

My Vocation in Christ

A Bible Study Course for Adults

by

Kenneth A. Cherney Jr.

Leader's Guide

Lesson One— My Vocation Is the Role in Life to Which God Has Called Me	3
Lesson Two— Through My Vocation, I Love and Serve My Neighbor	9
Lesson Three— God Sends Me a Cross within My Vocation	14
Lesson Four— God Calls Different Christians to Different Vocations	20
Lesson Five— Through My Vocation, God Is Glorified	25

All rights reserved.

Second printing, 2008

Northwestern Publishing House
1250 N. 113th St., Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284
© 2004 Northwestern Publishing House
Published 2004
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 978-0-8100-1655-2

Scripture is taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

To the leader

We are glad you have chosen this Bible study. The lessons carry out a threefold goal:

1. To help God's people understand that our vocations are gifts from God.
2. To demonstrate that all vocations are equally righteous before God.
3. To encourage people to view their vocations as opportunities to serve God and one another.

We pray that this course will be a blessing to you and your congregation.

Luther's Works, vol. 14 © 1958 Concordia Publishing House. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

Luther's Works, vol. 3 and 24 © 1961 Concordia Publishing House. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

Luther's Works, vol. 26 © 1963 Concordia Publishing House. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

SAMPLE

My Vocation in Christ

• Lesson One •

My Vocation Is the Role in Life to Which God Has Called Me

1. God calls me to my vocation
2. Through the gospel, God gives me joy in my vocation

Worship

Have you ever looked down at a row of ants scurrying across your driveway? Did you find yourself overwhelmed with compassion for them? Did you worry about whether each had enough to eat, a comfortable place to live, and meaningful work to do? Probably not.

Our God is exalted far higher above us than we are above the ants in our driveways. Yet he is overwhelmed with compassion for each of us, and he stoops down to help. It's an awesome thought expressed in Psalm 113:5-9. Let's read it responsively.

Leader: Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high,

Group: Who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?

Leader: He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

Group: He seats them with princes, with the princes of their people.

Leader: He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children.

Group: Praise the LORD!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you proved your love for us once and for all by sending your Son to be our Savior. Open our eyes to see further proof of your love in the simple and ordinary things we see every day. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

What would you say to these people?

- A wife and mother of three small children is inspired by a presentation on the work of the Central Africa Medical Mission. She says she feels very strongly that the Lord is calling her to go and help.
- A congregation president expresses his frustration over how difficult it is to get people to fill positions in the church. "What's wrong with these people?" he asks. "Don't they care about serving the Lord?"

Note: These questions for reflection introduce this entire Bible study, not just the first lesson. It might be best to limit the discussion at this point. If necessary, explain briefly that (1) the fact that the woman has three small children is a much better indicator of her calling than are her own “strong feelings”; and (2) a person does not need to hold a formal church office in order to serve the Lord.

A better understanding of the doctrine of vocation as drawn from the Scriptures would be helpful for the wife and mother, the congregation president, and all the rest of us. This study will focus on that doctrine.

Studying God's Word

God calls me to my vocation

A once-popular song went like this: “And you may say to yourself/‘How did I get here?’” The answer according to the song was “Letting the days go by.” The idea was that we land in a certain place in life more or less by accident. Time goes by, our life story moves along, and we don't give it much thought. Then one day we wake up—startled to find that we have a home, a job, and a place in a community.

How *did* we get where we are? Was it all just an accident? Or did we choose it ourselves?

What does the Bible say?

- Read 1 Corinthians 7:17-24.

1. Some of the early readers of this letter might have thought that their place in life resulted from their skill or intelligence or perhaps because of bad luck or bad birth. What answer did Paul's words give to such thinking?

“The Lord assigned” (verse 17); “God has called” (verses 17,24). Note: Verse 20 really refers to God's calling a person to faith, not to a particular place in life.

2. List some of the different places in life in which Paul's readers could be found. (Look also at verses 27,28 and at Ephesians 5:22–6:9.)

Paul had Jewish readers (“circumcision”) and gentile readers (verse 19). Some were slaves; some, freemen (verses 21-23). Some were married, and some were single (verses 27,28).

3. List some of the different places in life that the members of your Bible study group occupy right now.

Each person holds several vocations at once. One of Paul's original readers could have been a married-gentile-freeman. In the same way, a member of your group might be a wife-mother-registered nurse-Sunday school teacher.

These places in life where we find ourselves are our vocations.

4. Someone objects: “I chose my own career path. I decided to move to this community. I picked my own marriage partner. I, not God, chose my vocation.” Respond:

- a. from Scripture (use Proverbs 16:9).

We make plans in our hearts, but the outcome is up to God. God can thwart our plans, or he can work through them to place us where he wants us. In either case, our station in life comes ultimately from God.

b. from your own practical experience.

We have less control over the direction our lives take than we may realize. External circumstances—which are under God's control—often influence the course of our lives. A man may choose a marriage partner and propose to her. Whether or not she accepts is up to her. People may decide to train for their dream jobs, but they will never get them unless someone else chooses to hire them. (Gene Edward Veith Jr., in his book *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002], discusses this at length. See especially page 50 and following.)

- Read Colossians 3:22-24.

5. With what attitude does a Christian pursue his or her calling?

“With sincerity of heart,” “reverence for the Lord” (verse 22), and “with all your heart” (verse 23).

6. Why?

We are “working for the Lord, not for men” (verse 23); we “know that [we] will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward” (verse 24).

God's Word in My Life

As they clean up together after dinner, a husband and wife are discussing how their day went. “You wouldn't believe it,” one says. “I spent the last three weeks on that report, and suddenly my boss tells me he doesn't need it anymore. Sometimes this job seems so meaningless!”

“Tell me about it,” the other says. “I spend all day cleaning the house. Then the kids come home, and within ten minutes it's messier than when I started! What's the point?”

What would you say to them?

When our work seems meaningless, it can be hard to continue serving faithfully in our vocations (more on this in Lesson Three). But if our vocations are assignments from the Lord, they are never meaningless. Ultimately we are not doing our work for the sake of our own feelings of satisfaction, but for the Lord. That fills every task with meaning, no matter how boring or pointless it may appear.

Thus every person surely has a calling [Latin: vocation]. While attending to it he serves God. A king serves God when he is at pains to look after and govern his people. So do the mother of a household when she tends her baby, the father of a household when he gains a livelihood by working, and a pupil when he applies himself diligently to his studies.

—Martin Luther (*Luther's Works* 3:128)

Through the gospel, God gives me joy in my vocation

“It would be easy to find joy in my calling if I were a restaurant critic or a stunt pilot. But I'm not. Or if I lived on a tropical island, or had a picture-perfect marriage and family. But I don't!”