

# Calling and Discernment Tool

By Jim Merhaut

## Is it a Call from God or Something Else?

God calls us every day, but how do we know that what we are experiencing is a calling from God? Am I following a voice that is true and rooted in God's love, or am I following a voice that someone else wrongly gave to me (perhaps even with good intentions), or am I following a voice that I have created in selfishness?

God is calling us to live more faithfully to our true selves (the self that is rooted in love for God, neighbor, and self) in every aspect of our lives. What does it look like to have love at the core of a calling? Here are eight characteristics that could help you discern whether or not you are following an authentic Christian calling:

1. I am following a voice that is calling me to build loving relationships, not to create division in relationships.
2. I am following a voice that leads me deeper into a communal experience, not deeper into isolation.
3. I am following a voice that is consistent with the best wisdom of religious traditions that have lasted for millennia and have been positive and loving influences in the world.
4. I am following a voice that is inspired by the witness of others who are dedicated to building a more loving world.
5. I am following a voice that is consistent with my life situation, including my interpersonal commitments, the condition of my body, my talents and strengths, and the events around me.
6. I am following a voice that is calling me to meet a need.
7. I am following a voice that is challenging me to grow and develop.
8. I am following a voice that I hear in both private and communal prayer, and the voice I hear in prayer is affirmed by those who know me best and love me.
9. I am following a voice that gives me a sense of joy and peace even in the midst of suffering and challenges.

“There is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace, my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find God I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find God.”

— Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

The more you follow God's authentic voice, the more you discover your true self. Christian spiritual traditions distinguish between a true self and a false self. The true self is rooted in the commandment to love God and love neighbor as self. The false self is rooted in the belief that anything is more important than love. If my decisions and actions are motivated by anything other than love for God, love for neighbor (including enemies), and love for self, then my decisions are not being formed in an authentic response to God's calling; they do not reflect who I am called to be. I may be hearing a calling, but it is not a calling from God if love is not at the core. The true self is simultaneously self-loving and self-giving; the false self is selfish.

Lest this sound simple and clear, we will muddy the waters a bit by making this less of an either/or description of self by placing the true and false selves on a spectrum. It is too simplistic to say that one is grounded totally in the true self or totally in the false self. We are a mysterious blend of both, and we move along a blended spectrum of the two dynamically, minute-to-minute, each day.

False Self ←—————▶ True Self

What is the status of your true/false self today? It can be helpful to reflect on where you fall on the spectrum in the various aspects of your life. Rather than measuring your true self and false self on one spectrum, try assessing your true/false self on a spectrum for each of these nine areas of life: friendship, work, significant other, family, finances, health, recreation, living space, and spirituality/religion.

*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my friendships?*

False Self ←—————▶ True Self  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my work or my daily occupations, paid or unpaid?*

False Self ←—————▶ True Self  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my spousal or partner relationship?*

False Self ←—————▶ True Self  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my family life?*

False Self ←—————▶ True Self  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my financial life?*

False Self ←—————▶ True Self  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my diet and fitness plan?*



*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my recreational life?*



*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my choice of living space (house/apartment)?*



*How much of my true self and my false self are revealed in my spiritual and religious pursuits?*



After assessing your self in these nine areas, ponder one of the areas in which you believe God is calling you to grow.

- How would you describe your true self in this particular area of life?
  
- What would your life look like in this particular area if you were living more fully as your true self?
  
- How is God calling you away from your false self and more deeply towards your true self? Remember to use the eight characteristics discussed above to discern to what degree your calling is authentically coming from God.