

Strengths Awareness & Development:

Building Blocks to Affirming Purpose and Calling

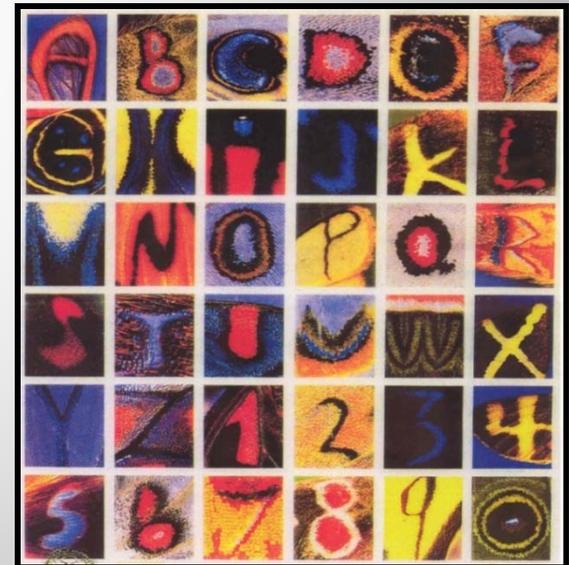
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Azusa Pacific University
February 3, 2011



Letting Your Life Speak: Cultivating Benevolent Purposes in College Students

Premise: Our lives “speak” in powerful, meaningful, and deeply satisfying ways when they align with natural talent patterns in each of us.

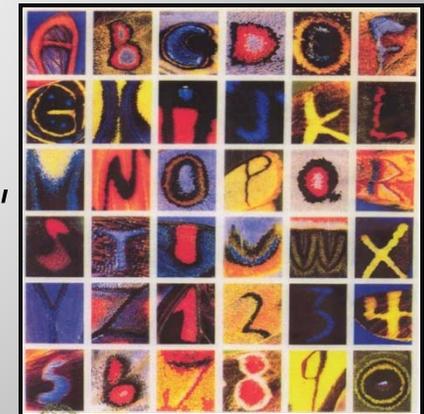
Q: How do we help students to figure out what’s in “the fiber of their being” so they can make the greatest impact “for good” throughout their lives?



One Example: The *Poiema* Project

Lee University (Cleveland, TN)

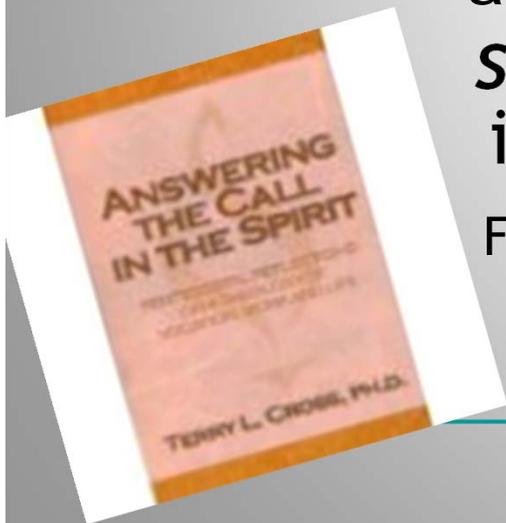
- Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation
Lilly Endowment grants funded 88 institutions.
- Lee's initial grant of \$2 million: 2003-2007
Supplemental grant of \$500,000: 2008-2011
- Framework for Lee's project:
Eph. 2:10-For we are God's *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do."



At Lee: Strengths Connected to Calling

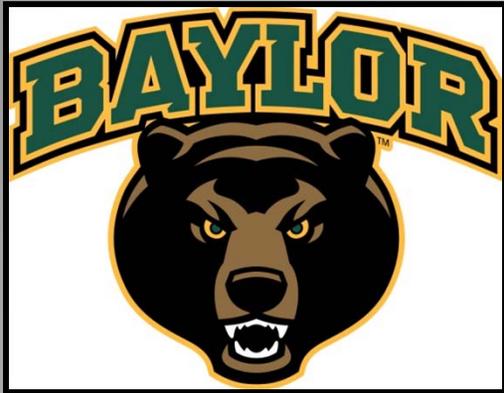
- God is more concerned about who we are than what we do.
- God loves diversity and variety. God puts different gifts in each of us so that we may work together to glorify God and also benefit humankind.
- Part of what it means to say God calls us, is an attempt to find out *what gifts or strengths* God has already placed in us.

