



DIRECT MY STEPS

10 steps to
discover your calling

LARRY GRIFFIN

**A man's heart plans his way,
But the Lord directs his steps.**

Proverbs 16:9



How do I know what my calling is?

Kyle is a high school senior trying to decide what he wants to do with his life. His high school counselor tells him that he needs to figure out what major he will want to pursue and where he should go to college. He has to start applying to colleges right away because the best spots are limited, and the process to attain financial aid is competitive.

But, to be honest, he really isn't sure what he wants to do for the rest of his life. He knows he wants to go to a good college. He knows he needs to get a college degree. But, he doesn't want to make the wrong choice. He has heard of students that change their major several times, rack up an enormous amount of student loan debt, and end up with an expensive piece of paper representing years of study in a field they are really not excited about.

On top of all of this, Kyle is a Christian and he firmly believes that he needs to choose a career that will honor and glorify God. How is he supposed to know what God wants him to do, and what if he makes the wrong choice?

I understand what Kyle is going through. Going to college, choosing a career, and discerning God's call on your life are questions I see young people struggling with every day.

What does it mean to discern God's call?

Today the word "vocation" is used to talk about an occupation or career path to which someone feels particularly drawn or for which they think they are well suited. That word, vocation, comes from the Latin word, "vocātiō" which originally referred to a "call" or "summons." The word emerged from a Christian context and for many centuries spoke specifically about the call to the priesthood or the religious life. However, during the Protestant Reformation the concept was expanded to underline the idea that all work is sacred and God calls people into a variety of careers that can be used to bring Him glory and honor.

Christians today recognize that one can "minister" in many diverse roles, some of them in traditional church related vocations, and others in what might be called secular careers.

But how do we know if God is "calling" us to something in particular?

Do you have an uneasiness or urge to do something?

Most Christian leaders experience something that compels them to serve. Sometimes they truly **want** to do it, and other times they try to **avoid** doing it. The Bible gives us examples of some leaders who reluctantly fulfilled their duty. I think of Jonah, of course, and then also there is Jeremiah.

In Jeremiah 20:8-9 we read, *"Whenever I speak, I have to cry out and shout, 'Violence! Destruction!' Lord, I am ridiculed and scorned all the time because I proclaim your message. But when I say, 'I will forget the Lord and no longer speak in his name,' then your message is like a fire burning deep within me. I try my best to hold it in, but can no longer keep it back."* (Today's English Version)

That “fire” is hard to describe to someone who has not experienced it, but there is no doubt that it is what pushes many men and women into service in the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul put it in other words in I Corinthians 9:16, *“Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”* (New International Version)

This “obligation” to preach or to lead is what we often refer to as “the call.” What we mean by that is that many Christian leaders do not necessarily choose to be a leader, but rather they are chosen by God to lead.

In his classic book, Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders says, “Spiritual leaders are not elected, appointed, or created by synods or churchly assemblies. God alone makes them. One does not become a spiritual leader by merely filling an office, taking course work in the subject, or resolving in one’s own will to do this task.” [Sanders, J. Oswald. Spiritual Leadership. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994. p. 18.]

Even though a congregation, synod or assembly might affirm the calling, they cannot effectively name a leader that has not been chosen, prepared and gifted by God. In Acts 13:2-3 we read, *“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ so after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”* (New International Version)

Why did they place their hands on them and name them formally to this ministry? Only because the Holy Spirit had **already** chosen them for the task.

It is important to recognize that it is God who chooses, trains, equips and empowers his leaders. While formal education, congregational

recognition and on the job training is of great benefit, they are not sufficient without the anointing and calling of the Almighty God. Ephesians 4:11 says, *"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers."* (New International Version)

But, how do we perceive that calling in our life?

Let me share my personal testimony.

When I was just a teenager I had my entire life planned out. I was a true animal lover, and always wanted to be a veterinarian. In high school I worked with a veterinarian, and since my grades were good I was able to get a scholarship to a state university to study pre-veterinary medicine.

During my freshman year at college I began to grow and mature deeply in my walk with the Lord. It was one thing to follow the Lord with your parents and family, and quite another to have to depend upon him totally. My devotional life began to grow, and yet there was one particular point at which I could not find peace. I knew that I wanted to be a veterinarian, but I was not sure that God wanted me to be a veterinarian. I knew that this was something which I would need to submit to him in prayer, but to be quite honest, I was terrified. I was afraid that if I offered to follow God wherever he might lead me, I might be asked to do something unthinkable. Personally, that something unthinkable (and don't laugh) was the armed services. Everything I knew about the army repulsed me, and I couldn't imagine being able to survive boot camp or basic training. I had a terror of praying, "Lord, I will go wherever you want me to go, and do whatever you want me to do," and then hearing God say, "Okay enlist in the army." I simply could not bring myself to pray that prayer.

