

Called to be...

Reflections on
calling,
discipleship, and
living out faith
through work

SCM

For some it is right to give their whole lives explicitly to concrete forms of service, but for most their service will lie in the sheer quality of the soul displayed in ordinary occupations.

Quaker Faith and Practice 23.66

What is a Vocation?

Vocation refers to an occupation that a person is instinctively drawn to. There is usually a sense of suitability and purpose attached to this job. Though typically associated with a religious calling such as joining the priesthood - a role known often to be life-long - vocation can also be related to non-religious jobs. Just because a job is not quintessentially religious in nature does not mean it is not a vocation, nor does it mean that you can't connect with God while in it.

God can be found in everything we do. If you do not feel drawn to a classically spiritual job, such as ministry, there are other ways for you to feel connected with your faith in your day to day life.

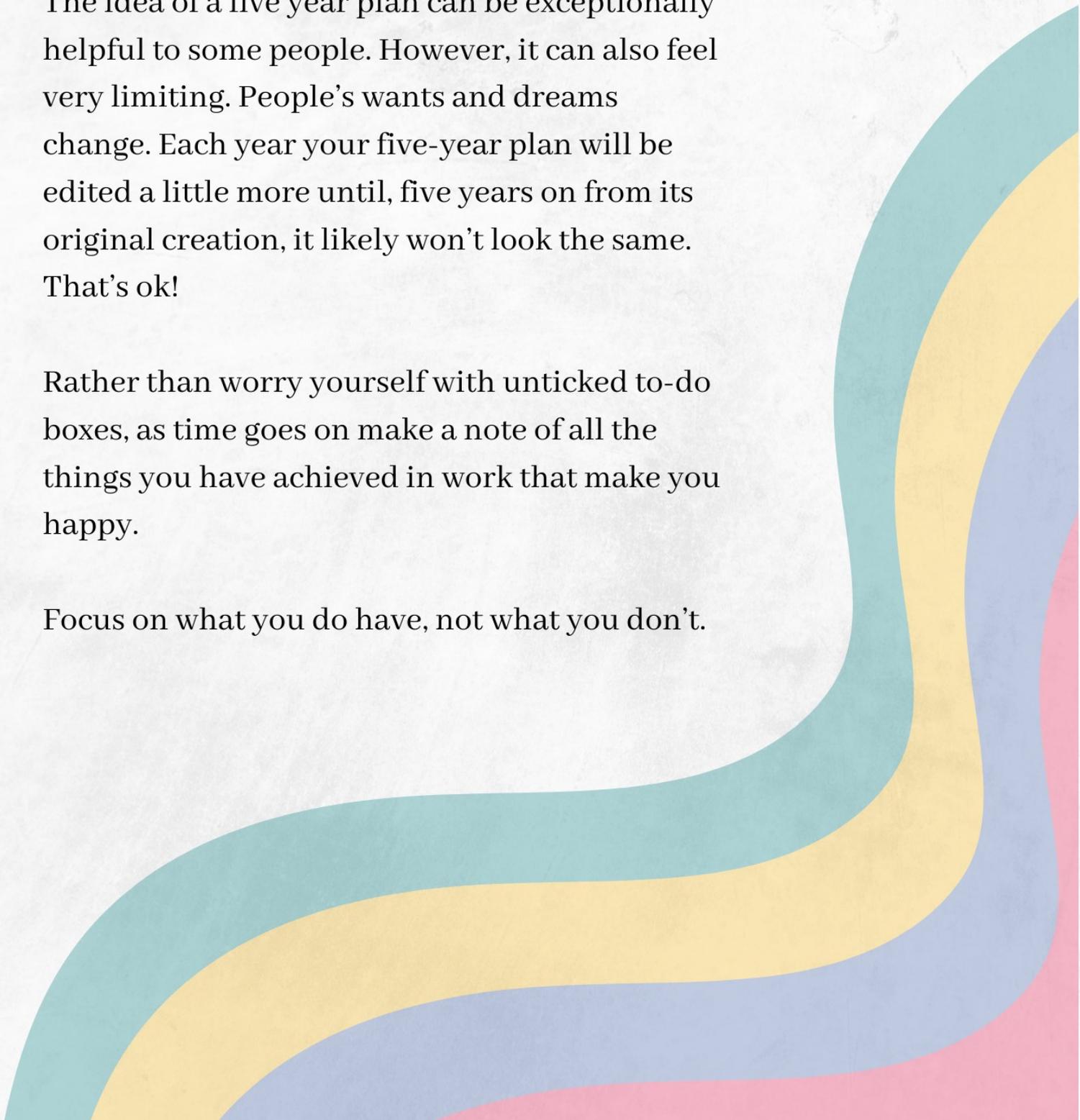
Sometimes, it is in the little things we do that we see faith is most consequential.

