

The book you are about to read can really be the beginning of the rest of your life! It not only contains a lot of highly relevant and helpful information about the nature of the contemporary time and life pressures we face, but it gently guides you along what can be an exciting, challenging and ultimately fulfilling journey.

I know I have experienced moments in my life when all the best of everything seems to come together and I feel like I am really living out my unique destiny. Times when the hours rush past, when I forget to stop and eat, and when I know that what I am achieving will be right on the button. Once we have tasted such a sense of “Yes” it is hard and frustrating to go back to what can feel like a second rate existence. And I believe we all have the desire to live the “Yes” days more often.

***SoulPurpose** can open up the opportunity for you, the reader to be living such a life.*

*I encourage you to find someone, or a team of supporters, to sojourn with you as you travel this journey. However, the writers of **SoulPurpose** share their own personal stories in such an honest way that you are provided with companionship and reassurance and need not feel alone as you bravely work through the various chapters and exercises.*

Pip Jamieson, Career and Human Resources Consultant

*This book is a very stimulating read. Normally you would have to go to many different sources to find the insights on personality types, spiritual gifts, stages of faith and other things that you find here. Not only that, but these are all put together to help you find how best to serve, not just in the church, but in all the different aspects of your life. **SoulPurpose** is an excellent resource for personal reading or group study.*

Murray Robertson, Senior Pastor, Spreydon Baptist Church, Christchurch

*Becoming fully myself – the person God made me to be – requires my conscious involvement. The very act of stopping to ask questions like “Who am I?” “What is my purpose in life?” can be the beginning of an exciting journey as I come to understand myself, how I operate, and how I want to spend the life God has given me. Packed full of resources, **Soul Purpose** is an invaluable companion on the journey towards fullness of life. The workbook section alone is worth the price of the book.*

Diane Bengé, Editor, Reality Magazine

I like the way these writers drag “faith” out of the religious cupboard – and release it in the marketplace where it belongs. I like the way work and skills and

vocation and careers are viewed as honourable activities for Christians to engage in – no longer dirty words, but as “holy and acceptable” as the stuff we do on Sundays. I like the way our involvement with God is seen as a journey, rather than a destination – the important thing being to keep moving. And I like the way this book is down-to-earth practical – not just pointy-headed theory.

*May the ideas in the chapters that follow help you to discover your **SoulPurpose**.*

John Cooney – founder/editor, Grapevine magazine

*There seems to be a growing hunger for purpose in the Western church these days. Here’s a book that very creatively engages that hunger. **SoulPurpose** takes you on an important journey that will enable you to creatively connect your life to both a larger sense of God’s purposes and the needs of the world.*

We know of no book that offers the reader a more practical pathway to find a sense of focus that impacts every part of life. A “must” resource for small groups that want to help their members find a better way of life that is more about making a difference than simply giving our lives over to the stress-race.

Tom and Christine Sine, authors of *Living on Purpose: Finding God’s Best for Your Life* and co-ordinators of the ministries of Mustard Seed Associates (www.msainfo.org), linking those on the creative edge.

Giving career guidance is a bigger part of my job than I would have ever imagined. I have stumbled and fumbled my way through it - until now! This book will be the companion I have needed. I am delighted to see the way issues surrounding both self-awareness and divine-awareness have converged to create a resource which is biblical and practical.

Paul Windsor, Principal, Carey Baptist College

SOULPURPOSE

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN LIFE AND WORK

ALISTAIR MACKENZIE

WAYNE KIRKLAND

ANNETTE DUNHAM

SoulPurpose

Alistair Mackenzie, Wayne Kirkland, Annette Dunham

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SECTION A

WHAT ON EARTH WAS I MADE FOR?

CHAPTER 1

SEARCHING FOR A SOULPURPOSE

I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us . . . have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people.

Nora Watson

DOES MY LIFE COUNT?

One of the fundamental desires we humans have is the desire for significance. We want – we *need* – our lives to count for something.

This is a longing that increases as we get older. In the movie *About Schmidt*, Jack Nicholson plays the role of a recently retired insurance middle manager. This sobering story charts Warren Schmidt's struggle to find significance and meaning in life. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of his wife and fellow workers he feels useless and redundant. Soon his wife dies and his only daughter, who has made a life for herself in another city, marries a man whom Warren despises.

He is alone and desperately unhappy. But he finds some solace in the sponsoring of a small boy in Tanzania. Though he has never met the child, Warren begins to write letters to him, expressing his frustrations and deepest emotions about his life. In one letter he says:

"I am weak and I am a failure. There's just no getting around it. Relatively soon I will die. Maybe in twenty years. Maybe tomorrow. It doesn't matter.

Once I am dead and everyone I knew is dead as well, it will be as though I never existed. What difference has my life made anyway? None. None at all."

Shortly after, Warren receives a letter from the Catholic sister responsible for the care of the sponsored boy. She explains that even though he cannot read,

the small six-year-old orphan keeps his letters and thinks of him every day. He is grateful for Warren's help and it has enabled him to get medical attention for an eye infection. Enclosed is a picture, drawn by the boy, of

Sadly, Warren's deep angst Warren and himself. The movie finishes as the realisation begins to sink in that maybe something of his life *has* mattered.

is a common experience for many of us. Warren Schmidt is right about his life. Much of it *has* counted for little. His relationships with his family, workmates and friends are largely broken and dysfunctional. Retirement has only accentuated the dismal lack of meaning. And yet, in the midst of all this gloom, there *is* something positive. Warren is able to appreciate and understand the difference that small acts of kindness can make to the lives of others.

Sadly, Warren's deep angst is a common experience for many of us. We too long for significance and yet so often we stumble through life with serious questions about our lives. Do they really count for anything?

ESTHER: "FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS"

The book of Esther in the Bible provides a fascinating true-life contrast to Warren Schmidt. It tells the story of the Jewish girl Esther, "drafted" into the harem of Xerxes, Great King of Persia. Eventually she becomes his Queen. It all seems like a fantasy come true...

But a storm is brewing. Esther's adopted father Mordecai has aroused the hatred of a powerful noble. Haman is advisor to the King, and Mordecai has refused to pay homage to him. Haman is furious and turns his anger on Mordecai and his people. He is determined to rid the land of all Jews. Haman's goal becomes nothing less than their total annihilation.

Up to this point Esther has kept silent about her Jewish background. But now Mordecai turns to her for help. He implores her to intervene and try to influence the king in order to avoid impending disaster. Initially she is reluctant, fearing for her life, but Mordecai is emphatic. He sends her a message...

*"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"*¹

¹ Esther 4:13-14 (NIV)

The story ends well. Esther takes the risk and gains an audience with the king, where the evil intentions of Haman are exposed. The king's response is rapid. He orders Haman hanged on the very gallows he has erected for Mordecai. The Jews are saved. Mordecai is elevated to Xerxes' second-in-command. And Esther, once a poor Jewish child, having saved her people continues to live as Queen of the super-power of her day.

WINSTON CHURCHILL: "A MAN FOR HIS TIME"

Esther is not alone in her experience of divine destiny. Down through the ages countless men and women have risen to the challenge of particular tasks that seemed to be part of their destiny. That towering figure of the twentieth century, Winston Churchill, is another example.

Full of caustic wit and glaring personal weaknesses, nonetheless Churchill was "made" for the challenge of leading Great Britain through the desperate days of World War II. His morale-boosting strength of character and his magnificent oratory impassioned and inspired a nation to stand against the evil of the Nazi empire.

Churchill was 66 when he became Prime Minister. All his life, he said, seemed "mere preparation" for the Herculean task of leading a nation at war. As he wrote in his memoirs, "I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour, and for this trial."

All his life seemed "mere preparation" for the Herculean task of leading a nation at war.

DISCOVERING YOUR SOULPURPOSE – YEAH, RIGHT!

Inspiring as these true stories may be, they often have the opposite effect for many of us. Frustratingly we end up thinking that this level of meaning and significance is simply the preserve of a fortunate few. We may not feel exactly like Warren Schmidt, but we certainly don't imagine ourselves as an Esther or a Churchill.

Heroes like them may have "seized the moment" and lived out what they were made for. But for the rest of us, stuck firmly in everyday life, there are no such paths to glory. The daily challenge – and the daily drudgery – more than fill up our day, thank you. It's often hard enough finding time and energy just for that. And anyway, where would we begin? Our day-to-day jobs seem mundane, meaningless and disconnected. At least, that's the discovery that has led to the writing of this book. As we have talked with hundreds of Christians through the years we have found, sadly, that plenty feel that way.

CALLED BY GOD

Yet this is not how God intended it to be. He made *all* of us for a purpose. That's why there is a yearning in our hearts to live significantly.

**there is a
yearning in
our hearts
to live
significantly.**

The truth is that God has *called* us. Called *us!* This is our destiny – to discover how we can turn God's purpose for us into a reality, in the way we live and work.

God's calling is not simply to work in a particular job or profession. Before all else, the call of Jesus is to follow him. We are invited to enjoy his friendship. To share a relationship with him – and with others. The fact that God desires us to know him intimately must be a cause for great optimism and hope. Clearly he rates us astonishingly highly – and that high regard is quite independent of anything we might do or achieve. First and foremost, he values us simply for being us. As far as God is concerned, we all have real intrinsic worth.

However, God does also call us to join him as partners in his work. In fact, his intention is for every part of life to be meaningful – not just employment, but *all* the work we do, as well as our relationships, our rest, our enjoyment, our learning...

It all counts. Sometimes we develop romantic notions of finding the one thing we were created for. But it would be foolishly simplistic to think we could ever reduce our lives to a single function. We are called to life "in all its fullness".

Of course it's easy to say we were made for more than just a single task or challenge. That there needs to be a rich diversity in our lives. But too often that's the very problem! How do we hold together all the mad complexity of what we're involved in? The key is the biblical concept of "calling". Our calling is all about the very reason we were made by God.

Unfortunately, in Christian circles the word "calling" has come to be misunderstood, and often applied only to our job. As you will see in this book, God's call to us goes vastly beyond that. So we've coined a phrase that we will use consistently – *SoulPurpose*.

What is *SoulPurpose*? Well, if it was in the dictionary, it might read something like this:

SoulPurpose *noun* compelling sense of calling, destiny and mission that brings focus, integration, balance and meaning to one's life.

A person's identity and design, which shapes and directs their service for God in God's world.

Ongoing purpose that continues despite changes in the nature and mix of work done.

A reason to live, a cause to die for.

MORE THAN A JOB

It should be plain from what we've already said that discovering your *SoulPurpose* means more than just finding the one perfect job that fits you best. We're on about something that gives cohesion to the whole of our lives – the peculiar mix of paid and unpaid work we each do, as well as the relationships we develop and the *whole* range of activities and interests that are us. It affects everything.

At the very core of this is our relationship with God. This is where our identity lies – not in any particular job or career. Inevitably the types of work, leisure and relationships we are engaged in will change from time to time. These days even careers are no longer for life. When our *SoulPurpose* is too closely tied to a particular role, if we ever lose that role we are likely to become seriously disoriented and distressed – as Warren Schmidt's life demonstrates.

FIVE KEY COMPONENTS FOR DISCOVERING A SOULPURPOSE

In order to grow and maintain a clear sense of *SoulPurpose* for yourself, we believe you need five particular components in your life. We've identified them as Connection, Fit, Service, Balance and Encouragement. The absence of some or all of these components seems to us the reason most people struggle to experience a strong sense of destiny and significance.

CONNECTION

SoulPurpose makes a connection between God's work and your work. What you are doing in your small corner of the universe fits neatly into God's cosmic purposes.

Easy to say! Of course, to make it happen the first step is to understand what God is doing. Now to be sure none of us knows the mind of God, but what we do have is a Bible chock-full of examples of God at work ... and Jesus as our prime model! Understanding God's purposes, then, in the world God made is an achievable goal. And when you have consciously seen how you

can work alongside God you will come to appreciate how you are participating in something of far-reaching significance.

Whatever you are doing and wherever you are, as you begin to understand and put into practice your *SoulPurpose*, your faith and your life will gain a real sense of direction. This can even happen if the situation you live or work in falls woefully short of your dreams. A *SoulPurpose* will stimulate you to make your life increasingly creative and satisfying.

FIT

Our *SoulPurpose* is inextricably linked to our own uniqueness. The Psalmist saw it:

*“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”*²

In making you the way you are, God has taken exceptional care. He wants you to reach your potential by using and developing the mix of temperament,

You have a unique “psychological DNA” that marks you out from every other human. gifts, talents, skills, motivations and yearnings that go to make up the person that is you. You have a unique “psychological DNA” that marks you out from every other human. As you work your way through this book you will identify the building blocks of that DNA. They are the ingredients that equip you for your life’s work. Assembled together (as they will be if you make the most of the exercises in this book) they will give you clues to how you “fit” into God’s broader purposes.

In fact, they will give you a glimpse of your destiny.

Os Guinness notes: *“God normally calls us along the lines of our giftedness, but the purpose of giftedness is stewardship and service, not selfishness... Giftedness does not stand alone in helping us discern our callings. It lines up in response to God’s call alongside other factors, such as family heritage, one’s own life opportunities, God’s guidance, and our unquestioning readiness to do what he shows.”*

² Psalm 139:13 (NSRV)

³ Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: Word, 1998) page 46

So part of your journey calls for self-discovery. How am I made? How has God put me together? What situations has he placed me in?

The process of getting to know yourself is therefore incredibly important. The better you understand yourself – your unique combination of gifts, abilities, passion and personality – the better you will understand how and where you “fit”; that is, the role in which you can best use your strengths. Be clear that your “fit” is not just *what you do*. It is also *who you are* – the values you hold, the dreams you nurture, the kindness and compassion you offer, the energy and enthusiasm you harness.

SERVICE

Service is a given. It’s half the reason we’re here. Just as it’s why Jesus came to earth. Finding our *SoulPurpose* means learning to be of service to others. It means finding our significance through investing in God’s wider purposes and in the lives of other people.

(We’ve chosen to use the word “service” rather than “ministry”, because unfortunately “ministry” has been hijacked. It has come to reinforce the false idea that sacred and secular are two different parts of our lives. As a result ministry is used to refer only to certain set forms of “religious” service. *Diakonia* – the Greek word which is translated “ministry” – can just as easily be translated “service”. It refers to any kind of service which is motivated by the love of God.)

It’s encouraging to be where we “fit” most comfortably. But do remember that God often pushes us out beyond our comfort zone. So always be ready to see your “fit” tempered by the call to serve. This may mean that sometimes the need of a situation is so great that you won’t have any choice but to respond, even if it means venturing outside the logical boundaries of your “psychological DNA”.

That’s usually not easy. We always feel at risk when we’re doing things that don’t come naturally to us. But then, often those nervous ventures produce new levels in our growth. Learn to welcome them when you’re sure they’re the right step. But as a general principle, don’t make the mistake of wasting your life in places or tasks that just don’t suit you at all.

BALANCE

We are not one-sided beings. We are complex creatures. As we said above, God made us for far more than just a single task. So you need to establish a balance in your life which enables you to express your *SoulPurpose* not just

through your “job” (whether paid or unpaid, whether at home or in an office or factory) – but also through a mixture of domestic, voluntary and church work, and in ways that include relationships, rest and recreation. In short ... in every aspect of your life.

Balance is needed to get all those parts into a healthy harmony.

Balance is needed to get all those parts into a healthy harmony. This balance will never be easy – but you’ll find in the chapters ahead helpful guidelines for achieving it. And it will never be final, either. It will always need fine-tuning. In fact, at certain definable stages in life it will need to be renegotiated.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Finally we also need to understand that living out our calling was never meant to be a solitary task. For discipleship is not a solitary word. It was designed to be lived out in solidarity with a supportive community.

This is our dream for the church – a group of committed companions who want to see each other equipped and supported as they live out their faith in the world. While in this book we won’t specifically address the issue of how we support one another, it is an assumption that permeates all of the chapters that follow. In fact, we have designed those chapters so that groups of people can read and discuss them together – as it were, fellow pilgrims on the road, helping each other discover their *SoulPurpose*.

AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

Now, let’s put all that together. In our *SoulPurpose* our plans will be **connected** into God’s plans, so that we are part of his wider purposes. Our role will be mainly dictated by how our strengths **fit** the needs we identify around us. Comfortable in our fit we will be able to offer genuine **service** (following the example of Jesus) to the world that God made. Because it is now a fallen world we don’t expect that service to be easy, but we will be helped by consciously keeping in **balance** all the ingredients that go to make up our lives and work, and by the **encouragement** and support of our fellow-Christians, the Body of Christ of whom we are a part.

Your own, unique *SoulPurpose*? A life plan that you can identify, and then use to transform your living? Is that just a fantasy? Is it wild optimism? We don’t think so. We are convinced that it’s within the grasp of every person. It is not elitist – only for those with extraordinary talents and opportunities. Neither is it limited to the few who have the freedom to spend their time doing whatever they want. Most of us do not have that luxury and life is not like that.

Even when our situation limits our capacity to develop *SoulPurpose*, it will never extinguish it totally. If you find yourself in disappointing and limiting circumstances, a position that is second-best or worse, God can still use you to make a difference. Paul managed it on a doomed ship and in jail! Many Christians have, like him, been imprisoned, and have nevertheless brought some small part of God’s kingdom to their grim surroundings.

That is because God’s intention has always been for our *SoulPurpose* to centre not on what we *do*, but rather on *how* we do it and *who* we become.

If you yearn for more than you are presently experiencing, you can be sure that this is a sign that you were *created* for more. The hunger for significance is not a sadistic attempt by our Creator to push us to the brink of despair and frustration.

The hunger for significance is not a sadistic attempt by our Creator to push us to the brink of despair and frustration.

Rather, it’s a call to destiny – a pointer to a greater measure of purpose and fulfilment.

SoulPurpose can shape your life. Read on if you want to find how!

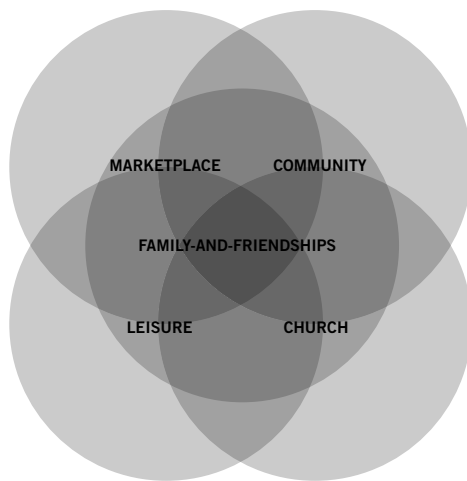
A PERSONAL MEDITATION

- If the level of meaning and significance in life was a scale of 1-10, with Warren Schmidt being 1 (almost no sense of significance) and Esther and Winston Churchill 10 (an extraordinary sense of significance), where would you place yourself? Why?
- What are some of the hopes and dreams you have for your life?
- Who were some of your early role models and heroes? What was it about them that caused you to admire and try to emulate them?

- Do you regard yourself as a person with a destiny? In what ways?
- What specific hopes do you have that reading this book will help you discover more of your *SoulPurpose*?

SELF-DISCOVERY EXERCISES

- 1 We listed five important components to growing a sense of *SoulPurpose*. Rate yourself from 1 to 5 on each of these areas (1 = seriously struggling; 5 = doing really well).
 - Connection
 - Fit
 - Service
 - Balance
 - Encouragement (both receiving and giving)
- 2 Which of these components do you most need to learn and grow in?
- 3 For each of us our *SoulPurpose* is worked out through five overlapping spheres of involvement – the marketplace, community, church, family-and-friendships, and leisure. (See the diagram below.)

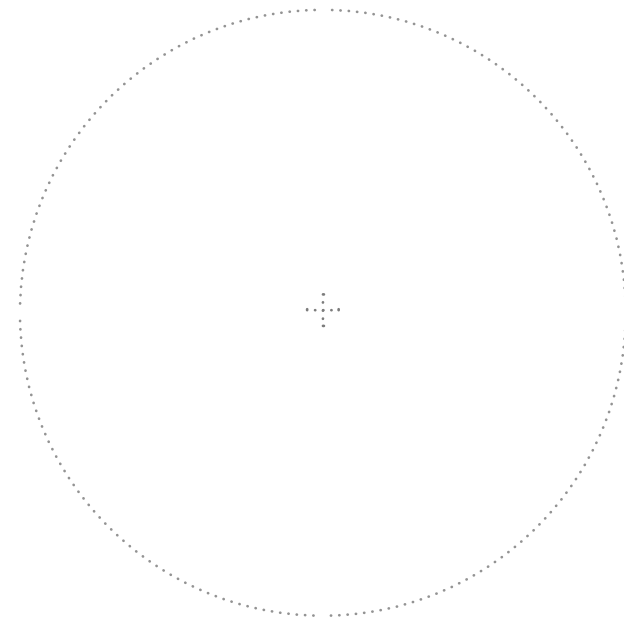


The time and energy each of these spheres demand of us, will vary greatly from person to person – and from season to season. Some of us invest most of our effort in the marketplace: in the worlds of business, law, education and industry. Others are able to give a majority of their energy and time in the family, in the community, or in the church.

The boundaries between these spheres of involvement are not very distinct. They blend and overlap. Many of us are involved in all five of them – but to varying degrees. Discovering the right balance (or mix) is something that will differ from one person to another, and likely change throughout our lives.

STEP 1: Using the diagram below, create segments in the circle proportional to the amount of time and energy you give to each sphere of involvement. For example, if you operate a retailing business, the marketplace segment on your diagram will probably take up more than half of the circle. If you are employed in a shop it may take up a quarter or third of your circle.

STEP 2: List all the activities you’re involved in on a regular basis, grouping them in the appropriate segment.



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON:

- Which spheres of involvement dominate your time and energy?
- Are you able to see ways in which these activities and relationships are connected to what God is doing? Do you see these tasks as having significance and value?
- Look again at where most of your energy and time is spent; has this always been in the spheres that currently dominate? Are you content with how your energy is being spent?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS; PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

Different exercises, activities and questions will suit different groups. Throughout this book use those that are appropriate to your group.

- 1 Share the results of the Self-Discovery exercises with the members of your group.
- 2 How much is the Christian journey an individual responsibility, and how much should a group (a church, a family, your group?) be responsible for the well-being of its members?
- 3 In what ways do you feel supported and encouraged by others in your journey to discovering your *SoulPurpose*?
- 4 What forms of encouragement could this group of yours offer its members?

WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

Discovering your *SoulPurpose* is an expedition into uncharted territory. Through the following pages you will explore a wide range of issues. But always the focus will be on how you will discover and pursue your *SoulPurpose*. That is the goal.

So are you ready to embark on this journey of discovery? It's not the jungles of South America or the crevasses and peaks of the Himalayas that we're asking you to explore. This odyssey is much more intriguing. It will take you deep into the most fascinating person in your life – YOU!

There'll be opportunity to explore dimensions of your make-up, plumb new insights as to who you are, and (we hope) find fresh and life-changing handles on how to embrace your growing sense of *SoulPurpose*. Be ready for a riveting journey.

On any daring adventure it's kind of useful to have a map. So here's a sketchy one to help you find your way around these new and exotic landscapes. We're sure that as you journey you'll be able to fill in more details than we've been able to show.

SECTION A – STAGE 1 (WHAT ON EARTH WAS I MADE FOR?) introduces the concept of *SoulPurpose*. (Hey, you're already half-way through this section of

the journey!) These two chapters are critical preparation for your trek. A chance to clear a bit of the undergrowth out of the way and to take a look at where you're heading.

Here's an interesting question. Will God give you explicit instructions, laying out precisely what you must do at each point as you follow the route? (Truth is, if you think he's going to show you just exactly where to put each step ... well, you might find yourself making pretty slow progress.) But don't get nervous. Chapter two may excite you with the discovery of just how much responsibility God is willing to hand over to you, the choices he puts in your hands.

SECTION B – STAGE 2 (UNIQUELY 'ME': A WORKBOOK) forms the core of our wanderings. This is quite different terrain to what you'll experience on the rest of trip. It's a pretty detailed guide book.

Remember, the subject matter in these parts is YOU. So a word of advice – if you want to get the maximum value from this section, you'll need to do some hard work. Can't just be a bystander or hanger-on here. These investigations aren't much good if the principal character isn't prepared to do some digging! We'll help of course, but it isn't enough just to read. The exercises and reflections are where the real discoveries will be made. That's where you'll discover *yourself*.

We'll begin by getting you to unpack and tell your unique story (chapter three). Then we'll look at your personality (chapter four), knowledge, talents and skills (chapter five), spiritual gifts (chapter six) and finally your values, desires and passions (chapter seven). Put simply, *Uniquely ME* is about what makes you tick; how God has "hardwired" you.

That might mean that you'll dwell a little longer in this stretch of the journey than in some of the others. And you might have cause to return to these parts from time to time, to fill in some missing sections of your map.

SECTION C – STAGE 3 (HOLDING IT ALL TOGETHER) A key to the journey of discovering our *SoulPurpose* is gaining some sense of how each part of who we are fits together in a co-ordinated and intelligible way. This section might be a little strenuous – it'll require you to climb a challenging peak or two. But don't worry, it will be worth it. The view from the top is not only inspiring, but also helpful. It should teach you some useful skills – like juggling all those jobs and demands you have to cope with (chapter eight); and reducing the frantic busyness of your life (chapter nine).

So slow down a little on these slopes. It would be a shame to go for a tumble here. Take time to rest and look around along the way.

SECTION D – STAGE 4 (THINGS KEEP CHANGING) We're all at different stages in our life. How do they affect our *SoulPurpose* (chapter ten)? And what about the changes and transitions we all have to go through – adolescence and midlife and the golden years? They will have a big impact on your growth and development (chapters eleven and twelve).

How long you stick around these parts will depend on their relevance to your life right now. If you've recently been through a crisis or major change, or are finding things very different to what you're used to, then this place may be a good point to camp for a while. Or if you're journeying easily and are not bothered by current changes in your life, it may be a part of the map you'd prefer just to mark for now. You can come back to it later.

SECTION E – STAGE 5 (LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD'S NEEDS) will bring you to the end of your journey. (At least for now. When it comes to your life, there will always new lands to explore.)

But by this stage you may feel a little overwhelmed. When you're surrounded by the awesome grandeur of the creation that is You, you just might be tempted to feel a touch self-important. As if this epic journey is mainly for your own enjoyment and gratification.

Chapters thirteen and fourteen remind us why we're on the road. We're learning to understand ourselves so that we can live for the ultimate Guide, Jesus. We're training to work with him. As we'll discover, our *SoulPurpose* is inextricably linked with who he is, and with his invitation to roll up our sleeves and join him.

FINALLY...

Right through the book we (the writers) will be telling you about our own travels through these parts. We've spent some long days and nights camped out at various locations along the way, and have learnt much about the terrain and how to travel well. But bear in mind that we don't consider ourselves experts. Each of us frequently returns to parts of the trek to learn more and reflect. This is an odyssey that can be done more than once in your life, because there's always so much more to discover. We are, after all, incredibly complex creatures.

So we're inviting you to journey with us. Make sure you do it at your own pace and in a way that suits you. Best if you can make up a party of fellow travellers – perhaps four or five friends who know you well and who can help

you along some of the trickier stretches. That's why at the end of each chapter there are questions to chew on with others. (A good cup of coffee around the campfire will probably help.)

Oh, and a final word – sometimes you may feel the need for help from a professional guide. While the quality of guides varies (you must understand this is a growth industry) all of us need expert help from time to time, so don't be afraid to ask. Again, there are some suggestions scattered through our notes as to where and to whom you can turn.

So ... are you ready? Let's get started then!

FINDING WHERE YOU FIT

The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Frederick Buechner

God has plans for us. God has made us for a purpose. We have a calling. We have a *SoulPurpose*.

But just where do we fit into God's purposes? What does God want us to do? – the question that consumes the energy of those who want to make their lives count for God. This one great problem for Christians has generated endless seminars, books and sermons. "Are you in the centre of God's will?" "Five easy steps to finding God's will." "Discover your spiritual gift." We've almost made an industry of Guidance!

Of course, the drive for purpose and significance is a basic instinct amongst humans. So as Christians we have no trouble believing that God wants to use us for his purposes. We are special. We are unique. We are deeply loved by God. We are called. Therefore he has a purpose for our lives.

So we are right to look for direction and purpose. The question is – are we asking the right questions and are we looking in the right place?

DOES GOD HAVE A BLUEPRINT PLAN OF MY LIFE?

"God has a wonderful plan for your life," declares a well-known tract. The lesson is, it seems, that we need to find God's will for our lives and then live by it. Under this teaching, God's individual will for us is often described as a

road map, or a blueprint. All of life is planned. We simply need to discover what church God wants us to attend, who he wants us to marry, which job he wants us to take, where he wants us to live, etc., etc.

And how do we find God's will for us? The blueprint model generally teaches that we look for "road signs" such as circumstances, inner witness, "fleeces", "open and closed doors" and wise counsel. When we do this right we'll find ourselves there in the very "centre of God's will".

It doesn't require too much thought to see that this model is inherently flawed. Yes, I know who God wants me to marry (or at least I fondly imagine that I do) ... but what happens if that person chooses someone else? Am I then "stranded" with no hope of fulfilling God's will for me? Thinking of God's will as a blueprint, or detailed road map for our lives, simply does not take into account that there are many circumstances in life which are outside our control and yet affect the choices we can make.

And what about *my* failures? Whenever I make a mistake or a bad choice, does that wreck the whole plan? Is my life for God doomed to mediocrity because I missed out somewhere along the line? – or more accurately, because I keep messing up on a regular basis all the way down the line! Does God have an infinite number of backup plans?

Another problem with this model is that it can easily lead to "divination" – employing "supernatural" methods to somehow work out God's will. This is simply not biblical.

The blueprint approach suggests that God has every last detail of our lives mapped out, and expects us to play complicated guessing games to find out where our next move is.

There is a much healthier way of approaching this question of leading. Rather than thinking of God as having a "wonderful plan" for our lives, it makes much better sense to think of him having a "wonderful purpose". A plan ties us down to precise demands; a purpose provides us with direction and a goal. A plan is unforgiving. Make an error at the beginning – while you are laying the foundations perhaps – and all the following work and effort could be wasted; the whole building might collapse because of that one error. In contrast, as Paul Stevens points out, a purpose is like a stream that flows to a distant sea.¹ The stream may be diverted from time to time. It may even wander

aimlessly in swamps for a period. But it can also recover its way further down the valley and still has the potential one day to become a great river.

WHAT IS GOD'S WILL FOR US?

So what is God's purpose for us? Fundamental to this is the concept of God's will. Bruce Waltke suggests that God's will is for you "to be a mature man or woman of God ... He wants to see your character develop. He wants you to draw close to Him and be changed."² Furthermore, "God's will is that you be holy, wise, mature, joyful, prayerful and submissive."³ There is no secret code required to discover this. God's will for us is as plain as the scriptures.

"One does not divine God's will. One lives God's will as one comes to know Him through His Word. This concept of growing close to God so that you can live out His will, or live to please Him, is consistent throughout the New Testament."⁴

God's intentions for us are clear. But what about the many decisions in life (large and small) which are choices between two or more good options. Does God have a fixed agenda in these matters? Does he have anything to say at all about each point of decision?

Yes he does ... but so should we.

Gordon Smith makes the point that rather than try to "find" God's will, we need to learn how to make wise choices by discerning God's direction. Smith uses the analogy of a figure-skating pair on ice to describe how God leads with us. The person who follows the lead still has a choice and still contributes to the shape and form of the dance.⁵

In a similar vein, Annette remembers a Life Boys' poster that used to hang in the Sunday School hall of her church when she was a child. The poster showed a boy (in full Life Boys' uniform, of course) with his hands on the ship's wheel. Standing behind him was Jesus (flowing robes and all). Jesus had one hand on the shoulder of the boy as if to steady him. His other arm was outstretched, fingers pointing into the distance. The boy's gaze

Rather than try to "find" God's will, we need to learn how to make wise choices by discerning God's direction.

¹ See his article "Guidance" in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), page 471. Paul Stevens is co-editor of this volume with Robert Banks.

² Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?*, page 78.

³ Waltke, 86.

⁴ Ibid, 86.

⁵ See Gordon T. Smith's book, *Listening to God in times of Choice* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), page 22.

was also fixed on that point far ahead. All very dramatic! But it strikes us that the picture got it pretty right. We need to take hold of the wheel of life ... we are active participants in the course we follow ... but God is right beside us, providing encouragement and strength for the voyage, and helping us keep our eyes on the goal.

Clearly, God *does* want to provide direction in our life choices. However, it's a growing partnership, where we have freedom to make the calls as we understand more and more of his heart for us. God treats us with astonishing respect. We are not just pawns in some great cosmic game of chess. We are junior partners with the Master of the Universe.

For when it comes to our decision-making, God too has a purpose. And that purpose is not just utilitarian, getting us to find the right answers. God certainly desires that we make good choices, but he has a much bigger scheme. He uses these times of choice to grow relationship, trust, character and maturity into our lives.

DECISION-MAKING IS A RELATIONSHIP ISSUE

First and foremost, decision-making for the Christian is a relationship issue. Often the reason we have so many problems discerning God's leading is that we just aren't close enough to him. We cannot clearly sense God's heart if we are not consistently developing an intimate friendship with him. Gordon Smith comments:

*"We can be discerners only if we are pray-ers. We discern the voice of God within the context of relationship. If that relationship suffers, so will our ability to discern what is best."*⁶

The more we walk with Jesus, the more we understand his intentions for us and the world. We pick up his heartbeat. Our hopes and aspirations become more closely aligned to his.

DECISION-MAKING IS A TRUST ISSUE

When faced with a decision it is worth asking ourselves the question, "What is more important to God – that I get this decision right, or that I honestly attempt with his help to make the best possible choice?" At the end of the day

⁶ Smith, 40.

(we believe), God is more concerned about our heart relationship with him, and with our growth as people, than anything else.

For that reason we suggest that decisions are really an issue of trust. We need to trust God, that he will not trash us when our human inadequacies mean we miss the mark. The Psalm-writer had no doubts on this issue:

*As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion to those who fear him.
He knows how we were made;
He remembers that we are dust.*⁷

God's whole objective is to make us more like himself.

Why do we construct this ugly picture of God as being intent on smacking us into line? God's whole objective is to make us more like himself. We need to trust that his love – just like a human parent's love – will be what guides him in this aim.

Perhaps some of our pre-occupation with decision-making shows that we want to control our future and make things comfortable, safe and predictable. But the reality of life is that what lies ahead is unknown. It's that very uncertainty which forces us to trust God.

For example, have you ever thought what it might be like if you knew the future? Suddenly your decision-making would be a simple matter. You could always get it right. Very comfortable, of course ... but a bit like playing every game of tennis knowing that you would always win. Where would be the satisfaction? Where would be the tingle of excitement? The whole challenge of sport would trickle away. Each game would become predictable ... and boring.

But it's worse than that. If you were always destined to win, why strive any more? Why subject yourself to all the training and discipline? Why strain to outdo all competitors? In short, why go to any trouble to develop your talents and skills? You would have no incentive to make yourself better.

The same applies to our living for God. If we knew what lay ahead each time we faced a decision, why strain to understand the issues? If we were always bound to get it right, what growth would we achieve?

The reality is that we don't know the future – good or bad – and it's best that we don't. James comments that planning for certainty about tomorrow is nothing less than presumptuous.⁸ Jesus also promotes a trust approach in his Sermon on the Mount, where he says:

⁷ Psalm 103: 13-14 (NRSV).

⁸ See James 4: 13-17.

*“Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now; and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time arrives.”*⁹

As Gerald Sittser puts it: *“The will of God concerns the present more than the future.”*

So perhaps our longing to know the right solution in advance is misleading us. Much better to step out in faith with God, knowing that he will be with us whatever the results of our choice.

DECISION-MAKING IS A CHARACTER ISSUE

In thinking about where we fit in God’s purposes it’s easy for us to focus on what we are called to do. But God is also concerned about who we are called to be. And this is a question of character and integrity. The people of God are called to be like God as well as to join in his work. God uses the process of decision-making to grow character in our lives.

One of the difficult things about character is that mostly it is forged in the midst of challenge and struggle. Moral integrity grows as our character is tested. And this is a process that takes time. 2 Peter 1:5-9 says:

*“Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, kindness; and to kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if any of you do not have them, you are short-sighted and blind.”*¹⁰

People who seek to express God’s character, will also find it easier to experience God’s leadership in their lives. God’s priorities are clear in these words from the prophet Micah:

*“He has showed you, O people, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*¹¹

Micah has no doubts about our priority. It’s our relationship with God – and our desire to become like him in thought and action.

⁹ Matthew 6:24 (The Message)

¹⁰ NIV

¹¹ Micah 6:8 (NIV)

You may be a little fuzzy at times about which gifts you’ve been given. You may be uncertain about which roles you’re best fitted for. (The following chapters will help you deal with these issues.) But you don’t ever need to be confused about the character you should strive for. You’re called to become more like Jesus. You’re encouraged to let the fruit of the Spirit grow in your life.

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*¹²

If we get these priorities right, then the small choices we make each day to follow God and to become like him will make it much easier to decide on the bigger issues. As Gerald Sittser notes: *“How we choose to live each day creates a trajectory for everything else. Perhaps that is why the Bible says so little about God’s will for tomorrow and so much about what we should do to fulfil his will today.”*¹³

DECISION-MAKING IS A MATURITY ISSUE

Everyone knows that adolescence is a critical period. Here is where young people begin making decisions that have serious consequences for their lives. Less well-known is that parents too have tough learning to do at this time. For years they have been responsible for the behaviour of their children. Now, during the teenage years, those parents will steadily lose control of their children. Teenagers are moving from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independent maturity.

Two things are important: (1) the teenager must learn to make wise decisions; (2) the parent must learn to hand over responsibility for those decisions. If the teenager fails, maturity will never be reached. If the parent fails, the teenager will be shackled in a childlike dependency.

Those of us who are parents know that the key is progressively allowing our adolescents to make their own choices – even if that means we must sometimes watch them make mistakes. That’s the only way they can grow, learning what works for them, learning the consequences of poor choices, and learning the reward of good choices.

“Letting go of the apron strings”, handing over the “control button”, these are essential to growth. It can be painful to stand back, but even more painful

¹² Galatians 5:22 (NIV)

¹³ Gerald Sittser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), page 20.

if we don't allow the maturing process to take place. Of course, one of the keys is laying the foundations for young people to make judgement calls for themselves, and this starts much earlier than adolescence. Good parents use all of childhood as a preparation for the time when their children will leave and become independent, mature adults.

Consistently the Bible refers to us as God's children. The question is: what stage of development does this image bring to mind for you? Many of us seem unable to disentangle ourselves from the "small child syndrome". Our view of discipleship is of a little baby or toddler who is unable to do anything of real substance for him/herself – or for others. Totally dependent on the father or mother, in every way.

