

RUN WITH THE VISION

Find your Niche

*What's God going to say to my questions? I'm braced
for the worst.
I'll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon.
I'll wait to see what God says,
how he'll answer....*

*And then God answered: "Write this.
Write what you see.
Write it out in big block letters
so that it can be read on the run.
This vision-message is a witness
pointing to what's coming.
It aches for the coming—it can hardly wait!
And it doesn't lie.
If it seems slow in coming, wait.
It's on its way. It will come right on time."
—Habakkuk 2:1-3 (The Message)*

For most of us, *Perspectives* was a like a grenade tossed into our predictable, normal Christian lives. We've been ruined for the ordinary because, amazingly, our worldviews have changed.

Worldview Change ➤ **Lifestyle Change** ➤ **Panic**

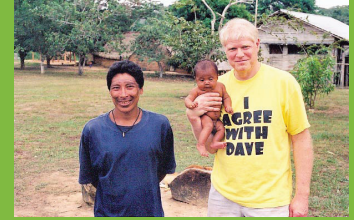
Once that began happening—for some of us, in Lesson One!—we all sensed some lifestyle changes were also coming. Made us all a little edgy because the more drastic the possible changes, the more we're desperate to know precisely our part in this biblical, historic, mega-cultural and strategic plan of God. What does He want? What's next?

That query, of course, slides into the well-worn question of "What is God's will for my life?" (Check the sidebox beginning on page 7.)

But before we figure out the niggly details of our next step in God's unchangeable purpose, God wants us to clearly understand the general basics that He's already revealed. In fact, He probably won't get specific about where we fit now until we position ourselves in what the Word teaches about the following steps.

We won't even deal with the primero question of the Lordship of Christ in our lives, all right? If we're not in that simple, radical, living-sacrifice posture, we can forget about trying to get some divine guidance on our next step. (Review the sidebar passages.)

With that basic Lordship stipulation settled, work through the following to help clarify your next step in the Kingdom.



NELSON MALWITZ (pale guy on right), founder of The Finishers Project, is working on a book called *Passages That Don't Preach*—about the "hard sayings" of Jesus.

Jesus didn't pander to our self-seeking instincts:

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it."

—Matthew 10:37-39

And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

—Mark 10:21

And another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home." But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

—Luke 9:61, 62

"So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

—Luke 14:33

If these passages don't describe your current stance before God, not to worry: Throw your hands up in the air, confess your lapse of self-control and sin, rend your clothes and toss ashes on your head if you need to repent the serious Old Testament way. (Just kidding.) And state once again, "Whatever whenever and wherever, Lord."

See INSTRUCTIONS below.

FINDING YOUR NEW NICHE

YOUR PRIESTHOOD

- **Wear your priest-collar!** Remember *Perspectives'* eye-openers about the responsibilities—along with the well-known privileges—of the “priesthood of the believer”? As a priest, your overall job description will always be 1) worship, 2) intercession and 3) service. Your next step ministry lies within the mandates of interceding for others—even for whole nations—and then serving them.

“*But you are a royal priesthood*” (Exodus 19:5-6 & 1 Peter 2:9).

YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE

- **“Know Thyself.”** Think through God’s design of your life. He uses everything—your heredity, environment, experiences, temperament, strengths, passions, weaknesses, the good, the bad and the ugly. This is almost a useless exercise unless you *write it down*; so “freewrite,” not worrying about spelling, grammar or that anyone else will ever read this summary of your life! A helpful framework for thinking through this phase of finding your niche is the SHAPE acronym. (See sidebar page 3.) Seriously spend some time on this; it’s possibly the most revealing exercise to clarify your role in the Kingdom!

“*In Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me*” (Psalm 139:13-16);

“*You are His handiwork...*” (Ephesians 2:10).

YOUR GIFTING

- **Study the spiritual gifts and determine yours.** The gifts—the original Greek wording is “spirituals”—comprise people gifts, speaking gifts, serving gifts and sign gifts (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-30; Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Peter 4:7-11). Work through this helpful [Spiritual Gifts Inventory](#) at www.buildingchurch.net/g2s-i.htm or, for the 23 gifts and DISC personality inventory, go to www.uniquelyyou.net

“*There are varieties of gifts*” (1 Corinthians 12:4).

