



Consider Your Calling: Six Questions for Discerning Your Vocation

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“What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” poet Mary Oliver asks. In this brilliant, captivating and immensely practical meditation, Gordon Smith offers you a compass for every stage of your life. Read it slowly, prayerfully, take notes on the book and on your life and you will find your way.”

—Ken Shigematsu, pastor of Tenth Church Vancouver and author of *God in My Everything*

What is the good work to which I am called?

We need to take personal responsibility for our lives and our vocation; we need to be intentional and proactive. We each will ask, What is the good work to which I am called? And only you or I can answer this question. We each have to make the call; no one else can do it for us. Yet it is equally important to stress that although we each make the call, we cannot do this alone. We need the company of others—co-discerners who walk with us on this road. We need fellow pilgrims who will be good conversation partners with us as we journey together on the road. At the very least, good conversation has the following qualities: it is hopeful, it is theologically informed and it is productive.

Good conversation is hopeful. Conversation about our work is easily filled with frustration. We complain about our circumstances and complain about the people we work with or the people we work for. Perhaps we complain about the situation that we face—economic or social problems that limit us. Or we feel the weight of what seem to us to be the limits that we have to live with, including the feeling that we do not get adequate support from others. What is needed is good conversation—meaning conversation that is consistently edifying and grace-filled, that empowers us to navigate the challenges that inevitably come when we face a transition. As those who are older, do we know how to encourage and foster the capacity of those of a generation younger? As spouses, can we talk together about how we are being called, individually and together? As parents or friends, can we speak to our children and others about work that matters to us and them as fellow pilgrims trying to make sense of our lives and our work? Pastors are in conversation with their parishioners, teachers with their students, but they can only do this well if there is a resilient hopefulness that undergirds and infuses the conversation.

Good conversation is also theologically informed. By this, I mean that we have an understanding of the *meaning* of work. We grow in our understanding of what our work means to us, to God and to the world, and we view our work through the lens of the Christian theological tradition.

Finally, good conversation is productive, meaning that it helps us see our next steps and empowers us to act. In good conversation, we enter into the wisdom that comes from the encounter with others—wisdom that provides us with headlights on a dark night.

And in all of this, we have friends, companions on the way with whom we can speak with clarity and honesty. These companions allow us to ask the hard questions, the right questions, while we know that they care about our lives, our circumstances and our challenges. So what I am proposing here is that good conversation requires that we learn



BOOK EXCERPT



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how to ask the right questions—or better put, that we learn how to respond to the right questions. What follows are the crucial and pivotal questions each of us needs to consider and engage:

- What on earth is God doing?
- Who are you?
- What is your stage of life?
- What are your circumstances?
- What is the cross you will have to bear?
- What are you afraid of?

There are perhaps other questions that would be pertinent to a discussion on vocation, and I will reference a couple of additional questions in the conclusion, but these six are certainly a good starting point for fruitful conversation and they provide us with a vehicle for getting to the heart of the matter. In conversation with others, we can come closer to finding clarity and courage to face what lies before us.

— *Taken from the introduction*