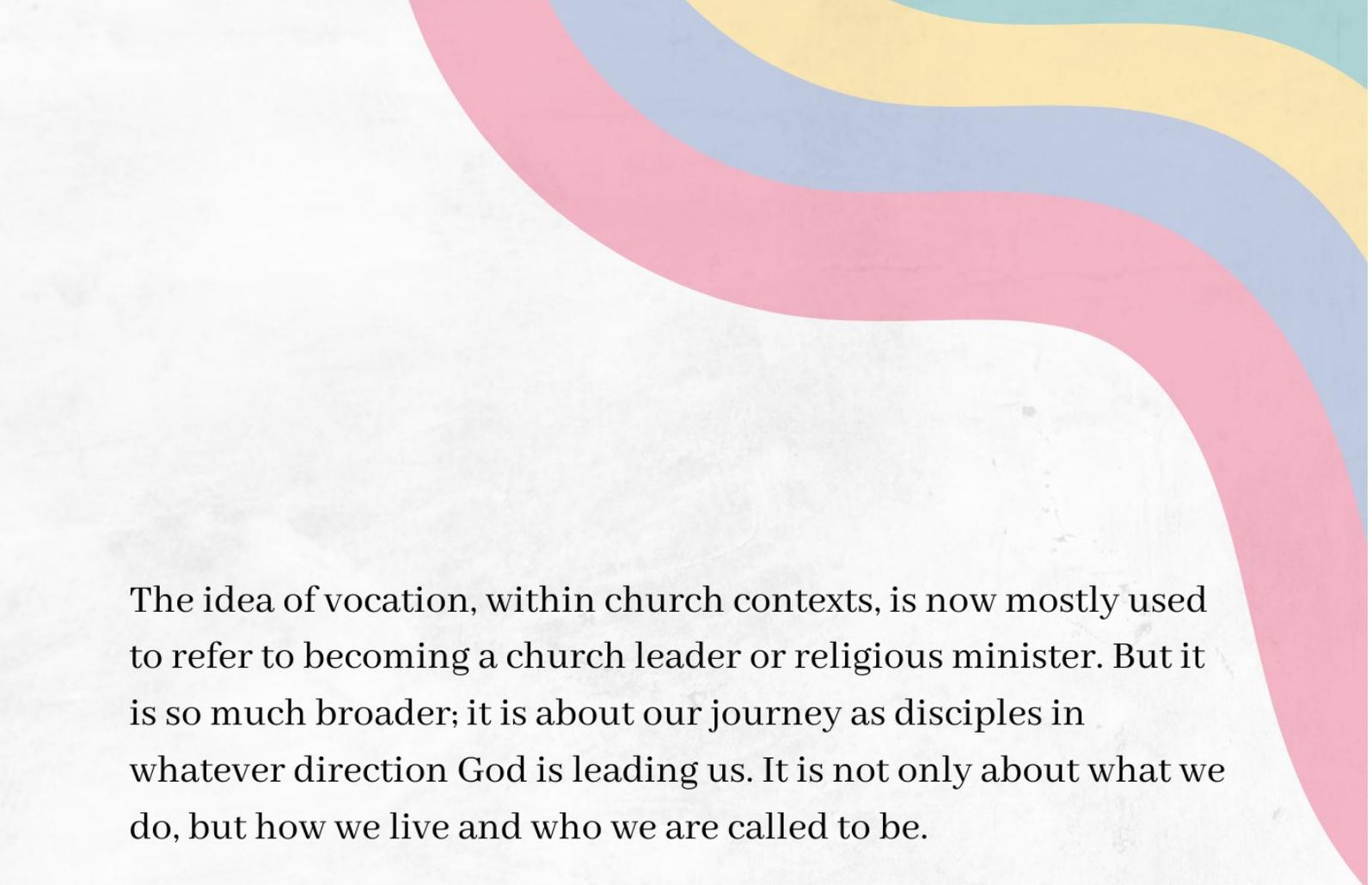
As children, we are asked what we want to be when we grow up. Throughout this growing up process, the question changes form but remains the same - what subjects will you study, where do you want to go to university, what experience do you need for your CV, what is your five year plan?