YOUR MINISTERING

- **Practice your gifts in various types of service.** Example: Your intercession-service as a priest + life experience of abuse and empathetic personality + an “encouragement-exhortation” gift (the *paracletos* gifting meaning “one called alongside to help”) could mean a ministry counseling abuse victims or presenting parent training seminars or You’ll recognize your area of service as you test out various ministries by volunteering, interning, short-terming before committing yourself to one opportunity.

“*There are varieties of service*” (1 Corinthians 12:5).

YOUR IMPACT

- **Explore various settings—including other cultures—for your ministering.** This is where “the effects” (NASB) of your ministry might prove to be most powerful in another culture. Your affinity for befriending and enjoying other cultures can be easily explored as you attend events or volunteer with local/regional groups ministering to international students and immigrants. (See [Welcoming](#).) It’s at this point you then begin contacting organizations and agencies about long-term opportunities in [Welcoming](#) or [Going](#). Or you’ll find your ministering is more effective in your own culture, so you focus on world-Christian roles such as [Mobilization](#), [Sending](#) or [Prayer](#).

“*There are varieties of effects*” (1 Corinthians 12:6).

YOUR ASSIGNMENT...FOR NOW!

- **Grab the opportunity that God sets before you.** It’s easier to steer a rolling car, and at this point you’ve been praying, studying, serving—and God will get specific. Be alert to recognize what He has *already planned* for you to do next. But don’t let your niche become a rut.*
“*...Created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10)

Broad — to — Specific
The more carefully and honestly you work through these steps, the more your thousands of options as a world Christian narrow down to a specific assignment...for now!

* Don’t let your niche become a rut! Philip was a deacon in Jerusalem, then an evangelist in near-culture Samaria, then a missionary to the Ethiopian in Gaza, then—apparently for the rest of his life—a godly family man at home in Caesarea (Acts 8:4-5, 26; 21:8-9). If you announce a divine “call” to a lifelong role and then choose or are forced to switch to God’s new assignment for a new season of your life, you’ll have to appear to disobey the first “call” to move into the second! God can move His servants around as He chooses whenever He chooses. So when you find your niche, add the qualifier “...for now!”

INSTRUCTIONS FOR “FINDING YOUR NEW NICHE”

You’re a grownup and a wise *Perspectives* grad as well, so you can use this exercise any way you choose:

Your SHAPE

Spiritual gifting
Heart
Abilities
Personality
Experience

The momentum of the Purpose-Driven ministry’s PEACE Plan (PurposeDriven.com) has mandated that millions of ordinary believers get good at figuring out who they are and, therefore, where they fit in the advance of the Kingdom. Use this local church’s Web outline of [SHAPE](#) to help you pray and think through—and write out—the story of who you are as God’s *poema* (the original Greek of “masterpiece” or “workmanship” in Ephesians 2:10).

(Thanks for posting this, North Way Community!)

The QuickStart

Simply work through the above levels in one sitting! Perhaps you’ve already investigated some or most of these steps. (Although beware of jumping to conclusions about yourself: For example, if you studied spiritual gifts and took a gifts assessment years ago, don’t presume that a dormant area of gifting won’t now appear for a new phase of ministry.) For feedback, surround yourself with world Christians—perhaps by initiating a **“Pilot” World Christian Fellowship** among your mission-minded friends. Next, find out the best ways and the bloopers of raising others’ mission vision in our mobilization unit: ***Make A Difference: How to Mobilize Mission Vision in Your Fellowship***.

