

CAREER AND CALLING

By William Messenger

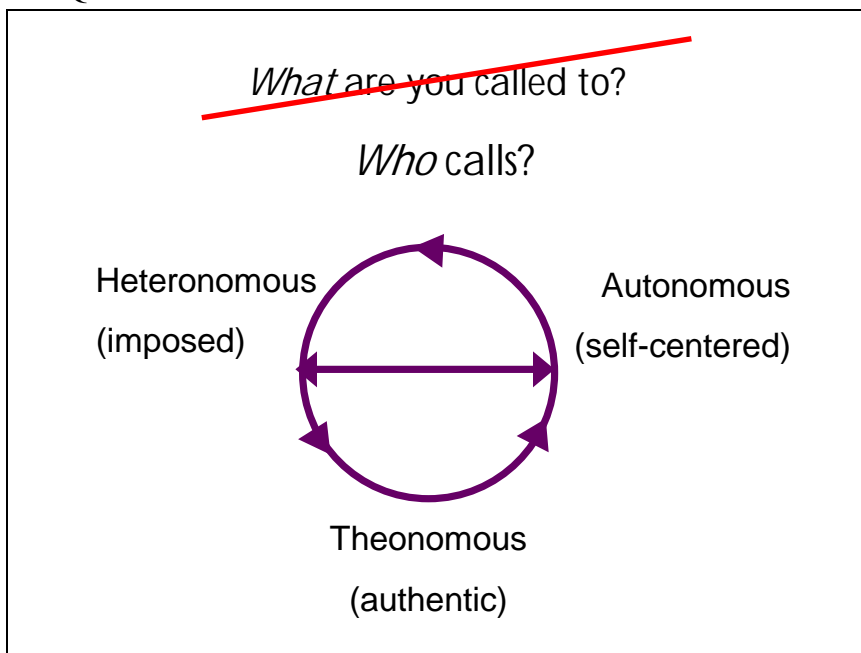
Introduction

I. Overview – sections to come

- A. What is a call?
- B. Your gifts and talents
- C. The needs of the world
- D. Your deepest (truest) desires
- E. Freedom and creativity in Christ

II. What is a calling?

- A. First Question: WHO calls?



1. Partly comes from beyond you (heteronomous)
 - a. But if only from beyond, it is like the draft, tyranny, slavery, feels burdensome
 - b. But Jesus said “Come to me all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”, so we don’t expect a call to be only burdensome
2. Partly comes from within you (autonomous)
 - a. Self-actualization, but also isolated, narcissistic, feels lonely
 - b. Jesus said, “He would follow me must take up his cross”, meaning it’s not just about what you would choose to do naturally
3. Ultimately must come from God, or else it’s not your true calling (theonomous)
 - a. God designed you, so God knows you better than someone else AND better than you yourself
 - b. Affirms and incorporated both heteronomous and autonomous in a way that feels authentic
 - (i) Heteronomous in the sense that it’s God’s authority

- (ii) Autonomous because it feels like what you were created to do, like you are fully yourself
- (iii) Neither eliminates autonomy and heteronomy, not balances them, but unites them in tension (but not sundering). This is a concept of Paul Tillich (Vol. 1) “For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 7:22)

