

Scott: Fine work.

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**My Vocation of Ministry:
Its Arrival, Discernment, and Impact on My Life**

**By
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IS502: Vocation of Ministry

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I got “called” in the summer of 1998. At least that’s what I used to tell everyone – that is – until now. The funny thing is, when you say you got “called,” everyone at church (and most in society) know what you mean. However, reading Guinness has changed my semantics. I knew God calls us all to repentance and he calls us to do something in our lives, but I’ve never realized how important it is to distinguish the two calls. Guinness refers to these as our primary and secondary calls and he notes that “the business person, the teacher, the factory worker, and the television anchor can do God’s work just as much as the minister and the missionary” (Guinness 34). I’ve even said something to the effect of this in a sermon before, but I now realize how important it is rephrase my life and say that ‘I was called to be a minister of some sort in the summer of 1998, but right now I’m ministering as an engineer while I’m in Seminary.’ But what exactly is calling? Guinness beautifully expounds that “calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, every thing we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service” (Guinness 4). Guinness goes on to tell us that at the same time, “God does call us to ‘be ourselves’ and ‘do what we are’” (Guinness 48). Smith reiterates this point, noting that “the call of God and his direction will not violate who we are; on the contrary, it will reflect our strengths, abilities and even desires” (Smith 90).

When I finished the DiSC profile and read my general profile regarding these very strengths, abilities, and desires, I was astounded to see a word – counselor – given as my classical profile as that word has been echoing in my

heart and mind as I've been reading all of our literature on calling. I've always loved to be a 'listener' and show compassion for people and I've been noticing my gifts would work well together as a counselor. In the past year, God has even been teaching me specific things related to this calling that I have also found echoed in our reading. For example, Smith advises us "to continually allow others to respond to their own conscience. Running other people's lives undermines our ability to take charge of our own lives and respond fully and freely to the will of God. A helpful rule of thumb might be 'Offer no unsolicited advice'" (Smith 96). Also, Smith further echoed, "one of the ways we encourage is through empathic listening. This is often the greatest gift we give another – the gift of not speaking" (Smith 135). Regarding my gifts, I would further say that my "core" spiritual gifts have emerged as exhortation, leadership, and compassion, and teaching. I am currently in the M.Div. program looking towards ordination and pastoral ministry and seriously considering the MABS and progressing with other post-graduate work. Now I might consider the Counseling or Pastoral Care degree instead! In addition, I feel God has been speaking to me through the faculty testimonies as I have noticed that Professors Arnold, Bauer, Thompson all originally discerned a pastoral call, but while pursuing this call they were redirected into different fields of ministry. I wonder if this is how God is leading my life as well.

My basic profile places me low in Dominance (D) and Conscientiousness (C) and high in Influence (i) followed by Steadiness (S). My profile's strengths are contacting, enthusing, and showing care for others while being dependable

as a leader and team builder. I am currently involved in our Church's budding Young Adults group and even though I've been in the Church less than two months, I'm already the person others look to me make decisions and plans for the group and its activities (it is a small congregation). On the contrary, my profile's liabilities include needing facts and logical steps, being indecisive, and needing priorities and deadlines. I could have told you this before I did the DiSC profile as I've always had trouble making decisions (even what to wear) and getting things done without deadlines. When I produce work, it's high quality, but it sometimes seems I am incapable of doing anything until it's almost due. My undergraduate degree is in engineering and as such I've always been very fact-oriented and used logical and ordered steps to do everything. Further, my profile suggests a ministry environment where I am surrounded by others who are direct and logical while they respect my sincerity and my care for their lives. My best environment will also allow me to be an organizer and a mobilizer of people where I can make sure things are getting done in an orderly fashion. I'd also like to use my Seminary studies to train myself to do work ahead of time and without deadlines always breathing down my neck. I'm getting married in four months and I want my Seminary studies to be an encouragement to our relationship – not a burden.

