

here I am Lord, send me but wait, I have some questions

"I'm seriously thinking about vocational Christian work, but how can I be sure of God's will?"

This is probably the most common question believers ask. Any sincere, Spirit-filled Christian who wants to know the will of God concerning his life can know it, but this is typically a process, not a dramatic revelation.

Multitudes of well-meaning Christians are wasting their lives, powerless because they are waiting for some unusual sign, signal or flash of light from God before they act.

There is a lot of mythology surrounding the issue of knowing God's will and "being called." Many Christians think that a call from God will be an emotional experience when they hear God boom: "Do this! Go here!" In the words of Dr. Howard Hendricks, "The will of God is not nearly as focused on location or vocation as it is on character."

Being called primarily means being obedient to the ongoing direction of the Lord's leading in your life. God is calling every Christian to submit his whole life to Him and thereby bring glory to His name. "Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The call to be a vocational Christian worker is no different from the call to be a doctor, a homemaker or a ditch-digger. Any vocation to which God directs you can glorify Him.

For further information on how to know the will of God for your life, write for a free copy of the Paul Brown Letter. After years of counseling students and adults in career decisions, Dr. Bill Bright wrote this helpful article. You may request your copy from: Campus Crusade for Christ International, Staff Opportunities (1200), 100 Lake Hart Drive, Orlando, FL 32832; 1-800-444.5335.

"What if I plan to get a secular job and use my position to develop a ministry?"

If God is clearly directing you to a career in a secular field, then you will need commitment to your employer and his firm. He is not paying you to evangelize on the job, but rather to make a profit for the stockholders of his company. You are to work heartily, as unto the Lord, whatever you do.

Sure, as a Christian you are called to be His ambassador every minute of every day, but you need to be sensitive to your employer's expectations. Your opportunities to witness and disciple will be significantly more limited than what you've been experiencing as a student. It is exciting to have a ministry in a secular context; however, keep in mind that it is very difficult to balance your commitment of time, talent, creativity and energy in your professional goals and in your ministry.

Kick back for a moment and think: What kind of ministry do you want to have? What will it look like? Will you be an usher passing the offering plate in the 9:00 service? Will you be a member of the Christian education committee? Perhaps you are thinking of something more.

You probably see an attractive, creative outreach to your colleagues and clients. Perhaps you envision a discipleship group of people who have come to Christ through your ministry, and they are being built and trained to have their own ministries. You expect that soon a Christian influence will prevail throughout your entire company.

Let's ask the hard question: How many people do you know who are having this type of ministry? The scarcity of men and women having potent ministries of evangelism and discipleship in the work place should give us some indication of the difficulty of the task. Now, it is certainly not impossible. Yet it is often more difficult than what students anticipate. Therefore, they get ambushed by naive expectations and insufficient preparation.

A survey of young professionals seeking to minister in the market place revealed four predominant barriers to an effective ministry: 1) Pressure from employer not to "dispense religion" in the context of his business. 2) Pressure from the boss to "produce" leaves little time for ministry during the workday. 3) Commuting time included, 50- to 60-hour work weeks are the norm. That leaves little time or energy for ministry after work. 4) Little to no environment, encouragement or accountability is available to foster a ministry. Brian Birdsall, a Denver attorney, said:

"My client is paying the firm \$100 per hour for legal advice. He has a right to the best legal work I can produce. My boss knows I am a Christian, but he is

definitely not paying me to share my faith in the office, even if the client's need is basically spiritual. The difference between having a ministry on campus and in the business world is the difference between day and night. I have to perform in the work place. I have to be prepared every day. There is much less time for me to minister. And, those I want to reach have little time or inclination to talk about spiritual issues."

North Carolina physical therapist Lynn Rendleman added:

"If I shared Christ with a patient, I would be censured by my boss. He would say, "You have a good education and training. Use It! Don't use this God-business." ... When you get out of school and start your first job, you feel tremendous pressure just to do your work correctly. There's no time to develop the creative evangelistic approaches necessary to be effective in a business context. Even though I have a Bible study with some of the staff at the hospital, few of them have a vision to make a spiritual impact. I often feel weighted down by the mediocrity of the Christians around me."

