

A Compass for Guidance

How do I recognise God's call on my life?

"...the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." John 10:3-4 (NIV)

Jesus, as our Good Shepherd 'calls' us by name and 'leads' us. He describes his followers as being like sheep, who follow him and trust him because 'they know his voice'. But how do you recognise Jesus' voice? When you have a sense of 'call', how do you know it is Jesus calling you and not just your own wishful thinking, or something else?

There are some clues to help you. Just as using a compass can help you find the way, so the following COMPASS checklist can help clarify the direction in which Christ is calling you. It is not an exhaustive list, but provides some helpful pointers.

C Consistency

Is this sense of calling something that is constant or recurring: a nagging sense that just won't go away over time? If so, then perhaps it is more than just an idea, a 'fad' or a phase you're going through. God is patient and won't give up on you just because you're confused or doubtful.

O Others

Is it through other people, maybe friends or colleagues, that you have received this call? Or have other people confirmed it? Can other people see the potential in you to fulfil this calling? What gifts do other people think you have? Often other people see us more objectively and honestly than we can see ourselves. It is worth talking to other Christians who know you well, who will be honest with you and who you trust and respect. God doesn't call us in isolation. He calls us to serve him as part of his body, the church.

M Motives

Why are you thinking of pursuing this call? If you want to, it is quite easy to justify or rationalise anything in your own mind! Are your motives pure enough? Are you genuinely laying self-interest aside and seeking to be obedient to God in a sacrificial way?

P Passions

What are the things that excite you and energise you? What turns you on? God has created you uniquely. There is nobody else quite like you. Does this call strike a chord with you and make you feel fulfilled as the person God created you to be?

A Aptitudes

What are you good at? What are your natural abilities? What are your spiritual gifts? Your God-given strengths? Does this call fit with the tools God has already given you, or is beginning to develop in you?

S Spirituality

How strong is your relationship with God through Jesus Christ? To what extent have you learnt to see God at work in the world and in your own life? How do you keep close to the Good Shepherd so that you can learn to recognise his voice? Do you read the Bible regularly in a way that feeds you? Do you meet regularly with other believers to worship? Do you have a pattern of prayer which keeps Jesus as the centre and foundation of your life? Are you growing as a Christian? People often find it helpful to have someone to whom they are accountable for their spiritual life, such as a spiritual director or soul-friend.

S Sense

Common sense, that is. When we're trying to discern God's call on our lives, we can't leave our brains at the door. What are the implications for you and for those around you? How does it fit with other callings you may already have to take seriously (e.g. as a spouse or a parent)? Is the call realistic? Yes, with God all things are possible, but he is a God of order, love and grace. Initially a call from God can seem impossible or nonsensical, but if the call is genuine, at some point it will begin to make sense.