

The Concept of “Calling” and its Relevance to the Military Professional

Study #6

Conclusions

At a time when, according to the polls, people’s major preoccupations are work and family, there has never been a greater need to recover the Christian doctrine of vocation. —Gene Veith, *God at Work*

The first study affirmed that Americans are vigorously seeking to understand their purpose in life—that is, to answer the question, “What on earth am I here for?” Theologians are using the concept of “calling” (also known as vocation) to provide answers to this question. Senior military leaders have recently used the word “calling” in various venues to describe the profession of arms. The second study explained what “calling” means and why it is relevant to today’s military professional. Based on a review of current literature, this study first concluded that calling is not merely “being involved in *something* bigger than oneself.” The “something” is, in fact, *Someone*—the Caller, God, who sovereignly works through the means of people’s multiple vocations to providentially care for people. The biblical doctrine of calling views everything a Christian *does* in life (i.e., their secondary callings) as a response to *being* God’s own (their primary calling). The Reformers attempted to restore this all-encompassing aspect of calling, thereby making a quantum leap from the dualism of previous eras. Unfortunately, their sense of vocation has been all but lost in recent centuries. Nonetheless, the third study explained that God continues to use internal clues and numerous external factors to help people discern their callings—that is, specific ways they are to love and serve their neighbors—and uses internal and external means to confirm whether or not they are “on track.”

The fourth study concluded that because of the depth of commitment its “practitioners” have for their “clients,” the military profession is a calling unlike any other. The fifth study concluded that viewing one’s military service from the biblical perspective of calling—namely, that God is enabling him or her to love and serve their fellow man by providing for their security and freedom—has profound personal and professional implications. These implications are even more profound when viewed against the backdrop of today’s strategic landscape. In particular, a sense of calling will result in renewed satisfaction and validation, realistic expectations, servant leadership, a balance-based definition of success, and calm assurance as the military professional navigates the waters of periodic reassignment and eventual retirement or separation.

During the course of my research, several opportunities for further study presented themselves. First, it would be interesting to interview a large number of current and former military professionals—representing all branches of service and as many “designators” as possible—to gain an understanding of why they entered the military and, as applicable, why they continue to serve or chose to separate or retire. Such a study would shed further light on how people discern a calling to the military, and may validate or suggest improvements to the way the military currently accesses personnel (e.g., the “vocational” aptitude battery, ROTC and service academy applications, etc.). Second, it would be interesting to investigate how a sense of calling impacts retention; the author suspects a direct relationship. If this is so, a strong case could be made for adding

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discussions of this topic to military education and training curricula. Third, a joint study similar to the aforementioned *The Future of the Army Profession* would benefit members of all services; the author suspects many of this Army study's conclusions are applicable to members of other services.

Scripture: Colossians 3:23

Questions:

- Describe “the Christian doctrine of vocation”
- Respond to “everything a Christian does in life...[is] a response to being God’s own.”
- What internal and external clues has God used to help you discern your calling?
- What internal and external means has God used to confirm whether you are “on track?”
- How has considering the concept of calling resulted in “renewed satisfaction and validation?”
- Discuss the author’s assertion that having a sense of calling directly impacts retention.

Scott G. Frickenstein, Ph.D., Lt Col, USAF authored these six studies for OCF.
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