Looking back, these qualities of mine propel me to be the highly critical thinker I have grown to be. As I have grown intellectually, I have become more unaccepting of the accepted – at least without serious thought about why I should believe certain things. As Brookfield states, “just because an idea is

accepted by everyone else does not mean that we have to believe in its innate truth without first checking its correspondence with reality as we experience it” (Brookfield 9). Many people do not understand this questioning of what they find unquestionable and it can become offensive to them. Brookfield notes that “trying to force people to analyze critically the assumptions under which they have been thinking and living is likely to serve no function other than intimidating them to the point where resistance builds up against this process” (Brookfield 11). One of the biggest areas I struggle with in having to be careful of my critical questioning is when I do not understand why the Church that licenses me for ministry – and will some day probably ordain me for ministry – believes some of the things that they believe. 80% percent of my extended family belongs to this Church so to question it makes me feel as if I am questioning them. And if I were to someday leave this Church, I know I would have to have a lot of discussions with my family, but if I am never able to critically accept their beliefs, how can I stay? Polonius’ words have rung in my head since reading Hamlet in high school – “To thine own self be true.”

The main theme of this module is the relationship between critical thinking and spirituality. Collins teaches that the main “difference between critical thinking in the strong and weak senses concerns, on the one hand, overcoming the interests of a particular individual or group, what can otherwise be referred to as egocentrism and ethnocentrism and, on the other hand, seriously taking into account the thoughts of other individuals or groups” (Collins 33). At first, I had no idea how critical thinking and spirituality could be related, but Collins offers that

“strong-sense critical thinking and spirituality are perhaps most similar in that they both challenge egocentrism and ethnocentrism as the most significant obstacles to wisdom, truth, and progress. Thus, just as critical thinking exposes the self-interest which prevents one from seriously entertaining opposing views, so too does spirituality question the pervasive self-concern which undermines the love of God and neighbor” (Collins 42). How interesting to note that the pursuit of critical thinking in conjunction with spirituality is a pursuit of selflessness. To think critically (in the strong sense) is to lay aside and question our beliefs in a search for truth and spirituality’s goals revolve around not focusing on ourselves, but on God and others. Further, Collins notes that “with their emphases on values, it is not surprising to learn that both critical thinking in the strong sense and spirituality call for the transformation of people as they pursue the true, the good, and the beautiful” (Collins 41). I can only pray that I would be transformed as I seek to follow the Lord wherever he leads me.

The Spiritual Life Inventory (SLI) helped me to critically evaluate and enumerate certain areas in my spiritual life that I thought were lacking and certain areas that are going well. I knew that I don’t directly pray enough. I feel that most of the time I am in continual prayer and seeking God’s guidance, but in all honesty I rarely make time to sit down and go through a list of prayer requests for myself and those around me. Further, I receive great consolation from sitting in silence and listening to the Lord, but rarely make time to do so. Another realization is that I need a way to get something new from the Bible. Lately, when I read the Bible it just seems like I have read what I’m reading numerous

times and I rarely find anything new nor do I find nourishment. I am looking forward to re-reading the NT this summer in NT520 and to studying the Gospel of Mark in my first IBS class in the fall. I have done some inductive Bible studying before and found it very enriching. I meet with a small Bible study / prayer group, but in looking back over the past couple of months the Bible studying has not been as particularly enriching or intellectually stimulating as the prayer time has been. Just like my personal Bible study time, nothing seems new and I thus wonder if I meet with the group out of desire or out of a feeling of necessity. Sometimes I feel just like those that Smith points out that “in their eagerness to serve Christ and do good, often take on more than they can do and neglect necessary times of leisure and rest” (Smith 118). However, the prayer time has been refreshing as I enjoy the time of sharing and being able to carry each other’s burdens.

Looking back, I can see how this SLI exercise was an excellent chance for me to critically think about my spirituality, as was this entire paper. God’s call on my life and the characteristics he has made me with have led me to be the critical thinker that I am. Collins explicitly helps us understand the direct relationship between this critical thinking and our spirituality and the SLI thoroughly aided me in evaluating my current spiritual life. My closing prayer is that God will continue to lead, guide, and direct my life as He continues to daily teach me more about myself through this class and those around me.