

CAPITALIZING ON THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL CALLING

By Jim Mathis

Sometimes we hear some say, about things they enjoy doing, “That is my calling.” But what is this mysterious thing we sometimes refer to as “calling”? Experience has taught me that calling is that place where our interests, giftedness, and opportunity intersect, the “sweet spot” where we excel.

Giftedness and talent are terms often used interchangeably. I had a teacher who made a statement I have never forgotten. He said, “Talent is a word used by people who don’t want to do the work to describe those that do.” That may not be entirely true, but it is worth thinking about.

We might describe giftedness or talent is “turbocharged interest.” If someone is so interested in or passionate about a subject that they are willing to spend more time studying it, practicing it, or learning about it than the next person, we often say they are gifted. They make what they are doing look so easy!

Is it possible that talent, more than innate ability, is the desire and capacity to learn? For instance, if we spend enough time and effort learning to play an instrument well, someone might declare us “talented.” If we say someone is talented, we are really saying that person has dedicated a lot more time and attention to their particular pursuit than most of us would be willing to devote.

If we love something so much that we spend much of our life learning about it, doing it, and getting better at it, when we have opportunities to use that skill, we can say that we are called – that this is our calling. I do know that if we are working within our calling, work is a joy. We don’t want to stop, and time passes quickly while we are doing it. We may feel as if we were born to do it.

By contrast, working outside of our calling can become drudgery. Work becomes increasingly difficult, and we often do a poor job as a result. What percentage of people feel they are doing what they were called to do? I would guess it is a small number, based on how many people say they don’t like their jobs. It would be sad to never sense the excitement of what we were put here to do.

When I was growing up, I had a misconception of what talent is, thinking I either had it or I didn’t. If I tried something that seemed hard and did not find immediate success, I assumed I wasn’t talented in that area. As I grew older, however, I learned that by working harder, learning more about it, or getting instruction from a mentor, I could develop that skill.

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At the same time, for those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ, we know from the Scriptures that God does call and equip each of us for specific roles of service. Psalm 139:14 declares we are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and I believe that includes our special interests and abilities.

Describing the Church or what the Bible terms “the body of Christ,” the apostle Paul wrote, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts...” (Romans 12:4-8). To function best, we should each contribute our gifts – fulfill our calling.

One’s gift or calling is the passion, the turbo-charged interest, that motivates us to put in the necessary time, seek out the best teachers, and develop the talents that bring meaning and joy to our lives.

© 2023. *Jim Mathis is a writer, photographer and small business owner in Overland Park, Kansas. His latest book is The Camel and the Needle, A Christian Looks at Wealth and Money. He formerly was executive director of CBMC in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A.*

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When you hear someone refer to a person’s “calling,” what typically comes to your mind?
2. If someone were to ask you what you consider your calling, how would you respond? And why would you answer in that way?
3. What is your reaction to the statement that one’s talent or calling is the result of “turbo-charged interest” that motivates a person to spend considerable amounts of time studying about something, practicing about it, and even being willing to learn more about it from someone else?
4. How do you think someone should go about learning about their calling and cultivating it, if they are not presently certain about what that calling really is?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Psalm 139:15-18; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:11-13

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