I knew I was wrong and I struggled for the better part of a year with the question, but it just seemed I could not sincerely say those words. I studied my Bible, I read other books, I discussed it with other Christians. Little by little God began to show me his goodness. Through random events in my life I began to learn just how good and full of mercy He is. Time after time He convinced me that I could trust Him, and I still remember the day I was finally able to come to the point where I was willing to submit 100% to God's will, even if it meant the army!

It was only a few weeks after that prayer that I attended a youth conference where I heard a very powerful preacher lay out in black and white the present situation of the spread of the gospel around the world. For the first time I realized that almost a third of the world's population had never really had a valid opportunity to hear the gospel message in terms they could understand. They had never truly been given the choice to accept it or reject it. When the preacher asked who would be willing to take the gospel message to them I could find no valid reason to say "no." I went forward and promised to dedicate my life to the world wide expansion of the Kingdom of God. I did not know where, when or with whom, but I was positive that it was what God was asking me to do, and I simply could not say "no."

I then enrolled in Bible College and began learning more about the scriptures and my abilities to teach and preach them. I developed an interest in geography, anthropology, etc. and began praying that the Lord would lead me to an area of service. It wasn't until my Senior year in Bible College that I attended the National Missionary Convention, looking for an opportunity to serve. I met Doug Lucas, who at the time was trying to find a few people to join with him in a mission effort to Montevideo, Uruguay. I talked with him, conversed with my parents, and shared the

opportunity with some very dear friends before deciding that this was what I should do. I began sharing my vision with others in my church and with other congregations in the area, and found that they were willing to support me financially and pray for me. Although I was still single, and did not look forward to the idea of going overseas alone, I felt compelled to obey the Lord, and that is how I ended up with Team Expansion, working as a missionary in Montevideo, Uruguay.

From my own experience, and from that of others, I see a process in perceiving the call to serve. While this may not be the same for everyone, I believe that if you will follow each of the following steps, you will be able to discern God's call on your life.



STEP 1

Totally submit yourself to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Often times the desires of our heart indicate God's will, but they can also often indicate carnal or selfish motivations. The early Protestant leaders were right in understanding that, in reality, there is no distinction between "secular" and "sacred" work. If first and foremost your desire is to be used by God, then there are literally limitless opportunities and options available to you.

Among those many options there may very well be certain careers or areas that are of particular interest to you. Certainly God can use you to glorify Him in those vocations, but if you truly want to be used to the maximum, you must find out if that particular career is God's choice for you, or simply your own self-centered desire.

The problem that many young people face, however, is that they are afraid or unwilling to tell God that they are prepared to follow Him wherever it may be that He leads them. Maybe their parents have placed expectations upon them, or maybe their peers have influenced them, or maybe they simply have a personal dream or hope that they are unwilling to give up.

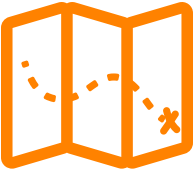
If you want to know what your calling is in life, you must first be willing to trust God. Often times this is not an easy step, and for many it can take weeks, months, or even years before they are willing to truly submit to God's will.

Ask yourself, “Why am I drawn to this particular career path (or this particular college, or this particular major, etc.)?” If you can honestly say that you know it is what God has asked you to do it, then by all means proceed. However, if you are not sure then you must ask yourself if you are **willing** to do whatever God asks you to do.

He may not tell you what He wants. His voice may not be very clear just yet. However, if you are unwilling to submit your future to Him, do not expect Him to guide you.

How do you know that you have reached the point of totally submitting to the lordship of Christ? Try and think of the absolutely, most horrifying thing you can imagine God asking you to do. Remember when God asked Abraham to kill the only son he had—the one for which he had prayed and for which he had waited for 100 years? Can you imagine how incredibly difficult it was for Abraham to arrive at the place where he was willing to sacrifice (literally) this precious gift from God? Do you have a desire, a dream, a person, a place, etc. that you simply cannot imagine parting with? Would you be willing to do it if God asked you to? If you can get to this point, then you know that your life is submitted to God.

