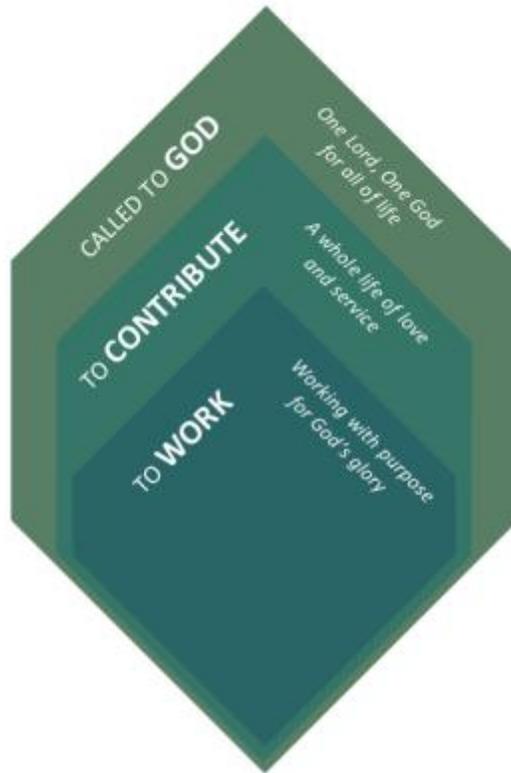


# Vocation: It's Bigger than Your Job

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One of the hardest questions for many people to sort out is how *work*, *interests* (such as volunteer work or relief efforts), simple *kindness*, *walking with God* and *ministry* all fit together. Here is one way to picture it:



**Called to God:** First and foremost, God calls us to Himself. As Os Guinness writes, “everything we are, everything we do, everything we have” is God’s. All of life is based on God’s authoritative call on our lives. He wants all of us, all the time.

**Called to Contribute (Vocation):** Inside this call to God, God asks us to join Him in His work of restoring and rebuilding our world. We are called to contribute – through love and service to others – in every aspect of life. *This contribution includes work* (“contribution” is the bigger umbrella that work fits into) but also other areas: being a good neighbor, volunteering and other types of formal and informal contributions.

**Called to Work:** Everybody “works” – it is part of our identity and part of God’s larger call to contribute – and for many people (at least many people here in the US), this contribution takes place in the workplace. The Bible teaches that it is not just *how* we relate to people at work that makes a difference. *The work itself* also provides a way for us to do good (for example, the farmer who grows food, the doctor who helps people get healthy or the engineer who helps design safer vehicles). Work is not the only way we contribute, but it can be a significant place for us to do our part to change the world and make it a better place.

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**DISCUSS:** How is this sense of calling different from the way you have thought about calling before? What are the advantages of seeing some aspects of calling “inside” of others? How might this way of understanding calling make your work more difficult?

Another way to think about these layers of calling is “Who, What and Where.” The big box focuses on the *Who* of calling. The middle box is about *what* God calls us to do, and the smallest box tells us *where* that work takes place. For a baseball player, you could call this *the team you play for*, your *role* on the team and *the stadium* you happen to be playing in on a particular night. The most important thing is that you are a ball player, signed to great team. *Where* you exercise those skills is the least important part of the equation. Do you agree or disagree with this analogy?

# SESSION 1: GOD'S CALL TO A LIFETIME OF LOVE AND SERVICE

## WARMUP

When God rescues a person, He does so for Himself *and for others*. We are re-made in the image of Christ to do works that benefit others (Ephesians 2:10).

God's guidance into a specific occupation and, mostly likely, into multiple work opportunities during your lifetimes, is a subset of this broader call to a life of love and service (which is itself a subset of our call to God). Historically, this engagement with the world, in partnership with God, was called *vocation*.