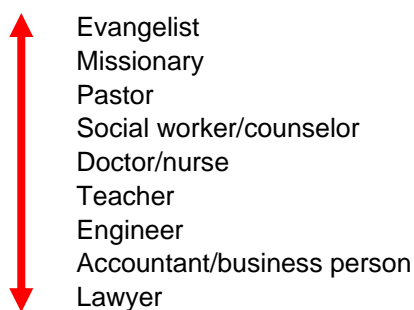
B. Hierarchy of Callings

1. Universal callings — apply to everyone.
 - a. To belong to Jesus “You are among those who have been called to belong to Jesus” (Romans 1:6)
 - b. To become like Jesus “We will be like him” (1 John 3:2)
 - c. To bear fruit through Jesus “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10)
 - d. To be pruned with Jesus “He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they produce even more.” (John 15:2)
2. Particular calling — doesn’t necessarily apply to everyone.
 - a. To specific work in Jesus “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart” (Jeremiah 1:5)
 - b. Not everyone is called TO specific work, but everyone is called to follow Jesus IN whatever work they do. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” (Col 3:23-24)
 - c. This series focuses on particular calling, with
 - (i) If God is calling you to something particular, it would be good to find out what that is and do it.
 - (ii) But if you somehow fail to find it or do it, it won’t ruin your life. It’s no big deal compared to the universal four above. Is this comforting or frightening, or both?

C. Can you be called to non-church work?

1. Luther: YES, via your Station (fixed at birth, generally). Luther’s is the strongest confirmation of non-church work. “Ploughboy at his plough is as pleasing to God as the priest at his prayers.” Only three occupations illegitimate: usurer, prostitute, monk
2. Calvin: YES, via your vocation (more flexible), but unfortunately is open to the erroneous interpretation that some occupations are “higher callings” than others.
3. Miroslav Volf (Yale): YES, via the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Volf accepts vocation, prevents the concept that some occupations are privileged by pointing out that Holy Spirit is the source of the gifts and talents that lead to fruitfulness in every legitimate occupation.
4. Examples
 - a. Wilberforce was the English MP who spent 50 years in Parliament obsessed with ending the slave trade in Britain and its colonies, at which he was ultimately successful in 1837. His biographer John Pollock called this “the greatest moral achievement of the British people.” But upon conversion at age 25, decided to give up politics and enter the priesthood because he thought “spiritual” affairs to be more “secular” affairs. John Newton — the converted slave trader who wrote Amazing Grace — convinced him otherwise (Source: Os Guinness, *The Call*, pp. 27- 29)
 - b. “Susan” was a Sunday school teacher in a church where I served as assistant pastor....

D. The false hierarchy of call

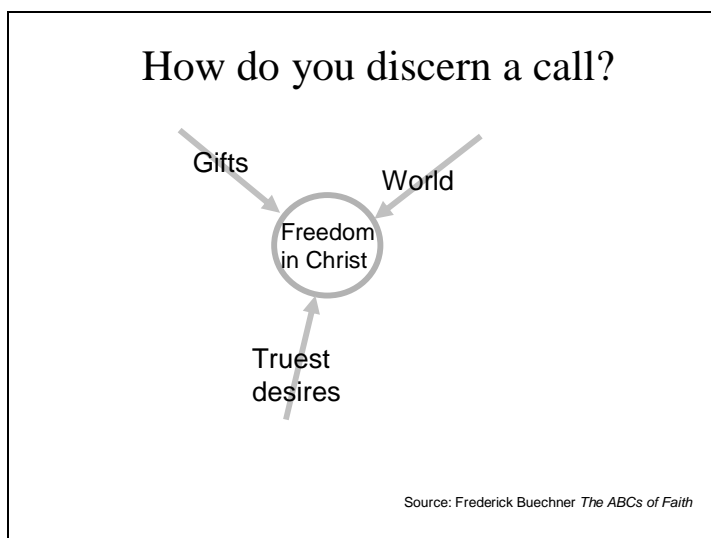


1. Almost everyone believes something like this, it seems.
2. Virtually no Christian religious tradition teaches it
3. It is false, and has no Biblical basis