The Six-Month Plan

Want to be amazingly confident about your next step? First, read over the steps above. Then begin working through our mobilization unit: ***Make A Difference: How to Mobilize Mission Vision in Your Fellowship***. And consider launching a **“Pilot” World Christian Fellowship**. But come back to this “Finding Your New Niche” exercise and *take literally a month to cover each of the six steps listed above*. It might sound ridiculous for a one-page exercise, but taking six months to discern God’s leading for the next major season of your life is a wise investment of your time and energy. Here’s your schedule:

Month 1: Your Priesthood

- **Wear your priest collar!** Fast at least twice this month—for as long as God suggests each time. Focus your fast on worship, not on getting answers. (If you have food issues, you can fast other recurring, favorite things—video games, TV, etc.) Also, spend the month seriously interceding—making a list—for your family, Christian and pre-Christian friends, your church, your nation, another reached nation and at least one unreached people. (See JoshuaProject.net if you need suggestions.)

Month 2: Your Life Experience

- **“Know thyself.”** Free-writing your life story takes time, so let yourself take weeks to pray for insight and actually wade through and write out *who you are*. Once you’ve taken a self-assessment such as the SHAPE (See sidebar.) profile, let a close friend see your responses and talk with you about what she/he sees differently about you. Consider doing the [self-assessment](#) in our ***Going All Out*** and ***Welcoming*** units, where you can then plunge ahead into a discipline that will change your life: asking a mentor to keep you accountable to work on weak areas.

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR “FINDING YOUR NEW NICHE”

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Month 3: Your Gifting

- **Study the spiritual gifts and determine yours.** Use a full month to not only study and determine your areas of spiritual gifting but to also get feedback. Ask a friend to review your gifts inventory; sometimes others can sense capabilities we don't see in ourselves. And, again, consider securing a mentor who will encourage you, pray for you and keep you accountable to be using your giftings. This is also a good point at which to pull in your pastor/church leader who needs to know what's going on in your life.

Month 4: Your Ministering

- **Practice your gifts in various types of service.** Choose four of the ministry roles you feel most drawn to, and then devise a week-long exposure in each. Your advising friend, mentor and church leaders can help you arrange to volunteer/help in each type of service. For example, as much as your own schedule allows:

Week 1: Help in as many of your church's children's programs as possible.

Week 2: Shadow an international student ministry leader in her/his work.

Week 3: Volunteer at an area homeless shelter.

Week 4: Spend all your freetime assisting the mission/outreach leader or helping your church leadership do anything that will further the mission awareness of your church—such as hosting the **“Pilot” World Christian Fellowship**.

Wherever you test out your ministry, let everyone you work with know what you're doing and why, and keep a list of their names and contact numbers. At the end of the month, talk over with your friend, mentor and pastor which of the four seems to match you. Then begin planning an extended time to work in that area as a volunteer, an intern, a short-termer.

Month 5: Your Impact

- **Explore various settings—including other cultures—for your ministering.** By now you know what energizes you in ministry, so personally or as part of a group, implement your service among international students, immigrants and—in short-term mission trips—in a setting that's foreign to you. Even with limited skills such as in language and cultural knowledge, you'll sense whether another culture is where you long to serve. Spend this month:

- Intentionally interacting with internationals,
- Contacting organizations, agencies and mission-matching services (*See Resources, below.*) about upcoming short-term mission opportunities—and long-term possibilities.

Month 6: Your Assignment...for now!

- **Grab the opportunity that God sets before you.**

If God doesn't give light on His future role for you, it's dangerous to invent your own light—your own rationalization of what He wants, pretending that a twist of circumstances is His “call.” Sometimes God allows you to just step ahead into the unknown by faith. Don't push ahead of God in finding your route in His plan. Those who “fear the Lord and obey the word” yet who “walk in darkness, who have no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on God. But now, all you who light fires and provide flaming torches...” —manufacturing your own “light,” guessing at your next step so you don't appear unspiritual or stupid— “will lie down in torment,” tossing and turning, tormented by regret. (See Isaiah 51:10-11)

Okay, let's talk about...(drum roll with echo-reverb)

THE CALL TO MISSIONS!

Often Christian organizations and churches talk of “a call” to certain ministries—almost always the “professional” ministries of the pastorate, the evangelist, the missionary. But nowhere in Scripture do we find that a dramatic “call” is a doctrine or a requirement to move out in vocational ministry.