*The Reformers saw a difference between **vocation** and **occupation**. Occupation was seen as an opportunity (God's providence) for service presented to all believers that enabled them to fulfill their vocations/callings through what we would call everyday work (Hugh Whelche, *How Then Should We Work? Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work*, p. 9).*

Today, however, the word "vocation" has been diminished to just mean "work" or "occupation." In this study, we consider vocation to be *our divinely given life purpose*. It is the *contribution* that God invites us to make and embraces all dimensions of our human existence, including our occupation, but also things we do outside the workplace.

- Before you begin this study, write out as best you can what you think God is calling you to do, overall, in your life. Include your sense of calling for all areas of contribution you think are important, including contributions inside and outside your workplace. (You will have a chance later to review and refine these ideas.)

## CALLED TO A WAY OF LIFE

The New Testament is filled with practical instructions for everyday life. Throughout history, the Body of Christ has focused on different points of emphasis, sometimes forgetting the wider picture of the many contributions God wants us to make. Skim through the passages below (from the ESV), looking for answers to the following questions:

- What *actions* or *way of life* is being encouraged for followers of Christ?
- What kind of *impact* are these actions or this way of living expected to have on the world around us?

**Acts 2:46-47** – "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

**Romans 12:14-21** – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

**2 Corinthians 9:8-12** – “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency<sup>[a]</sup> in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup> As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” <sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.”

**Ephesians 4:29** – “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

**1 Thessalonians 4:11-12** – “And to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, <sup>12</sup> so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”

**Titus 3:8** – “The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”

**Hebrews 13:1-3** – “Let brotherly love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. <sup>3</sup> Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”

**Discuss/reflect:** If you are in a group, share your observations. Otherwise, use these questions as a way to reflect on your observations from the passages above.

- Are any of these contributions new to you? Are you surprised to see them on God’s “list”?
- Which of these contributions do you see playing out in your current or future workplace? Are there things that would most likely need to be pursued outside your everyday work?
- Looking at the overall picture that these verses describe, write a brief summary of the kind of life that God calls people to live.

## ***CALLED TO DO GOOD DEEDS***

The idea of living a life full of good deeds runs from Genesis to Revelation, but what is the purpose of “doing good”? Are we just “being nice”? Read through the following verses quickly, just trying to get a sense of the main ideas. Use a highlighter or circle key words to capture anything that jumps out at you. Pay particular attention to “why”—what is the outcome or purpose of doing good? <sup>1</sup>

**Psalms 34:14** – “Depart from evil and *do good*; Seek peace and pursue it.”

**Psalms 37:3** – “Trust in the LORD and *do good*; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.”

**Psalms 37:27** – “Depart from evil and *do good*, So you will abide forever.”

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<sup>1</sup> These passages are from the NASB. Emphasis added.

**Ecclesiastes 3:12** – “I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to *do good* in one’s lifetime.”

**Isaiah 1:17** – “Learn to *do good*; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.”

**Micah 6:8** – “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to *do justice*, to *love kindness*, and to *walk humbly* with your God?”

**Matthew 5:16** – “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your *good works*, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

**Matthew 7:12** – “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

**Matthew 12:12** – “How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to *do good* on the Sabbath.”

**Mark 7:37** – “They were utterly astonished, saying, ‘*He has done all things well*; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’”

**Mark 12:30-31** – “‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

**Luke 6:27** – “But I say to you who hear, *love your enemies*, *do good* to those who hate you.”

**Luke 6:33-35** – “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same...*but love your enemies*, and *do good*, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.”

**Acts 10:38** – “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how *He went about doing good* and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

**Romans 2:7** – “...to those who by perseverance in *doing good* seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.”

**Romans 13:8** – “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law... if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself.”

**Galatians 5:14** – “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself.”

**Galatians 6:9-10** – “Let us not lose heart in *doing good*, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us *do good* to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

**Ephesians 2:10** – “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

**2 Thessalonians 3:13** – “But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of *doing good*.”

**1 Timothy 6:18** – “Instruct them to *do good*, to be rich in *good works*, to be generous and ready to share.”

**2 Timothy 2:21** – “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, *prepared for every good work*.”

**2 Timothy 3:17** – “So that the man of God may be adequate, *equipped for every good work.*”

**Titus 2:7** – “In all things show yourself to be an example of *good deeds*, with purity in doctrine, dignified.”

**Titus 2:14** – “Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, *zealous for good deeds.*”

**Titus 3:1** – “Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be *ready for every good deed.*”

**Titus 3:8** – “This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in *good deeds*. These things are good and profitable for men.”

