

Session 2: Understanding God's Calling on a Person's Life

WCR Summer Elective: God's Will & Making Decisions

Why are Christians so Desperate to Find God's Will? (Ch 3: Directionally Challenged)
DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleecees, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Chicago: Moody, 2009.

A. We Want to Please God

We may have the best intentions in trying to discern God's will, but we should really stop putting ourselves through the misery of overspiritualizing every decision. Our misdirected piety makes following God more mysterious than it was meant to be (pg. 27-28).

B. Some of Us are Timid

Many Christians are paralyzed by indecision and inactivity. They refuse to make a decision without all the facts and an almost complete assurance that everything will turn out fine. Cautious and fainthearted Christians need admonition, patience, and help (28-29).

C. We Want Perfect Fulfillment

Many expect too much out of life and have lost any sort of pilgrim attitude required in following Jesus. If you think that God has promised this world will be a five-star hotel, you will be miserable as you live through the normal struggles of life. But if you remember that God promised we would be pilgrims and this world may feel more like a desert or even a prison, you might find your life surprisingly happy. Consider the hardships early Christians faced in Hebrews 11. Most of us would be more fulfilled if we didn't fixate on fulfillment quite so much (pg. 29-32).

D. We Have Too Many Choices

Previous generations did not struggle like we do trying to discover God's will because they didn't have as many choices. Our preoccupation with the will of God is a Western, middle-class phenomenon of the last fifty years. Today we can go to school anywhere, major in hundreds of things, live almost anywhere, have a chance to personally meet thousands of single people in person and millions more on the Internet. We have a gaggle of stores to choose from, dozens of restaurants, hundreds of careers, and millions of choices. College students today tend to have multiple interests and capabilities. They have gobs of talent and opportunities. The world is wide open to them. But instead of reveling in this freedom, most find it agonizing. We live in a culture of massive un-rootedness and an explosion of choice, but the church needs lifers and those who can be counted on for the long haul. It would be wise to advocate floundering less, making a difference for God sooner, and—above all—not spiritualizing, year after year, our inability to make decisions in the elusive quest to discover God's will (pg. 32-38).

E. We Are Cowards

Sometimes we are guilty of praying a coward's prayer: "Lord, tell me what to do so nothing bad will happen to me and I won't have to face danger or the unknown." We want to know everything is going to be fine for us or for those we love. But remember—God's plans can include risk and an opportunity to show courage. Obsessing over the future is not how God wants us to live, because showing us the future is not God's way. His way is to speak to us in the Scriptures and transform us by the renewing of our minds. His way is not a crystal ball. His way is wisdom. We should stop looking for God to reveal the future to us and remove all risk from our lives. We should start looking to God—His character and His promises—and thereby have confidence to take risks for His name's sake. God is all-knowing and all-powerful. He has planned out and works out every detail of our lives—the joyous days and the difficult—all for our good (Eccl 7:14; Acts 17:26-28; Rom 8:28-29). Because we have confidence in God's will of decree, we can radically commit ourselves to His will of desire, without fretting over a hidden will of direction (pg. 38-42).

God's Calling on a Person's Life

Guinness, Os. *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purposes in Your Life*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

* Definition of Calling: "Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service" (pg. 29).

* Calling is straightforward and relational, means "to name," is a synonym for salvation (God calls people to Himself), and has a vital, extended meaning in the NT that flowers more fully in later church history (pg. 29-30).

1. Our **primary calling** as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him. First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia).

Primary Calling to God: Eternal Life (1 Tim 6:12; Rom 8:28-30), to Faith through the Gospel (2 Thess 2:14), to be Saints in fellowship of the Son (1 Cor 1:1-9), out of Darkness into Light (1 Pet 2:9), to belong to Jesus Christ (Rom 1:6), to Holiness/Obedience (2 Tim 1:8-9), to Peace (1 Cor 7:15), to Suffer for the Gospel (1 Pet 2:21), to be His Witnesses (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:6-8).

2. Our **secondary callings**, considering who God is as sovereign, is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for him. We can therefore properly say as a matter of secondary calling that we are called to homemaking or to the practice of law or to art history. 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 (pg. 31).

Secondary Callings: to a Particular Office or Role (Rom 1:1-6; Acts 9:15-16), in Spiritual Gifts that build up the Church (Eph 4:4-12), to a Way of Life (1 Cor 7:15-20), to Tasks (Gal 1:15-17; Acts 20:24), to Places (Acts 17:24-28; Acts 8:26-31).

