



# Choosing a Major

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A Guide for IMB Students

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## Consider Your Opportunity

Where does your career fit with the idea of going to the nations as an ambassador for Christ? Thousands of people groups remain unreached. Many of these groups are even unengaged, meaning there are no churches or missionaries to offer them the gospel. You can use your skills and gifts to live and work among the world's unreached people, meeting practical and spiritual needs.

Caring for the needs of people is integral to the missionary tasks of evangelism, discipling new believers, training leaders and forming healthy churches. Your major and future career could help by giving you access to the unreached, allowing for intimate conversations, meeting needs, making disciples, and empowering the church.

This guide will help you learn more about missions, discern your calling, and use your future career to serve people and share the gospel around the world. It will point you to tested and proven resources that will help you think biblically, prepare practically, and discern spiritually. Remember, the Holy Spirit is your Counselor.

All this assumes that you are already a disciple of Jesus. Are you? A disciple is more than a person who has mastered some information, or even practices a set of spiritual disciplines and shares the gospel. Have you turned from sin and self (repented) and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord? Is the Holy Spirit at work in your life bringing about transformation in your heart and mind, leading you increasingly toward godly affections, will, relationships, and purpose?

### Essential Reading

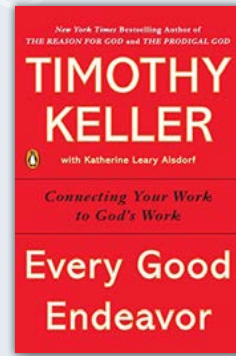
Here is your prerequisite assignment for beginning your journey.

#### *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Plan for the World*

By Timothy Keller

This book will provide you with practical guidance and help answer the following questions:

- What is the purpose of work?
- How do I integrate my faith with my work?
- What wisdom does the Bible give us in choosing our work?
- How do I thrive, or even survive, in a cutthroat, bottom-line-oriented workplace?
- Can I stay true to my values and still advance in my field?



## STEP 1: Discernment – How Do I Know Missions Is for Me?

So how do you know if God is calling you to leverage your future career to live among and serve the unreached? Discerning the will of God is often a paradox for believers. In Scripture, it has both the qualities of crystal-clear clarity as well as mysteries to be pursued and explored.

First, recognize some relevant things that God has already made clear about His will:

1. God has called you to Himself through salvation in Jesus Christ.  
*Matthew 9:13; Acts 2:39; Romans 8:28-30, 9:22-26; 1 Corinthians 1:9, 24*
2. God is to be our supreme passion and His glory our ultimate motivation.  
*Habakkuk 2:14; Psalm 96:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 3:7-11*
3. The call to salvation includes a call to mission. Every person who responds to God's call receives Christ's command to make disciples of Jesus.  
*Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8*
4. Calling is the gracious act of God by which He directs disciples to make disciples in a certain way, at a certain time, among a certain people, in a certain location, or through a certain vocation.  
*Matthew 4:18-22, 9:9, 10:1-4; Acts 13:1-2, 16:10; Romans 1:1; Hebrews 5:4*

This previous point means that there are items that will require exploration and confirmation in discerning God's will for you:

1. What work will I do?
2. How will I go?
3. Where will I go?
4. With whom will I go?

### THE BIG QUESTION

Be honest with yourself: as you look for answers, is following Christ your greatest priority? The temptation is to make your own plans and simply ask God to bless them. The God-directed life begins with a serious investment of time and effort, alone and with others, to learn God's Word and obey His will.



## STEP 1: Discernment – How Do I Know Missions Is for Me?

There is help in accomplishing this first step of discernment.

- **Start listening to God.** Get off the “It’s all about me train.” Calling is a very personal matter, but nowhere in Scripture is it described as a journey of self-construction or personal ambition. It is primarily an invitation to go beyond oneself and follow wherever God leads.
- **Learn how God has made you unique.** God has planted signposts to your calling in how He has gifted you, provided you with experiences, and crafted your story. What lessons can you learn by paying attention to how and why God has made you for such a time as this?
- **Engage and wrestle with options and possibilities.** The Bible supports the idea that discovering your God-given identity requires active participation and struggle. Do not make an unquestioning commitment to the first good thing that comes along.
- **Dialogue with trusted friends and leaders who are believers.** The strong emphasis on individualism in America often overshadows the importance of a biblical community. You need the perspective and encouragement of others. Remember, missions is not something you do alone.

