VOCATIONS AND CALLING
A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF WORK

PRE-GAME
As graduation approaches, you are facing a major transition in life and with it, major questions concerning the direction of your life and career. How do you decide if you should go to medical school, work at a consulting firm, Teach for America or pursue full time ministry? While there are many factors behind these questions, the underlying issue is how can you be faithful to God in and through your career. More than just being measured in terms of prayer and bible study, faithfulness is a holistic issue that is based on our obedience to God in every area of our lives, including how we handle work. A faithful Christian perspective on work involves thinking Christianly about all aspects of the vocation to which we have been called, be it in graduate school, on Wall Street or with Athletes in Action. This study will equip you to think Christianly about work by building a biblical perspective on how we discern God’s calling in our lives and how we can honor God through our attitude toward work itself.

THEME
God created us uniquely with his own purposes in mind. Our attitude and approach to all work should reflect an appreciation of God’s unique calling and purpose in our lives.

PRACTICE
A biblical perspective on vocation and calling should lead us to see work not as an occupation that makes us money but as a vocation that expresses who God has uniquely created us to be.

SYMBOL KEY

† Indicates discussion questions

📖 Indicates Biblical passages to look up

↗ Indicates application questions to be discussed
I. THE NATURE OF OUR CALLING

What does it mean to be ‘called’ by God to do something? What are we called to?

Christians often pray, talk and worry about God’s ‘call’ in their lives as if it were a secret that God is reluctant to reveal. But God is personal and has clearly expressed his will to us through two different types of ‘calling’ in our lives.

Our primary call – a call to being
God has called everyone to respond in faith to him as Savior and Lord.

- Does it seem that God’s will for us is a secret?
- What does our primary call entail?

We are primarily called to be the person God intended for us to be when he created us, beginning with following Christ, but also involving an obedient life.

Our secondary call – a call to action
There is much more to God’s call than being a Christian. God calls us to specific actions that reflect who he has uniquely created us to be. This secondary calling is distinct for different individuals and should move us to invest our lives in specific ways.

Read Luke 5:1-11
- Has Peter (Simon) responded to God’s primary call? Where do you see this?
- What specific action is Christ calling Peter to? What does it involve?

Like Peter, we face two significant callings. Primarily we are called to salvation; secondarily we are called to respond to Christ’s Lordship by going a specific direction in terms of work. For Peter, this call was to be an apostle, ‘a fisher of men.’ We too are called to an area of work, or ‘vocation’ that expresses who God has uniquely made us to be. A vocation is an occupation that reflects God’s call in our lives.

How would your process of making decisions about jobs after college change if you took into account the difference between ‘occupations’ and ‘vocations’?

“For the secret of man’s being is not only to live...but to live for something definite. Without a firm notion of what he is living for, man will not accept life and will rather destroy himself than remain on earth...” - The Inquisitor in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov

“There is not once square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine! This belongs to me!’” - Abraham Kuyper, 19th century Christian theologian.

vocation = to call
occupation = job
II. The Investment of Our Calling

Our calling from God is a gift - it is a personal way in which God orients us in order to carry out his purposes through us. He has called us to specific vocations to live out an abundant, fruitful life (John 10:10) in light of our unique giftedness and personality.

If you won a $30 million lottery, would you work next year? If so, how would your job choice be different? What does this say about the purpose of work in our minds?

Read Ecclesiastes 2:17-26

The writer of Ecclesiastes describes work apart from God as “meaningless toil,” “anxious striving” and “chasing after the wind.” Likewise, we often pursue work apart from a sense of calling from God and thus work becomes a necessary drudgery to make money. In contrast, Scripture says that God’s calling should lead to work that is satisfying (Eccl. 2:24), successful as we pursue God’s purposes (Proverbs 16:3-4) and significant because it is work that achieves a purpose that is part of God’s grand plan.

Read Genesis 1:27-31 - The Cultural Mandate
- Beginning at creation, what type of work is God generally calling us to do?
- What does the command to work and ‘have dominion’ have to do with the attitude we should have toward work and vocations?

How should the Cultural Mandate lead us to see our calling to work in terms of vocations as opposed to occupations?

‘Christian’ work is not a specific type of occupation but rather an attitude that sees work “not, primarily as a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. ‘Work’ is, or it should be, the full expression of the workers’ gifts, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.” (Dorothy Sayers, Creed or Chaos)

Because God has called us to invest our lives into a vocation that reflects our personality, passions and giftedness, we must stop seeing work as a means of making money, gaining power or building a resume but as an expression of how we have been made in the image of God.
III. THE DIRECTION OF OUR CALLING

Fulfilling our call and living out a purposeful life of work involves determining the unique direction God is leading us.

How do you discern direction from God? What do you look / listen / search for?

We often err in how we discern God’s direction. Some expect God to show them a heavenly neon sign that lays out a specific plan. This results in passivity and indecision. Others think God only cares about ‘eternal’ things and leaves ‘earthly’ things like jobs choices completely up to them. This results in autonomy and independence from God.

God reveals his plan for us through his Word. In Scripture, we find several factors that we must consider in order to rightly discern God’s direction in our lives:

- **providence** - What opportunities exist and where is God leading you? God sovereignly controls all things and guides our lives and circumstances for his purposes. The clarity of these ‘open doors’ varies. *Acts 16:6-10*

- **giftedness** - What do you know a lot about or seem to be very good at? God gives each of us unique gifts and calls us to be stewards over them through our lives of work and service. *Matthew 25:14-30*

- **passions** - What do you care about? What brings you joy or makes you angry? When we walk faithfully with God, he aligns our passions and desires with his purposes. *Psalm 37:4*

- **wisdom** - What do other godly people think? God does not intend for us to only seek direction through praying on our own. He provides guidance through the wisdom of our church communities, good friends and elders. *Proverbs 3:13-35*

IV. POST GAME

Because God has called us to specific investments of our lives through our unique set of gifts, passions and personality we should see work not as an occupation that makes us money but as a vocation that expresses who God has uniquely created us to be. Our calling may not take us down a path that seems glamorous by worldly standards, but no matter what our profession, we are called to have an attitude toward vocation, calling and work that honors God and is in submission to his Lordship.