FINDING YOUR CALLING

Introduction

Thank you for completing the Finishers Project Survey. All of the information you have provided will be kept confidential.

You can choose to Build your Service Profile at any time by selecting that option after logging in to your account. Completing your profile will allow you to receive a list of our partner organizations with ministry opportunities that match your interests as selected on your profile.

John Bradley, President of the IDAK GROUP, has written the following paper entitled, “Finding Your Calling”. Over the past 30 years John has assisted thousands to evaluate their aptitudes from secular employment to future ministry service opportunities at mid-life and beyond.

John is the author of Discovering Your Natural Talents and several other books on career advancement. He is a graduate of Western Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree. He has been a guest on Focus on the Family, the 700 Club and the Moody Mid-Day Broadcast. Much of John’s private practice includes ministry leaders as well as business owners, Fortune 500 managers, professionals, government executives and educators.

Mr. Bradley specializes in assessing and evaluating the natural talents of mid-life and older clients. His list of clients includes individuals from all walks of life – secular and Christian. In addition to working with corporations, government agencies, small businesses and universities, John also assists church denominations, seminaries and Bible colleges, mission agencies and parachurch organizations in the assessment of their ministry leaders. His assessment includes a matching of aptitude strengths to over 20,000 ministry options.

For further information on the IDAK Group, see www.idakgroup.com.
Finding Your Calling

John Bradley, IDAK Group for the Finishers Project

As a student of the Bible and as a practitioner advising mid-career adults in future ministry options, I believe there are three basic parts to finding God’s calling for our lives. Furthermore, each of us at midlife and beyond can determine that calling without mystery or need for the right “feeling” to guide us. These three parts are

1) Understanding the call of God;
2) Knowing the difference between your learned skills, your motivation/passion and your innate skills; and
3) Matching your aptitudes to ministry options.

Part One: Understanding the call of God.

There are three factors to understanding God's calling in our lives.

A. God's divine prompting.
B. Confirmation from the community.
C. God's gifting.

A. God's divine prompting.

When it comes to making vocational decisions, we need to address the divine intervention of God in our lives. Some may experience a dramatic event as did the Apostle Paul on the way to Damascus in Acts 9:3-6. On the other hand, most Christians refer to an inner conviction regarding the biblical imperative "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19-20) or use other Bible references. We want to acknowledge that God can prompt each person in different ways. There are many examples in the Old and New Testaments of how God and Jesus prompted men and women to action.

We also need to be careful of the subjective "trap" of saying, "I don't feel called" or, "I'm waiting to be called, but it hasn't happened yet."

The issue is that we have but one life to live. Each of us has a unique contribution which we can make during the few years of our life. Are we pursuing that course; are we attempting to give our very best to glorify God? If yes, then we have been sufficiently "prompted," and at any time can be directed as God would so choose. Giving our best includes both secular and sacred service.

But, you may ask, what if one senses God's leading to go or do something so unusual that requires major risk as well as financial commitment? Fortunately, there are good biblical guidelines to prevent any one of the saints from going off the deep end. This leads us to the second part of understanding the call, confirmation from the community.
B. Confirmation from the community.

To help us stay on track and not be led astray, God has provided a multitude of counselors, advisors, family and friends. One of the many advantages of being an active and transparent member of a church body is to seek a reality check when considering life changing decisions. Asking three or more individuals who know you well to express their views regarding your interpretation of God's prompting in your life provides a good benchmark. This is called confirmation from the community. Several key examples illustrate how God has used the community to guide a person’s vocational decision. We see the selection of Steven and the others in the early church (Acts 6:1-3). We note Paul’s advice to Timothy to be careful in selecting leaders (I Timothy 5:22). We also are familiar regarding the standard for selecting leaders (elders) who were above reproach, which was determined by the community who knew the individuals (Titus 1:5 and I Timothy 3).

C. God’s gifting.

A third part of understanding the calling of God is to acknowledge that each of us have been created by Him in such a way that He knows the minutest detail of our make up (Psalm 139:13-16). Part of that detail includes His choice of aptitudes and temperament characteristics. God states that He put the innate skill in men and women in order to build his tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-6) and also His temple (I Kings 7:14, II Chr 2:14).

We are also instructed that mediocre or average is not sufficient. We are encouraged to not grow weary but rather perform well above average with the talents the Lord has given us. Matthew’s gospel states that we should let our light shine before men so that they can see our good works and give the glory to God (Matthew 5:16). The word for "works" is not limited to charity or ministry, but includes our vocation.

In Ephesians we are admonished to walk in the good work for which we were created (Ephesians 2:10). Another performance standard is offered in Proverbs. "One who is skilled (highly proficient) in his works will stand before kings" (Proverbs 22:29). Being acknowledged by the king was the ultimate standard of career mastery. If it was good enough for the king and the community, then it would give glory to God.

All of these verses testify that not only are we gifted by God, but that by focusing on that gifting should bring about a lifetime of quality productivity which brings glory to God. So, as you contemplate and pray about a new venture which God has placed on your heart, it is important to ask, does it fit your gifting? Your gifting is clearly part of God's will for your life.

In summary, there are three important parts to evaluating one’s calling. First, is there a prompting from God either through the leading of the Holy Spirit or the revelation of His Word? Second, is the calling confirmed by the community of saints who know you well? Third, is the calling compatible with your gifting?
Part Two: Knowing the difference between your learned skills, your motivation/passion and your innate skills.

Within the profession of aptitude assessment, there is a common understanding that most people don't know the difference between their learned skills and their innate skills. This means that a high school English teacher probably will not know if their job skills are based on a teaching degree along with on-the-job experience, or because of a God-given talent for teaching (most people say both).