Be careful, however. Someone once said that the problem with a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2) is that they keep wanting to crawl off of the altar. Jesus said that we must take up our cross (in other words we have to kill our selfish nature) DAILY! Just because you have reached a point where you can submit to Christ’s lordship does not mean you won’t end up following your own desires again the next day.



STEP 2

Pray for guidance.

If you are not willing to obey, then there is no sense in asking God to tell you what He wants you to do. However, once you feel you have fully submitted to His lordship, then the next logical step is to ask Him to show you what He wants you to do.

Effective prayer includes several things:

It is specific.

Try to be very specific in what you are asking God to reveal to you. "Father, what do you want me to do? Where do you want me to do it? How do you want me to do it? With whom do you want me to do it? For how long do you want me to do it?" etc.

God may or may not answer all of those questions, but the fact that you are asking them will remind you to submit those areas to His lordship again, and it will help you to begin the process of thinking through the specifics of your calling.

It is persistent.

Don't give up just because you don't immediately hear a voice from heaven telling you to go to Timbuktu. Through the process of prayer God is molding and preparing your heart for His answer. This may take days, weeks, months, years, or even a lifetime but if you will keep praying, keep

asking, keep looking for His guidance, then you will eventually begin to discern His will for your life.

It is creative.

Many times we feel there is only one way to pray—with our eyes closed and silently in our room. However, prayer can take many forms. Try writing out your prayers in a journal. Try placing prayer prompts as alarms on your cell phone that will ring at significant moments throughout the day to remind you to pray. One of the things I have done is to place prayer prompts in emails, and schedule them to be sent to my cell phone as text messages at a certain time each day, or on a certain day each month. You may want to vary the place where you pray. You may want to stand up to pray, or sit down, or kneel. You may want to try praying with your eyes open. Sometimes you can pray out loud, and at other times in the silence of your inner being. You can pray alone, or you can pray with others.

It has been said that variety is the spice of life. Variety also keeps our prayer life vigorous and effective. Be creative!



STEP 3

Stay informed and aware of needs.

It seems only logical that if we are asking God to direct us to where he would like to use us, that there would be a specific need or problem requiring our attention. In fact, there are needs all around us and all around the world. The problem is that we often are not aware of the needs.

I still remember the very first time I visited Southern California. I was spending a week in Pasadena and I had rented a car when my plane arrived late at night. I drove to my hotel and the next day woke up and began seeing some of the sights around the city. I stayed in the same hotel for several days and did not notice anything different. However, on about the fourth day of my visit, I left the hotel to get into my rental car, and lo and behold, right before my very eyes was this huge mountain. I had been there for four days and had literally not seen this mountain before. How could a mountain (and I'm not talking about a small hill) hide? I later learned that the smog in the San Gabriel Valley can be so thick at times that the mountain literally disappears.

At the current time there are more than 7.1 billion people in the world. Of those, it is estimated that 2.9 billion of them live in unreached people groups with little or no access to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, 40% of the world's population does not have anyone sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them. That is a pretty significant mountain. Did you know about it?

2.9 billion is a large number, difficult to wrap our minds around. Let me illustrate it this way. If we had a football stadium capable of holding 50,000 people, and we were able to fill it up each and every day with people who had not had the opportunity to hear the gospel, how long would it take us to preach the gospel one time to each of the 2.9 billion people? If we preached to 50,000 people each day, seven days a week, 12 months out of the year, how many years would we have to preach to give them all one opportunity to hear?

159 years! That is a mountain! I suspect that most people are unaware of this great need. It is difficult for people to hear God calling them to the foreign mission field if they are unaware of the need.

The same is true for most any need anywhere. If you do not know what urgent needs are present in your community or your church, or if you are unaware of the needs in today's society, it is extremely difficult to discern where God might be calling you.

However, once you become aware of a compelling need, God often places a desire in your heart to do something about that need and you simply cannot remain idle. That is the beginning of discerning God's call upon your life.

Many potential servants in the Kingdom of God are sleeping on the sidelines because they simply are not aware of the urgent needs of our world. I have seen time after time that when people are informed of the needs, they feel compelled by God to meet those needs, and they dedicate themselves to that task.

How do you inform yourself of the needs?

With the proliferation of information available today on the Internet, it is not difficult to hear about all sorts of needs. Read blogs, watch videos, do searches for social, spiritual, and physical needs. Listen to Christian leaders that are attempting to raise awareness of certain causes. If we will open up our eyes, and prepare our ears to hear, we will begin to become informed about the needs that surround us every day.