As *Perspectives*-savvy world Christians, it's a good idea to be careful about conventions such as “the call to missions.” The place to begin evaluating traditions, of course, is the Word. If this elusive “call” is a hot-button issue for you, do an inductive concordance search of the term *call* in the New Testament. Here's a start:

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|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 4:21-22 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 8:30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 5:13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 3:1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew 9:13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 9:24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 1:18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 5:4 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke 5:32 | <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 11:29 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 4:1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews 9:15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> John 10:3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 1:1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians 4:4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Peter 1:15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 2:39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 1:2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Philippians 3:14 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Peter 2:9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 13:2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 1:9 | <input type="checkbox"/> Colossians 3:15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Peter 2:21 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 13:9 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 1:24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Thessalonians 2:12 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Peter 3:9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acts 16:10 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 1:26 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Thessalonians 4:7 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Peter 5:10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 1:1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 7:15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Thessalonians 5:24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Peter 1:3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 1:5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Thessalonians 1:11 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Peter 1:10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 1:6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 1:6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Thessalonians 2:14 | <input type="checkbox"/> Jude 1:1 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 1:7 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 1:15 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Timothy 6:12 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romans 8:28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians 5:8 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Timothy 1:9 | |

In the Old Testament, Isaiah 6 has prompted thousands of great old missions sermons with the “Who will go for us? Whom shall I send? Here am I, send me” theme. But God was talking about sending a herald of judgment to Isaiah's own people, not to the nations. Was that a call to missions?

If you did that New Testament search, you found a few passages that could be construed as calls to a particular ministry. But Bob Sjogren in *Run With the Vision* says in his research of all the cross-cultural workers mentioned in the book of Acts:

“It's sobering to note that 99% of the people serving God cross-culturally were there for one reason: persecution.... How about the other 1%? In Acts about 74% of that 1% serving God cross-culturally were doing so because Paul asked them to go. Beyond that 74%, 18% were there because their church sent them.... Finally, 7% of the Acts believers involved in cross-cultural ministry [of the 1% not going because of persecution] were there because of their own zeal. There seems to be no other obvious reason.”

The typical proof-text that believers have to wait for a “missionary call” to explore cross-cultural ministry is Acts 13:2: “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Yet Paul and Barnabas were *already* ministering cross-culturally in Antioch when this directive came. Philip was already ministering cross-culturally in Samaria when God told him specifically to go to Gaza (Acts 8:26). When His harvest workers are already moving out in ministry, God does often fine-tune their directions: “Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right or to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

Some say that Peter's vision to allow the Gentile house of Cornelius to hear the Good News was a call to missions. But Peter didn't go, then, as a missionary to the Gentiles. Actually, Peter's vision was simply God's vivid reminder to bless *all* the nations (Acts 10).

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GLADYS AYLWARD said, "I wasn't God's first choice for what I've done for China. I don't know who it was. It must have been a man—a well-educated man. I don't know what happened. Perhaps he died. Perhaps he wasn't willing. And God looked down... and saw Gladys Aylward. And God said, 'Well, she's willing.'"

As the PreparingToGo.com site says, "Just because someone is dead doesn't mean they can't still mentor you!"

Paul himself is the one New Testament believer who at the point of salvation was told he would go to the nations (Acts 26:15-19). Not a specific call (Remember, there were maybe 59,999 Gentile nations at that point!)—much like the Great Commission command that we all have about discipling all nations. But a supernatural “call” nonetheless. He later says that he was a “called apostle” (literally “sent one”). Yet Paul’s spectacular salvation experience with its mandate to take the Gospel to the Gentiles isn’t a biblical doctrine nor the way God leads every believer. Being struck with a glorious, literal vision, conversing audibly with the risen Christ about being a missionary and being blind for three days isn’t exactly the norm for everyone’s salvation experience. (If that’s your experience, follow Mary’s advice at the wedding in Cana: “Whatever He says to you, just do it!” —John 2:5)

Mission scholar Herbert Kane interviewed hundreds of missionaries and found that although most spoke of a definite “call,” upon careful evaluation most admitted that what they felt was a *process of God’s leading*. Very often, missionaries would say that, following a stirring message or a remarkable ministry experience, they “considered that my Call to Missions.” For most, God’s leading into missions took place over many years; for 80% of the interviewees, that leading began when they were between ten and twelve years old! Kane determined the process was:

Curiosity: What is this people group like?