"How can I prepare myself for an effective ministry within the context of a secular career?"

Many Christians fail to develop disciple-building opportunities "on the job," because they simply are not equipped to work through the complexities of a ministry in the marketplace.

If God calls you to develop a lifelong ministry within a business environment, then you need to equip yourself just as a physician, attorney or CPA invests several years of additional education and experience in preparation for a lifelong career.

Two years of vocational Christian ministry will give you the basic training you'll need to be a well-equipped ambassador for Christ—wherever God leads you. Think of it as a graduate school in life effectiveness.

As a Campus Crusade for Christ staff member, you'll have unlimited opportunities to develop and sharpen skills that will be important for the rest of your life—skills in the areas of personal ministry, leadership, communication and relationships. Realistic preparation for a lifetime of ministry in a secular position may include taking two or three years of "graduate work" to strengthen your walk with the Lord and develop personal ministry skills.

"Wouldn't a secular job be more secure financially and therefore better stewardship of my money?"

Financial security is probably not the major factor in your decision. If it is a specific issue, however, consider that there really is no financial security in any position. Tens of thousands of men and women have spent years of their lives working for major corporations only one day to turn around and have no job.

Yes, God calls us to good stewardship and responsible planning for our futures, but there is no security apart from the Lord. When you started college, some of the best-paying jobs in America were in the oil and high-tech industries.

Today many of those companies have gone out of business or have been swallowed by mergers or takeovers. One out of every four jobs in the oil industry has disappeared in the last four years. Men with graduate degrees in petroleum engineering are pumping gas at Houston service stations rather than exploring for new wells.

A commentator on the January 6, 1987, edition of "Today's Business" said flatly: "Let's face it, there's no such thing as job security anywhere in America today." You are more secure in a fiery furnace in the will of God than anywhere outside the will of God.

Financial security can only be found through obedience to Him and His direction for your life. The bottom line is our obedience to His call. It is only in Him and through faith in His promises that we find lasting security. Our lives are in His hands—therefore, we are ultimately His responsibility.

"Who came up with this support-raising idea?"

Nearly 3,300 years ago, God designed a comprehensive financial plan that would adequately provide the salaries and benefits of His full-time workers.

In the book of Numbers, God called the Levites to be His first full-time ministers. There were plenty of qualified and motivated laymen (i.e. Moses, Joshua, Caleb) to work in the tabernacle, but God was looking for more than part-time help. He wanted to meet the demanding spiritual needs of the nation, but even the most dedicated workers could not meet these needs, in their spare time alone.

God created a position for vocational ministers in His kingdom, and these first full-time workers, the Levites, were instructed to rely on God for their income and financial stability.

The Lord tells Aaron in Numbers 18:20,21 "...I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel...to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform..." (See also Deuteronomy 18:1,2.)

The Lord staked His credibility on providing financial security for His servants. While the nation Israel worked the land and faced the financial uncertainties of drought, disease and famine, the Lord promised to provide for the Levites through the tithes and offerings of their countrymen.

In addition, when God set up His employee pay scale, His checking account was not overdrawn (Numbers 18:8-13). He demanded that His workers be well cared for. The Lord instructed the people to set aside the "most holy gifts" and "the best of the fresh wine and of the grain" for His ministers. The Israelites were charged with the responsibility of providing for the finances of the Levites, and they were to give of their best.

"Didn't God change His missions budget in the New Testament?"

After Christ came God did establish a new covenant whereby any believer (not just those in the family of Levi) could serve Him in vocational ministry. Jesus, who was a carpenter, could have funded His ministry by building furniture or repairing carts and tables full-time, then teaching and healing during His spare time. But that's not the example He left those He calls to vocational service.

