

Prayer:

Father, please show us Your ways that we might see Your great works and worship You.

Logistics:

Website: <https://carrigelanepres.com/ss-vocation> (audio: stream or download; and PDF of notes)

Bibliography: forthcoming on the website (a work in progress)

- Gene Veith. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*
- Tim Keller. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*
- Theology of Work Project (website: theologyofwork.org; Bible commentary; various books)
- Alistair Mackenzie. Thesis: "Faith at Work: Vocation, the Theology of Work, and the Pastoral Implications"
- Os Guinness. *The Call: Finding & Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*
- Martin Luther. Various writings on "vocation" and man's "estates"
- George Grant. Various lectures on Abraham Kuyper and Thomas Chalmers
- Abraham Kuyper. *Lectures on Calvinism: The Stone Lectures of 1898*
- Thomas Chalmers. *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*
- Bruce Gore. Various lectures on Church History, John Calvin, and William Carey
- William Carey. *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*
- Greg Bahnsen. Various lectures on the Lordship of Christ
- Richard Pratt. Sermon Series on Discovering God's Will
- Greg Koukl. Lecture Series on Decision Making and the Will of God
- Garry Friesen. *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View*
- Raegan Rose. *Redeeming Productivity: Getting More Done for the Glory of God*
- Douglas Wilson. *Productivity: A Practical Theology of Work and Wealth*

Overview of the Course:

Vocation: What Am I Called to Do and to Be?

1. **The Caller and the Called:** *What is the Context of Calling?*
 - Your life is not your own. God is the Caller; we are the called. Find your calling in His Word.
 - Love Christ by obedience to His call and thus pursue your purpose: to glorify and enjoy Him forever.
2. **The Meaning of Means:** *What is the Concept of Calling?*
 - You are part of a royal priesthood. All work for the Lord is sacred – it has meaning and worth.
 - God loves His people through His people. Loving your neighbor is the framework of faithful calling.
3. **The Scope of the Summons:** *What is the Content of Calling?*
 - Christ is Lord over every sphere of life. You are called to glorify and enjoy Him in all things.
 - The Dominion Mandate and the Great Commission are equally ultimate ends.
4. Calling Lived Out – In Our Work
5. Calling Lived Out – In Our Families
6. Calling Lived Out – In Our Church
7. Calling Lived Out – In Our Society
8. Wrong Way: How NOT to Discern God's Will
9. Proper Path: How to Discern God's Will
10. Productivity: Stewarding Our Most Limited Resource (Time)

Goal of Lesson 2:

The goal of this lesson is for students to understand the **concept** of calling. Together we will explore what it has meant throughout the history of the church, how we ought to view our roles in Christ's Kingdom, and how love is the lens through which we ought to analyze our faithfulness to God in our work.

*In the next lesson, we'll move on from the concept and discuss the **content** of calling. We will look at the work left to be done in both the Dominion Mandate as well as the Great Commission, the various spheres over which Christ reigns and calls us to work, and how we ought to pursue excellence in all of our endeavors.*

Focus Questions:

What motivates you? What drives you to spend time, money, and energy? What has great worth and reward for you?

What types of things excite you? What gives you energy? Some things are more difficult than others to get excited about. You know how 5 minutes of some things feels like 5 hours and 5 hours of other things feels like only 5 minutes. What are some of the things you can spend all day doing and not get tired?

Lesson 2: The Meaning of Means**Setting the Stage:**

At the end of the day, our calling, or various callings, are not merely academic ideas. They're not pie-in-the-sky, ethereal, so-whatisms. They work their way out into real life actions and interactions with others.

The **WHAT** of our calling consists, in large part, in our labor – in the things we do. That's generally where we get jazzed up. We're doers. But the **WHY** of our calling is also important. It turns out to have great influence on the WHAT.

- Why we do what we do shapes everything from the motivation of our work to the methods of our work.
- It influences both the attitudes we have towards our work and the satisfaction we derive from it.

Secular author, Simon Sinek, has a book called **Start With Why**. In it he features what he calls the **Golden Circle** with WHY at the center followed by HOW and WHAT in expanding concentric circles.

