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Identity, Vocation, and Calling: College Students' Development Toward Meaning

An essay on college student identity, vocation, and calling that reviews recent books from the Lilly Endowment's Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation.

by Roger D. Wessel

The traditional undergraduate collegiate experience is a transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood when the search for identity, vocation, and for some spiritually astute individuals, calling, often rise to prominence in the lives of college students. How do young adults identify and form personal identities? How does the identity impact decisions about current and future vocational and career opportunities? And, does a Christian vocational calling, a special hybrid of identity and vocation, often described as a life-mission, exist? If so, how does one identify, understand, and actualize it?

The search for meaning, or life-purpose, is common. The Christian's desire for finding the "will of God" for his/her life is desirable, yet may be confusing to some. How does the contemporary college student figure all of this out? Aaron Shust's (2005) popular song, *My Savior, My God*, demonstrated the complexity.

*I am not skilled to understand
What God has willed, what God has planned
I only know at His right hand
Stands one who is my Savior.*

Jesus directed his followers to pray that the Heavenly Father's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Holy Bible, n.d., Luke 11:2, NKJV). The prophet Jeremiah reminded God's people of His intention for them: "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV). How do you figure out your personal identity, find peace about who you are (or choose to be), decide on a vocation or career that is right for you, and understand if God has a plan for you that somehow is a combination of identity and vocation?

In this essay an overview of college student developmental theory is provided as a philosophical context for understanding how identity emerges from the undergraduate collegiate experience. Reviews of several books are presented, some that directed the author's personal search for identity within the Christian calling construct, and more contemporary works that have emerged from the Lilly Endowment's Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation. The essay is written from the perspective of a university faculty member or Student Affairs' educator who, through his/her interactions with college students, may be asked some variation of the following questions.

- "How do I find out who I am?"
- "How do I know what I should major in?"
- "How do I understand what I should do with my life?"

Reviews on books are provided that college educators may use to help their students find answers to these questions.

College Student Developmental Theory

How does attending college influence student development? Feldman and Newcomb (1969) and Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991, 2005) collection of studies documented research to date on college student development and how college affects students with focus on their cognitive skills and intellectual growth, psychosocial change, attitudes and values, moral development, and career and economic impacts of college. College student development has Kurt Lewin's (1936) work as its theoretical foundation. He suggested that behavior is a function of a person in his/her environment. College student developmental theorists describe how college students develop in higher education settings.

Three developmental conditions for college students were proposed by Nevitt Sanford (1966): readiness, challenge, and support. Readiness is a function of maturity and beneficial conditions including challenge and support in the environment. Individuals are not ready to display certain behaviors until there is an optimal dissonance of challenge and support.

College student developmental theories fit into clusters. For example, cognitive developmental theorists focused on universal patterns that individuals go through as modes of thinking are established (Perry, 1970). Vocational theorists (Holland, 1973) postulated that individuals have, and occupations require, a certain set of traits for success and that the closer the match between the personal characteristics and job requirements the greater likelihood for success. Psychosocial theorists often built upon the works of Erik Erikson (1968) who described a life cycle and sequential stages for development.

Schuh (1994) suggested that Arthur Chickering's (1969) psychosocial theory of identity development had generated as much research as any theory in the field of college student development. His theory focused on the life content of traditional-age college students, what they thought and experienced. Chickering (and Reisser, 1993) theorized that during a developmental vector college students face a developmental issue that needs resolution before the next stage can begin. Rejecting the simplicity of sequential models, Chickering described college student development as a sequential order of personal building blocks. In vector one college students focus on developing intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence so that they will have a strong sense of confidence. Gaining control of one's emotions (vector two, e.g., anxiety, aggression, sexual attraction, depression) enables processing experiences in a healthy way and integrating feelings with actions. In the third vector college students move through emotional and instrumental autonomy so that they recognize and accept the importance of interdependence. The development of mature interpersonal relationships (vector 4) enables tolerance and appreciation of differences and a capacity for intimacy. These initial vectors are prominent in the lives of traditional-age college freshmen. With this foundation established, the student is then ready to move on toward the establishment of an identity (vector 5) where an inner sense enables personal stability and comfort with body, gender, and self. Developing purpose is the sixth vector where the individual clarifies interests, alternatives, and sets direction for life. In the final vector, developing integrity, an individual personalizes values by which to live and accepts social responsibility.

