

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

# LORD, DO WHAT YOU WANT THROUGH ME

AN EXPLORATION OF VOCATIONAL  
AND KINGDOM LIVING FOR YOUTH

Developed by Lucy Swanson

Edited by Cesar Castillejos, Nathan Miller, and Anne Sopiartz



**BETHEL**  
SEMINARY

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St. Paul, MN 55112

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

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Work with Purpose Initiative

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Lesson 1 – “Choices, Decisions, Career...Oh My!” .....	2
Lesson 2 – “Work – A Curse or a Blessing?” .....	7
Lesson 3 – “God’s Calling” .....	12
Lesson 4 – “Jesus Calling” .....	17
Lesson 5 – “Resources” .....	22
Lesson 6 – “Spiritual Gifts” .....	27
Lesson 7 – “Discernment” .....	32
Lesson 8 – “Kingdom Come” .....	36
Lesson 9 – “Lord, Do What You Want Through Me” .....	40

## Introduction

Our high school students increasingly spend their days juggling classroom time and their homework load, seasonal extra-curricular activities, family commitments, part-time jobs, youth group, and then some. They are encouraged to pursue their dreams and expected to know “what they want to do when they grow up” as they rapidly approach graduation and face choices about college and career. These demands and opportunities are forming our students and shaping the assumptions they’re making about their roles in the world. How can we encourage them with a biblically and theologically practical vision of career, calling, and vocation? How can we inspire our students toward Kingdom living no matter the job they hold or the role they play?

This course attempts to address these questions in both an informational and formational approach. Students will hear from Scripture, hear from one another, and do self-reflection in order to begin to develop a deeper and more vital Christian understanding of vocation.

Each lesson is 50 to 60 minutes and is arranged in four main sections:

1. **Warm Up:** introduce the topic through a hands-on activity
2. **Bible:** study what the Bible says about the topic
3. **Apply It:** explore how to apply what they study through the simple framework of search, pray, and listen
4. **Take Home:** a closing reflection (and sometimes homework) based on the simple prayer, “Lord, do what you want through me”

The content is intended to be an interactive and robust exploration. The course is 9 lessons long because each provides an important component to the overall exploration, though the material can be adapted to fit your needs. A few key suggestions:

- Lessons 5 and 6 suggest specific tools and assessments through which students can build self-awareness—limitations may constrain how much time, if any, you are able to give to these lessons.
- Lesson 4 provides important insight in how Jesus called his followers, building on God’s calling in lesson 3. However, if you cannot commit two weeks to the topic of calling, prioritize lesson 3 and/or weave in one passage of Jesus calling his disciples into the Bible section of lesson 4.
- 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.

## Lesson 1 – “Choices, Decisions, Career...Oh My!”

### Introduction

Welcome to the first lesson of this course. This lesson acts as both an introduction, and a foundation for the rest of the course. We will look at what Jeremiah has to say in a Scripture passage many churches use in celebration of graduating seniors. However there is much to be gained from this Scripture, especially as we compare the place of the Babylonian captives with the way many of our high school students and college students feel as they begin to navigate career waters, choosing a major, etc.

### Lesson Objectives

- Students will be introduced to the course subject of vocational stewardship through a hands-on activity of choices.
- Students will study the promises God gives the people in Babylonian captivity through the prophet Jeremiah.
- Students will apply the promises God gives in Jeremiah through search, pray and listen.
- Students will be encouraged to invite God into this course and process with a simple prayer of, “Lord, do what you want through me.”

### Supplies

- Bible, pens (Bible)
- Whiteboard, large paper (to hang on wall), writing utensils (Apply It)
- Optional: print out of “Lord, do what you want through me” prayer for each student to take home (Take Home)

Due to the subject of this course, and specifically the role we hope each student will play in communal discernment for one another, if the students do not already know one another, it is imperative that this session is first opened up with a round of introductions and light-hearted information about oneself (i.e. name and favorite ice cream topping, favorite cartoon hero, favorite candy bar, who their best friend is and why, favorite hobby, someone they look up to, etc.).

### Warm Up (10 minutes)

In this activity, students will have to make a choice or decision between two options. You will give them two options, and they must individually choose between the two. Depending on your students and the space you are in, you could have them run to the right side of the room for choice (a) and the left side for choice (b), hold up their right hand for choice a or left hand for choice b, etc.

Below are a few sample options, and feel free to customize for your students (choose between two rivaling state universities, two favorite chain restaurants your students go to, etc.). Make sure the questions get progressively harder to choose between the two.

Suggestions:

- Do you like sweet snacks (a) or salty snacks (b)?
- Are you a night owl (a) or a morning person (b)?
- Would you like to make one big decision a day (a) or many little decisions throughout the day (b)?
- Would you work the same job for the rest of your life (a) or a new job every day for the rest of your life (b)?

Wrap up the activity with a few discussion questions:

1. Was it easy or hard to make your choice? Why?
2. What choices or decisions, besides this game, have you already made today? (i.e. getting out of bed, choosing outfit, deciding to go to church, etc.)
3. What are some big choices or decisions in your life right now? (studying for a big exam, who to go to Prom with, career path/college major, etc.)
4. How has decision making been modeled in your family?
5. What does poor decision making look like?