He says that the why is your purpose, and *very few* people or companies can clearly articulate why they do what they do. *Some* are good at explaining the how. But *every single* company or person knows what they do.

The problem is that bypassing the why to focus on the what is commoditizing and unsustainable. Sinek says, "People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it. And what you do simply proves what you believe."

So what? Who cares what this secular "influencer" and business guru thinks? He's not quoting scripture.

Well, God loves His creation and He supplies it with myriad forms of common grace. Jesus says of God in Matthew 5:45, "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

Why do I bring this up? Because I believe Simon is on to something. He has, by God's common grace and His general revelation in the world, discovered what the special revelation of the scriptures has taught throughout the generations of the faithful.

Namely: **why we do what we do matters greatly**, and we cannot faithfully live out an external action without a rightly ordered internal orientation of the heart. To do otherwise is hypocritical and sin.

- **Jesus says**, “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45)
- **Solomon says**, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” (Prov. 4:23)

Why we do what we do matters greatly.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he spent the first 3 chapters explaining all of the indicatives, all of the blessings of a life in Christ and the mysteries of the Gospel. The last 3 chapters he fills with all of the imperatives, all of the commands for right living in light of those previously explained truths. He opens chapter 4 with the “therefore.”

- “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...” **He started with why.**

When God delivered the 10 Commandments through Moses in Exodus 20, how did He start? Not with the First Commandment, but with the Prologue.

- “And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ... You shall have no other gods before me...” **He started with why.**

When Jesus called His disciples to Himself and gave them the Great Commission, notice what He said:

- “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore** go and make disciples of all nations...” **He started with why.**

So, as we look to better understand our callings from God, it is important to see both the context that we discussed last week and the concept that we will cover today, before we delve into the content of our specific stations in life.

You’ll see as we walk through a brief history of the doctrine of vocation how various beliefs about its meaning influences significantly the type of fruit produced by believers living out those thoughts.

- **Orthodoxy precedes orthopraxy.** Right thinking, right belief, is a prerequisite for right living.

So, what ought we believe about the concept of calling?

Historical Survey:

In 1997 a student by the name of Alistair Mackenzie wrote a thesis for his Master of Theology degree at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. It is entitled, “Faith at Work: Vocation, the Theology of Work, and the Pastoral Implications.”

The whole thing is a couple hundred pages long and covers historical developments in the doctrine of vocation, various applications to the ministry and mission of believers, and a number of pastoral implications for addressing Christian disciples as church leaders seek to equip the body for every good work.

I came across this piece through some the **Theology of Work Project**. Now isn’t the time for any in-depth introduction to that work, but I would commend it to you as a resource should you have a desire for further reading. It will be referenced in the notes for this class and you can find more at **theologyofwork.org**.

But what I'd like to do for the next few minutes is leverage some of Alistair's hard work in research and give you a summary the different understandings of vocation which have existed throughout Christian history.

Much of this is a mixture of various quotes and excerpts from Mackenzie's thesis intertwined with my own thinking as I tried to weave it together. It will be difficult to try and cite exhaustively as we go, so just consider everything good and helpful that you hear from him and all the rest can be attributed to me.

The World Just Before Christ Came on the Scene

1. The Greeks.

- a. In the Greek worldview, the notion of work was looked down upon. It was thought to be a curse.
 - i. Aristotle said: "The end of labor is to gain leisure" and "All paid jobs absorb and degrade the mind."
- b. Greek society was highly dichotomized such that only an elite few could live the good life of leisure and participate in political and contemplative life.
 - i. The majority of work was done by slaves.
 - ii. Everyday work was demeaning and should be avoided.
- c. Keller says they believed that "the soul was good, but the soil was bad."