James Fowler (1981) postulated a six stage faith developmental theory that had a triadic connection between self, others, and a central power (i.e., God within the Christian tradition). Within the past few years, faith and spiritual development has experienced a renewed emphasis among college student developmental theorist. Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) stated that the collegiate experience needed to be broadened to include spiritual development. There were several reasons for including spirituality within the student affairs profession.

The first is based on a very traditional and closely held assumption of the profession: the value of holistic student development . . . Another reason is that these concepts are being addressed in other related helping professions and in academic disciplines that have traditionally informed our practice. (Love & Talbot, 1999, p. 362)

Sharon Daloz Parks (2000) viewed spirituality as a search for meaning, transcendence, wholeness, purpose, and “as the animating essence at the core of life” (p. 16). Love and Talbot (1999) identified “the quest for spiritual development [as] an innate aspect of human development” (p. 364). Tony Marchese (2006) encouraged individuals to:

Gaze deeply into our soul [so] that we can discover our own “code” that reveals the equation for personal fulfillment and vocational realization. . . . look inward at our own unique design; this reflection is essential for the identification of our calling. (p. 16)

Merging Identity, Vocation, and Christian Calling (Friesen and Maxson, 1980)

Finding personal identity and God’s “will” for one’s life, two rather overwhelming tasks, have been a developmental struggle for many individuals. My personal story included one of trying my best to understand if God had a specific vocational plan for my life that somehow I had to follow if I were to have God’s blessing. My struggle was a combination of trying to identify how I was to receive the plan and what that plan was. A favorite college professor (from Lee University, my alma mater in Tennessee) shared his wisdom and directed me to Friesen and Maxson’s 1980 book on *Decision Making and the Will of God*. The subtitle of the book, *A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*, revealed the book’s purpose. Garry Friesen is a professor of the Bible at Multnomah Bible College in Oregon, and Robin Maxson is the senior pastor of the United Evangelical Free Church in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

Within the first paragraphs of the book’s introduction Friesen and Maxson’s view of finding God’s will for one’s life emerged.

Most Christians find knowledge of God’s will difficult to come by. It’s not that they don’t know what to do. It’s just that after they have followed all the steps, the clear picture that is supposed to materialize, doesn’t. I have met many believers who were frustrated because they were convinced that God loved them and had a wonderful plan for their lives, but for some reason, He was not telling them what it was. Are Christians like so many laboratory rats, consigned to explore every dead end in the maze of life, while the One who knows the way through just watches? No. God does guide His people. It’s important to know that. The question is: How does He guide. (p. 15)

The book was organized into four parts. Part one presented the “traditional” view of finding God’s will. After defining God’s sovereign will (“God’s predetermined plan for everything that happens in the universe,” p. 32) and moral will (“God’s moral commands that are revealed in the Bible teaching men how they ought to believe and live” p. 33), he offered the “traditional” view of God’s individual will as the “ideal, detailed life-plan which God has uniquely designed for each believer. This life-plan encompasses every decision we make and is the basis of God’s daily guidance” (p. 35). This is the perfect and ideal will of God for an individual. Using a target analogy, it is often described as being the bull’s eye, the perfect and ideal will of God for one’s life. For those who prefer a theological definition of predestination as defined by Calvin (1536/1960) and others, an external locus of control, the “traditional” view is a good theological fit. In part two of the book they critiqued and refuted the “traditional” view and demonstrated its flaws.