Yet the New Testament consistently calls us to mature. Paul scolds the Corinthians: *"I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it."*¹⁴ The writer of Hebrews shakes his head sadly: *"You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature..."*¹⁵

A constant cry of the New Testament leaders to their people is, "Grow up!"

With this in mind, we need to see the imagery of childhood as a process of growth and change. God does not want us to remain babies. He wants mature disciples, able to make wise choices, in dependent obedience to Him.

Making choices is a wonderful opportunity to grow some of this maturity. So when we puzzle over what God wants us to do, could it be that God is working on a different plan altogether? Rather than deliberately making life difficult for us by veiling the answer, it may be that he is grooming us to take responsibility for our own decisions. He may be willing us to exercise our freedom and choose our own path – confident that whatever we do, we will serve him and he will bring about his purposes in and through us.

Is there risk involved in this growing-up process? For sure.

Will we sometimes make bad calls? Definitely.

Will God love or use us less if we get it wrong occasionally? We firmly believe, no. We are convinced that what God wants from us is not mindless obedience, but mature co-operation.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 3: 1-2 (NIV)

¹⁵ Hebrews 5: 12b-13 (NIV)

CLUES FOR THE FUTURE FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT

A common myth in Christian circles is that the paths we ought to choose are usually the ones we least want, the ones we long to avoid. (You know how it goes: "I dread the thought of being a missionary in China, so I bet that's what God will tell me to do!") As if the less we like it, the more determined God is to make us do it. A sort of punishment for our unwillingness. Or a grim belief that it's only the toughest and most unpleasant tasks that will make us truly submissive to God.

What a grim picture of life with our Father in Heaven! Whatever happened to the loving Father that Jesus constantly talked of?

No question about it – for all of us there are times when we need to take the harder, more difficult road. But we are convinced that God's primary concern is for us to concentrate on and excel at what we do best.

Seldom is the future God has prepared for us completely divorced from our past, and alien to how we are wired. Throughout this book you will be given the opportunity to reflect on the journey you have already travelled. For it's our past (and our present) which will offer the best clues to our future. Although there may be changes ahead for us, it is still essentially the same person we take into the future. And although there may be some things God is inviting us to leave behind, it is the essence of who he has made us to be that we need to understand. With that knowledge we are in the best position to achieve the God-given potential he has placed within us.

Discerning the shape God has made us is critical for seeing where we fit into God's landscape. The Apostle Paul puts it this way:

*"We have been shaped by God, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God has prepared for us."*¹⁶

God has taken great care in shaping us. We are his workmanship. The Greek word used (*poiema*) could as easily be translated "masterpiece" or "work of art". Imagine that. According to Paul, if we want to find out the type of work God has prepared us for, we need look no further than how he has put us together.

If we want to find out the type of work God has prepared us for, we need look no further than how he has put us together.

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:10

We like what Keith Miller and Bruce Larson have written about this: *“All that we’re meant to be! God’s dream for us is so vastly greater than the largest dream we have for ourselves. But what is his dream for us? I believe he has given us clues to what that dream is. And the longings and yearnings buried in each of us often provide those clues. It is like being on a cosmic treasure hunt. Follow one clue and it will lead you to another...and then another...until you find the treasure himself. For to find God and his ultimate will for us, is to find ourselves. This is the discovery for which all of creation stands on tiptoe – to see God’s sons and daughters coming into their own.”*¹⁷

OBSTACLES TO FINDING OUR WAY

Decision-making is a challenging matter for nearly every Christian we know. It’s not made any easier by at least two differences between us and Paul’s first readers.

The world we live in is very different from that of the early Christians. Over half of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves or servants of some description, and had little control over much of their destiny. Most of life’s circumstances were dictated by the decisions of the master of the household.

Yet Paul’s counsel to Christians in slavery is somewhat surprising. He didn’t instruct them to ask God how they might gain freedom. In fact, in one case he recommended to a runaway slave that he return back to his master!

There’s no suggestion that Paul thought slavery an ideal system. However, his point to Christians caught in it was to seek to do God’s will in the midst of their far-from-ideal situation. That is, they were to work diligently for their masters, obeying them, working as if they were serving God.

This should help us to see that *“circumstances themselves do not determine whether we are inside or outside the will of God. We decide that by how we respond to God in our circumstances.”*¹⁸ The key is learning to do God’s will wherever we are.

An important difference between us and Paul’s first readers is that we live in a modern world which prizes individual and democratic liberty. We are blessed with a wonderful gift of freedom and choice – but it brings with it unexpected complications. We simply have too many choices! We are like

small children let loose in a toy shop, told by our parents that we can have any one of the thousands of toys on the shelves ... but only one!

No wonder we often find it so difficult making decisions. We are swamped with options and it can easily leave us unable to make a choice. Add to this our incessant busyness ... and we have a powerful mix capable of overwhelming and immobilising us when decisions need to be made.

Is over-choice any harder to live with than lack of choice? For our immediate purposes the answer doesn’t matter. What is important is that this is the situation many of us find ourselves in. And – says the Bible – *our capacity to do God’s will is not dependent on our circumstances.*

The second difference between us and those first Christians is even more subtle. We moderns suffer from a lack of community. Our lives of faith should be inextricably linked with those of our fellow believers. Paul makes this clear in his description of God’s people as a body with many different parts. The parts are only useful when working in combination with the rest of the body.

But in our intensely individualistic culture it is easy to become disconnected and separated from others – from people whom we need, and who also need us. When we set out to make decisions, the focus of our questions is likely to be, “What’s right for me?” This question is not in itself wrong, but we only too easily forget the balancing questions. Like ... “How do I fit into what the Body is doing?” And ... “What is my role/part?”

Answering all these questions will be greatly assisted by strong relationships with other Christians. In fact, it is our belief that without intentional community we will struggle to find our place. For we need others who know us well and hear our heart. They are able to give us important perspectives on how they see God’s purposes being worked out in our lives.

Not only that, but as we learn to work together we’ll discover new things about our particular contribution. It’s also distinctly possible that where we are called to work as part of a team we’ll discover the exhilaration of realising that the “sum total is much greater than all of the individual parts put together”. Our gifts may only make sense and be maximised for good in the context of community.

Of course, ultimately each of us needs to take responsibility for our own choices but the support and involvement of others can make a big difference.

¹⁷ Keith Miller and Bruce Larson, *The Passionate People* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1979), page 14.

¹⁸ Sittser, 203.

WAYNE'S ENTRY INTO BUSINESS

There are times, even now, when I try to work out how I ended up as a car dealer. It happened so fast and seemed such a radical departure from what I had been doing.

Why was it that I took the initiative to buy a couple of vehicles from the local auction and then sell them on? What caused me to investigate importing direct from Japan ... and to go there a couple of months later (with a guy I hardly knew) and buy 30 vehicles? What gall! After all, I knew so little about cars.

Thinking about it, I recognise two forces at work. One was my own determined initiatives, the other an outside propelling force. The picture that comes most readily to mind is a small yacht being swept along by a strong wind. I felt pushed in a certain direction, but also I was working hard to direct the yacht the same way, though I didn't quite understand where that would lead me. This inadequate picture captures for me something of the dynamic involved – a somewhat mystical collusion between God (the wind), and Wayne (the sailor), jibing and heading in a particular direction to a part of the ocean where I'd never been before and couldn't even imagine.

Did God's power "overwhelm" me into starting a car business? No. Was it just me directing the decision-making? Not at all.

Did God "orchestrate" the opportunity? Maybe, though it seems a rather meaningless question. Ultimately, through a series of mini-decisions, I sensed that this was a good choice and took the plunge. What gave me the confidence to do so? Support and encouragement from a colleague who knew me well, an inward burst of adrenaline, and excitement ... and also the belief that if it proved to be a bad call it would not be the end of the world, but rather a chance for God to work his purposes in my life.

Looking back, the opportunities I found myself drawn/directed to were ones that appeal to me and that fit me well. My family (parents and grandparents) had been in business – though not selling cars. My maternal grandfather, in particular, was an entrepreneur and salesman. That I had similar motivations and abilities had never really entered my head.

But it seems that my venturing brought to the surface what was latent. If I had known myself better, I would have seen a pattern in my earlier experiences which pointed to this being a good fit. My eye for a "good deal", my attention to detail, the enjoyment I gain from relating to people, the pleasure I get from doing something in a way that is different to the norm, arithmetic and administrative skills – all these aspects of who I am fitted me well for the challenge.

The uncertainty and lack of confidence I felt during those early months was sometimes extreme. It was certainly not plain sailing. I was on the edge, moving at a brisk 25 knots in some challenging seas. Frightening and exhilarating, both at the same time. There were moments when I genuinely thought I had made a bad call, and I don't know exactly what gave me the confidence to keep at it, short of a sense that God was there in the adventure with me. In hindsight (a wonderful gift!) I could see the rightness of it all. But that's no help when you're in the midst of the decision-making! Even so, it was a period of real growth for me – in my trust, my character, my taking on responsibility for my own decisions, and in the development of my unique "fit". I'm so grateful the opportunities came and that I was bold enough at the time to grasp them.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- 1 Think back to the last major decision you made in your life.
 - How did you come to your decision?
 - What factors influenced you?
 - In retrospect, how can you see God's part in the decision?
 - What did you learn from the process?
- 2 Are there any important decisions you're confronted with now? Write down a short list of the factors (either derived from this chapter or more generally) that can assist you to make a good decision?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS; IDEAS TO DISCUSS WITH A SMALL GROUP

- 1 Looking back over your life, what has been your greatest difficulty about finding guidance?
- 2 Describe to your friends a time when (especially now that you look back on it) you felt confident you made a good decision. Try to identify some of the reasons you feel happy about it. (Was it just that things turned out well in the end!?)
- 3 If you can, try to share about a poor decision you have made at some time. What happened that made you feel it was a bad choice? How has God used this to "grow you"?

- 4 What is your reaction to the following statement by Gordon Smith? “*We see through a glass darkly (1 Cor 13:12 KJV), which means there will always be an element of uncertainty in our choices. In this life we will not have absolute, ambiguous peace and rational certainty that we have divine guidance... The presence of sin in our lives complicates matters further. What makes discernment so difficult is that we can never really trust ourselves, especially our motives... By not overstating our certainty, by qualifying our statements and not making absolute our sense of divine guidance, we are not negating for a moment the presence and witness of God to our hearts. We are merely affirming our own human limitations and humbly accepting our potential for self-deception.*”
- 5 Parker Palmer writes: “*Let your life speak ... Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you.*” Think about a recent decision you have made. In what ways did your knowledge about how you have been shaped by God contribute to your decision-making?
- 6 As a group, draw up a scheme to help you when you face your next major decision. Identify and list the factors you will try to take account of.

PROBING FURTHER

The following books are all worthwhile and challenging reads:

Gerald Sittser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life* (Zondervan, 2000)

Gordon Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice* (IVP, 1997)

Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Vision House, 1995)

Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God* (Multnomah, 1980)

David Runcorn, *Choice, Desire and the Will of God* (SPCK, 2003)

Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: listening for the voice of vocation* (Jossey-Bass, 2000)

SECTION E

UNIQUELY ‘ME’: A WORKBOOK

CHAPTER 3

DISCOVERING YOUR OWN STORY

Every time a person does something that they experience as enjoyable or satisfying and done well, they reveal a certain pattern of behaviour. That design is unique to the person; no one else has one exactly like it. It is like a fingerprint.

Arthur Miller

This chapter marks the beginning of our workbook. Here is where we turn from principles to practice. We are inviting you to an exciting opportunity – nothing less than examining your own life and how you live it!

We've already quoted Paul's words in Ephesians 2:10. Look at them again, and see what a remarkable insight they give about what God is up to in our lives:

"We have been shaped by God, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God has prepared for us."

God has designed our "shape"! If God has constructed each of us to a unique, individual design, then we need to know as much as we can about that design. It should tell us a lot about the work we are best fitted to do.

So how do you get a clearer picture of what your shape looks like? And how do you see what kind of "good works" this shape points you towards? Or to put it another way, who exactly are you?

If you had lived in an earlier generation you would probably have found it easier to establish your identity. Who am I? I am a blacksmith ... or a shepherd ... or a tailor. Why? Because that's what my father was. Who are you? I am a wife and mother. Why? Because I was born a woman and from my childhood I expected that marrying and raising a family would be the whole focus of my life.

If you'd lived in the past, you would probably have followed in Mum or Dad's footsteps. And if that avenue was closed you would no doubt have accepted your parents' guidance. Wayne's mother, who really wanted to be a dressmaker, was instead found a job in a bank by her parents when she left school. For most people, there was little choice. Fewer opportunities were available. And what there were, were usually decided by the family and tradition that a person belonged to.

Nowadays our society offers us vastly more options, and vastly greater freedom in pursuing them.

Nowadays our society offers us vastly more options, and vastly greater freedom in pursuing them. That, of course, just makes our decisions all the more difficult! The responsibility to find the right vocation can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially for Christians who want to feel that they are doing what God wants them to do.

In this chapter, therefore, we offer you the opportunity to look at yourself, to picture your "shape", to see what you were designed for, and to identify a future (or a new direction) that will enable you to live out the kind of life you want. How's that for a grand aim! Grand it may be, but it's not too much for the person that God wants you to become.

YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY

We are each given a limited number of years on this planet. Many people just drift through those years, doing whatever comes to hand. But is that enough? Are there ways we can be more pro-active, preparing ourselves to make good choices? To what extent does God invite us to influence or choose the course of our life? Can we ask God to help us sort through and understand just what it is that we do best, and therefore what it is that we should concentrate on?

It's our conviction that we can ... and should.

But how do we catch a glimpse of the future? We believe that the best place to look for clues about your future, is actually in your past and the present. Rather than speculating about what might one day be, we think it's best to focus on your personal history (however short or long that has been) and on what you are doing now. Why? Because only then can we really look carefully at hard data that is specific to you.

Only in this way can we be sure, when later we start to use some tools borrowed from other people's schemes and stories, that we started with you. That we took seriously the evidence that comes from your life. The exercises you do throughout this book will depend for their usefulness on insights gained in this chapter.

Our purpose, then, is to help you identify what you do best, what satisfies you, what gives you fulfilment. When you lie down at the end of the day and look back over all its many activities ... which moments are the ones that you recall with the greatest pleasure? When you look back over your life, which are the activities that you value most? What are the tasks you have attempted and jobs accomplished that have given you the richest sense of satisfaction – not only in the finishing, but also in the very doing of them?

But before we rush into this exercise we invite you to stop and reflect for a moment.

Think about your present life situation. Be clear in your own mind that God is with you in what you are doing right now. Where you are at this time in your life is intimately connected with God's purposes for you. This does not mean that you must stay where you are, but it does mean that you must not feel you need to be somewhere else, or be someone else, before you can be part of God's purposes.

Some people battle with the belief that their lives are in the wrong place. If that is a problem you face, our advice is that you begin by giving up fighting who and where you are, and instead embrace the present as God's opportunity to lead you into his future.

The present is where you have to begin. Only after coming to terms with that, will you be truly ready to put effort into understanding what you can learn about yourself from systematically examining your past.

This involves remembering and retelling significant parts of your own story. As you do this your aim is to gain a picture of your shape. To understand how God has wired you, and what journey you have travelled that brings you to where you are now. Seldom is the future God has prepared for us completely divorced from our past. Although there may be changes ahead, it is still essentially the same person we take into the future. And although there may be some things that God is inviting you to leave behind, you need

When you look back over your life, which are the activities that you value most?

to understand the essence of who he has made you to be, in order that more of the God-given potential he has placed within you might be realised.

Both in your creation and through experiences, God has gifted you. He has done this so that you can work with him and fulfil his purposes by giving full expression to the potential for doing good that he has placed within you. In this chapter we want to help you catch a clearer glimpse of what that potential looks like. You will do it by trying to understand how parts of it have begun to be expressed and realised already, sometimes without your even being truly awake to it ... because your central core will seek to express itself in everything you do, even when it feels that the work you are involved in doesn't fit.

The aim, then, of the following exercise is to remember some of the most satisfying accomplishments from different periods in your life – those activities that gave you a buzz because you felt you had made a contribution of real worth, or because you were doing what you really enjoyed doing and were good at.

NOTE 1: Before you set out on the exercise, read through all the instructions so that you gain an overall idea of what to look for.

NOTE 2: Although this exercise requires time and effort, it's worth it. It will lay foundations and will make other exercises in later chapters easier to work through. If you want to know more about this approach, the exercise draws on the insights and work of Ralph Mattson and Arthur Miller, as found in the books, *Finding a Job You Can Love*, *The Truth About You*, and *Why You Can't Be Anything You Want to Be*.¹

YOUR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

STEP I

We want you to choose the seven most satisfying events of your life – times when you achieved something especially pleasing (not just pleasing to others, but specifically pleasing to yourself), when you really enjoyed what you were doing, and when you gained a sense of fulfilment in what you achieved. These should focus on what you helped to make happen and not just be enjoyable events that others organised for you.

¹ These books are listed at the end of the chapter

There are several ways of going about this. Use one or more of the following:

- 1 You can divide your life up into a number of blocks starting from early childhood. Quickly list all the most significant things you enjoyed doing in each period.
- 2 You can think back over the most pleasurable experiences of your work, your play, and your learning. Write down the most memorable.
- 3 You can make a list of the different roles that you have played in your life.

Now look back over what you have listed. Choose the seven most satisfying and enjoyable achievements overall. You may wish to include some that are **long-term** accomplishments, rather than separate events. (For example, becoming proficient in some activity like fishing, or mathematics, or a musical instrument, or basketball, or truck driving...) Whatever you choose, the common denominator is that sense of satisfaction, that feeling that this is something you were created to do ... and you do it well.

STEP II

Write a detailed description of each of these seven achievements under the following headings.

- 1 A one-line summary of what you did.
- 2 Details about what you did, clarifying exactly how you personally went about it.
- 3 Go back over what you have just written and underline the verbs you used to describe personal actions that gave you satisfaction. (For example: "I drew up a list of jobs that needed to be done. Then I collected the tools/equipment needed for those jobs. I asked individuals to take responsibility for one task..."). Also underline nouns that describe what you particularly enjoy working with.
- 4 What aspects of this activity gave you most personal satisfaction?

STEP III

Read back through what you have written and try to answer the following questions about themes that keep on recurring: (You don't need to restrict yourself to the words listed here. They only provide examples.)

1. ABILITIES: What abilities were you using to accomplish the results? Note down those abilities you exercised that keep on recurring in the majority of your stories.

Choose some from the list below or come up with your own descriptions.

Writing	Analysing	Persuading	Strategising
Teaching	Designing	Negotiating	Researching
Organising	Evaluating	Co-ordinating	Networking
Counselling	Creating	Building	Advising
Shaping	Problem-Solving	Improvising	Investigating
Planning	Assembling	Implementing	Learning
Motivating	Experimenting	Pioneering	Entertaining
Promoting	Publishing	Performing	Building Relationships
Synthesising	Managing	Operating	Observing
Interviewing	Communicating	Training	Mentoring

Write down the abilities that recur most often

ANNETTE

Five years into my career as an Occupational Therapist I was offered what was to me a dream opportunity. My brief was to come up with some kind of information package for Rest and Residential Homes in the community, helping them to establish stimulating recreation programmes for their elderly residents.

Six months grew into eighteen as I surveyed Rest Homes and interviewed management and staff to discover their needs. Then I researched and assembled the relevant information, packaging it into a handbook for staff. I followed this up by devising and running an introductory course to train staff, and then published that as well.

- I thrived on being given the room to use my own initiative and imagination on how to approach the task.
- I enjoyed being able to consult with people, using active listening, coaching, and teaching skills.
- I enjoyed the research involved.
- I was stimulated by the task of finding ways to communicate and package the information – and then putting it into practice, with the result of seeing people become better equipped.
- I particularly enjoyed being able to choose how much time I spent with people. When I needed a break from people contact (pick the introvert!), I could spend time in research.
- Searching for ways to improve the quality of life for elderly people in Rest Homes was a way to put my values into practice.

Looking back over the whole experience I now see that a number of these elements are recurring themes in my life.

2. SUBJECT MATTER: From working with what objects or subject matter do you receive most satisfaction?

Choose some from the list below, or come up with your own descriptions.

Ideas	Money	Numbers	Concepts
People	Tools	Machines	Colours
Designs	Methods	Business	Schedules
Graphics	Symbols	Animals	Procedures
Policy	Projects	Language	Books
Budgets	Problems		

Write down the subject matter that recurs most often

3. CIRCUMSTANCES: What circumstances do you function in best? What circumstances are most positively motivating for you?

Choose some from the list below, or come up with your own descriptions;

When working on a project

When you are working on your own

When trying to solve a problem

When personal growth occurs

When you are pioneering something new

When clear guidelines are given

When you have freedom to go about things in your own way

When a whole group or organisation is involved together

When a challenge or test is involved

When competition is present

When you are working to a deadline

When you can take as long as you need to

When you believe in the cause

When there is a clear goal

When you can see concrete results

When meeting a need

Write down the motivating circumstances that recur most often:

ALISTAIR

I thought I was going to be a missionary overseas, but it didn't happen like that. While I was still a pastor I helped start a mission group with a special purpose. We aimed to mobilise western Christians to live and work among squatter inhabitants of a number of large Asian cities. As it happened I stayed home myself, but I got involved because I identified closely with the dream, and because I had worked closely with some of the young people who became members of the first two teams to Manila in the Philippines.

I ended up working with this group for about 11 years altogether, the last four full-time. My role involved a lot of time away from home networking with churches and other agencies, offering pastoral support to workers and mentoring candidates in training. I was also helping to clarify the vision and values of the mission through exploring a combination of biblical roots, theological frameworks, community development theory and cross-cultural understanding. It was a very demanding time, but also one of the most satisfying experiences in my life. Some of the elements that made it so satisfying were:

- I enjoy pioneering ventures. I am not a maintenance man.
- I like working as part of a team.
- I love to encourage, equip and support young people to pursue their dreams.
- I like travelling and teaching groups, but even more I enjoy personal mentoring in a continuing relationship on an action/reflection basis.

- I find great satisfaction in both preparing people to undertake a project, and later helping them to evaluate what they have done.
- I enjoy doing research and trying to find words to communicate important insights.
- I yearn for Christians to develop a strong personal faith and social conscience.

As I look back at this and other similar experiences I'm aware that most of these are recurring themes in my life.

4. OPERATING RELATIONSHIPS: How did you relate to others to accomplish these meaningful results?

Choose one or two from the list below, or come up with your own descriptions.

Manager Co-ordinator Team member	Solo effort Motivator	Facilitator Director	Team leader Coach
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Write down the operating relationship that recurs most often:

WAYNE

I'll never forget the day I was asked to organise and plan a four day bus trip, taking 130 teenagers and leaders from Wellington to Auckland. My mind immediately "got into gear". Even while that first meeting was still in progress I was working out how I could make it successful! I was only 20, but I'd already planned and organised a similar event (on a much smaller scale) the year before when I was still a university student in Dunedin. I'd borrowed the idea (and name) from a friend up north, and developed the concept.

Called "Entertainment Plus", the idea was to travel to another city and do as many fun things as possible. It involved me in investigating the possibilities,

and negotiating bus hire, entertainment venues, and accommodation options. Then I had the challenge of scheduling all this (few of the venues could cope with three busloads of people at the same time), doing costings, promotion, etc.

I planned the whole event in detail – down to the last minute. And it worked like clockwork. Everyone had a ball – including me! Looking back, I can see a certain predictability in the way I went about it – predictable because it's a pattern that has repeated itself countless times in my life since. Some of the factors were:

- Rather than create the idea from scratch, I took the seed of an idea from somewhere else and saw the potential, substantially developing it as my own.
- After initial encouragement and help from my supervisor in getting the project's boundaries sorted, I firmly insisted on taking sole ownership of the project. I wanted a hands-off approach from my boss.
- A number of values were very important to me. For example I rose to the self-imposed challenge of doing as many activities for the least amount of money. I also wanted kids to experience as many different new things as possible in the time.
- I visualised what I wanted to see happen, then used my investigative skills, along with extensive pen-and-paper lists, charts and diagrams, to work out the scheduling of the whole exercise.

5. RESULTS: What particular outcomes give you that pleasurable sense of accomplishment?

Choose some from the list below, or come up with your own descriptions:

Overcoming a challenge	Solving a problem	Achieving excellence
Seeing something built	Completing a project	Gaining recognition or influence
Fulfilling expectations	Receiving thanks	Knowing you helped
Learning something	Ending up in charge	Pioneering new ideas
Organising what was a mess		

Write down the results that recur most often:

YOUR FINGERPRINT:

These factors combine together to give us that unique multi-dimensional motivational design Arthur Miller calls our motivational “fingerprint”. Discerning the shape of this “fingerprint” is a very important key to discovering our *SoulPurpose*.

Summarise what you have discovered from 1-5 above:

1. ABILITIES

2. SUBJECT MATTER

3. CIRCUMSTANCES

4. OPERATING WITH PEOPLE

5. RESULTS

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

Here is your opportunity to gain from the encouragement of friends – and perhaps, at times, their wise caution! When you have worked your way through the material of this chapter, meet with your group. Take it in turns to present what you have discovered about yourself. Allow the group to affirm or question the understandings you have come up with, amplifying your own insights by offering their own observations of how you work best.

Allow plenty of time for this. You may need to give more than one session to this sharing, so that all members of the group can profit fully from it.

PROBING FURTHER

Arthur F. Miller and Ralph T. Mattson, *The Truth About You* (Ten Speed Press, 1977,1989)

Arthur F. Miller and Ralph T. Mattson, *Finding a Job You Can Love* (Nelson, 1982)

Arthur F. Miller Jnr with William Hendricks, *Why You Can't Be Anything You Want to Be* (Zondervan, 1999)

APPENDIX: IT MAY NOT BE AS EASY AS WE SUGGEST...!**SOME BARRIERS TO DISCOVERING OUR GIFTEDNESS**

Doing the above autobiographical exercise and making your own analysis will be easier for some than others. Many of us, for a number of reasons, have lost touch with our sense of what we really enjoy. It seems incredible to say that, and yet it can easily happen. Here are some reasons...

We have pursued interests and developed skills according to early influences on us.

Our parents, teachers and other significant people gave us messages that had some degree of bias.

- The mum or dad who wants a child to succeed to the family business... It's all too easy for parents to selectively encourage their child whenever he or she shows any relevant talent or gifting – and at the same time to ignore or neglect those talents/gifts that don't fit the mould, even if they are stronger.
- The mum or dad who wants a “chip off the old block”... In the same way, parents may selectively encourage the interests in their child that match their own, ignoring those that don't.

- Caregivers can easily have biases about what is a good job and what isn't, with no regard for “fit” between a person and a job.
- The mum or dad who missed out. Dad wanted to be a pilot, but never received the encouragement or resources. Now he is encouraging his son to do so, fulfilling his own ambition rather than his son's.

This is not to say that as a parent or teacher you should not provide any kind of encouragement or guidance for your children. You should certainly help them find their talents and interests. But you should also be aware of your own biases. You need to learn to “read” your children. The key positive response to look for is enthusiasm. What is it that your child loves to do?

We have received messages that undermine the value of those things we really enjoy.

- The child wants to do creative “work with their hands”; but Mum and Dad think the real money is to be made in working with figures or computers. So they're steered away from natural interests.
- Or the opposite. Children sometimes positively want to follow in their parent's footsteps, but all Mum and Dad can see are the obstacles that they themselves faced along the way, or their own disillusionment. So they try to discourage their child.

WE HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY STEREOTYPES.

- The woman who has an administration or leadership strength ... but she chooses to ignore this because she has been taught or believes that leadership is a man's job.
- The man who wants to work with children ... but is afraid of being ridiculed for taking on a “nurturing” role.
- “All lawyers are money-grabbers” ... so a young woman steers away from a career she could have made a difference in.

WE HAVE DEVELOPED COMPETENCE IN AREAS THAT DON'T NECESSARILY MATCH OUR OWN DESIRES.

In conscientiously rising to meet a certain need we have developed areas of competence which we become known for. Before too long we find ourselves being type-cast into certain jobs, just because we showed we could do them.

- Like the woman who takes on the job of treasurer for an organisation when she really longs to be involved in training volunteers... She is competent at handling the finances but she really wants to be involved elsewhere. Even when she joins other organisations she finds herself asked to offer her services as treasurer.
- Or the young father who regularly solves technical and computer problems for his friends, but really wants to be outdoors doing something physical.

WHAT OTHERS THINK TAKES ON TOO MUCH IMPORTANCE.

- Some people have been raised to believe we should defer to others for all our major decisions. They surrender the responsibility of their own life to those who they think will know better than they do. While others often have helpful advice and information for us, this should be weighed up against what God has revealed to us about who we really are and what we can do with our lives.
- We can become so caught up in what others want of us that we lose sight of what we enjoy.

WE HAVE BOUGHT INTO THE BELIEF THAT IF IT FEELS GOOD THERE IS NO SACRIFICE ON OUR PART.

- Enjoyment has had a “bad rap” with some Christians. They think that the less they like something, the more they should do it – so they will grow in obedience and submission.

The truth is that any job/role/career will bring challenges and demands that stretch us to new growth. Yet if we enjoy what we do, we would be able to so much more effectively express who we are, and grow spiritually at the same time. Yes, there are times when we need to do tasks which don't particularly match our Fit. Does it make us more spiritual if most of our life seems taken up with these roles? Absolutely not. God has made us for a purpose. A car manufacturer doesn't design a heavy duty 4WD for use on sealed roads – though it will drive perfectly well on them. It's built for the off-road. That's where its unique design will most find expression. So it is with us.

SO IT'S IMPORTANT TO:

- Relish those activities that you really enjoy, that energise you, and that you find fulfilment in.
- Look for clues. As a child what activities did you naturally gravitate towards? What was your favourite play activity, or a play activity that set you apart from most people? Examining your play activities is a good place to start because it usually points to what it was you loved to do and may be a good indication of your own longings. There's another reason for looking at your childhood. Parents didn't always associate your play choices with a likely future career and were more likely to leave you to do what you excelled in.
- Identify the voices that try to influence you, and ask God to help you sift them. Pay attention to what you thought or felt about a particular option, not what others thought. Realise it may take time. Sometimes we have made a lifetime habit of taking on activities, jobs, and even careers for the wrong reasons, some of which are listed above. It can take a while to re-connect to the person God created you to be. Commit your future direction and your searching to God, and trust that He will provide the clues you need to keep moving forward. Remember: “Don't neglect the gift that is in you...”

CHAPTER 4

UNRAVELLING OUR PERSONALITY

If you have anything really valuable to contribute to the world it will come through the expression of your own personality, that single spark of divinity that sets you off and makes you different from every other living creature.

Bruce Barton

We're all sitting in front of the TV. Excitement is mounting. It's an international rugby test match. The scores are tied and we're in the final moments of the game. Our winger receives the ball twenty metres out from the goal line. He swerves past one player, runs right over another and dives over the line just as the opposition fullback tackles him.

It's a try! The game is won. Everyone in the room goes crazy and begins to celebrate. Tony jumps up in the air, punching the air with his fist. Sue screams with delight. Michael just sits there with a huge beaming and relieved smile, nodding his head in approval. Gemma strains her head to see the action replay, while Jeremy and Alan begin to talk excitedly about the lead-up to the try, analysing which players created the space to allow the giant winger to crash over in the corner.

Six people in the room. All ecstatic. Yet each exhibiting such different reactions to their favourite team winning a game. Such is the nature of being human and of the differences between varying personalities and temperaments. Indeed, simple occasions such as watching a rugby match, often highlight just how unique and different each of us are. As the Psalmist proclaims:

Simple occasions such as watching a rugby match, often highlight just how unique and different each of us are.

“Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother’s womb.

*I thank you, High God – you’re breathtaking!
Body and soul, I am marvellously made!”¹*

WHAT IS PERSONALITY AND TEMPERAMENT?

The “inside” uniqueness the Psalmist is writing about has to do with more than just gifts, abilities and motivations. Personality and temperament features are also very much a part of the puzzle that is “me”.

So what is our personality and temperament? They are somewhat slippery terms and difficult to be precise. How hard they are to define is emphasised by the Oxford Concise Dictionary’s rather unsatisfactory answers – personality being “*the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual’s distinctive character*” while temperament is “*a person’s nature with regard to the effect it has on their behaviour*”.

Not only do we struggle to identify exactly what these terms describe, we also find it hard to distinguish between them. Are they essentially the same thing, or are they two related but separate elements of our nature? Some say one, some the other.

For our purposes, it doesn’t matter which theoretical position you support. All of us have a unique personality which is a result of both inherited and learned traits. It deeply shapes the way we perceive and respond to situations and other people.

PERSONALITY TESTING

In the popular press, psychology tests abound. Try doing an internet search and see how confused you can get!

There’s nothing new about analysing personalities. Hippocrates put together some ideas on the subject about 2,400 years ago. He was a Greek doctor and philosopher and after years of observing patients, noticed that although none of them were exactly the same, many of them behaved in similar ways in similar situations. He came up with four personality types and gave them names from four fluids in the body which he thought caused them – Melancholic (gloomy and pessimistic due to too much black bile); choleric (bad-tempered and controlling due to too much yellow bile), phlegmatic

(calm and balanced because of having too much phlegm), sanguine (passionate and cheerful resulting from too much blood!).

Fortunately the body fluids explanation passed away, but the understanding that people could be “typed” according to preferred responses remained.

HOW HELPFUL ARE PERSONALITY TESTS?

Over the years, there has been a proliferation of personality/temperament tests developed, some of which still group certain traits into personality types.

While personality researchers differ to some degree on the number of different personality traits we each have, currently there seems to be some consensus on five broad factors – each composed of a number of aspects.² Personality traits (simply defined) offer insights into areas like a person’s tendency to be extraverted or not; the degree to which they are willing to accommodate others; their tendency to be structured or more flexible in their approach to organisation; their tendency to stick with what has worked in the past versus an openness to new ways of doing things; and, their emotional responses to demands and pressure.

The strength of any personality questionnaire is the self-understanding that develops from considering one’s preferences. All of the insights gained from this and more complex personality information have potential for helping us understand how we might fit within specific occupations, work settings, and teams.

PERSONALITY- HANDLE WITH CARE

The usefulness of personality related exercises depends on how accurately we see ourselves and our behaviour. It’s easy to fall into the trap of selecting certain preferences that are attractive to us because we *don’t* usually respond that way – but wish we did! For example, if you score more as an introvert, and tend to be reserved and less exuberant by nature, you may find yourself choosing to identify with high-energy, outgoing traits that are more associated with extraversion. The result, if you’re not careful, is that you fill out a personality indicator according to the type of person you would like to be, rather than the person you *really are*. For that reason it can be helpful to ask close friends or colleagues for their insights. These may either confirm or balance out your own understanding of your personal style.

¹ Psalm 139: 13-14 (The Message)

² See for example, V.J. Derlega; B.A. Winstead; & W.H. Jones, *Personality: Contemporary theory and research* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1999).

Personality questionnaires are valuable only in as much as we use them to understand ourselves and one another rather than using them to create stereotypes.

It's true that our personalities are relatively stable, but we are also constantly growing and developing. Not many of us fit the nice, clean categories described by the personality type approach. A little knowledge about ourselves can become a dangerous thing.

Not many of us fit the nice, clean categories described by the personality type approach.

The same is just as true in how we see others. While we acknowledge our own uniqueness and recognise that we don't fit precisely into certain patterns, we are sometimes reluctant to extend the same courtesy to others. It's only too easy to put friends and acquaintances in one personality group or another, and then begin to define their behaviour and responses according to that pattern. There is nothing more destructive, and we all need to beware of this.

On the other hand, when it comes to understanding the people around you, knowledge of personality *is* helpful. You'll become aware that the reactions of others and their ways of doing things may be different because of their uniqueness, not because they're trying to make life difficult for you! This can enable you to "give them space" to be who they are. You can learn how to relate and work with them in ways that are consistent with their own style.

WHO IS THE GREATEST?

There is no "best" personality or personality type! This understanding is fundamental to the use of personality tests. Whatever personality type you identify yourself with will have some strengths and some limitations. My inclination to be decisive and assertive might be a God-given attribute, but if I do not learn to temper it with a consideration for others, it can become very destructive in any leadership I might undertake. Likewise, my inherently tolerant, considerate and peacemaking nature is a wonderful attribute for working with others, but it can easily lead to avoiding conflict. It may cause me to compromise when the right and loving response may well demand that I speak up and voice concern.

While there is no "best" personality type, in certain cultures (including organisational cultures) one trait may be more valued and socially desirable than another. We need to be aware of this, and be able to accept the traits we

have whether or not they are considered desirable by the world around us. God has made us unique, and each personal style is a wonderful expression of God's creativity.

THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR (MBTI®)

While there are a number of appropriate personality questionnaires or inventories in this area, one widely used among career and human resource professionals is the Myers Brigg Type Indicator®. Because we know of many people who have benefited from using the MBTI and there are many resources readily available using this tool, we offer the following introduction.

Developed by Isabel Briggs Myers and her mother Katharine Cook Briggs, the MBTI® is based on the observations and theories of Carl Jung. There are a number of MBTI questionnaire forms available. They differ in length, according to their purpose.

Those completing the questionnaire are asked to choose between two possible preferences. As a result, they are assigned to one of sixteen different categories or types (these are made up from the letters representing each preference).

The MBTI revolves around four key considerations. They are:

- **HOW WE ARE ENERGISED** – is it primarily by interaction with others and activity (**E**xtraversion) or is it mainly by the inner world of thoughts and reflection (**I**ntroversion)?
- **WHAT WE PAY MOST ATTENTION TO** – do we focus on facts, data and reality (**S**ensing) or do we focus on possibilities and respond to hunches (**iN**tuition)?
- **HOW WE MAKE DECISIONS** – is it primarily through reasoning, analysing and trying to be objective (**T**hinking) or is it mainly by way of the more subjective and personal issues of values and feelings (**F**eeling)?
- **HOW WE APPROACH ORGANISATION** – is it primarily through being organised, decisive and systematic (**J**udging) or is it a more flexible and spontaneous tendency (**P**erceptive)?

THE WORSHIP TEAM –“TYPE” IN ACTION

It's Thursday night and the church worship team has just finished running through the songs for next Sunday's services. Rose is rostered on as worship leader, a role that she enjoys. It is never a problem for her to find words to fill

the gaps between songs, and her enthusiasm tends to lift others. The downside is that some nights she goes away from the practice wishing she hadn't said quite so much, and sometimes she wishes she could be more like her friend Naomi who is on the keyboard. Naomi is an extremely thoughtful person – she plays the keyboard with such sensitivity. As a matter of fact, Rose would love to have talked to her about how she thought the practice went, except that Naomi was the first to leave. Truth is, Naomi is frequently the first to leave most social events. Rose can never understand this. She herself could go on for hours. In fact, why doesn't she suggest they all go somewhere for coffee?