The idea of a five year plan can be exceptionally helpful to some people. However, it can also feel very limiting. People's wants and dreams change. Each year your five-year plan will be edited a little more until, five years on from its original creation, it likely won't look the same. That's ok!

Rather than worry yourself with unticked to-do boxes, as time goes on make a note of all the things you have achieved in work that make you happy.

Focus on what you do have, not what you don't.





The idea of vocation, within church contexts, is now mostly used to refer to becoming a church leader or religious minister. But it is so much broader; it is about our journey as disciples in whatever direction God is leading us. It is not only about what we do, but how we live and who we are called to be.

This resource contains reflections from people in different walks of life, living out their calling in unexpected ways, as they keep their faith at the heart of what they do. We hope it will inspire you to think beyond career fairs and five-year plans but instead explore where your faith, talents, and curiosity might be calling you in your work and in your life.

Throughout each reflection we have interspersed quotes from other writers on this resource. This is to show you how everyone's stories are interlinked: you are not alone in your concerns, you are not alone in feeling uncertain, and you are not behind in discovering your vocation. Be patient, don't rush yourself, then, you'll find your calling.

Emilia's Journey

Emilia has a degree in motorsports and now works for a luxury car company. She reflects on the struggles she has experienced training in a field that has contributed to projects she believes go against her faith.

Growing up I thought vocation meant becoming a vicar or another church sort of job, whereas, what I realised I wanted to study and work in was engineering (specifically motorsport). As I learnt more about engineering and after I got to university, I felt like it was going to be more than just a job - more than a career even. Recently I have concluded that to me being an engineer is a vocation, and I hope to use the skills I've learnt to do good in the world. Engi-

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neering is a way to serve others through the things we design, make and innovate, and engineers create all sorts of products and systems that can help people for the better. To me, serving others and doing good with the gifts we have been given is part of being a Christian, and my work is just one way I can do that. My faith, in part, does determine what sector of engi-

neering I work in. My degree, although specifically motorsport, is mechanical engineering based so lends itself to a range of sectors. Although I believe all engineers should use their skills and expertise for good (as does the Royal Academy of Engineering and Engineering Council in their statement of ethical principles*), there are plenty of sectors that require engineers that don't always adhere to those ethical principles. Personally, I refuse to work in the military or defence sectors and am unlikely to work in aerospace or for some large engineering/consultancy firms (aerospace and large corporations can work in defence). I don't want to be part of the development of technology and equipment that can, and does, hurt and kill people. Being a Christian calls us to love our neighbour and to not do harm to others, yet this doesn't come through working in these sectors.

We need to be true to ourselves and our faith - Jan

Currently I am in the automotive sector, working on projects for a luxury car company. Although my current work doesn't have the obvious 'doing good and serving' element that would ideally be part of my work (and my plans to work in motorsport don't particularly either), I

I use my position as a young female engineer to create change through volunteering.

am hoping I can take on roles in the future that will allow me to do so. Whilst it is not in my day-to-day job, I try to use my engineering skills and position as a young female engineer to create change through volunteering. I volunteer at STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) events for children and teens, encourage women and other under-represented groups into STEM careers and am involved with organisations that support minorities in STEM.

