taken an irrevocable step. Rising within me came these words, repeated almost constantly for the next 48 hours: "I am always with you. I am always with you. I am always with you."

It was after that surrender I began to be guided by God.

What about you? Have you surrendered your life to God? Are you willing to let him direct your life as he pleases? Or are you, like I was, holding on to some private idol you are not quite sure you want to let go? Go ahead and let it go. Life with God is worth it. Trust him.

2. Look at what you WANT to do.

It took me years before I could trust that what I wanted to do might also be what God wanted me to do. Try as I might, I could never quite be sure if my motives were purged of self-interest. Even confessing my sins and receiving his pardon was, in large measure, still all about me. But I've learned over the years to not get paralyzed when I discover some amount of self-interest in my pursuit God. After all, he is my father and I am his dependent child. Of course, I need things from him and I always will. The fact that it brings blessings to me to obey him only makes sense.

Still, it is worth noticing when the desires of our "flesh" rise up, so we can be on guard against them, to SET THEM ASIDE. The "flesh" is the Biblical term for our embodied habits of sin, which have trained us to live independently of God. If you have been born-again, you are not under the control of the flesh, but your intentions can certainly become crossed when the flesh gains the upper hand.

Fear, lust, anger, ambition, jealousy, envy, bitterness, pride, vanity and so on will influence us if permitted. These things cloud our thinking and motives. When pursuing God's callings, be suspicious of opportunities to advance your reputation, vanity, pleasure, wealth, and ease. You don't have to reject them outright, but you must look closely at whether the opportunity is from God or just something that appeals to your flesh. I think it is a particularly American failing to assume God's callings will create personal advancement and promotion. Consider how many pastors find their next "call" to a larger church? I'm all for pastors being paid well and the sad fact is many churches underpay their pastors, which in turn necessitates their finding a larger church with better pay to support their families.

Still, following Christ means we take up our cross and pursue a life of SERVICE, following after one who gave up his glory to serve us. Yes, God brings opportunities for our advancement, but advancement is for his kingdom purposes, not for our glory.

God honors those who serve him. But that honor is given as a gift, not pursued as a goal.

Having dealt with wrong desires, I now want to emphasize the place of right desires. It is common for conscientious believers, rightly distrustful of the flesh, to assume if they take pleasure in doing something, it is must not God's will for them! Not so. God created us in his own image and that "image" includes the creative impulse. If our will is surrendered to God, we should take a good look at those things we enjoy doing and are skilled at. All other things being equal, I believe we can assume God's various callings in our lives will run along the lines of what he has already gifted us with and given us the desire to do.

Perhaps the very first occasion in the Bible of gifts of the Holy Spirit being linked with a divine calling have to do with a man named Bezalel and his artistic ability. **"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts'"** (Exodus 31:1-5).

What do you like to do? What are you good at? What good things bring you pleasure? What gives you satisfaction as you do it? I believe you can assume God is in those desires. A good illustration comes from the 1981 Academy Award winning movie CHARIOTS OF FIRE. The movie is the true story of Olympic runner Eric Liddell, later a Christian missionary and killed by the Japanese in a prisoner of war camp in WWII. A scene in the movie shows him defending his joy of running to his missionary sister, who strongly disapproved of it, by saying to her, "When I run, I feel God's pleasure!" You and I can expect to feel God's pleasure when we are walking in the callings he has for us.

Be open to un-looked for interests too. I never thought I would enjoy teaching teenagers. But after that very painful first semester, I began to find a growing satisfaction and pleasure in teaching high school kids. I would never have guessed it. For some reason teenagers like being around me and I enjoyed being around them. Now years later, I still feel God's pleasure in that unexpected calling.

3. Begin with your present motive but move beyond it

The truth is we initially seek God because we need help, not because we want to bring him glory. I assume God is used to this by now. Years ago a man asked me to come to his place of business to pray for him. His TV dealership was on the brink of disaster. He was desperate to know what God wanted him to do. He and I prayed together for God's mercy and wisdom to rest upon him and save his business.