The power of the book comes in part three where the Biblical alternative was presented. Friesen and Maxson’s approach frees the readers of the fear of missing God’s perfect will in their lives and provides freedom and responsibility for making wise life choices. They answered the question, how does God guide believers in the process of decision-making, by providing four basic principles.

1. In those areas specifically addressed by the Bible, the revealed commands of God (His moral will) are to be obeyed. 2. In those areas where the Bible gives no command or principle (nonmoral decisions), the believer is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. Any decision made within the moral will of God is acceptable to God. 3. In nonmoral decisions, the objective of the Christian is to make wise decisions on the basis of spiritual expediency. 4. In all decisions, the believer should humbly submit, in advance, to the outworking of God’s sovereign will as it touches each decision. (pp. 151-152)

In the final section of the book the authors provided assistance with deciding on “the big ones” (p. 281), major individual life decisions: singleness, marriage, vocational ministry, missions, vocation, education, philanthropy, and human relationships.

The book’s conversational tone makes it easy for college students to read. Thirty-seven illustrations demonstrate main points of the authors. The authors’ revised work (Friesen & Maxson, 2004) offered the contemporary college student an updated and expanded look at how to make sound, individual decisions, especially about life-choices as important as personal identity and vocation from the Christian worldview.

Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation

In 1999 the Lilly Endowment’s (2006) long-term commitment to religious communities was demonstrated by encouraging colleges and universities to

1) assist students in examining the relationship between faith and vocational choices, 2) provide opportunities for gifted young people to explore Christian ministry, and 3) enhance the capacity of a school’s faculty and staff to teach and mentor students effectively in this arena. (Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation, 2006, About PTEV, History, ¶ 1)

During 2000-2002 the endowment invested more than \$176 million in Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV) among 138 colleges and universities. A portion of these resources were used to support the development of books that addressed identity, vocation/career, and calling. The books are found on the PTEV resources “text bibliography” section of the website. A search was conducted of three prescribed categories provided on the website (i.e., for use with students, vocation, and young adult development) for 2005 or 2006 books that addressed vocation and/or calling. Books that college students may read, informally or as a course assignment, as they reflected on vocational identity issues were identified. The following books were chosen.

- *The Skeptical, Passionate Christian: Tools for Living Faithfully in an Uncertain World* by Michael F. Duffy
- *A Sacred Voice is Calling: Personal Vocation and Social Conscience* by John Neafsey
- *Here I Am: Now What on Earth Should I Be Doing* by Quentin Schultze
- *Call Waiting: God’s Invitation to Youth* by Larry L. McSwain and Kay Wilson Shurden
- *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be* edited by Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass

Additionally, although not a part of the PTEV collection, Richard N. Bolles’ 2006 edition of *What Color is Your Parachute: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career Changers* was chosen because of its prominence in the career field and the author’s advice for Christians seeking to find their mission in life. For this review the author’s purpose, book’s organization, and my personal review of each of these books are provided.

The Skeptical, Passionate Christian: Tools for Living Faithfully in an Uncertain World (Duffy, 2006)

Michael Duffy, Associate Professor of Theological Studies at Hanover College in Indiana, examined how faith and vocation interact in the lives of Christians in *The Skeptical, Passionate Christian*. He struggles with how passionate faith and critical analysis are compatible by exploring the idea of vocation and how the Christian should discover God’s calling. In the first half of the book he described the Christian’s relationship to theology: defining faith and theology, partners in Christian conversations, and exploring theological issues. In the second half of the book he addressed vocation and how it unfolds in the lives of Christians.

In the fifth chapter, Duffy developed his hypothesis: does God call and does He call you and me? “Should we, as Christians, seeking to live well in an uncertain world, base our lives, at least in part, on the conviction that God calls each one of us to accept certain specifiable roles or sets of responsibilities” (p. 86). In the remainder of the chapter he pondered the answer through a series of questions. Do we have a relationship with God? Is God personal? Does God intervene in our lives? Does God have a plan for us, collectively or individually? Does God reveal how we should live? Does God reveal our vocational roles? What does it mean to talk about general and unique roles or responsibilities? What does it mean to “call?”