Many engineers - and others - who work in STEM are able to do good through their day jobs and in various sectors of engineering. An example is Extreme E, a new motorsport series. They race in locations across the globe that have a visible impact on climate change and aim to highlight the issues of the climate crisis to the public. All of the kit and vehicles (which are all-electric SUVs) are transported by boat to have less of a carbon impact. The series also

employs science advisors to create legacies for local communities and advise on the series' outreach and education activities.

Additionally, there are charities implementing engineer's technical skills for positive change - Engineers Without Borders UK is a charity working to achieve social and environmental justice by using the knowledge of engineers. In the past they have provided 200,000+ hours of engineering knowledge, pro bono, to projects across the world and are now focusing on creating systematic change in order to put global responsibility at the forefront for all working in the engineering sector.

*the four fundamental principles from the statement of ethical principles are as follows: honesty and integrity; respect for life, law, the environment and public good; accuracy and rigour; and leadership and communication. <https://www.engc.org.uk/standards-guidance/guidance/statement-of-ethical-principles/>

Lydia's Story

Lydia uses her skills in accounting and auditing to volunteer with small charities, helping them to manage their finances. She reflects on how her faith has guided her to use her skills to promote financial justice within organisations and for individuals.

After graduating I joined PwC, a professional services firm. Working for a big corporate was an amazing experience, and very helpful in discerning what I did, and didn't, want to do. While on secondment to the non-audit side of the business I read an article from Christian Aid about the importance, and privilege, of paying

Accounting brings order to finances, as God brought order to the cosmos.

tax for every country's development. I shared this article with the partner managing a client's tax inversion, but unsurprisingly it didn't impact the advice PwC gave to the client. This helped me further clarify the distinction between what is legal and what is good. I moved department to focus on auditing charities. Charity accounting is a specialist area and I wanted to learn all I could, and then offer my skills to smaller charities which couldn't afford PwC's fees.

I was never motivated by promotion or money

so I took the opportunity to resign after eight years of hard work when my husband started his curacy. I am now the treasurer/trustee of numerous charities, including a community/youth centre in inner-city Leeds and Church Action on Poverty. While finance underpins every organisation, most struggle to find anyone with the confidence and ability to take control of the finances. It is often hard work, especially supporting charities who have "muddled through" for many years. But it is extremely satisfying helping them to establish strong financial controls and regular reporting, so that they can focus on achieving both their charitable objectives and their ability to raise funds to do more. Serving organisations through finance is not a front-line role, but an effective finance function enables those directly changing lives to do their vital work.

Accounting and auditing have helped me to live what I read in the Bible, and fulfil God's image in me. Accounting brings order to finances, as God brought order to the cosmos in creation. Hebrews 4.13 says "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account", and Job 31.4-6

says "Does he not see my ways and number all my steps?... let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity". The threat/promise of being audited encourages organisations (and all of us) to strive for truth, and holds a light to the darkness of potential wrong-doing.

I hope to use the skills I've learnt to do good in the world - Emilia

I am also a debt advisor, which brings me alongside people during dark, difficult times. The Lord's prayer says "Forgive us our debts", and I get to share in God's work of releasing people from the burden of debt and offering a fresh start so that someone can "have life in all its fullness". Hearing people's life stories also

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keeps me grounded, keeping me aware of the privileges and life opportunities I have had, and helping to counter the "fake news" that we are constantly exposed to about scroungers and

skivers.

When I was young I thought God would make it clear what my path through life was to be. I can now see that my choices have made sense in hindsight, and that I am doing the work that I've been called to do. But at the time I was just making one decision after another that I hoped would work out. I believe that God will work with us in the decisions we make, as long as they are in line with God's vision for building God's kingdom, here on earth as it is in heaven. We might not get a flash of inspiration that directs our future but that doesn't mean that we can't make the best of the opportunities that we can find.

Robert's Story

Robert works in the court system offering legal advice. He reflects on the Biblical value of justice within his work and the need to remain open to God calling us in new directions.

I didn't choose to be a criminal lawyer, it kind of found me! I originally applied to join the Royal Navy but when I failed that interview process I was already signed up to do a Law degree and I carried on my studies with the faith and outlook that God was signposting me in this direction. Similarly when I was applying for training contracts with law firms, God waited until I had finally exhausted my options and had finished my studies before I was offered a job in the court – in what is now HM Courts and Tribunals Service.

