****

**Consider your Calling**

*By Marti Smith,* [*Pioneers*](http://www.pioneers.org/)

You’ve had a taste of it, and you want to change the world; you wonder if there’s a place for you among the 400,000 or so long-term foreign missionaries serving around the globe. Yet maybe you compare yourself to missionary role models and heroes and wonder if you have what it takes. You’ve seen friends make emotional commitments they didn’t keep, or watched people you thought were in it for life come home beat up and confused. All this makes the question seem more serious. Before you set about finding a fit, preparing to go, and getting sent, you’re asking God: Lord, is this something you’re leading me into? Do you want me to be a missionary?

Some Christian workers can clearly articulate how and when God called them into missions, an experience they lean on through good times and bad. It’s the same as coming to Christ isn’t it? There are people who can tell you exactly how it happened. God leads other people a little differently – to the point that some Christian leaders consider the quest for a mystical experience or crystal-clear “Go!” an unnecessary (and maybe destructive) obstacle that keeps people from responding to God’s universal “call to all.”

Do you have a call? Do you need a call? [Does God want you to be a missionary?](http://www.askamissionary.com/question/16) Relax. You can trust the Lord to give you what you need to pursue and persevere in his will for you. Ask him to guide you as you actively explore the question.

**Here are some steps you might take to do that:**

**1. Surrender yourself and your future to him.**

Maybe when you were on your short-term trip you said to the Lord, “Where you lead me I will follow, what you feed me, I will swallow.” That’s a good start. Lay before him your gifts, skills, and passions along with your weaknesses, questions, and fears. Can you tell him, “Whatever you want to do with this, I am open”? Pursue God and turn away from anything that keeps you from walking with him. After all, you were made to know him even more than you were made for a specific mission. Ask and trust God to tell you want he wants you to hear and show you what he wants you to see. Involve a good friend or mentor in the process to keep you from getting off track.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

**2. Take a closer look at what you really care about.**

Have your eyes on God? Now look for his guidance. Do you see how he’s working in your life? Is there a plot to the story he’s telling in and through you? You don’t want to follow emotions alone, but they usually provide clues. What sort of stories brings tears to your eyes? What suffering or injustice makes you angry? What is nobody doing that ought to be done, or what is somebody doing that you want to be part of? These things point to what you really care about, the purposes for which you can maintain a long-term passion and commitment. Writer Frederick Buechner put it this way: "vocation happens when our deep gladness meets the world's deep need."

**3. Seek opportunities for learning, growth, and experience.**

Short-term experiences rarely bear a close resemblance to long-term life in another culture, though they may help paint a picture. How can you dive deeper?

Going for a longer season, taking a leadership position, or otherwise investing more of yourself in the work may help you discover the next steps God has for you.

Take the initiative to communicate regularly with workers on the field, especially those in the kind of service that most interests you. Read books, follow the news, and learn about their world. Make what you learn fuel for your prayers. In other words, press on.

While some ministry teams will not take on someone who doesn’t sign up for the long-term, others encourage internships and shorter commitments as a way to explore long-term service. In her helpful book [To Timbuktu and Beyond: A Guide to Getting Started in Missions](http://missionbooks.org/williamcareylibrary/product.php?productid=675&cat=0&page=1), Marsha Woodard wisely recommends a cyclical model of training and experience. Steve Hoke and Bill Taylor’s [Global Mission Handbook](http://www.ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/book.pl/code=3717) suggests other ways to get the hands-on training and experience that will help you find your fit.

God seldom provides guidance so clear as to remove all our doubts, fears, and questions. You’ll have to look to him, link arms with others and walk forward in faith. You can trust the Lord to lead you.