III. Is it really a “call”

- A. No one in the Bible is ever called to an paid occupation except king of Israel/Judah
 1. Priests in Israel served 2 weeks per year, then went back to their regular jobs
 2. Church leaders are not described as being “called.”
 3. Paul was called to be an apostle, but his occupation continued to be a tent maker/leather worker.
 4. The closest to a call to an occupation is when God chooses a king. “Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and bring your youngest son; for we will not sit down until he comes here.’ He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward *1 Samuel 16:11-13*
- B. People are called to various particular kinds of service to God, but they are not paid jobs
 1. Abraham & Sarah - Specific call to follow God, but remained herders. “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” *Genesis 12:1*
 2. Moses – called to lead the people. “ God called to Moses out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am....” Then the Lord said, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” *Exodus 3:4,10*
 3. Jeremiah — called specifically to be a prophet, but he didn’t make his living from it. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart” (Jeremiah 1:5)
 4. Amos — remained a forester: Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Amos 7:14-15
 5. Disciples of Jesus — continued fishing during their service as disciples
 6. Apostle Paul — remained a tentmaker/leatherworker
- C. So why do people (Christians, Jews, and nonbelievers, alike) call a job or career a “calling?” Perhaps a “leading” would be better, emphasizing that God does lead people to specific work, but not necessarily to jobs/careers, at least not in the same way he leads people to Christ.

IV. How do you discern a call/leading?



A call/leading to a particular form of work, is where/when

- Your gifts and talents
- The needs of the world
- The deepest/truest desires of your heart come together

In the freedom and creativity of Christ.

A. Your gifts and talents

1. Natural gifts or talents
2. Spiritual gifts you receive in advance
3. Gifts you won't receive until you begin the work you're called to
4. Possibility of misunderstanding or misusing your gifts — Enron, gifted at misleading financial statements

B. The needs of the world

1. Start with the part of the world you know
2. Since Christ is the Lord of all creation, Christians have a responsibility to the entire world
3. Church often does a crummy job of understanding the true needs of the world (e.g. cheesy economics)

C. The deepest or truest desires of your heart

1. What you desire to do is important
2. But it's hard to be in touch with your deepest or truest desires. Not the present you whose desires are true, but the desires of you as you were created by God to be.
3. Trial and error is one way, along with prayer, Godly counsel, maturity, Bible, etc.

D. Freedom of Christ

1. There's not a calculus you can apply — it's a journey of faith and freedom
2. Should be a liberating experience

E. Why do I believe this?

1. NOT claiming this is a Biblical definition of call. (But I will show in each section why I believe there are Biblical foundations believe each aspect.
2. Undoubtedly there are other valid ways to think about career and calling. This is just one that I find most helpful

Your gifts and talents

I. Talents/skills/gifts (sometimes called “natural” gifts)

Any ability you have — ordinary meaning.

II. “Spiritual” gifts

- A. Abilities imparted by God beyond your ordinary abilities.
- B. Some church talk (pardon to those who aren’t big churchgoers)
 - 1. Super narrow usage: “ecstatic gifts” such as speaking in tongues, interpreting someone else speaking in tongues.
 - 2. Narrow usage: 18 gifts listed in the Bible as coming from God’s spirit, such as teaching, administration, showing mercy, helping, giving money, speaking in tongues, et al. (found in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4)
 - 3. Wider usage: any gifts that come from God’s spirit
- C. Applied within the Bible to building up the church
- D. Also applicable to any legitimate work
 - 1. Ordinary work matters to God. Otherwise the gifts of the Spirit would be divorced from the gifts of the Creator. But Jesus is the one through whom everything is created (John 1) and the one who sends the Spirit (John 16:5-16)
 - 2. Gifts applied outside the church are a witness to the rest of the world, which *does* build up the church.
 - 3. Jesus — whose gifts were definitely “spiritual” used his gifts generously for all kinds of people and situations

How do you move from skills/talents/natural gifts to spiritual gifts?

I. Intensification of natural gifts

- A. Normally occurs after you connect/commit to your calling. Once you find what you’re called to, you discover your natural gifts are intensified as you apply them to your calling
- B. Examples
 - 1. Gift of remembering names (short-term example) – non-church
 - 2. Gift of prayer - church

II. Reorientation of natural gifts (actually, reorientation of *you* as the one employing the gifts)

- A. Normally occurs after you connect to God, which in Christian thinking means committing your life to Jesus
- B. Same gifts as before become more meaningful and (often) more productive because they’re being employed in a better direction
- C. That’s because of the nature of what it means to commit your life to Jesus
 - 1. You are accepted, therefore you act/obey/follow
 - 2. NOT you act/obey/follow in order to be accepted
- D. This frees up your gifts for purposes other than self-justification, self-gratification.