Amidst all the questions, I yearned for answers and some of them began to appear in the sixth chapter. “God is continually calling to us. We can discern and follow God’s leading” (p. 109). Duffy provides several examples from the Old Testament (Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and Jeremiah) and the New Testament (rich young ruler in Mark 10, Saul, and the Ephesian Christians in Ephesians 4).

However, some Evangelicals may be confused with the disparity of some of Duffy’s conclusions: consider these examples. In response to the question of what does God want me to do, Duffy suggested that “God may or may not call us to be Christians as opposed to having some other religious faith orientation or none at all” (p. 151). In response to the question of how do we know what God wants us to do, Duffy suggested that discerning God’s plan would include hearing and reading the scripture, “being told directly by God or Jesus, paying attention to where we are in the moment, and examining our gifts and our roles in our communities. . . . having discussions with people we trust, praying” (p. 151). His final “conviction” about all this was that

God demands action from us. There are at least three kinds of demands: general demands to all Christians, more specific demands to individuals to fulfill certain roles for which they are gifted, and unique demands in the moment. These are God’s ways of loving us and loving the world. With training, we can learn to hear God’s demands, to trust and respond to them, and to love on God’s behalf. (p. 151-152)

The book seems ideally suited for the theologically inclined who enjoy pondering deep, repetitive questioning. Most undergraduates, not so theologically inclined, may quickly set aside the work in their dualistic desire for specific answers.

A Sacred Voice is Calling: Personal Vocation and Social Conscience (Neafsey, 2006)

What does it mean to find and follow a personal calling? How do we know what we are meant to do with our precious time and talents and treasure during our short lives here on earth? How, exactly, do we “hear” calls anyway? What happens if we miss our calling – maybe because we fail to hear it or don’t have the courage to follow it? Is there any reliable way to tell the difference between the “still, small voice” of our authentic calling and all of the other distracting, competing, counterfeit voices in our culture and in ourselves that tend to get us on the wrong track? (p. ix)

Neafsey, a practicing clinical psychologist and a theology teacher at Loyola University Chicago, Illinois, approached vocation from the Roman Catholic tradition. His book reflected the admonition of the prophet: “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Holy Bible, n.d., Micah 6:8, NIV).

The unique contribution of the book is the emphasis on the individual’s conscience, especially the social conscience often displayed through moral and political dimensions. In fact, Neafsey believes that vocation can be understood as a call *to* conscience.

In a global situation of expanding injustice and inequality, and in a nation caught up in a way regarded as unwise and unjust by most of the world, it seems to me that an uneasy conscience may be one of the best places to listen for the whisper of the Spirit that calls us to a better way. (p. xi)

Neafsey's broadened definition of vocation essentially included every level and dimension of our lives: anything that we do with our time, talent, and resources.

Vocation is not only about what we do but about who we are. . . . Our fundamental human vocation is to become just, loving, and humble persons during our short lives here on this earth. Conducting ourselves with justice, love, and humility always begins with how we treat our loved ones and the people in the circle of our everyday lives. (p. 5)

He described the calling of God as the inner voice of God that mysteriously guides our path toward our true destiny. Finding our calling is finding our true self, the innermost self, or conscience. The path to finding calling is self-realization, "an ever-growing consciousness of the unfolding truth of who we are" (p. 7). God uses our search for self to guide us toward the goal for which we were created.

What sets Neafsey's work apart is the social context in which he approaches vocation. His book is organized to support that approach. Apart from the introductory and concluding chapters, the book unfolds as a series of eight short essays, each providing context on how to find the inner self: listen to the sacred voice, discern the direction of the heart, be authentic to the truth, have compassion and be passionate, seek a worthy dream, learn from suffering, be aware of the "moral tug" of our conscience, and response to inhumanity in our world.