The work that I do in and around the court system is complex and extremely varied, and you

If we get our advice wrong there are serious implications for people's liberty.

never quite know from day to day what you are going to face, but the core values have remained the same for centuries – delivering good quality legal advice so that magistrates (lay

people who sit part-time as volunteers to deliver justice) can make the best possible decisions.

It is easy to see principles of Christian faith echoing through our work.

The impact of those decisions affects so many people – defendants who may have committed a crime for any number of reasons, victims of those crimes, people who have witnessed them, and the general public and community. If we get our advice wrong there are serious implications for people's liberty, so there is pressure to make sure that arguments are clear and concise from all sides. I have been very fortunate to work alongside a great team of colleagues who face the same pressures in the courtroom but come from all sorts of backgrounds.

Throughout Scripture we know that one of God's eternal values is Justice – as Christians we believe that one day Christ will judge all humanity, but that he is also our advocate in

Heaven. Therefore it is easy to see principles of Christian faith echoing through the work that we do as we take on a tiny amount of the earthly responsibility of bringing people to realise that they have done wrong and to put it right in some way. In many respects we are all called to the place of justice where we need to realise that we have sinned. In some rare cases we have been able to see restoration of broken relationships happening in front of us, which is amazing and can be seen as the work of the

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Feylyn**

Holy Spirit. We work within a broken earthly system where we have no way of having all the available information, but I trust God that one day Christ will judge perfectly with all knowledge of what we have done, but also appreciating our frailties from his time on earth.

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In terms of vocation I have tried to remain open to being where God has called me to be – even after 17 years in my current role I never want to be so comfortable that I cannot move on if God is to ask me to do so. I have tried knocking on several doors over the years and trust in that God has guided my path to this point, so I carry out my duties using the skills and abilities that God has given me, hoping that I might be a blessing to others around me in my workplace.

Katie's Discovery

Katie is training to be a librarian through a distance-learning MA in Library Studies. She reflects on how her passion for books led her to a calling she didn't expect.

I wanted to work in libraries because I liked books on shelves. I quickly learned this was a mere illusion, the tip of the iceberg, one which isn't always true of all libraries anymore. This bookish fantasy was enough to draw me in and I learned about Library Graduate Traineeship

I learned how much I enjoy helping people access and use information.

roles. Traineeships offer you a 12-month paid role in a library where you get to learn the ropes. They can be really varied depending on the size, location and sector of the library you work in, but generally they focus on frontline customer services and helping the librarians with their projects. By chance I came across a traineeship in Bradford the summer I graduated, at an NHS library, which I honestly applied for because I lived in nearby Leeds. My chance application might be the best decision I've ever made. I was offered another role in the library

when my traineeship came to an end and I'm now studying a distance learning masters which will give me full librarian professional status.

My library supports the knowledge of NHS staff, ensuring they can provide patients with the best care. Day to day my duties include answering enquiries, finding journal articles, creating knowledge bulletins and recommending public health education models to loan. Quite quickly my initial fantasy became unimportant. I learned

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how much I enjoy helping people access and use information, through varied means. If you're good at synthesising information, advocacy and communication with a range of people, if you're a techy mastermind or have a background in STEM then your skills will be highly sought in libraries.

I got lucky with the book fantasy hook for libraries. Working out what you'd like to do is *really* hard. Sure, we can struggle our way to getting a job somewhere but it's a real challenge to find a job that you also enjoy and feel you can make a difference in. For me, vocation has something to do with this challenge. How can I best support society and God to my full potential without burning out? What on earth is a calling? These questions are made even more challenging by our lack of experience in jobs, most roles aren't

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actually like what we imagine them to be. Chances are that your vocation can't be boiled down; our broad, unknowable vocations are mysterious. Take this mystery as a sign - you have the potential for so many roles, Jesus will be with you down so many paths. If, in a job, you feel you're bringing God's kingdom on earth, you're using the talents given to you, and you're not too burned out at the end, then roll with the role!

