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They could be right in front of you...



SERMON SERIES:

THE COMPASS

ISAIAH 30:21

WRITTEN BY TRAVIS COLLINS, BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH, RICHMOND, VA



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This is the third Sunday in our series on “The Call.” Remember the definition of “call” with which I’m working: **Call is the ongoing promptings of God’s Spirit, confirmed through Scripture, the faith community, intellect, and experience, that communicate: “These are your roles in my mission.”**

Also, our theme for this series is this: **We can know, and live out, the purposes for which we were created. Each of us has a God-given mission—a call—and we can fulfill it.**

Today, as part of this quest to understand our call, I want to suggest for you a COMPASS, a *LIFE COMPASS*.

God spoke to His people, when they were living as exiles in Babylon, through the prophet Isaiah. He promised them, “Whether you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21).

God’s voice is not necessarily like the newfangled Global Positioning System in some of your cars; it does not tell you every turn to take. I was riding with a friend to a ball game last year; he has on his car a GPS. Some distance before we would reach a turn, a woman’s silky voice would say, “Your turn is approaching.” Well, I offer no voice that will tell you exactly when and where to turn before you get there. I do believe, however, that we can have a compass—a clear sense of direction—a means of understanding God’s course for our lives when we stand at the many forks in life’s road.

COMPASS

C – Constancy

Do you have a vision that won’t go away? A constant concern for a certain need and a consistent desire to meet that need? Then you might be the recipient of a divine call.

Gwen Siler had a vision that wouldn’t go away—a vision for a Christian ministry to young ladies with an eating disorder. Despite a steady stream of setbacks, Gwen kept following the dream she couldn’t shake.

There was a 49-acre piece of property, for example, that Gwen believed God wanted her to have. More than one “sign” had confirmed for Gwen that it was on this piece of God’s earth that the vision should be implemented. The property, however, was just too expensive at first. Then she had the opportunity to buy it, but it slipped through her hands. Twice. The first time she couldn’t close due to a lack of financing, and the second time because someone else bought the property. At several junctures it looked to many of us like her vision was just going to disappear into the fog. She even began to appear a bit like Don Quixote to some—impractically idealistic. But Gwen kept plodding, praying, and expecting.

All the while, Rebecca Jones had an undying passion for single young ladies with unplanned pregnancies. For years Rebecca had been drawing up plans for some type of ministry that would love and mentor these young ladies and coach them on the life growing inside them. Both Gwen and Rebecca are in our church, and when they found out about their similar passions, the confluence of their visions seemed blessed by God.

Gwen, Rebecca, and their ministry partners are about to open *Northfield*, a Christ-centered, residential ministry for young ladies with eating disorders or unplanned pregnancies. Would you like to guess where it is going to be located?

Yep, in the plantation-style home on that very piece of property in Cumberland County, Virginia, that once appeared to some to be a pipe dream. It is absolutely one of the most inspiring stories of faith and perseverance that I've known.

One day I commented on how unrelenting Gwen had been. "I can't help it," she said. "I can't lay the burden down. This dream keeps haunting and driving and prodding me."

If you catch a vision for some ministry, but your interests soon shift to something else, then your good idea was probably no more than that—a good idea. One of the signs of a God-given call is constancy—a tug that won't go away toward a need that you can meet.

Do you remember God's call to Samuel? Samuel was lying in the darkness when God's voice disturbed Samuel's rest. It was on the fourth time, and after Eli's counsel, that Samuel finally figured out it was God calling. After that fourth call, Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Does something that sounds an awful lot like the voice of God keep calling? Maybe...just maybe...it *is* His voice.

O – Observations by Others

A college professor introduced himself to me on campus one day. For two years he took me to lunch, invited me to his home, mentored and challenged me, pulled no punches with me, and gently nudged me toward ministry. Dr. Cowley's observation of me—of something I didn't see in myself—set me on my God-planned course.

