

Discussion Guide for *Courage and Calling* by Gordon T. Smith

1. Smith suggests that our view of the work of God in the world is too narrow because of our inclination to think of religious work as more sacred and thus more significant. What does the church need to do to profile the essential goodness and sacred potential of each sphere—each occupation—into which people may be called?
2. Consider either business or the arts as a sphere into which God may call women and men for sacred service. What would it mean, in your opinion, for business to be good work in its own right? And what would it mean for an artist to do good work—what would qualify it as good work?
3. The author stresses that few things are so crucial to vocational integrity as self-knowledge (chap. 3). As you reflect on this, what in your opinion are the greatest obstacles to self-knowledge? Then, after having listed four or five obstacles, go back and review the list and ask yourself: What is the greatest obstacle to self-knowledge for me?
4. Smith states that in considering vocation it is essential to take into account a person's life stage (chap. 4). In response, think about the following questions. What can the Christian community do to help emerging adults more effectively move into taking adult responsibility for their lives? What can the Christian community do for those in mid-life? And how can the Christian community most empower those moving into their senior years?
5. In chapter 5, the author highlights the importance of sabbath, implying that if we are faithful in our vocation it will be evident, at least in part, in our regular observance of sabbath. Do you agree? If not, why not? Either way, ask yourself: What will it take for sabbath to be a regular part of the rhythm of my life and work?
6. Smith observes that there are three great temptations—the lure of power, the inordinate desire for material security and the longing for prestige—that derail us from truly embracing our vocations (chap. 6). Reflect on all three in regard to your own sense of calling and vocation, then focus in particular on one. Ask: Is there one temptation to which I am most vulnerable, and what should I do to minimize its capacity to derail me vocationally?
7. In the chapter on four callings (chap. 7) the author highlights that a vital part of the calling of a pastor is to equip congregational members and support them—with a theological vision and encouragement—so that they can effectively fulfill their respective vocations. Is this something you experience in your church? If not, what can be done to encourage pastors to embrace this side of their pastoral visions and callings?

8. The title of this book reflects the crucial question: Will we have the courage to do what we are being called to? In the end, there is only one threat to the fulfillment of our vocations—and it is not external to us (such as “the economy,” “my parents,” “lack of adequate support” or whatever we might blame); it is, rather, internal. It comes down to asking: What are we afraid of? If you can ask this question of yourself honestly and freely, then put it on the table. What is the fear that could keep you from doing what you are being called to do?

9. A critical and probing question when it comes to vocation is this: What learning—perhaps a new skill or capacity—is essential for me at this stage of my life if I am going to fulfill my vocation? Smith identifies various kinds of learning (chap. 9). With which of these are you most comfortable? Is there an approach to learning that does not come so easily but is essential to your vocation? Are you willing to embrace this new learning?

10. The author suggests that there is a cross that is inherent in each vocation (chap. 10). Do you agree that there is a cross to bear? If not, why not? If so, then consider, by yourself or with a close friend: What is the cross you are being called to bear at this stage of your life and career? What will it mean for you to bear this cross graciously?

11. Smith suggests that most, if not all, of us will fulfill our vocations in the company of others, as part of organizations (chap. 11). And he identifies a number of capacities that characterize those who work effectively in organizations. Review these, in conversation with others. Which of these capacities is most present in the organization of which you are a part? Which, regrettably, is missing? What role can you play to foster within your organization a capacity to encourage each person to thrive in their shared work toward a common mission?

12. A theme that comes up often in this book is thanksgiving, or gratitude. When it comes to our work, careers and vocations, it is easy to approach life aware of all that is missing, of all that is not as we had hoped it would be. But we cannot live in the truth unless we are grateful for the multiple ways in which we are being blessed by God. So, as a conclusion to your reflections, simply ask: In my current life circumstances, for what am I thankful? In what ways am I experiencing the blessing of God?