III. May mean extraordinary skills not imagined before

- A. Sudden new abilities (rare), e.g. piano prodigy
- B. “Ecstatic” gifts (less rare)
- C. Amazing blossoming of gifts you hadn’t cared about before: e.g., emotional intelligence, giving money, redemptive leadership (common)

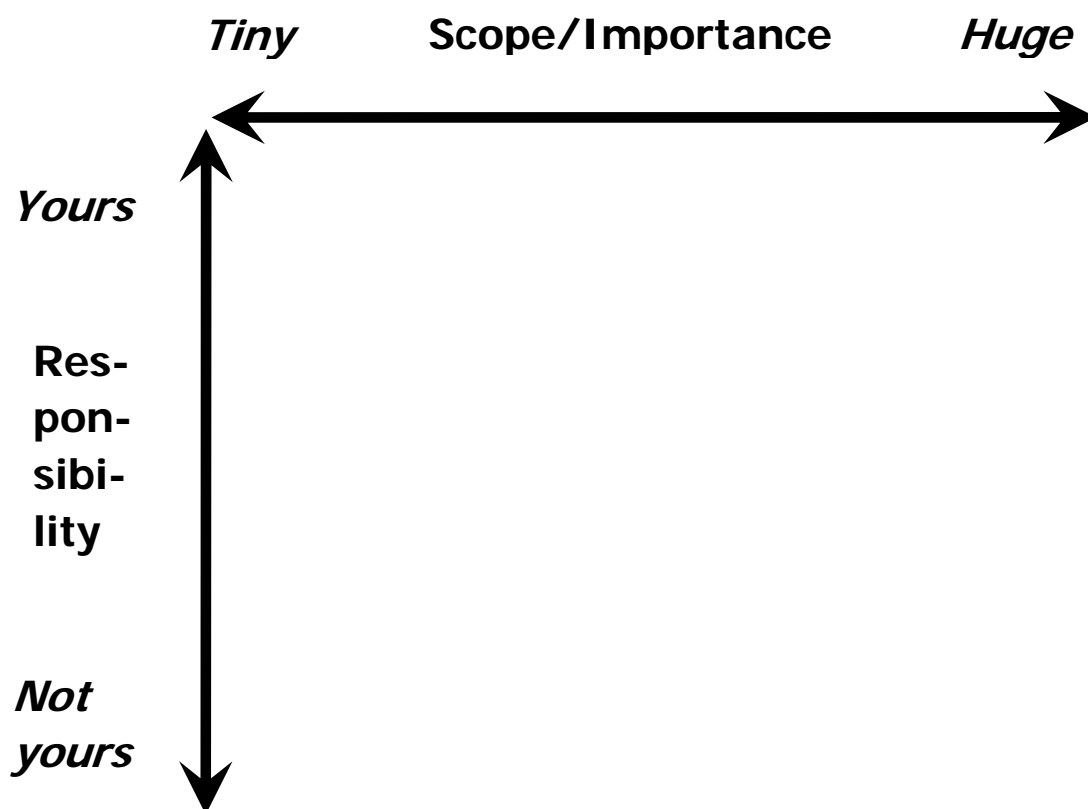
3. Can you spot a pattern here?

Too much of a good thing?