Meanwhile Will, Stu, Sarah and Steve are discussing how things are going at church with the music. Steve has just come back from a worship leaders' workshop that the others couldn't get to, and he is fizzing with ideas of new possibilities for the group. (In fact, he has some suggestions about a couple of new things they could try on Sunday.) He can see that these new possibilities could improve the way worship is done. Stu is immediately cautious. He thinks that Steve is never satisfied, always wanting to go on to something new and untried. Often these things seem little more than gimmicks, and Stu can't see the point in changing a formula that already works well. This means that they can clash a bit – especially as Stu is the worship group's representative on the church leadership team.

Sarah glances impatiently at her watch and makes the comment that it's too late to go altering things.

Will joins in the conversation. He likes the sound of what Steve is saying ... and besides it's never too late to change the plan. In fact, he thinks that sometimes they plan too much and would be better to go with the flow more in their services. Sarah, on the other hand, glances impatiently at her watch and makes the comment that it's too late to go altering things. It's the end of the practice and it's all been decided on. Changing now will just frustrate her and everyone else.

Linda standing nearby picks up on some of the criticism being expressed, and adds her analysis of the music. She is focused on the task – who is doing what, what they could do different, how it could improve. Some of the others become tense as they listen. Will tries to smooth things over. He hates to see team members in conflict. For him it's more important to preserve relationships and not hurt people's feelings. He suggests that they shelve this for a while. Stu agrees, but knows the new conflict will remain an issue until they make time to discuss it further. He schedules a meeting for this purpose.

EXTRAVERSION / INTROVERSION

Having a preference for introversion (like Naomi) doesn't mean that you don't like people or are not sociable, but rather that you gain much of your energy from your "inner world". Consequently, those who identify with this grouping find they require less contact with people than those with a preference for extraversion, before they reach a comfortable level of stimulation. Once beyond that, it is easy for them to feel overwhelmed, so they are more protective of how they spend their time and need "time-out" to restore their energy.

People with a tendency for extraversion (like Rose) thrive on contact with people. They are energised by their "outer" world. They enjoy being in the midst of social interaction and having lots to do. They are uncomfortable with long periods of time spent alone.

Many people while identifying with one or other of these preferences (introversion or extraversion), also show behaviours associated with the other at times.

The following summary box may help to describe more what these preferences look like:

EXTRAVERSION	INTROVERSION
Energised by being with people	Energised by having time to themselves
Tend to initiate interaction with others	Tend to let others initiate interaction
Say what they are thinking as they are thinking it	Think through what they want to say first
Have a lot of friends and acquaintances	Prefer a smaller group of close friends

² Our understanding of these four dimensions has been drawn from a number of resources, some of which are listed in the Probing Further section at the end of this chapter. Among those we can recommend you follow-up are: Jane A. G. Kise, David Stark, and Sandra Krebs Hirsch (1996) *LifeKeys*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House; Renee Baron, (1998) *What type am I? Discover who you really are*. New York: Penguin; Sandra Krebs Hirsch and Jane A. G. Kise (1996) *Work it Out: Clues for solving people problems at work*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.

EXTRAVERSION

INTROVERSION

Become edgy if spending a lot of time alone	Can be drained by a lot of time with others
Are happy to be the centre of attention	Tend to avoid being the centre of attention
More likely to speak, less likely to listen	Listen well, but reserved about own information
Like action	Prefer to think and reflect about things
Are stimulated by interruptions	Find interruptions disruptive
Enjoying having lots on their plate rather than little	Prefer to have one thing happening at a time

ALISTAIR:

One occasion when I was working with a leadership team, I remember gaining an unexpected and valuable insight from my understanding of personality type. At the time I was constantly feeling misunderstood by a woman on the team, even though she was a close friend. It all fell into place one day when I heard someone explain: “Extraverts talk in order to think, while introverts think in order to talk.”

Suddenly it dawned on me that this woman, who was an introvert, was taking everything I said quite seriously, even when I (an extravert) was just brainstorming ideas off the top of my head. More than that, she was getting upset that I was so indecisive and kept on changing my mind. I had to explain that I was just thinking out loud and needed help to clarify my thoughts. At the same time I began to see that when she spoke she had thought carefully about what she was saying, and needed to be taken more seriously than I had realised.

SENSING/INTUITION

The sensing-intuition dichotomy reveals the types of information that we pay most attention to. This can lead to quite big differences in our day-to-day lives. People who have a preference for the sensing function (S) are very aware of sensory information – things they see and hear. They notice detail, and are good at both measuring and documenting what is around them. They are

“hands-on” in their approach to things. Based on their experience they have developed an orderly approach to whatever they are doing, and they value the systems they have come up with. Just like Stu they have an appreciation for the accepted ways of doing things. Sometimes they need help to see “the big picture”.

In contrast, people with a preference for intuition (N) like abstract and theoretical information. They prefer to find out if there is a novel way of approaching a task and (like Steven) are not afraid to break with convention. They spend a lot of time thinking about the future and are “big picture” people. As a result they are sometimes vulnerable because of their low tolerance for details.

SENSING	OR	INTUITION
Very practical with good common sense		Inspirational, insightful, and innovative
Focus on accuracy		Focus on creativity
Tend to think in terms of the present rather than future		Prefer to think of the future
Very methodical when presenting information		Present data in an innovative way
Base own practice on past experience		Base own practice on inspiration
Identify details but may miss the “big picture”		Identify the big picture but may miss details
Enjoy “hands-on” activities		Enjoy thinking about ideas and possibilities
Prefer applied information		Prefer theoretical information
Have a realistic approach		Have an idealistic approach
Literal in expressing and receiving communication		Figurative in speech, using lots of metaphors

ANNETTE:

I remember how much I loved writing essays in high school English classes, especially when having to identify ideas and themes in literature. This continues today in my preference for dealing with theoretical information, which is an aspect of a preference for intuition.

I have learned to enjoy the strengths of the intuitive style but also recognise some its limitations, and try to compensate for those. For example, some of those close to me with a preference for sensing, help me evaluate the practicality of some of my ideas and dreams without pouring cold water on them. That's something I greatly appreciate.

THINKING/ FEELING

The thinking (T) and feeling (F) dimension is about what people consider most when it comes to making decisions. Will has a preference for feeling – basing decisions on values, a willingness to provide warmth and nurture, and a focus on relationships. Sometimes this approach makes the person with a

While thinking seems to best fit a male stereotype and feeling the female stereotype, it is not gender based.

preference for feeling seem “easily influenced” because of their reluctance to upset others, and they may tend to try and avoid conflict – even when it may be quite constructive.

The person with a thinking preference, like Linda, values fairness over harmony. Thinkers can be outspoken and can be seen as coolly analytical rather than accepting by others. They are logical and objective in their approach to decision-making – a style which

can be infuriating to their feeling friends, who tend to be more subjective in their approach. While thinking seems to best fit a male stereotype and feeling the female stereotype, it is not gender based. However this misapprehension may explain why men who prefer to base decisions on more subjective means, and women who are more logical and fair in their approach, feel as if they are moving against the current of people's expectation.

Both the thinking and feeling approaches have positive contributions to make to the decision making process.

THINKING	OR	FEELING
The “flaw-finders” of life; can be quite critical		Tend to be the “people-pleasers” of life
May seem insensitive and uncaring at times		May seem easily influenced by others
Take an analytical approach to life present rather than future		Are sympathetic in their approach to life.
Justice and fairness are strong values		Empathy and harmony are strong values.
Consider truth more important than tact		Considers tact important
Enjoy developing ideas for data, structures, and things		Enjoys developing ideas for people
Will give praise for results rather than effort		Praises effort as well as results
Impartial; their head rules their heart		Subjective; heart rules the head
Doesn't shy from conflict; may invite it		Takes conflict personally; tries to avoid it
Tend to be task-focused in a group		Tend to be people-focused in groups

ANNETTE:

I have a preference for feeling – but have become quite comfortable with a thinking approach. When I am with strong “feeling” people I find myself taking a more “thinking” approach as if to balance this, and yet when I am with strong “thinking” people I am reminded that that is not my natural preference – though I do appreciate what a thinking approach offers. As I have got older, and especially with my studies, I have developed my “thinking” side more. However many of my ideas are about helping people to grow and learn – and that, I think, is the clue to my original preference.

JUDGING/PERCEIVING

The dimension of judging (J) and perceiving (P) focuses on how people approach organisation and planning. Those with a judging preference are very structured people who thrive on pre-planning and organisation (like Stu), and prefer when things are decided (like Sarah). They enjoy the satisfaction of completing a project, and follow through on their commitments well. Sometimes they can be so structured that they miss opportunities that come “out of the blue”.

People with a preference for perceiving enjoy the challenge of beginning a new project, but can lose interest quickly. The result can be a number of unfinished tasks. They enjoy leaving their options open in order to respond to late-breaking information (a tendency seen in Will). They are flexible, but are sometimes seen as unpredictable.

JUDGING	OR	PERCEIVING
Tend to plan ahead		Prefer not to plan too much in advance
Use a “to-do” list and a diary and/or timetable		If they use lists, they seldom tick off items
Are anxious until a decision is made, then they relax		Anxious after decisions in case other options arise
Prefer to work at something before they play		Try to make their work like play, or combine both
Feel great satisfaction when completing a task		Experience satisfaction as a project commences
Keep to deadlines		Deadlines are seen as negotiable
Prefer to make steady, regular inputs into projects		End up doing a lot of work at the last minute
Like to have a tidy and organised work area		Can tolerate less tidiness and obvious organisation
Can seem inflexible to suggested change		Enjoy spur-of-the-moment, spontaneous events
Structured in their ways of doing things		Are flexible in their approach to doing things

ALISTAIR:

At one stage I was involved in the leadership of a rapidly expanding organisation. It presented me with a big challenge, and I had to learn some new ways of operating. In particular I found myself needing to have a much better organised diary and timetable, and to put more time into training others to perform delegated tasks. The whole assignment was something which I found quite stressful.

When during this period I did the MBTI for a second time, I discovered that my answers suggested that my natural P had turned into a J. On reflection, I realised that the mode I was having to operate in at that time was influencing my answers. What I learned was that although I can operate in a much more organised mode for significant periods of time, if this is unrelieved I get stressed. As a result, if work demands a lot of organisation and administration from me, I also need time to play in a much more spontaneous way to compensate. It’s good for us to learn to grow in ways we are not accustomed to, but not if we completely lose sight of how we have been put together. We can maintain balance by ensuring that different parts of our lives perform different functions.

FINDING YOUR “TYPE”

While the people in the worship team story illustrate clear versions of the preferences, many of us may find that we present a more mixed picture of either – possibly changing according to different situations we are involved in.

However, most people are able to identify an approach they feel most comfortable with in each of the four dimensions.⁴ The combination of their preferences establishes their “type” (identified by each of the four letters of their preferences). For example, a person who prefers Extraversion, intuitive, Thinking and Judgement would be an ENTJ type.

The MBTI identifies sixteen possible combinations. The way the MBTI and other related resources develop these types, gives individuals some useful and quite specific information. While it is not our intention to attempt to unpack the types here, we recommend that you pursue some of the resources noted in the Probing Further section.

Many personality “type” questionnaires can be helpful. Nevertheless they make us quickly aware that none of us fits the mould one hundred percent. We are just too unique for that. The insights we can gain have the potential to help, but is also useful to remember the cautions we have outlined earlier in the chapter.

⁴ Some people get confused because they say “I operate differently at work than at home or in other contexts”. However, for the purposes of identifying type it is best to think about the person you are when you can just be “yourself”.

PERSONALITY AND CAREER FIT

While it's impossible to define exactly which careers fit particular types, understanding your preferences can be helpful in identifying job types, environments, and even team situations that are most likely to align with your strengths and preferences.

For more help see Allen L. Hammer *Introduction to Type and Careers* CPP or Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger, *Do What You Are* (Scribe Books, 2001). These offer help on interpreting your “type” for career-related issues.

PERSONALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

What kinds of approach to spiritual development do different types find most beneficial? A lot of work has been done in this area, exploring the relationship between personality type and the ways we pray and express our spirituality. To investigate further we suggest you look at *Soul Types* by Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A.G. Kise (see Probing Further at the end of this chapter).

A HELPING-HAND

We've already mentioned that there is a lot of personality information available in books and the internet. Personality puzzles, tests and questionnaires that are so readily available tend to be less dependable in the information they offer. Even standardised tests differ in their ability to actually measure what they say they measure, and in the likelihood that the result you get today will be repeated on another occasion. If you are really serious about understanding how personality contributes to your *SoulPurpose* we recommend you seek professional advice.

When it comes to career and vocational issues a good place to start would be a career consultant or human resources professional who is qualified to administer and interpret personality questionnaires.⁵ In this way you are more likely to receive a balanced interpretation of how your personality may influence your preferences and options.

A FINAL WORD

Last, but definitely not least - don't allow the results of any personality questionnaire to dictate your future. It is not the whole truth about you. Use them as *one* source of information about who you are – not as the *only* source.

⁵ For career professionals in New Zealand, contact the Career Practitioners Association of New Zealand (CPANZ) website: www.cpanz.org.nz, or nearest branch of Career Services.

Personality is just one aspect of our uniqueness and needs to be kept in perspective with the other aspects we have identified in this workbook section.

A STRUCTURE FOR USING THIS CHAPTER PERSONALLY

If you have access to some personality information about yourself like the MBTI, think about how your preferences may have influenced your past activities and work. Have another look at the information you came up with in the Autobiography exercise and look for evidence of aspects of your personality at work.

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: GROWTH IN MATURITY

If you're studying this material with others, you may like to get their feedback on the following possibilities.

- 1 How might my personal style affect:
 - The type of work I might be best suited for?
 - The kind of working relationships I might prefer?
- 2 Consider your present work or role. How does it allow you to make the most of your personality type? What opportunities does it offer for you to grow further, and to make a greater contribution?
- 3 Can you identify a particular limitation of your personal style that you could work on?

PROBING FURTHER (For some more MBTI and other “personality type” related resources)

The MBTI[®] is well worth doing through a qualified test user. See the contact address below for more information.

The Keirsey Temperament Sorter is available online. It sorts people into one of four main temperaments – Guardians, Idealists, Artisans and Rational – as well as sixteen personality types.

Websites

<http://keirsey.com>

<http://www.personalitytype.com>

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/>

Contact

For more information regarding the use of the MBTI® contact your local MBTI service provider. (For example, in New Zealand, NZAPT, PO Box 9842 Wellington.) The MBTI® is a registered trademark of Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.

Books

David Keirse and Marilyn Bates, *Please Understand Me* (Prometheus Nemesis Books, 1984)

Sandra Hirsh and Jean Kummerow, *Life Types* (Warner Books, 1989)

Jane Kise, David Stark and Sandra Krebs Hirsh, *Lifekeys* (Bethany House Publishers, 1996)

Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen, *Type Talk* (Tilden Press, 1988)

Allen L. Hammer *Introduction to Type and Careers* (Consulting Psychologists Press)

Paul D. Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger, *Do What You Are* (Scribe Books, 2001)

Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A.G. Kise, *Soul Types* (Hyperion, 1998)

Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A. G. Kise, *Work it Out: Clues for solving people problems at work* (Davies-Black Publishing, 1996)

Renee Baron, *What type am I? Discover who you really are* (Penguin, 1998)

WHAT'S IN MY TOOLBOX? TALENTS, SKILLS AND INTERESTS

To do easily what is difficult for others is the mark of talent.

Henri Frederic Amiel

WAYNE'S MISERY

There are always things to repair around home. A tap leaks, a door jams, a leg falls off a chair, the motor mower breaks down...

Both my father and father-in-law are handymen and can fix most things around the house. So I grew up assuming that all men just naturally became expert at those household fix-it and build-it tasks. It was, I assumed, simply a matter of applying myself to the job at hand.

But somehow it wasn't like that. Not for me! Those day-to-day handyman jobs that are part of family life – it took me a while to realise how good I had become at avoiding them. Eventually guilt would get the better of me and finally I would attempt them – often weeks or months later. They always seemed to take ages, and I invariably found them so difficult that they left me in a bad mood.

Sometimes I would visit a friend and notice a newly built fence or a well restored cabinet. I'd ask him how he managed it. Or I would request some advice on how to repair leaking windows. The answer would often frustrate me intensely – "Oh, that's easy. All you have to do is..." Well it may have been easy for them, but my attempts to do similar feats were nothing short of pathetic. Eventually I figured it out. I was technically inept. The few skills I

Eventually I figured it out. I was technically inept.

did have in the fix-it and build-it arena have been developed through dogged perseverance, certainly not through any natural aptitude. Fixing the rattle in back of the car may be “easy” for some of my friends, but it’s just plain hard work for me. Of course, everything is easy if you have the know-how or skills or abilities. But when you don’t ... they’re all dauntingly difficult.

It’s only natural then that as Arthur Miller notes: *“your agenda will be driven by your design. Furthermore, not only will you focus on what you value most, you’ll avoid things that hold little motivational value for you, or the things you don’t do well.”*¹

That’s me. Now I know why I felt so frustrated. The fact that I kept avoiding fix-it jobs should have told me what I wasn’t gifted or skilled in.

CONSIDERING OUR TOOLBOXES

A key element in each of our fingerprints is the unique mix of talents, skills and gifts that we possess. They’re like a toolbox that we carry with us through life. Some of the tools are ones we seem to have possessed right from the beginning. As we progress through life, those innate skills often get sharper and more versatile. But something else happens too. Along the way other, new tools get added to our box.

The Autobiographical exercise in chapter 3 will have set you thinking about your own toolbox of talents, skills and interests. You will have used a varied mix of capabilities to do whatever tasks you listed there. Now we invite you to create a more extensive inventory. One way to do this would be for you to take a blank page and begin listing what you know to be your abilities. However, starting cold like that is difficult, so we suggest here some exercises that might help you.

But first let’s look at what we mean by the various items in your toolbox. The differences between abilities, talents, gifts, skills, competencies, and aptitudes are quite subtle. These words are often used as synonyms and there is a blurring when it comes to making absolute distinctions between them.

For our purposes we *do* want to suggest some differences, while still recognising that there is overlap. So the arbitrary distinctions we are about to adopt are only for the sake of convenience and clarity. Remember that, in general use, these words are often not sharply defined.

Here, then, is how we will use three terms:

TALENTS – those natural, God-given abilities we have been born with. To be fully used, talents need to be developed and grown, but their existence is already built into our fingerprint.

SKILLS – the know-how and competencies we have gained through the course of our lives, as a result of both formal training experiences and informal learning. Skills are not necessarily intrinsic to our make-up, though the ones we most quickly gain and most effectively use are often closely associated with our natural talents.

INTERESTS – those activities and subjects that grab our attention and excite us. They are the things we become absorbed in and enthusiastic about, and which engage our passion.

Note: in the next chapter we’ll consider more particularly Spirit gifts. For the moment note that the distinction between talents and gifts is very hazy. If we accept that all abilities/talents/gifts are given by God, then there is no sharp line between “natural” giftings and “spiritual” gifts. (More about this in Chapter 6.)

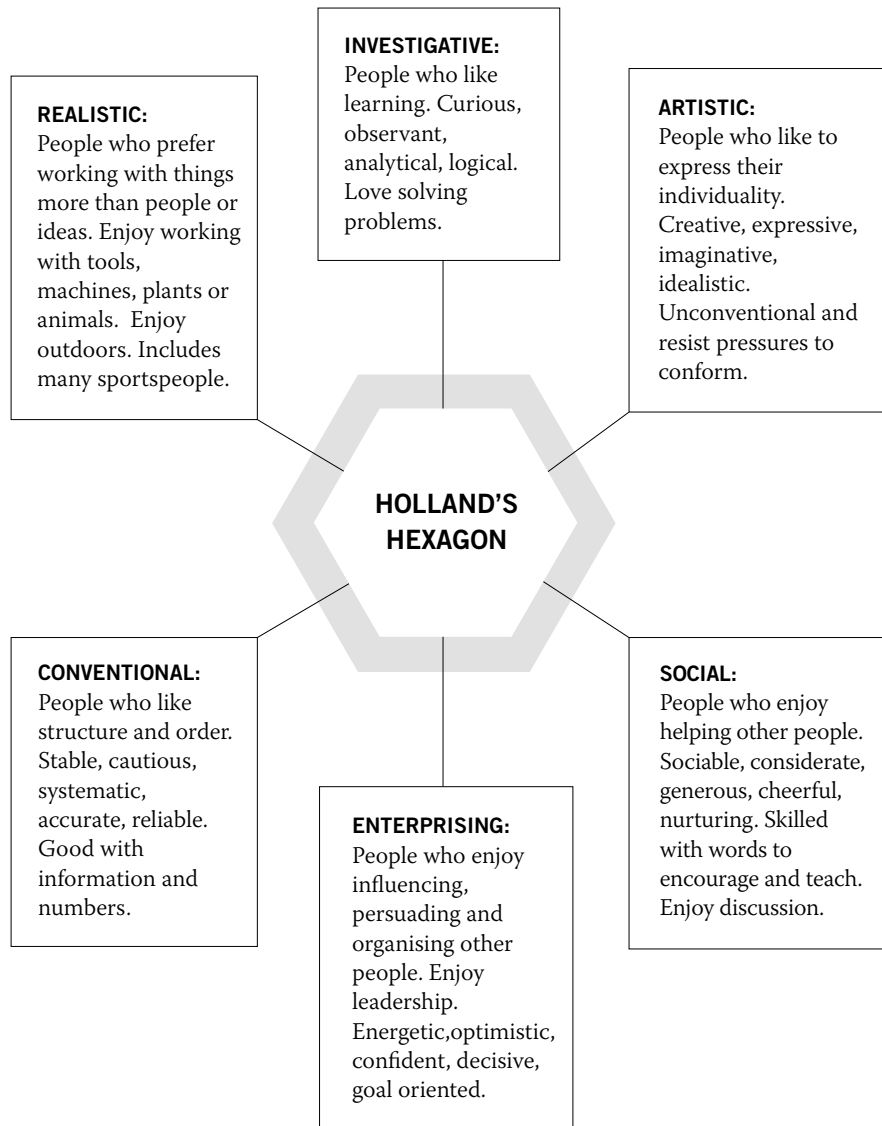
INTERESTS AND TALENTS – HOLLAND’S HEXAGON

One way of exploring the talents that you have been given is through the work of John Holland and his description of six different preferences. Holland’s work is familiar to career counsellors and has been influential for many years (see *Probing Further* at the end of this chapter).

Holland suggests that people who have similar interests also tend to enjoy similar work, similar co-workers and similar working environments. Expanding on this Holland describes six different clusters of interests, portraying them in a hexagon. People with interests adjacent to each other on the hexagon have more in common than those further removed or opposite each other.

¹ Arthur Miller Jr, *Why You Can't Be Anything You Want To Be*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), page 35.

HOLLAND'S HEXAGON LOOKS LIKE THIS:



This diagram has been used in a variety of ways. Richard Bolles invites his readers to imagine it as a party setting and asks them to choose which groups they would enjoy spending the most time with.²

Another way of viewing it is as a church congregation where people are asked to divide up into groups according to their interests and hobbies. Alternatively, it can be viewed as people gathered in the different sections of the local library, where they are chatting about the types of books they've been browsing.

All these approaches invite you to choose the group you would feel most relaxed with and enjoy spending most time with. Which one is it?

Then imagine this group has left. Which of the remaining groups would you be most attracted to? This is your second preference.

Finally, imagine the second group has also left. Repeat the process to choose your third preference.

Note: In considering these categories try not to base it on who you think you *should* be, or who you wish you were, but look for the best description of *who you really are*. Often we have developed Christian or cultural biases towards certain interests and away from others. However, it's important not to let these influence you.

Usually our natural talents and interests are evident from very early on in life. Often other people close to you may see them even more clearly than you do. So also invite feedback from family and friends to confirm the categories you choose. (To learn a lot more about the areas that may fit you best the *Strong Interest Inventory*TM is also a very useful tool.³)

Holland has also developed an elaborate classification of occupations built around these six groups, also taking into account people's second and third preferences.⁴ His work is based on the belief that people will be most satisfied in work environments related to their interests.

It's also critical to differentiate between those people and activities we're attracted to and those that not only interest us but also motivate us to action. For example, many people say they love music, but only some are drawn into seriously making music and loving the practice as well as the performance.

Our interests (in the sense Holland uses them) are about us doing naturally what others struggle to do. It's as though we just can't help ourselves from doing it because it is so much a part of who we are.

¹ See *Probing Further* at the end of this chapter. Useful websites are also noted there.

² This is published by Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA.

³ See his books and the *Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes* listed at the end of this chapter.

- What issues do you feel most strongly about?

- What issues would your friends say you feel most strongly about?

- If you won or inherited a fortune, which causes/issues would you give money to?

- If you were a reporter, what kind of stories would you like to write?

- What are your favourite objects?

- If you knew you couldn't fail what would you most like to do?

- What sorts of information do you find most fascinating?

- Who do you greatly admire?

- When you were ten years old, what did you dream of one day becoming?

SKILLS

As we have already mentioned, skills are related, but somewhat different to talents. We define them as: *the know-how and abilities we have gained through the course of our lives, as a result of both formal training experiences and informal learning. Skills are not necessarily intrinsic to our make-up, though the ones we gain most quickly and use most effectively are often closely associated with our natural talents.*

As Richard Bolles (author of the bestseller *What Color is Your Parachute?*) notes, some important things about our skills are:

- Everyone has skills.
- Most people have far more skills than they have ever realised.
- We acquired most of our skills at an early age through informal life experience, rather than through formal training programmes or classroom teaching.
- Many skills developed and used in one setting, can also be very usefully employed in other settings, although we may not previously have seen how readily transferable they are.
- Many of our skills are not only transferable but also marketable, if we begin to view them from a creative point of view.
- Many people have skills that they severely underestimate the significance of, or that they are not aware they possess.
- Sometimes we need the assistance of others to help us appreciate and understand the skills that we have acquired.

Bolles follows the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, in which skills are broken down into three major groups – skills applying to Data (Information), to People, or to Things.

The skills are then arranged under each heading in a hierarchy – from less complex at the top to most complex at the bottom.

SKILLS WITH THINGS	SKILLS WITH INFORMATION OR DATA	SKILLS WITH PEOPLE
Handling (objects)	Comparing	Taking Instructions
Being Athletic	Copying / Storing and	Serving
Working with the Earth or Nature	Retrieving	Sensing / Feeling
Feeding / Emptying	Computing	Communicating
Minding	Researching	Persuading
Using (tools)	Analysing	Performing / Amusing
Operating (equipment)	Organising	Managing / Supervising
Operating (vehicles)	Evaluating	Negotiating / Deciding
Precision Working	Visualising	Founding / Leading
Setting Up	Improving / adapting	Treating
Repairing	Creating / Synthesizing	Advising / Consulting
	Designing	Counselling
	Planning / Developing	Training
	Expediting	
	Achieving	

EXERCISE

Look at the three lists and note the following:

- (a) What do you most enjoy working with: people, data or things? (Some people might like to include animals. If that's you, feel free to add them as a fourth category, along with some appropriate skills.)
- (b) What levels of skills have you developed? Identify your skills at the highest level you have realistically accomplished, because this is likely to include attainment at the less complex level.
- (c) Ask a couple of people who know you well to sit down with you and talk about which skills they see you demonstrating most competently. Which ones do they see in you that are valued most by others? Which ones do they detect you enjoy most?

(d) Now look at the more comprehensive list of skills listed below and consider: Which words describe skills that you believe you have already developed?

- 1 **TICK** the skills that you have already developed.
- 2 **UNDERLINE** any skills that you think you would like to develop more in the future.
- 3 **CIRCLE** your top ten skills (those you think you have developed best).

Note: skills may be marked in more than one category. Also these are in no way exhaustive lists, so feel free to add your own additions as you think of them.

USING ANALYSIS, LOGIC, OR RESEARCH SKILLS	USING COMMUNICATION SKILLS
Researching	Writing Creative Speeches Journalism Minutes Reports Technical Other_____
Analysing	Reading
Comparing	Translating
Organising	Speaking
Categorising	Editing
Problem-solving	Copying
Prioritising	Proofreading
Systematising	Instructing
Testing	Listening
Diagnosing	Reflecting
Reviewing	Mediating
Evaluating	Negotiating
Compiling	Presenting (with audio-visuals)
Designing Surveys	Discerning
Keeping Records	Other_____
Statistics	
Classifying	
Other_____	

USING LEADERSHIP SKILLS	USING MANAGEMENT/ ADMINISTRATION SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising Leading Making decisions Taking risks Performing before a group Selling Promoting Initiating Other _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-ordinating Problem identification Goal setting Policy development Organising Reporting Scheduling Delegating Controlling Budgeting Monitoring Supervising Communicating Forecasting Teaching/Training Other _____
USING PHYSICAL AND MANUAL SKILLS	USING ORIGINALITY AND CREATIVITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assembling Building Repairing Installing Drafting Precision working Machining Constructing Operating tools or machinery Operating equipment or vehicles Muscular co-ordination Athletic activity Outdoor pursuits Typing Data Processing Gardening Other _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagining Inventing Creating Designing Improvising Experimenting Adapting/Improving Visualising Developing Other _____

USING PEOPLE HELPING SKILLS	USING FINANCIAL AND NUMBER SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping someone in need Listening sensitively Drawing people out Offering support Being an advocate Healing/Caring Counselling/Guiding Motivating Coaching Other _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computing Programming Data Processing Budgeting Financial Planning Investing Tax preparation Statistics Record keeping Stock-taking Designing surveys Quantifying Calculating Auditing Other _____
USING ARTISTIC SKILLS	USING SENSORY SKILLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designing Composing Sculpting Displaying Colour consulting Acting Singing Dancing Illustrating Painting Cooking Playing an instrument Conducting Visualising Drawing Other _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observing closely Examining Diagnosing Touch Hearing Taste/Smell Other _____

Take another look through the lists of interests and talents and skills that you have come up with, and then compile your results in the following tables.

INTERESTS

My primary interests include:

Now circle the two that are of greatest interest to you.

TALENTS AND SKILLS

List below your most well-developed skills and talents:

List the skills that you are keen to develop and want to use more:

How do your existing interests and skills correspond with the talents and skills that you enjoy using most and want to continue developing in the future?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

Do the personal analysis (above) as preparation for your group session. Then in the group take turns to describe your toolbox of talents, skills and interests. After each member's presentation give the group opportunity to:

- Affirm or otherwise comment on your findings.
- Mention ways or situations in which they have seen you using your abilities.
- Suggest possible further developments you might consider for yourself.

PROBING FURTHER

Richard N. Bolles, *What Color is Your Parachute?* (Ten Speed Press, 2004)

Richard N. Bolles, *The Three Boxes of Life and How To Get Out of Them* (Ten Speed Press, 2003)

John L. Holland, *Self-Directed Search* (Psychological Assessment Resources - package edition, 1994)

Gary Gottfredson and John L. Holland, *Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes* (Psychological Assessment Resources – 3rd edition, 1996)

John L. Holland, *Making Vocational Choices: a theory of vocational personalities and work environments* (Psychological Assessment Resources – 3rd edition, 1997)

For more information on careers, based on Holland's material, see on the internet at http://www.cdm.uwaterloo.ca/Career_Clusters.asp

Or alternatively through the Massachusetts Institute of Technology website: <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/workshops/finding/Objective.html>

CHAPTER 6

UNWRAPPING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's Spirit...Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful.
St. Paul 1 Corinthians 12, The Message

Imagine the following conversation:

Barry "Have you found your spiritual gift yet, Jane?"

Jane "I didn't know I was looking for it?"

Barry "Ha, ha! Very funny! What I meant was, have you worked out what particular gift the Holy Spirit has given you?"

Jane "Don't know. Maybe it's the gift of humour?"

Barry "Sorry. That one's not in any of the lists. It's not a *spiritual* gift."

Jane "What do you mean by *spiritual*?"

Barry "Well, in the New Testament Paul lists a number of gifts which he says are *spiritual* – specifically given to believers. Things like prophecy, speaking in tongues, pastoring, evangelism and faith. There's 19 of them altogether."

Jane "Why 19? Surely if they're *spiritual*, there should be 7, or 77 – or maybe even 777?"

Barry "I don't know. Anyway, you're bound to have one of them. All of us are given one by the Holy Spirit when we become Christians."

Jane "You mean you only get one? That's a bit raw."

Barry “Maybe, but at least everyone gets included. After all, we’re all part of the body. Even someone with the gift of helps feels like they have something to contribute.”

Jane “So what’s your gift, Barry?”

Barry “Just quietly, and in all humility, Jane, it’s – ah – prophecy.”

Jane “Oooh! Bit spooky, eh?”

Barry “I take it very seriously, Jane. Being a mouthpiece of the Lord and all that. Anyway, do you have any idea what yours might be?”

Jane “Maybe it’s teaching?”

Barry “How do you figure that?”

Jane “Well, it’s what I do during the week, isn’t it. I was born to teach. I just love getting alongside those six-and-seven-year-olds in my class.”

Barry “No-ooo – you don’t get it. Just because you have a natural talent for teaching, doesn’t mean to say you have a spiritual gift of teaching. There’s simply no link between the two. Anyway, you didn’t become a Christian until you were 25, did you? By that time you were already teaching. So the Holy Spirit can’t have given you it.”

Jane “Doesn’t make much sense to me.”

Barry “Well, it is a bit mysterious. But hey – who are we to argue? Anyway, it’s critical you find out what your gift is.”

Jane “Why’s that, Barry?”

Barry “Otherwise you’ll find it hard to mature as a Christian, Jane. And besides, if you don’t know, it’ll really limit your effectiveness.”

Jane “So what do you suggest, Barry?”

Barry “I was hoping you’d ask that. Mind you, it took you a while! No, just joking. But I do have the very thing for you. It’s an eighteen-week course called, How to Find your Spiritual Gift. I think you’ll find it most helpful, Jane. What do you think?”

Jane “Maybe. But I still want to know why humour isn’t on the lists.”

A FOG OF MISINFORMATION

If there’s one area of theology which has in recent years produced a huge industry of wrong ideas and misinformation, it’s the business of spiritual gifts. While some of the books, sermons and seminars have been helpful, many have been decidedly inadequate – and in some cases downright destructive.

Since the early days of the charismatic movement, enormous attention has been given in a number of Christian circles to discovering one’s “spiritual gift”. Gordon Fee (Pentecostal New Testament scholar) and Paul Stevens note at least ten prevailing misunderstandings regarding spiritual gifts. So much confusion makes it difficult for us to come to the biblical data without imposing “a grid of expectation formed by popular Christian teaching”.

The misunderstandings which Fee and Stevens identify are:

- That spiritual gifts are given at the time of conversion and do not change during one’s lifetime;
- That Christian maturation is hampered if we do not know what our gift is;
- That our gift defines our identity (“I am a teacher”);
- That gifts are primarily linked to roles and offices in the church;
- That the more extraordinary gifts are indications of advanced spiritual life;
- That gifts have little to do with our natural capabilities (sometimes called talents);
- That gifts concern the spirit of a person (generally people talk of “spiritual gifts” but not of “Spirit gifts”);
- That gifts define the character of the personal ministry of each Christian;
- That emphasis on spiritual gifts may threaten the unity of the church;
- That the lists of gifts in the New Testament are definitive and exhaustive.¹

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT – NOT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

A good starting point in considering the biblical data is to get our vocabulary as accurate as we can. The term “spiritual gifts” tends to suggest to us that

¹ Gordon D. Fee and R. Paul Stevens “Spiritual Gifts” in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity* (IVP: Downers Grove, 1997), pages 943-949. Edited by Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens.

these particular gifts or abilities are “spiritual” in nature – or superior to “natural gifts”. This simply tends to reinforce the false secular/spiritual dualism that divides our lives into two compartments: in one, the spiritual areas that we imagine God to be interested in ... and in the other, the mundane practicalities of our daily round.

The truth is that we call them “spiritual” gifts because they have been given by the Holy Spirit.

The truth is that we call them “spiritual” gifts because they have been given by the Holy Spirit. It seems much more helpful, then, to refer to them as either “gifts of the Spirit” or “Spirit gifts”.²

NO DEFINED LIST OF SPIRIT GIFTS

A second issue applies to the lists of gifts that Paul gives in his letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians and Romans.³

We need to recognize that in no way are these lists intended to be definitive. These chapters provide only small samples of gifts to illustrate what is being talked about. All of Paul’s letters are “ad hoc” in nature – written to specific groups of believers and attempting to deal with specific issues. For example, as Fee and Stevens note regarding 1 Corinthians, “*they (the gifts) appear in ways that make systematizing nearly impossible. Paul’s concern is not with instruction about spiritual gifts as such – their number and kinds; rather he offers a considerable and diverse list so that they (the Corinthians) will stop being singular in their own emphasis (that is, on tongues).*”⁴ Diversity within the body is Paul’s central point here. Nowhere in his letters is he attempting to detail an exhaustive list of the Spirit’s gifts.

GIFTS ARE A WORK OF GRACE

Paul clearly considers the manifestations of the Spirit among the people of God as a work of grace through and through. This is not something we can engineer, as 1 Cor. 12:11 points out: “It is the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us.”⁵ They are literally undeserved “graces” that speak about the goodness of the giver, not about any merit of our own.

² Significantly, in our churches we have not been totally consistent with the term “spiritual gifts”. If we were to apply the same form to the “fruit of the Spirit”, then we would call them “spiritual fruit”. In both cases (gifts and fruit) “spiritual” needs to refer to the source – the Holy Spirit. Making this clear would ensure that the words do not convey a sense of superiority.

³ Romans 12: 6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4: 11-13.

⁴ Fee and Stevens, 944.

⁵ CEV.

Neither is there any sense in which we can refer to “my gift” in an ownership kind of way. We are trustees of the Spirit’s gifts and need to use them wisely, just as we are called to steward all other resources entrusted to us (see chapter 13). In fact, it’s presumptuous to even think that because we exercise a particular gift today we will also be given it to use in the future. Some are not given permanently, but for particular situations.

DO I NEED TO KNOW WHAT MY GIFT IS?

All disciples are endowed with gifts for service. But do we need to know what our gifts are in order to serve God effectively? Not necessarily. In fact, far too much time and energy can be consumed in “the search”. Far better to concentrate on looking for opportunities to serve. As we become involved in service, our particular contribution to the Body of Christ will eventually become apparent.