### **Bible (20 minutes)**

Supplies: Bible, pens

**Transition: Choices and decisions can sometimes be very simple to make, and yet other times be completely overwhelming, such as choosing a college major or career field. Regardless of where a decision is on the spectrum of simple to overwhelming, let's look to a word of encouragement from Scripture.**

### **Read Jeremiah 29:1-14.**

Many of us know this passage because it is on nearly every single graduation card, written on many senior gifts, and is typically part of the lineup for a Senior Sunday service or a devotional for seniors. In spite of how cliché it may seem to look at this passage, Jeremiah has very relevant advice as we begin to delve into God's plans for each of us. We read that Jeremiah has written to those whom King Nebuchadnezzar has sent into captivity in Babylon, also known as Babylonian exiles, while he remains in Jerusalem (v. 1). Jeremiah is sharing words directly from God, in contrast of those who are false prophets among the Babylonian exiles. Those false prophets are telling the people they will return to Jerusalem soon, while God, through Jeremiah, is telling the

people to stay put. “Build homes, and plan to stay...Marry and have children...” (v. 5-6). God says that the people will remain in Babylon for seventy years, and then God will bring them home (v 10). The next verse is where the famous lines are found, “For I know the plans I have for you...” (v. 11). God is not abandoning them in captivity; God has plans for the people. It continues into verse twelve; God is pleading with those in captivity to pray and God will listen, to look and God will be found. If the people, in the midst of captivity, will search, pray and listen, God will end their captivity, restore their fortunes and return them to their home (v. 14).

Discussion questions:

1. Who is Jeremiah writing to? (Babylonian exiles, those King Nebuchadnezzar has sent into captivity in Babylon)
2. In what ways does God tell the people to “settle in” to captivity in Babylon? (Build homes, plant gardens, marry and have children)
3. In verse 7, what does it mean to “work for the peace and prosperity of the city” and “its welfare will determine your welfare?”
  - a. What might God be doing through the people while in captivity? (Captivity may require the people to rely more on God during this time)
  - b. How do you think the people felt about being told by God to work and pray in the very city where He had exiled them? (Disappointed that they will continue on in captivity)
4. Who were the false prophets in Babylon and what were they saying? (They were falsely speaking on God’s behalf)
5. How do you think the people responded when God said they would be in captivity for seventy years (v. 10)? (Upset, discouraged)
6. What promises does God give the people in verses 10-14?
  - a. What plans does God have for them? (God will bring the people out of captivity, back to the Promised Land)
  - b. What is God calling the people to do? (God is calling them to trust in Him, to rely on Him while in exile, seek God with their whole heart)

### **Apply It (15-20 minutes)**

Supplies: Whiteboard, large paper (to hang on wall), writing utensils

**Transition: Though we may not be in captivity like those in Babylon, God still has plans for us, “plans for good and not for disaster, to give (us) a future and a hope.”**

Open up this section by revisiting question number three from the Warm Up, “What are some big choices or decisions in your life right now?” Encourage them to think collectively; what is God calling our generation or those of us in this room to (just like God was calling the entire group of Babylonian exiles). How might they, collectively and individually, be in captivity?



Without a doubt, the topic of choosing a career, deciding upon a major, etc. came up. Depending on your room set up, use large paper or a white board, and write their answers on it. Then as a group, number their answers based on the level of stress; if you have ten answers, number one would be the most stressful, and ten the least amount of stress.

Circle or underline all the answers that are related to career and college choices. Explain that throughout the next several weeks, this course is going to focus on the future, some of the very things you just underlined or circled, and specifically where God may be leading and calling students as they begin to look to their future, including career and vocation. It is important to note that some students may not feel they are heading in the direction of college or career; they may be interested in a gap year, military, etc. Be sure to affirm them in where God is leading them, even if it does not fit within college or career.

Spend a few minutes asking the following questions:

1. When you were in preschool or kindergarten, what did you say you wanted to be when you grew up?
2. How many of you know right this minute “what you want to do when you grow up?”
3. Does anyone feel like God’s people who are in the foreign land of Babylon when it comes to career, college, and future choices? Do you feel like the Babylonian exiles waiting for God’s direction and not sure what God’s plans are for you? Why?

Regardless of where each student lands on the continuum, this passage in Jeremiah is for them. God is speaking to a group who just entered an unknown land and is told they will be there for seventy years. It may seem like a stretch at first, but those in Babylon are in a similar place as those in high school and college. They enter a foreign land, completely different than what they are used to, where students are completely responsible for decisions that will impact the next seventy years of their lives.

Compare the similarities and differences between those in Jeremiah and students in front of you. Just like those in Babylon, God promises “plans for good and not for disaster...a future and a hope.” Just like those in captivity, God is not abandoning students in an unknown “land,” God is there. Just as the passage says, “when you pray, I will listen,” “if you look, you will find me” (v. 13). As we begin this course, let’s SEARCH, PRAY, and LISTEN.

Discussion questions:

1. SEARCH
  - a. What does it look like to search for God?
  - b. How can we search for God as we seek God’s plan for our future?
2. PRAY
  - a. What is the importance of prayer as we seek “uncharted waters”?

- b. In what ways can we be praying this coming week, and also for the duration of this course?
3. LISTEN
  - a. What does it mean or look like to listen for God?
  - b. What are some ways in which we can be listening for God in the coming week?

**Take Home (5 minutes)**

Supplies: Print out of the prayer for each student (optional)

**Transition: As we begin this process by searching, praying, and listening, we can do so by centering ourselves on one simple, yet powerful, prayer.**

Encourage students to begin to pray this simple prayer throughout this next week, and throughout this course. As we begin this course, our foundation is formed and filled by prayer.

Prayer: Lord, do what you want through me. Adjust for your class, “Lord, do what you want through us.”

Close your time together by praying that prayer together.

**Additional Resources**

A great resource on the topic of vocation is the adult version of this course, “Vocational Stewardship,” which can be found at <https://www.bethel.edu/seminary/about/initiatives/work-with-purpose/resources>.