

Bethel Seminary's Work with Purpose Initiative
Church-Based Course Series

VOCATIONAL STEWARDSHIP

ENGAGING IN SELF-DISCOVERY

LEADER'S GUIDE

Developed by Jennifer Woodruff Tait and
TediAnne Hasapopoulos



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SEMINARY

Funded by the Kern Family Foundation

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Bethel Seminary's
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<https://www.bethel.edu/seminary/about/initiatives/work-with-purpose/>

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Printed in the United States of America

Work with Purpose Initiative

Bethel Seminary

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St. Paul, MN 55112

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Note for Leader's Guide

The Bible is clear. God designed each of us for His purposes and planned work for us. The Bible is also clear that this work is done within the context of our everyday lives, doing everyday things. This six-week course has three components, as it: 1) Explores biblical principles regarding our work; 2) Provides tools for self-exploration of personality, strengths, interests and motivations, and spiritual gifts; and 3) Helps us integrate exploration and understanding into a spiritual growth action plan so that we can be better stewards of our vocational uniqueness.... for our good and for the good of others.

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

Introduction

This course seeks to be both informational and formational in its approach. First of all, it aims to introduce modern Christians to a number of reflections about vocation. These reflections come from many eras of the Christian church, and from theologians, Biblical scholars, and pastors. A few even come from the secular world and its own reflections on the meaning of life. The hope is that, as participants go through the assessments, stories, Biblical examination, and other readings and videos, they will begin to develop a deeper and more vital Christian understanding of how to discern our own secondary vocations in light of our primary vocation as a follower of Christ.

The course is intended to be mainly discussion-based. Video introductions for each week are suggested, but the meat of the group's time together should be spent working through the discussion questions. Depending on the size of the group (and the relative percentage of introverts and extroverts), the leader may want to divide people up into groups to process the questions, sharing the result with the whole group, and/or allow people some quiet reflection time before group sharing.

Each week is arranged in four main sections:

1. An opening exercise to encourage people to begin thinking about the topic and relating it to their own lives
2. Biblical and theological material related to the week's topic, with discussion questions
3. Stories about Christians from the past and present who have struggled with these issues, with discussion questions
4. A closing exercise to encourage people to make application of the topic to their own lives

The course is accompanied by a journal which will provide a place to record answers to opening and closing exercises, results of the gift assessments taken during the course, and any other questions and reflections that may occur to participants.

Week One:
Work's a Curse.....Right?
How our work fits into the story of the Bible

MAIN POINTS

1. Work was not brought into the world by the Fall. God worked to create the world, and work existed in the original Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:27-30, 2:2, 2:19-20) where humans were asked to labor in complete unity with God's purposes.
2. However, our attitude towards our daily work was profoundly affected by the Fall; we often experience work as a curse, and have trouble discerning what God is calling us to do in the world (the word "vocation" comes from a word meaning "to call").
3. In Christ, the curse is lifted and our work is redeemed. Listening to Christ, we can discern our callings (Matthew 11:28-29): to love God with all our being (our primary calling) and, grounded in that, to love our neighbor as ourselves (a grouping of secondary callings, including our occupational work)
4. We will work even in the consummation of all things in the New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 21-22)

All these exercises could be done either with individuals or in a small group, then shared in a larger group.

OPENING EXERCISE

List as many words as you can think of which describe your current occupation, whether paid or unpaid. What do you do? What positive feelings and thoughts does it produce in you? What negative ones? How does it serve you, your family, and your neighbor?

List as many words as you can think of which describe your ideal occupation, whether paid or unpaid. What would it be? What positive feelings and thoughts would *it* produce? What negative ones? How would it serve you, your family, and your neighbor?

What words and phrases describe the difference? Where are you feeling work's "curse"? (For example: "In my ideal job I would get to talk to people more often, but right now I work mostly by myself." OR "I always wanted to serve God as a missionary, but instead I work for a finance company. Is there a way to serve God there?")

We'll explore in this course how to begin bridging that gap.

OPTIONAL 5-minute excerpt from Christian History video on Vocation.

OR this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihnzFH2L818>

DIGGING INTO THE TOPIC #1 – Being Human

Read Genesis 1:26-31:

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 29 God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

AND then read Genesis 3:17-19:

17 And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

1. What are humans called to do in the first passage? What is the experience supposed to be like?
2. What are humans called to do in the second passage? What is the experience supposed to be like?
3. What caused the difference between the first and second passage?
4. How does the "gap" between those two passages relate to the "gaps" you felt in your own work during the opening exercise?

DIGGING INTO THE TOPIC #2 – Being in Christ

Read Matthew 11:28-29:

28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Read Revelation 21:1-4:

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from

God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

1. How do these two passages deal with the "gap" we identified looking at Genesis?
2. What does God promise in these passages? Who are those promises for?
3. Does viewing your own personal everyday life in the light of these passages change anything about it (or about how you feel about it)? Does viewing your family, community, congregation, and society in light of these passages change anything about your approach to serving them through what you do in your everyday life?