So is there value in questionnaires on spiritual gifts? Some of these surveys (like the one we use at the end of this chapter) may prove helpful to many people. However, they should never be regarded as categorical in any way. They merely provide an indication of where our Spirit gifts might lie.

These questionnaires almost entirely lean on the gifts listed by Paul, and are therefore a very restrictive list. Worse, they often interpret certain gifts in narrow ways – and may also give the impression that because we have exercised a gift in a particular situation there is a permanence about it.

The main value of a questionnaire is that you may find it a useful starting point. But we urge you to then move beyond it. For example, others will often see more clearly than you can, how the Spirit is gifting you. There is therefore real value in talking with those who know you well, so you can gain perspective and insight on how the Spirit’s work of grace is being expressed through you.

Look also for opportunities to explore and experiment. There are many places to serve and they provide chances to try things. From your use of these opportunities it will soon become clear to you and those you serve with how the Spirit is gifting you.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “GIFTS” AND “MINISTRIES”

Fee and Stevens note that the gifts listed by Paul can be grouped into three broad categories – (1) “Spirit manifestations within the worshipping community” (which are themselves either “miracles”, such as faith, healings and miracles; or “verbal utterances”, such as wisdom, knowledge, discernment,

tongues, interpretation and prophecy); (2) “deeds of service” (like giving, caring/leading, serving and mercy); and (3) “specific ministries”.

The specific ministries listed in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 are apostles, prophets, teachers, pastors and evangelists. Sometimes people refer to them as the “leadership gifts”. These roles are functional – not referring to positions of authority or offices.

So what is the distinction, if any, between gifts and ministries? In the strictest sense of the word, a ministry is any form of service for God. It is a much-abused term which unfortunately has often just reinforced the spiritual/secular split.

Technically, we minister when we employ our talents and gifts to serve God. For example, serving God through running a business may involve using a wide range of talents and gifts such as administration, creativity, technical expertise, mercy and giving. In this sense, when it is managed for the wider purposes of God the business could be considered a ministry – as much as something like pastoring. (As we have noted earlier, in order to avoid this misunderstanding we prefer the term “Christian service”, rather than “ministry”.)

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT AND TALENTS?

Paul Stevens argues that talents are *creational* in nature. In other words, they have been “woven into our DNA” by the creator God, right from when we were first conceived.

In contrast, Spirit gifts are *inspirational* – not natural endowments of ability, but rather supernatural motivations and capabilities brought about by the Spirit’s direct action in us.

This is a helpful distinction. However, there is no neat and tidy division – as Stevens himself acknowledges. The line between the two is sometimes blurred and indistinct. Often, in fact, the Spirit seems to endow talents in such a way that our natural abilities become supernaturally enhanced and enlarged. Over and over again, it is clear that our talents, used in service to God, can be spiritually potent for building God’s kingdom.

The bottom line is always that both Spirit gifts and natural talents are given by God. And they are given in order that we might serve Him, his people, and the world. Rather than being overly introspective, we should look to be good stewards of the unique capabilities he has entrusted to us, honouring him by using and developing all the gifts he has blessed us with.

WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

From what we have said already it should be apparent that there are a variety of ways you may be helped to discover your Spirit gifts. Here are some:

- 1 **Explore:** Explore some of the possibilities by looking at a sample of the great variety of gifts the Bible mentions.
- 2 **Experiment:** Look for, and accept opportunities to engage in activities that stretch you in ways you haven’t been tested before. Give things a go and see what you enjoy and find satisfaction in.
- 3 **Evaluate:** Analyse how you feel about what you have attempted. Evaluate your effectiveness. Do you sense that you might be gifted in this area?
- 4 **Ask:** Ask others to give you feedback about what they think you do well and where you are gifted.
- 5 **Examine:** Examine your feelings about different activities. Sometimes others see us doing well what we know doesn’t come easily and isn’t particularly enjoyable. The things we are most gifted in usually give us a good deal of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment and they flow from us more easily than other endeavours. In fact they often feel so natural to us that we don’t recognise them as special gifts at all.
- 6 **Expect:** Expect some form of confirmation about what your gifts are. This will come from others; from the sense of satisfaction and enjoyment you gain yourself; and through seeing tasks effectively further God’s purposes.

In listing these suggestions we are not wanting to encourage excessive introspection. God gives us gifts to help us get on with the job. Gifts have to be given away. They are given to help us serve God, God’s people and the world. While there is some value in studying various gifts (and the following exercise will help you do this) the best way to discover our gifts is by serving and seeing what has the stamp of God on it.

EXERCISE

The following list suggests definitions and gives Bible references for some of the spiritual gifts listed in the Bible.

We have included the list with some hesitation because, as we have already made plain, we consider the biblical lists of gifts to be representative rather than exhaustive. Furthermore, even Christians cannot agree on how many spiritual gifts are listed in the Bible. So this list might suggest a number of possibilities for you to consider, but please do not despair if you don't find yourself described here. Using this list is only a beginning. It is designed to inspire you to consider options rather than box yourself in.

Try to identify gifts you have demonstrated or find yourself particularly attracted to. Then spend some time studying the biblical references to see in what ways they help explain the gifts that God has given you.

We have also recommended that you ask some people who know you well what gifts they see you possessing. If you are using this book with a group, a section is added below for this purpose.

1 Administration: The ability to devise and execute effective plans through delegating specific tasks to other people according to their gifts and talents.

Scriptures: Proverbs 23:3-4; Luke 14:28-30; Acts 6:1-7; 27:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Titus 1:5.

2 Apostle: The ability to exercise helpful leadership among a number of churches to establish new churches and strengthen existing churches.

There is some debate about the extent which apostolic ministry continues beyond the first century and the extent to which denominational leaders exercise this role today. Different church traditions define this in different ways.

In addition to the Twelve and Paul, the Bible refers to many other apostles: James (Gal. 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7), and others (1 Corinthians 15:5, 7; 2 Corinthians 8:23; 11:13). (There is some uncertainty about whether the Junias Paul mentions is a man or a woman.)

Some writers who compile spiritual gift inventories combine the gift of apostle with the gift of missionary. The Greek word (which means "sent one") is the same. Others separate these two gifts with the distinction that the missionary gift is focused on cross-cultural work, while the apostle gift is focused on overseeing the growth and multiplication of churches in a given area, regardless of culture.

3 Arts: The ability to communicate truth and celebrate beauty through music and a variety of art forms and expressions of worship.

Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 34:9-13; Acts 16:14; Exodus 31:3-11; Psalm 45:1

4 Celibacy: The ability to remain single in order to pursue ministry unencumbered.

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 7:3-7 and 32-34

5 Crafts: The ability to use hands and tools to create and shape things of unusual beauty or worth.

Scriptures: 2 Chronicles 34:9-13; Acts 16:14; Acts 18:3; Exodus 30:22-25

6 Discerning of Spirits: The ability to discern with assurance whether certain behaviour purported to be of God is inspired by God, and if not, what spirit is operating. Also to discern peoples' true motives and whether it is truth or error that is being communicated.

Scriptures: Matthew 16:21-23; Acts 5:1-11; 16:16-18; 17:11; 1 Corinthians 12:10; Hebrews 5:14; 1 John 4:1-6.

7 Evangelism: The ability to communicate the gospel so that men and women become devoted followers of Jesus.

Scriptures: Acts 8:5,6; 8:26-40; 14:21; 21:8; Ephesians 4:11-14; 2 Timothy 4:5.

8 Exorcism: The ability to facilitate the release of people from demonic oppression and the power of evil spirits in the name of Jesus Christ.

Scriptures: Jesus gave His apostles the authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:14, 15; 6:13), and the gift was used during the earliest days of the church. Matthew 12:22-32; Luke 10:12-20; Acts 8:5-8; 15:16; 16:16-18; Romans 8:38, 39; Ephesians 6:10-12.

9 Exhortation: The ability to offer words of comfort, consolation, encouragement, and counsel to people in such a way that they feel helped and healed.

Scriptures: Acts 14:22; Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 4:12; Hebrews 10:25.

10 Faith: The ability to discern with extraordinary confidence the will and purposes of God.

Scriptures: Acts 11:22-24; 27:21-25; Romans 4:18-21; 1 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 11.

11 Giving: The ability to contribute with unusual generosity and cheerfulness material resources to those involved in God's work.

Scriptures: Matthew 6:2-4; Mark 12:41-44; Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 13:3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 9:2-8; Philippians 4:14-19.

12 Healing: The ability to serve as a human intermediary through whom God cures illness and restores wholeness.

Scripture: Acts 3:1-10; 5:12-16; 9:32-35; 28:7-10; 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28.

13 Helps: The ability to offer practical help that contributes to the growth of God's kingdom.

Scriptures: Mark 15:40,41; Luke 8:2, 3; Acts 9:36; Romans 16:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 12:28.

14 Hospitality: The ability to provide a warm welcome and open home to those in need of food and lodging.

Scriptures: Acts 16:14, 15; Romans 12:9-13; 16:23; Hebrews 13:1, 2; 1 Peter 4:9.

15 Intercession: The ability to pray for people and situations with a regularity, enthusiasm and effectiveness that doesn't come naturally to most Christians.

Scriptures: Luke 22:41-44; Acts 12:12; Colossians 1:9-12; 4:12-13; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2; James 5:14-16.

16 Interpretation of Tongues: The ability to make known in the vernacular the message of someone who has brought a message in tongues.

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12:10-30; 14:13, 26-28.

17 Knowledge: The ability to reveal and explain things, that God wants communicated but which others cannot understand. This knowledge may arise either spontaneously or in the light of research.

Scriptures: Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 12:8; 2 Corinthians 11:6; Colossians 1:10; 2:2, 3.

18 Leadership: The ability to get a group of people voluntarily and harmoniously working together to accomplish God's purposes.

Scriptures: Luke 9:51; Acts 6:1-7; 15:7-11; Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17.

19 Mercy: The ability to express genuine empathy and compassion for people who are suffering, and to cheerfully provide practical help to alleviate that suffering.

Scriptures: Matthew 20:29-34; 25:24-40; Mark 9:41; Luke 10:33-35; Acts 11:28-30; 16:33, 34; Rom 12:8.

20 Miracles: The ability to serve as human intermediaries through whom God acts to change circumstances by supernatural intervention.

Scriptures: Acts 9:36-42; 19:11-20; 20:7-12; Romans 15:18, 19; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 2 Corinthians 12:12.

21 Missionary: The calling and ability to minister cross-culturally. This may involve the exercise of other gifts of the Spirit and may also overlap the exercise of apostolic gifts (see Apostle above).

Scriptures: Acts 8:4; 13:2, 3; 22:21; Romans 10:15; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

22 Prophecy: The ability to receive and communicate a true and timely message from God to His people, with authority and urgency.

Scripture: Luke 7:26; Acts 15:32; 21:9-11; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Ephesians 4:11-14.

23 Service: The ability to anticipate needs and offer practical help cheerfully and with humility.

Scripture: John 12:26; Acts 6:1-7; Romans 12:6, 7; Galatians 6:2, 10; Philippians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:16-18; Titus 3:14.

24 Shepherd (Pastor): The ability to assume a long-term personal responsibility for leadership and the pastoral care of a group of believers.

Scriptures: John 10:1-18; Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3.

25 Teaching: The ability to study, digest and communicate truth in such a way that others will learn and grow. Those with this gift find it easy to

organize large amounts of information in such a way as to make it easy to understand and remember.

Scriptures: Luke 7:26; Acts 15:32; 21:9-11; Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; Ephesians 4:11-14.

26 Tongues: The ability (a) to speak to God in a language that the person speaking has never learned and/or (b) to receive a message from God and communicate it to God's people in a language the person speaking has never learned.

Scriptures: Mark 16:17; Acts 2:1-13; 10:44-46; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28; 14:13-19, 26-28, 39.

27 Voluntary Poverty: The ability to renounce material comfort and luxury and adopt a very simple lifestyle in order to serve God more effectively.

Scriptures: Acts 2:44, 45; 4:34-27; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 8:9.

28 Wisdom: The ability to discern how knowledge may best be applied to make perceptive judgements, solve complicated problems and apply spiritual truth to everyday life.

Scriptures: Acts 6:3, 10; 15:13-20; 20:20, 21; Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-14.

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS; PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

1 Use the list of Spirit gifts given in this chapter, expanding it if necessary, to discuss with the other members of your group some occasion when you have felt you were exercising some gift or gifts. Give each member in the group the opportunity to do this.

AND/OR

2 What do you understand your own personal Spirit gifts to be? Give each member of the group opportunity to be the focus as the group helps him/her identify those gifts.

3 A personal question to each group member, when you have completed your part of question 2: Is what others have shared about your gift/s new information, or does it confirm what you knew?

PROBING FURTHER

Many of the gift definitions used in this chapter have been adapted from:

Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow by C. Peter Wagner (Regal Books, 1997).

...and from material produced by the Lakeview Baptist Church and Andrew P. Kulp, available online with gifts inventories at:

<http://www.lakeviewbaptist.org/gifts.html>.

<http://buildingchurch.net/g2s-d.htm>

Another useful online resource is On Discovering Our Spiritual Gifts, produced by Pastor Rich of the Calvary Baptist Church at:

<http://www.calvaryrose.org>

Links to a variety of other free Gifts Questionnaires and resources can be found by visiting:

<http://www.ministryinmotion.net/>

or by looking up "spiritual gifts questionnaire" on an internet search engine such as www.google.com

CHAPTER 7

CLARIFYING OUR VALUES, PASSIONS & DESIRES

*If you're not living **your** values, whose values **are** you living?*

Michael Henderson

VALUES

Susan, Mike and Dion are preparing a seminar for people in the hospitality industry. They have spent several hours working through the content of the seminar, and all feel pleased with the information they will be presenting. But Susan is uneasy about one point. She's not comfortable with Mike's suggestion that they produce a photocopied, stapled set of notes, in what she considers to be a very bland form. Furthermore, the intention to use no visual aids in the presentation is disturbing her.

So Susan voices her concerns. A discussion develops over what form the notes should take and whether a *Powerpoint* display is worth producing.

While some of this debate relates to what makes communication effective, a significant part of Susan's concern comes from the high value she places on aesthetics. How something looks is very important to her. Visit her house and you quickly recognise that Susan has invested a lot of effort in decorating and shaping her home. It has a distinctive ambience that visitors pick up as soon they enter. Furthermore, when Susan serves up a meal to guests she takes great delight in making the dishes a work of art. They taste great, but part of her personal satisfaction is presenting them in a visually appealing way.

Mike, on the other hand, places a high value on simplicity. He is very utilitarian when it comes to things. As long as they do the job, it doesn't

matter too much what they look like. No surprise then that he drives an old car which needs some serious panel work, and wears clothes that lack fashion sense! Mike's focus is putting his time and money into what he considers the more important aspects of life – relationships, hospitality, generosity, and people matters generally.

Is the high value Susan places on aesthetics right or wrong, good or bad? Neither.

Is this value God-inspired? Absolutely.

Does the fact that God values it mean that all of us should also value it? Yes – and No. We may not have an aesthetic bone in our body – in which case we need feel no compulsion to strive for Susan's flair – but we can certainly learn to appreciate how things look and feel, and thereby begin to value beauty as part of God's touch in his world.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "VALUES"?

The struggle Susan and Mike are experiencing is essentially a tussle between each of their personal values. Both have developed preferences and priorities according to how they see the world around them. To them certain ideals and concepts are of greater importance or value than others. All of us have values. Some things will be given greater weight or importance by one person than by another.

VALUES

- Feel important to you.
- Help define your fundamental character.
- Supply meaning to your work and life.
- Influence the decisions you make.
- Compel you to take a stand.
- Provide an atmosphere in which you are most productive.

(From *Lifekeys* – see Probing Further, below.)

WHERE DO WE GET OUR VALUES?

This brings us to an important question – where do our values come from? Are they part of inherited nature (or “fingerprint”)? Or are they largely formed as a result of the environment we grow up in and the experiences we have?

As with our personality, the answer is both. Some of our values are inherited. They are part of our hard-wiring and relate intimately to our personality, talents and motivations. But the culture, family, and faith environments we are immersed in also play a significant role. In fact, some values are more dominant in particular families, faith communities or cultures.

For example, in Western European culture, being punctual is highly valued. *If the bus is due to depart at seven o'clock, then arriving at five past seven means you are inconveniencing thirty other passengers. They have lost 5 minutes each = 150 minutes wasted.* However, in many other cultures time is viewed much more flexibly. People are ruled less by the clock and more by doing whatever seems most important for sustaining relationships. *We'll hold the bus till half past seven if necessary so that Mereana doesn't miss out on coming with us.*

Our values are regularly adjusting and changing.

In the same way, many of our values are shaped by our belief system or worldview. How we see the world and ourselves dictates what we feel is important.

Like our worldview, our values are regularly adjusting and changing. New experiences and relationships challenge our beliefs and priorities. So do different stages of life – both physical stages and spiritual ones (see Chapter 10). For example, the high value many people place on financial success in their twenties can often, through a combination of all of the above, change to a much lower value in their forties. Others might discover the hollowness of “success” through a failed marriage, causing them to reconsider their worldview and values.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY OUR VALUES?

Values play a crucial role in our *SoulPurpose* and in the quest to discover where we can best serve. They provide us with a clearer sense of who we are, and are part of the grid we develop for evaluating and deciding what we should do and how we might go about it.

But the truth is that many of us are out of touch with our real values. We may think we attach significance to something but often the way we live demonstrates otherwise. For example, our family, peer group or faith may cause us to think that relationships are of enormous importance – but if our lifestyle, work and behaviour don't bear that out, then it will produce discord

and confusion in our lives. This will likely show itself in the form of stress, demotivation and frustration.

Many of us are out of touch with our real values It's therefore critical that we learn to be scrupulously honest with ourselves about what is truly important to us. We must *own* our value system.

Such honesty may also lead us to *change* our priorities. It's okay to say, "I have to be honest and admit that the way I'm living now shows that health and fitness is not a high value for me. But I'd like to change that." To make this meaningful you would need to re-shape your lifestyle – something that you might need help to accomplish.

Ultimately, our values focus our attention and give shape to where we direct our energy, helping to steer the course of our lives. Deciding what really counts enables us to make an evaluation: Where am I putting my energy? How does that equate to my real priorities?

Identifying our values is also a key to finding energy and strength in our lives. Michael Henderson puts it this way: "*The Latin root word for values is valor, meaning strength. It is our values that give meaning in life, and meaning in turn provides us with strength, motivation and willpower. In understanding our values, we equip ourselves with a perennial source of motivation, focus and strength to achieve those things that matter most to us.*"¹

MORAL VALUES OR PERSONAL PREFERENCES?

It can be easy to become confused by the way we have written about values here. Are we talking about absolute moral values or just personal preferences? The answer is both, although the exercises we use in this chapter are geared more to exploring our personal preferences.

When it comes to clarifying what you consider very important, you need to recognise the interplay between your moral concerns and your personal preferences. We encourage you to consider *both* as you decide what really matters to you. And if at times you feel each pulls you in a different direction, then analysing the source of that internal conflict can give rise to some very

important insights.

When you feel pressured to become someone different from the way you naturally are, it may be God trying to remind you of some important values you have neglected. But it can also be something else – often just the result of pressures to conform to others' expectations and values, perhaps ones that God does not want you to embrace.

WORKING OUT OUR VALUES

The process of clarifying what we value is not easy. There are many ideals that each of us believes are important. The first exercise in this chapter begins the process of clarifying what you really do value most. As you read the limited list of values we have identified, you will most likely warm to as many as twenty or thirty.

However, working out which are your primary values requires you to rank them in order of priority. The critical question is not "Do I value this?" but rather "How much do I value this – relative to other values of mine?"

So the process of clarifying our values is really one of establishing those values that are most important to us – the ones we would fight tooth and nail to live by if they were challenged. For it's not until one value is put at risk by another that we discover which is more vital to us.

For example, Ian is experiencing a few difficulties in his relationship with his work colleague John. They mainly revolve around John's loose patterns of company money and materials. To put it bluntly, Ian feels that John is wasting valuable resources unnecessarily. He seems to photocopy vast sheets of paper for little discernable purpose. This goes right against Ian's own values of frugality and environmental concern.

Ian, who is so careful to minimise wastage, is frustrated and annoyed. However, he also values smooth, interpersonal relationships with his workmates. He and John work well together – there's synergy, along with a good measure of humour and trust. In deciding what to do about his growing feelings of annoyance towards John, Ian must weigh up which he values more. Is it "standing against wastage" or is it "warm and trusting work relationships"? Both, after all, are important to him. But deciding which is the more valuable will determine whether he learns to suffer his colleague's wastage, or puts at risk his good working relationship.

The critical question is not "Do I value this?" but rather "How much do I value this – relative to other values of mine?"

¹ Michael Henderson, *Finding True North* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2003), page 17.

The pressure of having to choose which conflicting values to value highest can be a painful experience, but we are confronted with these situations all the time. Dealing with them is what causes us to develop a hierarchy of values.

ORGANISATIONAL FIT

Not only do individuals have values, but so do groups, organisations, and indeed whole cultures. So it is clearly to our advantage (though not essential) if we can find places to serve where our own values are complementary to those of the group we're part of. At the very least, we should seek to make ourselves familiar with the values of the organisation. This may not be as easy

—————
**For all of us
 there is
 generally a gap
 between what
 we say and
 how we act!**
 —————

as it sounds. We should beware of the possible gap between what an organisation says it values and what it really *does* value. For example, a business might confidently announce that it is “family friendly”, but you might need to talk with staff to discover if this is a reality or just a nicely voiced sentiment. (In this sense, organisations are no different from the individuals who make up them. For all of us there is generally a gap

between what we say and how we act!)

The idea of “organisational fit” is becoming increasingly more relevant in the world of business. Many organisations now evaluate people not only in terms of their fit to a task or role, but also on their fit to the organisational culture and values.

A warning. When you examine your work or career, you could well reach the point of wondering whether you are in the wrong job. Sometimes, of course, you may be. However, often you could be in the right *type of work* but in the wrong *workplace* or *organisation*. The disquiet and unease you are experiencing may largely be a result of a clash of values.

If you suspect that you are in the wrong place rather than in the wrong job (i.e. your values are out of alignment with those encouraged by the culture of the organisation), there are a number of options open to you, which we explore briefly in the Appendix to this chapter.

PASSION

Closely linked to our values are our passions. Like all words, passion has its limitations – mainly because it is generally applied to the deep emotions of romance. Passionate lovers are supposed to show high levels of physical

affection. However, the word has a much wider meaning. We use it here in its full sense, referring to the intense enthusiasm (enthusiasm = “with-Godness”) that we may have for an activity or cause. It’s the great joy we experience when we are involved in something we feel we were made for.

Passion is what “gets me going”; what “turns me on”. It’s likely to produce the kind of response Eric Liddell had, in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, when he explained to his sister, “When I run I sense God’s pleasure in my running.” A kind of “I was born for this” feeling.

A good test as to whether some activity is a passion for us is whether or not we become so caught up in it that we lose a sense of time and self while doing it. It both extends and absorbs us. Psychologist Mike Csikszentmihalyi refers to this as the “*state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.*”² We’ve all felt that way at some time in our lives.

When our passion is one with our sense of *who* we are and *what* we are here for (our *SoulPurpose*), it becomes a powerful force for good. This is where passion runs deeper than just the immense pleasure of doing something we love – such as playing football. What we’re talking about is the deep joy that results from engaging in a course of action much greater than ourselves. This is essentially what Frederick Buechner, the novelist, means when he writes about our “deep gladness”.

*There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest ... The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.*³

Rosa Parks exemplifies this type of passion. She is the black American who refused to give up her seat to a white bus passenger and went to jail for her stand, thus becoming a catalyst for the burgeoning civil rights movement. Her early experiences of injustice, along with her conviction that all were equal in the sight of God, grew a passion that even the hardship of prison could not extinguish. Her life demonstrates how often our personal struggles and sufferings can launch us into a wider sphere. Having been brought face to face with an issue in our own lives, we end up acting on behalf of others.

² M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991).

³ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973), page 95.

Perhaps it was Rosa that Robert Kennedy had in mind, when he said:

Each time a man (or woman) stands up for an idea, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, s/he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

*Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or greater intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change.*⁴

The courage Kennedy is referring to is generally only possible because of passion. It's the driving force, the fuel that propels people to work for change.

DESIRES

Our values and passions are closely entwined with our *desires*.

According to the dictionary “desires” are strong feelings of wishing or wanting something. They are the emotion of yearning for – even craving for – things or goals.

This book is about life planning. But can we possibly choose directions on the basis of our desires? Wouldn't that be a selfish way to look for God's guidance? In fact, can our desires be trusted at all?

WHERE DO DESIRES COME FROM?

The Bible has both positive and negative comment on this topic. Clearly there are good desires and bad desires. For example:

Positively:

“Delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”⁵

“Whoever desires to be an overseer, desires a noble task.”⁶

Negatively:

“Do not grant the wicked their desires, O Lord.”⁷

“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”⁸

⁴ Quoted by Deborah Myerson in *Tempered Radicals: How people use difference to inspire change at work* (Boston: Harvard School Press, 2001).

⁵ Psalm 37:4 (NIV)

⁶ 1 Timothy 3:1 (NIV)

⁷ Psalm 140:8 (NIV)

⁸ Ephesians 2:3 (NIV)

These verses indicate that our desires are a mixed bag. Some good, some bad, probably most a mixture of both – depending on their origin and how they are pursued.

CREATION AND THE FALL

We are made in God's image. God has desires and has created us with desires too. So desires are not bad in themselves.

Many desires are common to all people. For example, the desires for significance and meaning, for security, for service, for love (both received and given) ... are all part of the very fabric of our humanity.

Desires are not bad in themselves

But how these desires are worked out in our lives is as different as we are unique. God has placed longings in us to help motivate us to find fulfilment and our *SoulPurpose*.

Like everything else in life, sin has impacted on our desires. Now it is a deeply flawed image of God's character that shapes us. Our desires have been tainted and twisted.

This does not mean they are now all bad or wrong or evil. There is much that still reflects (even if sometimes opaquely) God's crafting of who we are.

DISTINGUISHING THE GOOD AND THE BAD

We all easily understand the danger to our faith of pursuing every desire that crosses our minds. But the other extreme is an excessively self-conscious faith that robs us of enjoying the fulfilment of our heart's desires. How do we find a way between these two errors?

Distinguishing between the helpful and unhelpful forces that tug on our lives is never easy. It requires wisdom to discern which desires really have been planted in us by God ... and how much those longings are being subverted by our sinfulness. We need more wisdom to determine the right timing for pursuing our healthy desires. For example, God has given us sexual longings that look for fulfilment in a satisfying relationship. But this doesn't mean that God is encouraging us to look for sexual satisfaction in every relationship as soon as possible. We are encouraged to exercise discernment and patience.

We may have an ambition to be a public speaker. In itself, this is a healthy desire that God has planted in us so that we can communicate effectively. However, it is also the kind of desire that, distorted by selfish ambition and indulged without restraint, can become excessively dependent on the buzz of

the crowd and the thrill of gaining recognition. It can even lead to manipulating people. What started as a God-given desire can become corrupted.

The faith community we grow up in can also influence how we view some desires. For example, entrepreneurial business skills seem to be admired and prized by some parts of the Christian church – and viewed with suspicion by others. This usually depends on how business and capitalism are understood, rather than the skills themselves. So it is easy to elevate or despise certain desires according to other assumptions. Hence our need of discernment.

SO WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?

Let's put it all together:

- There are desires placed in us by God that point to the work he has prepared us to do.
- There are desires that are stimulated within us because of the things our culture promotes as important and makes us ambitious for.
- There are desires that are aroused by the particular group we identify with.
- There are desires that drive us and may become compulsions, even sometimes addictions, arising from hurt and unhealed parts of our being.

There is a difference between living as driven people and living as led people. Drivenness stems from unhealthy compulsions, and means that someone other than God is in control. But the deepest desires of our hearts have been placed there by God to motivate and guide us further into his purposes. Recognizing these desires is one way God leads us.

We need to discern our own motivation. Some of us need to guard against too negative a view of our desires. Others need to guard against too positive a view. The way we look on our desires tends to depend on which Christian tradition or community we have been raised in and shaped by.

Some of us have been taught to be deeply suspicious – even antagonistic toward our desires. We may have grown up with the belief that if you really enjoy doing something then it is probably not what God would want you to do. “The heart of man is deceitful and wicked above all things!” (Too dismissive of our desires)

Others may have been taught to be overly optimistic and uncritical with our desires. Under the mantra “Do what you enjoy doing”, we may have assumed that just because we desire it, it is good. (Too trusting of our desires)

So the question becomes:

How much of my desire is a reflection of God's image in me, and how much is a result of the Fall and in need of transformation?

If only there was a simple way of answering that question for each situation we find ourselves in! But of course that is what walking with Jesus is all about. The more closely we follow him, the more he transforms our desires, bringing them into alignment with his own. They change and grow as we learn more about what life with Jesus is about, and as we refine more clearly our SoulPurpose in company with him.

IN SUMMARY...

- God created desires in us.
- The Fall has twisted and deformed them.
- Nevertheless, the roots of our desires are healthy and God-formed.
- Some of us need to trust our desires more. Others need to be more discerning.
- The more we walk with Jesus the more he will bring our desires into alignment with his purposes.

The message of Psalm 37:4 is an important part of discovering your *SoulPurpose*: “Delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

CLARIFYING OUR VALUES, PASSIONS AND DESIRES

Together, values, passions and desires are closely related to our SoulPurpose. They are essential pieces of the puzzle that is you. The exercises that follow are a selection of some of the more helpful ways we have found to discover them.

Exercise 1 aims to help clarify what your most important values are.

Exercise 2 asks some questions to assist you in checking how well your stated values are aligned to the way you are currently living.

Exercise 3 considers Schein's "Career Anchors" as a way of clarifying what is of paramount importance to you in your day-by-day work.

Exercise 4 outlines some questions you can ask in order to help identify your passions.

Exercise 5 lists several more questions to reflect on if you want to explore further what your primary values, passions and desires are.

EXERCISE 1 CLARIFYING YOUR VALUES

This exercise can be done in two ways. Option A takes longer, but will give you a broader understanding of yourself. Sometimes we learn a lot from identifying the values that are not priorities for us, as well as the ones that are. Option B will still identify your main values, and is for use if you have less time available.

OPTION A

Take a look at the following list of values. This list is by no means exhaustive, so feel free to add others that you may have identified. Divide the values into the following categories:

- 1 This is very important to me
- 2 This is of some importance to me
- 3 This is of little importance to me
- 4 This is not something I value at all

OPTION B

Take a look at the following list of values. The list is by no means exhaustive, so feel free to add any others that you may have identified. Mark the values that you immediately feel a strong identification with (go on initial gut reaction). Re-read the list you have, and try to refine it until you have 10 or fewer.

Accuracy: Paying attention to ensure correct details.

Achievement: Reaching a goal, completing something.

Activity: Lots going on in your life at a fast pace.

Advancement: Proceeding up a career ladder to seniority.

Adventure: Looking for challenging opportunities; may include an element of risk.

Aesthetics: An appreciation of beauty in natural and human-created surroundings.

Authenticity: Being on the outside what you are on the inside.

Autonomy: The freedom to act as you decide – self-reliance and independence.

Balance: Giving appropriate amounts of attention to each aspect of your life.

Challenge: The desire for demanding projects and tasks that stretch your abilities.

Change: Comfort with ambiguity and unpredictability, less attached to routine.

Competence: Able to meet requirements in an effective and efficient manner.

Competition: Desire to win and match your talents against another.

Conformity: Preferring not to stand out, but to align yourself with others.

Connection: Making deep, lasting relationships with others, and maintaining these.

Co-operation: Working with others in a way that makes and preserves good relationships.

Creativity: Finding novel ways of accomplishing tasks – thinking outside the box.

Duty: The willingness to do what is right regardless of personal cost.

Economic Success: To reach a satisfactory economic position through effective management.

Economic Security: To achieve an economic position for your needs, with low risk.

Education: To learn and/or achieve qualifications for a desired position, influence or status.

Efficiency: Completing a task in an accurate and timely way.

Equality: A conviction that all people have the same rights regardless of gender, race, age, etc.

Faith: To practice and nurture a belief system, and all that this implies in daily life.

Family: Giving time and attention to family relationships and the well-being of your family members.

Flexibility: An openness to new information and ways of doing things.

Friendship: Giving time and attention to friends and caring about their well-being.

Happiness: Finding satisfaction and contentment.

Health: Establishing and maintaining physical and mental well-being.

Independence: Being able to accomplish things in the way you think is best.

Influence: To be able to affect a situation, or have impact on others.

Integrity: To act in a way that is true to your own beliefs, ethics, values.

Justice: The desire to see the right thing done for all – fairness and consistency.

Knowledge/learning: To acquire insight, understanding, and expertise.

Leisure: Pursuit of interests that aid enjoyment and relaxation.

Location: To live in a place that is conducive to your values and lifestyle.

Loyalty: To stick with others (people, organisations, ideas, traditions) through thick and thin.

Order/Organisation: Exercising control over time, methods and possessions in an orderly way.

Personal Development: The desire to reach your full potential.

Physical Fitness: Achieving good physical condition through exercise and sports.

Power: The opportunity to influence, or direct an operation, person, or group of people.

Recognition: To be known for an achievement and receive deserved credit.

Responsibility: To be accountable for a task/person, to be reliable.

Self-Respect: An awareness and appreciation of personal identity.

Service: A desire to help others according to their best interests.

Stability: The consistency over time in people, routine, or actions.

Simplicity: The desire to cut down extra stimulation, possessions and activity to the basics.

Status: Achieving respect and renown for one's position, possessions, or associations with others.

Tolerance: Openness to the viewpoints of others, without judging them.

Tradition: An appreciation for the ways things have always been done – continuity and stability.

Unity: The willingness to come together and co-operate regardless of differences.

Variety: The enjoyment of unpredictability and different tasks, people and routines.

Others:

EXERCISE 2 VALUES ALIGNMENT

Once you have established a list of your most important values, it is important to begin evaluating whether your life is actually reflecting those values. If not, some re-alignment may be necessary. Here are some questions to begin that process:

- 1 Ask someone who knows you well to read through the list and suggest what they see as your top ten values – examine whether this matches your own list in any way.
- 2 You may want to ask people from different aspects of your life to suggest what they think your top ten values are; e.g. family, friends, work or community affiliations. Again, examine how much their list of what they would see as your top ten values matches your own.
- 3 Think about the things you put most effort into – do these reflect your values?
- 4 Think about how you spend your time – does your use of time reflect your values?
- 5 Think about the organisations you are involved in (family, employment, community, etc.). What are the values and priorities in these organisations? How much of a match is there between your values and those of these groups?
- 6 What are the trade-offs you make in your life? Which of these are you prepared to continue to live with. What other alternatives might there be?
- 7 In what ways might you consider working in a way that is more in line with your values?

EXERCISE 3 CAREER ANCHORS

One exercise that we've found helpful is based on Edgar Schein's work on "career anchors". This involves exploring what motivates and directs your work.

This approach is built on the understanding that people work for different reasons and are motivated by different ambitions. Some people need constant excitement and change to enjoy their work while others like routine and peace. Some need to feel that their work is part of creating a better world, while others just enjoy responding to a challenge.

While we will stick with Schein's phrase – career anchors – it can be misleading. The word "career" tends to be used only for paid employment. You may prefer to use the term "work anchors", as more appropriate to your role in life.

The eight main career anchors Schein identifies are:

- Technical/Functional Competence
- General Managerial Competence
- Autonomy/Independence
- Security/Stability
- Entrepreneurial Creativity
- Service/Dedication to a Cause
- Pure Challenge
- Lifestyle

NOTE: Everyone is likely to identify to some degree with all of these categories. But the label "career anchor" suggests that one is likely to recur as a more fundamental overriding description of you at each stage of your life because it is more closely tied to your self-image.

So ... your aim is to discern which of these categories is of paramount importance to you.

Look at the statements under each heading below. Which career anchor best describes you? If it is not immediately obvious, you might like to rate each statement from 1-5 from "never true for me" to "always true for me". Add up the total for each category to see which scores most highly. Then see if it sounds most like you.

1. TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCE

- I love using my special skills at work (these don't have to be technical skills – they can be people or practical skills).
- I want to be recognised as very competent in what I do.
- I like providing expert advice.
- Being valued for my expertise is more important than becoming general manager.
- I would rather leave than change roles away from my area of expertise.

2. GENERAL MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE

- I love managing and supervising other people.
- I enjoy training and directing the work of others.
- I like authority and responsibility and dream of being in charge of a significant organisation.
- I have a good combination of analytical, interpersonal and emotional competence.
- I would rather leave than have be taken away from the general managerial track.

3. AUTONOMY / INDEPENDENCE

- I want to be recognised for my own achievements.
- I like the freedom to do things in my own way and in my own time.
- I get frustrated by other people's rules and procedures.
- Freedom is more important to me than security. I dream of being free to do my own thing.
- I would rather leave than accept a role that limited my freedom.

4. SECURITY / STABILITY

- Security and stability are very important to me.

- I like structures that maintain predictability and calm.
- I like completing tasks properly.
- I don't like taking risks.
- I dream of a stable job that offers financial security.

5. ENTREPRENEURIAL CREATIVITY

- I love the challenge of starting new enterprises.
- I have lots of interests and energy.
- I enjoy having a number of projects on the go at once.
- I get most satisfaction building something from my own ideas and effort.
- I dream about building my own business.

6. SERVICE / DEDICATION TO A CAUSE

- I need to feel that I am making a worthwhile contribution to society.
- I find satisfaction using my talents in the service of others.
- Feeling that I am helping to make the world a better place to live in is the most important thing to me.
- I would rather leave than accept a role that would undermine my ability to serve others.
- I dream of having a career that makes a real difference to humanity.

7. PURE CHALLENGE

- I love work that challenges my problem solving or competitive skills.
- I would rather work on problems that are almost unsolvable than complete an ordinary job or rise to a high position.
- I find satisfaction in confronting and overcoming very difficult challenges.
- My strongest desire is to conquer obstacles.
- I am a very single minded individual when it comes to facing testing circumstances.

8. LIFESTYLE

- I want to enjoy work, but it is only one of many parts of my life.
- I “work to live” rather than “live to work”.
- I am concerned that work fits (in a balanced way) into the rest of my life.
- I want work that minimises interference with personal and family concerns.
- Balancing personal and professional concerns is more important than rising to a high position or being the best.

HOW CAREER ANCHORS APPLY TO SPECIFIC WORK

When it comes to looking at specific work and roles, career anchors apply more to the kinds of roles you are likely to be attracted to and find fulfilment in.

The anchor doesn't involve the content or specific field of your work so much as the context, the framework in which you are most likely to flourish.

