

Who are you and where are you going?

A Christian Perspective on Calling and Identity (by Mary Scott)

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Mary's Story

“Oh God, please don’t make me be a secretary!” I prayed miserably as I gazed out of the classroom window one grey Oxford day in 1984. I was supposed to be practicing typing for my bilingual secretarial exam but was so de-motivated and depressed, I couldn’t be bothered.

...but guess what? - a secretary is exactly what I did become!

But even back then as a three-year-old Christian without any Christian background I somehow knew deep down that God had a special purpose for my life... not that I was more “special” than anyone else, but somehow it was just logical that anyone who follows Christ must have a calling... I’m not talking about the generic and primary calling of all of us to worship God and make disciples... but rather my niche, my place in the world, my “way”.

It took me over 20 years to find out what that calling was – I call it the “wilderness years”....

As a child I became fixated on a dream to be a ballerina. This lasted from the age of 4 to my late teens, when a back injury put paid to the whole idea. I thought this was God’s doing and he was punishing me in some way. I stoically accepted my ‘lot’ and scrapped my whole dream of going to performing arts college, and picked the next best thing – languages, with secretarial skills thrown in. Why? Because it was practical – I was more likely to find a job if I had secretarial skills.

Unwittingly I was already thinking the world’s way: you do well at school, go to college or get training, find a job (ie. financial responsibility/security) and if you have time and/or ability, get involved in some kind of church ministry. Where was my childhood dream? Was it perhaps not from God after all, was it

a little girl's pipe dream? After all the performing arts are hardly a "proper job" are they? – and certainly not very spiritual!

What I didn't recognise back then about my childhood tendencies, which then continued into adulthood, were the "unofficial" things. The things I did when no-one was looking, when I wasn't at school or college or in a job, the things that I instinctively did eg. making up stories, using my very fertile imagination, engaging all the senses, having an eye for space and shape, needing a specific "role" but always in partnership or small groups, learning through watching, observing – then using it, adapting and improvising instinctively, taking a concept, realising it to completion, drawing out potential in others and situations, 'coaching and 'directing' them. None of these things were in the school curriculum, none of them were 'taught' – but they were already there in embryonic form, ready to be trained and brought to fruition.

These are some of the things that make me me! Not just were they instinctive, but without even realizing it, I took any and every opportunity to express these things. To me they were normal! And my energy level, enthusiasm and sense of fulfilment were at a peak when I was involved in these things.

Our unique Design (and Purpose)

I believe that there is no such thing as 'normal', nor are there 'types' of human beings. Just like each DNA pattern is unique, so are our ways of operating, our driving forces and preferences!

"We are God's workmanship" ... why on earth should such an incredible Creator want to create 'types'? Look at creation, the thousands of varieties of even one species of plant, amphibian, fish or mammal. I like to use the expression "design" – we are designed by God - the great Artist who likes to make each design unique and special. Just look at the sunset – is it ever the same twice?

These designs each have a purpose: – we don't put on our best patent leather shoes to go mountain hiking! But are the patent leather ones of more value or more important than hiking boots? Value relates to function and purpose. Patent leather is of no value in rainy, wet and rocky conditions – regardless of how much we paid for them! Hiking boots don't go down well at a ball, not just because they are not aesthetically so pleasing, but because they are not being used for the purpose for which they were made!

Secular or Godly thinking?

Pigeon-holing

I am really sorry to have to say that many Christians (and I count myself amongst them) have some deeply engrained secular attitudes, that we simply don't recognise as such, because perhaps we put a spiritual or Christian label on them.

For example, to put people in categories I believe is not biblical, and yet how often do we see Christian "personality" or "ministry" tests asking multiple choice questions (which by nature forces you to decide between a limited number of alternatives – very frustrating!) and then putting people into a category: – a number, a combination of definitions, a 'type'. These have some limited value in helping self-awareness and helping us find those common elements with others, and we rejoice in that. But what about those things which we don't have in common, and therefore simply cannot understand? How do we learn to come to grips with those things without judging or simply ignoring those who operate and think differently?

How many people in churches have been denounced as sinful or unspiritual, how many conflicts have arisen, just because we cannot understand and accept the way the other operates?! For example, competitiveness – oh dear! Christians shouldn't compete should they? How sorry our world be without all the healthy sports and business competitors! It's not the driving force that can be sinful, but the way it is used and the motive or agenda behind it (and only God can really be the judge of that!)

The Status Trap

A rather subtle example of secular thinking is that sadly we really do rate certain occupations and ministries higher than others! Would you rather have your child be in an actor or a lawyer? Who do you admire more, the church cleaner or the worship leader? Many try very desperately not to think in this way... and so many sermons are preached on the value of all types of ministries. But when it comes to our children's choices of subjects and career paths, or when it comes to our own sense of self-worth and value, suddenly things look very different.