From: *Answering the Call in the Spirit* by Dr. Terry Cross,
Dean of the School of Religion, Lee University



A Campus-Wide Commitment: Exploring the Call

- Intensely personal and theological
 - A matter of study and story
- Applicable to all sectors of campus
students, parents, faculty, staff,
administration, board members
- Applicable to all ages
 - Entering students to retiring faculty members



Baylor Horizons: Vocation for a Life of Service

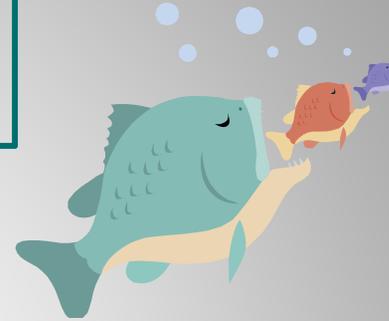
All Incoming Students Introduced to Strengths:

- Committed to students' holistic development.

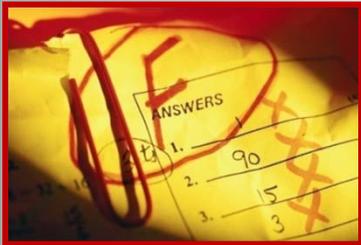
- Focused on enhanced awareness of calling.
 - developing students' *identities*
 - understanding students' *influences*
 - Focusing on students' *impact* on the world
(e.g., discipline-specific mission trips)

Letting Your Life Speak: Philosophical Approaches

Survival of the fittest



Deficit-based remediation



VS.

Strengths-based development
and application



Can We Intuitively Know Our Talents? Are Strengths Clues to Calling?

■ Five Clues to Talent

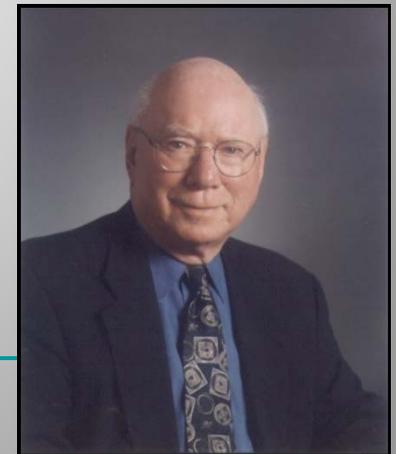
- ❑ Yearning
- ❑ Rapid Learning
- ❑ Flow
- ❑ Glimpses of Excellence
- ❑ Satisfaction



Dr. Donald O. Clifton

Long-time CEO of The Gallup Organization

- 1950s - Began studying the University of Nebraska's teacher education programs
- Research focus on "the best of the best"
- Left the university and formed his own company – Selection Research Incorporated
- SRI bought The Gallup Organization
- Developed the "*StrengthsFinder*"
 - Web-based instrument
 - Used by 5 million people
 - 660,000 college students



Like Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*

- Putting on “Strengths Glasses”
 - Helps us to understand the “two-second” way we process everything around us.
 - Helps us appreciate “the best” about how God made and gifted us.
 - Results in greater understanding and patience when others are different.
 - Real world examples: Empathy, Arranger, Achiever
-