Driving home, I wondered to myself if the man was really interested in God or just desperate to get his business out of trouble? That judgmental thought has dimmed over the years when I think of the many times in desperation I have done exactly the same thing he did. The Lord God is **“compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness”** (Psalm 86:15). I am very grateful God understands we are in need of pity.

There are times though, praise God, when we are not in dire circumstances or desperation, and genuinely want to know God’s will so we can obey him because he deserves our obedience. He is a wonderful God and we love him and want to honor him. I believe I can truthfully say at this point in my life I want God more than anything else. That in turn gives me a great deal of inner freedom to make choices. “What’s in it for me?” is not nearly the deciding factor it once was. “Does God want me to do this?” is now most important, even if it costs mean it usually does. But so what? Anything of value has a cost. The Apostle Paul said it quite simply: **“I want to know Christ.”** For Paul that meant knowing the power of Christ’s resurrection as well as sharing in the fellowship of his sufferings. (Philippians 3:10)

Our first reason to seek God may not be all that noble, but God is kind and understands. In relationship with Christ, we will grow to have higher motives.

4. Gain a thorough knowledge of Scripture

Jesus Christ believed the Scriptures to be the very word of God. Tested by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus fought back and stood his ground by proclaiming “IT IS WRITTEN...”

There is no substitute for having our mental capacity saturated with a knowledge of the Bible. God’s callings on our life will always be consistent with who he is and what he has done as revealed in the Bible.

But the Bible is a big book and not an easy read. I recommend you buy a good study Bible (the ESV STUDY BIBLE is excellent) and find a DAILY pattern of reading that will work for you.

Years ago a wonderful pastor, Dr. David Dean, taught me “the three bookmark method.” It has worked well for me for many years. Place one bookmark in GENESIS chapter one, one bookmark at PSALMS chapter one, and one bookmark at MATTHEW chapter one. Read those three chapters on your first day, then move the bookmarks. The next day read chapter two from each book. The plan is to read three chapters each day, one from the Old Testament, one from Psalms – Proverbs,

and one from the New Testament, in a continuous cycle, for the rest of your life. If you get behind, it is not a problem. The bookmarks are still there. As the months and years go by, this daily habit will cause Scripture to move its way deeply into your heart, and you will come to know God and his ways.

We read the Bible to get to know the Author.

5. God will speak to you through the Bible.

There are at least two ways to read the Bible and BOTH are extremely important. The first, mentioned above, brings us an intellectual comprehension of what God is like and what he has done historically. We study in this manner to bring correction to our faulty thinking and wrong assumptions about what God and life are all about.

The second approach is devotional. By this I mean reading slowly, meditatively, and letting the Holy Spirit speak to you through his written word. As you approach Scripture this way, you will find the wonder of the inner touch of God in your mind and heart through what you read. Words, phrases, concepts, and ideas will come alive and match exactly with your present needs and circumstances. Take a journal and write down and date what God speaks to you. Years later, re-reading your journals, you will relish those words.

I will never forget reading for the first time the words of Jesus, **“I am with you always.”** I came across this verse some weeks after God had been speaking that very phrase into my heart following my surrender to Christ. I didn’t even know those words were in the Bible. But they were. Matthew 28:20! My heart jumped with joy finding those very words the Holy Spirit had been speaking to me.

My life verse from the Bible also came to me in those first precious days after giving myself to God. It was these words of Jesus: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”** (Matthew 11:28-30). Over the years I have often felt “weary and burdened” by one thing or another. Countless are the times I simply have not known what to do. This invitation by Jesus to come to him, learn from him, and walk with him in his gentle yoke has been the compass for my life. I would never have received this life verse apart from reading the Bible.

We serve a living God. He has acted in human history and he still acts. He is acting in your life and will speak to you. You must decide if you wish to be spoken to.

6. God will speak though sermons.

At the time of this writing I have been a pastor for 32 years, which means I have preached in excess of 1500 sermons. I can honestly say each sermon has had God's help with it. Not one time do I remember feeling I was just "doing it on my own." But how much good did those sermons do, I wonder? I don't know and I don't need to know. God compares his word to rain and snow that falls, and has promised:

**"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11)**

We live in a day in which preaching is not held in great respect. Nevertheless, the preaching of the gospel is THE primary way God speaks to people. Perhaps you view your pastor as rather ordinary and only a modest public speaker. That is true about most of us who preach. But WHAT we preach is what counts.