The main problem I encounter in people who come to me is lack of self-confidence based on a sense of who they are or what they have 'to offer' being not important or somehow invalid. It might be a teenager, a successful business person or an at-home mother, it doesn't make any difference!

You are already equipped!

"In my innermost being you created me, you knit me together in my mother's womb" Psalm 139

Motivational drives

This does not just refer to physical characteristics and personality traits, but also to motivational tendencies. We all have a set of distinctive motivational patterns, for example:

Perhaps you really operate best on your own with no one to supervise you, or rather you like to work in a group with your own specific function. Perhaps you like attention to fine detail, or rather you like the big picture and don't like to bother with details. Perhaps you want to compete and win, or rather you want to enable someone else to win! Perhaps you want to start projects and bring them to completion yourself, or rather you prefer to join someone else's project. Perhaps you prefer the long distance race to the sprint...this list is infinitesimal!

Although not a biblical scholar, I believe (and I think there is sufficient evidence for this) that we have in our makeup all that we need for our calling and it is inextricably linked to our identity. In other words we are already equipped with the necessary tools, we just need to recognise, validate and then train and develop them!

The Talent Trap

We know that it is a biblical precedent that we should use the abilities and talents God has given us. The trap lies in our thinking: certain careers, occupations, subject matters and types of ministry are superior to others. All the people I have coached have a multiplicity of abilities. They cannot use them all at once! So, they have defaulted to the more socially, educationally or religiously "acceptable" or superior ones at the expense of their own desire to use some of the "lesser" ones!

It is my belief that out of God's grace he gives us all a vast array of abilities. Many people have the ability to cook really well and that's very useful, as we all need to eat! That does not mean they are called to be chefs!

The best kind of Evangelism (in the workplace)

Doesn't it feel fantastic when quite naturally you get a chance to share your faith, without this horrible feeling of pressure or a sense that you artificially generating "opportunities"!

I am a useless evangelist! I used to get very guilty about this. I avoid street outreaches, certainly don't like approaching strangers and giving out leaflets or trying to engage them in conversation about Jesus; people rarely come to faith when I evangelize them and I am nervous, shy and to be honest, a completely different person, when I have to do "evangelism"! (Does this hit a chord with any of you?!) In recent years I have been able to relax, because knowing at last that I am in the place God has called me, knowing that I am 'in my element', being able to use what He has given me in the **way He has given me it** (and not in the way he has given it to someone else), I cannot but reflect the presence of God, and so witnessing to Him comes naturally!

There is no divide between the sacred and secular - our spiritual and ministry giftings are also expressions of our motivational patterns. For example:

You don't have to be someone you're not!

It is when we try to be someone we're not, either because of pressure from ourselves, peers, authority figures or society's subtle influences, that it can lead to frustration, a sense of dull acceptance of our "lot" (or much worse ...!)

God wants you to be who you really are !

The Enemy's Strategy

I have been observing people and their situations for many years and come to the conclusion that the enemy's strategy is to keep Christians spiritually "dull", hold them down and keep them occupied with issues of financial security (or responsibility), status in ministry or workplace, low self-confidence, with a good dose of fear of man thrown in!

The Money Trap

In Luke 12 – Jesus says (summarized) "don't worry about your life, what you will eat and what you'll wear... these things are the preoccupation of unbelievers, your Heavenly Father knows you need them, seek the Kingdom of God... and he'll give you everything you need". Does this only apply to those in full-time "Christian ministry"? I don't think so! I think, seeking God and living out the Kingdom of God in all aspects of daily life is what is meant here.

We all like to think that we trust God for provision, but the test only really comes when we are out of work or don't know when the next contract or commission is coming – or when we decide to make a change! The Christians in poor countries are a tremendous example to us of real faith and therefore the enemy has less hold on them in this area.

The biggest issue I face when working with Christians is not that they can't believe that they have a calling and God-given purpose (I think everyone deep down knows this) but rather "stepping out of the boat", and really trusting that God provides – not because we're "earning" it, but because he loves us and we're seeking his Kingdom! Don't forget, the first thing God did after the fall was give Adam and Eve clothes!

As performing artists and consultants, my husband and I have been living for the most part of the past 25 years not knowing what our income would be in any given month. I spent many, many years in anxiety over this, and when I got desperate I slipped back into my 'secretarial work comfort zone', to stop the gaps and as a result I lost my vision for a long time until God convicted and challenged me! The irony is that we have always had a nice home to live in, good food and decent clothes – regardless of what we have and haven't done, regardless of the mistakes we have made (and there are many of them!) God has proved himself time and time again as our provider, and only after a 30 year battle with this anxiety have I begun to be free to live out my calling, despite the financial uncertainties. I am so thankful for this!