The Key to Extraordinary Living

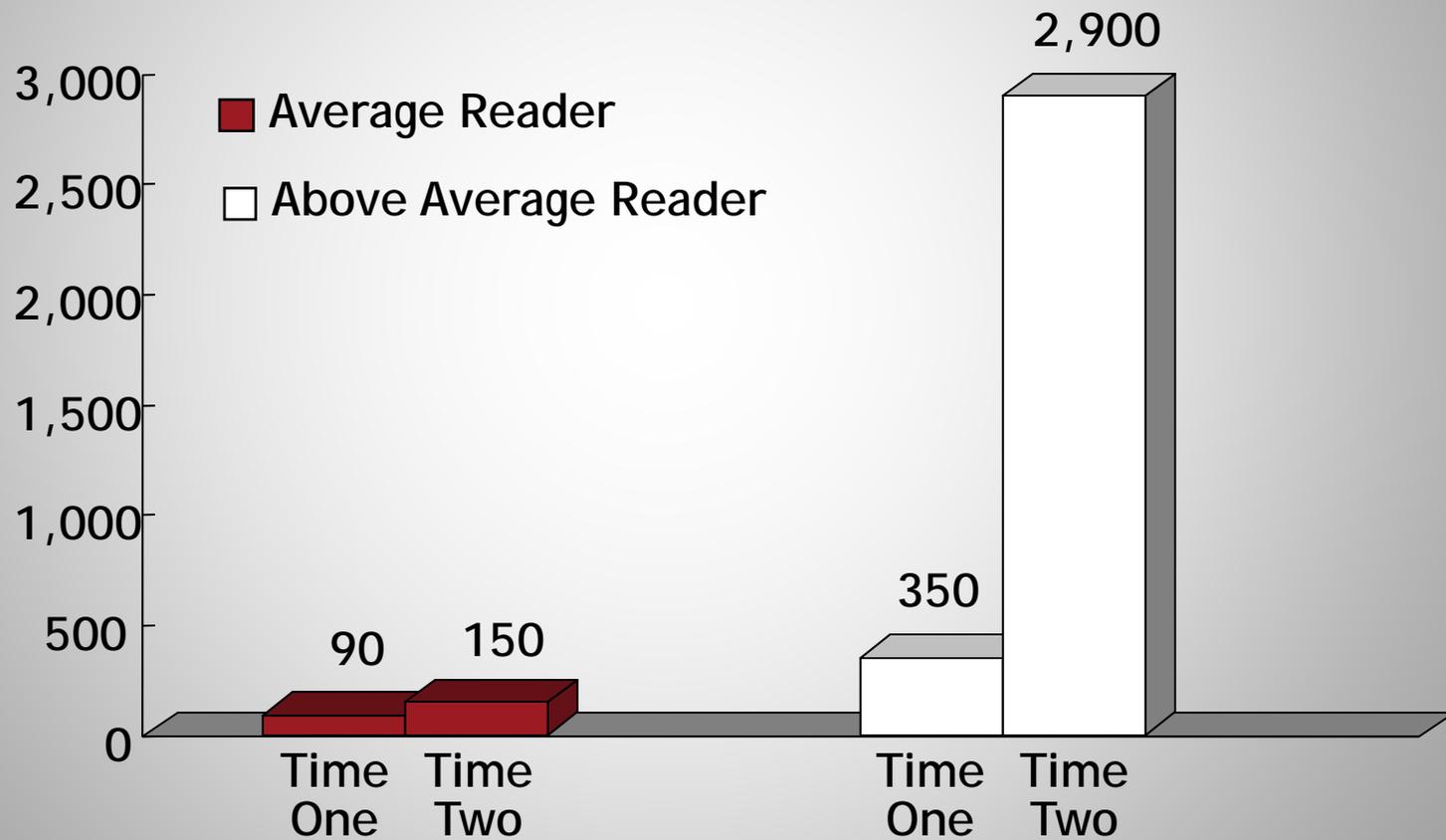
- *“Extraordinary individuals are distinguished less by their impressive ‘raw power’ than by their ability to identify their strengths and then exploit them.”-Howard Gardner*

Extraordinary Minds: Portraits of Exceptional Individuals and an Examination of Our Extraordinariness



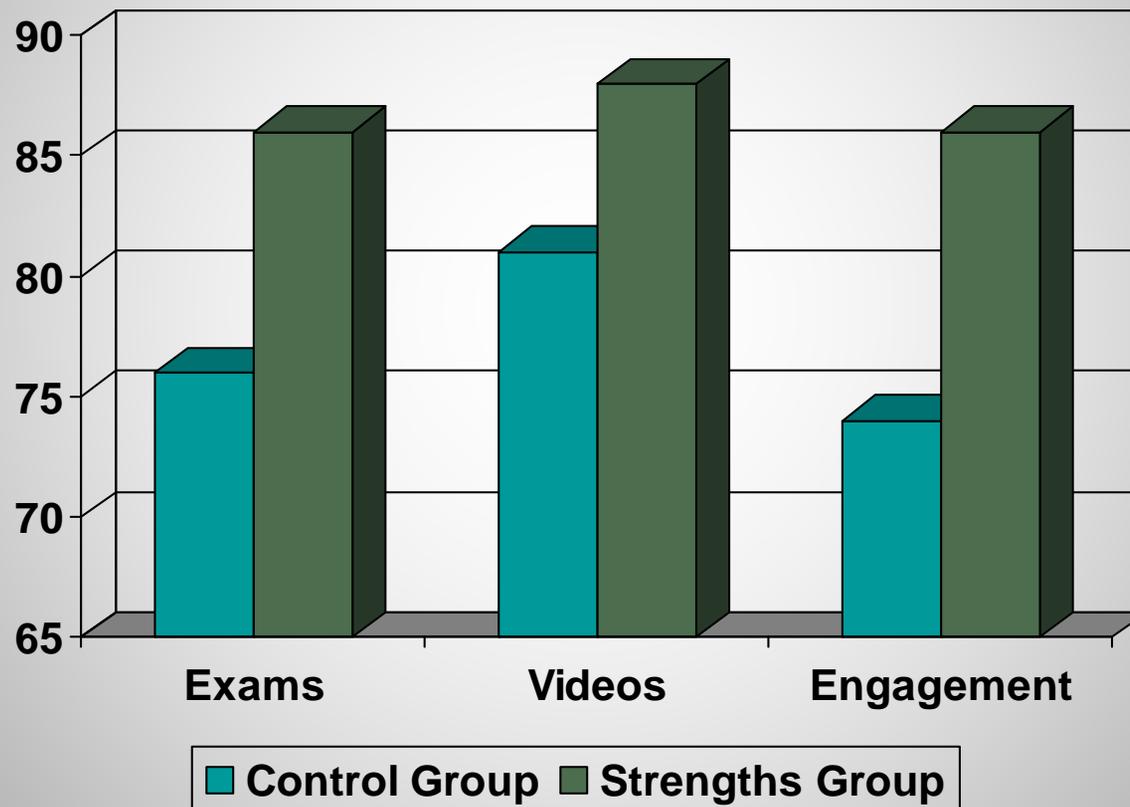
“Greatness” Comes from Building on Natural Talents