Paul and Timothy had a similar relationship. In Paul's mentoring of Timothy I see what you and I need from those whose observations will help us discern God's call: genuine concern for Timothy's well-being, words of encouragement, a readiness to address the chinks in Timothy's armor when such was warranted, and the wisdom to give sound counsel. On the one hand, he encouraged and affirmed Timothy. But when it was time to be candid, he could do so. Paul wrote, for example, "Now, Timothy, I know you'd like to leave Ephesus, for that's a tough assignment. But you need to stay in Ephesus." God's call to Timothy was made clear by the observations by Paul.

You need to look for your personal "Pauls" and "Dr. Cowleys." God has them for you—people who love you and who are kind enough, honest enough, candid enough, and wise enough to give you good counsel.

M – Motive

If we aren't careful, we can easily misuse this concept of the will of God. We sometimes appeal to "God's will" to defend our own decisions or to avoid responsibility for our actions. Often this is not a premeditated decision on our part. So you and I have to be cognizant of our own motives, and self-aware enough to realize that if we aren't careful we can convince ourselves that something is God's will when He might prefer not to be associated with our decision.

There are only two ways that I know of to check our motives. The first is sincere, God-aided, introspection. David prayed, "Search my heart, and see if there be any wicked way in me" (Psalm 51). Earnest prayer that God will help us see our true motives is critical. A second means of determining our true motives is to find spiritually mature people who care enough about us to shoot straight with us—people whom we trust to help us see what we cannot see on our own.

When I was in the process of being considered by, and considering, Bon Air Baptist, my good friend John Lockett often took me to lunch and pumped me. He'd ask why I'd want to leave a place I loved—FBC, Mt. Washington.

Was it the prestige of Bon Air? Was it because Bon Air is a bigger church? He loved me enough to help me examine my motives.

If our motivation is not as pure as humanly possible, then our judgment is impaired. Mixed motives muddle our thinking. We can mistake our selfish desires for a word from the Lord. By doing so we might say “no” to what we might ought to say “yes” to, or say “yes” to what we ought to say “no” to, or leave where we ought to stay, or stay where we ought to leave.

Furthermore, selfish intentions jeopardize the ultimate reward for our service. The Bible tells us that when the Lord comes, “He will...expose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5). Let’s live so that God will be able to say, “Well, done, good and faithful servant,” and that He will be able to add, “And you did it for the right reasons.”

P – Peculiar Passions

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (Philippians 2:13).

When you take a look at those things about which you are passionate—peculiarly passionate—you will begin to see God’s call unfold.

Near the end of the workday Ralph can hardly contain his enthusiasm. “I can’t wait till tonight,” he exclaims to his coworker.

“What’s the big deal about tonight?” his coworker inquires.

Ralph exclaims, “Tonight is the night of the children’s English as a Second Language class that I teach at the church. Tonight is *bring a dish from your country* night!”

“Let me get this straight,” says his coworker. “You get all excited about sitting around with kids who speak very little English and whose customs are different from ours. And tonight you’re going to eat weird food. You actually like that?”

“I *love* it,” answers Ralph. “Wouldn’t *everybody* love that?”

Well, no, as wonderful as it sounds to some people, *everybody* would not love it. Some people would wonder how Ralph has the energy to do that at the end of a long day. The fact that Ralph loves children who speak another language and enjoys unusual food is one of his peculiar passions. And that distinctive characteristic of his make-up lets us know that he is probably living out his calling in that ESL class.

So what are your peculiar passions? What are the issues and who are the people about which you care most deeply? Your peculiar passions are God-given, and God didn’t give them to you to waste.

A – Aptitudes

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 (1 Corinthians 12:7, *The Message*).

Why would God create us with unique aptitudes and expect us to do something that didn’t fit?

Each person born into God’s family through faith in Jesus has at least one spiritual gift. The gifts are listed in various places in the New Testament, including Romans and 1 Corinthians. Ideas about how to compile and formulate a list of spiritual gifts vary, but Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels have suggested the following “master list” of the gifts for us:

Administration, Apostleship, Craftsmanship, Creative Communication, Discernment, Encouragement, Evangelism, Faith, Giving, Healing, Helps, Hospitality, Intercession, Interpretation, Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Miracles, Prophecy, Shepherding, Teaching, Tongues, Wisdom.