**Titus 3:14** – “Our people *must also learn to engage in good deeds* to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.”

**Hebrews 10:24** – “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and *good deeds.*”

**Hebrews 13:16** – “And do not neglect *doing good* and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

**James 2:8** – “If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

**1 Peter 2:12** – “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your *good deeds*, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

**1 Peter 3:8-11** – “To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, ‘The one who desires life, to love and see good days, Must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; He must seek peace and pursue it. He must turn away from evil and *do good*; He must seek peace and pursue it.’”

## Discuss/reflect

- When most people think about “good deeds,” what kinds of activities do you think they have in mind? How do most people see good deeds? Are they critically important, neutral, not important?
- From what you have read above, how does God see good deeds? What are some of His purposes for our deeds?
- List some of the different ways of doing good you noticed in the passages above.

- What does “doing good” mean to you? How might you put this into practice, especially at work or among the people you work with?

## THE IMPACT OF LIFE’S CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Today, it is increasingly rare to find one job in one place that you can expect to do for the rest of your life. Companies, economies and technology are constantly changing, and perhaps more importantly, over time, our own expectations, needs and priorities shift.

The traditional and biblical view of calling and vocation (what this study calls God’s *call* and our *contribution*) suggests that while our jobs and roles may change, God’s definitive call into a relationship with Himself and to a whole life of love and service to others never changes. We serve one God for all of life (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), and we are called – in all of life – to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31).

Even so, the decision to change jobs or an extended period without paid work is not easy. Here are 4 scenarios and some questions for reflection. Write out your answers and/or share your thoughts with your group.

1. Three weeks after graduation and one week before your first “real” job starts, your Mom calls and tells you Dad has broken his leg badly and is likely to never walk again. In fact, he is not likely to ever leave the nursing home where they are caring for him. Your Mom can no longer drive and is starting to have “little accidents” in the kitchen – last week, she left the stove on for a whole day, not realizing it was on. In your conversation, she suggests she “might need some help” and wonders if you wouldn’t be “too busy” to come and help her “for just a little while.” What she is really asking is for you to move in with her. With Dad in the hospital, neither she nor you have the money to pay for the help she needs cooking, cleaning, driving and very soon, for the nursing care she will need (her own health is also quite fragile), and no other family members or friends are available.
  - Your future boss (who is a believer) calls with some last-minute details. She is sympathetic to your trouble and offers you the option of working from home but not on the same, exciting projects you signed up for. What will you tell her? How does God’s call to a lifetime of contribution impact your decision?
2. Your work life has never been “normal.” You have traveled often (not always for work) and have been to three different job training programs (and finished two of them). You have had four jobs in the last five years, all in different fields. In spite of these changes, you are happy and feel you have learned much. You don’t know where it is all going, but you do feel it is going somewhere.
  - At lunch, a friend asks, “How can you possibly be happy about all these changes!? You’re not exactly on the ‘fast track,’ are you?” Your friend is not a believer but is open to talking about faith – you have talked about God in the past. How do you explain how your sense of calling and contribution affect how you see your work? Because you are being honest, include the mistakes you have made along the way.
3. In college, you once heard the president of your university say, “Women can ‘do it all,’ just not all at the same time.” After graduating, you got a great job. Six months before your first annual review,

you got your first promotion. Five years later, you have started to travel and have become the “go-to” person for all kinds of problems at work. Last night, your husband gently asked (again) what you are thinking about in terms of having a family.