I learned the value of the sermon during that very low time in my life mentioned earlier. A lot of painful things were happening. I was between churches, teaching high school and had not a clue as to what God was doing with my life. Frankly, I felt abandoned. But Sunday after Sunday I went to church anyway. And each Sunday God took something the pastor said in the sermon and "spoke it" to my heart. And that was enough to get me through the next week. The following Sunday, God would use that pastor once again and I would hear something in the sermon that would get me through the following week. This continued, Sunday after Sunday. Outwardly, I'm sure I looked like I was doing fine. But inwardly I was just hanging on by my fingernails. I am so grateful to God and that pastor for the ministry to me through his sermons. Years later, I wrote a note and thanked him for how much that meant.

That experience taught me to never devalue what goes on during the sermon. I have preached a lot of sermons that were, in my opinion, just "so-so" or not very good at all. Yet many times someone would later say to me how much the sermon meant to them. And sometimes they would bring up a point I know I never made! But apparently the Holy Spirit did.

Next time you go to church, ask God to anoint the one preaching with the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to speak to EVERYONE in church that day. Ask God to speak to you. Have a pencil ready. You will be spoken to.

7. Seek wise counsel from others

Unless you are a prisoner of war or an inmate in solitary confinement, God will provide the wise counsel of others to confirm the callings you are wrestling with. But choose carefully. Now that I am older, I understand why “elders” in every culture are looked to for wisdom. They have walked through difficult seasons, made their own share of mistakes, or have watched others do so, and finally have arrived at a point where they know how life works and have counsel worth listening to. I’ve had many wise counselors over the years and I am indebted to them.

There have been times the counsel of others has been prophetic. God spoke to me through their words. I remember when I was leaving my congregation in California to move to North Carolina. A friend and mentor, Pastor Jack Hayford of the Church on the Way, took me out to lunch to say goodbye. After talking through my leaving, he looked me in the eye and said, “It is going to be uncomfortable for you to be without a calling. But I believe God has something special in mind.” That next year was very hard, indeed. But I remembered his words and sure enough, as I have mentioned before, God led me eventually to a wonderful congregation along with a new calling – teaching at my high school.

Those who offer counsel cannot make the decision for you. But they can bring an outside “look” at your life and help you see pitfalls, or errors in your thinking. While he was living, I used to rely on my dad for this kind of wisdom. He wasn’t always right, but I knew if I asked him a question, he would pray about it and then give me his very best effort at an honest answer. I miss that about him so much.

God expects you to seek out wise counsel. It is presumptuous to plunge ahead into your life callings without that kind of wisdom. It also takes humility. We like our predispositions to be confirmed, not challenged. Folks have gotten mad at me at times when, coming to me for counsel, I did not agree with their plans. But I could deal with that knowing I was trying my best before God to give honest counsel as I saw it.

Find wise counselors. But ultimately, you must be the one to trust God and make your choices.

8. “Off-hand” remarks by others

God can speak to you through any number of ways. I’ve often been surprised by the happy coincidences of something I would read, hear from others, even watch on TV that would “speak” to me. I’ve learned not to ignore these things. Granted,

I won't change my life solely on the basis of such "words" but I do rejoice in the confirmation they sometimes provide regarding a direction I had been thinking about.

The first of these "words" I remember experiencing was from Miss Helen Moreland, the 90 year-old lady living in the apartment above me when I lived in Boston, a few years out of college. I was telling her how I had experienced a spiritual rebirth over Christmas at my dad's house and had committed my life to Christ. One of the first things out of her mouth was "You should become a minister!" That was a new idea. But her words "fixed" themselves in my mind and would not let go. That afternoon I found myself thinking about how one even became a minister. What she said to me was the first of a series of coincidences culminating in my going to seminary.