How do you find out who you really are?

Your motivational tendencies will always seek expression, like water finding a leak in a container. It is a case of identifying these things, and they are often the seemingly "small" or "insignificant" things.

Recognising the Symptoms

Firstly, check out whether or not you are in your niche! The SIMA® organisation have established that when we are not operating at our best we suffer any number or combination of the symptoms below (some I have witnessed or experienced and added myself):

Unexplained tiredness, a lack of self-confidence, lethargy, indifference, some forms of laziness, boredom, burn-out, frustration, stress, non-clinical depression, etc.

PLEASE NOTE: the list above is not exhaustive, nor is it always an indication of de-motivation as there could be other spiritual or emotional causes which produce similar symptoms, if unsure, check the 'positives list' below to see if they are true for you in your work!

Indicators of compatibility

Whatever your motivational pattern, when you operate according to it, you experience most or all of the following:

- You lose a sense of time, ie. you're not continually watching the clock or waiting for the break, the weekend, the holiday (I call it the TGI Friday mentality!)
- You can't imagine ever doing anything other than what you are currently doing – ie. You can't imagine retiring!
- You don't feel the need for continual "pep ups" like coffee, comfort eating, smoking (or worse)!
- You seem to have boundless energy – even when you're tired! (not to be confused with burn-out!)
- You don't feel out of your depth or over-exerted, even when the work is quite stressful.
- You feel a certain level of confidence that you cannot explain!
- You are motivated to work hard or learn hard, and don't get bored.
- You feel 'in your element' and inexplicably proud of yourself!

...and so on....

PLEASE NOTE: the list above is not exhaustive, nor is it fool proof, as other factors may be at work! However, it is a useful guideline.

We see these people around us sometimes (... albeit not as often as I'd like). It is unmistakable. However, we do tend to make the mistake of thinking they are someone "special", they have "talent", or some kind of psychological driving force that compels them. This is correct, but all it means is that they are doing what they are **designed** to do! This is not just for the "special few" - **I believe God wants this for all of us!**

There are some keys that can help you:

Look back over your life and make a note of things you did which you felt you did well (regardless of what anyone else said, didn't say or whether it was recognised in any way!) and things that you felt satisfied about achieving (again, regardless of anyone else!) These patterns are revealed in childhood in a very embryonic way, but those things that you enjoyed doing and did instinctively from childhood throughout your life, perhaps as a hobby, or when no one was looking or "unofficially" will say a lot about you!

Look at activities or elements of an activity now or in the past that give you particular energy, excitement and where you don't get tired or bored. Look across the spectrum to things in or outside work, hobbies, in or outside the church.

Areas to be careful about

We derive huge satisfaction from Christian experience and seeing people saved or healed etc. This is not what I am talking about above, because this is *generic* to all Christians, and may not necessarily indicate a unique characteristic in your makeup. They are acts of God and he is using us as His vessels. He does, however, want to use the ***motivated abilities that he has given us*** for Christian ministry as well as outside the Christian sphere, so there will be some overlap, that is why you must look over your whole life, and not just in the context of Christian experience.

Resist the temptation to ask others! They will tell you what they see but, however well they know you, they cannot identify what **motivates** you. They see your strengths, abilities and weaknesses. These are not necessarily connected with your motivations. Don't forget: **we all have things we can do well but are not motivated to do!**

Having done this, if you are still completely stuck you can contact me or another SIMA coach [via the website!](#)

A Fruitful Garden.

The bible talks a lot about Gardens – often a symbol for our lives. When God created us he planted seeds in us which were designed to grow. We may have tended some plants in our garden and they have grown into big strong trees, flowers or plants. However, very early on we may have neglected or had other little shoots trampled on! It is never too late to start, however, as they are always there, albeit some are rather small and weak. Plants only remain small and weak due to insufficient light, water or nourishment – they are *supposed* to grow!!

Don't look at or compare yourself with someone else's garden! Don't try to plant things in your garden that don't belong, and for which it is not designed - like orange trees in a cottage garden, or cabbages in a fruit garden! The Lord has your garden mapped out for His purposes for your life and he has been gracious enough to give you not only the abilities required but also the desire and motivations to use those abilities!

"You are like a private garden, my treasure, my bride! You are like a spring that no one else can drink from, a fountain of my own. You are like a lovely orchard bearing precious fruit, with the rarest of perfumes: nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, myrrh and aloes, perfume from every incense tree, and every other lovely spice. You are a garden fountain, a well of living water, as refreshing as the streams from the Lebanon mountains." Awake, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden and waft its lovely perfume to my lover. Let him come into his garden and eat its choicest fruits. "(Song of Solomon 4:13-16)