- After a long walk in the morning (it’s a Saturday), you realize you do want to have kids...but you wonder how you and your husband will manage your paid jobs and the unpaid work of nurturing your children. What do you want to ask your husband? What do you want to ask your boss? How does vocation and calling fit into your thoughts about this change?

4. You are the husband in the scenario above.

- What do you want your wife to do in terms of her paid job? What are you willing to offer her in terms of sharing the load, both in the home and in her paid career? How does vocation and calling fit into your thoughts about what it will take to raise a family?

When you are done discussing, have someone in the group share their own real-life scenario.

### *(OPTIONAL) ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE*

Pick two or three of the scenarios above and act them out. Assign the various roles described in the scenario, talk about a simple plot (for example, your character picks up the phone, mom answers....) and then present the scene to your group. (If are doing this study on your own, invite some friends to join you or write out the dialogue on your own.)

- After you play the scene, ask the audience what they saw. If you were in the scene, share what you learned about work and calling as you were playing your part. Looking back, are there things any of the characters could have said differently?
- While our culture is in changing, historically, women have more often borne more of the cost of the decision to raise a family or the need to care for an elderly parent. It is women (more often than men) who have chosen to make the radical change from a paid role in the workplace to an unpaid role as a nurturer or caregiver. Men also make significant changes, but typically, these are from one paid career to another paid career.

What did you learn from these scenarios about work and calling, especially how it impacts your thoughts on significant life changes?

As more men take on more of the task of raising children or sharing in the care for elderly parents, how might their careers and families be affected? For example, might more men be faced with choosing lower paying jobs that offer more flexibility (a choice women have often faced)? Would such a change be a good thing? Neutral? Bad?

## SESSION 2: THE BREADTH OF THE GOSPEL

### WARMUP

When God created the world, He declared it “very good.” It was created with unity, harmony and order. When sin entered the world, everything was broken. As a result of sin, human beings are now alienated from themselves, from God, from each other and from the created order. Jesus came into the world to bridge this alienation, and today, God is working to redeem, reconcile, renew, restore and rebuild. He invites us first and foremost into intimacy and worship, and – from this union with Himself – into a life of engagement. We are adopted into a family, and this family is called together into the work of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

**Discuss/reflect:** As you think about all the parts of the world that are broken—relationships, politics, economics, poverty, injustice, flawed products and flawed systems, inefficiency and others—what problems are you most drawn to? For which problems do you most hope to be a part of the solution?

### THE GOSPEL—IN FOUR PARTS

E. Stanley Jones described the Gospel as “God’s total solution for man’s total problem, both individually and collectively.” Of course, a central piece of this solution is God’s redemption of individuals.

However, if we are only familiar with a simple, “executive summary” of the Gospel – the part that only touches on individuals – then we are missing the grand breadth of the Gospel and the many ways God is inviting us to partner with Him.

To more fully understand our part, we need to more fully understand God’s broad purposes. We need a fuller and longer view of salvation, going all the way back to creation. This story can be divided into four chapters.

**Creation**—In the beginning, God created the cosmos in beauty, unity and harmony. To use a Hebrew word, *shalom*. It was perfect and unmarred (Genesis 1-2).

**Fall**—When sin entered the world, our covenant with God was broken. The unity of our relationship with God was damaged, and the harmony of the cosmos was disrupted. As a result, mankind was **lost** and **alienated**, and our world was **broken** (Genesis 3).

**Salvation**—Salvation is what Jesus purchased for us on the cross. It is not something that happened long ago. It is the “chapter” in the story we find ourselves in today. What is God doing right now? He is changing everything!

- **REDEMPTION** – What is **lost** is being found and bought back. Jesus paid the price for us on the cross. We are saved, healed and delivered. Redemption is the core of God’s work.
- **RECONCILIATION** – What had become **alienated** is being reconciled. Jesus paved the way for us to be reconciled to God, to one another, to ourselves and to all creation.
- **RESTORATION** – What is **broken** is in the process of being restored in Christ. The present reality of the Kingdom of God is like leaven that penetrates society and transforms it. Doing justice and righteousness is a big part of setting broken things right.