Here is another example. Two years after my father died, still missing him a lot, I was in the kitchen at home loading the dishwasher. The TV was on in the next room and SCRUBS, a comedy about doctors and hospitals was playing. In the show, one of the doctors had just lost a patient and was in terrible grief about it. Another doctor confronted him and said, "You have to let go!" Those words hit me square in the heart. I knew God was amplifying and directing those words to me the next moment, in faith and surrender, I turned loose of my grief and thanked God for my dad and the promise that God would continue as my father.

How can you know when an off-hand remark is being used by God for you? For me at least, there is a resonating feeling inside, a "quickenings" that persists because of those words. It is as if something jumps inside me. My attention is drawn to the message and gratitude rises within me.

No matter how odd the "messenger" might be – if God is speaking, listen!

9. Coincidences

We do not live in a world ruled by fate, or luck, or astrological destiny. We live in a world governed by a good God. Granted, God has permitted the presence of sinful people and evil spirits, so not everything that happens to us is "from God." Still, I view coincidences as always worth looking at. Not all coincidences are meaningful, but I've experienced some that have clearly been from God. That same evening after Miss Helen Moreland said "You should become a minister," I was at a party and struck up a conversation with a young lady I had just met. Now keep in mind, for the first time in my life, that very afternoon I was wondering how one became a minister. So I asked this young lady what she did. "I'm a seminary student,

studying to become a minister,” she said. I couldn’t believe it. For the rest of that evening I asked her question after question about what seminary was like, why she was studying to be a minister, and how one became a minister. Over the next few weeks, she invited me to different campus activities as I began to explore the possibilities of my going to seminary.

I was living in Boston at the time. There were six or seven seminaries in the Boston area and I began looking at them all. Not knowing any better, I figured one seminary was as good as any other. I first visited Harvard Divinity School and met with a group of students and faculty. When I explained I had given my life to Jesus, a couple of the students laughed. That puzzled me, but I shrugged it off. The next night, my phone rang. A female voice on the phone asked if I was the Scott Hilborn who had visited Harvard Divinity School the day before. I said yes. She sounded amazed and blurted out she had remembered my name was Scott, but couldn’t remember my last name, so she opened her phone book at random, and saw my name on that page! She called to apologize for the behavior of the students who laughed at me and then gently explained that probably Harvard was not where I wanted to go. I thanked her and followed her advice.

I next visited Boston University’s School of Divinity. Again, the night following my interview, clear out of the blue, a secretary from the school called me. While seated by her desk waiting for my interview that day I had shared with her my story of being spiritually re-born. She phoned to tell me (at risk of getting into trouble) that given my recent spiritual experience, she felt I would be more comfortable going to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, also in the Boston area, where her husband was a seminary student. So I thanked her profusely, and again, faced with this kind of coincidence, began to look at Gordon-Conwell Seminary (where I eventually attended.)

At no point in this process had I told my dad what I was considering – leaving the Dow Chemical Company to go to seminary to become a minister. Though I had told him about committing my life to Jesus, I was reluctant to tell him about my thoughts of seminary, fearing I would hear his usual comment, “Scott, just find something to do and stick with it!”

But one night I finally decided I had to call my dad, down in South Carolina, to tell him what I was thinking. I wanted to know what he thought, even if it was a negative reaction. So I told my dad over the phone, “Dad, you may think this is crazy, but I believe God wants me to become a minister.” Inwardly wincing, I waited to hear the usual, “Scott, just find something to do and stick with it!” But

instead, Dad paused, then said, “Scott, it’s funny you say that. A couple of months ago at church in our Bible study, Pastor Cox told us we should pray and ask God to call our own children into the ministry. I don’t know what came over me, but I jumped to my feet and said out loud ‘We should pray for Scott!’” As my dad said those words, I cried. And I knew right then this series of events had to have been from God.

Towards the end of his life, my dad recalled that conversation. He added how surprised he had been when the Holy Spirit prompted him to pray for me to become a minister because, as far as he knew, at the time they prayed for me to go into the ministry, I was not walking with Jesus. He was right.

I’ve learned to look hard at coincidences and ask, “Is this you, God?”

