
MEDITATIONS ON THE CALL TO LABOR | *Selected by David F. Coffin, Jr.*

The Calling of God to a Particular Task

The term call is a metaphor, referring both to the command or summons by which a person is verbally invited and directed to any duty, and to the vocation or employment to which he is summoned. It is, therefore, that command—addressed to any individual through His word, by the Holy Ghost,—to engage in any work or duty, or to enjoy any privileges and blessings. It is used in the Scriptures generally for every state and condition of life to which any one is destined by God—for which He gives the requisite capacity and qualifications, opening the way for an entrance upon it—and blessing and supporting those who engage in it. The Holy Ghost is represented as the efficient agent in carrying out, in reference to every individual, the *providential* purposes of God, as well as the dispensations of His grace. To every such state, condition and duty, whether in the family, the church, or the commonwealth, the Holy Spirit calls, and his people are called; and hence, these employments are termed callings, or a man's vocation. A call, therefore, is necessary to the proper discharge and enjoyment of any business or occupation, and this call is the more clear and evident, in proportion as the duty is peculiar, responsible, and attended with temptation and difficulty. A Christian is, therefore, to expect such a call, and a comfortable persuasion or assurance of duty in all that he undertakes.¹

With respect to office in the church the Word specially sets forth the work to be done and the special qualifications necessary. For ordinary vocations the work to be done and qualifications necessary are determined by reason and providence, consistent with the general principles of the Word.

The Way to an Approved Calling²

I. Consider Carefully the Inward Calling—What you are naturally fitted for in mind and body.

“Men outside their proper callings are like joints out of place in the body; in finding the proper place, each must examine both his ‘affections’ and his gifts.” William Perkins, *Treatise on Vocations* (1502)

Consult carefully:

1. Your Affections/Inclinations—in-created, biblically informed, God-honoring desires (Ps. 139:13-14; Prov. 13:12; 1 Tim. 4:3-5; Ps. 10:3; Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:5; Prov. 25:28; Prov.

¹ Thomas Smyth, “Call To the Ministry—Its Nature and Evidence,” *The Southern Presbyterian Review* 2: (Sept. 1848): 157-183. The quoted material is on page 159.

² Drawn from Richard Baxter’s *Christian Directory* (1673), pt. I, chap. X, pt. 1, title 1, and Richard Steel’s *Religious Tradesman* (1673), Chapter II. Of Choosing a Calling, pp. 24-44.

16:32; 1Cor. 9:25; Gal. 5:22-23; Ps. 145:16; 1 Jn. 2:16-17; Prov. 19:2; Ps. 145:19; 37:4; Ps. 20:4; Mat. 7:11; Mat. 6:31-33; Prov. 21:5)

2. Your Gifts/Abilities—Gifting is “tacit appointment” by God, other things being equal. God provides fit means to His ends (James 1:17; Jn 3:27; 1 Cor. 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; 1 Pet. 4:10; Mat. 5:16)

If one has greater gifts than required in the task, discontent will tend to follow.

If one has lesser gifts than required in the task, failure and discouragement will tend to follow.

II. Consider Carefully the Outward Calling

1. That it is a lawful task.

- a. Negatively—don’t make a “trade” of sin (Prov. 22:8; 10:2; 15:27; 1:19; Rom. 13:10). Such are employments which:

—Tend to lessen the reverence and duty we owe to God

—Obstruct the general good of mankind

—Are a necessary occasion of sin to ourselves

—A certain incentive to the sin of others

- b. Positively—that it fulfills the law of love (Josh. 22:5; Col. 3:23-24; Col. 3:17; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8)

A task wherein you can best serve God and the public good—to love God and to love neighbor

A fair test: work for which you can ask God’s blessing and expect His favor. (Ps. 90:17)

“It is a great satisfaction to an honest mind, to spend his life in doing the greatest good he can; and prison and constant calamity to be tied to spend one’s life in doing little good at all to others, though he should grow rich by it himself.” Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory* (1673)

2. That it is a task that will be to your own good—requiring a challenging use of the body and mind, thus providing a proper stewardship of your gifts. (2 Tim. 3:2; Gal. 5:14; Mat. 25:14-30)

“Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker’s faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual,

mental, and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.”
Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos* (1949)

3. That it is a task that will tend to your success and honest gain, making provision for yourself and those for whom you are responsible. (1Tim. 6:9; Ps. 85:12; Eccl. 3:13; 5:19; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Cor. 9:14; 2 Cor. 9:6-7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Eph. 4:28; Rom. 13:5-7)
4. That it is a task consistent with the counsel of wise. (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 20:18)
 - a. Those who know you (your strengths and weaknesses) concur with your choice; and
 - b. Your vocation receives the commendation of experienced people within that calling.

With such considerations you pursue a rational conviction that the Lord has called you by the Holy Spirit to the task you have undertaken. So thinking you can properly feel approved in your work—that your heavenly Father favors your endeavors. Only in this way can you engage in what J.I. Packer calls every Christian’s “full time employment,” to please God (Rom. 12:1).

*“Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,
fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work. . . .”*
Col. 1:10