**Shalom**—In the end, everything will be put back together, made right again, reconciled and restored to its proper place and original design (Colossians 1:20). There will be a fullness of beauty, unity and harmony. God’s peace is the ultimate hope of our broken, bruised and wounded world (Revelation 21-22).

### Discuss/reflect

- How might your worship, your relationship with God and your relationships with others and your work in the world be enhanced by keeping all of these aspects of the Gospel in mind?
  
- How might your worship, relationships and work be hindered by focusing too much on just one aspect of God’s work and forgetting others? For example, how might your understanding of God be hindered if you *only* thought of God as a creator or *only* as a redeemer or if you *only* thought about what happens after we die? How might your understanding of God’s order be hindered if you *never* thought about the world as fallen or never thought about God’s desire to reconcile and restore *all things*?

### *GOD’S PURPOSES FOR OUR WORLD*

A “word search” is one way to broaden our understanding of Biblical concepts. In the following groups of verses, note the specific areas God is interested in. For example, in Romans 8:1-2, who is being set free? What are they being set free from? (NOTE: The passages below are all from the ESV. Other translations may use slightly different words to translate the same ideas.)

*“Set Free”*

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has **set you free** in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2)

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be **set free** from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (Romans 8:19-21)

“For freedom Christ has **set us free**; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.<sup>2</sup> Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.<sup>3</sup> I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.<sup>4</sup> You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace....<sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:1-4, 6)

### *Redeem”*

“Christ **redeemed** us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:13-14)

“In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephesians 1:7)

### *“Reconcile”*

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be **reconciled** to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24)

“For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Romans 5:10)

“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband<sup>11</sup> (But if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be **reconciled** to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

“All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;<sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation**.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

“By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,<sup>16</sup> and might **reconcile** us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” (Ephesians 2:15-16)

“And through him to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,<sup>22</sup> he has now **reconciled** in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,” (Colossians 1:20-22)

*“Restore” (Renew, Rebuild, Make Whole)*

“And your ancient ruins shall be **rebuilt**; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.” (Isaiah 58:12)

“Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”<sup>13</sup> Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was **restored**, healthy like the other.<sup>14</sup> But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.” (Matthew 12:12-14)

“And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.<sup>23</sup> And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?”<sup>24</sup> And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.”<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was **restored**, and he saw everything clearly.<sup>26</sup> And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.” (Mark 8:22-26)

“But that is not the way you learned Christ!—<sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,<sup>22</sup> to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,<sup>23</sup> and to be **renewed** in the spirit of your minds,<sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:20-24)

“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.<sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices<sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being **renewed** in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Col 3:8-11)

## Discuss/reflect

- Are any of the things God is interested in, as demonstrated in these passages, new to you?
- When God invites us to work with Him in presenting the gospel to another person, there is a clear “division of labor” – we may do the speaking, but it is God who is offering forgiveness, arranging circumstances and moving hearts. If you apply this model to the other work God is doing (to put the world “back together” and make things right), what might be our part in this work? What might be your part?
- How does this picture of the partnership God is inviting us into change your understanding of the work you are doing now or the work you see yourself doing in the future?
- When a person is reconciled to God, they are “made new” (2 Corinthians 5:17) and begin to change. Even so, the full fruit of this change is something we must wait for (Galatians 5:5) – we work with God to grow and change even as we wait for the fullness of this change. How does this tension between working with God now and waiting for the future fulfillment of His promises apply to issues such as restoring relationships, making the world a just place, making the world a better place?

## SHALOM

From a biblical perspective, the hallmarks of human flourishing are community, dignity, intimacy with God, justice, beauty, peace, wholeness, economic flourishing and joy. The biblical word for this idea is *shalom* (peace, prosperity, security, wholeness – everything ordered the way God designed it and the way it will be in the end). In the following verses, note the many different ideas that are tied to *shalom*. (NOTE: All words in bold are translations of the Hebrew word *shalom*. All passages are from the ESV.)