10. Open doors

“When opportunity knocks, open the door” the saying goes. Well, not always. If your heart is set on obeying Jesus, yes, take a good look at opportunities. But not all “open doors” are from God. That doesn’t mean they are from the devil, either. As another saying goes, “Not every good thing is a God-thing.” Some opportunities will only diminish your energy and time and take time away from your real callings.

In addition, not everyone who believes God has something for you gets it right. I remember when my wife and I were leaving our church in Wilmington, NC and were interviewing with various church pulpit nominating committees. In the course of the process, five different churches told us they believed God was calling me to come and serve as their pastor. Don’t get me wrong. I am not criticizing those well-meaning committees. But surely, God could not have been calling us to all five churches!

Not all opportunities need to be accepted. Well-meaning people can want you involved in their own projects when in reality, God wants you to say “no.” In particular, opportunities appealing to your vanity need extra discernment. Usually God is not in such callings. Still, just because certain aspects of an opportunity appeal to your flesh does not mean God is NOT in the opportunity. You must simply give the opportunity over to God so you can hear his Spirit speak.

11. Knocking on doors versus shoving them open

It is a fiction to believe that if God is in something, everything will just “fall into place.” Yes, sometimes that happens. But as one of my seminary professors, Dr.

Christy Wilson put it, “If God is in something, you can count on opposition, because the devil will seek to thwart it.” It is my experience when God is calling me to do something, I can’t just sit back and “let go and let God.” Time, planning, money, prayer, working it out with others, just plain hard work, together with unexpected set-backs and frustrations are typical in my experience. One needs only to look at the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul in the book of ACTS to get a true picture of following the leading of Jesus Christ.

Having said that, it also takes wisdom to know when it is time to let go of a cherished goal and move on. When doors remain shut, after repeated efforts in good faith to open those doors, faith (not failure) would have us stop and go on to something else. Paul refers to the number of times he attempted to visit the congregation in Rome but was unable to do so. He also refers to efforts to visit certain other cities with the gospel but was prevented from doing so. A New Testament principle for proceeding on any given plan is the statement, “**If the Lord wills**” (see James 4:15). Sometimes our heart breaks when leaving a cherished opportunity. There is death to self in walking away. Like Abraham sacrificing Isaac, we don’t know if what we are giving up will be gone for good or only temporarily. But in our heart, we must know we have truly given it to God.

12. Through prophetic words

The Apostle Paul thought highly of prophetic words. “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may **prophesy**” (1 Corinthians 14:1); “The one who **prophesies** speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3); “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you **prophesy**” (1 Corinthians 14:5); “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to **prophesy**, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:39); “Do not despise **prophecies**” (1 Thessalonians 5:20); “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the **prophecies** previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18).

I have both given and received prophetic words. Prophetic words are messages given by God through another human being. These words are NOT on the same level of authority as the Old Testament prophets. They are inspired thoughts for the “strengthening, encouraging, and comfort” of others. In my experience, prophetic words serve best as CONFIRMATION of a direction God seems to be leading you i.e. cannot imagine a situation in which I personally would chart a new course only on the basis of someone’s prophetic word to me. But when I have

received such words, particularly from people I trust, I write them down, pray over them, and wait. It is so exciting to find God's leading in ways that confirm prophetic words already received!

For example, years ago I attended a conference in which one of the speakers picked me out of a crowd of several hundred people, asked me to stand up, and then said in front of everyone, "God wants you to enlarge your vision. He is pleased with your faithfulness and wants you to know the "David's" are coming and they will need resources for ministry." Well, I was both excited and overwhelmed at receiving that prophetic word, but I could not imagine what it meant. But sure enough, over the next couple years, a surge of people within my present congregation, and some who later joined, expressed interest in being trained for ministry leadership. Out of that grew a monthly healing service, an early Sunday morning time of prayer and praise, and our adult Sunday School class blossomed. That class continues to provide a significant time of discipleship and ministry training.

So, if someone says to you, "I think God wants you to know ..." don't write it off as foolishness. Nor do you need to act on it RIGHT THEN. Write it down and pray and wait.