Interest: I want to keep learning more.

Understanding: I’m beginning to get a heart for this people.

Assurance: I believe God could use me in this group.

Conviction: I’m virtually designed to minister among this people.

Commitment: As God leads, I’m ready to engage in ministering to this people.

Action: I’m being confirmed as one to minister among this group.

Being *led* by God is biblically accurate; not moving till we get an experience-based “call” is suspect. Insisting on a specific, supernatural call before engaging in global-scope ministry—when God’s Word doesn’t insist on it—often brings comparison, confusion, frustration and guilt. We as God’s people have been very clearly commanded and commissioned. We are to align our lives with God’s objective of making follower-learners—disciples—of every people including our own. In Old Testament parlance, we’re to bless every nation, gracing them with the privilege of joining God’s family through redemption in Jesus Christ.

If God leads you into an assignment of ministering cross-culturally, super. If not, it's still crucial to realize that a supernatural call isn't required to align every facet of your life with God's purpose—which happens to involve every culture on the planet!

If we're training our children to expect that they will never do anything significant in the Kingdom unless they receive some zap of a special professional call, maybe we're misleading thousands or millions of potential goers, welcomers, senders, intercessors or mobilizers. This is not about special Christians getting *called*; it's about all of us being *led*. It's about finding our life-purpose in the biblical, historical, cultural and strategic plan of God.

But let's pause and clarify: Listening for very specific guidance from God is definitely scriptural—once we're already moving in obedience. The follower who isn't following, the servant who isn't serving probably won't hear God's voice. But those who are already on the field of battle seem to be the ones biblically who receive specific fine-tuning direction from the throne room of God.

Don't argue with believers who insist on these special calls to go into professional ministry roles. Don't argue with agencies and organizations whose acceptance requirements list having a specific "call" to a ministry. Just open your ears for the very voice of God, constantly confide to God that you'll go anywhere and do anything at any time, grab the opportunities He sets before you...and don't wait for a call! ■

*See the Find your Niche Resources on the Next Steps section of the Perspectives website.
www.perspectives.org*

The word leading is usually more appropriate than the loaded word calling when it comes to God's specific role for you in His grand purpose.

Hung up on "How to Know God's Will for Your Life"?

Don't feel alone: A Google search gives you 3,080,000 references on the Web that deal with that blockbuster question!

- Determine God's will by "when things fall into place"? This is usually the exact opposite of what happens when you choose to obey God in the context of this world-system counter-kingdom. Obeying God's will usually brings chaos, risk, stress, wounds...(yet incredible joy). "In this world-system," Jesus promised, "you will have tribulation [literally "pressure"]" (John 16:33). "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Doesn't sound like everything's supposed to "work out." Jesus, in the very core of the will of God, got crucified.
- Determine God's will by what gives you "peace"? See *above*.
- Determine God's will by whatever happens? (Hmmm: Is there any intelligent, biblical way of answering this method of "finding" God's will for your life?)

It's such a common question, you'd think the Bible itself used the phrase "God's will for your life." No, but it does refer often to "God's will." So:

1. Study all the passages in which *God's will* is mentioned.
2. Step into this revealed will of God for your life.
3. Do what you want.

Bible expositor John MacArthur is often criticized for this unorthodox statement of "How to Know God's Will for Your Life: "Obey God fully and then do what you want." —Because what you want will be what He wants. This, amazingly, keeps all extremes of various systematic theologies happy: If what you do is then sovereignly pre-determined by God, great. If what you do is your own freewill choice that God foreknows and will use for His purpose, super.

Just give up on the guilt-ridden, confusing, vague school of "one Perfect Will and if you miss it you're a loser living only His Permissive Will the rest of your life." Yes, there are consequences for disobeying God; you then live with them till heaven. But that doesn't mean you're banished from a life of living out His will. It just means you need even more counsel from godly fellow saints, you visit 1 John 1:9 very often, consistently walk in your new nature under the control of the Holy Spirit, and then *do what you want*.