STEP 4

Carefully examine your abilities, interests and talents.

There are many abilities that can be learned and developed, but it is very likely that God has uniquely prepared you to do something by giving you natural talents and abilities. Some people are very good at focusing on details, while others find this almost impossible. Some have a natural ability to love, care for, and minister to those the society in general shuns, while other people tend to have a knack to work with wealthier and more educated people. Some individuals will find they work well with children, while someone else may fit better with adults.

If you are able to identify what your abilities, interests and talents are, then you can assume that God has uniquely prepared you to use those qualities. Once you begin to understand the way God has prepared you, you will be able to discern where He wants you to serve Him, and how that might be done.

Think about your talents. What comes natural to you—speaking in public, music, writing, sports, graphic design, art, etc.? God can use just about any talent you have, and if He has gifted you with the ability to do something, you should consider using that talent for His glory.

What about your personality? God has also uniquely designed the way you interact with others. Are you good with people and an extrovert, or do you prefer to interact in a more private way? Do you get energized when you are around other people, or do you prefer to be alone? Do you

have an aggressive “go get it” type of personality or are you more of a laid back “whatever” person? It doesn’t matter, God can use you just like you are. In fact, He made you like you are so He was probably preparing you for something special when he did so.

Are there things that you are interested in, but maybe have never learned to do? Maybe you are intrigued by photography but never really had the opportunity to develop any skills. Maybe architecture, or computer programming, or video game development interests you but you don’t necessarily have any acquired skills in those areas. A strong interest in a particular area might also indicate something God would be leading you toward. He can certainly make you effective in that area if he wants to use you there.

If you have sincerely submitted your future to God’s will, have prayed about it, have surveyed the needs, and have honestly inventoried your skills, talents and abilities, then it is time to move to the next step.



STEP 5

Stay informed and conscious of opportunities.

This is different from staying informed of the needs. There are many needs worldwide that, unfortunately, at the present time, are in very restricted and often completely closed areas. Though you desire to do something there is no “open door” for you to get involved.

That is why you must also stay informed of the opportunities that are available. You need to familiarize yourself with the nonprofits, agencies, businesses, networks, etc. that are making a difference in the community and around the world. Many of them publicize opportunities to get involved. Look through them and see if there are any opportunities that match your abilities and interests. When a need lines up with an opportunity that matches your interests and abilities, there is a good chance that God is calling you to it.

How do you find out about the opportunities that are available?

A good place to start is with a Google search of your interests and abilities in your community. Find out what businesses or organizations are using people with your abilities and talents to meet needs you are passionate about. Call them up, or send them an email, and ask how you can get involved. Many times you may have to start out in a volunteer capacity. That is ok—that is how you get your feet wet, how you help them

appreciate your abilities, and how you begin to network with people who will understand how to plug you into an area of service.

There are job fairs, trade shows, conventions and many other avenues where organizations and benefits go to find people who will fit in with their mission. Go to these events. Talk to people. Hand out your business card and fill out interest forms. Before you know it, you will have a multitude of opportunities, some of which will match your interests and passion.

Don't forget to ask your natural network connections, too. Your family and friends, your pastor or teachers, your fellow church members, neighbors, etc. can all have connections that you may be unaware of. Talk to these people about what you are passionate about and watch how God puts people into your path that will guide you to the perfect opportunity.



STEP 6

Seek wise counsel.

Just because you think you have found something that will be a perfect fit, don't jump into a commitment you may later regret. Other people are often more capable of seeing the true nature of our abilities than we are. Don't be afraid to ask people you respect what they think about the direction you are thinking about taking. Ask them if they know something about the business or organization. Ask them if they think you have what it takes to make a difference. Ask them where they might see you fitting in.

Be careful, however, not to put more stock in the counsel of friends, over and above the urging of the Holy Spirit. You need to consider very seriously their advice and suggestions, but you also need to recognize that they may or may not have spent as much time praying about it as you have.

It is important, however to get feedback from others. God seldom calls someone without letting someone else know about that calling. This is especially true if you are married and/or have a family. While you should not let them make the decision for you, you need to listen carefully to what God is telling them.



STEP 7

Seek confirmation from your church.

If a congregation truly submits to God's leading, it is of absolute importance that our Christian brothers and sisters confirm our calling. If they have seen us grow and mature among them, if they have seen our service to the Kingdom of God, if they have been aware of the leading of God's Spirit in our lives, then they are the most qualified to help us discern if what we are perceiving is from God or is only a figment of our imagination. I would be very reluctant to make a life changing decision if my very own church did not feel it was the right thing to do.