As Jesus went out ministering full-time, He relied on people (i.e. Mary, Martha, Lazarus) who helped "...support Him out of their own means" (Luke 8:3). Jesus had financial supporters.

When Christ commissioned His followers "to every city and place," He gave them the spiritual authority to minister and told them to trust Him for their physical provisions. "Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep" (Matthew 10:9,10).

They were to accept gifts from others, as Jesus said, "eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:4-7). A laborer in God's kingdom is truly worthy of being paid for his service. The workers in the early church lived on the same system of support that God established with the Levites.

"Paul was a tent maker. He didn't ask for gifts. Shouldn't I follow his example?"

The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 9:14, "so also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." He explains that God set up a system of financial support for His workers. He also writes that even though he had the right to be supported by the Corinthians, he chose to make tents. This was an exception, however, to Paul's normal method of ministry.

Paul wanted to make sure that the Corinthians to whom he preached had no reason to question his motives. He chose to live on a smaller salary and take less from the Corinthians in order to validate his character, his faith and his ministry. With the Corinthian church Paul may have supplemented his income by sewing canvas, but he did rely on gifts from supporters.

Many times in the New Testament (Philippians 4:10-16; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5) we see that the churches gave sacrificially to support Paul's work. He commended them for their support and reminded them of the eternal profit of their gifts. "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account" (Philippians 4:17).

This great missionary willingly received financial support from other Christians and churches, and he asked for support. "When I go to Spain...I hope to have you assist me on my journey" (Romans 15:24). The original language in this verse confirms Paul's request for money. John also made reference to support: "For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth" (3 John 7,8).

In examining Scripture it is clear that Paul was a support-raising missionary, and his part-time job in Corinth was a special exception to God's financial plan for His full-time workers. The lifestyle of supported ministry that he was called to was little different than the models followed by both Levites of the Old Testament and Jesus Himself.

"Is it less spiritual to look for a salaried missionary job rather than a support-raising position?"

Raising support does not make you holier than other Christians. There is nothing you can do or fail to do that will make you more spiritual or alter your eternal position in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14, Romans 6:5-9).

Many outstanding denominations and missions groups offer salaries to their missionaries, and the Lord is honoring their ministries. All Christians need to live by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11:6) regardless of how they receive their paychecks. The bottom line is that you need to be willing to do whatever the Lord asks you to do or you won't be qualified for any missionary career (salaried or supported).

"Can I really live on a missionary's salary?"

This depends on your definition of living." If you think you need to make \$100,000 a year, you will probably find the salary a little meager for your lifestyle. However, living on a moderate salary does not mean you have to live like a third-class citizen. In most Christian organizations your income will allow you a sufficient amount to give cheerfully to the Lord's work (2 Corinthians 9:8), as well as adequately meet your daily needs, educate your children and provide for your retirement.

Almost 67 percent of the more than 420 North American Protestant mission organizations require their staff members to develop their own financial support. That's more than 67,000 people depending on vocational ministry salaries. In Campus Crusade for Christ, for example, each staff member's salary is evaluated annually in light of the Consumer Price Index and, if necessary, adjusted to the rising cost of living.

In addition to salaries, a number of other expenses may be covered through reimbursements (automobile, insurance and ministry expenses). Plus a group insurance plan provides staff members with full health coverage for personal injuries and sickness; and a life insurance and pension program is designed to meet individual needs and give families a reasonable level of security. It is the philosophy of Campus Crusade in financial matters that a staff member should be free to minister without undue financial pressures.

The steps of good men are directed by the Lord. He delights in each step they take. If they fall it isn't fatal, for the Lord holds them with His hand. I have been young and now I am old. And in all my years I have never seen the Lord forsake a man who loves him, nor have I seen the children of the godly go hungry. Instead, the godly are able to be generous with their gifts and loans to others, and their children are a blessing' (Psalm 37:23-26, Living Bible).

"I'm willing to do what God wants, but right now I just don't feel comfortable raising support."