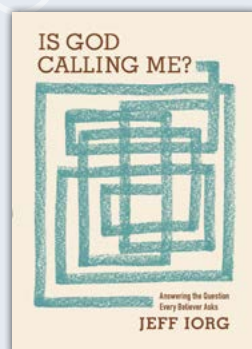
### Essential Reading

Here is your prerequisite assignment for beginning your journey.

#### *Is God Calling Me?: Answering the Question Every Believer Asks*

By Jeff Iorg

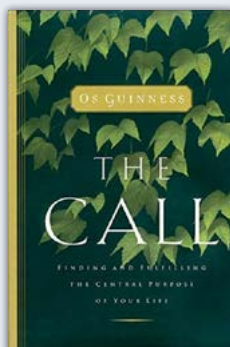
God is calling out a new generation of kingdom leaders who will accelerate the fulfillment of the Great Commission in this generation. This book will help you walk through biblical steps to discern God’s will for your life. It will also help you see how God has called others.



#### *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*

By Os Guinness

This book goes beyond a surface understanding of God’s call and addresses the fact that God has a specific calling for our individual lives. How do I fit God’s call with my own individuality? How should God’s calling affect my career, my plans for the future, my concepts of success? Guinness relentlessly and exhaustively exhorts the believer to honor his or her call to live as a child of the King in every way possible.



## STEP 2: Find Mentors

When you have important decisions to make, you need the counsel of others who are wise, trustworthy and experienced. Godly advice now can help you get off to a great start in connecting your education and career to missions. Even before you begin studies for your degree and learn from experts in a field, it is critical that you find mentors to help you to prepare to live and work cross culturally.

Do not expect to find one perfect mentor who can assist you in all aspects of life and ministry preparation—that person likely does not exist. Look for multiple leaders who have different strengths and experiences to help you:

1. Understand and complete the necessary education needed for your future career.
2. Walk in a deep and growing relationship with God.
3. Share and practice your faith in a work context.
4. Learn how to reach people and start churches in a cross-cultural context.

Mentors are all around us. We often “have not, because we ask not.” The list above is just a starter. Make a longer list of the skills you will need in your profession, as a follower of Jesus, and as someone who will be living cross culturally. Identify one person for each of your areas of preparation. Ask that one person to mentor you. You will be surprised how willing and responsive people are to being asked to serve as a mentor.

Here are a few friendly reminders regarding mentors:

1. **Find the right person.** You will need someone wise and experienced but also available. Someone may have what you need, but not really have the time to share it with you. Personality and manner are also important but remember that “iron sharpens iron.” Don’t be afraid to pick someone who will challenge your perspective and expand your horizons.
2. **Approach mentoring as a two-way street.** Be ready to learn, but also look to add value and to bless your mentor. When possible, offer them assistance. Mentors will not be good at everything, and you may have a skill that will help them in a time of need.
3. **Come prepared.** Mentoring is not about filling a blank mind. Prepare for meetings with mentors by developing a list of questions or items to discuss. Follow through on their suggestions or assignments. Treat the gift of their time as valuable.
4. **Ask to shadow your mentor.** Discussions can be very helpful but seeing someone do what you are preparing to do is even better. Professionals create rhythms and patterns to their work. Seek to learn the habits and practices that have led them to success.

### Recommended Reading

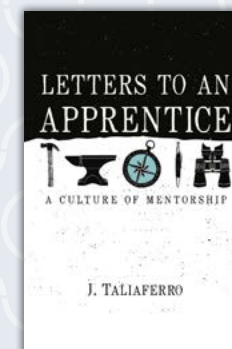
#### *Letters to an Apprentice: A Culture of Mentorship*

By Jeremy Taliaferro

Learn from an IMB missionary’s experience as both an apprentice and a mentor.

This book is filled with practical examples and steps to help you:

- Find your mentor and make the best of that relationship.
- Find your apprentice and pass on what you have learned.
- Create a culture of mentorship in your family, church, ministry, or team.

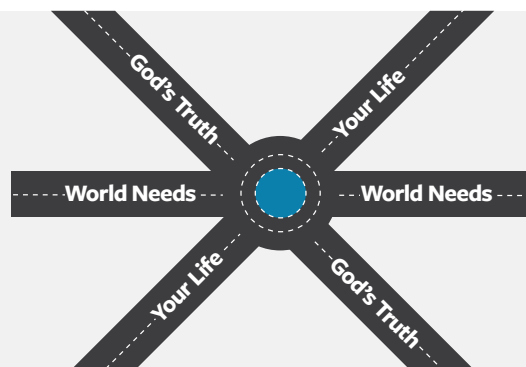


## STEP 3: Choose the Right Major

Choosing a major can be a daunting and difficult decision, but if you seek God's will and are equipped with the right questions, you can head to college (or anywhere) with a clear focus on God's glory and taking His Good News to the nations.