* The **"Catholic Distortion"** elevates the spiritual at the expense of the secular (pg. 31-35). Consider the fallacy of the contemporary term *full-time Christian service* or the jargon *"answering the call."* Earliest clear example is Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, in *Demonstration of the Gospel*. Christ gave 2 ways of life: 1) The "perfect life" is spiritual, dedicated to contemplation and reserved for priests, monks, and nuns. 2) The "permitted life" is secular, dedicated to action and open to such tasks as soldiering, governing, farming, trading, and raising families. Both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas praised the work of farmers, craftsmen, and merchants but always elevated the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*) over the active life (*vita activa*). This perspective began to change during the Reformation. Martin Luther recommended the abolition of all orders and abstention from all vows, because the contemplative life has no warrant in the Scriptures, it reinforces hypocrisy and arrogance, and it engenders "conceit and a contempt of the common Christian life." Consider that Jesus was a carpenter, His

disciples were fisherman, the apostle Paul was a tent-maker. Recovering a holistic view of calling was powerful in culture as well as in the church. It gave everyday work a dignity and spiritual significance.

* The "**Protestant Distortion**" is a secular form of dualism, elevating the secular at the expense of the spiritual (pg. 38-42). This reduces vocation to an alternate word for work and betrays the purpose of calling. The seeds of this perspective can be traced back to the Puritans. Like the earlier reformers, they never split the primary call ("by God, to God, for God") from the secondary call ("everyone, everywhere, in everything"). Slowly words like work, trade, employment, and occupation came to be used interchangeably with calling and vocation. Callings became jobs and jobs became corrupt. Secondary callings triumphed over the primary calling, and work was made sacred. 2 things are required to find a way back from the disaster of the Protestant Distortion: 1) The Debunking of the notion of calling without a Caller and 2) the Restoring of the primacy of the primary calling (by restoring worship devoted to Christ). Oswald Chambers wrote, "Beware of anything that competes with loyalty to Jesus Christ. The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service for Him . . . the one aim of the call of God is the satisfaction of God, not a call to do something for Him."

Josh's Practical Thoughts on Calling:

1. God and the Scriptures are our sole authority. God has given us all we need for life and godliness through His word and power. God's will is clear in the Bible: Love God, love your neighbor as yourself, live in obedience to His commands, commit and serve in the local church, share the Gospel, make disciples, etc.

2. Commit to Local Church & Seek Pastoral Wisdom. Our main loyalties are to God, Scripture, the Church, marriage, and family. Seek the wise counsel of your church pastors, elders, and spiritual leaders and do this in humility and a teachable spirit. Don't pursue pastoral ministry or missions without church approval. The Holy Spirit told the church to set apart Paul & Barnabus (Acts 13).

3. Consider Your Desires: Take stock of your gifts, abilities, and passions. Psalm 37:3-4 says, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." If you truly love, trust, and delight in God, He will place His desires in your heart. Love God and do what you want.

a) If you desire it and your church affirms, *pursue ministry and missions* until God closes every door. Missionary martyr Jim Elliot said, "Our young men are going into professional fields because they don't feel 'called' to the mission field. We don't need a call, we need a kick in the pants." Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15). You don't need a mystical calling experience to serve in pastoral or missionary service. Count the cost, because effective ministry is difficult and requires long-term commitment.

b) If you desire it, *pursue other careers and occupations*. Wherever your paycheck comes from, live a life of ministry: serve the church, share the Gospel, and make disciples.

4. Don't focus on the things that are unimportant: your title, the source of your paycheck, and the specific location of service.

a) *Your title doesn't matter.* Men too often wrap their identity in a job title or position. It is good to work and serve. This is God's creation design for us stewarding as an act of worship (Gen 2:15,19-20; 4:2-7). Nonetheless, our identity is to be in Christ (Phil. 3).

b) *The source of your paycheck doesn't matter.* People have to work to pay the bills. Some of us enjoy our jobs more than others. Most folks overseas are grateful to even have a job. Be grateful. It's a privilege to have a job. It's an even greater privilege when you can get paid for doing things you truly enjoy.

c) *The specific location you live doesn't matter.* Most people tend to worry, overspiritualize, and obsess about these things. Yes, seek counsel and make wise decisions, but ultimately, God appoints the times and places that we live, so trust in the Lord (Acts 17:26). Some of us need to learn commitment to stay in ministry long term (longevity is crucial). Others of us need a willingness to move and go to difficult fields. Seek Christ daily with open hands and hearts: willing to stay or willing to go.

5. Become a wise and confident decision-maker. The godly, righteous man of Proverbs knows truth and what God expects and is a wise, confident decision maker. God desires that we become wise decision makers who know truth, move forward in confidence, and fully trust Him. Proverbs 16:9 says, *"In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps"* (NIV).

Recommended Books:

Borgman, Brian S. *Feelings and Faith: Cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian Life.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2009.

DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something: How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.* Chicago: Moody, 2009.

Guinness, Os. *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purposes in Your Life.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003.

Jensen, Phillip D. and Tony Payne. *Guidance and the Voice of God.* Kingsford NSW, AUS: Matthias Media, 1997.

Okholm, Dennis. *Monk Habits for Everyday People: Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants.* Ada, MI: Brazos, 2007.

Piper, John. *Don't Waste Your Life.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.

Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *God At Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2002.

Wingren, Gustaf. *Luther on Vocation.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004.