Nathan's Experience

Nathan completed his MA in political communication in 2020, when employment options for graduates were especially limited. He reflects on how our calling can be found outside of paid work.

The year had not gone to plan. Or at least, it hadn't gone to my plan. By the end of 2020, I had hoped to graduate from my MA, get a job working in communications down in London and move in with my girlfriend. By December of that year I'd only managed to tick off the first of these three items. Whilst I'm proud of what I managed to achieve in 2020 – and frankly, you all should be proud of what you've done, no matter how big or small an achievement you might think it is – I was also frustrated. I knew I was lucky to be in a job, despite it not being what I want to do or where I want to be. But I do not feel called to do what I am doing, even if it is for a good cause. Over a couple of months, I discovered that it doesn't have to be the case

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that you are called to do what you do 9 to 5 (or any of the other shifts you might work!).

Meaning can be found in what you do the rest of the time; vocation can be found outside employment.

The disconnect between the things we want to do and the things we have to do - Jan

Now, to some of you this might seem really obvious. But as the son of a Methodist minister, it has always made sense to me that your job should correspond to your vocation. The ability to find meaning outside work is still novel to me! Luckily, I have been able to pursue other things that give me a bit of experience in what I do feel called to do. The first of these roles was as Editor of Movement magazine. During my time as Editor, I had so much fun putting issues together and working with both members of General Council and SCM staff. Doing this gave me the opportunity to learn more about the Movement, and to produce something that I hope you lovely lot enjoyed reading.

The second role I picked up was as a volunteer for Christians on the Left, helping produce their social media content, articles for their website and generally providing administrative support to the organisation. Both of these roles had given me a sense of purpose that I often failed to find in my job role. They have also given me some hope that I will one day be employed to tell the world about God's radically inclusive love

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and all of the really cool things that people are doing to spread the Gospel. Until then, it has been a pretty fun thing to do on the side.

Jan's Reflection

Jan is an organisational psychologist and vocations adviser in the Church of England. Here she reflects on how we can use the objects around us to connect with God fully in the workplace .

These days finding a job may be simply a matter of 'what's on offer when I leave Uni?' But most of us want to be more thoughtful than that and want jobs that we enjoy, that challenge us and that sit comfortably with our values and our hearts.

My own life career was more a matter of stumbling from one point to the next and slowly working out what I could do and wanted to do. I began as a teacher but soon started to think again about what I might want from life. It was a long slow journey that involved retraining and doing poorly paid part-time work until, finally, I reached my post of teaching organisational psychology in a university, and doing consultancy work for mostly Third Sector organisations. It felt like sometimes I was pushed, and sometimes I was pulled. It involved sometimes saying 'no I don't want to work for that organisation where either I know people are being exploited or where I will be stressed by the conditions there,' or 'I won't do that piece of work without certain conditions applying.' I lost work because of it, but sometimes I gained work. It was really important to me to think about how power was used in the organisations I worked for and with. Was power being used for the good of the employees as well as the company?

Was power being used for good?

When I said to someone once that it didn't feel like I was doing much that was 'spiritual' in my work he said 'Are you doing your work to the best of your ability, with truthfulness?'

My choices have made sense in hindsight - Lydia

That opened my eyes. In the management work I did we always started with a session on ethics and asked people what their guiding principles were and how they made ethical decisions in their own lives.

Without this sometimes painful reflection about what we would, and wouldn't, do and how we wanted to treat people, it would be hard to draw the boundaries we need to be true to ourselves and our faith.

We are more than our work.

There's choosing our jobs, where we have to think about our talents and what we have been given as abilities and what lights us up. Then there's living faithfully in the jobs we have. It's hard to survive at work sometimes. There's the things we want to do and things we have to do and we can feel a disconnect between those. I did a piece of research about how people related to the often ignored physical objects around them at work: their mugs, their phones and much else. I found that people can bring themselves and their values to work through these. Objects. For example a cleaner who felt quite badly treated in her work through having nowhere to eat her lunch had some cartoons in her locker about confident women and she would look at them and think "yes"! She did her work cheerfully and with confidence – she chatted to everyone, did her work willingly and well and didn't let her resentments get in the way of a job she enjoyed, even if it did have down-

sides. We are more than our work but we bring ourselves and our faith and our values to it. Being clear about how we want to be is a hard but important part of being at work.