### The Great Intersection

Imagine that your decision about education and career is a matter of finding an intersection of roads—a junction where several dimensions of your life, God's truth, and this world come together. Use this section as a worksheet to help you explore such a crossroads in your life.



#### Vector 1: What truths about God's purposes for my life have I learned?

God has much to say to us already through His Word. How would He address the statement, "This is why I made you"? (Do you keep a journal of your personal Bible study, prayer, and worship experiences? Doing so will help you answer this question.)

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#### Vector 2: What does the world need?

You are created for this time in history. Do not ignore this fact. You were born during the time of social media, global travel, urbanization, the largest generation of youth, and more. Have you thought about how God wants you to consider the needs of the day in your career? What work could give you the freedom, skills, and flexibility to take the gospel to people who have never heard?

Take time to investigate the most needed careers on the planet. As you investigate, make sure to look for careers that benefit people, not just areas where it is easy to get a job. You can search for these careers online or by talking with a career counselor at your school or university. Here are some suggested online searches:

- Most needed jobs
- Jobs that help the world
- Jobs in the developing world
- Careers in need
- Jobs needed in the future

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#### Vector 3: How has God made me unique?

God has specifically wired you and has called you to use your skills and gifts for the Kingdom. Many times, it takes a bit of exploration to understand this for yourself. Answer this question in three parts.

- **What do others say about how I am made?** Interview 3 leaders who know you well. Ask them to help you discern a good major or career using these questions:

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- What are the types of activities in which I excel?
- What type of career would be a good fit?
- What type of career do you think I should avoid?
- What is a career or major that would help me take the gospel to people who need to hear?

## STEP 3: Choose the Right Major

- **What do I believe are my strengths and interests?** List your favorite/best classes in school. In what have you done your best work? Describe what in life gives you joy and what you love to do. Perhaps it's research or creating new plans. Maybe you love to teach children or solve complicated technical problems. Perhaps you enjoy spending time with people.

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- **What experiences and circumstances has God used to shape my life?** God has a way of leading us through situations, whether wonderful or difficult, that prepare us for a future we couldn't have imagined. How has your family and upbringing made you different? What have been your greatest blessings so far? What struggles or losses have had an impact?

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- **What is my dream?** Dreams are sometimes God-given. Remember Joseph (Genesis 37) who as a teenager was given visions about his future? Samuel (1 Samuel 3) learned very early in his life that he would be God's messenger. Has God planted a dream in your heart? If so, test it by sharing it with godly mentors and leaders. Look for confirmation in this crossroads exercise.

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#### Note: Count the Cost

Choosing a path means rejecting other possibilities, and that can be very difficult at first. Our natural inclination is to keep our options open for as long as possible, but the road to maturity means making commitments.

Every major or career has other costs as well, whether it be of your time, finances, distance from family, or even health. Read Luke 14:26-33. Counting the cost is important if you want to reach your goal.

As you consider a major, find several people working in that field and ask them these four questions:

1. If you had it to do over again, would you choose this major/career again? Why or why not?
2. Would you recommend that I choose this same major?
3. What are the benefits of the major/career that you've chosen?
4. What are the challenges to this major/career path?



## STEP 4: Prepare Spiritually

Spiritual preparation is the most crucial step in any plan to live and work internationally for the gospel. Your decision to be in the marketplace for this purpose makes you a missionary. You will be using your skills and gifts to share the gospel with people who have never heard. The missionary assignment requires that you have an authentic personal walk with God and participation in corporate worship, discipleship, and service through a church.

Let's make this clear: your spiritual preparation is both individual and communal. There is no substitute for your private worship, Bible study, and prayer. You need time alone with God, and that needs to be a regular and even daily discipline. It is also true that to follow Christ means to be vitally linked to His body—the church. Most of the admonitions of the New Testament cannot be obeyed and practiced alone.