Speed-Reading Course Illustration



Strengths-Based Learning

(Cantwell, 2005)



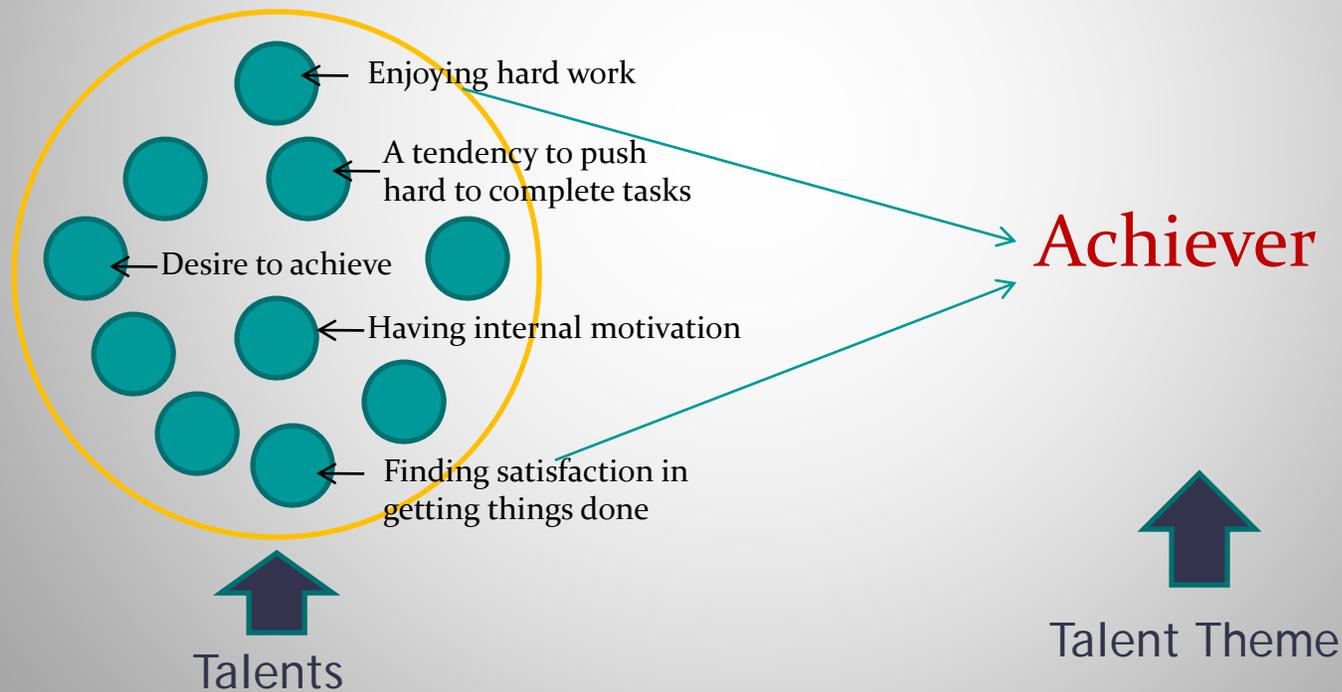
Clifton StrengthsFinder

- Developed by The Gallup Organization
- A web-based instrument
- Identifies five “signature themes of talent” that can be developed into strengths
- 34 possible themes - Recent work on the overlapping impact (e.g., ideation and strategic)



The *Clifton StrengthsFinder* Measures Themes of Greatest Talent

A talent theme is a group of similar talents



“Letting Your Life Speak” Most Powerfully Starts with Talents

“....naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied.”

Clifton & Harter, 2003

How Does a Talent Become a Strength?

Talent x Investment = Strength



Predisposition



Requires Effort



Developed

Investment is a MULTIPLIER of talent!

Investment includes time spent practicing, developing skills, & building knowledge.