Most people find themselves a little uneasy as they approach the challenge of support raising. It seems to go against our American culture to depend on others...especially for finances.

As Christians we heed strong scriptural warnings about our culture's view of morality, materialism, etc. Similarly, we should not rely on the world's view of our own feelings when it comes to God's Word on support for His full-time ministers. The Bible strongly states that accepting support gifts is part of God's economy.

Raising support is a matter of obedience, not feelings. If God calls you to a supported ministry position, then He will provide everything you need to fulfill your ministry (including emotional strength and perseverance). "...my God shall supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19), and "Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Developing a financial support team is a great faith adventure and a tremendous opportunity to see God work in your life as well as in the lives of the people who will stand with you through their prayers and financial gifts. When you look at the benefits of support raising; a stronger faith, opportunities to introduce others to Christ, a solid base of prayer for your ministry and a network of new friendships, the fears and obstacles dim in comparison.

You must choose to remember God's promise to meet your needs and to bless those who give. The phrase "it is more blessed to give than to receive" is not just a platitude on Sunday school walls, but the conviction of our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:35). God honors giving and promises to return His blessings a hundred-fold. In Malachi 3:10-12 God commands, test Me now in this I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need." Your supporters are not merely doing you a favor, but you are helping them make investments for which God will return benefits to them now and throughout eternity.

For further study and consideration: Numbers 1:47-54; Numbers 18; Deuteronomy 18:1-6; Luke 8:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9; Matthew 16:25; Luke 6:38; Jeremiah 29:11; John 15:16.

"I'm interested in going into vocational Christian work, but my parents don't want me to."

When the Bible clearly teaches that we are to both honor and obey our parents, it's hard to justify going against their wishes. Both the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12) and Ephesians 6:1-3, as well as other passages, admonish children to revere and obey their fathers and mothers.

Your parents' opinions are important. Your mother and father love you and are probably as concerned with your future as you are. So, how do you weigh your parents' wishes when you're evaluating many factors in trying to discern God's leading for your future? Are their wishes the predominant criteria or merely one voice in the crowd?

Neither. Your parents' wishes should be considered as a very significant piece of information, but not the determinative factor.

There was a period of time in your life when you were totally under your parents' authority. However, the Scriptures indicate that with the onset of adulthood, your accountability shifts from your parents to your own independent responsibility to God. We are always to be committed to honoring our parents, but there comes a time when we are personally accountable before God.

The Bible indicates that God considers a person an adult at the age of 20. For example, God required men 20 years old and upward to fight in the Israelite army (Numbers 1), and He expected them to pay the temple tax at the age of 20 (Exodus 38:21-26).

When Israel was ready to enter the promised land, God considered each person above 20 years accountable for his own decision to cross the Jordan or remain behind. Was this not the case, those over 20 that responded to their parents' wishes to stay would have been spared God's judgment. They were not. God held them accountable, and all those of majority age (20 years) died and did not see the land of Canaan (Numbers 32:11).

The New Testament also addresses the issue of the age of adulthood or the time of breaking with parental authority. As in Genesis 2:24, Jesus (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7) clearly states that a married couple should depart from their family homes (which were the places of government and parental authority) and begin their own home. Jewish men usually married by their 19th year and were held responsible before the Lord.

Jesus challenged young men (probably near the age of 20) to leave their parents and follow Him. The Bible records in Mark 1:20 that, "...they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him" (see also Matthew 4:22).

Though they had probably discussed Jesus' ministry as a family, there is no biblical record that they even consulted their parents about their vocational choice when the directive came from the Lord.

We see that the sweep of Scripture points to the necessity to honor our parents, and it recognizes that at the majority age of 20, a person must assume responsibility for his own life decisions.

It is both biblically and psychologically sound that you should develop greater autonomy throughout your college years, while still maintaining an attitude of honor and respect for your parents, supplemented by regular communication and seeking of counsel. If you are 21 years old, and your parents are still pulling the strings in your life, it is very unhealthy for both of you.