- I. Gifts are the “fruit” of the spirit, not the evidence/essence/proof (spiritual gifts)
- II. Too much attention to your strengths can prevent you from finding and fulfilling your calling (natural gifts)
 - E. You may only perceive things in line with your gifts (hammer-nail syndrome)
 - F. You can’t grow and learn if you only do things you’re already good at (new languages), except by demanding miracles
 - G. You will prevent others from growing and learning if you preempt them by applying your superior gifts (Harvard Management Update “How Strength Becomes a Weakness”)
 - H. Your personal gifts can stand in the way of forming a community in which the gifts of the whole group are greater than the gifts of any individual, including even you (Heifetz & Minsky *Leadership on the Line*; 1 Corinthians 12-14)
- III. Very dangerous, common mistakes
 - A. Excessively avoiding risk as a result of clinging to known skills
 - B. Believing that your calling lies in *unique* gifts. This is a silly concept that seems thoroughly entrenched in American culture education, right from grade school
 - C. Focusing on technical skills in the early stages of a career, esp. in graduate school
 - D. Falling into the reverse gospel by mistake (“I perform excellently, therefore I must be accepted), meaning that I am only as worthy as my skills
- IV. Life and work cannot proceed without faith!
 - A. Expecting skills — even proven, excellent skills — to produce the desired outcome is an act of faith.
 - B. Surprising how often people act as if they implicitly believe that getting their own way — esp. using their best skills/gifts/talents — is going to get the desired outcome. Yet most evidence suggests otherwise, that the desired outcome depends at least as much on outside factors (e.g., circumstances, others’ abilities and motivations, love, luck?, God?)
- V. Most graduate students should probably pay less attention to maximizing their gifts when making career and job choices

Questions

- Can you think of an episode where you clung to a known skill at the expense of receiving/testing /developing a new one?



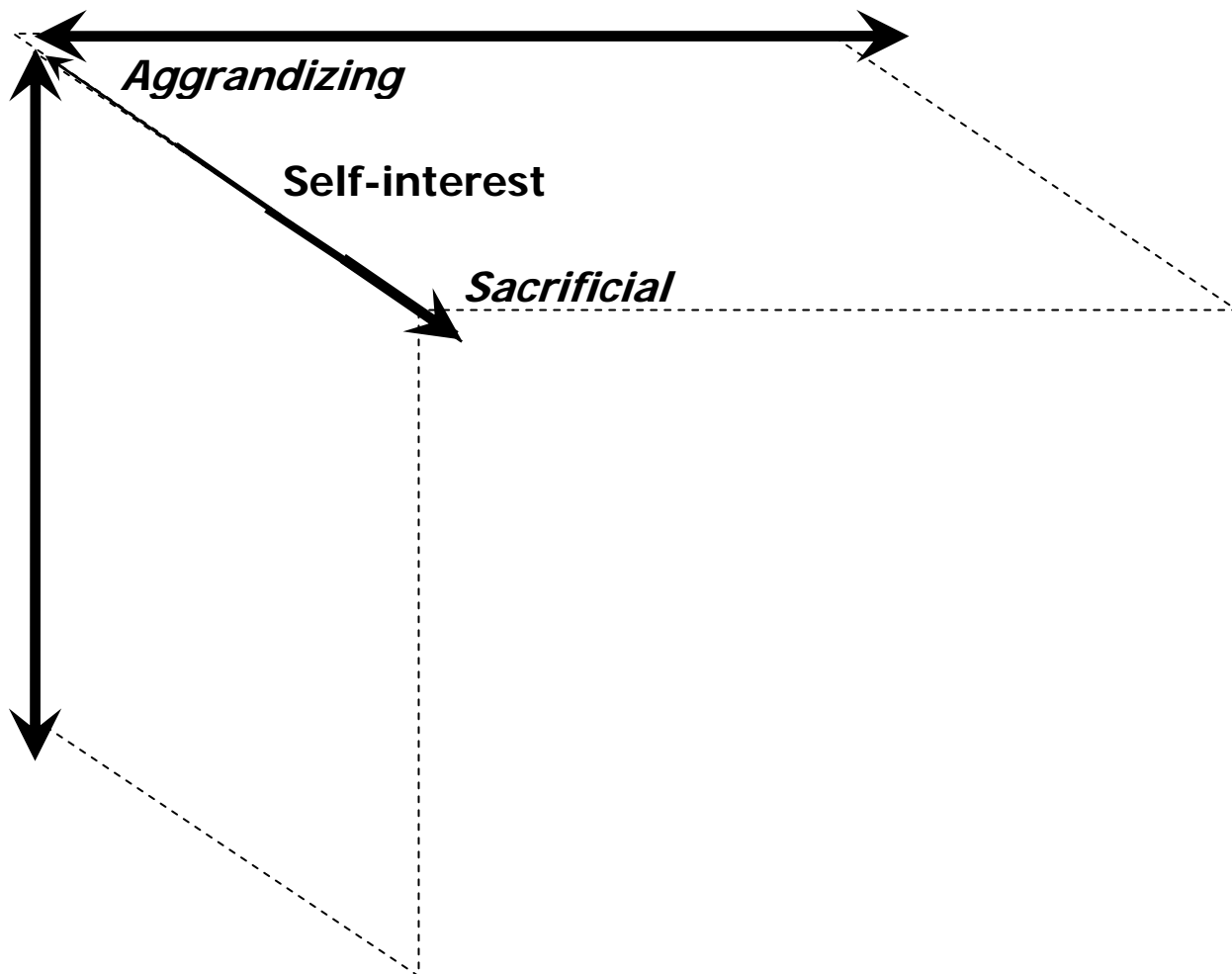
- A. Explain and give examples
 1. Earning a living
 2. King of Swaziland
 3. Woman in Billings, MT, needs a babysitter so she can go to the doctor
 4. Human rights abuses in Sudan
- B. Seems not very spiritual until you add
 1. Legalistic vs. redemptive pulls/biases
 2. Christ-like growth
- C. Scope/importance
 1. Legalistic bias towards smaller, more containable needs
 2. Redemptive bias towards larger, more important needs
 3. Christ-like growth is toward **awareness** (church is good on wider, poor on accurate/insightful)
 4. Example passage, Matthew 23:23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. (NIV)
- D. Responsibility
 1. Legalistic bias towards needs that are your responsibility
 2. Redemptive bias towards needs that are no-one’s responsibility