Callum's Journey

Callum is a musician who also works part time as an admin assistant. He reflects upon the moment he discovered that music was his real passion. Vocation is more than just a person's career.

Towards the end of sixth form, I was setting myself up to study classics at university. I'm very process orientated, so was going to great lengths to make sure I was doing the right thing. However, while the process was good, when the outcome came to be that I should study classics, something just didn't sit right. I wasn't at peace with the decision I had made. It didn't feel right.

I looked at my other options, and found only one other: music. By taking a step back from my perfect process I had created, I realised that while I was good at classics, I wasn't suited to reading and writing essays for three years. That works for many people, but I wanted my time at university to be active and doing something, so music made sense. I would have succeeded in studying classics, I realised that music was where I actually thrived and what I wanted to do for three years. I was more excited by the opportunities that would become open to me as a musician, both professional opportunities but also opportunities for me to use my music to build the kingdom of God.

I studied popular music at two different universities, and then moved back home into whatever job would take me. I was gigging alongside work, which started out infrequently but soon

meant I was working 6/7 days and evenings a week, which wasn't sustainable. I took the chance to move to a part time role with SCM to give me a stable secure income, but also allow me more time to develop my music as a more focused and central part of my career.

This is working really well for me at the moment - I'm actually really passionate about ad-

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ministration, so I get the fun of working in an office with incredible people and a job that holds meaning and purpose, as well as the chance to invest much more time into my music career, my main passion that I feel called to. I'm able to spend time honing my craft and pursue exciting opportunities I wouldn't be able to do if I were working full time, as well as giving more time to serving in my local church.

For me, music is the part of my week that constantly changes. I can be teaching one week, rehearsing the next, then composing, performing, business planning, creating social media content, recording in a studio, the list goes on. Between this and my office job, my “workplace” can vary massively from week to week.

All of these places are different opportunities to use my talents and time to represent the Kingdom of God in places and to people that I maybe wouldn't be able to if it weren't for my music. My music career has taken me to places I never had any other reason to go to, and given me both professional and personal relationships with people I wouldn't have met otherwise. Equally, my office job is developing my administration skills, which is directly feeding into the events planning and project management side of my music business work. I view these experiences as being closely related to my Christian faith and relationship with God, and as opportunities to show people who aren't familiar with God or Christianity a different way of living and a different way of working in the music industry.

Through my experience, vocation is more about the way I live out my faith while working rather than working specifically in any chosen career. It's how I choose to work, wherever I am working on that particular day. Obviously, it helps massively that I have been able to find jobs and careers that I am passionate about, and that I am able to sustain myself from those. But I quickly learnt when I left university that no matter what our work might look like – whether it

Tell the world about God's radically inclusive love - Nathan

aligns to what we've studied or what we want to do, and how ever that looks – that there will still be the call to represent God in 'the workplace' throughout our lives.

Feylyn's Discovery

Feylyn is a Research Fellow at the University of Sussex. She reflects on how she has listened to God calling her through the people around her, and seeing God at work in the highs and the lows.

I spent much of my childhood as a young carer for my disabled mother. It was a profoundly isolating, frightening, and traumatic experience, yet God has been so faithful to take care of me and my family.

Growing up in the United States, I didn't meet any other young carers. I wasn't even aware the term "young carer" existed until my Masters counselling program, when I chose to write a developmental psychology mini-thesis on young adults who provide care for their ill family members. This is when I discovered a wealth of research largely stemming from one world-renowned academic: Professor Saul Becker in England. Around this same time, I had been searching for PhD programs. My search primarily focused on very sunny locations like Southern California or the beautiful mountain scenery in Denver, Colorado. Coincidentally—or perhaps in

hindsight not so coincidentally—my developmental psychology professor was also my mentor. Thankfully, my mentor told me I had been conducting my search for a PhD program all wrong. He told me that I should be looking for programs where I could find academics with my research interest. With a chuckle, I told him, "Well, that's England". Winking, my mentor replied, "Well, that's where you need to go".

