



EXCERPT



Your Calling Here and Now *Making Sense of Vocation*

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Gordon Smith invites us to reflect on our vocation and step into God's call in the present moment. When discerning our vocation feels overwhelming, Smith offers a simple question as a way forward: At this time and place, who am I meant to be, and what am I called to do? Theologically and historically grounded, *Your Calling Here and Now* offers theological reflections and spiritual practices that will help you discern God's call on your life.

Beyond Wishful Thinking and Regrets

When we speak about the here and now, we do so with a frank and honest read of our time and our situation. We face our reality. There is no effective capacity to discern and embrace vocation unless and until we name our reality; vocation is always—always—about the here and now. In this time; in *this* place.

It is so very easy to say “if only”—if only this or that or the other had not occurred. If only this had not happened to us as a child or in our teen years. If only we had not been fired from our job. If only this illness or accident had not come our way. But the problem is that in so doing, we live looking back rather than facing and living within our current reality and accepting that this is now our new reality. And it makes no difference if what has happened is a result of our own doing: we mishandled our job or a relationship or very simply did something inappropriate and now are living with the consequences. Or, if the situation we are facing is due to something another person did—however wrong it was or continues to be. In both instances, one is a victim, either of one's own foolishness or the misdeeds of others. And yet, regardless of the original cause, this is now our reality. Discerning vocation is a matter of getting beyond the “if only,” which leads to wasted emotional and intellectual energy.

We also learn to get beyond nostalgia—the propensity to look back fondly or wistfully to an earlier time. We turn from longing for a previous time and ask about the *here and now*: this time, this place. This is not a matter of fatalistic resignation; rather, we do this in hope. We ask, What can and must be done now in light of what is *actually* the case rather than what we wish was the case? This is not because we are only living for today; it is merely that today is all we have and so, looking to today and down the road, we choose where and how we will act. Here and now.

And in this, it is important to remember we cannot map out the rest of our lives. We choose and discern in light of today, and we know the rest of our lives will be lived out one day at a time, one step at a time. We are merely affirming and embracing what we are called to do today—with hope and grace and courage.

When I became a university president, I came into a situation where the institution was carrying an inordinate amount of debt. And sure, once or twice I bemoaned the situation and wondered what factors might have led to this challenging situation. In other words, there might be a space for a little raging and ranting, if you must. Perhaps go out to a quiet spot on the beach and yell and scream. Fine. But then, turn, and rather than say “if only,” consider what must be said and what must be done in light of what is *actually* the case rather than what we wish was the case. In my case, it meant that as the president, it was my job to help the institution move to a stronger level of financial sustainability. And I needed to do this while keeping the university on mission. Sure, it was not what I would have chosen, but that is not the point. This was the situation that presented itself, and this was the situation in which I had been called to speak and to act.

Sometimes, this is a particularly difficult pill to swallow. The way before us is closed. Our position is terminated. We were denied admission to a college or university. The publisher turned down our book proposal. We feel the sting of this setback. But now we are asking, in light of not what we wish was the case but what is actually the case: How do we choose to act and move forward, one step at a time?

—Taken from chapter 1, “At This Time and in This Place”



Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



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