3. Christ-like growth is towards **compassion**
4. Example passage, Luke 10:25-36 “A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

E. Self interest

1. Legalistic bias towards self-aggrandizing (this is the *motivation* for legalism in the first place)
2. Redemptive bias towards self-sacrificial
3. Christ-like growth is towards **trust**
4. Example passages:
 - Luke 9:23-24 “Jesus said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.²⁴ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.
 - Matthew 11:29-30 “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”



IV. Observations

- A. “Progressive/liberal” legislation begins to look a lot like compelling people to towards redemptive the bias that would come from growth in following Jesus. Whereas “conservative” legislation begins to look a lot like protecting people who meet legalistic requirements. Is that a good thing or bad? As a lawyer, which of these interests you the most, if either?
- B. The Christ-like bias begins to look a lot like leadership, or at least a servant type of leadership: Accepting large needs, that are not your responsibility, and are not entirely in your self-interest.
 1. *Servant Leadership* by Robert Greenleaf
 2. *Leadership on the Line* by Ron Heifetz
 3. *ArQule Board of Directors*
- C. The three axes come together in Jesus himself
 1. Who as the union of God and man embodied complete/accurate *awareness* of the needs of the world;
 2. Who kept teaching a wider and wider *compassion*, not just for himself or his friends and family or his tribe or nation, but for the whole world
 3. Who as the one who already had everything, sacrificed everything on the cross, *trusting* God with the outcome.