The Highest Achievers

Build Their Lives Around Their Strengths

- Spend most of their time in their areas of strength
 - Have learned to delegate or partner with someone to tackle areas that are not strengths
 - Apply their strengths to overcome obstacles
 - Invent ways of capitalizing on their strengths in new situations
 - Identify, Develop, Apply, Celebrate!
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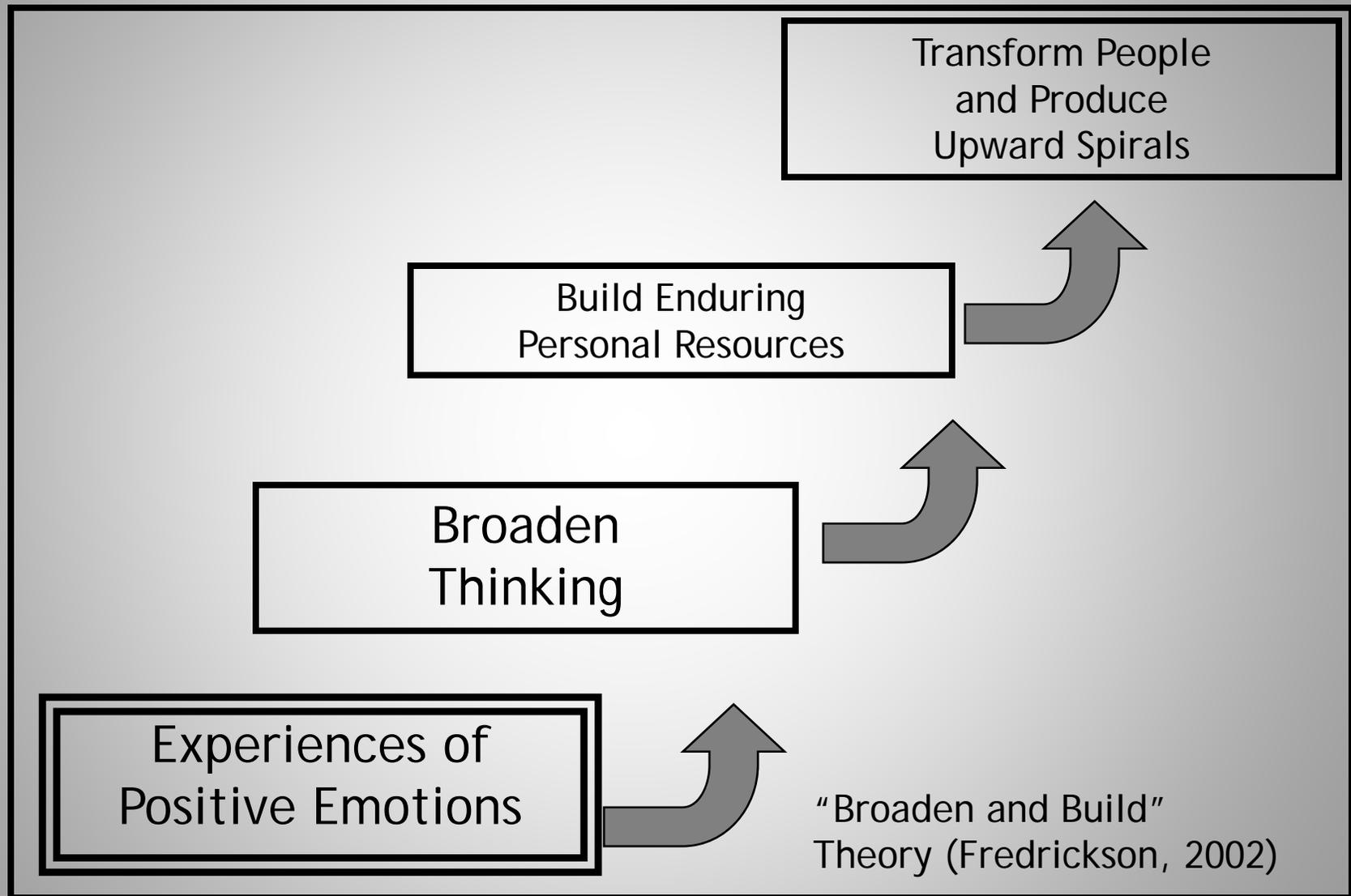
Strengths:

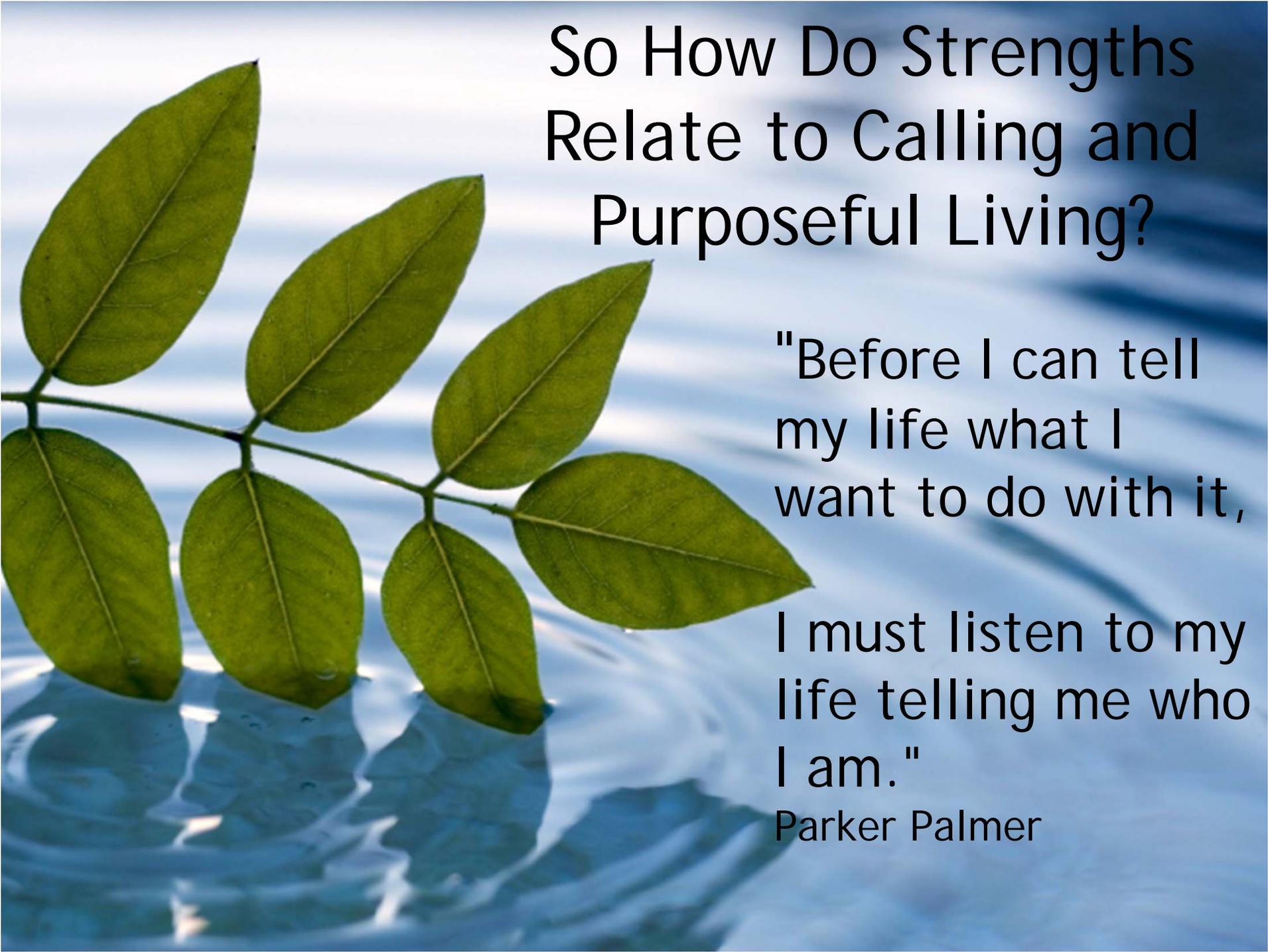
Not Just “What You’re Good At” !!

Strengths lead to success, but they also

- ❑ Energize you - they “strengthen” you
 - ❑ Fulfill a need within you
 - ❑ Create positive emotions which open up the channels for learning and complex problem solving
 - ❑ Lead to greater investment of time and effort because they are self-reinforcing
-