2. The Jews.

- a. But then you have the God of the bible who reveals Himself as a worker. The opening scene of Genesis shows God with His hands in the dirt as He creates the first man.
- b. The Hebrews, like the Greeks, saw value in contemplation and engagement of the mind, but not at the exclusion of work. Mackenzie states:
 - i. "Jewish teachers were not expected to live off of the contributions of their students, but were all expected to have a trade through which they could support themselves."
 - ii. "Far from being avoided...work was to be embraced as part of God's purposes in creation and theological reflection would be engaged in by people who were daily engaged in everyday life in the world."
 1. This, I think can be seen in the imagery of the Psalms where David often relates the emotions of his heart to regular, ordinary occurrences of daily life.
 2. Similarly, Moses teaches in the Shema of Deut. 6 that the discussion of God's truths and theological education is to occur in the midst of regular daily life:
 - a. "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (Deut. 6:6-9)

The Early Christian Church

1. Early Christianity.

- a. "There is no call in the New Testament for all Christians to withdraw from participation in everyday life and work."
- b. "Jesus was known as a carpenter and the son of a carpenter... He called some of his inner circle of disciples to leave their fishing nets to follow Him. But there are also examples of them continuing to fish at times."
- c. "Certainly He gave no general call for all Christians to give up everyday work and much of His teaching drew on themes from the world of everyday work without any self-consciousness or apologies."
- d. "Paul emphasizes a positive view of work, commending all Christians to continue in their work and to work well. And he plainly continued in his trade as a tentmaker during his church planting ministry. This [seems] to be the general Christian pattern for the first century after the Apostles."

2. Distorted Christianity.

- a. "Gradually the Church Fathers began to draw more heavily on Greek and Roman motifs rather than specifically biblical teaching and this resulted in a lower view of work."
- b. "This is reflected in...Eusebius who wrote about his doctrine of [Two Lives around 300 AD]. He says:
 - i. "Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living; it admits not marriage, child-bearing, property nor the possession of wealth, but wholly and permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone...such then is the perfect form of the Christian life. And the other, more humble, more human, permits man to join in pure nuptials, and to produce children...it allows them to have minds for farming, for trade, and the other more secular interests as well as for religion...a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to them."
- c. "In a similar way Augustine distinguished between the 'active life' and the 'contemplative life.' While both kinds of life were good and Augustine had praise for the work of farmers and [craftsmen] and merchants, the contemplative life was clearly of a higher order."
- d. The belief was that, "while at times it may be necessary to follow the active life, wherever possible one should choose the other. The one life is loved, the other endured."
- e. This deprecation of the doctrine of vocation continued on into the Middle Ages with the monasticism of Benedict and Aquinas, but saw a shift in the German Mystics who believed that:
 - i. "...for the laity the nearest way to blessedness and gaining heaven is by working faithfully in the secular position in which God has placed them."
 - ii. "This new way of looking at things resulted in alterations to common speech. By the time of Luther the word 'vocation' or 'calling' (*Ruf*) in the sense of class or profession, was already in general usage."

A Reformation of the Church and Christian Calling

1. Restoring the Balance: Luther

- a. "It was initially through the work of Martin Luther that the 16th century Reformers recovered a sense that all of life, including daily work, could be understood as a calling from God."
- b. "According to Luther we respond to the call to love our neighbor by fulfilling the duties that are associated with our everyday work."
- c. "Work is our call to serve. This work includes domestic and civic duties, as well as our employment ... Luther said we can only truly serve God in the midst of everyday circumstances and attempts to elevate the significance of the contemplative life are false."
 - i. "In fact, it is the monastic life that has no true calling. IT is an escape from the true obedience that God calls us to."
- d. **"According to Luther, vocation is not confined to occupation, but also includes domestic roles and any action that concerns the world or a person's relationship with their neighbor."**

2. Advancing the Understanding: Calvin

- a. "John Calvin developed a more dynamic view of vocation." "Although Calvin, like Luther, relates the calling both to the given orders of society and to the particular estate that a Christian is in, his view is not quite as static as Luther's."
- b. "Luther maintains we obey the divine call when through faith we serve God in our estates. For Calvin, the work of calling is the work of the 'estate' itself, and so is itself obedience to God."
- c. "For Calvin, a Christian might, with 'proper reason,' change a calling and choose another. Calvin encouraged Christians to examine the social consequences of their work...and seek out a truly Christian vocation."
- d. "Another development in Calvin's understanding of vocation was his stress on the utility of callings. He talks about the 'advantage', 'utility', 'profit', and 'fruit' of Christian works."
 - i. **He believed a calling would not be approved by God unless it is useful to others.**

3. Contrasting the Views

- a. "For Luther, the primary reason God gives a Christian a vocation in the world is to encourage a life of loving service, whereas for Calvin the reason is more related to the proper ordering of human life."
- b. "Calvin sees vocation as a means of giving glory to God by furthering God's will in the world, while Luther sees it primarily as a means by which God's good gifts are bestowed on humankind."