“Pray for the **peace** of Jerusalem! ‘May they be secure who love you! <sup>7</sup> **Peace** be within your walls and security within your towers!’ <sup>8</sup> For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, ‘**Peace** be within you!’ <sup>9</sup> For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.” (Ps. 122:6-9)

“But seek the **welfare** of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its **welfare** you will find your **welfare**.” (Jeremiah 29:7)

“Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and **security**.<sup>7</sup> I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first.<sup>8</sup> I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.<sup>9</sup> And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.” (Jer. 33:6-9)

**Discuss/reflect:** How does the biblical perspective of shalom relate to the products and services offered by businesses? To the efforts made by those who “stay at home”? To the many kinds of work that can be done through volunteer work or working for a non-profit organization? To the work done by ministry organizations (including individual participation in evangelism and discipleship)?

## **CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION**

As Eugene Peterson (translator of *The Message*) explains...

*Salvation is God's determination to rescue his creation; it is his activity in recovering the world. It is personal and impersonal, it deals with souls and cities, it touches sin and sickness. There is a reckless indiscriminateness about salvation.*

In partnering with God, it is important to connect your interests with God’s heart. At the beginning of this study (p. 14), you reflected on the broken parts of the world that you feel drawn to. From what you have learned in this study about God’s purposes, can you see how your interests are connected to the work God is doing in the world today? Write a statement that expresses your area of interest and how it connects to one or more of God’s passions. For example, you might write something like “I believe my work/pursuit of \_\_\_\_\_, connects to God’s heart for \_\_\_\_\_.”

Which, if any, of these interests are tied to the work you are preparing for or currently doing? Which are tied to things outside of the workplace?

## *FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)*

As Doug Sherman and William Hendricks outline in their book, *Your Work Matters to God*,<sup>2</sup> There are three prominent views of work that fall short of the clear teaching of Scripture.

The first is the **humanistic view** of work. In this view, work is magnified, God is minimized and career is reduced to a pathway to personal fulfillment. In this view, *vocation*, which is a whole life of service to God, gets reduced to occupation.

The second is a **two-story view** of work. People who hold this view believe that the only part of life that really counts to God is the part committed to religious activities such as Bible study, prayer, church activity, religious work and the like. Day-to-day work has no inherent worth (beyond meeting survival needs) and contributes nothing to the work God is doing.

The **“platform” view** of work argues that Christians participate in the mainstream of culture only to set up strategic opportunities to share the Gospel message and disciple friends and associates.

While each of these views of work has some value, each is missing the bigger picture of God’s perspective. Based on your understanding of work, how would you refute each of these sub-biblical views of work?

## SESSION 3: THE GOSPEL “IN WORD AND DEED”

In the Bible studies above, we focused on the way of life God calls His people to and the many ways we can do good in the world. But how do these actions fit with the advance of the Gospel?

### WARMUP

When people talk about “advancing the gospel,” do you mostly think about *presenting* or do you mostly think about *modeling*? Or do you think advancing the gospel mostly means *influencing and changing* how the world operates? Do you ever feel guilty about your lack of involvement (or poor skills) in any of these ways?

Why might it be helpful to think about these different aspects of the gospel as interlinked? Are there ways that thinking about them as linked that might not be helpful?

Do you think focusing on any one of these approaches (presenting the gospel, modeling the gospel or seeking to change the world around us) might be dangerous?

### GOOD DEEDS <—> GOOD NEWS

One way to better understand our part is better understand how God combines His own **care for us** and His **call to us**. In the passages below, we will look closely at how God treats us and how He encourages us to treat others. Here are two ways to approach these passages. (Try one or the other, or both!)

- Try having a quiet time in each of these passages below.<sup>2</sup> Before you begin, ask God, “What are you saying to me?” “What should I be learning about You?”
- Study and dig deeply into the passages by making observations and connecting ideas: what doctrines/principles do these passages teach?