This is recognition that individuals value and enjoy different aspects of work. Certain aspects are regarded as rewarding or unrewarding. As a result two people might be attracted to the same field of work, but for quite different reasons. According to Schein...

- All of us will have one factor that resonates more than any other and which we will constantly search for in whatever work we do.
- This factor must be present for us to gain any long term satisfaction.
- It will be the last element we would choose to give away if forced to.
- If it is taken away, nothing will compensate us for that loss.
- It is non-negotiable.
- This is our career anchor.

Below is a brief summary of what we can say about the type of work that is attractive to each career anchor.

1. TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCE

- Views the content of the work as more important than the context.
- Satisfaction lies with gaining expertise.

- Boredom results when there is no challenge.
- Teaching and mentoring offer an opportunity to demonstrate expertise.
- Recognition from professional colleagues and peers is rewarding.

2. GENERAL MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE

- Satisfied when controlling a complete operation or process.
- Not afraid of stress, in fact often stimulated by an emotionally demanding environment.
- Looks for high levels of responsibility.
- Expects promotion on basis of merit and results.
- Expects financial recognition.

3. AUTONOMY / INDEPENDENCE

- Looks for work that offers freedom and keeps options open.
- Will be frustrated by external constraints.
- Often highly creative and productive but thrives on independent role; e.g. consultant, contractor, freelance professional. Also independent tradesperson or businessperson.
- Can work in larger organisations if given freedom.
- Promotion means more autonomy and rewards appreciated include recognition through awards, testimonials, and prizes.

4. SECURITY / STABILITY

- Less concerned about the content of work than continuity and the work environment and relationships.
- A secure position with steady progress, gradually gathering experience and advancement according to seniority, mark ideal job.
- Grade and rank system that rewards loyalty is preferred along with pay and benefits and improvements in the work environment.

5. ENTREPRENEURIAL CREATIVITY

- Needs to be involved in creating something new and will get bored quickly if there is not this opportunity.
- Restless unless opportunity to continually be engaged in creative challenges.
- Ownership is the most important issue.
- Looks for the power and freedom to move into roles that are felt to be key ones, with rewards measured in terms of growing enterprises, accumulating wealth and public recognition.

6. SERVICE / DEDICATION TO A CAUSE

- Motivated more by involvement that reflects the importance of certain core values rather than the work itself.
- Looks for work that reflects values such as working with people, serving humanity, caring for the planet, and peacemaking.
- Wants fair pay, but money is not central.
- Views recognition and support from the public and peers as reward.

7. PURE CHALLENGE

- Enjoys careers where competition is primary, either in problem-solving, interpersonal or physical challenges.
- Rewarded by being encouraged and supported to face new challenges.
- Will throw away stability and all sorts of other rewards for the opportunity to confront new challenges.

8. LIFESTYLE

- Looks for flexibility.
- Career needs to be integrated with the rest of life.
- Looks for organisations that demonstrate respect for personal and family concerns.

- May not want to move geographically.
- Finds rewarding: flexible working hours, part-time work, maternity leave, sabbaticals, day care options and other signs of organisations accommodating concerns beyond employment.

EXERCISE 4 IDENTIFYING OUR PASSION(S)

Here are some questions that may help clarify where your passion(s) lie.

- What's the topic of conversation that will keep you talking into the wee small hours of the morning?
- What is it that you would be prepared to pay for rather than necessarily be paid for in return?
- What are the topics of books that dominate your bookshelf?
- What activity do you do where you lose all sense of time?
- What is the project you can't wait to get up in the morning to do?
- What is the cause you find yourself most drawn to?

Now attempt to write down what your passion(s) are:

Take the time to ask two people who know you well what they think your passions are.

EXERCISE 5 VALUES/PASSIONS/DESIRES PROMPT

If you are having difficulty defining your values, passions and desires, use the following questions to prompt you – the answer to each may not refer to a value or passion, but by reviewing your answers you may find there are themes associated with a particular one:

- 1 What are the qualities you prize most in others?
- 2 What are the things you have stood up for or against in the past?
- 3 What are the aspects of your life that give you the greatest satisfaction?
- 4 What are the most important things for us to pass on to the next generation?
- 5 What would you most like to be remembered for?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

In the exercises above we have suggested several times that you look for the insight of others regarding your values, desires and passion(s). Use your group meeting for this purpose. Here is a suggested format:

Invite each member of the group to work individually through some or all of the exercises above, and then to select one area to submit to the group. As each member describes his/her personal discoveries, allow opportunity for the group to affirm or enlarge on (and perhaps sometimes to question) those understandings.

Depending on how fully your group wishes to explore these issues, you may choose to allot more than one session to this topic.

PROBING FURTHER

Books

Edgar Schein, *Career Anchors: Discovering Your Real Values* (Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer – workbook edition, 1985)

Jane Kise, David Stark and Sandra Krebs Hirsh, *Life Keys* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996)

Michael Henderson, *Finding True North* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2003)

Websites

A more recent update of Schein's work on Career Anchors can be found on the Internet at <http://www.sol-ne.org/res/wp/10009.html>

APPENDIX: WHAT DO I DO IF MY VALUES DON'T FIT WITH THOSE OF THE ORGANISATION I BELONG TO?

When you spend time examining your work/career, it is possible that so many issues arise for you that you reach a point where you wonder if you are in the wrong job. Sometimes that may well be the case. However, often people who feel uncomfortable are in the right job but in the wrong place. The disquiet and unease they are experiencing is often a result of a clash of values.

If you suspect this is the case for you (i.e. your values are out of alignment with those encouraged by the company or group) there are a number of options open to you:⁹

- 1 Try to find out more information. This should be along the lines of what the official organisational stance is on a particular issue, and also what flexibility (if any) there is in the organisation for you to influence change.
- 2 If there is an obvious difference between the values you hold and those of the organisation you are involved in, and there seems to be little tolerance for change, it may be best to consider looking elsewhere for employment or involvement. This may be more easily said than done, but even if you are unable to leave your organisation for some time there are things you can do to survive while retaining your sense of values and identity. These include meeting for mutual encouragement with others within or outside your workplace who share similar values. Or making use of what limited opportunities there may be to express your values without rocking the boat; e.g. how you dress, how you decorate your workspace, what style of leadership you select and so on. Don't automatically assume that you have to leave the organisation if your values don't match. Sometimes people are able to initiate worthwhile changes from within.

- 3 If your organisation differs from you on a number of important issues, but you are confident there is some room for negotiation – then go for it. Work respectfully to present a viable alternative. Engage others in negotiating for change. Collective action both within the organisation (again respectful to those who may feel differently to you), and outside the organisation may be possible to bring about change.
- 4 You might choose to let the organisation “dictate” terms, deciding to take the path of least resistance and surrendering to their values. By doing this, the message you are communicating is that your own values don't matter too much. This will cost you your integrity, and doesn't really represent a healthy alternative. Unfortunately it's one that many people take because they fear exploring and pursuing any of the former three options.

⁹ Some of these suggested ideas have been adapted from Deborah Myerson's book, *Tempered radicals: How people use difference to inspire change at work* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001).

PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER - PLEASE!!

Phew! That's been a whole lot to digest over these past few chapters.

We hope the numerous exercises and questions have begun to give you a more comprehensive picture of your own Fit.

To help you, in this regard, take a little time to summarise what you've discovered (or what has been reinforced) about yourself.

The exercises below are designed with this in mind.

EXERCISE 1

Imagine your life as a wheel. (Those of us who are more round may find this easier than others!)

At the very centre of the wheel (the hub) is our relationship with God. It is our living connection to God that gives a reason and focus for all we are and do.

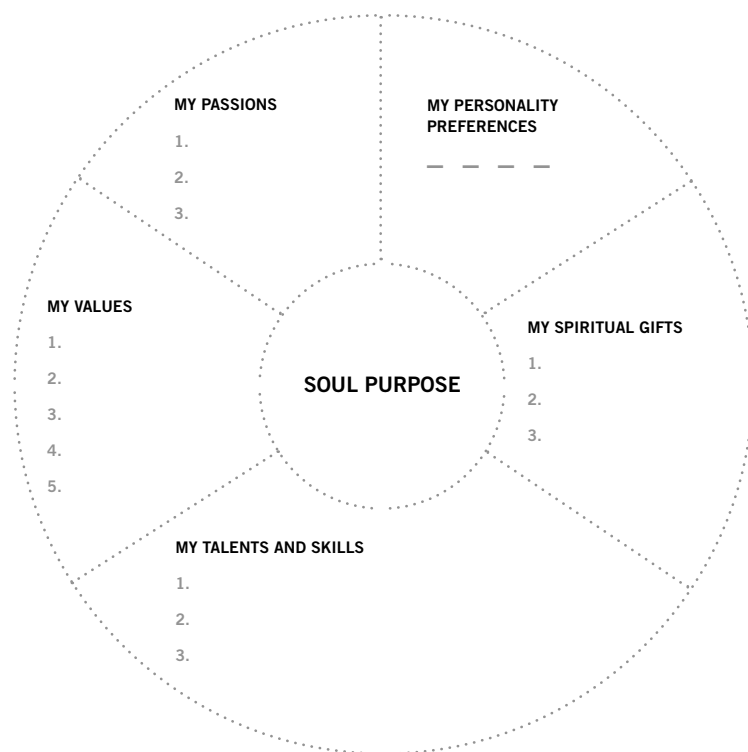
We've written "*SoulPurpose*" in this hub. This simply reminds us that we are God-created, God-related and God-developed. Without this ongoing connection we will fail to fulfil our destiny. Seeking to live in this God-centred way will influence all of our life.

The inward ring of spokes that surrounds this central hub is a summary of much of the core of our personal make-up.

Take time to think about all the elements of your unique Fit that you have explored:

- "Fingerprint" (chapter 3)
- Personality (chapter 4)
- Talents and skills (chapter 5)
- Spirit gifts (chapter 6)
- Values and passions (chapter 7)

Transfer your discoveries from the exercises in these chapters into the spokes of the wheel below.



EXERCISE 2

The second “wheel” (pictured below) shows a series of outer spokes.

These outer spokes represent various areas of our life. They are both:

- the context in which we currently express our *SoulPurpose*, as well as
- the opportunities and relationships that help to further shape and mould who we are and our *SoulPurpose*.

NOTE: It’s important to recognise that this wheel diagram does not attempt to summarise EVERYTHING about you or your *SoulPurpose*. It’s not meant to be “the complete picture”. The intention is simply to identify how the

elements of our lives we have been considering so far, fit together as part of our *SoulPurpose*.

Take time to identify and write in some of these specific contexts, opportunities and relationships.

For example, you may like to list:

- some of the key relationships you are developing (under friendships, community, church and marketplace)
- any study (formal or informal) you are currently undertaking (under learning)
- particular types of work (paid and unpaid) you are involved in and what your role and goals are etc.

Feel free to change the names we have given each of these spokes (there’s nothing particularly sacred or special about the ones we’ve identified).

You may even want to change the size of each segment to reflect the amount of time you’re involved in a particular area, or the significance of this part of your life.

A WORD ABOUT SEEKING FURTHER HELP

This section (Uniquely ‘ME’: a workbook) may have raised some issues for you that require help from a more “professional guide”.

If so, we suggest you consider looking for a qualified career counsellor. For example, in New Zealand, the Career Practitioners Association of NZ (CPANZ) website (www.cpanz.org.nz) provides the names of all qualified members.

Alternatively, you may like to ask around (friends and acquaintances) for suggestions as to someone who is both trained and competent.

Beware anyone who promises you the world, or no hard work on your part! Remember that the career counsellor is not there to tell you what you should do. They are there to help facilitate your own self-awareness and to explore some of the possibilities with you. They may help you clarify your thinking and decision-making, but remember, the final decision/direction is still up to you. After all, you’re the one who will have to live with the consequences.

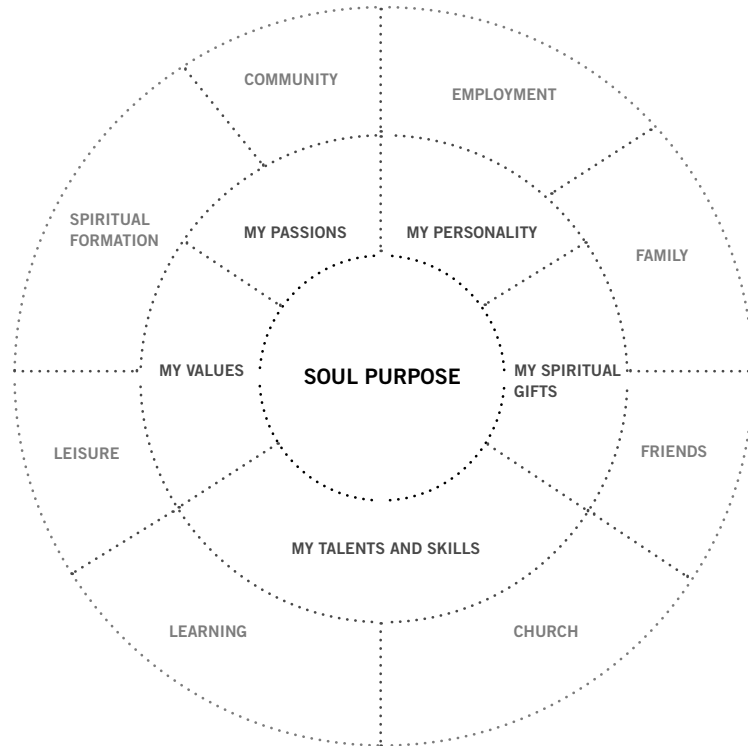
JOB HUNTING

For those people who want more information about the specifics of job hunting we suggest you look at:

The “Career and Life Planning” section of the *Faith At Work* website: www.faithatwork.org.nz

Richard Bolles *What Color is Your Parachute?* (Ten Speed Press, 2004)

Barbara Moses *What Next?* (Dorling Kindersley, 2003)



SECTION C

WEAVING IT ALL TOGETHER

CHAPTER 8

LEARNING TO BE AN EFFECTIVE JUGGLER

Short-term imbalance is inevitable; long-term imbalance is destructive.

Gerard Sittser

DENISE'S DILEMMA

Teaching is my first love. It always has been. Even from a young age I loved organising my brothers and sisters into a play-act classroom, and “teaching” them the rudiments of arithmetic and reading. So it was no surprise to anyone when I applied for the teachers training college and eventually became a primary school teacher.

Apart from some years while our children were young, I’ve continued teaching right through to now. Presently I work with Year Fives at a school twenty minutes from home. Needless to say, it hasn’t always been easy managing the job as well as a family. There have been a number of times when Brett (my husband) and I have discussed whether I should give up teaching altogether. There are just so many demands.

Parenting, of course, is a major one. But so is wanting to stay involved in three or four community and church endeavours. And it’s not just having a job. A big part of the pressure is the hugely increased demand on teachers these days.

All this means tight limitations on what I can do. I love teaching nine- and ten-year-olds, but there are those other things I’m drawn to as well. After all, if life was all about getting up in the morning, going to school, coming home, sorting out the house, and going to bed, I would dry up pretty quickly.

So the last five or six years when I've been back teaching have created a real dilemma for me. Our principal demands a great deal from us and so does the system. The paperwork is overwhelming, and we're expected to be involved in a number of extra-curricular activities alongside our normal teaching load. Sometimes I get the feeling that the principal thinks teaching should be the sum total of life. We're expected to sell our heart and soul to the cause.

Sometimes I get the feeling that the principal thinks teaching should be the sum total of life.

Meetings and other demands are unexpectedly thrust upon us, involving evenings and weekends (Saturdays and Sundays!). Then when ERO (the school review authority) turns up or it's time for reports ... it's even worse.

You can understand the pressure this all puts on other areas of my life. Sometimes it gets to be just too much. In fact, not long ago I reached a point where I simply had to do something about it. My employer's expectations were unrealistic. They were destroying the growing sense of well-being and *SoulPurpose* that I had been coming to. I decided I just had to make a stand.

This was very difficult initially as I'm one of those people who feels a strong sense of loyalty, and I take seriously my responsibilities. Plus, I had a fear – unnecessary, as it proved – that if I put limits on the time and energy I gave to my teaching job, I'd soon get the sack. Actually, it was that "worst-case scenario" that helped me deal with the issue. If they sacked me, I decided, then that was their choice. I wanted to teach there, and I'm a good teacher. It would be their loss as much as mine.

With Brett's help I worked out some clear boundaries which would go some way to protecting me (and everyone else!) from being swamped. It required a degree of negotiation with the principal, but what helped was his knowledge that I'm no shirker. I had a proven record and that increased my bargaining power. It was a case of ... "If you want me in this job, this is what I'm prepared to give and this is what I'm not prepared to give." Sounds simple enough, but I needed all Brett's encouragement to face up to the principal!

As a result, there are certain days when I leave the school grounds fifteen minutes after the kids do. I have chosen not to take any work home. There are also tasks in the school I won't do, and meetings I don't attend.

It's not easy. I regularly have to keep reminding myself – and the principal – where the boundaries are, what is reasonable. There's always pressure, internal and external, for the workload to grow. A helpful way of monitoring this is a monthly meeting that Brett and I have set up with a senior teacher at

the school, where we talk about how things are going, and decide on any correctives that need to be made.

Outside of school, one of the keys for me has been to view my year not as one block of time with an unchanging tempo, but rather as a series of seasons (or mini-seasons) each containing periods of intense activity in certain tasks, followed by times of relative inactivity. I've accepted that each week is not going to be neatly balanced between the different parts of my life.

This particular solution is a personal balance that came from gradual self-discovery. There was a time in my life when I tried to achieve perfect equilibrium all year. That state of Nirvana was never achieved! Not even close. It was an impossible and implausible myth!

Then I realised that in order to give my best to the children I teach, there would be times of the year when their needs would dominate my life. A school concert, for example, or when reports are due. Reducing my other activities in anticipation of these pressure points is how I cope. I can give over and above the call of duty for short times if I (and other people in my life) know that things will not always be like this.

In compensation, there are also times when teaching has to take a backseat to my other roles. And definite, planned-for occasions when rest is the priority. Our two weeks camping with friends is sacrosanct. So are the three days Brett and I have to ourselves every October.

Another helpful key for us has been the support structures we have around us. While neither Brett nor I have family living nearby, we have developed a close group of friends, both Christian and not Christian, who know us well and understand what makes us tick. They help share the load. This is not a one-way street by any stretch of the imagination. For example, we pick up each other's children from school, have them over regularly, and eat a shared meal together once a week ... plus a number of other informal supports. When I'm busy, someone will often drop a prepared meal around or invite us over. We try to do likewise. Without these people in our lives, things would be so much more difficult.

Sometimes, even in spite of this marvellous support and the best of intentions, things just overwhelm me. It's in those times that I have been learning I'm not called to be Superwoman (though the idea does appeal!). I'm trying to face up to my limitations. (Brett helps!) I have only so much energy.

I've accepted that each week is not going to be neatly balanced between the different parts of my life.

I can give it to only so many things. I simply cannot cope with every demand.

But that very decision has produced another bout of self-discovery. I'm an organized person, but you can't programme your life to perfection. Sometimes

You can't programme your life to perfection. you just have to be there – a friend's father dying, one of your kids in desperate need of some one-on-one, a neighbour dropping around unexpectedly to talk. I've realised that I can't simply cut myself off from others to suit my own schedule of wellbeing.

This hit home to me recently when one friend told me what another friend had said to her – that it seemed I didn't have any time for her these days. I felt terrible about that. It made me realise that relationships are more critical than anything else. So at present I am determining to make people (including my Year Fives) the key to how I shape my life.

Yes, I know this is going to produce some impossible conflicts! And yes, I admit it, I'm still a work in process! But at least these days I know where I'm trying to go to, and I have a fair idea of what the problems are like on the road ahead...

JUGGLING

Denise's challenges are ones that many of us can identify with. It's like being a juggler. At any one time we have a whole range of roles and responsibilities, and we have to cope with the competing demands they bring. It's not an easy task juggling these demands, keeping all the balls in the air – or as the Oxford Dictionary puts it, "...adroitly balancing several activities", all at the same time.

Juggling commitments is not new. For instance, the woman described in Proverbs 31 clearly had to handle a variety of different roles. Not only was she a wife and mother, managing the household, but she was also a businesswoman – buying and selling real estate, planting a vineyard, making and selling clothes. Then there was her service among the poor, and her reputation for being a wise counsellor. She is commended for her faith and sensitivity. It all sounds rather exhausting and more than a little intimidating. But it's a great model of integration, and her lively faith is clearly at the centre of her activity.

In a similar way the Old Testament leader Nehemiah carried multiple responsibilities. We think of him primarily as a man of prayer, championing justice for those who had been exploited and oppressed, and confronting the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. And he was. But Nehemiah was also the governor of Jerusalem, with a special responsibility for rebuilding the walls of the city. This major construction job was his main task, around which everything else had to be fitted.

But that wasn't all. Nehemiah faced other complications. The walls of the city had been demolished through attack after attack from enemies. And those enemies were still camped close by, threatening to renew their assault even as the building project went on. This created enormous pressure to get things done quickly. Talk about deadlines!

Nehemiah also had to deal with disharmony and conflict inside the walls. And to top it all off, he answered directly to the emperor of Persia – somehow balancing Israeli aspirations with the wishes of an occupying power. Now that would have been a challenge!

INTEGRATION

So dealing with competing commitments is nothing new. However, there are extra challenges when it comes to finding integration in our modern lives. Our twenty-first-century world is vastly different to the one that most people in history have experienced. If you could take yourself back to before the industrial revolution you would find yourself in a village or town, not only living with your family and friends but also working, worshiping and recreating with them. In fact, for most people through most of history, work was centred on the home.

To be sure, living and working and relaxing all in the same community brought its own set of problems and tensions, but the positive side was that it led to a much more integrated life. Today, we may well find ourselves involved in multiple communities. We may live in one place, be employed in another place, worship somewhere else, and have a friendship and interest network scattered all over! (Literally all over the world, given the ease of email and the freedom of travel.) Instead of our children learning a trade from watching and participating with us while working at home, often they have no awareness of what we "go off to" each day. They may be able to put a name to their parent's job ("Daddy is a truck driver"), but ask them to explain what he does all day and they have little idea.

Integration means the achievement of a comfortable and harmonious unity across the different parts of our lives. The impact of the industrial revolution, however, has been to compartmentalise and to separate those parts. No wonder most of us struggle to gain a sense of integration among the roles and responsibilities we carry.

So we juggle. But it's not just the set of commitments we have. It's not just that we need to keep all those balls in the air all the time. They keep

changing! No sooner have we got used to managing them than one or two are replaced or enlarged to make life even more difficult! New shapes, new sizes, new colours....

So juggling is an absolutely necessary skill for each of us to learn if, in our modern world, we are to achieve balance and integration.

BALANCE

The dictionary describes balance as “...an even distribution of weight ensuring stability; mental or emotional stability; a condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions; a counteracting weight or force.”¹ When the boss demands that we devote all of our time and energy to the job, we just know that giving in to his/her demands is going to get things out of proportion. If we’re to keep our lives in equilibrium we desperately need to find a “counteracting weight or force” – like a spouse or friend who can remind us of our other commitments!

“Short-term imbalance is inevitable; long-term imbalance is destructive.”
Balance is something we bring to our lives not in each individual moment, but over the long-haul.

We can also lose equilibrium when we give far more time and energy to a task than it merits, like spending 100 hours on a 20 hour assignment. If we don’t value the various roles and tasks in our week in their correct proportions, other things are likely to suffer, to say nothing of our emotional stability.

But don’t make the mistake of thinking that balance means giving an even spread of work and rest to each day or week. When we juggle several roles, there will always be some periods where one role or another dominates our energy and time. That’s life. As Gerald Sittser notes, “Short-term imbalance is inevitable; long-term imbalance is destructive.”² Balance is something we bring to our lives not in each individual moment, but over the long-haul. We do it by recognising where we have been giving our energy recently, and then by compensating –giving energy next to the other important parts of our lives.

¹ Oxford Concise Dictionary.

² Gerald Sittser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

SHALOM

Balance is keeping the elements of our lives in comfortable proportion. Integration is where every diverse part makes sense and fits into the overall scheme of things. That’s perhaps even more difficult to achieve, but integration is what helps bring meaning and purpose to our lives.

A key biblical concept for bringing about such integration is by remembering our “calling”³. When our lives seem fragmented into unconnected parts, we need to connect to those parts; we need to strive for a sense of unity. We can do this by working out who we are, who we’re called to be, and how we fit into God’s purposes.

There’s another biblical word that applies here. It describes the complete state of balance and integration. That word is “shalom”. Shalom speaks of wholeness and harmony – where all things are in their right place: relationships, work, rest, creation.

FLESHING IT OUT

All of this is, of course, easier said than done. So far we’ve described the concept. Let’s now try to earth it in real lives. We, the writers of this book, would like to take the risky step of describing our own experiences of striving for balance and integration – both the struggles and the successes. We hope that you will be able to identify with at least parts of our journeys, and that you will find here some keys for a greater measure of balance and integration in your own life.

ALISTAIR

I enjoy the challenge and variety that comes from being involved in a lot of different activities. I live with my wife, Alison, 19-year-old daughter Catherine, 16-year-old son Chris, and fun-loving three-year-old grand-daughter, Ruby. So home life dictates the shape of much of what I do.

For much of my working life I have had more than one job at a time, usually combining some kind of pastoral leadership with theological research and teaching. This has been supplemented by a number of other, mostly voluntary, roles such as serving on boards. I also enjoy playing music in a couple of bands, playing golf and watching rugby, going to the movies and enjoying the company of friends socially.

³ See *Appendix: Someone is calling you*, at the end of this book. This unpacks the concept of calling.

Consequently, the picture of a juggler trying to keep a number of balls moving in the air without dropping any describes exactly the way I often feel. I've

The picture of a juggler trying to keep a number of balls moving in the air without dropping any describes exactly the way I often feel.

watched a number of jugglers, and it never ceases to amaze me the skill required to do it well. In fact, some are so clever that they hardly need to look at the balls, or even think about what they're doing!

Unfortunately life has never been like that for me. I find it hard to say no – I just don't like missing out on things! But I'm well aware that this frequently gets me overcommitted and leads to stress and trouble. As a result I constantly need to re-examine my priorities. Am I really managing to keep all those balls successfully in the air? Am I maintaining a healthy balance between my various responsibilities?

To help juggle my employment and family commitments in an integrated way, I have chosen to work most of the time from an office at home. I'm aware that other people might not like the way this blurs the separation between home and employment, but it works well for me – and for my family.

Juggling certainly describes how I often feel. But another picture I've found helpful in trying to maintain a healthy balance in my life is the Pentathlon.

The pentathlon is an Olympic event that requires an athlete to compete in five military skills: fencing, riding, running, shooting and swimming. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, in their book *How to Balance Competing Time Demands*, write: "As a pentathlete, you can't do exceptionally well in just one or two areas, like running and swimming, and blow off the other areas just because you don't like horses or you have a thing about handguns. You have to excel in all areas."

Because quite different skills are required in each event, the training periods for each must be carefully planned. Aiming for perfection in one event could undermine the overall purpose. Trying to be the world's top swimmer or top fencer would create an impossible strain. So rather than perfection, the goal for a pentathlete is "overall excellence".

What I like about this model is that it encourages me to look at my life as a whole. Pursuing growth in all areas – family, employment, church, community and friendships – is what I'm aiming for. I recognise that these parts overlap and interact, affecting one another. The pentathlon helps me to work toward integrating everything in my life into one comprehensive whole, with God as my coach.

It also recognises individuality. Each of us has to develop our own training programme. This requires that we know ourselves well and encourages us to prepare in a way that builds on our strengths ... and compensates for our weaknesses.

ANNETTE

Balance – you either love it or hate it. Right now I'm struggling with it, because I'm not handling it the way I'd like to. There are just too many things to do: a house and garden to be maintained, food and laundry and basic life needs to be managed, friends and relatives to keep in contact with, lots of rich experiences to be had as a parent, opportunities for various forms of service, the challenge of university study...

Balance – sometimes I love it. There was a day some time last year when all of a sudden ... my life felt balanced! The sun was shining, I had study and work commitments exactly how I wanted them. I had ample time to stop and smell the roses. I felt so grateful for my life and the composite parts of the whole.

There was a day some time last year when all of a sudden ... my life felt balanced!

The truth is that it had taken some time to reach that state – it didn't just happen overnight. But it felt good because I had worked hard and had achieved results I was pleased with. A couple of years ago, my first week as a post-graduate student presented me with a dilemma. I could see that the workload involved was going to eat into the time I had set aside for my family commitments. I knew I could complete the course if I devoted nights and weekends to it. But I hadn't been expecting to have to do so at that stage, nor was my family prepared for my sudden absence.

On the other hand I didn't want to put off the time when I could complete this degree. I preferred to graduate with my class rather than wait till later. I was also afraid that if I didn't do it all full-time it would look as if I wasn't "up to it".

I had a week to make my decision. It really came down to the trade-offs I was prepared to make. In this instance I had to check for myself that I was on the right road – should I continue with the course at all? I was positive that continuing was the right thing to do. Then I had to think about the consequences of each alternative (studying full-time or part-time). Where it looked like there were pros and cons for each, I would have to call on my values.

It didn't take long for me to realise that I wasn't ready for such a full-on commitment, and I also felt that my family needed a bit more preparation before

I absented myself for longer periods. Compared to being around more for my children at this time of their lives, the prospect of graduating a few months, or even a year, after my classmates wasn't much of an issue.

Going part-time would mean taking longer to complete the degree. I had to discuss the implications with my husband Geoff, and we needed to balance those trade-offs together. It would mean more input from Geoff in caring for the children after school on the day I had a late lecture. He is self-employed, so fortunately there was some flexibility for him to do that.

I tried to think of ways I could make a part-time course work for me, rather than feeling disadvantaged by taking longer to finish. How would I structure it to fit my other commitments? How would I deal with the reactions I was likely to get from people just for doing something in a different way?

So I made the commitment to part-time study. Since that time I have been more pro-active in involving all the family in the household jobs. We all get to

Finding and maintaining balance is an ongoing task.

contribute in some way according to age and ability. There are occasional relapses! Sometimes we think we have succeeded well – other times we are frustrated in our efforts and it feels like starting again at square one. I think each member of the family has learned something from the process. (“Yeah, right!” they say, groaning.)

Finding and maintaining balance is an ongoing task. I try my best to keep things balanced and in perspective, but you can't plan for every eventuality. I am learning to relax my high expectations of myself, and to set limits over the expectations others have of me. It means I have said “No” to worthy requests for my time – and have struggled with feeling guilty because of the disapproval my “No” has sometimes earned. People aren't always aware of the other commitments you have outside of the role they see you in. So I try to put the guilt aside.

I choose one community commitment at a time. That way, I can give my time and energy with enthusiasm. I have been able to manage more than that in the past, and possibly will again in the future, but for now, one is enough. This year I have opted to coach my daughter's netball team – it means an after-school practice during the week and being available on Saturday morning for the match game.

I can occasionally help with activities at school, but I don't do so on a regular basis, although I was quite involved in those activities when the children were younger. It seems a natural progression that as they grow I also

seek other growth for myself. Balance in my life today looks different to balance in my life ten years ago.

I have also come to respect my need of rest and relaxation. One of the reasons I wanted to keep my weekends free was to make time for a break from all the structure and timetables in my life, amidst all the other stuff that happens at home over the weekends. I need time to reflect and to be renewed for the week ahead. I work more efficiently from Monday to Friday when I know that I'll have time off in the weekend.

And now a balancing comment ... about balance! Achieving and maintaining it is important, but the search for balance can become a tyranny at times. Is it just “stability” or “calm” or “security”? Everything hanging together well, without a loose thread in sight? Life's not like that. At least not life where we learn to struggle and grow and then get to look back at what we learned. At different stages of my life, as I have taken on new goals or new responsibilities, my life has been momentarily out of balance, and has looked (and felt) messy. That was the case in my first year as a postgraduate student. I didn't feel very “in control”, and it was very uncomfortable at times. Finding new ways of adapting took some time and creativity from all of us.

Keep balance as a goal, is my advice, but don't get frightened off a new opportunity just because it will initially upset your lifestyle.

Balance, in spite of the struggle involved, is healthy. I am happy that there are several different roles I have in life. While each is an important part of who I am, none of them is the whole of who I am. Knowing that helps me keep each role in perspective.

WAYNE

In his book *The Elephant and the Flea*, Charles Handy coins the terms “portfolio person” or “flea.” He's referring to the kind of person who fulfils a number of roles largely independent of any particular organisation. This describes the last ten years of my life perfectly. I juggle numerous different tasks through the week. I'm presently a car dealer, writer, school trustee, teacher and student – to say nothing of my roles as a father, husband, church member, friend and neighbour.

This juggling act is probably not exceptional for someone in mid-life. In my case, however, there is a complicating factor. I need to keep all the balls in the air, trying to lead a balanced and integrated life, while working from home and having a highly unstructured working week.

There are, of course, huge advantages to being able to work in this way. Many people are quite envious of the flexibility I have and the ease of simply travelling up the stairs to my office without encountering any traffic jams whatsoever! However, my working life does raise some tricky issues for me. Let me identify some of them.

(But first let me humbly acknowledge that a large part of the population has been here long before me. I look with total admiration at the way “home-makers” – mostly mothers – handle the extraordinary complexities of being a fulltime and unpaid parent on the one hand, and a contributor to community activities of all kinds on the other.)

FIRST, HOW DO I DRAW A LINE BETWEEN “WORK” AND “FAMILY AND REST”, WHEN MY PRIMARY PLACE OF WORK IS HOME AND MY SCHEDULE HAS ME WEAVING MY WAY IN AND OUT OF BOTH WORK AND FAMILY ACTIVITIES?

Many of my friends commute to their place of daily work, some by train, others by car, and some by walking. The travel time allows them to orientate themselves to the job, or (at the end of the day) to the family demands of home.

How do I switch off my “business” or “writing” brain, and switch on my “parenting” or “rest” brain?

The clear divisions of the day help them to switch from one sphere of life to another, allowing them to re-focus on the next task.

But what about me? How do I switch off my “business” or “writing” brain, and switch on my “parenting” or “rest” brain? One possible solution would be to keep definite work hours. However, I greatly appreciate the flexibility of easily slipping from one role to another as need arises.

Physical space helps to a degree. My office/study is designated for “work”. My family know that if they want my full attention I need to get out of my office and downstairs to the family areas of the house.

As well, I have managed to build some healthy disciplines into my life; for example, not answering the phone at certain times of the day – though again I am far from perfectly consistent.

WHO/WHAT CAN HELP ME TO DETERMINE WORK PRIORITIES WHEN SO MANY OPTIONS COMPETE FOR MY ATTENTION AND ENERGY?

I don’t find this easy at all. As with most people, the urgent often gets done at the expense of the important. Not only that, but I find administration very

easy to do and so this will often get priority over more “thinking” work such as writing. The reality is, of course, that work with short term payoffs and results is easier to be motivated for than long term projects. They can be “left for another day”! I all too easily fall into this trap.

Gaining a sense of perspective on priorities is not simple. After all, I have no boss dictating how my week should be spent. However, I do have a small group of “significant others” – my wife Jill and a varied set of close friends and colleagues. I have asked them to act as sounding boards for my plans, and I read carefully their reactions to my thoughts and intentions. If enough of them feed back to me concerns about something I am sinking time into, or voice positive reactions to an idea, this increases my confidence to hold back or invest energy.

For example, my current status as a part-time student (finishing off a qualification I began many years ago!) is largely the result of the urgings of these friends. The choice to study was not something I felt sufficiently motivated to do, but Jill and a number of friends felt differently! While ultimately I was the one who had to make the choice to undertake study, I leaned fairly heavily on their knowledge of my growing *SoulPurpose*.

This leads to the other great benefit of developing a number of close family and friends. It’s the perspective they can bring as I shape my sense of *SoulPurpose*. I know I have blind spots and only a hazy view of who God has made me to be. The “significant others” in my life help fill out the picture, as well as call me to account for how I am using what I have been given.

In fact, sometimes they have more confidence in me than I do! At strategic times in my life they have given me the faith to take a step in a new direction – like moving to Canada for study in 1990, and starting a business in 1995. They have also enabled me to change the way I use my time – such as learning to touch-type instead of writing longhand, and not feeling the need to answer the phone every time it rings.

There are some things that we all have difficulty recognizing in ourselves. Lack of balance or integration are two of those things. So is excessive busyness. We have to be willing to hear these kinds of evaluations from those who know us well.

We also have to give them the opportunity to exercise such a role. I’m incredibly fortunate to have family and friends who really believe in me,

Work with short term payoffs and results is easier to be motivated for than long term projects.

understand me, and are prepared to sensitively support me, so that I can pursue my *SoulPurpose* in a balanced and integrated way.

HOW CAN TASKS AND ROLES THAT SEEM SO DIFFERENT (SUCH AS CAR DEALING AND WRITING/TEACHING) BE DONE IN A WAY THAT GIVES A SENSE OF INTEGRATION AND WHOLENESS TO MY WEEK?

I am a car dealer ... and I also work for a Christian organisation. I'm sure that when some people hear that they shake their heads and wonder how I could end up working in such seemingly opposite worlds. And yet, for me there is no incongruity between selling cars and teaching the Bible, mowing the lawns and writing a book on pain, paying the monthly accounts and giving counsel to a school principal. How did I reach that awareness?

Three revelations over the years made it possible. The first was the discovery that all work, done to the glory of God, is of value. There is no hierarchy of tasks. Nor is there a mystical division between "secular" or "spiritual". Each task I do has value, and contributes to the call to follow Jesus. It all counts.

For me there is no incongruity between selling cars and teaching the Bible, mowing the lawns and writing a book on pain, paying the monthly accounts and giving counsel to a school principal.

The second was the realisation that God himself is a worker – and that not all of his jobs are highly creative. The type of work he engages in is astonishingly varied, and includes some rather mundane maintenance work. If it's alright for God, then it should be alright for me!

The third revelation was coming to terms with the incredible diversity of abilities and opportunities I had. There were so many ways I could serve God and other people. The challenge was to learn how to work Christianly in all things – in a way that glorified God and helped build his kingdom. Car dealing can do this. So can washing the dishes.

THERE ARE PERIODS WHEN I FEEL ANYTHING BUT MOTIVATED. HOW DO I DEAL WITH THOSE DOWN TIMES?

Much of what I do requires me to be a self-starter. And an important component of my working week is long-term in nature – where the benefits may not be seen for years. So inevitably there are days when I fail to be motivated to tackle these long-term tasks, weeks when the downside of

my melancholic nature gets the better of me. "What's the point of this?" "Is this really going to make a difference?"