A favorite chapter of mine addressed discernment and how it is the inner compass of the heart. Neafsey, using Michael Himes' (1995) work on discerning a call to serve, identified three key questions that revolve around joy, talent, and service that provide vocational direction: "what we most enjoy doing, what we are good at, and what others most need from us" (p. 43). The unique contribution of this suggestion is the commitment to the common good. Neafsey reminds us that our response to God's calling is contextualized in the needs and demands of society. Another favorite section of the book addressed how God may use dreams to provide guidance. There are multiple examples of Old and New Testament personalities that received confirmation from God in their dreams. The purpose of dreams, as unpacked by the prophet Daniel, was "that you may understand what went through your mind" (Holy Bible, n.d., Daniel 2:30, NIV) or as translated in the New King James Version, "that you may know the thoughts of your heart." Dreams may be a way to confirm God's purpose for our lives.

College students may greatly benefit from reading *A Sacred Voice is Calling*. The book may be a helpful tool for college students developing a personal identity or serve as a contemporary resource for a Christian thought class focusing on personal development.

Here I Am: Now What on Earth Should I Be Doing (Schultze, 2005)

Quentin Schultze, the Arthur DeKruyter Chair in Faith and Communication at Calvin College in Michigan, offers a simplistic response to the question of "what on earth should I be doing?" He suggested that God calls all of us on two levels.

One is the vocation shared by all followers of Jesus Christ. The Bible says each of us is called to care for God's world . . . "being a blessing to others." . . . The other level of calling includes each person's many stations – the particular places, relationships, and work in and through which a person cares. (p. 9)

This short book (109 pages including suggested readings and notes) is organized into nine chapters (i.e., listening to God, participating in renewal, succeeding wholeheartedly, caring responsibly, celebrating leisure, flourishing in communities, loving for good, and offering a legacy) that reiterate the themes of vocation and station. It is easy to read.

Schultze advised the reader that identifying vocation is “more like an unfolding relationship than a carefully planned trip. As we come to know God better and to know ourselves in relationship to God, we also discern where and how to serve – but rarely with absolute certainty” (p. 13). He identified our “shared” vocation to be “caring followers of Jesus Christ who faithfully love God, neighbor, and self” (p. 15): in the broadest sense, being an ambassador of God on the earth. He distinguished our stations as jobs, situations, and relationships. This reviewer struggled to follow his view and didn’t find comfort from his suggestion that “God’s callings have always been incredibly diverse and often rather ambiguous even in hindsight” (p. 18).

Throughout the book Schultze provided many scriptural references and life stories to explain his perspective on vocation and calling. The strength of the book is that it is packed with stories of how God works in the lives of people. For the individual who finds comfort reading life experiences of others, this book may be helpful. For the reader desiring a deeper understanding of personal identity and vocational choice, this book may be disappointing.

Call Waiting: God’s Invitation to Youth (McSwain & Shurden, 2005)

Larry McSwain, a professor of ethics and leadership at Mercer University in Georgia, and Kay Shurden, a family therapist, wrote *Call Waiting: God’s Invitation to Youth* for teenagers trying to find vocational direction in their lives. The book includes stories from the Bible, young people, and the authors. It is designed so that the reader is led to reflect on the readings – each chapter has pages for personal reflection on their stories or what they have read. The short book (82 pages) is organized into seven chapters and three appendices (i.e., for group leaders, guiding principles, and a guide on how to use the book with small groups). It is designed to be used as a guide in a series of lessons on how to understand God’s call to youth. As it relates to that goal, the authors accomplished their purpose.