The Impact of Positive Emotions



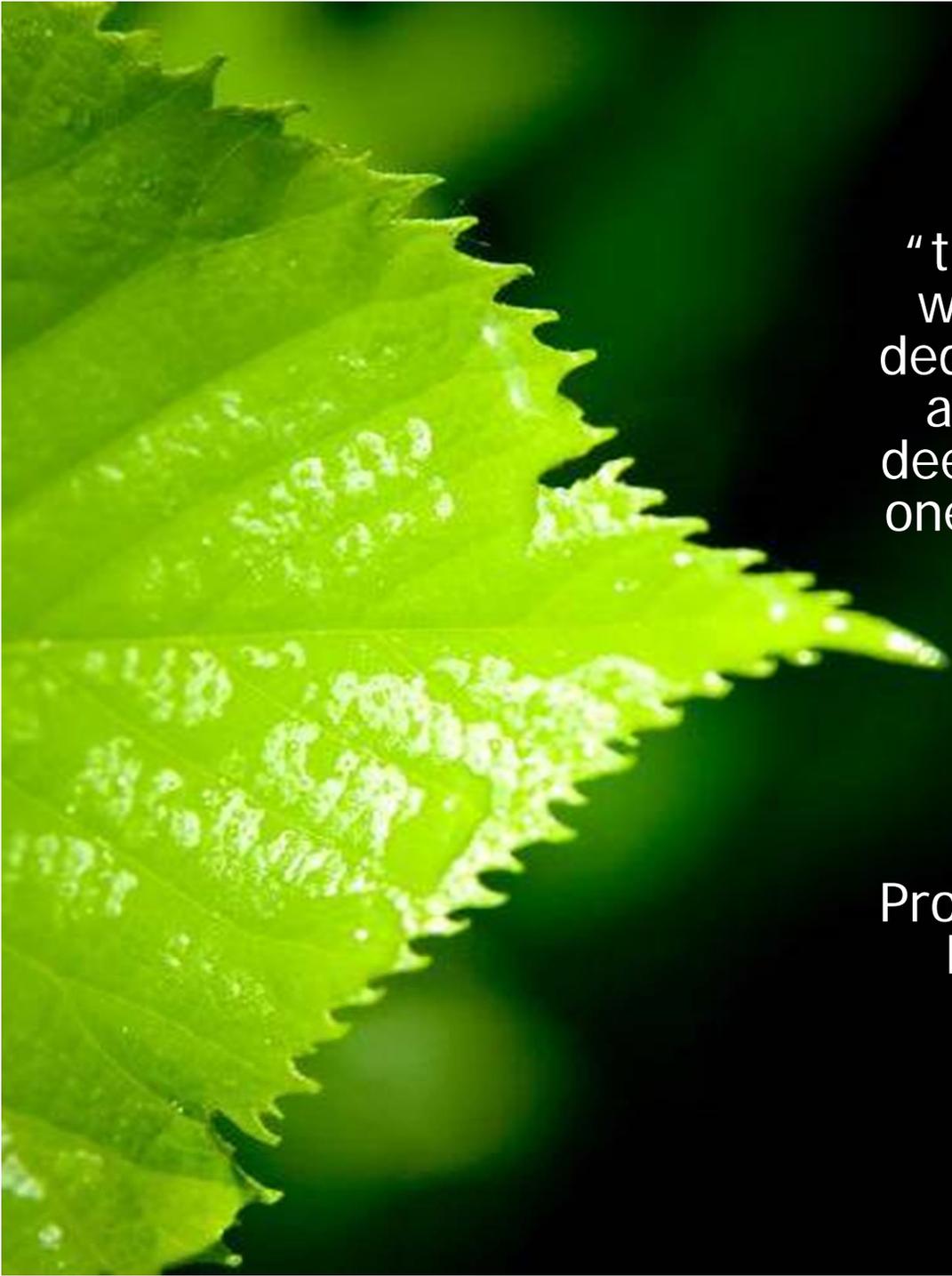


So How Do Strengths Relate to Calling and Purposeful Living?

"Before I can tell
my life what I
want to do with it,

I must listen to my
life telling me who
I am."

Parker Palmer



Calling is that which
incorporates:

“the shape and arc of one’s
whole life, with what one
dedicates oneself to in every
aspect of life, with one’s
deepest devotions, with who
one most fundamentally is.”

Craig Dykstra
Lilly Endowment
Programs for the Theological
Exploration of Vocation