In these times of self-doubt and lack of motivation it's easy to get caught in the trap of just "busy-ing" myself with some of the more tangible tasks. There are always files I can tidy up, emails I can answer, dishes I can wash. But often these easy options simply act as diversions and distractions, when I know I should be attending to other matters. Bringing balance and direction to my working week is not easy.

So I am learning about myself and trying to work in a way that is more in tune with my motivations. For example, there are times in the day where I generally find it easier to do thinking and writing work – mainly mornings and late afternoons. Freeing up time in these periods gives me a better chance of using the time well.

Knowing when to be hard on myself is a key. And so is knowing when to cut myself a little slack. Sometimes I need to give myself the freedom to go for a walk or to have a sleep – I don't always have to be "productive". Other times what is required is a bit of application – just getting stuck in.

Lack of motivation can result from lack of stimulation – interacting with others may then be the right thing to do. And then, of course, there are times when those practical jobs are appropriate – I've been absorbed in creative work for two or three hours, so now is the time for some mechanical tasks.

HAVE I MASTERED IT?

Bringing balance is an ongoing challenge and there are many times when I get it wrong. Sometimes the fallout from the imbalance requires some drastic action – like having to reduce the number of balls in the air, or learning to say no to a certain opportunity.

For me perfection is definitely a long, long way down the track!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 What aspects of our stories did you particularly identify with? What parts challenged you?
- 2 Think through the following statements as they relate to your life:
 - Short-term imbalance is inevitable; long-term imbalance is destructive.
 - Being a responsible and reliable person doesn't mean you have to deal with every problem that arises.

God himself is a worker – and not all of his jobs are highly creative.

- Because you can doesn't mean you should.
- People are more important than jobs.

YOUR PERSONAL BALANCING ACT

One helpful way of maintaining balance in your life is suggested by Richard Bolles in his book *The Three Boxes of Life*.

Bolles notes that traditionally life has been divided into three areas, each dominated by a particular activity – Education, Work, and Retirement. He suggests that it would be more healthy if we saw Learning, Working (paid and unpaid) and Playing as essential ingredients of each stage of life. Bolles invites us to divide a circle into segments that portray what kind of time and energy we are currently investing in each of these activities and then decide if there is anything we would change in our present circumstances if we were really committed to lifelong learning, lifelong working and lifelong leisure.

He suggests that to help us analyse carefully what is going on, during the course of our life we need to regularly ask the following four questions:

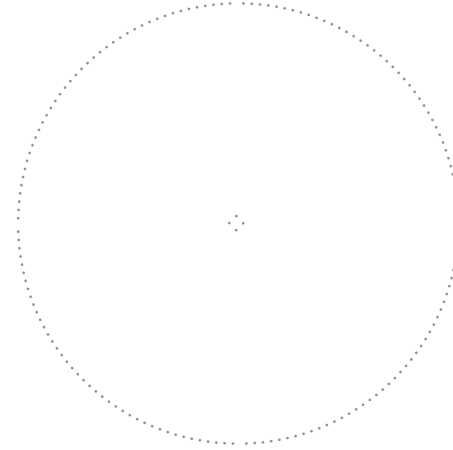
- What is happening?
- What do I need for my survival?
- What meaning or mission or ultimate goal shapes my life?
- How do I arrange my life now to most effectively sustain me and work towards my goals?

These four questions, asked in this order, need to be answered for each of the Learning, Working, and Playing dimensions at every different stage of life.

Note: Ongoing or lifelong learning is accepted as an important part of working life these days – partly because of our need to grow technical skills, partly so that we can develop as people, but also partly because of our constantly changing world. We cannot assume that the tasks we work at today will be the same or even exist in ten years time. For example, forty years ago most churches had need of an organist. Today the organ has been largely replaced by electronic keyboards. Who would have thought back then that a sound technician might replace an organist?

STEP 1

Divide up the following circle into three segments – learning, working, playing – making each segment proportional to the time and energy it currently takes in your life at the present time.



STEP 2

Ask yourself the four questions listed above.

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

Do the previous exercise as preparation for a group session. In the group show your personal pie-chart, explaining it and your answers to the questions of Step 2. With the help of the others in your group, aim to sharpen your understanding of how you are working out your priorities in your life, and how you can make your life more balanced.

PROBING FURTHER

Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *How to Balance Competing Time Demands*, (NavPress,1989).

Mary Ellen Ashcroft, *Balancing Act: How women can lose their roles and find their callings* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996).

Richard A. Swenson, *The Overload Syndrome: Learning to live within your limits*, (NavPress, 1998).

Richard Bolles, *The Three Boxes of Life* (Ten Speed Press, 1978).

CHAPTER 9

MIND YOUR OWN BUSYNESS

There is more to life than increasing its speed.

Mahatma Gandhi

You may not be a workaholic. (Then again, living in the 21st century, you just might be!) But one thing is almost a given – you go through long periods when your life is far too hectic and busy. It seems that 99.9% of the population knows all about stress and nervous tension. Too many things to do, too many people to see. “Stop the world now – I want to get off!”

There is a tragic irony to the situation most of us find ourselves in. Our culture has never been more materially rich. We have all the gadgets and toys one could imagine. Yet as Robert Banks notes, we find ourselves caught in a new poverty – a lack of time.¹

WHY ARE WE SO BUSY?

Why have we allowed the treadmill of life to speed up? Why do we have to live faster and faster? Why do our lives seem to be spent just trying to keep up?

PACE OF LIFE

Thirty years ago, Alvin Toffler predicted it. And it's just as he said. Over the past generation the pace of life has increased dramatically. We see it most acutely in the way technology, communications and transport have changed.

But hang on. Shouldn't the advent of cars, new motorways, faster aeroplanes, computers, mobile phones, fax machines and the internet make it much easier

¹ Robert Banks, *All the business of Life* (Sydney: Albatross, 1987) page 63

to do our work, and free up much more time? Those new appliances: the microwaves and the automatic washing machines and all the rest – aren't they "labour-saving devices"?

The answer to that is yes – and no. Yes, they do save a lot of time and effort. No, they don't slow life down. It turns out that for some perverse reason the benefits have been well and truly overwhelmed by a whole series of unexpected pitfalls. Thanks to mobile phones we can be swiftly in touch with our loved ones – but we also find ourselves at the mercy of every caller, however trivial the enquiry or inconvenient the time. Thanks to the modern motor car we can get quickly to other places – but we get caught in traffic jams on the way. (If you live in an area where you are blessed with clear roads, then don't get smug. It's a safe bet you squeeze far more destinations into your schedule than your grandparents ever did when they walked or caught a tram.)

And the final insult is that we actually have to work longer ... in order to earn the dollars ... in order to pay for those microwaves and washing machines. And then to have them repaired ... or updated. (Think of the domestic crisis when the washing machine breaks down. Or the stove. Or that greatest of all domestic disasters, when there's a power failure...)

The writers of *Affluenza* put it precisely. "*Swelling expectations lead to a constant effort to keep up with the latest products, to compete in the consumption arena. That, in turn, forces us to work more, so we can afford the stuff. With so many things to use, and the need to work harder to obtain them, our lives grow more harried and pressured.*"²

Where did our extra free time go to? Where did all those other demands come from?

PRODUCTIVITY HAS BECOME A GOD

We are a culture fixated on Productivity – leading to Progress and Growth. The gods of the 21st century are not wooden, stone, or bronze. They are economic.

Our whole system is built on the belief that for our society to be a great place to live, this year we must produce (and therefore consume) more than we did last year. Apparently this is real progress! The measuring stick is the increase in GNP (Gross National Product).

It doesn't take too much imagination to work out where this leads. Enough is never enough. New levels of productivity must be achieved this year – and

next year – and the year after. Only by literally working harder or faster, or by employing ever-newer technology, can this be achieved. In a cruel twist, the record sales figures produced by committed and hard-working staff last year become the starting point for increasing this year's goals. The reward for the poor staff caught in this tightening vice is increased consumption ... which, of course, they must pay for by increased earnings.

UNREASONABLE EXPECTATIONS FROM THE WORKPLACE

Amidst such a pervasive ethos, it's hardly surprising that many of us struggle with increased demands from our jobs. Longer hours, more productivity, less staff to do more and more, expectations of taking work home or coming in to the office in the weekend, and so on.

The demands on employees have dramatically increased over the past fifteen years. In fact, according to Harvard economist Juliet Schor, Americans are now working 160 hours more per year (on average) than they did in 1969. That's nearly a whole month of extra 40-hour weeks!³

We don't have too much choice. If we don't meet the expectations will we get the chop and be replaced by others who are prepared to sell their soul for the company?

"Home-maker" parents are caught in the same bind. It's no surprise to find that studies report mothers (and the occasional home-staying father) spending more time shopping and ferrying children than their parents did.

We gladly recognise that there are employers who aim to create a work-life balance in their companies. We suspect, however, that far more often employers relate to their staff as if they own them – as if there is nothing else in life nearly as important as the job. In recent years the situation has been made even worse by "contract work" – where the worker is simply contracted to do a specific job. This can mean fewer and fewer companies that have a long term commitment to their employees, and feel responsible for their wider well-being.

Breaking out of this is not easy. Unscrupulous managers and employers will push staff as far as their employees are prepared to be pushed. And, perversely, even where an employer creates a positive work environment, many of us still drive ourselves to earn more, using credit or extra part-time jobs, or both. Our whole culture is based on the premise that we need more and more things.

The demands on employees have dramatically increased over the past fifteen years.

² John De Graaf, David Wann, Thomas Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2001) page 44.

³ Noted in *Affluenza*, as a result of a personal interview with Ms Schor.

STAGES OF LIFE

Certain periods in life are more demanding than others, and this accentuates the pressures and demands. For example, the writers of this book fulfil numerous roles in a week. We are parents, marriage partners, home owners, neighbours, board members and friends. Alistair is a pastor and teacher, Annette a postgrad student, Wayne a businessman and writer. And in our spare time we all run a taxi service and volunteer support crew for our children and their many and varied activities.

Parents among our readers will be well familiar with the syndrome. We all happen to be at that stage in life where the number of roles we carry is probably the greatest it will ever be, and those roles stretch us to the limit.

Furthermore, certain parenting stages are extraordinarily demanding even without multiple roles. For example, if you have two or more pre-schoolers you will feel you have precious little discretionary time. (And any scraps you do have are constantly rendered useless because you have so little energy left. You repeatedly find yourself collapsing in desperately needed sleep, or flopping in a vegetable-like state in front of the TV!)

For many parents the stress of raising children is accentuated by the lack of close-at-hand family support, separated as we so often are from parents and siblings. And it can be made worse if the employed partner faces unrealistic demands at work, so that two-parent families are in reality, one-parent families for large chunks of the week.

**In our society
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BUSYNESS IS NOW A VIRTUE

There’s another crucial reason why many of us are so harried. Busyness has become a virtue, not a vice. In our society – and indeed in our churches – you could be forgiven for thinking that “busyness is next to godliness”. Mention how hard-at-it you are and you are likely to be highly affirmed.

So why do we want people to know that we are so industrious? Because busyness is equated with importance, significance and success. We desire to be esteemed and wanted. We are affirmed and valued when we are always on the go. So we become skilled players of the “I’m just so incredibly busy” game.

“How’s your week been, Wayne?” “Oh, so busy, Gary. I had to go to Sydney on Monday for a business meeting; Tuesday I was due to meet with a visiting

CEO from the US; Wednesday I had a home group meeting in the evening; Thursday it was off to Auckland to see some clients for two days. And now my business partners have told me I need to fly to London on Monday week to sort out a problem over there. I tried talking them out of it but they said I’m the only one who can do it. I feel exhausted.”

Gary is impressed. “Wow, you have been busy, Wayne. You need a break.” And inside Gary’s head a little tape is running: This guy must be really important; he’s run off his feet. When he asks me how my week has been, how can I embellish it so it sounds like I’m really busy too – and therefore important?

WE DON’T WANT TO BE CONSIDERED LAZY

Perhaps a further cause of busyness, at least among Christians, is the desire to avoid being labelled “lazy” – for this is one of the worst of evangelical sins. We work hard to “pull our weight”, and often end up overcompensating. It’s easy to soon become driven.

IS BUSYNESS A BAD THING?

So far in this chapter we’ve made an underlying assumption that being busy is wrong. At first glance this may seem to go against what we have been taught about the Christian life.

After all, aren’t we called to “give our lives for the cause”, to expend ourselves on behalf of others? And wasn’t it the Puritans and early evangelicals who taught us to view time as a precious resource which should not be wasted?

The answer to this is, of course, yes. We are called to be meaningfully employed in God’s kingdom. In that sense, busyness may not be totally negative. And certainly there are times in our lives when we must urgently complete a task. Nehemiah was in just such a bind as he raced to finish the walls of Jerusalem before his enemies could exploit the weak points. Farmers can’t afford to lose a minute when the time is right for bringing in the harvest.

However, when in this chapter we refer to busyness we mean the overwhelming and persistent feeling that there are just too many things to do, too many people to see ... and too little time to get it all done.

All of us go through busy patches. But when busyness becomes a way of life – a regular habit – it turns destructive.

**When
busyness
becomes a way
of life – a
regular habit
– it turns
destructive.**

Busyness will often divert our energy away from the most important issues of life, and undermine what we were made for. Our homes can become railway

stations or B&B's; our stress levels go through the ceiling; there is little or no time for growing relationships; we often have the feeling we are busy with so many things, but really not doing any of them justice; time for nurturing spiritual disciplines is sacrificed; reflection, prayer and relationship with God are squeezed out.

These are just some of the results of being habitually busy. Such a lifestyle also puts pressure on other resources, like money. Our frantic state may lead us to take shortcuts for meals – eating out frequently, buying more takeaways and pre-prepared meals, options which cost a lot more and put pressure on our finances.

The pace of life we set for ourselves can cause us a lot of damage. But is there anything we can do about it?

HOW DO WE COUNTER A BREATHLESS PACE OF LIFE?

There are several ways to get our busy lives in better balance.

BE FOCUSED ON WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT FOR YOUR LIFE

Discovering your *SoulPurpose* allows you to work out what your priorities should be. Frequently we take on roles and tasks which don't fit who we are. This might be through a sense of obligation or of supposed importance. More likely it's because we simply haven't worked out where we fit in God's scheme of things. Discovering who we are and who we're not, and being content in that, will help us to build a grid which sifts the stuff we should be doing from the stuff we shouldn't. You might call it strategic living.

There's another angle on getting our priorities back in line. It's learning the value God places on relationships. This is a lesson Martha had to learn – the hard way, as Luke recalls:

As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said. But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in, interrupting them. "Master, don't you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand."

⁴ Luke 10:40-41 (The Message).

The Master said, "Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it – it's the main course, and won't be taken from her."⁴

Martha was anxious to produce a welcoming meal. Is that important? Absolutely. Luke tells us about this incident not so that we should rate the spiritual level of different activities. He's not saying it is more spiritual or important to sit down and spend time with Jesus than it is to do the dishes. The point Jesus was making was that activism shouldn't rule our lives. There are strategic times when relationships need to take priority. At those times "productivity" should take a back seat. Knowing when to be active and when to relate, reflect, and pray is a critical act of discernment.

Many of us can identify with Martha. There's a lot to be said for getting things done and out of the way. But Mary and Martha had all too few opportunities for sitting down and talking with Jesus. On this occasion Martha was wasting a rare opportunity. It's important to discern the appropriate thing to do in each situation. We need to live strategically...

LEARN HOW TO SAY "NO"

Saying no is one of the most important skills you can learn. It can become easier when you understand how you were made and what you are called to be involved in. (The activities of the previous chapters will have helped you identify this more clearly.) What is it that God is calling you to make the primary involvement of your life? That's what you should focus on. When people are laying on you the expectation that you should deal with a particular problem (or you are laying that expectation on yourself), ask these questions.

- Am I the right person to do this?
- Is it something I am equipped to deal with?
- Are there others who could do it as well or better?
- What other priorities do I have at this time?
- Should I really be putting them aside in order to deal with this?

Knowing when to be active and when to relate, reflect, and pray is a critical act of discernment.

It's true that there can be times when we sense God asking us to do things which don't "fit" well who we are. But that should be a conscious decision we make, rather than simply responding to the needs of the moment.

Remember, there will always be more opportunities and needs out there than any one of us can deal with. Learning to sense which ones God wants us to be involved in, and to feel okay about saying no to others, is critical if we want to make a difference. Time is a gift from God – but it's a limited gift.

Which leads to the next point...

REALISE YOU CAN'T DO EVERYTHING

None of us is called to save the whole world. That's God's job! When we accept internally that we are simply junior partners with God in his work, it substantially alters our perspective. The air of indispensability is gone.

Sometimes we simply have too high a view of what we are doing. That can distort our priorities so that we end up worshiping our work.

BUILD HABITS AND ROUTINES THAT ASSIST IN THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE

Life is not meant to be all about activity. Genesis is clear on this. The example of God's work in creating the Cosmos should act as a template for us in our activity. What did God do after six days?

God took a break.

Through the Bible we discover that God has established natural rhythms for healthy living – and in one case (the 24-hour day) he even assisted us by turning off the lamp! So we have day and night; and we have working week and Sabbath. It doesn't end there. Israel's calendar also included regular "religious festivals" (some lasting several days), the sabbatical year (every seventh year when the land was rested) and the year of Jubilee (the 50th year – after seven sets of seven years).

With all of these God intended to structure into the normal schedule of work a balancing rhythm of rest. How we do this in our modern and largely urban context is a personal challenge we all must face. But rest we must – not only because our weary minds and bodies need a "breather", but also because for our own health we need to constantly realign ourselves with our Creator and his Creation.

Jesus is our ultimate example. As O's Guinness says, for Jesus *"...spirituality is plainly not a life of contemplation divorced from a life of action...There is*

⁵ O. Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: Word, 1998) page 159

*only the rhythm of engagement and withdrawal, work and rest, dispensing and recharging, crowds and solitude, in the midst of one of the shortest, busiest public lives ever lived."*⁵

Strikingly, one of the features of NZ society in the past fifteen years is that Sunday has become like every other day of the week. On what used to be the day of rest, shops are now open and sporting events held. This means that we have to be much more intentional about building the weekly rhythm of rest into our lives.

For example, an acquaintance who has very busy weekends tells us that ten years ago God spoke to him quite specifically about taking every Wednesday off. Though it has been hard at times he has held to this commitment, and reckons that he has actually been more productive as a result.

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFESTYLE

Our lives are generally too cluttered – with things, desires, and activities which are not helping us to live faithful lives of discipleship. We need to think seriously about simplifying our lifestyle and lowering our expectations. Richard Foster comments that: *"(Christian simplicity) allows us to see material things for what they are – goods to enhance life, not to oppress life. People once again become more important than possessions. Simplicity enables us to live lives of integrity in the face of the terrible realities of our global village."*⁶

The call to simplicity is not a call to do away with material possessions. Neither is it some kind of mystical extraction from our culture – a total rejection of all that modern life offers. Rather it is an approach which enables us to see the wood from the trees. What is really important about this life comes clearly into focus, while the clutter is sifted out. In such a state, our real priorities are able to be lived out.

Many of us actually have a standard of living well beyond what we need. Tragically we don't realise it. For most of us really do think that we are "just getting by". However, when we dig below the surface of our expenditure we can soon discover that we have chosen or bought into a particular standard of living. Our choice of home (size, geographical location, features, material it's built of), our living situation, transport, furniture and furnishings, entertainment, eating habits, holiday options, etc., all dictate the standard of living we choose to maintain. As we stated in our book *Where's God on Monday?* :

⁶ Richard Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) page 3.

We need to think seriously about simplifying our lifestyle and lowering our expectations.

Many of us can actually live on substantially less with very little pain. Buying a house in a cheaper area of town and then resisting the desire to “upgrade”; buying a second-hand vehicle that has already depreciated substantially but still has good life in it; settling for mainly second-hand furniture; eating out only occasionally; keeping one’s wardrobe to a minimum and wearing clothes till they are well-worn; choosing cheaper forms of entertainment and holidays – all these are some of the practices we’ve pursued over the years. And they have reduced the cost of living substantially. During the years of greatest expense (teenage children!), simplifying our standard of living has meant much less financial pressure on us than on many of our friends. We are content to live on a lower income and therefore have more time and energy to give to other matters – including rest.

RECOGNISE OVERCHOICE

A simpler lifestyle affects our role as consumers in modern society. Writing over thirty years ago, Alvin Toffler noted the huge complexities developing for people through what he described as “overchoice” – “*the point at which the advantages of diversity and individualisation are cancelled by the complexity of the buyer’s decision-making process.*”⁷

We are faced by too many choices on too many products. Having to decide between a dozen different cereals at the supermarket is challenge enough. But then just down the aisle is another choice – and another – and another.

The skills required to negotiate through such a gridlock of choice are increasingly important. Savvy consumers read a lot and investigate the pros and cons of particular brands and models. But with each new invention we complicate our lives still further – rather than simplifying things. This is hardly helpful for our spirituality, and it frequently makes our lives even more hectic.

There are no easy answers to the state of overchoice we find ourselves in. It will help if we can keep “essential” requirements to a minimum, and if we can regularly remind ourselves and each other of the problem. As with so many matters of healthy living, this is a dilemma which is easier to face when we do it with like-minded people. Talking these things over with alert and supportive friends can keep us sensitive to the issue.

⁷ A. Toffler, *Future Shock* (London: Bodley Head, 1970) page 239.

CREATE “HOLY SPACES” AND BUILD SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Learning to shut the office door for a few minutes of relative solitude; pulling to the side of the road and turning the truck engine off; putting on a video for our preschool children while we take a coffee into our bedroom for half an hour’s peace – these habits are necessary in order to nurture our spirituality (to say nothing of our sanity!).

This type of slowing down is, in reality, a spiritual discipline. However, as Os Guinness points out: “*Neither of the two terms in ‘spiritual discipline’ comes easily to us as modern people – we are by nature neither spiritual nor disciplined.*”⁸

So we have to work at it! Till it becomes as natural to us as breathing.

THE CALL TO “FULL” LIVING

When we provide these suggestions for dealing with our incessant busyness, we are not trying to construct a neat “10 steps” programme. What causes our overly hectic lifestyles is a complex mass of demands that won’t be dismissed easily or simplistically. Our circumstances and responsibilities differ, and as a result the challenges are greater for some of us than for others.

Nevertheless, we hope that this chapter will be a catalyst. We hope that it will help you, and us, to aim for more consistency between what we really believe in and have been “made for” ... and the reality of our day-to-day living.

Busyness is a bit like passive smoking! None of us can avoid the effects totally – unless we cloister ourselves away. But that means either being a closed sect removed from the culture; or, by opting out of the “rat race”, selfishly protecting our time and resources for our own indulgence. The latter is definitely not an option for a Christian, (and even if it was, we suspect busyness is so much in our blood we would soon get bored!).

The purpose of working against the downsides of busyness is not so we can indulge ourselves more. Far from it. It is exactly the opposite. It’s so we can be more effective, focused and productive partners with God.

A friend draws a distinction between a busy life and a full life. One could easily dismiss this as just playing with words, but he has a point. It might be a

What causes our overly hectic lifestyles is a complex mass of demands that won’t be dismissed easily or simplistically.

⁸ Guinness, 159.

busy day if we rush around vacuuming, cleaning windows, weeding the garden and trimming the edges. It would be a day used to the full if we leave

A full life is one that values balance and integration. the hedge unclipped and instead spend an hour under the shade of a tree with a favourite book. It might be a busy week if we work late each night getting that recommendation paper finished on time for the boss. It would be a week used to the full if at one point we drop what we're doing and visit friends who have had a disaster.

It might be a busy year if we work long hours getting our new business up and running. It would be a year used to the full if we down tools when we see the signals that a client is having a bad time and needs someone to talk to, or a shoulder to lean on.

A full life is one that values balance and integration. A full life calls for sensitivity – to what God is doing, to the needs of others, and to our own needs. And it's the kind of life that is free enough to be wonderfully spontaneous at times – dropping what we're doing to help someone else or to play a game with a child, to throw a party or to send someone a gift. When we allocate our time we reveal subtle yet critical values.

We suspect this is something of what Jesus had in mind when he said, *"I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest."*⁹ Erma Bombeck's little prose *If I had my life to live over*, picks up some of the sentiments of living a full rather than a busy life. It's worth reflecting on:

If I had my life to live over...

I would have talked less and listened more.

I would have invited friends over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded.

I would have eaten popcorn in the "good" living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace.

I would never have insisted that the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed.

I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage.

I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about the grass stains.

I would have cried and laughed less while watching television and more while watching life.

I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for the day.

When my kids kissed me impetuously I would never had said, "Later, now go get washed for dinner."

There would have been more "I love you," more "I'm sorry..."

But mostly given another shot at life, I would seize every minute look at it and really see it... live it... and never give it back.

I would tell all my friends that I need them and love them and that my life would be empty without them!

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

- 1 Of the reasons given for busyness, which ones especially affect you?
- 2 If unrealistic expectations from your employer is one reason you can identify, write down as specifically as you can what you think are reasonable expectations. Schedule a meeting with him/her to discuss these expectations, and to see if you can agree on a common list of solutions that are fair both to you and to your employer.
- 3 Think about the pressures you find yourself under at present. Which of these are external (for example, the demands or expectations that others place on you) and which ones are internal (inner compulsions or "voices from the past" such as a need to please, to be a perfectionist, to live at a certain standard or to achieve certain goals)? Are there any ways in which you feel you are a "driven" person? What steps can you take to change this? What help do you need to change?
- 4 Think about how you take time out or do things just for yourself. Which of these activities cause you to slow down and "unbusy" yourself? Which ones just reinforce the hectic pace of life you experience the rest of the week? Which of these activities are genuine energy gainers (i.e. recharge your batteries) and which ones are actually energy drainers (sucking more of your energy)?

⁹ John 10:10 (CEV).

- 5 Take time to meditate on the following words of Jesus (*Matthew 11:28-30 The Message*).... “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR SMALL GROUPS

- 1 What are some examples of overchoice in your local shopping centre at the moment?
- 2 What are some other possible reasons for life being constantly busy?
- 3 Tom Wright comments: “*Only in a society that has its priorities drastically wrong could a football pools advertisement shout, ‘You’ll never work again!’ and mean it as a promise, rather than a threat.*” How do we help each other to see that the purpose of “unbusying” ourselves is not so we can live even more self-indulgent lives – taking it easy and “enjoying life” – but so that we can concentrate on living holy lives of obedience?
- 4 Discuss some of the following quotes:

“All junior executives should know that if they work hard ten hours a day, every day, they could be promoted to senior executives so that they can work hard for fourteen hours a day.” **John Capozzi**

“Although people will pay to fix their stress, they are not about to change the lifestyle that is causing it.” **David C. McCasland**

“If the most conscientious physician were to attempt to keep up with the literature by reading two articles per day, in one year this individual would be more than eight hundred years behind.” **Octo Barnett M.D.**

“Work expands to fill the time available.” **Parkinson’s Law**

SECTION D

THINGS KEEP CHANGING!

GROWING THROUGH THE STAGES OF LIFE

Time is a dressmaker specialising in alterations.

Faith Baldwin

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

According to Paula Poundstone, adults are always asking little kids this question. (She reckons it’s because they’re looking for ideas!) But have you noticed a curiosity about the enquiry and its answers? “I want to be a fireman/policewoman/teacher...” In our western culture it’s all about what we want to do rather than who we want to become.

So just exactly when did we become “grown-up”? Was it at some pre-ordained age? Maybe 21, or 18? Or is maturity more complex and variable than simply sticking a label on us at a certain birthday and calling us “adult”?

For many years it was taken for granted that human development went through the four stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and finally adulthood. The last one was supposedly a stable state. Once we got to it ... that’s who we were. However, since the latter half of the twentieth century there has been a growing awareness that adulthood itself comprises a number of steps toward greater maturity – each one often, though not always, identified with a particular age period.¹ Much research has focused on trying to understand these different stages and the transitions that accompany them.

Life, of course, is a rich tapestry that cannot easily be divided into neatly categorised sections. People are all so very different in their development.

¹ Popular examples include Levinson’s book *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* and Gail Sheehy’s *Passages: the predictable crises of adult life*.

Some mature more quickly than others, gender and cultural differences influence the pace, as do changes within a culture from one generation to another. For example, Gail Sheehy suggests that the crises usually met at age forty in the 1960s and 1970s now seem to be experienced at age fifty in the new millennium.²

Life is definitely not static once we attain adulthood. The point remains, however, that there are a number of predictable development issues which come along in most people's lives. While it's true that there are variations between men and women, and from one culture to another – so that we may meet these issues in different ways and at slightly different ages – nevertheless meet them we all will. Life is definitely not static once we attain adulthood.

These stages of growth and development can change our lives in unexpected ways. As a result, they can have a dramatic impact on our sense of identity ... and therefore on our *SoulPurpose*.

WHO AM I?

There are three major transitions in life when identity issues are up for grabs. During these times our *SoulPurpose*, and with it our career and life-planning decisions, come into sharp relief.

The first is the transition that occurs during adolescence and early adulthood, when we are concerned with entering the workforce.

The second is at midlife when we tend to take stock of our lives. We become aware, slowly or suddenly, that we no longer have time to do all the things we want to. The urgency of passing time causes us to examine which of our goals are really important to us.

The third is at what used to be called retirement, but is now often referred to as the third age. Because people are living longer, this transition can involve making new choices that may include a mixture of paid and unpaid work.

Let's look at each of these three critical life stages and consider how they affect our identity, and with it our *SoulPurpose*.

ADOLESCENCE

Erik Erikson wrote that the major crisis of adolescence is the forging of an identity. This identity can be expressed as the beliefs and values that a person stands for, and the direction in which that person chooses to go.

² See her book *New Passages* (Ballantine Books, 1996).

James Marcia picked up on Erikson's findings and elaborated on them. He suggested that even though forming an identity was the goal of adolescence, not everyone was successful and that an individual could achieve (or get stuck in) one of four identity states. He described them as:

1. IDENTITY FORECLOSURE

Mike left school when he was 16, largely because his father told him to go and get a job. So that's what he did. One of the local banks was advertising for tellers. He applied and soon found himself behind the counter of a downtown branch. He didn't particularly enjoy the work but he gained some degree of competence and soon found himself promoted. Twenty-five years later Mike realised he hated the job he had to go to each day.

Identity foreclosure is where we shun exploring alternatives and take, often uncritically or without any reflection, whatever principles, values or direction which the authorities in our life pass on to us or direct us to. This can be particularly relevant in the *SoulPurpose* process. In later years, adults who have "foreclosed" on their identity at adolescence may be the ones who make a sudden career change at midlife. They have finally begun to explore alternatives and have arrived at their own sense of *SoulPurpose*, rather than something just handed down to them.

2. IDENTITY MORATORIUM

Sue is 25 years old ... and has a reputation for making "weird and wacky" decisions. Some of her family harp on that she has "never grown up", and there's an element of truth in this. Sue's choices, like her inexplicable job changes, indicate that she has postponed thinking through who she is and what she is made for. Her unrealistic explorations are simply delaying the inevitable – deciding what she is going to do with her life. Sue has, indeed, not allowed herself to grow up.

Sue's identity is stalled in what Marcia calls an identity moratorium – a stoppage which is hopefully temporary. Because she is only 25, Sue's family and friends have so far made allowances for her, arguing that she is still young and has time on her side. But the longer Sue's moratorium continues, the less tolerance others will give her. After all, we can't put a hold on grappling with our identity forever – though sadly there are individuals who don't move on, often drifting from job to job without any seeming connection between them.

3. IDENTITY DIFFUSION

Murray is literally going nowhere in life. He is drifting aimlessly without any sense of urgency. Murray is neither looking at career alternatives nor is he even interested in doing so. He represents identity diffusion, a state of not having yet faced up to a core part of adolescence – the awareness of the need to do something with one’s life. Part of the reason for Murray’s total inertia and disinterest may be that he is yet to experience a crisis or major challenge to the way he is living.

4. IDENTITY ACHIEVEMENT

Julie, on the other hand, is passionate about making her life count for something. She has taken a while to work out what she wants to achieve in life, but has now set a clear course towards Christian development work in an Asian country. Julie is only 24 but she has grappled well with what kind of contribution she can make, and with what values and beliefs will drive her life. She has reached what Marcia calls identity achievement, through exploring some alternatives and then making a commitment.

Exercises like the ones in this book can help facilitate this process, by helping people like Julie take some time for self-reflection in order to move on.

The following chart summarises the distinction between these various states of identity.

IDENTITY STATES	EXPERIENCED A CRISIS	SEARCHED ALTERNATIVES	MADE A COMMITMENT
DIFFUSION	No	No	No
FORECLOSURE	Yes	No	Yes
MORATORIUM	Yes	Yes	No
ACHIEVEMENT	Yes	Yes	Yes

It’s natural at adolescence that quite a lot of focus is given to preparing for a “career”. However, we are anxious to make clear in this book that career is not to be confused with our whole life’s work. Ultimately our *SoulPurpose* is

expressed through a mixture of paid and unpaid work. The degree to which people find fulfilment of their *SoulPurpose* through a career differs from person to person. For some, investment in activities outside of paid work is a more important component than for others. Striking a healthy balance through which we can give expression to this at different stages of life is a subject we’ve already given some attention to in chapter 8.

It’s also important to note that identity development encompasses more than just what we do. Despite our childhood focus on the future job, once we finally do become train drivers or prime ministers or astronauts we discover there are much deeper issues that concern us – especially how we relate to others, and what we come to believe. All such issues are up for consideration in the transitional years.

MIDLIFE

Adolescence is not the only time in our lives when identity development and the search for *SoulPurpose* come to the fore. It also occurs at other stages, especially midlife.

The period of midlife can be any number of years and is usually located any time between the ages of 35 and 60. It’s a staging post – kind of like a half-time in the game of life (as Bob Buford puts it). This growing awareness of being half-way along life’s journey evokes different responses in different people. Lillian Helman the American Playwright wrote, *“If you’ve invested yourself in life, you’re pretty certain to get a return. If you are inwardly a serious person, in the middle years it will pay off”*.

That may be so, but how many of us actually feel more like Dante (the 14th century poet) who wrote *“Midway in life’s journey I was made aware that I had strayed into a dark forest, and the right path appeared not anywhere”*? This transition can be a perplexing and disorienting time.

Midlife has received huge press over recent years. Unfortunately much of it has been rather sensational, focusing on “midlife crises” – like the businessman who runs off with his secretary and the company money, leaving his wife who “just doesn’t understand me”.

Most midlife experiences are nothing like so dramatic. A better term for describing the more predictable experiences at this time may actually be

The questions midlife often raises are quite different from those of earlier years.

midlife consciousness. This is an important and valuable time of re-assessment, a time for taking stock of where we are going in life. Is our direction of the last two or three decades really where we want to go?

Men in particular often experience a shift from their earlier dreams of “success” to re-adjusted dreams of “significance”

The questions midlife often raises are quite different from those of earlier years. By 40 most of us have experienced a number of successes and satisfactions ... as well as our share of dashed dreams and failed expectations. This mixture of joys and disappointments combines with the growing realisation that our years are limited. This is the context in which we find ourselves pushed to re-assess what our life is all about.

Depending on how much we perceive we have achieved, this can be a threatening experience. There will be feelings of grief where dreams have not been attained, or somehow lost along the way. There will be a sense of waking up to the realisation that some of the dreams we held were never our own but were pressed upon us by others (as well as the relief of finally letting these go). There may also be anger at wasted or lost opportunities.

Men in particular often experience a shift from their earlier dreams of “success” to re-adjusted dreams of “significance”, often involving a new clarity on what are the important values to live for. Words such as *relationships*, *legacy*, *contribution* begin to figure more prominently in their vocabulary, and achievements, goals, success somewhat less.

Many of the people who participate in life-planning courses are working through their midlife consciousness. Often earlier career choices were shaped by influences other than meaning-of-life factors – things like money, family expectations (or a reaction against these), location, etc. Now, at midlife, work acquires new meanings. Am I making a worthwhile contribution (to my family, to society, to God’s work)? How much time do I have left to achieve the things I want to achieve?

Erik Erikson calls the crisis of this time a struggle between “generativity and stagnation”. Generativity is the sense that one is making a worthwhile contribution to those who follow – whether expressed in parenting younger generations, or through employment or voluntary community work. Stagnation is the sense of sliding into retirement, of unwillingness to keep growing and learning– and is similar to what others call “inner death”.

Midlife may have a number of different implications for women. For those

who have been raising children it means a time of taking stock of their life as their family becomes independent. Many of these women return to employment with a vigour more reminiscent of young men in their twenties.

For those women who have delayed child bearing and rearing, the approach of midlife signals a time of making a decision that will no longer wait. Other women who have remained single out of circumstances or choice also face the end of their child-bearing years, and may need to grieve this lost opportunity. Similarly, for an increasing number of women who have left childbearing until later, infertility takes a toll. The work that once claimed their time may now lose its attraction. For the previously contented career woman, midlife may signal a change to a more “meaningful” occupation – this perception will be defined in different ways of course. Some women who have spent two decades establishing themselves at work may now long for time with their families. Their career isn’t working for them anymore.

Frequently for men the frenzied approach of their early work years can no longer be sustained at midlife. Energy levels drop and there is usually a growing sense of one’s own mortality. Many men become aware of the sacrifice they have made in terms of their time with their family in order to pursue work goals. This causes them to rethink the whole work question. For some the financial security they have established during their early work years, or a sudden redundancy settlement (or second, or third redundancy...), means they can now afford to consider other occupations that previously were not so realistic. Others find that their paid employment does not offer them any chance to make a meaningful contribution. For these men, family, voluntary work and/or leisure-time occupations may become the way they can express generativity.

In marriages a subtle reversal may occur in the focus of each gender. The man may become more aware of the importance of relationships, even if it is the golf gang, while the woman suddenly has a drive to achieve more outside of the home. These differences can be heard in the conversations of midlifers. A man may talk of the way his life was task-driven, of the emphasis on individuality – and he may now affirm the importance of community and connecting with others. Meanwhile, the woman may be longing for a little individuality, having been absorbed (and sometimes enmeshed) in relationships for most of her life.

Midlife consciousness need not be all about loss and regret.

Midlife consciousness need not be all about loss and regret. If anything it is a time of opportunity. It's about offloading things that are no longer useful, in order that we can continue with the journey without being weighed down. Midlife means an appraisal of all aspects of our lives – work, relationships, physical health and well-being, spiritual growth, and more. The questions midlife raises should bring clarity to the big issues of life – who am I, what am I living for, and where am I heading? It can be a time of creativity as in partnership with God we re-fashion some of those old dreams into more authentic packages. The things of value from what has gone before can now result in renewed wonder, as we move into a new phase of life with a fresh appreciation of how wondrously we have been put together.