Long story short and four years of many sleepless nights later, I completed my PhD research on the identity development of young adult carers in the United Kingdom and the United States under Professor Becker. In the two years post-PhD, I've been working as a research fellow where I lead a six European nation study on the mental health well-being of adolescent young carers.

It's been a phenomenal journey. I've found myself traveling the world being asked to share my life story as a young carer, as well as my research. I've presented my findings to the European Parliament and to Congressional representatives in Washington D.C. I've also been incredibly privileged to hold the precious life stories of the hundreds of young carers I've met around the world who, like me, felt alone and lacked

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support. My mother once gave me this word from God about my time in England: "God-ordained, God-fueled, and sustained by the favour of God". What a true word that's been! The joyful mountain tops of success have been just as real as the pain of the valleys, and like any journey, I've often felt like giving up. In fact, even other people have suggested that the challenges facing me are insurmountable and that I should quit! However, I've seen God orchestrate my life so many times, through so many people, that I can't deny the Lord is at work.

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I've also learned to follow God's voice, especially when you're the only person hearing God say, "Walk this way". That doesn't mean that I'm always confident I'm hearing God speak nor does it mean that I'm always confident that I'm making the right choice. In actual fact, I'm very often un-

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sure. Nevertheless, I have learned to take every decision concerning my path to God and pray, cultivate His presence through worship, and seek wise counsel from those individuals whom I trust, admire, and respect. Whilst I've often felt alone, this hasn't been a journey made in complete isolation— and I don't think God intended it to be so. In all of the beautiful things that I've seen God do in my life, I recognise that God has used both me and others to carry out His plans. I don't know how everything will play out in the end, but I know it will be good.

Where next?

We hope you've been inspired by these stories to think about where God is in your work and the work God is calling you to do. If you're keen to do some reflecting, or would like some more resources to help you, here are some ideas to get you started.

Activities

More than one of our writers wrote about the importance of hindsight and letting God lead the way. Reflect upon some of the moments in your life when you came to understand them more later (these moments can be seemingly unrelated to vocation).

- Do you think the choices you made would have changed if you knew then what you know now?
- Did you know that these moments were significant to your life at the time, even if not in the way you expected?
- God tends not to announce Their presence or intentions in obvious ways. Does this ambiguity make it difficult for you to relinquish certainty regarding your future to God, or do you trust Their call to you completely? (There is no right answer).

Keeping in mind what you've learnt from past experiences, make a list of the things that give you energy, bring you joy and nourish your wellbeing. How much time do you actually dedicate to doing these things? Reflecting upon this might help you to understand where you're being called. For a more in-depth conversation, your university chaplaincy is a great place to find wise people who will listen.

Resources

The Examen is a Jesuit daily prayer practice which encourages you to become more mindful of God's presence in your day to day life, including at work. Their website can be accessed via this address: www.ignatianspirituality.com.

The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity has partnered with Fusion to produce *Routed*, a group resource for students exploring the transition from university to work with videos, workbooks, and session plans. For more, visit licc.org.uk/routed.

The best way to explore calling is with others. For more stories like these, of people living out their faith in active ways, as well as devotionals, workshops, blogs, and Bible studies, head to movement.org.uk/resources.

SCM members receive regular updates and resources for exploring faith. So, please, join the movement!

And remember...

While our work is important, and as such we should seek to approach work in a faithful way, it should not dictate our lives. Not everyone has the mentality to find nor, perhaps, the financial luxury of being able to wait for a job they love. For many reasons we may find that we can't work or that work is a source of stress or unhappiness.

To have a vocation is a privilege. It is an opportunity to enjoy your working life. Never does it need to define you, however, never should it detriment your health or happiness. Your life is your choice.

Remember that our most important calling is to love and to know ourselves loved by our creator. May you find the essence of your calling in these words from the prophet Micah...

**He has told you, O mortal, what is
good; and what does the Lord
require of you but to do justice, and
to love kindness, and to walk
humbly with your God.**

Micah 6:8 (NRSV)