When an individual is on the threshold of adulthood (about 20 years), that person alone is responsible for the decisions he makes. The final say must belong to the individual, and this may unfortunately be contrary to parental wishes. What Jesus communicates (Luke 12:51, Luke 9:59-62, Mark 3:31-35) is that the call of God is much more important than the call of the family. We must always respect and honor our parents, but our responsibility to obey subsides when we become independent adults.

"My parents are worried that I will be wasting my major."

It is difficult to imagine a major that would not have application in some facet of the worldwide work of the Kingdom. Many organizations have positions that someone with your particular academic degree can fill.

The academic part of your education, while very important, is only one part of your higher education. While in college you also learned how to deal with pressure, how to produce, how to function under different grading styles, how to learn, and, most importantly, how to get along with other people. These benefits of your education will be with you long after the specifics of your major become obsolete. These broader abilities can be significantly used in any ministry context.

Incidentally, very few individuals actually end up working directly in the field in which they majored. Just ask most people you know who have been out of school more than 10 years.

Your major field of work is not to be confused with your spiritual gifts. For example, if your chosen major is economics, and God has given you administrative abilities, His first concern is what you do with your gift of administration rather than how you use your degree. Pursuing a particular major doesn't include the responsibility to practice it; receiving a spiritual gift does.

Notice that the Lord never hesitated to call people away from their majors or life work to serve Him full time. For example, Moses, who was raised in Pharaoh's court, listened to God's call and left a prestigious leadership position. Peter "majored" in oceanography, Matthew in tax accounting and Luke in medicine. Jesus never apologized for calling them away from their "majors."

Maybe your parents are really saying, "We don't want you to waste the buying power of your education." That's understandable. But, the way that you waste something is by spending it on something of lesser value. Buying land in Florida with your life's savings, only to find that it is six feet under a lake, is wasting your money.

The most valuable commodity in all the universe is the human soul. "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36). Certainly it is not wasteful to invest something that you have for something of higher value. In a ministry you're investing your education in the changing of people's lives for all eternity. You're purchasing the commodity of highest value. That's no waste. That's a phenomenal investment.

"What can I do to help my parents understand what I want to do?"

First of all, sit down and ask them what their questions are. "I know you have some concerns about my future decisions, and I'd like to understand them" will go a long way in opening up communication. By tilting the time to listen, you're not only showing consideration and respect, but you'll also be better able to address their specific questions.

Explain what you want to do and why (your parents need to see your heart and the depth of your conviction). Calmly communicate your goals and desires, and give them adequate information on the organization that you will be with.

Most Christian organizations have adequate to excellent programs for insurance, health care and retirement. Good organizations will be pleased to send information regarding their salary and benefit package. Many objections come from misinformation or a total lack of information. Talk to your parents in the context of how much you appreciate them and all that they have done for you.

If you sense pressure to fulfill their expectations more than your convictions, then consider saying, "I want you to know how much I've appreciated all you've sacrificed for my education. Now that I'm making my career choices do you have some expectations in return for your investment or am I free to make my own choices?" Getting their expectations out on the table will help both you and them evaluate their validity. Remember: your parents want what they perceive to be the best for you.

"What are some other steps I can take?"

- Be filled with the Holy Spirit, and pray for your parents.
- Determine specifically what questions or objections your parents have.
- Take the initiative to get answers and helpful information for your parents.
- Introduce your parents to other people involved with the organization in which you are interested.
- Begin to take personal responsibility for the decisions you have to make.
- Be firm and assured in your call to vocational Christian work. Parents easily can sense apprehension, which can raise further doubts in their minds.
- Remember that disapproval probably does not mean that your parents will disown you. For most parents their children will always remain exactly that - their children. Letting go is often very difficult.

In response to commonly asked questions, Roger Randall has written this article about full-time vocational ministry. Roger, who has served on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ for 25 years, has counseled thousands of university students and young professionals regarding their career decisions