13. Through dreams

The Bible is full of examples in which God speaks to his people through dreams. In fact I can't think of any major Biblical character who did NOT receive dreams with messages from God. These kind of dreams are of two kinds, SYMBOLIC (Joseph in the Old Testament for example, his brothers' sheaves of grain bowing down to his sheaf of grain) and LITERAL (Joseph, husband of Mary in the New Testament warned by an angel to leave Bethlehem immediately and escape to Egypt to protect the baby Jesus).

I have had dreams which I concluded were from God. They were all symbolic in nature, but because of their vividness and positive content, I felt they must have been from God, so I wrote them down to wait and see what God might be saying.

Here is one example: In a dream, I was led up a long flight of stairs to the pulpit of a church, and was seated in front of an old-fashioned galvanized metal microphone, from which I was to preach. But I couldn't see the congregation because a darkened plate glass window stood on the other side of the pulpit and microphone, between me and the congregation. I couldn't see them and they couldn't see me, that is all there was to the dream. For years, I couldn't imagine

what that dream meant. But I felt sure it meant something. Eventually, I interpreted the dream to mean I would reach people with the gospel in an old-fashioned, anonymous, way. But I still didn't know how the dream applied. Within just the last year though, I realized the dream probably refers to my writing. For some years I have been writing booklets on Christian topics for my congregation, some of which have gone out to others, including inmates at various prisons. An old-technology way of communicating (written material) and an anonymous one (no face to face interaction). I felt I had been a little slow on the uptake, but was excited when I finally connected the dots!

Like prophetic words, I believe dreams should normally confirm a direction from God, not establish one.

14. Listening to the inner voice

Many Christians, I believe, hear from God via the "inner voice," but dismiss it as just their own thinking. Experience with the inner voice of the Holy Spirit is the only way I know to gain familiarity and confidence that yes, this is God speaking to emit would be very hard indeed for me to describe to you what my own mother's voice sounds like. But I can instantly recognize her voice, even with my eyes closed. So too with God's voice. It takes familiarity. And the familiarity comes from the experience of stepping out in faith and acting upon what you heard. This will generally make you nervous. "How do I know this is God? What if it is the devil? Or what if it is just me?" My counsel is that if the inner voice is motivating you to do something in love, and what you are being led to do is good and helpful for others, you are safe in acting upon the "voice." The devil certainly is not interested in creating love or goodness. And even if it is simply your own thoughts, who is going to be hurt by your acting in love and extending goodness and helpfulness to others?

Here is an example from my own experience which illustrates the inner voice. Some years ago, while working-out, a morbidly obese man walked in the front door of the gym. I didn't mean to stare, but he was so large I couldn't help but notice. When he walked by, I nodded to him in greeting. Instantly, the Holy Spirit spoke to me within and said, "Tell him I am interested in him." I laughed. How was I going to do that? I didn't even know the man. But I offered up a silent prayer along the lines of "Lord, if you give me an opportunity, I will." Then I promptly forgot about it. Forty minutes later I finished my workout and went into the locker room. There he was, seated by himself on one of the benches, just the two of us. Then I remembered. So I hesitatingly said "Hello," asked his name and what he did for a

living. I was nervous but determined not to give up. Eventually I got around to saying “I’m a pastor and you may think I’m crazy, but when you walked by me, I believe God told me to tell you he is interested in you.” All at once, hearing my words, the man started to cry. He looked up at me and whispered, “Thank you.” I never saw him again. But I’m sure glad I told him what I did. Who knows what the poor man had been going through?

My mentor, Dr. Dallas Willard, helped me immensely in recognizing “the still, small voice” of God by his book, HEARING GOD: DEVELOPING A CONVERSATIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. I highly recommend it. In brief, Dallas points out that the voice of God comes with a unique AUTHORITY, a unique SPIRIT, and a unique CONTENT. In terms of authority, God simply speaks. He does not plead, he does not ask permission, he does not hesitate. The weight of authority is evident in the voice. In my experience God speaks with just a few words or sentences, such as “I am pleased with you,” or with a brief question such as “What would you like to know?” God’s voice also has a certain “spirit” or tone to it. It is quiet, solid, peaceful, and kind. It is never silly, panicked, rushed, argumentative, or condemning. Even when God speaks a word to correct me, it is always matter-of-fact, never punishing. And there is something about the inner voice such that when I am being spoken to, his voice itself creates within me a desire to yield and obey. I suppose I could refuse, but I don’t want to.