A natural talent is something God given. Each of us have at least five unique talents which give us the capacity to intuitively understand the work we do rather than just go through the motions. Natural Talents are very transferable and can predict success in a future job. Ironically, in the early years of one's career, the difference between learned skills and innate skills (talents) is not noticeable. In our early years, job performance can be just a repetition of what we know and have done. Once a person ages beyond 35, stress can begin to occur; where before this time it was not noticeable. This stress pattern can come from job performance due to learned skills without innate skill or natural talent.

At mid life and beyond if we are considering a change of career, it is important to have some predictability of success. Motivation or passion can make the first 6-12 months in a new position appear to be a good fit. Beyond that point, intuitive know-how resulting from Natural Talent will become important. Unfortunately, learned skills are not easily transferable, as they operate best within the organizational structure where they are learned. An English teacher who is not naturally gifted in teaching will have difficulty transferring skills to a mission school in Kenya, for example.

On the other hand, one who intuitively understands teaching (has a talent) and works easily with adolescents can make the switch with ease. In addition, the talented person's job performance will not experience a setback but will continue its growth through self-improvement. Unfortunately, many are confused in thinking that passion plus work experience is all one needs to predict future success in ministry service or any other career. Talent is not always authenticated by passion and work experience.

Spiritual Gifts

When the subject of God's gifting or one's innate gifts are discussed, the topic of spiritual gifts usually arises. There are two major references to spiritual gifts in the New Testament: Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12. Interpretation of how these gifts were intended for use during the first century of the early church until there was a canonized New Testament versus how they are intended to be used today varies widely. Unfortunately, differences of opinion on the use of the gifts has caused some heated opposition among members of the body.
The good news is that both natural talents and spiritual gifts were given by the same Creator. Therefore, in His plan they work together to do His will. We understand that spiritual gifts are given to each person at the time one makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ (I Peter 4:10). At that time three gifts are received: 1) we become born again spiritually (II Corinthians 5:17), 2) we receive the Holy Spirit (the helper) who will teach us about the truth (John 14:16-17, 26) and 3) we also receive a spiritual gift. All three of these gifts provide for each of us an incredible new perspective on ourselves, the world and spiritual things. They enable us to discern spiritual things where earlier we were blind to them.

Clearly, spiritual gifts are important and of a higher order than natural talents as they are part of our new spiritual identity. They do not invalidate the talents or replace them. Many recorded expressions of the spiritual gifts in the New Testament evidenced supernatural activity which gave a type of authenticity to the leader. Some believe that these supernatural activities occur today through the expression of spiritual gifts. However, being able to name one’s spiritual gift does not appear to be a priority for spiritual leadership. The two classic passages which list the qualities for elder in

I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 give no mention of identifying one’s spiritual gifts as a prerequisite for leadership. (The only exception is the word "able to teach" which includes the role of explaining, by conversation to another, one’s faith). So it appears that whatever one’s gift was, it was sufficient; and, perhaps the more variety of the gifts the better in order to provide a well-rounded leadership team for the body. Therefore, the key issue about spiritual gifts is that each believer in Christ has at least one and it is most valuable. However, there does not appear to be an emphasis on knowing one’s spiritual gift(s) in order to be matched to a type of ministry service or for a specific leadership role.

One final issue. With over thirty years of assessing individual’s aptitudes, identifying natural talents is much easier to measure than the supernatural, spiritual activity of the gifts. Also, when it comes to matching aptitudes to ministry options, talents are more definitive and therefore easier to match to job duties.

For those who are caught in the tension between the talents and spiritual gifts, I encourage them to first assess their talents since they are the easiest to identify. Being obedient to these will then allow the believer to be used of God through the spiritual gifts. The spiritual gift will express itself in whatever job or role a person has as long as they are walking in obedience to Christ.
Part Three: Matching your aptitudes to ministry options.

What is a right fit in the future for you, having given a large part of your life to some type of work? Most adults at 50+ don't want to start at the bottom. They are looking for a good fit that gives them a sense of value and is also a help to the ministry organization.

Most ministry organizations do not have the staff or the expertise to match your 25 plus years of experience with a job in their ministry organization. Therefore, to succeed at a good fit, you need to provide the information regarding your transferable talent strengths as well as define your recommended job fit.

This is not as complicated as it sounds.

Let's consider what your final goal looks like. It isn't missionary or teacher or counselor. That is too vague. We need a type of organization, which you feel is performing the type of cutting edge ministry which will make a difference. Maybe this is disaster relief, water sanitation consulting, English-as-a-second-language school, shelter for orphans, banking systems for self-employment, medical care on wheels, etc. The selection of the type of ministry organization is half of your ultimate goal. This decision is usually made from your passion, compassion, interests or values.

The second half of the goal is the job title. What do you propose to do? Titles could include radio broadcaster (D.J.), consultant, fund raiser, music director, children's teacher, engineer, etc. There is no set list or special inventory of job titles to choose from because no one yet knows you and what you propose to do.

In summary, to select your ideal Finisher ministry career target, you need to make two decisions. Which ministry organizations do you feel are on the cutting edge? And, second, what job duties fit your natural talents (transferable strengths)?

Where to go from here:

Don't scratch your head too long over this. The Finishers Project has set up a process that enables you to complete a profile that will then be electronically matched with all the mission agencies that partner with Finishers Project. Log in to your account and Build your Service Profile to see which of these agencies would have the ministry positions that match your experience and desires for service.