A British television documentary series called Seven-Up has traced the lives of a number of individuals from the time they were seven years old, interviewing them at seven-year intervals. In the most recent programme (reflecting on the period between ages 35 and 42) there were some fascinating changes. At 35 a brashness and fearlessness still pervaded some of the participants. By age 42, there was a softening of attitude that almost approached defeat in some and graciousness in others. Even the previously most unlikable personalities seemed to become more likable. The rough edges had been knocked off them, though the knocks of life had in different ways left scars of one kind or another. Midlife consciousness was having its effect!

Perhaps the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel (in Genesis 32) is a helpful picture of midlife consciousness. It can be a time of turmoil, and when it fully engages the traveller you can be sure that there will be some rigorous wrestling done. Almost all of us survive the scuffle, even if we carry with us a limp as a sign of what we endured. Most of all, we walk away with a new identity. Jacob becomes Israel. We too will move to a new and richer level if we allow ourselves to engage in reassessment at the time of midlife. And we too have the potential to walk away with renewed SoulPurpose even if we are not totally unscathed.

Leaving your job doesn't mean that your sense of purpose stops.

THE THIRD AGE

In the third age, people have the opportunity to retire – and also, often, to stay in paid employment, perhaps part-time. Retirement can be couched in either very negative or overly optimistic terms. Some see it as the end of their productivity, while others view it as the

holiday they longed for. Neither are particularly healthy or realistic perspectives. If you have put time into understanding and developing your *SoulPurpose*, you will have a thread that provides real continuity beyond paid employment. Leaving your job doesn't mean that your sense of purpose stops. It will go on – just in a different form. This may be through a mixture of part-time jobs, voluntary opportunities, and more informal contributions as a parent, grandparent, friend, mentor, etc.

Our *SoulPurpose* will remain in spite of the changing outward forms through which it is expressed. It can open up doors to new groups of people, and new opportunities. For example, Mary left her job as a primary school teacher in her late fifties, but has taken her love of teaching and her artistic gifts to a new venture. She has begun her own drama group for children after school. This still gives her a regular opportunity to be involved in teaching and encouraging children, but with fewer hours (and ones that suit her). She also finds she has been able to start a weekly group in her church for people at the same life stage as herself, a group which offers companionship and opportunities for occasional service projects in the community.

If you understand your *SoulPurpose*, you are likely to cope much better with the transition into the third age. Regardless of whether or not you are viewed as a “mover and shaker”, your worth as a person will remain.

Many people in later maturity suffer from a crisis of despair, experiencing deep regrets and often a sense of futility about the way they have lived their lives. Having a well-developed *SoulPurpose* can avert much of this crisis. It allows people to look back over their past and recognise a real sense of purpose. They are able to see how their experiences have become integrated into a meaningful whole – like a patchwork quilt where the variety mingles with a sense of unity and completeness.

Erikson calls this state ego integrity. We can see God's providence at work in our lives – even in the not-so-positive experiences – and discover the truth of Paul's statement that “...all things work together for good for those that love God and are called according to his purposes”. Life comes full of jumps and starts, and twists and turns – so don't expect a totally complete and tidy package! Nevertheless you can look forward to a strong sense of having experienced an abundant and full life.

Midlife consciousness need not be all about loss and regret.

STAGES OF FAITH

Not only do we develop physically, mentally, emotionally and socially through different stages of our lives, but we also grow spiritually. So it's important to reflect on how our faith develops through the years, for this is a major factor in growing a SoulPurpose.

For many years Sunday School teachers and youth leaders have known about the development of faith from childhood through adolescence and on into early adulthood. However, only in more recent years has serious research been done exploring ways in which faith continues to change through our adult years. At the forefront of this research has been James Fowler – a sociologist of religion.

Fowler suggests that as faith develops, changes occur in the following areas:

- 1 the way people think;
- 2 their ability to see another's point of view;
- 3 the way they arrive at moral judgements;
- 4 the way and extent to which they draw boundaries around their faith community;
- 5 the way they relate to external authorities and their truth-claims;
- 6 the way they form their world view;
- 7 the way they understand and respond to symbols.

Fowler's research has led him to conclude that there are six stages of faith. However, there is an acknowledgment that not every person will grow through every stage. Furthermore, people mature at different rates and at different stages of life.

Fowler's stages of faith have been summarised in the following way:³

³ We have used the simplified titles for each stage from the Charles McCullough's book *Heads of Heaven: Feet of Clay* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), and descriptions from Richter and Francis, *Gone But Not Forgotten* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1998) and Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith* (Wellington: Phillip Garside Publishing, 2000).

STAGE ONE: THE INNOCENT. This is found in pre-school children whose faith is derived largely from their family experience and shaped by the talk that goes on around them, the stories that are told and the rituals and symbols that are part of their lives. It is a disorganised collage of images that include real and imagined events. Faith here has to do with powerful images and symbols rather than concepts or logical thought.

STAGE TWO: THE LITERALIST. This can begin as early as six years old. Children at this stage begin to separate fantasy from reality, though they still reason in very literal and concrete terms. To the influence of the family is now added the impact of teachers, school, television, movies and books. Their faith particularly involves identification with the stories of their faith community. They identify strongly with people who are like the significant adults in their life. They are aware of – and often critical of – people who are different.

Adults who remain at this stage prefer a community where a strong, literal interpretation of scripture is encouraged. This stage offers security for the individual and encourages deep conviction and commitment. It emphasises rules and authoritative teaching. The main image of God is that of a stern and just (though loving) parent.

STAGE THREE: THE LOYALIST. This stage occurs during adolescence and beyond. It comes at the time when we develop a new self-awareness, as well as the ability to think abstractly. We begin to clarify what we believe. However, we are also highly influenced by the opinions of respected teachers, other students, parents or church leaders. These are the ones to whom we look for guidance and affirmation.

People at this stage find security in belonging to a community of like-minded believers. Their faith is often tenaciously held ... but without serious analysis, without the conscious act of "standing outside it" and engaging in an in-depth personal critique of it. Their vision of God is usually as an external transcendent being. They often invest a lot in their faith community and it plays an important role in their lives. Conflict in the community is very threatening to them.

STAGE FOUR: THE CRITIC. At this stage we find ourselves standing to one side and critically reflecting on our faith. We are no longer willing to have second-hand beliefs, merely borrowed from influential people. Faith is personally

owned. This can be a difficult and lonely stage since we are likely to become critical of the community we have identified with. We begin to detach ourselves from it and to dismantle some of our previous beliefs.

This stage is often associated with leaving home – either literally or metaphorically. For example, young people may go away to tertiary study, get married, or start a new job. It involves developing a new respect and trust for one’s own intuition, feelings and judgements rather than such a heavy reliance on the views of others. People at this stage appreciate freedom to express their own views in forums that encourage questioning and interaction. They start to enjoy encounters with the beliefs and practices of people they previously stayed away from. They don’t sit easily in any leadership structure that pushes for conformity.

STAGE FIVE: THE SEER. At this stage we are much less defensive about our own beliefs and more open to others’ perspectives on reality. Though confident in our beliefs, we begin to demonstrate more humility as we become more aware of the depth of the unconscious and the unknown. Our faith is increasingly able to live with ambiguity and paradox. Truth is no longer a question of “either-or”, but “both-and”. Symbols, myths and stories take on a new relevance. We begin to love mystery and the vastness of the unknown.

STAGE SIX: THE SAINT. This is rare. It usually occurs only late in life – if at all. Mother Teresa is often offered as an example. This stage results when a preoccupation with self gives way to a sense of mystical unity with all things and the complete acceptance of the ultimate authority of God in all aspects of life. This last stage is more speculative and less empirically grounded than the other stages and not particularly relevant to our purposes.

Whether Fowler’s categories are exactly correct or not, it is clear that people do go through stages of revising their understanding of faith. Frequently this can leave them feeling quite confused and vulnerable during the times of transition – especially if they don’t understand what is going on for them. Sometimes it can feel or look as if they are losing their faith, because it does involve some letting go of existing beliefs.

However, it is generally more helpful to view this as part of the process of moving from one understanding to another. This is a positive and healthy

thing, though we do need the help of committed companions and wise counsel in the midst of such transitions.

It is not the purpose of this book to explore Stages of Faith in detail. However, it is clear that the Bible is the story of people on a journey of faith, resulting in a growing understanding of God and His purposes.

The Bible clearly talks about the development of individuals’ faith in similar terms. Luke notes that “...*Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favour with God and with people*.”⁴ The Apostle Paul tells the church at Corinth, “(We)... *are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory*.”⁵ Peter writes, “*Add to your faith goodness; and to goodness knowledge; and to knowledge self-control; and to self-control...*”⁶ And the writer of Hebrews reproves his readers: “*You need milk not solid food!...(for) solid food is for the mature, who by constant use train themselves to distinguish good from evil.*”⁷

We are people in the process of growing. Always changing. Always deepening and developing our understanding of our faith. The stages of faith we find ourselves growing through will inevitably impact on how we see and pursue our SoulPurpose. So it is important that we recognise how faith factors may influence the way we respond to transitions and crises in our lives – just as much as the other factors we have looked at, such as changes in career, and personal and family issues.

The exercises and questions below are designed to help you consider your own development and its impact on where and how you serve.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE: QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL PONDERING

A. General age and stage issues:

- 1 Think about the stage of life you are at and how that affects the way you live. What are the opportunities unique to this time of life? What are the limitations of this stage? How can you make both opportunities and limitations work for you?
- 2 Consider those you relate closely to – family and friends. What ages and stages are they at? How does this impact on your own *SoulPurpose*? (Note: The families we live in are systems just as our bodies are, and what happens to one member affects what happens to the others.)

⁴ Luke 2:52 (NIV).

⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV).

⁶ 2 Peter 1:5-6 (NIV).

⁷ Hebrews 5:12-14 (NIV).

- 3 Make a time line of your life, marking in at least every five years. Think back over your life, and identify some of the different stages. Did you find crisis points at some of the ages and stages mentioned in this chapter? In light of what you have learned here, what are the changes/crises in your life that can be understood as part of natural maturation and development? [Note: keep the copy of your time line. In chapter 12 we will suggest you look at it again.]
- 4 If you recognise yourself to be at a crossroad in one or more areas of your life, take some time out to reflect and pray it through. (We urge you to do this, even if other commitments make it difficult to find time. When you fail to pay attention to a transition time, the discomfort will not go away. It will continue to surface in your life.)
- 5 If you are in the midst of a transition, recognise that any feelings of grief and discomfort you experience at this time are quite natural. If you find yourself continually stuck and unable to move on, approach someone you trust – a friend, minister, or counsellor – to talk things over.

Note: All the hints for dealing with transitions that we will cover in the next section of this book are also relevant for adapting to different ages and stages.

B. Faith Stage issues

- 1 Where do you think you are in your faith development? (Remember this is a very subjective call and most of us oscillate.) Why do you think you're where you're at?
- 2 How is your Christian faith different now to 5 years ago? 10 years ago? 20 years ago?
- 3 In what ways are you yourself now different?
- 4 Think about the way you see the world and your role in it. How is this different now from the way it has been in the past?
- 5 In what ways have your temperament and background helped shape and influence your faith?
- 6 How has your particular experience of church, parents and other religious authority figures early in your life, shaped your later faith responses and choices?

- 7 Can you identify any experiences, insights, points of growth, relationships, etc., that have contributed to the development of your faith over the years? (Or to put this another way, what factors have caused you to grow in your faith?)
- 8 Can you identify ways in which your image of God has been shaped both positively and negatively by people who have had an impact on your life?
- 9 Some people have grown up with a black-and-white closed-box mindset, where to question one belief is to question everything. Others have been raised with strongly grounded beliefs but still an openness for movement and debate. Has your experience created space for you to ask questions and to develop your own understanding of things, or not?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL REFLECTION IN A SMALL GROUP

Take time in your group to discuss the following questions, allowing each member opportunity to identify his/her own experiences and insights.

- 1 How is your Christian faith different now to 5 years ago? 10 years ago? 20 years ago?
- 2 In what ways are you yourself now different?
- 3 What are some of the best things you have learnt in life? (Both your own personal discoveries, and insights you have gained from others.)
- 4 Do you have difficulty accepting people at a different "stage of faith"?
- 5 What are the problems for a church that arise from having and encouraging people at different stages of life and of faith? What are some ways of coping with those problems?

PROBING FURTHER

LIFE STAGES

Gail Sheehy, *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* (Bantam/Dutton, 1974)

Gail Sheehy, *New Passages: Mapping Your Life Across Time* (HarperCollins, 1995)

FAITH STAGES

Alan Jamieson, *Faith Development: Resources for those on the journey*

A collection of articles available from Spirited Exchanges, PO Box 11551, Wellington, NZ. This is a good introduction to the subject of faith stages, using a variety of different sources.

James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981)

This is Fowler's original book on faith stages. (He has written a number of others since.)

CHAPTER 11**NAVIGATING THROUGH TRANSITIONS**

Life is change; growth is optional. Choose wisely.

Karen Kaiser Clark

There's a light-hearted (and thoroughly apocryphal!) story about a man out hunting in rugged countryside. As he pushes his way through deep undergrowth he stumbles and suddenly, to his horror, finds himself slipping over a bluff. His rifle flies in one direction, his pack in another, and he goes straight down. In desperation he manages to grab hold of a tree branch growing out of the side of the cliff. There he is, dangling precariously over a hundred-metre drop onto jagged rocks.

He looks up and realizes he can never make it back to the top. There's nothing to grip onto and the cliff face is crumbling and unstable.

He looks down and nearly passes out with fright. He could never survive the fall.

In panic he calls out, "Help, help! Is anybody there?" It's an instinctive reaction. He knows he's far from any human assistance.

Not surprisingly, then, he nearly falls off the branch when a voice from above booms back, "I'm here. What do you want?"

The man can't figure out where exactly the voice is coming from but he hasn't got time to worry about that. Instead he yells back, "I need help. I'm about to fall and I'm stuck. Please, please help get me back up."

The voice from above is warm and sympathetic. "Don't panic, lad. I'll get you to safety. But you must do one thing in order for that to happen."

"Anything, I'll do anything. Just get me back up. What do I need to do?"

Five short words come from the voice above. "Let go of the branch."

There's a stunned silence. Despite his desperation it is clear that the man on the branch is taking time to weigh up his options – and the consequences they present.

Finally he calls out again. "Is there anybody else up there?"

LIFE IS A SERIES OF CRISES

All of us face crises in our lives. Some crises are self-imposed because of our foolishness. Others come because of circumstances dropped on us. Still others are a natural result of our growth from one stage of maturity to another.

And, like the man in the story, in a crisis we are desperate for help. Not that we necessarily want the solutions God may offer! Yet one thing is constantly true. It's a general rule that when we are at a point of great uncertainty we are open to God in a much more real way than we are in settled times when things are going smoothly.

Finding ourselves in a desperate situation causes us to reach out to God.

Finding ourselves in a desperate situation causes us to reach out to God. Our prayer moves from being a ritual to a necessity. No wonder Jesus was able to say, "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope." Why blessed? The second part of the verse makes it clear. "With less of you there is more of God and his rule."¹

We constantly forget what God is really like. We need reminders. Sometimes only by upsetting the applecart and turning our lives upside down can God make us re-evaluate what we have

come to assume and accept – about ourselves, about others, about our role in God's world. The crisis gives us the opportunity to trust God more fully, and to move in new directions.

THE BIBLICAL STORY OF CRISIS, CHANGE AND TRANSITION

Crisis, new awareness, and a fresh start. That, in many ways, is the story of the Bible, with its catalogue of catastrophes, journeys, and wilderness experiences. It is full of disorienting episodes in which settled people are thrown into upheaval and set on a new course.

It begins with Abraham, who is settled with his family in Iraq, running his father's business. Suddenly he is called to uproot himself and leave it all behind. "Go to a place that I will show you," says God.

So with little more than a promise, and great uncertainty about what that might mean, the great great grandfather of our faith pulls up his tent pegs and moves west. In doing so, Abraham shows us the kind of risk-taking and journeying that faith inevitably involves.

In Canaan, Abraham and his descendants finally begin to settle into the Promised Land that God has been leading them to all these years. That is, until another crisis arrives. Severe famine hits the whole region. Elderly Jacob and his extended family are forced to head to Egypt.

However, what was expected to be a brief period of escape from the drought soon develops into more than just a visit. Egypt proves very hospitable and welcoming. The family settles down, and they grow. Soon generations have come and gone and all talk of the Promised Land is forgotten. But the increasing number of Abraham's descendants causes the indigenous people to become resentful. They decide to exploit the Israelites, using them as cheap labour rather than allowing them to become influential and powerful. Slavery results.

This is the context in which God calls Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, back to the land he had promised their forebears. A major transition is under way. However, it is a transition filled with crises, risk and hard-heartedness. More than once the Israelites are instructed to "let go of the branch", but they resist and the result is years spent wandering in the wilderness before they eventually take possession of the land. In the face of

Abraham shows us the kind of risk-taking and journeying that faith inevitably involves.

¹ Matthew 5:3 (The Message).

such danger and risk they plead with God to go back to Egypt – back to the relative security of slavery. Consequently, rather than the transition being a few short weeks, it becomes forty long years.

If we had not previously read the story we might imagine that here at last was a fairytale ending. And perhaps there was for a time. Through the period of the judges and the early kings, Israel becomes increasingly rich, powerful and settled. But rather than the beginning of a Golden Age full of God's blessing, it all turns sour. Money, sex and power become the prize – instead of God. Israel loses the plot. In an attempt to remind them of their calling, God sends his prophets.

Then begins a series of bewildering and upsetting episodes where God allows some awful things to happen to his people so that they may once again learn to trust him. It ends with the Israelites being dragged off into captivity in a foreign land. Talk about disorienting! They can't even recognize God in this new setting. All the old cues are gone. No wonder they write, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion..." Utter desolation.

Even when the Jews finally return home, crisis and transition continue. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the re-establishment of Jewish life takes time and brings many challenges.

Centuries later, we see the arrival of Jesus on the scene. God's people are in familiar circumstances – living under the domination of Rome and yearning for God's military messiah to come and push the legions of the foreign oppressor back into the sea.

However, God doesn't act that way. Instead he does the unpredictable, and brings a very different new life out of a seemingly hopeless situation. The crisis that is the cross brings a transition to a new order, evidenced by the resurrection.

The same experiences of crisis and change shape the rest of the New Testament. The new believers face the challenge of trusting God in the midst of persecution. The young church faces the challenge of carrying the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. The Jewish converts must come to terms with a "new age" in which God will move beyond their nation. Through it all we are reminded that nothing is static. Seasons and transitions, crises and change; they are woven into both life and faith.

CRISIS – LOOMING DISASTER OR POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITY?

The biblical story helps us to see that in the midst of transitions we can wake up to insights about God and ourselves, insights that we easily miss in the routine of life. In fact, pain and uncertainty are probably the best teachers we have. If we can learn to welcome them and reach out to God in the midst of them, we will discover that God is embracing us in ways he never could in comfortable times.

**pain and
uncertainty are
probably the
best teachers
we have.**

It's on the journey, in the desert, through the catastrophe and grief, that we become open to God reorienting us. In no way is this process easy. But as long as we don't shrink away from the struggle, we can find God in it.

In the Chinese script, the character for "crisis" is a combination of the two characters that mean "disaster" and "opportunity". These are the two sides of a crisis. What seems to be a disaster, or at least has the potential for catastrophe, is at the same time an opportunity.

American writer Leonard Sweet notes that the idea behind the Hebrew word "crisis" is a birth stool. The experience of childbirth encapsulates so much of what a crisis is. There is great pain – so much so that the expectant mother may even for a time wish she was dead. But then comes the joy of bringing a new life into the world.

Crises threaten disaster, but also offer opportunity. Birth pangs produce new things. This seems to be a deliberate emphasis of the Bible about transitions. The pain and uncertainty, anxiety and anguish inherent in the crisis are used by God to birth something new in our lives.

We can be sure that during those times God knows what we are going through. He *does* care. He *does* hear our cries for help. And he *will* come to rescue us. When we are at the end of our tether God proves his ability to guide. The disorientation that comes during crises and transitions is the very tool he uses to re-orient us.

LOOKING BACK ON YOUR LIFE: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

- 1 What are some crises you have faced? What has helped to support and guide you through them? (Or did they throw you?! If so, looking back on them, how could you have coped better?)

- 2 Are there any biblical passages that have offered you reassurance in the midst of crisis? What are they?
- 3 Are there any biblical characters whose example has offered you help and reassurance?
- 4 Underline any parts of this chapter that have particular relevance for you. Why are they significant?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

- 1 Give members of the group opportunity to share their discoveries from the personal reflection questions above.
- 2 Do the personal stories prompt ideas of how the group might be supportive of its members in future times of crisis or change?
- 3 Taking into account what you have read in this and the previous chapter (and what know from your wider reading and life experience), what crises and changes may lie ahead for members of your group? What knowledge and preparation could help you as you enter these transitions?
- 4 Are there any crises you as a group have faced? Did they produce any new development? (If this question is not relevant to your group, it may be appropriate to ask it about a church or organization you may all belong to.)
- 5 Consider the situation your group (or church or organization) is in at present. Knowing what you do about the group, its past and the situation it is currently in, what changes may lie ahead? Do you see new directions which God might want you to investigate? What stresses would any such change cause, and how could you best deal with them?
- 6 Time to dream. Imagine that you personally, or your group, have just arrived in your neighbourhood. You have no commitments to any plan or programme. You have no responsibilities to any group or organization. If you were beginning with a completely clean slate – knowing what you do about your neighbourhood, in what ways and with what aims might you set out on this new phase of your life?

CHAPTER 12

THE ONLY CONSTANT IS CHANGE

All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind is part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another.

Anatole France

The news hit him like a locomotive train. Trevor was flattened. He had worked for the company for over fifteen years. Of course there had been rumours amongst the staff about the state of the finances, but no one ever seriously entertained the idea that they might lose their job. So when Trevor and half a dozen other employees were called in to the boss's office, his words left them dumbstruck.

For the next few days Trevor found it difficult to focus on anything. Money wasn't the immediate problem – it would be six weeks before his job was officially history, and then he had four months of redundancy pay. But somehow the news had disoriented him. Trevor had never intended leaving the company. He'd enjoyed the job and felt challenged by it. And now he just couldn't think what to do. For a whole week he couldn't even bring himself to tell his wife what had happened. On top of everything else, he was experiencing a frightening loss of motivation. He could barely bring himself to do even the most automatic of duties.

Over the next two or three weeks Trevor's workmates noticed that he had become increasingly distant from the everyday chatter of the office. Sometimes

Trevor's workmates noticed that he had become increasingly distant from the everyday chatter of the office.

irritable, other times just not quite there, Trevor found himself in a surreal state – almost as if he was suspended above the office in a kind of no-man’s land – looking on but not really a part of things.

Of course there were moments of anger too. Particularly at home in his discussions with Pat. She felt cheated, betrayed by the company, and she urged Trevor to be more aggressive in his final dealings with them. She’d always relied on Trevor’s income. He was the provider for the family. He was the strong one. When she discovered he’d kept it to himself for a whole week, at first she felt hurt. Then, as Trevor’s disorientation sank deeper, she realised she needed to take the supporting role. What should she do? Would she have to go out and find paid work? What would other people think?

Gradually Trevor began to function again. As the days passed and the inevitability settled in, he tried to focus on the “what’s next?” question. Almost imperceptibly at first, but with growing determination, he moved on. While he would later acknowledge that he underestimated the level of grief he would experience, Trevor’s primary concern in his last couple of weeks at the office was what was ahead, not behind.

It was at this point that a conversation with a close friend touched a chord, and gave Trevor the confidence to resist jumping into the first job that came his way. Mark mentioned how critical it was to take time – to process the options, and to discover what would be the most fulfilling way to use his resources in the next season of his life.

Looking back, Trevor realised that this was the best advice he could have heard. He was 43 years old and there were a multitude of considerations both he and Pat had to work through – among them issues of “fit”, life-stage and family. The redundancy money gave them the freedom to take their time and, amongst all the disorientation and grief, to embark on a new journey of discovery, finding where they could serve best. The end result, some twelve months later, was a situation very different from their previous season – one that they couldn’t have imagined and certainly wouldn’t have had the confidence to pursue if it weren’t for the redundancy. A year later, Trevor and Pat were able to see how God had led them by his providence in quite remarkable ways.

THE ONLY CONSTANT IS CHANGE – GET USED TO IT!

Trevor’s situation is far from unique. In the Western world the structure of career is changing quickly. The stereotype of a person employed in one job for his/her working life no longer applies. These days people are likely to

change careers several times in their lifetime. Not only that, but the concept of holding down one 40-hour-a-week job is in danger of extinction. The reality is that many people now have more than one paid job – either in the form of several part-time ones or by virtue of contracting out their services rather than being employed by a specific company. The variations from one person to another are immense.

In the midst of such rapid change, it’s imperative that we understand how best to deal with transitions, for the way we navigate such uncharted waters will have a major bearing on our capacity to develop a SoulPurpose. All changes, even those that we eagerly look forward to, tend to set off a chain reaction inside each of us. Knowing what we are likely to encounter in a time of transition will help us make it a growing experience.

Transitions come in many shapes and sizes. Some are a change in location: moving house, town or even country. Some are a change in role: a student takes up employment, a mother leaves paid work to care for a child, a father retires, an adult son takes up the task of caring for a parent who once cared for him.

Some transitions are ones we plan and initiate, such as getting married, having a child, or changing jobs to gain a more desirable position. Others come totally from left field, hitting us like a crunching, winding tackle. A loved one dies suddenly. We are made redundant. A crisis at our job jolts us into seeing how desperately unhappy we are in what we are doing. The shocks can be pleasant ones too: like receiving an offer of a new job without even looking for one! Or surprises that bring mixed and conflicting feelings: an unplanned pregnancy, or a job shift to another place.

Sometimes maturity and personal growth cause the transition. The skills we’ve developed have become too restricted by the job we do. Or the way we related to people in the past is no longer satisfying, and we need to discover new, more effective ways. Or our old expression of faith no longer matches the way our spiritual understanding has grown.

Transitions can result from burnout (stress, overwork, a poorly managed work/rest ratio); rust-out (boredom and lack of challenge) or being kicked-out (redundancy, bankruptcy, or being squeezed out by others). Life crises such as the death of a parent, partner, child or sibling can be the catalyst for a transition, as can the realisation that what we are doing doesn’t really fit who we are.

The concept of holding down one 40-hour-a-week job is in danger of extinction.

Regardless of what type of change we face, there is the potential for good and bad. Transitions are disorienting. It's easy to lose our bearings and our focus on SoulPurpose. Things are out of control – or at least they feel that way. Much loss and grief may be involved. However, with such danger comes a wonderful potential for new insights, new beginnings, and new ways of serving.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF TRANSITIONS

William Bridges, a consultant and writer, notes three major stages in a transition.¹ First there is the **leaving/loss**.

- If it is a change we have a choice about, it begins with growing discontent over our situation. This is the fuel that gets us going, forcing us to make a change. (Of course sometimes we try to ignore this discontent – at least for a while.)
- The leaving stage is also marked by disengagement from our current state. This enables us to take a more objective view and begin backing off.
- A side-effect of this process, according to Bridges, is disorientation. In fact, he suggests that there may be a frightening loss of motivation and direction, as we begin to question whether our life is really going anywhere.
- A further part of the leaving process is the dis-identification and loss that results from leaving a particular role, place or group. It's often scary to see how much our identity and the way we define ourselves is so wrapped up in the role or situation we are leaving.
- Disenchantment, states Bridges, is an inevitable result of the leaving process – in which we begin to discover that things were not as they seemed. We need to move on, though we are unsure what to.

This leads us into a neutral zone where disorientation becomes the major feature. Disengaged from what we were previously committed to, this may be a time of reflection. We may appear unavailable or distant to others. The cause of this is our disengagement and the need for time to ponder. In the midst of it all we may well have doubts about where God is in this, and will certainly experience a degree of discomfort as we seek to integrate and make sense of the change. Grief at our loss will also have its impact.

¹ William Bridges, *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes* (Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1980).

Bridges warns that though we may wish to rush through this part of the transition, there are grave dangers in doing so. For if we give it the time required, eventually we discover we're in a land of new beginnings, with fresh vision, energy and a renewed direction. A degree of anxiety and apprehension may persist for some – even if we sense the new possibilities. But our cold feet will eventually grow warm. Hopefully it will not be long before we are able to look back and see the new possibilities that have arisen from our time of anxiety.

CAREER CYCLES

Caple is another writer who has thought a great deal about transitions, particularly as they relate to changing our career.² He suggests that we are in fact, continually undergoing a transition process – a kind of Career Cycle.

Caple notes the following parts of the cycle:

- **Discontent** – with what we are doing.
- **Exploration** – beginning to seek out possibilities.
- **Commitment to change** – letting go of the past and setting sail for some (often unknown) future.
- **Renewal** – a re-discovered sense of well-being and confidence. The traveller is refreshed and experiences increased energy.
- **Consolidation** – coming back to reality, time to settle down a little.
- **Recommitment** – acknowledging completion of the whole process, and dedicating ourselves to the tasks ahead.
- **Discontent** ... and so it goes on.

Though both Bridges and Caple identify valuable steps along the path of transition, neither would suggest that every change includes every step. As you adapt this information for your own life, remember that each situation differs. A time of transition for you may include some of these stages, and omit some. Occasionally all may be present.

Caple's suggestion – that transitions, particularly those relating to occupations, may have a cyclical nature – is consistent with the concept of seasons/times that Ecclesiastes writes about:

² J. Caple, *Career cycles: A guidebook to success in the passages and challenges of your work life* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1983).

*“There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:*

*a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot...
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh...
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them...
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak...”³*

“A time” – the phrase carries with it a sense of divine appointment. God intends for us to have times of activity and of rest, times in our lives of great energy, of accomplishment, but also times when we pull back for a period of replenishment, to reflect on what has happened and to prepare and envision the future. There are seasons in our lives for various things, and rhythms of living under God’s grace.

THE EXODUS – A TRANSITION PARADIGM

As we noted in the previous chapter, in one sense the Bible can be viewed as a series of crises and transitions. And the dominant one in the Old Testament – at least as far as the Jewish people are concerned – is the exodus of Israel from Egypt which brings them eventually to settle in the Promised Land.

**the increasingly
harsh treatment
by the Egyptians
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among the
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their present
situation.**

This is a powerful example of the transition of a whole people, and of God’s dealings with them. First there is a call to change. Initially it is muted, but the increasingly harsh treatment by the Egyptians stirs up discontent among the Israelites over their present situation. A longing for something more arises. God provides a leader to channel the rising voices into a movement demanding change.

Other elements of the story illustrate many of the steps along the transition process. There is the pull of the status quo, trying to

keep the people from change (Pharaoh’s determination: “I will not let you go”). Passover night represents the reaching of a commitment to change, and the crossing of the Red Sea represents the point of no return. They then enter the vacillating experience of the neutral zone – in the desert, where doubts arise about God’s provision, questions surface, complaints are voiced. (“We want to go back to Egypt!”)

Then comes the pull of new beginnings – the Promised Land is close. But there is deep anxiety and apprehension about the challenges that lie ahead, with reports from the spies about giants in the land (“What kind of promised land is this?”). Their cold feet lead them back into the wilderness, wandering aimlessly (so it seems) for forty years.

However, eventually the new beginnings can be grasped again. There is fresh energy and vision. Crossing the Jordan, taking the cities and the land, settling down and establishing their life as a free people under God – all this takes time. But it happens. Israel enters a new season together as the people of God. The transition is finally complete.

GOING AROUND A LO-O-O-ONG BEND...

We would all like our times of transition to be smooth and speedy. Like turning right at a T-intersection. A decisive, definite and deliberate change in direction. Over quickly, and on to new sights...

**a transition is
much easier
to view in
retrospect.**

Some may indeed be like that but most are, as the word “transition” implies, a process or period of evolution. A change of season is like driving round a slowly turning bend. It takes time (though generally not as long as the forty years in the wilderness!). It can also be very frustrating because not until we are right around the corner do we see what’s up ahead.

Like so many things in life, a transition is much easier to view in retrospect. The lack of vision and direction we experience is eventually forgotten as we move forward into new territory. Looking back we discover God’s hand at work – when all we could see in the midst of it was confusion.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THOSE IN TRANSITION

So how can we best handle the uncertainty of change?

Just knowing that most transitions comprise the three different experiences (endings, a neutral zone, and beginnings) is helpful and reassuring. However

³ Ecclesiastes 3:1 ff.

here are some other suggestions for the journey. We've developed them from William Bridges' checklist.⁴

ENSURE THAT SOME FAMILIAR THINGS REMAIN IN YOUR LIFE

We can cope with only so much change and uncertainty at any one time. That's why it may help to keep some structures and routines unchanged during the transition. This might be a regular meeting with a group of friends, family celebrations, a routine of some kind as simple as going for a walk each day, and so on.

BEWARE OF THE TEMPTATION TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

There are times when the longing for security beckons the traveller to turn back to the familiar, or to race ahead – seizing hold of any kind of future that appears to offer the same sense of security. This is a time when the ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty becomes important.

Remember that you are on a well-trodden road. The temptation to make things happen is a normal experience in transitions. Don't turn back just because of the discomfort associated with leaving the familiar. Likewise be wary of running ahead in an attempt to feel better. A time of reflection allows you to gain from the past before making decisions that will affect the future ... whereas running ahead may propel you into a situation similar to the one you're leaving, just because it feels familiar or secure.

UNDERSTAND THE ORIGINS OF YOUR DISCOMFORT

The transition experience is not normally a comfortable one! As a result, you may easily misdiagnose change as something wrong or disturbing. It's easy to equate stability and security with "godliness". But when you leave behind old ways of doing things and embrace new ones ... suddenly the ground feels shaky!

Be aware too that the changes you are experiencing may create some confusion for those closest to you. They are accustomed to certain ways of relating to you. As you change, so will your responses. Family and friends need to learn to adjust to this. At first it may cause them understandable discomfort.

Your time of transition may even uncover some friendships that are not strong enough to handle growth. Remember that your change will affect

those around you. Be prepared for (and understanding of) their reactions, which may include hurt, resentment and rejection. Other relationships may grow stronger through your transition.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF DURING THE TRANSITION AND RECOGNISE YOUR VULNERABILITY

Some insects make their great leap of growth during the time between the shedding of their former skin and the growing of a newer larger one. At this time of transition they are particularly vulnerable to predators. In the same way, our times of transition give us great potential for growth. But they are also times of vulnerability. Being aware of this will help you be kind and patient with yourself.

Give yourself space to work through the changes at a pace that is manageable for you. This includes practical things like sleep, diet, fresh air, exercise, rest and recreation ... and time by yourself.

CONSIDER BOTH THE PROS AND CONS OF CHANGE

It's easy to fool yourself into change by stacking the positives against the negatives. In the same way you can resist change by piling up the negatives against the positives! So be honest and try to think beyond the obvious pros and cons.

If the change is something you particularly desire, then explore the potential negatives. That way you're less likely to be ambushed by unanticipated moments of grief. (Grief is inevitable when any ending occurs.) If the change has not been voluntary, try to see beyond the obvious disadvantages to the possible opportunities. This may not be possible at first, but should become so with time. Remember Trevor and Pat in our story at the beginning of this chapter. You will adjust.

TALK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST

We all need a listening ear. Find someone who is prepared just to listen – and to cheer you on as you make your own discoveries. Such a friend may also help you see the costs and benefits of changes that you find hard to see. When you are in the midst of transition you can become embroiled in the day-to-day details of just getting through, while others who know you (but who are less involved) can help by reminding you of the big picture. The support of encouraging friends who can pray and listen as you go through uncharted territory is beyond reckoning!

⁴ "Love and Work: a transition checklist" in Bridges' book, *Transitions*.

REFLECT ON WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE SITUATION.

Some people make changes to move away from a difficult situation or relationship ... only to walk into a carbon copy further down the track. Taking the time to carefully think it all through can help avoid this risk. Here again wise counsel from a trusted friend or counsellor/minister/careers advisor can help you be honest with yourself. Is the new beginning just a replay of an old scenario, or a genuine new start?

EXAMINING YOUR LIFE: TIMES OF TRANSITION

- 1 Choose a transition you have experienced in the past five years, and think through the following questions. (Remember that every transition is unique and the models suggested by Bridges and Caple aren't intended to be comprehensive or prescriptive in any way. If parts of their models don't fit your experience, that's fine!)
 - What were the causes of this transition?
 - Did you instigate it or was it the result of external circumstances?
 - What aspects of the process identified by Bridges and/or Caple occurred in your transition?
 - Looking back, in what ways was God at work in the change that took place? What leads you to believe this?
 - In what ways has the transition brought new beginnings to your life? (Think particularly here of Connection, Fit, Service, Balance and Encouragement – see chapter one.)
 - What would you do differently if you were to go through the same transition again?
- 2 Look back at the time line you constructed in chapter ten. Now add to it times of transition in your life that were not simply normal development and maturing. For each transition choose a title which describes the main learning the situation brought you. Mark the transitions which you feel you've not yet come to terms with. These are starting points for prayer, and possibly helpful if you decide you would like to talk through the issues with someone you trust.

- 3 In what ways can you identify "seasons" in your life up to this point? What were some of the key features of each of these seasons? Think here of ways the seasons stretched and grew you, how your faith was changed, what you achieved, etc.
- 4 Think about your current season/time. Are any of the lines of Ecclesiastes 3 especially relevant to where you're currently at?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

Select for group sharing one or more of the four questions in the exercise above. Then in your group session allow members the opportunity to explain their experience. Offer to each person the support and assistance of the group as you help him/her understand more fully the lessons learned and the transitions made.

Question for further discussion: What are some of the main reasons transitions happen? Which reasons are largely external and which ones are internal?

PROBING FURTHER

William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* (Addison-Wesley, 1980)

William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (Addison-Wesley, 1991)

J. Caple, *Career Cycles: A guidebook to success in the passages and challenges of your work life* (Prentice Hill, 1983)

Gail Sheehy, *Pathfinders: Overcoming the Crises of Adult Life and Finding Your Own Path to Well-Being* (Bantam, 1981)

SECTION E

LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD'S NEEDS

INVESTING OUR RESOURCES

By the grace of God I am who I am. How then can I, as the unique person God has made me, be stretched in the service of Christ and of people, so that nothing he has given me is wasted, and everything he has given me is used?

John Stott

Tom and Sue are good people. And successful. In their mid-forties, they live in a lovely home in a good suburb and have three teenage children. Until recently Tom worked for a multi-national as a senior manager, while Sue was nursing. They're involved in a church, having been committed Christians since their teenage years.