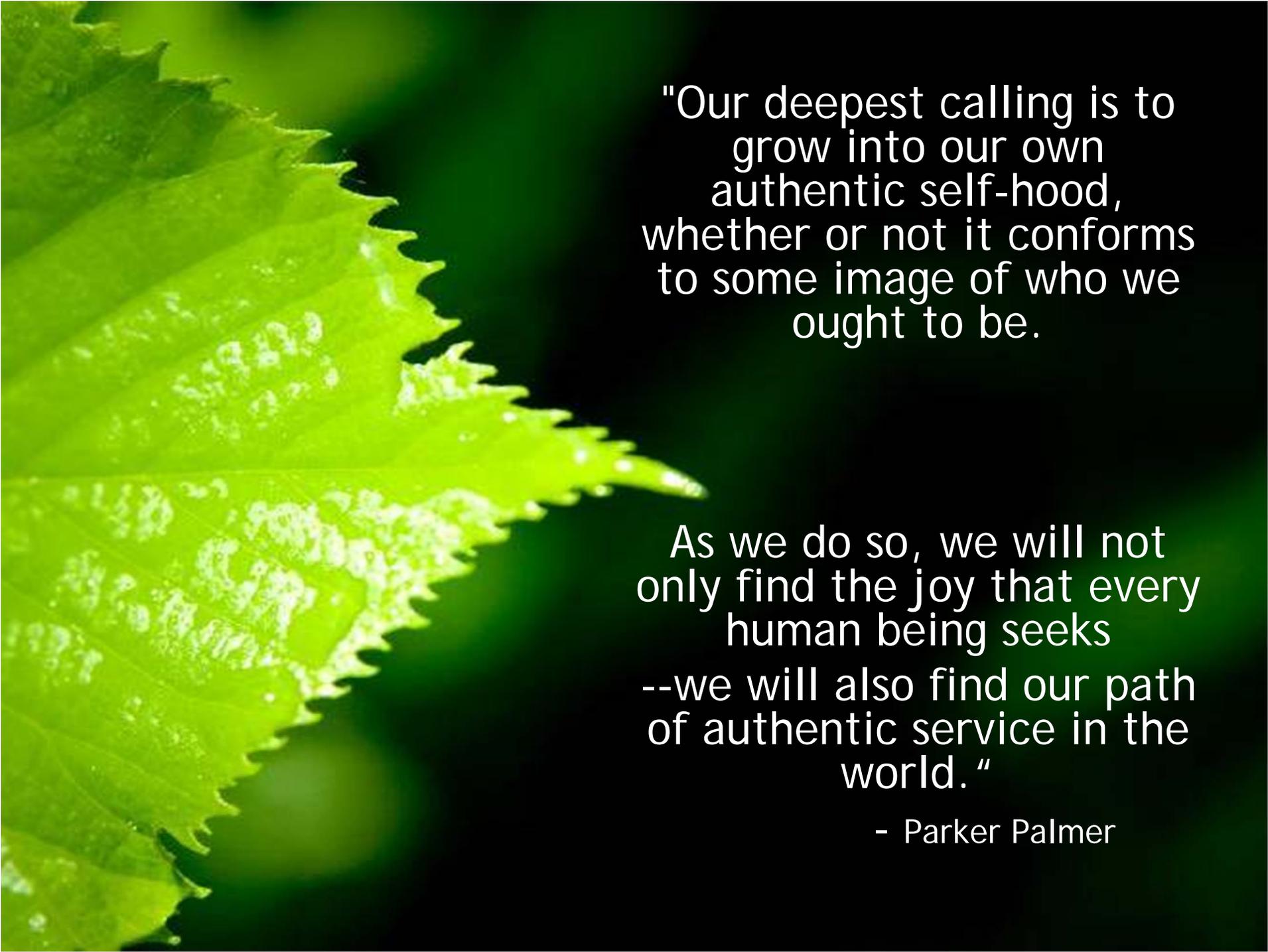


Life calling is:

“a confidence in an overriding purpose for your life based on a conviction that your life has foundational value, a unique design as an individual, and a personal vision that leads you to take action in response to the needs of the world.”

Millard (2004)

Indiana Wesleyan University
Programs for the Theological
Exploration of Vocation



"Our deepest calling is to
grow into our own
authentic self-hood,
whether or not it conforms
to some image of who we
ought to be.

As we do so, we will not
only find the joy that every
human being seeks
--we will also find our path
of authentic service in the
world."

- Parker Palmer

Research on Calling & Students

Empirical research on how college students conceptualize calling is sparse.

Quantitative methods identifying factors that contribute to students' sense of calling is even rarer.



(Phillips, 2009)

Research on Calling & Students

Dobrow (2006) examined sense of vocational calling among students (aged 17-21) who were extraordinarily gifted in their domains.

Four-year mixed methods study of 567 “exceptionally gifted” musicians emerging from high school into the college years. Qualitative data from 82 students.



Research on Calling & Students

Dobrow (2006) identified several predictors of calling:

Gender

Music Activities

Practicing

Type of Musician

Parents' Involvement

Calling-Oriented Career Advice from Parents



Of the demographic variables, one measure significantly predicted level of calling:
Female students reported higher levels of a sense of calling than male students.

Research on Calling & Students

Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2005) conducted a four-year mixed methods study on developmental elements of faith, identity, and life purpose.

Life purpose (calling") was measured by an instrument that the researchers developed.

Faith attitudes and behaviors, equivalent across gender, were correlated ($p < .01$) with vocational discernment and action.



Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2007) found that life purpose discernment scores were significantly higher for students who had participated in international experiences.

Research on Calling & Students

Phillips (2009) used SEM to examine variables that affect sense of vocational calling.

270 Evangel University (MO) students as they neared graduation.

13 Variables:



Personal Characteristics (e.g., Hope, Spirituality, Career Decision Self-Efficacy, etc.)

Demographics (e.g., Gender, Race, GPA, Hours Worked)

Student Involvement (e.g., Service Activities)

Phillips (2009) - Key Findings

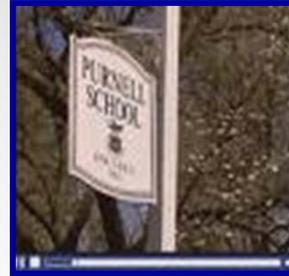
“Men and women conceptualized calling in distinctive ways. Although both genders perceived vocational calling from spiritual and purposeful perspectives...”

Men interpreted calling pragmatically and cognitively.

Women discerned calling from an affective (relational) perspective connected to their sense of self-esteem.



Putting Faces on the Linkage between Strengths and “Letting Your Life Speak”



Visiting Purnell School (NJ)

Helping students understand what brings joy and what they naturally do well.
