



JOB, CAREER OR CALLING?

Carolyn Lawrence

CAROLYN LAWRENCE SHARES SOME OF THE ROLES THAT SHE HAS HAD BEFORE AND AFTER BECOMING A 'MINISTER'S WIFE' AND REFLECTS ON THE VALUE THAT GOD PLACES ON OUR LIVES.

What is the difference between a job, a career and a calling? I believe the difference between these three is the focus. In a job the focus is on earning money to pay the bills. A career focuses on status – a bit more satisfying than just a job and hopefully with a goal in mind to move 'up the ladder'. But a calling is different again. When you are called to something, it means someone is doing the calling and for me as a Christian that is Jesus.

When we were first married thirty-five years ago, we were both working in jobs neither of us really enjoyed, just to pay the bills, but we felt for several years that God was calling us both to full time Christian work. This took the form of my husband applying to candidate for the Methodist ministry. When we sold our home and upped sticks with our two young children to move to Wesley College for him to undergo his training, I was plunged into a time of uncertainty, wondering whether I was included in this calling and whether God had plans for my life too. Gradually, God began to reveal his plan for my life as an individual, but some things I wanted to

do had to go on hold while I became the pivot for our family, supporting Mark in his new role and our two daughters as we all adjusted to this new and strange life in a manse!

FOLLOWING THE CALL

As together we sought to be obedient to the call of God day by day, there eventually came a time when I was able to study for a degree and become a Primary teacher and that call of God on my own life, dovetailed well into our joint ministry. As the children grew up and eventually left home, I was able to discern more about God's unfolding plans for my life and was excited to follow the path he laid out for me. We both felt called to serve God overseas and for a year worked as Mission Partners in South America.

On our return I sought guidance for the next step and felt God saying that I wasn't to return to teaching but to seek to serve Jesus in a voluntary capacity for a while. As I sought direction, the door opened to my current role within the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women and Methodist Women in Britain. This in turn has led to me being invited to take on other exciting roles within the Methodist Church Connexionally and I continue to be amazed by how God uses all my previous experiences in the roles I undertake, as I seek to bring glory and honour to Jesus in all I do. Sometimes I am bemused that God has chosen to use me in these roles and really believe that like Esther, I am sent here for 'such

a time as this,' even though I often feel unworthy for the task and I rely daily on his strength and equipping.

GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIVES

All of this has led me to reflecting on what constitutes a call and a vocation. Was I serving God more when I was working as a receptionist in a doctor's surgery, when I was a stay-at home Mum, when I was a classroom assistant, a teacher, an educational Mission Partner or now in my various voluntary roles for the church? I believe that no position has been more 'spiritual' than any other and that I have been serving God equally through all these different situations. It comes down to how we view what we do. If we are truly seeking to be obedient to God's call on our lives, then he can use us in whatever situation we find ourselves and there is no division between sacred and secular.

Even at times when we may feel that we are not being much use to anyone, or feel in someone else's shadow, God is still working out his plan in our lives. He doesn't seek people who necessarily have it all sewn up in their lives or who are super spiritual or qualified, but he does seek people with obedient and willing hearts who will listen for his call, and then actually do what he asks of them, even if it goes against their natural inclinations and preferences. Each year in the Covenant service we say, 'Let me employed for you or laid aside for you' and at times in my life I have had to deal with being laid aside and not fully



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understanding why these seasons were necessary. But through it all, I can see the hand of God guiding my path and unfolding his plan step by step and giving me the strength needed for each part of the journey.

WHERE DOES OUR VALUE COME FROM?

We can often get caught up in what the world says is of value and forget that God operates a completely different value system. In the world's eyes someone is successful or valuable if they have made it to the top of their profession, if they are earning megabucks or if they become famous. This can lead to many in our society feeling overlooked and undervalued.

There are certainly times when I have felt more valued than others in the world's eyes – when I was at home looking after the girls I lost count of the number of times I responded, when asked what I did, 'Oh I'm just a Mum.' Working in a full-time voluntary capacity sometimes causes people to raise an eyebrow and suggest that I don't 'work!' Being a teacher in a recognised profession certainly gave me more kudos at parties (apart from ill-thought-out comments about short hours!) and telling people about our year overseas usually stimulates some interest in that role.

I have learned that a true calling from God does not depend on what the world considers of value and monetary reward does not enhance our value to God in any way. It helps to remind ourselves at times that if we are in Christ then we are of infinite value to God as his precious children and that sense of self-worth, rooted in the love of Jesus frees us up to fulfil whatever calling he has placed on our lives, no matter what society tells us is important.

One of my favourite Bible verses says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). I pray that, whether you are a stay-at-home parent, a full-

time Minister's spouse, a carer, retired, a volunteer, a cleaner, teacher, doctor or CEO of a company, you will come to recognise your immense value to Jesus and seek his plans and calling on your life. Then that you will have the courage to obey what he asks you to do, so that you can enjoy the great adventure and blessing of walking in God's will.

Carolyn Lawrence has a background in Primary education as a teacher and then as an educational Mission Partner with the MCCA in Guyana, South America. Since returning to the UK she has worked in a voluntary capacity within the Methodist Church both locally as a preacher and leader, and nationally in many roles, including the British Area Officer for the 'World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.' Carolyn is married to Mark, who is Minister to Ivybridge Methodist Church, Plymouth and Devonport Circuit.

Since writing this article Carolyn has been appointed as Programme Support Officer for Mission Education with the World Church Relationships team.