Here are some questions to consider as you determine how you will prepare spiritually:

- **Are you an active member of a healthy, gospel-focused church?** Remember, the biblical pattern is that churches send out those whom God calls. Is your church aware of and supportive of your desire to serve God in missions?
- **Are you engaged in personal habits of Bible study, prayer, and Scripture memory?** Spiritual disciplines help you to abide daily in Christ and rely on Him. They also undergird your ability to serve God and join Him in His work.
- **Are you struggling with any habitual sins or addictive behaviors?** Recognize that you have a spiritual enemy that wants to distract and even disqualify you from opportunities to serve God in missions. To overcome sin, it is essential to take proper steps of repentance, change, and accountability.

Your spiritual preparation is an investment not only in yourself but also others. Take this step seriously and:

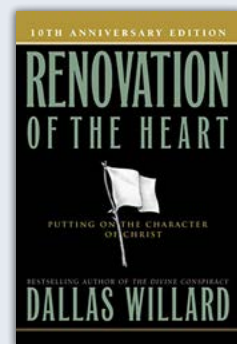
1. **Ask a mentor to lead you through a discipleship assessment.** Just like a yearly medical examination helps you to evaluate, improve, and protect your physical health, the right kind of spiritual assessment can identify areas in which you need to grow or heal. Lifeway Resources ([lifeway.com](http://lifeway.com)) offers the Discipleship Pathway Assessment as such a resource.
2. **Engage in a discipleship study with a group.** IMB offers several free online courses that focus on missions and can be done together. Find these at [imb.pathwright.com](http://imb.pathwright.com).
  - a. Explore Missions is a 6-week study that gives you a biblical overview of the mission of God and how He purposes the people of God to join Him in His redemptive plan.
  - b. Ready to Go is an 8-session study that helps students prepare for a summer or semester of missions service.
  - c. Deepen Discipleship is a 6-month course designed to be done with a mentor or small group in the context of your local church. The lessons and activities will help you develop or deepen habits of obedience in your Christian life. You'll also walk through the entire New Testament and learn to see your whole life in light of the gospel.
3. **Connect with others who are balancing academics with spiritual development.** Training for any career can be difficult; college isn't easy, after all. The challenge will be to find time and energy for church engagement and personal devotion. Whether through a campus ministry, your church, or fellow Christian students, find or create a team who can support your spiritual journey as you study.

### Recommended Reading

#### *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*

By Dallas Willard

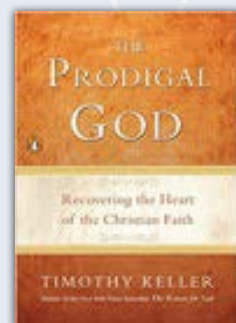
Don't settle for complacency. Accept the challenge to become an intentional apprentice of Jesus Christ, changing daily as you walk with Him. This book explains why Christians need to undergo change in six aspects of life: thought, feeling, will, body, social context, and soul. Willard also outlines a general pattern of transformation in each area, not as a sterile formula but as a practical process that you can follow.



#### *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*

By Timothy Keller

Being a follower of Jesus is easy to complicate. We can be distracted by thousands of teachings and practices that keep us from concentrating on the main thing of the Christian life. Keller uncovers the essential message of Jesus, locked inside his most familiar parable. This focus on the simple, amazing gospel will lead you to the heart of God and provide the inspiration you need to find your role in His mission.



## STEP 5: Start Making Disciples

This guide is about the possibilities of you using your career to minister to both the practical and spiritual needs of people. More specifically, you can follow the powerful biblical example of proclaiming the gospel in both word and deed. Christians are called to both share the gospel and show the gospel.

### The missionary task requires that you embrace the call to make disciples.

Disciple-making is the Christ-commanded, Spirit-empowered duty of every disciple of Jesus to evangelize unbelievers, baptize believers, teach them the Word of Christ, and train them to obey Christ as members of His church who make disciples on mission to all nations. (Matthew 28:16–20; 1 Corinthians 12:4–31; Ephesians 4:1–16; Colossians 1:27–29)

### Your missionary task of making disciples starts now.

Like any training, your missionary training needs practice. A recent Southern Baptist initiative, *Who's Your One?*, offers the simple challenge to be intentional about evangelizing and discipling someone. When you think of someone far from God, who's the first person who comes to mind? Is it a neighbor? Coworker? Parent? No matter who it is, God can use you to reach them. The *Who's Your One* emphasis includes a forty-day devotional guide ([whosyourone.com](http://whosyourone.com)) to lead you through the effort to love someone who is lost and lead them to Christ.

