

Finding Your Vocation

Most people think of vocation as a job, a way of earning a living. One definition expands it a little and states that a job may be short-term and a way of earning money. A job that becomes long-term may become a career with meaning and purpose that reflects commitment and skill. I believe vocation goes even deeper; it has to do with a reason for being. Native Americans believe the Creator puts us on this earth for a purpose. Finding that purpose leads to finding your vocation. Yusef Salaam, one of the Central Park Five, writes in his book: *Better, Not Bitter*, “I was somehow always clear that I was born on purpose, with a purpose.”

Job, career, and vocation, can be separate realities. A job may provide enough income to survive but not much meaning or satisfaction. A career may require special skills and provide long-term employment. A vocation provides deep meaning, puts a person in touch with their potential and reason for being. Then there are times when all three, job, career, and vocation, blend together and become one. William Sloane Coffin, in his book, *Passion for the Possible*, comments: “A career seeks to be successful, a calling to be valuable. A career tries to make money, a calling tries to make a difference.” Nikos Kazantzakis describes two paths in life, one that ascends toward life, and one that descends toward death. “Which of the two eternal roads shall I choose?” He states, “Of the two, I choose the ascending path.”

Over the years I have seen hundreds of men while in prison become skilled leaders, teachers, preachers, writers, and deep thinkers. After release they were able to blend a job, career, and vocation together as a way of life. Their sense of vocation was well established in prison where they developed concrete goals that had the power to pull them into the future. Nelson Mandela reminds us that the ascending path involves a long walk that never ends, “When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both....We have

not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road....I dare not linger, for my long walk has not yet ended.”

There is a great company of people on the ascending path. When we walk that path we find spiritual giants of past history, as well as present day colleagues and friends.