

***“What work should I pursue?”***

*I am in need of some career counseling I think. I am 28 years old and engaged to be married. My college degree is in biology but honestly I don't feel like working in a biology lab and in my five years since graduating I haven't even thought about science once. I've had jobs as assistant manager of a retail store and I have been selling insurance for a while but I don't think I can ever be very successful. My best experiences have been unpaid (or almost unpaid) --- working as a youth soccer coach and volunteering as a junior high school Sunday School teacher at my church. But that's not going to pay my bills, especially now that I'm getting married. What work should I pursue? Or how do I figure out the answer to that big question?*

--Seth

Dear Seth

Obviously this is a complex question to answer. But you have lots of company in asking it so don't be afraid to share your questioning and concern with others.

Just in terms of process, if you are a Christian (1) you really want to pray for God's guidance on this --- and (2) you want to carry out this search with a few close and wise brothers and sisters on your team. God can speak to you through the Bible as you read it; he can impress on your mind and heart his desire for your future; but I think we should never forget that our brothers and sisters are “members of the body of Christ” and Christ speaks to us through them. So don't be a lone ranger as you seek this vocational guidance.

You do have a survival challenge to face up to right away. At this point it is good to remember the “realism” of Ecclesiastes and Genesis 3: there is going to be sweat and toil and drudgery in our work lives. All of us experience at least some of this downside of work if not every day. God and our friends can help us make it through and provide some outside of work compensations, escape, and re-creation. But we've got to survive and work, gut it out --- maybe take some jobs that don't pay so well and aren't terribly interesting or fulfilling. Sitting around whining, moaning, and being lazy isn't an option, not for responsible adults. Certainly not for Christians.

But once we attend to our basic survival needs and provide for our household, it is important to look for opportunities not just to survive but to flourish and to fully deploy the gifts and abilities God has given us. In launching our search for such a career or vocation, it is both good and liberating not to make money and compensation the primary factor in choosing a profession or career or place of employment. Remember the verse: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and these things shall be added unto you.”

Here are some key questions: What natural skills and gifts and abilities has God given you? What do others see as your best abilities? What do you get asked to do (over and over)? What energizes you most and draws your interest and gives you satisfaction? Where are there needs that you could meet? What will be left undone if you don't step up with your abilities and help out? In your case it sounds like maybe it is working with kids or teaching/coaching.

Once you and your advisors (your “posse” or “kitchen cabinet”) begin to get some clarity on the preceding questions, the challenge is to find opportunities to get more experience and training to get even better at this “calling.” And then to find an organization (or free lance opportunity) to practice using those gifts and pursuing that calling. Be ready to move. Be sure your spouse is part of the whole process and you find consensus on all the big decisions of life --- including work and money stuff.

-David Gill