In the first chapter McSwain and Shurden brought definition to the Christian call as “something that all Christians share but that each of us has in a special way” (p. 2). In subsequent chapters the definition is explained as an invitation from God, getting to know yourself, partnering with God, living out the call in a local church, embracing adolescence, following God’s call as it unfolds throughout life, affecting life choices, and affecting what we do for a living. Each chapter follows a similar pattern of introducing a guiding principle, looking at a Biblical example, and then space for individual reflections on how to apply what has just been learned.

In a favorite chapter of mine, McSwain and Shurden explained to teenagers that the groundwork for identity in adulthood is laid during adolescence. They suggested that the teenager should struggle to define an identity by asking a lot of questions and dreaming big. The prophet Jeremiah was used as an example of how God’s call unfolds throughout life. Then each author shares personal stories about how their lives were redirected based upon personal decisions.

The book is simple and easy to read. It is not a book for the individual pursuing a deep and thorough explanation of the topic. The authors accomplished their goal of providing a handbook for teenagers to reflect on and make decisions regarding God's calling in their lives.

Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be (Schwehn & Bass, 2006)

Mark Schwehn, a professor of humanities, and Dorothy Bass the director of the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People of Faith, both from Valparaiso University in Indiana, designed this anthology for people desiring to lead lives that matter, acknowledged American's practical and pragmatic culture. Thus, the readings were chosen because they help the reader to think about the immediate practical issues within a framework of underlying philosophical issues.

We sense that what we do to earn a living somehow emerges from who we really are, and . . . shape[s] who we will be. A person's thinking about what to do to earn a living, in other words, is entangled with her identity and how she understands it. A person's choice of livelihood is framed by a sense of who he is and what he hopes to become. (p. 2)

The editors included the writings of authors from multiple traditions, both the sacred and the secular. They observed that “over the course of Western history worldly and religious life, the secular and sacred, have often informed, enriched, deepened, and constructively corrected one another” (p. 3). Most of the sacred writings are taken from the Christian tradition and most of the secular writing came from the democratic tradition.

The book had selected readings from 65 authors. It was organized into two broad sections. The first section, titled “vocabularies,” addressed authenticity, virtue, and vocation. It offered readings on the question of how one should think and talk about one's life. The second section, titled “questions,” was divided into seven chapters that addressed the following major life questions:

- Are some lives more significant than others?
- Must my job be the primary source of my identity?
- Is a balanced life possible and preferable to a life focused primarily on work?
- Should I follow my talents and decide what to do to earn a living?
- To whom should I listen?
- Can I control what I shall do and become?
- How shall I tell the story of my life?

This book makes a significant contribution to the reader who is struggling with identity, searching to get answers to important life issues, finding direction for the future, and understanding purpose in life's experiences. For example, when discussing vocation, the editors expose the reader to a diverse set of writings: Jesus' admonitions concerning servanthood to Zebedee's sons; Lee Hardy's essay on *Making the Match*:

Career Choice; the importance of *Choosing* by Gray Badcock; Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Place of Responsibility*; Frederick Buechner's writing on vocation; and *Vocation as Grace* as introduced by Will Campbell.

In the chapter that answers the question, "can I control what I shall do and become," Schwehn and Bass directed the readers to the writings of William Ernest Henley, Thomas Lynch (*Passed On*), Stephen Dunn, the book of Jonah, Sullivan Ballou (*a Letter to His Wife, 1861*), Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and Thomas Merton. To answer the question, "must my job be the primary source of my identity," the reader learns from Russell Muirhead (*Just Work*), Dorothy Sayers, Robert Frost (*Two Tramps in Mud Time*), Margaret Piercy, H. G. Wells (*The Door in the Wall*), Abraham Herschel, William Wordsworth, and Gilbert Meilaender (*Friendship and Vocation*).

The book concludes with an epilogue containing *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, by Leo Tolstoy. Its placement as the conclusion of the book demonstrates the editor's skill in providing the reader with opportunity for exercising judgment and wisdom in leading a life that matters. "One cannot think very well or very long about practical matters without sustained attention to the fundamental questions . . . [of] the shape, the meaning, and the significance of our entire lives" (p. 8).