A prerequisite course for IMB long-term missionaries is *Deepen Discipleship*, a 6-month discipleship resource designed to be done with a mentor or small group in the context of your local church. As you walk through the lessons, you'll read and do activities designed to help you develop or deepen habits of obedience in your Christian life. Find it at [imb.org/training](http://imb.org/training).

### The essential tools for discipleship are the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God.

*Disciple using the Bible.* There are many good resources to help you make disciples, but there is no substitute for Scripture. Every disciple needs to develop a thorough knowledge of the Word of God.

*Disciple in reliance on the Holy Spirit.* Only the Holy Spirit can take the Word of God and use it to transform every area of a disciple's life. Discipleship must be done in conscious dependence on the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

*Disciple in the context of the church.* God provides the local church as the necessary setting and the primary relationships for the full measure of biblical discipleship. One-on-one discipleship has a useful role, but it is not enough. Biblical discipleship requires the gifts and input of everyone in the body of Christ.

### Learn Other Languages

**Making disciples involves the ability to communicate the gospel to people in ways they can understand. In cross-cultural missions, this means that learning their heart language is invaluable. If you are preparing for long-term service, don't miss the opportunity now to begin to master another language. A second language opens up more job possibilities, communicates that you are serious about working abroad, and helps you make international contacts.**

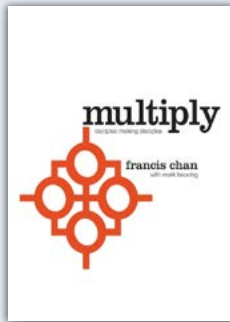
A few practical ways to go about language learning:

1. **Make international friends** – As a friend of an international, you will have the opportunity to learn language from your friend.
2. **Use free language-learning resources** – Local and campus libraries have free audio, video, and print resources. Research the best apps.
3. **Use electives wisely** – You might only have a few chances to take an elective, but when you do have the option, choose language electives. They are fun and offer a change of pace.
4. **Take a community course in language** – Many colleges offer free or low-cost language classes for the community, often at night, over the weekends, or during summer. Start your search with your school's office of continuing education.
5. **Pursue volunteer opportunities in multi-lingual environments** – Having this experience will not only assist you in taking the gospel to those in need, but it will also help you find a job.





## Recommended Reading



### *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples*

By Francis Chan, with Mark Beuving

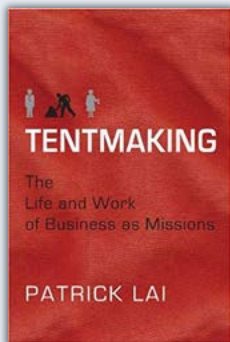
Jesus gave His followers a command: “Follow me,” and a promise: “And I will equip you to find others to follow me.” Designed for use in discipleship relationships and other focused settings, *Multiply* will equip you to carry out Jesus’ ministry. Each of the twenty-four sessions in the book corresponds with an online video at [multiplymovement.com](http://multiplymovement.com)



### *Something Needs to Change: A Call to Make Your Life Count in a World of Urgent Need*

By David Platt

Platt invites readers to relive his trek through the Himalayan mountains and seek answers to tough questions like, “Where is God in the middle of suffering?” “What makes my religion any better than someone else’s religion?” and “What do I believe about eternal suffering?” Learn what it means to give your life for the gospel — to finally stop talking about faith and truly start living it.



### *Tentmaking: The Life and Work of Business as Missions*

By Patrick Lai

Professional church planter Patrick Lai provides an in-depth reference for tentmakers operating in regions of great antagonism to the Christian message.

Those who are unfamiliar with the world of tentmaking will find valuable information to introduce them to the concept and to help in getting started. Designed to be a manual, *Tentmaking* is more than just an overview of questions and issues. This thoroughly researched collection is the result of interviews from over 450 people serving in the 10/40 window. It provides a unique viewpoint on missions, sharing proven, workable alternatives to conventional

## STEP 6: Explore Possibilities and Needs

God is calling you to join Him on mission, but where and with whom? A major step along your journey is discovering possible locations to live and serve. There are so many options it may be difficult to narrow them down and discern God’s leading. What is the best way to find direction and move forward? Nothing is more helpful than to visit locations.

A few options for these visits are:

### Take a short-term trip

- A mission trip can introduce you to a culture, a people group, and a team of missionaries, all which will be important components in your future service in missions.
- Start the search with your church, your local Baptist association of churches, and your state Baptist convention.
- IMB offers trip opportunities. Explore these at [imb.org/opportunity-finder](http://imb.org/opportunity-finder).