A STORY FROM THE PAST

Early church theologian Tertullian describes in this passage (part of his *Apology* to the Roman authorities refuting false accusations about Christian behavior) the kind of people early Christians were.

... I come now to lay before you the Christian way and fashion of living.

We Christians then are a corporation or society of [people] most strictly united by the same religion, by the same rites of worship, and animated with one and the same hope. When we come to the public service of God, we come in as formidable a body as if we were to storm heaven by force of prayer, and such a force is a most grateful violence to God. When this holy army of supplicants is met and disposed in godly array, we all send up our prayers for the life of the emperors, for their ministers, for magistrates, for the good of the State, for the peace of the empire, and for retarding the final doom.

We meet together likewise for the reading of Holy Scriptures, and we take such lessons out of them as we judge suit best with the condition of the times, to confirm our faith either by forewarning us what we are to expect, or by bringing to our minds the predictions already fulfilled. And certainly our spiritual life is wonderfully nourished with reading the Holy Scriptures, our hopes thereby are erected, and our trust fixed and settled upon God.

However, besides the bare reading, we continually preach and press the duties of the gospel with all the power and argument we are able; for it is in these assemblies that we exhort, reprove, and pass the divine censure or sentence of excommunication; for the judgments in this place are delivered with all solemnity, and after the maturest deliberation imaginable, as being delivered by men who know they are pronouncing God's sentence, and act with the same caution as if God stood visibly among them; and the censures here pronounced are

looked upon as an anticipation of the judgment to come, and the sinner precondemned by God, who has sinned to such a degree as to be shut out by his ministers from the fellowship of the faithful, the communion of prayers and sacraments, and the rest of that sacred commerce.

The presidents or bishops among us are men of the most venerable age and piety, raised to this honour not by the powers of money, but the brightness of their lives; for nothing sacred is to be had for money. That kind of treasury we have is not filled with any dishonourable sum, as the price of a purchased religion; every one puts a little to the public stock, commonly once a month, or when he pleases, and only upon condition that he is both willing and able; for there is no compulsion upon any. All here is a free-will offering, and all these collections are deposited in a common bank for charitable uses, not for the support of merry meetings, for drinking and gormandizing, but for feeding the poor and burying the dead, and providing for girls and boys who have neither parents nor provisions left to support them, for relieving old people worn out in the service of the saints, or those who have suffered by shipwreck, or are condemned to the mines, or islands, or prisons, only for the faith of Christ; these may be said to live upon their profession, for while they suffer for professing the name of Christ, they are fed with the collections of His Church.

But strange! that such lovely expressions of Christian charity cannot pass with some men without a censure; for look ye, say they, how these Christians seem to love each other, when in their hearts they hate each other to death!....But you need not wonder at this loving title among Christians, when we own even you yourselves for brethren by the right of one common nature; but by what diviner ties are we Christians brethren! We who all acknowledge but one and the same God as our universal Father, who have all drunk of one and the same Holy Spirit, and who are all delivered as it were from one common womb of ignorance, and called out of darkness into His marvellous light.

1. Why do you think Tertullian's community took the passing of judgment so seriously? Why did he emphasize their prayers for the emperor?
2. Why was their calling to Christ important to them? What do you think they saw as their vocation?
3. Where did they experience curse? Where did they experience blessing?
4. How did they love God with all their hearts? How did they love their neighbors as themselves?
5. Does this story have any resonance in your own life?

A STORY FROM THE PRESENT

Alice and Deb have been co-workers and good friends for almost twenty years. They both work together in a company in Minneapolis. Both are committed followers of Christ – and both have been in a weekly lunchtime Bible study together for the last five years.

Today is the day their department is honoring Alice's retirement. As Deb walked into Alice's office, she noticed several plaques on Alice's wall for outstanding service to their firm and also to a professional society. Deb also noticed bookshelves with notebooks from many training sessions, many of which were led by Alice. Deb remembered that Alice's office was always well-organized – and reflected on how Alice always brought a disciplined way of thinking to their workgroup. Deb also noticed the photos of Alice's husband and her children, now all grown up with kids of their own.

As Deb and Alice walked together to the conference room for Alice's retirement party, Deb asked Alice, "Well, how do you feel about your big day?" Then as Deb and Alice walked into the crowded conference room Alice surprised Deb by saying, "I'm really sad today. I have wasted my whole life in this dumb job."

1. What would you be feeling in this story if you were Alice?
2. What might you say to Alice if you were Deb?
3. How does this story fit in with our theme of "gaps" between God's original call in the garden and the way that we experience our everyday vocations?
4. How has Alice served God in her job? How has she served her neighbor?
5. How does this story resonate in your own life? Is it similar to any of your own "gaps"?

CONCLUDING EXERCISE

(These can provide a good basis for prayer requests shared among the group)

List three new places you might look for the presence of God in your daily life in the coming week.

List three places you know it will be difficult to see God in the coming week where you will need prayer.

PRAYER

O Lord, my God, grant us your peace;
already, indeed, you have
made us rich in all things!
Give us that peace of being at rest,
that Sabbath peace, the peace
which knows no end.

– St. Augustine