Either way, pay attention to the interplay between...

- God’s grace
- Doing good to others
- Honoring God
- Pointing people towards Christ

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<sup>2</sup> From the ESV translation of the Bible.

### Titus 2:6-14

### Notes

Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.<sup>7</sup> Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity,<sup>8</sup> and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.<sup>9</sup> Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative,<sup>10</sup> not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,<sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,<sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,<sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

### Titus 3:1-9

### Notes

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,<sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.<sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.<sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,<sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,<sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,<sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.<sup>8</sup> The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.<sup>9</sup> But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

## 1 Peter 2:9-17

## Notes

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

## Discuss/reflect

- In a few sentences, describe how you see these ideas fitting together: redemption, good deeds, God's grace, influencing others. What, if anything, is God asking you to think or do differently in the future, in general, or specifically in the workplace?
- God is already transforming your life into the image of His beloved Son (Romans 8:29) and is already drawing us into the footsteps of Jesus (I John 2:6). Think back on your day and on your week and note any "good deeds" that you were able to perform. Take a minute to thank God for the opportunity to be a blessing to others. Is there anything you have done recently that you now see in a different light as a result of this study? Any small deed that perhaps was more important to God than you previously thought?
- Also, think back to any missed opportunities. Are there times today or this past week when you clearly could have done something for another person and didn't, especially someone you were

studying with or working with? Do you know why you didn't? Maybe, you truly did not have time: God had other things in store for you! But if you feel you should have done a little more, get your heart right before God and then ask for the wisdom, courage and strength to do better next time. As you grow into caring for others, know that God will continue to care for you! (Isaiah 40:11)

- Look back at your answers to the warmup questions at the beginning of this study. Is there anything you would change, based on this study? What about anything you mentioned you feel guilty about? Is there anything God is asking you to do differently? Think differently about? Feel differently about?

### *FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)*

Before starting her first “real job,” a young woman decided that no matter what, she wanted to always—and only—be a positive influence:

*I determined to “always only add.” I decided I was going to use my hands to build, not tear down, and that no matter who I worked with, I only wanted to add—no matter what. (You can see the whole story on the Nav20s website, [nav20s.org](http://nav20s.org), in the blog section: "Always Only Add" April 16, 2014.)*

Her phrase, “always only add” captures well the kind of life this Bible study has tried to explore, the kind of life Jesus modeled for us and is helping us grow into. Does this seem like a do-able approach to life?

## WRAPPING UP

### *REVIEW*

As you look back over these four Bible studies, are there one or two new ideas that really stand out? Are there one or two things you believe God is asking you to act on? If you need help summarizing, try using a highlighter to mark the “cream of the cream” from your studies. Then, for each of these highlights, write out one or two possible action steps. Don’t aim for a long list of things to do. Instead, create a short list that you can begin to pray about and explore.

Review the things you wrote about your sense of calling on p. 3. Is there anything you want to add? Delete? Is there anything that you wrote that has gained more or less importance?

In today’s world, we have access to all kinds of ways to help. As you think about how God has put together *your* heart and *your* mind and *your* desires, what parts of His work are you most interested in? For example, do you love serving people? Listening to people? Do you find yourself regularly in conversations with people about the Gospel and God’s desires for their life? Do you have a technical mind? Do you often think about redesigning broken systems or broken products? Do you love to teach? Do you have a heart for the marginalized? List all of the contributions you regularly make and/or would like to make.

Our vocation can and should be worked out in multiple areas of our lives. Which of the desires and contributions listed above can be met through your work? Which contributions will mostly likely happen outside your work?

### *(OPTIONAL) THE LORD'S PRAYER*

End your study by praying through the Lord's Prayer. As you pray, concentrate on each word, each phrase and think about the focus of each request: what areas of life does this prayer focus on? As you feel lead by God, mention some specific requests of your own.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread,  
<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil." (Matthew 5:9-13, ESV)