God has placed pastors, elders, deacons and teachers in the church to help guide the flock into God's will. Listen to them. Make sure that you are not following a whim or a personal desire. Keep in mind that God places a call on someone's life for the betterment of his kingdom, not for the personal benefit of the person being called. The church, especially her leaders, should be able to help discern what would be good for the kingdom.

At the same time, you must be aware that many churches are not spiritually mature. Often times churches are just as selfish as individuals and they may not wish to acknowledge God calling someone from their midst, especially if that call means the person will leave and go somewhere else. Sometimes they want to selfishly hold on to those they have grown to love and admire.

In the end, however, if God is asking you to do something special with your life, your wise and spiritual church leaders should support you in the decision.



STEP 8

Consider the cost.

Just because something is difficult to do, or just because it entails paying a cost, does not mean it isn't worth doing. In fact, anything that is truly valuable will have an enormous cost.

There may be a financial cost involved, either in taking a reduction in pay or committing yourself to a career that pays very little financially, or by requiring a large initial investment. If you are thinking about going to school to get prepared for a particular career, there are often enormous costs involved in the education. If God is calling you to do something, he will provide the resources to get it done, but many people are unable or unwilling to trust him for those resources.

There are other costs involved as well. Perhaps it will mean leaving your family and friends, moving to another city, state or even country. Sometimes doing what we know God is asking of us will mean giving up other things we enjoy. You may have to put in long hours at work. You may have to forfeit holidays and vacations with your family. You may have to learn a new skill or a new language. You may have to eat different foods, or dress in different ways. Often times following God's call means sacrificing things others consider important.

And don't forget to count the cost of those who will misunderstand. Your parents, your friends, sometimes even your church leaders, have different priorities. They may not think it is wise for you to choose the path you feel

led to follow. I have known parents to withdraw financial support from a son who has felt called to the ministry because they want him to get a “good” job that will pay better.

A high cost does not mean God is not calling you, but it is important that you count the cost. You do not want to later on regret making a decision because you were too optimistic in what demands it would require of you.



STEP 9

Consider the obstacles.

Just like a high cost does not mean God is not calling, obstacles in your path also do not negate God's calling. If you are doing something that will bring glory and honor to God, there is a high likelihood that you will face obstacles. There is a very real and present enemy who will fight with every ounce of strength to keep you from fulfilling God's call on your life.

There are often legal obstacles, financial constraints, opposition from family and friends, as well as the internal personal doubts and conflicts that assail us at every turn. Just when you think you are about to breakthrough and begin making a difference, it is not unusual to face a setback.

Don't ever believe the lie that if you are in God's will you won't have problems. Just the opposite is true. The closer you are to following God's will the more opposition there will be. However obstacles are just what the word indicates, they are barriers that need to be overcome. In an obstacle course the person competing uses his or her intellect, strength, and willpower to find ways over and around the obstacles. The person who successfully completes the course does it in spite of the obstacles.

What is keeping you from following the lead of God's Spirit? Is it time or money? Is it physical strength or emotional peace? What are the obstacles? Once you have identified them, then it is simply a matter of sitting down and strategizing ways to overcome the obstacles.



STEP 10

Step out in faith.

Faith is of absolute necessity, but we are not talking about a blind faith. We do consider the costs. We do consider the obstacles. But, after taking a cold, hard look at the reality of the situation, we look to our faith to see if we are truly willing to take the risk. If we are, God will call us, prepare us, equip us and use us to accomplish great things for His kingdom.

You will never be 100% sure that you are in the very center of God's perfect will. You will have to do your best to pray, consider the needs and opportunities, get godly advice, overcome the obstacles, and then step out in faith. If you are waiting to be 100% sure, you will wait for the rest of your life. Faith requires us to move into the unknown by taking the hand of the only one we do know.

I have said that I do not think that God will call us to a task without equipping us to fulfill that task. I might actually say, that I don't think God will call us to a task without first equipping and preparing us for that task. However, we may not be totally aware of the gifts and spiritual preparation at the time of the calling, but it is usually already present. Moses felt totally inadequate for the task assigned to him, but he was not conscious of the preparation God had given him through 40 years in Pharaoh's palace and 40 years as a shepherd in the desert. God knew he was ready, but Moses wasn't yet aware of it. He had to trust God and move forward in faith.