### Study abroad

Many universities and degree programs highly encourage students to study abroad and may have an entire office devoted to offering opportunities and assistance. Study abroad options will help you:

1. Visit a new culture in a safe environment and program focused on helping you understand the people, history, and culture.
2. Help you meet international engineers and learn about engineering opportunities.
3. Receive academic credit while preparing to live cross culturally.
4. Explore a culture to see if you are a good match.

Another place to explore study abroad is with the Consortium for Global Education ([cgedu.org](http://cgedu.org)). CGE is a network of universities committed to assisting students and faculty in impacting the world through education. CGE’s Global Study Abroad programs provide strong academic and service-learning opportunities in key locations around the world.

**A NOTE OF CAUTION:** Not all study abroad experiences are the same. Prior to applying, research online for student reviews of their experience. Also, check with your academic institution and ask for references from students who have previously studied abroad. Finally, make sure to inquire about financial aid assistance and whether your existing scholarships and financial aid can apply.

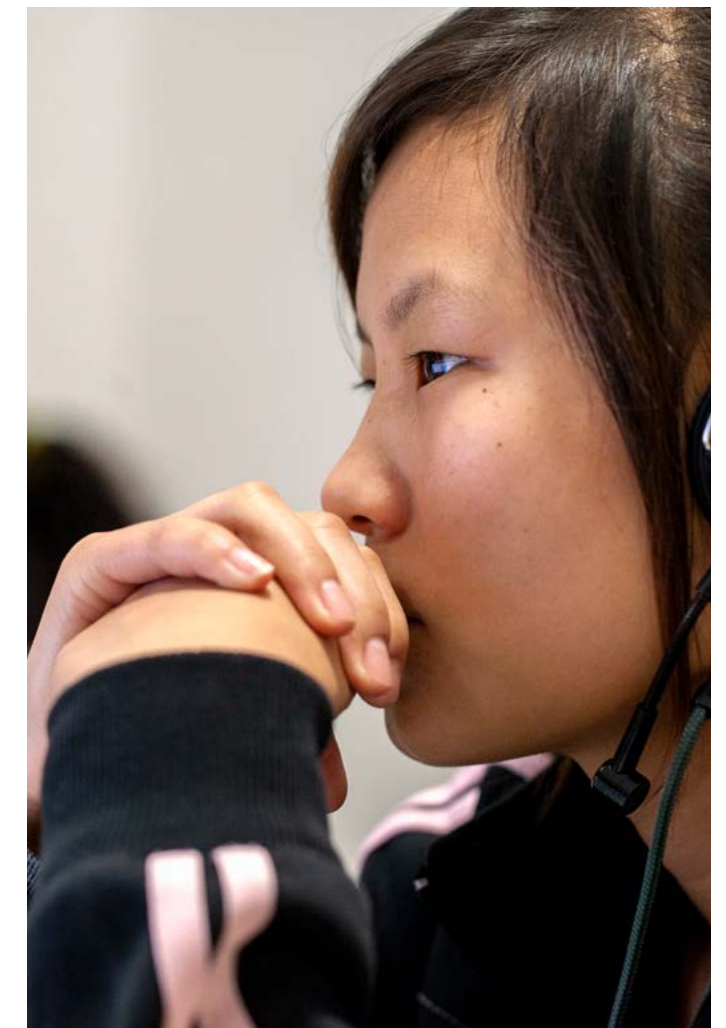
### Find a natural connection

Wherever you live, it’s likely that the world has come to your doorstep. Consider the international students on your campus, refugees and immigrants in your community, and ethnic churches and church plants. Missions does not start “over there,” but right where you live. Many missionaries began to develop a heart for a specific people group through relationships they made and ministry opportunities they encountered at home.

Many churches have established partnerships with missionary teams and church planters or have adopted unreached people groups. They can provide opportunities that would give you a “paved road” for a connection. A professional network, mentorship, or internship could also introduce you to people, places, and needs through which God stirs your heart and directs your attention.

IMB can assist you in exploring opportunities and pathways of service as well as preparing for a mission trip. Contact [info@imb.org](mailto:info@imb.org).

**May God bless you as you move forward toward a career that is focused on His Kingdom.**





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[imb.org/students](http://imb.org/students) | [info@imb.org](mailto:info@imb.org)