

Energized The “en” part of the word energy means “in” or “within.” Energy is created when what we do has meaning or value to us. Energy springs from within when we find ways to use our gifts and our past experiences for good in the world. Fatigue and frustration still happen—we are human after all. But when we are called, our vitality is renewed. It is almost as if we have tapped into an energy source beyond ourselves. Perhaps we have.

But I do more than thank. I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his Christians, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!

~ Ephesians 1: 18-19, *The Message*

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YOU MIGHT BE CALLED WHEN...

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ABOUT CALL IN
EVERYDAY LIFE

God offers us guidance and wisdom for the living of our lives.

This is a good thing because life can be plenty confusing. The process of listening for Holy wisdom is sometimes described as listening for God’s call or discerning a call. This requires paying attention to a variety of things including our history, community, finances, health, and the needs around us. God’s call is not separate from these realities but very much a part of it.

One primary way that God speaks to us is through our feelings.

Many of us get so busy that we miss the hints and clues that emerge from within. Or we dismiss them as irrational or untrustworthy. Surely our emotions can lead us astray, especially if we are not in relationships that support us and hold us accountable. But more often our emotions are a dependable guide and vehicle for hearing God’s call. Even the negative feelings provide valuable clues as we go about the imprecise business of tuning into God’s leading in our lives. John Neafsey writes, *“In vocational discernment, it is important to pay close attention to our feelings, because authentic callings always begin with a stirring of the heart.”*

With that as background, here are ten feelings that may reveal that a call is emerging.



YOU MAY BE HEARING A CALL WHEN YOU FEEL...

Gifted We all have gifts. These are usually some combination of “birthright gifts” that we entered the world with and the capabilities we have practiced and honed through the years. The term “gifts” is preferable because it emphasizes that they are given to us by the Giver. There is a relationship involved.

Sometimes we rediscover a gift later in life. We used to love to draw, or teach, or organize, and now we find a new need or application for this strength. We wonder: Am I being called to use this familiar gift in a new way?

We arrive in this world with birthright gifts—then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them . . . Then—if we are awake, aware, and able to admit our loss—we spend the second half trying to recover and reclaim the gift we once possessed . . . When we lose track of true self, how can we pick up the trail? One way is to seek clues in stories from our younger years, years when we lived closer to our birthright gifts.

~ Parker Palmer in *Let Your Life Speak*

Not Gifted Listening for God’s call is never as simple as just figuring out what we are good at. Sometimes God invites us to do things we are not skilled at or have no experience doing. Think of Moses who felt inarticulate when God asked him to speak to Pharaoh, or Jeremiah who didn’t have enough experience to be a prophet. Have you ever wondered why this happens? Maybe it’s because our gifts can only get us so far. Maybe we need to learn something about trusting in Someone other than ourselves. Knowing our gifts is important. Knowing our limits is important, too.

My grace is enough; it’s all you need.

My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

~ 2 Corinthians 12:9, *The Message*

Connected Often a new invitation comes in and we wonder if we should say, “yes.” As we explore connections, a yes or no may become clearer. Is there a connection between this invitation to serve and my gifts? Does it connect with my passion or the burden I carry for the world? How does it link to past experiences in my life including what I have learned through the years? How does it connect to my faith life? If we find no connections to the rest of our life, it may not be a true call. But when the invitation connects with other important pieces of who we are, the yes begins to form.

... wisdom is not simply an accumulation of information or experiences; it is the fruit of continuing reflection on encounters over time, a skill at drawing connections and finding similarities, looking for underlying patterns.

~ Mary Catherine Bateson in *Composing a Further Life*

Envious Living your call is an invitation to be your true and most authentic self. Envy or jealousy can tempt us to be someone whom we aren’t. Our call is always unique to us, and jealousy can be a distraction. But rather than immediately dismiss it, we can listen to it and learn from it. Often there is a hint or message about something we want for our own lives embedded in the envy. Without trying to imitate another, the invitation is to explore prayerfully what it might mean to incorporate that which we are envious of into our own lives.

It has always seemed to me that every feeling is given for a good purpose and that the function of envy might well be to point out the direction in which one is intended to move.

~ Elizabeth O’Connor, *Cry Pain, Cry Hope*

Resistant It is interesting that so many of the characters of the Bible resist God’s call when it first comes to them. They feel too young, too old, not up to the task in one way or another. “How can this be?” “I am but a boy.” “I am a person of unclean lips,” they say. We also often feel resistant in the face of a potential call. This makes sense. Something in us knows that if we say “yes” to this call, it is going to require sacrifice. Most callings do. On the other side of that sacrifice lie meaning, purpose and joy. But there will probably be some hard sledding in the midst of the call. Feeling resistance doesn’t automatically mean that you are called. But it doesn’t mean you aren’t.

Resistance provides us with a dynamic screen for discerning what is and is not call. In fact, exploring our resistance is really the only way to begin to explore our call.

~ Marjory Bankson, *Call to the Soul*

Desire “What are you looking for?” Jesus asks some bystanders. It is a great question for us as well, especially if we are willing to spend some time with it, and to ride with it below our initial responses. Neafsey writes, “If our desires are leading us in the direction of increasing superficiality, phoniness, or selfishness, we are probably on the wrong track. If, on the other hand, our desires are inclining us in the direction of increased personal depth, authenticity, and generosity, we can be fairly sure that we are on the right track.” When we hunger deeply for something, it can lead us to a calling.

The secret of vocation is to discover what it is you most truly and deeply want when you are most really and truly you. When you are at your best, what is it that you most truly desire?

~ Michael Himes in *Doing Truth in Love: Conversations about God, Relationships, and Service*

Totally Confused It is no fun when you have no sense of direction and are wondering what you are supposed to be doing with your life. Sometimes we try to do the right thing. We pray and ask God for guidance, a sign, anything at all. And what we hear is ... nothing. The image of seeds planted is important here. When we pray, when we seek to know, when we ask God for direction—even if we hear or feel nothing—something is happening. Like the seed under the earth unseen by us, growth and germination are taking place. These times of total confusion are ones where it is absolutely critical to find supportive friends. It can be the difference in keeping on or giving up.

I am a pilgrim, but my pilgrimage has been wandering and unmarked. Often what has looked like a straight line to me has been a circle or a doubling back. I have been in the dark wood of error many times ... I have had my share of desires and goals, but my life has come to me or I have gone to it mainly by way of mistakes and surprises. Often I have received better than I deserved. I am an ignorant pilgrim, crossing a dark valley. And for a long time, looking back, I have been unable to shake off the feeling that I have been led—make of that what you will.

~ Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow*

Angry Harriet Lerner writes, “Anger is a signal and one worth listening to.” Anger can remind us what we care about. We know the potential of our work (volunteer or paid) to do good in the world because we have seen it. We are invested. We care. Our frustration may be because this good work is not being stewarded well. “This could be done better. This should be done better,” we fume. Think of Jesus turning over tables in the temple, or an accountant frustrated with the sloppiness of another’s work.

We may not have this same level of intensity when looking at other’s work. Our anger tells us that this work really matters to us.

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come here.” And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

~ Mark 3: 1-5, NRSV

Tired Our bodies have a way of telling the truth. They communicate with us all the time. All of us get tired, whether we are called to the task or not. But if we get tired and stay tired by the work, it may be a sign that our call is fading, or at least that a change may need to be made. When Moses was leading the Israelites into the wilderness, he started to burn out. His father-in-law Jethro watched him and invited him to do his work differently. If we get tired and stay tired, we may be called to something new. Or perhaps, we need to live our call in a different way.

What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

~ Exodus 18: 17-18, NRSV