The editors achieved their objective of making available some of the "best thinking and writing that human beings have done over the centuries about the very questions that most trouble human beings when they wonder about how to lead lives of substance and significance" (p. 7). After absorbing the content from the book I felt as if I had just had a conversation with a dear friend or trusted mentor. It challenged my assumptions and provided perspective, making me think. The book would be a valuable contribution for the serious college student trying to find his/her way with identity decisions.

What Color is Your Parachute: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career Changers (Bolles, 2006)

Richard Bolles is legendary in career and vocational circles. The *What Color is Your Parachute* manual, affectionately referred to by many as the "parachute book," is a standard in the career profession. Annually, since 1970, a revised version of the manual has provided vocational direction for those in need. Bolles, overtly Christian and for many years an ordained Episcopalian minister, indicated that one of the purposes of the book was to help as many people as possible "find meaning for their lives" (p. xi).

The book is a classic. It has 13 chapters, an epilogue, and two appendices. It is divided into three sections: the problem (fundamental truths about the job search), the playing field (career options and alternatives), and the creative approach to finding meaning in your life (professional skills, employer identification, interviewing, salary negotiation).

The epilogue is a must read for college students searching for identity. Bolles provided his version of how to find your mission in life: specifically, addressing God and one's vocation.

We want to do more than plod through life, going to work, coming home from work. We want to find that special joy, "that no one can take from us," which comes from having a sense of Mission in our life. We want to feel we were put here on Earth for some special purpose, to do some unique work that only we can accomplish. We want to know what our Mission is. (p. 337) Bolles acquaints "mission" with calling and vocation.

These, of course, are the same word in two different languages, English and Latin. Both imply God. To be given a Vocation or Calling implies Someone who calls. To have a Destiny implies Someone who determined the destination for us. Thus, the concept of Mission lands us inevitably in the lap of God. (p. 337-338)

He identified a formula for finding one's mission in life. First, acknowledge and practice the presence of God in your life, or as Bolles says it, "seek to stand hour by hour in the conscious presence of God, the One from whom your Mission is derived" (p. 340). Second, do what you can each day to make the world a better place. And third, exercise your talent, "your greatest gift" (p. 340), in the place most desirable to you and for those most needy purposes. He then explains a cycle of unlearning and learning that takes place at each stage.

- Stage 1. Unlearn that our mission is to keep busy doing something. Learn that our mission is to keep busy being something.
- Stage 2. "Unlearn the idea that everything about our mission must be unique to us" (p. 341). Learn that parts of our mission on earth are to be shared by all of us.
- Stage 3. Unlearn that the Creator orders us to do something. "Learn that God so honors our free will, that He has ordained our unique Mission be something which we have some part in choosing" (p. 341).

Bolles does a nice job of explaining how God speaks his mission into each of our lives. First, he explains how we think it will happen. "We look for a voice in the air, a thought in our head, a dream in the night, a sign in the events of the day, to reveal this things which is otherwise (it is said) completely hidden" (p. 352). But then, with simplicity, he explains how it should happen.

God actually has written His will twice in our members: first in the talents which He lodged there, and second in His Guidance of our heart, as to which talent gives us the greatest pleasure from its exercise (it is usually the one that, when we use it, causes us to lose all sense of time). (p. 352)

In addition to the invaluable and practical job search provided throughout the book, it is worth the purchase price for Bolles' advice on how to find your mission in life.

Summary

Most of us have been quite fortunate to benefit from wise mentors as our life-paths unfolded. Now, because of our roles in American higher education, we have the privilege of working with college students struggling with the development of their personal identities, vocations, and callings. There is not a magic formula, no "one size fits all" advice that will work with all of our students. My hope is that some of the resources identified in this essay will help you work with your college students as they seek lives of meaning.

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