Finally, the inner voice has a unique content. It is consistent with what God has already revealed about himself and his ways in Holy Scripture. However, knowing God and his ways from the Bible does take time and maturity. You may remember the time Jesus’s disciples were angry at the way the Samaritans had treated Jesus. The disciples vehemently asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven and destroy those offenders! Jesus rebuked them and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of” (Luke 9:54-55). In other words, even though his disciples knew the Bible examples about fire coming down from heaven and destroying sinners, they didn’t have the maturity to recognize the fullness of God, as revealed in Jesus, pointing them to the superior way of justice AND mercy. His disciples should have known, knowing Jesus, but they were not mature enough. This is one more reason to confirm the inner voice with the wise counsel of mature believers. The voice of God will always speak consistently with the MEANING of Scripture.

One more thing about the inner voice. In my experience at least, when God speaks to my spirit, there is something about it that makes me stop what I am doing. The

voice makes me pause and stand still and listen. I find myself thanking him for speaking to me and asking if there is anything else he would like me to know.

15. In desperate circumstances

For any of you who are in desperate need right now for God to intervene in the circumstances of your life, I must share with you the powerful effects fasting produces when combined with prayer. When I have been in real crisis situations, I take a day or two and go without food (though I still drink water) and pray. I do not know why fasting “unto the Lord” works so powerfully, but I know it does. Crisis praying is not the preferred way to seek God’s will and callings, but at times, it is all we have. I have always found God faithful to answer when I seek him with fasting and prayer, crying out for mercy.

16. Confidence in your Good Shepherd

Finally and most importantly, we move forward in life and our various callings in confident trust that Jesus Christ has hold of us and will **“never leave or forsake us.”** There have been many times in my life with God when I could not figure out what to do. I needed a sign, a word, something clear to give me direction, but nothing came. In those times of confusion and distress, I would speak to myself along these lines: “Jesus Christ has told me he is always with meshed knows I am willing to do his will if I just know what it isohel is big enough and kind enough to re-direct me if I am going wrong. He has taken care of me all these years. Why would he change his mind about me now?” So trusting him as my Good Shepherd, I then move forward in the direction that seems best.

Living by faith is ACTING as if Jesus Christ is with you. Jesus himself said, **“The work of God is this: to believe in the One he has sent”** (John 6:29). There is nothing that pleases God more than our trusting Jesus.

F. FINALLY: WHAT IS GOD AFTER WITH YOUR LIFE AND CALLINGS?

“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. AND THEY WILL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER.” (Revelation 22:3-5)

The reward for our faithfulness in this life is to be entrusted with greater and nobler responsibilities as we reign together with Jesus for all eternity. Jesus, in his

parable of the talents, quotes the master saying, **“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Lord!”** (Matthew 25:21). Recently I had a conversation with a lady who expressed alarm over the fact we will have work to do in heaven. She really did not want to have to work! But I tried to assure her the work done in heaven will be our great joy, for it will fully utilize all God has put into us by the way of creative ability, talent, and authority. Our work will be the great expression of our love for God, and it will reflect God’s reward and pleasure in our faithfulness to our callings now.

Quoting Dallas Willard again, “What God gets from our life is the kind of person we have become. His plan is to train us to become the kind of persons he can trust to do what WE WANT throughout eternity.” Our callings enable us not only to serve God in this life, but also shape us on the inside to become the sorts of people God can trust. This is one reason our reward in heaven will be based in part on our faithfulness in this life. We will have become the kind of persons suited for greater and nobler purposes. Life in the “new heavens and new earth” will not be a time and place for us to lie on a bed of ease and be served chocolate-dipped strawberries by angels! Instead it will be an adventurous, thrilling, continuing noble quest, one of unimaginable joy as we shout aloud in the midst of our varied and unique callings entrusted to us, **“THIS IS WHY I WAS MADE!”**

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