V. Questions

A. What are the top 10 needs of the world, from your perspective?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

B. Plot them on the grids of importance, responsibility, and self-aggrandizement (using graphics above)

C. What do you observe?

The deepest desires of your heart

I. God will give you a desire or attraction for whatever God calls you to

- A. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. (Psalm 37:4-5)
- B. Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the **desire** of our hearts. (Isaiah 26:8)
- C. But eagerly **desire** the greater gifts (1 Cor 12:31)

II. But it's hard to know what you're really attracted to

- A. Some apparent desires come from outside as a kind of unrealized bondage.
 1. Advertising, etc. (1981 Cutlass Cierra at Doug's house)
 2. Cultural styles, prejudices, habits, etc., e.g. body image
 3. Covetousness (Desiring other people's wives)
 4. Some desires are sinful or broken. "Estrangement" in Tillich's terms. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. (Romans 7:19)
 5. Concupiscence – Desire to take things into yourself in a way that squeezes the life out of them (or you). Unlimited desire. Greed; sexual addiction; jealous consumption of the beloved.
 6. Hubris – Desire to elevate yourself above all else, e.g., excessive competitiveness. (Put off ordination for about 10 years)
 7. Unbelief (compartmentalization) – love of things in themselves instead of for the good they embody or point to, e.g. God (love of playing soccer with your kid becoming an obsession with the competition — parental fights.)
 - Deep-seated human desires, which are themselves good, often get tangled up this way: food and drink, sex, power, money/goods
 - These are not your deepest or truest desires, but represent a false way of trying to guarantee your security. Hence "unbelief" is the central one. The reverse Gospel: I obey/think/act/possess therefore I must be accepted [by God] rather than the true Gospel:
- B. People are generally afraid to admit to themselves what they really want
 1. What if you don't get it? It has a power over you (or the people who have it do). My friend at HBS (grades and job decisions — has he given up even in the midst of success)
 2. What if other people laugh at you?
 3. I'm not worthy
 4. Sacrifice vs. security (another form of unbelief)

III. Some ways to explore your deepest/truest desires

- A. Write down what you really desire. Writing is very important. Of all the voices in your head, *you* are the only one with access to writing. Keeping a diary is a way many have found helpful.
- B. What do you spend your time and resources on when you are free to do whatever you want? (when tired, free time, etc.). Astronomy, railroading, magazine/newspaper reading are things I keep coming back to.
- C. Whom do you spend your time with?
- D. Ask your friends and family what they think you really desire People who really know you. This takes a lot of trust, and you have to prevent backlash.

- E. What can't you imagine living without?
- F. What do you wish that you would desire?
- G. What are you afraid of? This often represents the flip side of a desire.
- H. Pray. Ask God to show your true desire. Confess (tell God how you really feel about things, not just naming bad things you've done).
- I. Trial and error, especially outside your comfort zone, especially in the Christlike direction of the needs of the world, especially sacrifice
 - 1. You can only test apparent desires and dig deeper by sacrificing whatever appears to be appealing, at least for a time. (If you seem to desire money/material comfort, you can only test it by sacrificing money or comfort for a time.)
 - 2. Sacrifice will usually release you from the apparent desire and make you aware of the deeper desire underlying it.
Sometimes sacrifice will confirm that a particular desire is very deep. Now you know! It may be good or bad, but at least you're working with reality.
 - 3. Multiple iterations are necessary!
- J. Your desires change (as do your gifts and the needs of the world), so your calling may change. Your deepest desire is always for God *through* whatever else you desire.

IV. Observations

- A. Sacrifice and stretching are elements of digging into your desires that it's easy to put off. But they are the most powerful ways. And genuine sacrifice always meets with new life (through Christ's resurrection)
- B. Multiple iterations are necessary! Your desires change (as do your gifts and the needs of the world), so your calling may change.
- C. Your deepest desire is always for God *through* whatever else you desire.

V. Questions

- 1. Write the 10 things you desire most deeply, as far as you can tell. Any surprises?

2. Write what you are afraid to admit to others that you desire. Any surprises?

3. Write what you spend free time and money on? Any surprises?

4. Share all, some or none of the above with your group