Dig below the surface though, and you'll find that for quite a few years Tom and Sue have been very frustrated with life. There were worrying signs. Tom worked 60-70 hours a week in his job. It was hugely stressful, and he knew (more so once he became a senior manager) that he was involved in an industry with many questionable practices. For several years Tom didn't know what to do about this. In fact his situation at work completely drained him. He would come home exhausted and have very little energy for anything else. When he attended church no-one could relate to his struggles. It was not an issue anybody wanted to talk about.

Sue went back to nursing ten years ago to help pay the bills. As the children grew they found that even with her income they were only just getting by.

One result of all this was that Tom and Sue felt they had little energy for the major task of parenting, let alone for friendships, church and community involvement.

Tom desperately wanted to "get out of the rat race". He was very disillusioned. His goal had been to work his way to a position of influence and really use that

influence well. That meant taking promotions, and often moving as a family. But he realises now that he actually became just like everyone else. Decision-making at work was more about survival than transformation.

Tom could see his predicament, but that didn't help. In fact, it just made the agony worse. He was 45. He wanted to make a significant difference with the last twenty years of his working life. But he felt trapped. He couldn't afford to rock the boat because he and Sue needed all the money they earned in order to pay the big mortgage on the house, and to maintain their standard of living. Losing his manager's income was too big a risk.

Besides he often thought to himself, "What could I do? I've spent my whole life in this industry. It's all I know." Sue felt the same.

Perhaps saddest of all, they had no one who could help them in this dilemma. They felt isolated.

And yet it hadn't always been like this for Tom and Sue. When they were in their early twenties they were excited about making a difference for God. They were bright young people, gifted, intelligent – involved in lots of good stuff and passionate about God.

So what went wrong?

WHAT DO WE DO WITH WHAT WE'VE BEEN GIVEN?

There are a number of interconnected issues we have raised throughout this book that apply directly to Tom and Sue's dilemma. Issues such as "fit", life

stage, busyness, balance and integration. All connect with the desire to make a difference – to develop a *SoulPurpose*.

But there is a further issue Tom and Sue struggle with. That is the question: "What do I do with what I've been given?"

Fundamental to discovering our *SoulPurpose* is acknowledging that our abilities, personality and life circumstances are a gift from God. All that we have is from Him. It's not ours to do with as we please. As the Psalmist sums it all up: "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.*"

If everything is ultimately God's, then we are, by implication, only stewards. What we "own" isn't simply ours. There's a sense in which the term ownership is unhelpful. It tempts us to think we have rights over all the resources that have come our way in life – resources that include not just our money and

¹ Psalm 24:1 (NIV).

possessions, but also our time, our heritage and background, the environment, our relationships and community, even our personal gifts and abilities.

The biblical concept is not one of ownership, but of stewardship – and that concept is foundational to developing a *SoulPurpose*.

Stewardship is a consistent theme through both the Old and New Testaments, beginning with the creation mandate of Genesis 1:26-29. It is a central feature of a number of the parables of Jesus. The Greek word for steward most often used in the New Testament is *oikonomos*, the manager in a large household, which included servants, slaves and all their activities.² The *oikonomos* was ultimately responsible and accountable to the master for the running of the home.

However, as Leonard Sweet notes, a more helpful word for this role may well be "trusteeship", because for a number of reasons "steward" and "stewardship" are either redundant or loaded words. Sweet argues this on two counts – firstly that steward is an anachronistic term (there are no stewards around any more in the biblical sense), and secondly that the concept has been so misused by the church. Nowadays it simply means money and church fundraising, rather than "whole-of-life discipleship" and the "costly care of creation".³

In contrast, "trustee" is a term in common use today. Most people are vaguely familiar with the many trusts that exist in our society – particularly school boards, charitable organisations and family trusts. Trustees are appointed to run and manage these trusts. Their role is the responsible stewarding of the resources of the trust in order to fulfil the goals or charter of the organisation. Trustees do not own the trust they represent, even though they carry legal responsibility for what happens. They are caretakers, managers, custodians.

Whatever word we use, it needs to carry with it this sense of responsibility for resources that aren't our own. In this chapter we will use steward and trustee interchangeably.

TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN, MUCH IS REQUIRED

In his Parable of the Talents Jesus shows that we are not all entrusted with the same number of resources. The greater the resources we are responsible for,

² Gordon Fee notes that this person was frequently a slave. See *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 159. A second Greek word, *epitropos*, is sometimes used, which also means steward or manager

³ While we don't address it in this chapter, creation is also a key resource and one whose responsibility we are entrusted with. Our stewarding of the environment - "earthkeeping" - is an important aspect of trusteeship.

⁴ See for example, Luke 12:42 and 1 Corinthians 4:2.

the greater the accountability. Faithfulness in taking care of what we have been given is the key attribute required of a trustee.⁴

Jesus picks up on this accountability theme when he ends his teaching on the Wise Steward by stating, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Or in one version, “To whom much is given, much is required.”)⁵

This perspective has huge implications for those of us who are resource-rich. Whether the resources are material things, or whether it is the “head start” that a loving and supportive family and community have given us, the message is the same: “To whom much is given, much is required.”⁶

Many of us are blessed by a large volume of discretionary time, or by exceptional abilities, or by the capacity to significantly influence others. Jesus says to us, “To whom much is given, much is required.”

Whatever God has entrusted to us, we are required to invest the Master’s resources wisely, for the benefit of his kingdom. For those with substantial resources, this is a weighty and sobering responsibility.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

In the realities of life then, how do we flesh out this need to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us? Using Tom and Sue’s very honest reflections on their own journey, let’s examine some of the implications.

MONEY AND POSSESSIONS

Trusteeship involves embracing a view of our paypacket and possessions which asks, “What of these resources will the Master allow me to use to take care of my needs, and how does he want me to employ the rest in the service of others?” This is fundamentally at odds with much evangelical teaching on giving, which works from the assumption that we should give the “first fruits” to God ... and then subconsciously presumes that the rest is there to do with as we please.

As we noted in the chapter on busyness, affluence can complicate our lives immeasurably and cloud the growing picture of our SoulPurpose. Whenever Tom and Sue looked at their lives they felt an ongoing pressure to earn more, in order to cope with their increasing expectations of consumption. Not that

their workmates or Christian friends ever thought Tom and Sue particularly extravagant. The way they lived was fairly normal within their social context.

However, looking back both Tom and Sue recognise that many of their choices were poor, and are part of why they now have limited options. At the moment they’re in the most resource-poor period of their lives. Raising teenagers, they’ve discovered, is incredibly expensive! But, as Sue commented to Tom recently, “Why didn’t someone tell us early in our married life that the excess income we enjoyed then should be saved for later? Then we wouldn’t be feeling the kind of financial pressure we do now.”

Tom has a similar comment. “The problem,” he explains, “is that even though we have always wanted to serve God, we’ve never really understood that our money was not ours to just do with as we pleased. Don’t get me wrong. We’ve always been faithful tithers and given where we could. But we’ve also chosen to upgrade our cars, furniture and appliances on a regular basis. And I now realise that shifting three years ago to a bigger house in a better part of town was not a good call. It just put more pressure on us financially. Not only did it give us a bigger mortgage – we then had to buy more furniture to fill the house!”

“The truth is we’d simply grown tired of our surroundings. And most of our friends were doing it, so we just assumed it was a good idea. Sue saw this really nice house across town one day, and next minute we found ourselves moving!”

Sue agrees. “Yes, it’s quite ironic really. I thought having such a dream home would make our lives easier to manage. But quite the opposite occurred. And not just financially. It also tore us away from the people we had been getting to know in our old suburb and church – our network of relationships.

“Because our lives were so hectic, with both of us working fulltime and the kids involved in all kinds of activities, I was regularly ‘buying time’ by using pre-prepared foods. Plus, it wasn’t uncommon for us to eat out or have takeaways two or three times a week. We were on the run so much that it was the convenient thing to do.”

Both Sue and Tom also agree that their loose patterns of spending spilled over into other areas as well. “I’m horrified at it now,” says Sue. “It’s no wonder, looking back, that we felt we were struggling financially – all the stuff

We’ve never really understood that our money was not ours to just do with as we pleased.

⁵ Luke 12:48b (NIV).

⁶ As Craig Blomberg notes, people in positions of power and wealth have no increased privilege - just increased responsibility. See page 84 of his book *Neither Poverty nor Riches* (Eerdmans).

we convinced ourselves we needed, the expensive holidays we thought we required because we were so exhausted and needed to spoil ourselves a little. We were really caught in a vicious cycle – spending most of our income simply to maintain our lifestyle. If we'd dropped our lifestyle expectations earlier, we would have released a substantial amount of money for other purposes. Even more importantly, it would have freed up time and energy to think about how we could meaningfully invest the next twenty years of our lives.”

TIME

Being trustees of time involves valuing it as a divine gift rather than a commodity to be used and abused. Rather than trying to squeeze as many activities as we can into our days and weeks, we need to treasure the time given to us and think carefully (just as a wise manager does) about how to apportion it.

God has actually given us all that we need for doing what he has asked us to do. When it comes to stewarding our time, it helps if we appreciate that even though we each have only a limited amount, God has actually given us all that we need for doing what he has asked us to do.

Tom admits that he never really understood this until recently. He could never say no to new commitments, which meant that he was forever swamped by tasks, and under immense pressure to get the multitude of jobs done. No wonder he wanted to “opt out of the rat race”.

Tom's inability to draw the line and limit the tasks he tackled was probably a symptom of too high a view of his work. (We touched on some of these issues in the chapter on busyness). “I know I suffered from a bad imbalance in my life. Recently a friend helped me to begin thinking strategically about what God really wants me to be involved in. But for years I got no help – though the truth is that I may not have been open to advice even if someone had offered it! I got into this pattern of making myself the exception. I mean, I knew about the Bible's emphasis on Sabbath rest, but I always thought my circumstances left me no option but to ignore it. Quite destructive really.”

As Tom's experience highlights, the pace of life in our culture means that our time may be one of the most difficult resources to steward.

GIFTS, TALENTS, SKILLS AND PERSONALITY

We've already written much in this book about how unique God has made us. Our personalities, gifts, talents and motivations are entrusted to us for a purpose – that we might serve God and others through their use.

Good trusteeship involves working hard to understand how God has put us together, and then to realise that this is just the starting point. We're not fully formed from the beginning. We have a responsibility to nurture and develop our gifts, talents and potential skills, honing them so that our service can grow and become better. The temptation is often just to rely on our natural flair – and not to improve on it.

Tom and Sue are both talented and skilled people and have certainly worked at developing their gifts over the years. However, both felt cramped serving where they were. Intuitively they knew that there were other ways they could use their abilities more fully. But as we've seen, their poor use of money and time resources left them trapped, feeling unable to do anything about re-ordering their lives.

Until recently a strong sense of SoulPurpose eluded them. However, some of the exercises and perspectives mentioned in this book really helped the two of them to re-consider who they were and how they could best serve. For example, as Tom explains it, “One thing that really limited me in the past was thinking that my career was where I served God most. When I was helped to see that it was just part of my life's work, then it freed me to see the potential of using my skills in other areas. Actually, that's what led me eventually to quit my job and join a smaller company working in the same area. It came to a head when the CEO wanted me to take on a position at head office. The thought of moving half way round the world when we'd just begun to make a life here didn't appeal in the least.”

Sue adds, “That's when I said, ‘Enough is enough!’ We'd just begun to get involved in other things which genuinely excited us. I'd taken on a part-time nursing role at the hospice – not because we needed the money but because I could see a way for me to make a difference. Plus, friends up the street lost their daughter in an accident and I'd been spending a lot of time supporting Keri. I couldn't just run away from that.”

We have a responsibility to nurture and develop our gifts, talents and potential skills, honing them so that our service can grow and become better.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

Sue's reaction to the possibility of moving yet again, was a clear sign that she was beginning to recognise another key resource in her life – relationships. Strong friendships and immersion in a community of people are also areas that a good steward needs to manage well.

Building genuine community takes time. It requires developing a culture of openness – inviting others to be significant in our lives in shaping our values, making decisions, finding where we fit, asking the hard questions and providing a safe environment to learn and grow.⁷

When I look back I can see that the regular moving we've done was very disruptive to establishing strong relationships. We basically did what we wanted.

Tom comments "It's only very recently that I've realised how important friendships really are. Don't get me wrong. We've always got on well with people and tried to get involved in the communities we've lived in. But when I look back I can see that the regular moving we've done was very disruptive to establishing strong relationships. We basically did what we wanted. We made the decisions on our own.

"I can clearly remember the reaction of a friend of ours – he was at the church we were attending at the time. After I told him we were moving city he obviously thought hard about it. A bit later he came up to me and told me he was quite upset that we could just decide to up

and leave; he'd thought that our friendship meant more than it obviously did.

"Of course I couldn't understand his feelings at the time. But looking back I guess presenting people with a *fait accompli* was our way of protecting ourselves. It meant we didn't have to worry about others interfering with our decisions or thinking that they had a right to tell us how to live."

Sue agrees. "I remember that occasion too. I don't think we understood Brian at all. He wasn't trying to run our lives for us. I think he just placed a much higher value on true friendship than we did. And the sad thing was, he and Anne knew us well. We'd shared quite a lot with them about our struggles, and I think they were quite committed to helping us work through some issues. Plus, they were very open about their lives too. They were a gift to us. But we just up and left!"

⁷ Of course, there are risks inherent in building accountable relationships. Some people treat such openness as an opportunity to impose their view of how we should live our lives, rather than allowing us to ultimately determine what we believe is the best option. So we must be aware of who we invite to journey with us, lest we become accountable to people who think they know better than we do what decisions we should make!

It's clear as Tom and Sue talk that there are many regrets about their utilitarian approach to relationships over the years. But they are determined to change this and have been working at nurturing a group of friends who are also committed to helping each other discover and outwork their *SoulPurpose*. "We now realize," says Sue, "that developing friendship requires time and patience."

This doesn't mean they have ruled out the possibility of moving again in the future. Just that if such a possibility arose, the way they went about deciding and what criteria they used would be very different from what they have been in the past.

"I think I've had a conversion of sorts," says Tom. "When I began to grasp the idea that relationships were right at the centre of what God was about, it caused me to take a serious look at my priorities and what really counted in the long run. It was actually very liberating because I began to see that parenting, friendships, helping my staff grow and develop – all this stuff was part of my *SoulPurpose*."

"If I'd had that attitude earlier in my career it would have made a big difference. But I just couldn't see the wood for the trees. I was always too caught up in the task, rather than letting God use me to serve people. As a manager, I hated people problems. But now in the new company I'm finding a real excitement from helping my staff work things through. In fact, I've discovered a lot more about myself – what I'm good at and what I really enjoy doing. Plus, the guy who owns the company sees that as part of my role. Which helps a lot – because in my old job I was made to feel really guilty about being interrupted by people. Productivity was everything."

"Things at home have been a lot better as well," says Sue. "For both of us – but particularly for Tom. He's really motivated to invest in the kids. And he has a bit more energy to do it, too. Not that life isn't hectic. Just that we've somehow started to say no to stuff that might be good but that doesn't fit what we need right now."

"Put it this way," says Tom. "My family and friends aren't getting the leftovers like they used to!"

CONCLUSION

Most of us will be able to identify with some of the struggles Tom and Sue have experienced. *We* certainly can! Answering the question, "What do I do

"My family and friends aren't getting the leftovers like they used to!"

with what I have been entrusted with?” is an ongoing challenge for us, as it is for them.

There’s no neat and foolproof path to becoming wise and responsible trustees. We are all so very different, as are our circumstances. How we exercise our stewardship over money, time, gifts, relationships, etc., will differ greatly from one person to another, and from one stage of our lives to another.

However, as Tom and Sue are discovering, there is real joy and fulfilment in using well what we have been given. It’s a key to discovering our *SoulPurpose*.

A Trustee’s Prayer

Lord, I remind myself today – all I have is yours; not mine.

So help me to manage your gift of time well.

Help me to invest your gift of money and possessions wisely.

May the unique personality, skills and abilities entrusted to me be well nurtured, developed and used, for your purposes.

May I appreciate the gift of loved ones you’ve placed around me.

All of creation is a gift to be stewarded.

Let me be your servant this day – not abusing or misusing, always treating with care.

Lord, help me to know what to do with what you’ve given, that you may be glorified and your kingdom built.

In the name of the supreme example of trustees – Jesus.

Amen.

PERSONAL PONDERING: YOUR ROLE AS A TRUSTEE

- 1 In what ways can you identify with Tom and Sue?
- 2 Do a stocktake of the resources you are a trustee of (money and possessions, time, “fit”, relationships, environment, heritage, etc.). How “wealthy” or “poor” do you consider yourself to be regarding each one? In what ways has this changed for you over the past ten or twenty years?
- 3 Reflect on the words of Jesus – *“To whom much is given, much is required.”* How might understanding resources as gifts affect the way you use them?
- 4 What is the biggest challenge you have in being a trustee of money and possessions? List any steps you can take to overcome this challenge. Is there anyone who can help you with this?

- 5 Make a list of the people in your life with whom you want to develop a deeper sense of community and accountability. What steps can you take to build a stronger relationship with them? Are there any particular ways they can help you work out your *SoulPurpose* at present?

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS; PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

- 1 Share some of your struggles over stewarding money, time and gifts.
- 2 Discuss the claim: *“God has actually given us all the time we need to do what he has asked us to do.”* What implications do your conclusions have for the way you approach your week?
- 3 Brainstorm ways in which you could restructure your lives to better utilise what you’ve been entrusted with.

PROBING FURTHER

Christine and Tom Sine, *Living on Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002)

SOULPURPOSE: A MISSION FOR LIFE

If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for.

Thomas Merton

In this book you have been looking at your own life, discerning the shape God has made you, and trying to understand how to achieve a healthy sense of balance in the midst of competing time pressures and busy schedules.

We invite you, in this final chapter, to bring your new insights into sharp focus by considering in depth two key questions:

- What do I really want my life to count for?
- What will really matter for me in the end?

THE RACE OF YOUR LIFE

According to Paul, the Christian life calls for all the grit and determination and dedication and training that an athlete gives to a race...

Paul describes the Christian life as a race. He writes:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it.

Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly ... but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others, I myself should not be disqualified.¹

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

It's a helpful analogy – particularly if we think of a long-distance race. Over the long haul it's easy to become distracted and to lose sight of your running plan. Same with life. It's the long haul that counts.

That's why reflecting on how to finish your race can give such a valuable perspective. It helps you understand better what to do along the way. Finishing well requires some wise preparation, along with the ability to pace yourself for the full distance.

For in life, as we progress along our course we only too easily become bogged down with the difficulties of the terrain. When present demands (and opportunities too) shape our decisions ... they then begin to shape our lives. We become immersed in the detail, and it begins to obscure our overall plan. Details can be important, of course, but if we deal only with them we risk losing sight of our long-term goal.

Our lives begin to drift, and one day we wake up to see that we have lost our momentum, we've frittered away our time, and we've strayed from where we first intended to go.

Having a clear picture of how we want to end is critical. And so is living now in the light of that goal. The writer of Ecclesiastes was struck by this very point. As he came to the end of his life he saw that so much of what had occupied his time (and the time of the people around him) was of little importance. So many things that didn't last; so many things that didn't matter...

He came to see the long term consequences of the choices people took. The years the lawyer invested in making it to the top of the tree, the wheeling and dealing that brought the businessman wealth, the power plays that gave a politician exalted status, the building projects a proud ruler thought would last forever – this is what people gave their lives to.

But what did all those things amount to in the end? Families in tatters, lonely rulers starved for real friends, and people with empty lives. Although they seemed to have gained the world they had actually lost their souls. Their trophies were “empty” because they had failed to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God.

It must be frightening to put everything you have into winning what you think is the main event ... only to wake up later to the realisation that it's just a sideshow, that the main event is actually being staged without you. This is the numbing result that the writer of Ecclesiastes saw.

Always keeping the end in view decreases the risk of getting distracted from our goal. Yachties know that to cope with fickle breezes and different currents you need to keep the bow of your boat lined up with a particular spot onshore. Otherwise you drift off course. And when you're well out to sea with no sight of land, some kind of fixed bearings are crucial. At night the stars can provide that, but to keep on course during the day a compass is an essential piece of equipment. Otherwise you'll literally be all at sea!

So it is with our lives. The writer to the Hebrews encourages his readers to focus on their finish line:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.²

The Message puts it this way: *Strip down, start running – and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed – that exhilarating finish in and with God – he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever.*

Jesus never lost sight of where he was headed. Follow his example.

THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH

In a delightful twist, Jesus is both the one who has started us on the race, and also the end goal. And he's the one who will help us become all we were meant to be – both in the refining of our character and in the full development of our *SoulPurpose*.

The race set before us is most of all about who we can become. It is only as we keep our eyes on Jesus that this transformation will be possible. He is the one who can help us discover what our lives were meant to count for. Jesus is also the one to whom we should look so that we can determine what will really matter to us in the end.

The race set before us is most of all about who we can become.

This chapter, like all the others in this book, will end with some questions and suggestions. They will help you work toward perceiving your own personal *SoulPurpose*. Another useful exercise (when your perception has taken firm shape) is to summarise in a paragraph what you understand the key strands of your *SoulPurpose* to be. This will never be a final statement. Your goals will always be open to further refinement. But at every point in your life it makes a world of difference to understand where you are aiming.

We (the authors) have all found attempting this helpful in taking a long view of our lives. Here are our own personal summaries:

WAYNE

I see my *SoulPurpose* centering on helping people make sense of what the call to follow Jesus involves in everyday life. This is mainly expressed through writing and teaching, but I also have a commitment to earthing my own faith in real life. (If I can't learn to live it, how can I talk about it?) Particular areas my *SoulPurpose* leads me into are how faith should affect our work, our use of resources, relationships, and our involvement in mission and evangelism.

ANNETTE

I want to see others grow in understanding their own *SoulPurpose* and see organisations (work, community, church, etc.) become places where people thrive – not just survive. At present I work this out in my family, studies, and the opportunities to coach individuals and groups who come my way.

ALISTAIR

Our God is too small and I want my life to count in helping to expand our vision of God. I want to see a younger generation of Christians living more purposefully in partnership with God in the world. That is why I like being involved in work with students, because they are such a strategic group at a very formative time of life. And that's why I'm interested in faith and work issues, because I want to see churches grow that really equip and support Christians to venture out into the world more purposefully. My *SoulPurpose* also includes a strong desire to reflect God's concern for the poor, oppressed and neglected. I also want my children and grandchildren to grow up knowing they are loved and gifted and using their gifts to discover their own *SoulPurpose*.

These are some of the things that provide motivation and direction for us.

But what about you? What do you really want your life to count for? What are the landmarks or compass bearings that are going to keep you on track when the winds blow fickle and the currents change? What are the things that God is on about that he also wants you to be on about?

What are some of the specific values that Jesus stood for that he's wanting you to grab hold of and not forget?

What are the priorities you need to be sure about if you're not going to lose your way?

CONNECTION AND SERVICE

If you were to idly flick through this book you might think we have written a justification for a selfish life. Find where you fit ... do what you are ... express your uniqueness. It sounds like one of those New Age self-improvement courses.

A closer look will, of course, dispel any such idea. The content of this book is grounded in God's call to us in Scripture. Jesus summed it up: Love God ... and love your neighbour. Our focus is on loving our neighbour. Not a sentimental love, but a practical, self-giving one. In these pages you have wrestled with the challenge of how to make that love your focus, and how to order your life so that you can do it well.

As you set out to express this love and put your new understandings into practice we have two suggestions that will help you maintain your bearings – two points of reference to use whenever you're considering a new task. They're compass points that will keep you on your chosen course. You'll recall them from our first chapter. The first is...

CONNECTION.

Connection reminds us to look at what God is doing, where he is working, and how your proposed contribution fits into his purposes. For ultimately it is God's work in this universe that is most important. We have been invited to become partners in what he is doing.

The problem is that we have all too often viewed God's work very narrowly – as if he is only really concerned with supporting the church and seeing individuals saved for a life in heaven, rather than as participants in God's ongoing, creative, sustaining and renewing work on earth.

For ultimately it is God's work in this universe that is most important.

So we need an expanded vision of God at work in the world. And we need to see how our daily work is connected to his daily work. When this happens we begin to see that no part of our lives needs to be divorced from what he is doing. Even work can – and should – become part of our worship.

Seeing our daily chores as being connected to God's work will definitely shape the way we go about our day. No longer will it be a matter of fulfilling

Our daily work can become, as Martin Luther suggested, our primary way of fulfilling God's command to love our neighbours.

selfish dreams and goals. It will become more and more about what we have to offer, and how that can be used by God for his good and the good of his world.

Connection then leads to the other critical compass point...

SERVICE.

We were made to serve. When we recognise that what we have been given is not just for us, but so the lives of others can be enriched through us, our search to find our "fit" takes on new meaning and purpose. The gifts we have developed, our understanding of how God has uniquely put us together – these give us a lens through which we can see how to better serve others in the course of our daily lives.

With this perspective, our daily work can become, as Martin Luther suggested, our primary way of fulfilling God's command to love our neighbours.

RE-EXAMINING THE RADICAL CLAIMS OF JESUS

Another important way to regain perspective on how to develop our SoulPurpose, is to be aware of the radical claims of Jesus. Meditating on this can be remarkably clarifying!

For we all face a terrible danger. The longer we walk with Jesus, the easier it is to remake him into our own image! His claims on our life are both radical and uncomfortable. So it is little wonder that as we grow more familiar with him we develop a tendency to moderate and soften those claims. That way they become easier to live with. For the lifestyle he calls us to is inevitably at odds with the voices of our materialistic culture.

Meditating often on his words, allowing them to wash over us afresh, is an important and sobering antidote to this natural tendency. Consider these statements:

*"When they came home to Capernaum Jesus asked the disciples, 'What were you discussing on the road?' The silence was deafening – they had been arguing with one another over who was the greatest. He sat them down and said 'So you want first place? Then take the last place. Be the servant of all.'"*³

*"Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat – I am. Don't run from suffering, embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?"*⁴

How do I find the "real me"? According to Jesus, by giving myself to him and his mission.

How do I find the "real me"? According to Jesus, by giving myself to him and his mission. By giving my life away. Only then, he says, will I truly discover who I was meant to be.

This then, is one of the great paradoxes of discipleship. My SoulPurpose is not found in a life of self-actualization. It is instead found as I live a life of service – to Jesus and to others. There is no other way.

WHY WE NEED TO DO TASKS THAT DON'T PARTICULARLY "FIT" US

We've written about the value of finding our "fit". We've pointed out how that can guide us in choosing the things we can best do. We've mentioned how, at first glance, this could sound like a licence to a self-focused life – the more I understand how I have been hard-wired, the more I ruthlessly reject doing anything that doesn't come naturally to me!

But, as we've just noted, our guiding aim is to connect with God in service to God's world. God's imperatives may sometimes require us to actions that are not determined by our "fit".

The life of Jesus is our supreme example here. He viewed his sacrifice on the cross as totally necessary for the world he came to save. We're sure a compelling case could have been made for him to avoid arrest – so that he could "bless" the world even more with his extraordinary gifts of teaching and healing! Some might even suggest an element of foolishness in the deliberate choice Jesus made to be martyred rather than restrict himself to tasks that perfectly fitted him. What a waste!

³ Mark 9:33-35 (The Message).

⁴ Luke 9:23-25 (The Message).

Fortunately, Jesus recognised that his *SoulPurpose* was not solely wrapped up in his “fit”. It merged with the wider purposes of God and called him to sacrifice what may have been perceived as the best use of his gifts, for the greater good of God and this world.

Thank God for the obedience of Jesus. Where would any of us be without it? And what an example to follow! Sometimes we too will find ourselves in a situation where, to connect with what God is doing, we will need to take on work that doesn’t comfortably fit our talents and skills and gifts.

LIVING LIFE ON THE EDGE

There are at least two other reasons we can think of for being prepared at times to serve outside of our “fit”. One is the need we all have for growth and challenge.

We cannot mature unless we allow ourselves to be placed in situations where more than just natural ability is called for. Under the tough conditions of life lies amazing potential waiting to be unearthed in each of us. Like the proverbial hunk of coal, our lives also need to be put under pressure in order to produce the beauty and purity of a diamond. For more than anything else, God wants us to become like Jesus, with his character clearly evident in our lives.

Alongside the need to grow is the need to be on the edge. The two go hand in hand. A curious thing happens when we gain competence in a particular field. We easily slip into a sub-conscious belief that we don’t need God. We’re managing quite nicely, thanks very much! “Comfortable-itis” often gets the better of us. It’s safe and secure within our niche.

However, risk-taking is part of the life of faith. Again Jesus is our example. And our teacher. He was the one who said to his followers (in the words of *The Message*) “*You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.*”⁵

A LIFE OF SOULPURPOSE

At the beginning of this book we claimed that all of us were made for significance. Right from before we were born God hard-wired us. He intended a unique purpose for each of our lives – to know him and follow him, and to join him in his mission to this world by finding and using our unique desires, motivations, giftings, personalities and preferred ways of operating.

Reaching the full potential of our *SoulPurpose* requires that we understand and make the most of that hard-wiring and those potentials. We need to

understand ourselves so we can work at our best. But our *SoulPurpose* cannot be found in a selfish life of just doing what we want to do. Only as we walk with our Maker, only as we discover how God works, only as we find how our unique “fit” can mesh with God’s plans for this world, will we be free to find and live out our *SoulPurpose*.

And when this happens, the words of Jesus will ring true and pure in our ears: *You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are – no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.*⁶

*I came so (you) can have real and eternal life, more and better life than (you) ever dreamed of.*⁷

*If your first concern is to look after yourself, you’ll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you’ll find both yourself and me.*⁸

Our hope is that each of us will experience the truth of these words. For there is no better way to live than to know that what we do and who we become counts for eternity.

PERSONAL MEDITATION: PLANNING THE END OF YOUR RACE

- 1 Write a personal mission statement for your life (Just one sentence)
- 2 What would you like to have said about you if you could write your own funeral eulogy or epitaph?
- 3 What is it that you would like to hear God’s voice say about you at the end of your life?
- 4 Make a list of the most important things you would like to have achieved by the end of your life.
- 5 What will you do next, having reached this point in your *SoulPurpose* journey?
- 6 Summarize your *SoulPurpose* in a paragraph, in a way that makes clear

⁵ Matthew 5:3 (The Message).

⁶ Matthew 5:5 (The Message).

⁷ John 10:10 (The Message).

⁸ Matthew 10:39 (The Message).

how you are living in God's world ... for God and for the people around you. (Do this exercise only when you have defined your *SoulPurpose* and lived it for a period of time.)

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS IN A SMALL GROUP

- 1** Prepare in advance (for this session) a sentence describing the contribution you see each other member of the group making to God's world. Go round the group, reading these out for each group member. How do you respond to the descriptions your fellow-members have given *you*?
- 2** Take question 4 in the personal meditation above, and explain your choices to the group. Invite others to help clarify your aims and look at ways you might work toward them.
- 3** How could your community – your neighbourhood or your town or your college or your place of work, or whatever part of society your group relates to – be different because of the way you live?

YOU ARE GOD'S SERVANTS

GIFTED WITH DREAMS AND VISIONS.

UPON YOU RESTS THE GRACE OF GOD

LIKE FLAMES OF FIRE.

LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD

IN THE STRENGTH OF THE SPIRIT.

MAY THE DEEP PEACE OF CHRIST

BE WITH YOU,

THE STRONG ARMS OF GOD SUSTAIN YOU,

AND THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

STRENGTHEN YOU IN EVERY WAY.

AMEN.

WRITTEN BY DIANNE KAMAY TRIPP

APPENDIX – SOMEONE’S CALLING YOU

CAREERISM VERSUS CALLING

When most of us think about the “working week” we have been conditioned to think in terms of careers and occupations. Our work as doctors, teachers, mechanics, retail assistants, human resource managers and hairdressers are in the end what matters most. Everything else in our week is peripheral. These careers are the way our culture has taught us to think about ourselves. “What do you do?” is the immediate follow-up question as soon as someone has told us their name. We are defined and valued and given status according to our “jobs”. Consequently our vocation or calling is frequently wrapped up in our career.

But this is far from biblical. It’s also not helpful in thinking about the mission of the church, and how each of us fits into it. Thinking in such one-dimensional terms leaves us bereft of finding an integrated focus to the whole of our lives – a centre that can drive all we do.

A VISION FOR THE CHURCH

Ultimately, one of the issues that is really going to decide the future of the Christian movement is how effective we are in mobilising everyone in Christian mission and ministry, on an everyday basis.

The trouble is – many Christians don’t think the words mission and ministry apply to their everyday lives. And unfortunately the church reinforces that fact (often unwittingly). For example, many congregations embark on courses that are designed to help us discover our gifts and find our ministries. However, they only apply to finding where we fit within the church and its ministries – not through the partnership we live out with God in the world.

At the core of this issue is the question - Can we gain a sense of being called by God in a way that applies to the whole of our lives? Many of us seem to struggle with that. Especially in seeing how our lives outside of the church and its programmes are genuinely connected to God’s mission and ministry.

A brief historical survey may help us see why we struggle and give us some starting points to move beyond our frustrations.

1. GREEKS

In the Greek world daily work was considered to be a curse. Aristotle said that to be unemployed was good fortune because it allowed a person to participate in political life and philosophising. These matters were what “real life” was all about.

So for the Greeks, society was organised so that a few could enjoy the blessing of “leisure” while work was done by slaves. Everyday work was a demeaning occupation – one that a person should try to avoid. And certainly there was nothing spiritually meaningful or uplifting about everyday work.

2. JEWS

However, the Jews had a very different worldview. Although the opportunity to think about political issues and engage in contemplation was also valued by them, other everyday pursuits were also part of living out one’s faith. So Jewish teachers didn’t live off the contributions of their disciples, but were expected to have a trade in order to support themselves.

In fact, far from being avoided, daily work was to be embraced as part of God’s purposes for us. Consequently, theological reflection was done by people who were also engaged in everyday life in the world.

3. EARLY CHRISTIANITY

So it wouldn’t have been surprising that Jesus, who was known as a carpenter and the son of a carpenter, was also a spiritual teacher (though there is no evidence of him continuing his trade during the period of his public ministry). While Jesus called some of his inner circle of disciples to leave their fishing nets to follow him, he certainly didn’t call all his followers to give up their everyday work.

Much of his teaching drew on themes from the world of everyday work without any self-consciousness or apologies.

And of course the apostle Paul emphasized a positive view of work, encouraging all Christians to continue in their work and to work well. This was emphasised in his own choice to continue his trade as a tentmaker during most of his church planting years.

This kind of integration of Christian life and daily work seems to be the general Christian pattern for the first century after the Apostles.

4. DISTORTED CHRISTIANITY!

However, some changes gradually started to appear from the third century onwards. The more positive (Jewish) view of work gave way to a much lower view, where “ordinary” work came to be viewed as inferior to the work of priests, monks and nuns.

It wasn’t long before this view dominated Christian thinking. Only those people pursuing the “contemplative” life or a priestly role in the church were said to have a true “calling”.

This view still persists today. And its message is easily apparent - if we want our lives to count for God we’d better get more involved in the church, because that’s what really matters to God. “Ministry” is where it’s at.

There is one qualification. If you can get a job as a doctor or nurse or social worker or maybe a teacher you might be able to turn it into something that feels a bit more like “ministry” because of the more obvious “people-helping” component in it.

So this “two-tiered” view of work is a distortion that began in the early church period. It’s Greek, not Christian.

5. RESTORING THE BALANCE

In the late middle ages the church began to wake up to the inherent problems of this dualistic (sacred and secular) worldview. Initially it was through the work of Martin Luther and the other reformers, who began to teach that all of life, including daily work, can be understood as part of a “calling” from God.

According to Luther, the primary way we respond to God’s call to love our neighbour is by fulfilling the duties that are associated with our everyday work. Work is our call to serve. And this work includes domestic work and community involvement, alongside our employment.

Luther had initially become a monk because he thought this was the highest spiritual calling. However, his own view changed radically. Eventually he decided that we can only truly serve God in the midst of everyday circumstances. Attempts to elevate the significance of the contemplative life are doomed.

Faith that doesn’t confront real life is not real faith at all. Luther felt that everyday pursuits had become devalued and sidelined from God’s purposes. For him it was largely through the daily work of his people that God works to

sustain life, continues his creative activity, and redeems those aspects of life where rottenness has set in.

God's work and our work are intimately connected even when it's not called "church work". This was largely the result of the contribution of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the Puritans (who followed them).

The difficulty is that like most people who seek to restore some truth to the church it tends to get pushed from one extreme to the other – from neglect to over emphasis. As a result, every day work – once devalued and treated as second-best in our discipleship, began to assume not just an important place in our discipleship, but even replace discipleship. This became even more extreme with the advent of capitalism and the industrial revolution.

6. A NEW DISTORTION!

With the passing of time the concept of "vocation" or "calling" became so closely associated with a person's occupation or career that these words became synonymous. People were encouraged to view their calling as being wrapped up in their paid employment or profession (so that someone might say, "My calling is to be a lawyer").

And that's how we tend to use it today. We talk about "vocational guidance" – but in a thoroughly secularised way – without any reference to the calling of God.

As a result, the pursuit of a vocation/calling became an end in itself. People were encouraged to look for personal fulfilment through the work of their own hands.

Whereas once people worked to make a living, now they began to live in order to work. Whereas once the medieval church threatened to divorce faith from work, now they became so closely fused that work was idolised. This was especially true of paid employment.

It's this distortion that deprives the unemployed person, or the person engaged in unpaid domestic or voluntary work, of status, security and satisfaction – by emphasising that these are primarily associated with employment. The assumption is made that unless you are paid for your work, it has little or no value, recognition and fulfilment.

However, there are other consequences to this new distortion. Work once degraded, is now worshipped, and demands huge sacrifices. So we end up with the strange situation that seems to dominate now, where the majority of

people feel stressed from overwork while a significant minority struggle with the fact that they can't find satisfying work.

Ironically it's because employment is demanding so much time and energy for so many, that we struggle to live out our calling as Christians in the other spheres of life – at home, in the community and in church life.

SO WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

We need to find a path that will lead us between the twin heresies of divorcing faith from work, and marrying faith and work (which just means idolising work).

This is best done by emphasizing that our primary calling as Christians is to follow Jesus and nothing else must be allowed to dilute that or squeeze it out.

However, this doesn't mean we live out some spiritual life separate from the rest of life. Our call embraces the whole of our lives – including our work – which itself refers not only to paid employment but also domestic duties, volunteerism in the community and tasks in the church. A broad definition of work is required to really understand our calling. None of these spheres should be devalued or overvalued.