Besides spiritual gifts, you have natural abilities. Romans 12:6 in the New Living Translation reads, “God has given

each of us the ability to do certain things well.” God’s gifts to us of those “certain things” help us understand His plan for us. Don’t assume that any talent you have is useless.

What are your “certain things”? The ability to maintain a building? To build a web site? To comfort older adults? To read a financial statement or a musical score? To speak publicly? What are your natural abilities?

Your aptitudes—your spiritual gifts and natural abilities—are part of your call.

S – Seasoning

Are you a new believer? A believer who, to this point, has not yet grown in your faith? Or are you a longtime believer who has continued to mature? Your answer will help determine what you should do. The Bible cautions, for example, in 1 Timothy 3, against a new believer taking on certain roles before having the time to season a bit as a Christ-follower. Have you had sufficient experience to be prepared for the opportunity you are considering? There is no shame in not being ready for a certain role. The shame is in taking on something for which we needed more preparation.

On the other hand, if you are a seasoned follower of Jesus, perhaps you ought to be assuming *greater* responsibility within God’s Kingdom. After several weeks of *Body Pump*, Suzy, the leader of the class, asked me, “Are you adding weights every couple of weeks?” I sheepishly admitted that I was working at the same level of difficulty as when I began, several weeks earlier. I’d begun to coast.

Don’t coast. If you have been a follower of Jesus for a while, then it is time to pray about bigger responsibilities. Paul wrote that it is a shame when people who should be enjoying steak dinners are still drinking only milk. I’m not suggesting you ought to be overloaded. Yet to “coast”—to let our accumulating wisdom and experience go unused—is a waste.

S – Sensible decision-making

Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that (Galatians 6:4, The Message).

This search for the will of God deserves our “careful exploration.” Common sense is not enough by itself. In fact, our human reason can mislead us. But common sense is important to the process.

One way to look at things sensibly is to do an “autobiography.” Look back on your life. What experiences have you had that would enable you to contribute to the body of Christ? When did you feel like you were in your “sweet spot?” That will be a good indication of God’s intention for your life.

Another means of exercising good sense in considering a call is to “try it on.” One night in Venezuela, when I was twenty-two years old, I was lying in a hammock in a room with two career missionaries. Joe Powell was one of the missionaries in the room that night. Hoping he hadn’t gone to sleep, I asked, “Joe, how did you know God was calling you to preach?” Joe didn’t respond with an explanation; he responded with an invitation. “I tell you what,” he said. “Why don’t you come to Faith Baptist Church some Sunday and preach in the English service?” I took him up on it, and a few weeks later I was standing in the pulpit of Faith Baptist Church, where Joe was pastor. It’s hard to explain, but as soon as the service was over I knew...I just knew...that God had cut me out to preach. I certainly had not produced a sermonic masterpiece; but it was like trying on a suit that fit.

A lot of people have found their place in the body of Christ by simply “trying on” ministries that seemed compelling. Many have tried on a ministry and sensed immediately that it was a good fit. Others, however, have wondered, “What was I thinking?” From teaching two-year-olds in Sunday School to helping out at a homeless shelter, “trying it on” can help you find your function(s) in the body of Christ.

Of course I don’t advise anyone with a family to sell your house, quit your job, get another degree, and take a completely new career path just to “try it on.” If you can test the waters without undue risk, however, that should help you discern God’s will for you.

Yesterday afternoon I went to see the movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean II*. (Went by myself. It was kinda sad—a middle-aged man sitting by himself in a dark theatre.)

I went because I'd heard that at the heart of this adventure is a compass. And it's true. At the heart of the story is a compass—no ordinary compass—an enchanted compass. The compass points not to the north, but toward that which the holder of the compass wants most in life.

I wonder what you really want. Do you truly long for a life that makes sense, that has meaning, that has direction and purpose? Do you really want to follow your call—your God-given mission?

I want to close with a challenge. Would you be willing to take this sheet of paper—this outline—and sit alone somewhere for a couple of hours? Is the living of your life worth some time alone with your Creator?

I pray for you the ability to follow your God-given COMPASS.