- c. **“A clear progression is evident. According to Augustine and Aquinas, Christians were to serve in the world when necessary. Luther’s followers were called to serve in the world. Calvin’s followers were called to transform the world.”**

Post-Reformation Developments

1. Further Changes: Some Good, Some Bad

- a. We don’t have time to trace them, but just so that you recognize the various ways in which the understanding of calling, the purpose of mankind, how people (both within and outside of the church) view their work has serious implications on society at large.
- b. Following the Reformation, we see the rise of the **Protestant Work Ethic** through the disciplined and **ordered lives of the Puritans**.
- c. We see the advent of the **Industrial Revolution** and the major shifts in connection between one’s work, family, and the fruits of those labors.
- d. We see the concept of **vocation** becoming so closely attached with a person’s occupation or career that the words become **secularized** without any reference to God as the Caller.
- e. **The pursuit of vocation becomes an end in itself**. As Mackenzie points out, “This is true for both capitalism and Marxism. Both encourage us to look for personal fulfillment through the work of our own hands. **Once people worked to live, now they live to work.**”
 - i. “Whereas once the medieval church threatened to divorce faith from work, now they are so closely fused that work has become idolized.”
 - ii. “It is this distortion that deprives the unemployed person, or the person engaged in unpaid domestic or voluntary work, of status, security, and satisfaction, by emphasizing that these are primarily associated with employment.”
 - iii. **“Work, once degraded, is now worshiped, and demands great sacrifices.”**

A Story of Calling and the Use of Means

William Carey (1761-1834). Born in Northamptonshire, England on August 17, 1761.

- Father was a weaver and the local schoolmaster of the parish school. Not poor, but also not wealthy. Never able to afford formal education or university training.
- Carey was a bright young man. With the help of a local retired professor, taught himself Latin at age 10.
 - Apprenticed as a cobbler at age 14. With the help of another local tradesman with classical education, learned Greek.

- Was highly influenced by the journal of missionary David Brainard and the writings of Captain James Cook, a British explorer and cartographer.
- Carey became a Baptist pastor in 1785 during his early 20s, while still serving bi-vocationally as a cobbler to support himself.
 - At the first gathering of local pastors in his parish in 1786, he was asked to give a devotional. In it, based on his extensive reading of Brainard and Cook and his growing belief in the need for the gospel beyond his borders, he pitched his passion for world missions.
 - When he was finished an older pastor, by the name of John Ryland, stood up and said:
 - **“Sit down, young man! You are an enthusiast! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He’ll do it without consulting you or me.”**
- Undeterred, Carey went back to his cobbler shop and regular pulpit ministry and continued his study of the state of the unchurched world.
 - He created what was known as **Carey’s Cobbler’s Map** from shoe leather and anytime anyone in his shop had the slightest interest, he’d bring them over to the wall and show them the places around the world with the population figures he’d collected and stories of the need of those people.
- In the meantime, he worked hard on a response to the sentiment of Ryland which was shared by so many.
 - In 1792 he published his book entitled, **“An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen.”**
 - It is laid out in 5 parts:
 - Theological Justifications
 - History of Christian Missions
 - Tables of World Populations
 - Answers to Objections
 - A Call to Action
 - It had an impact. In 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society was formed. It was the first of many around the world and throughout the various denominations of the Christian church.
 - In 1793 he sailed for India with his family. Lots of twists and turns to that story, but he faithfully served to his death there.
- A summary of his teaching was often repeated, so much so that it is engraved on his tombstone:
 - **“Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”**

Closing Thoughts

1 Peter 2: 9-17

⁹ **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. ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² 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.**

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

Matthew 22: 34-40

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or **whatever you do**, do all to the glory of God.

Colossians 3:17, 23-24

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in **word or deed**, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ²³ Whatever you do, **work heartily**, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. **You are serving the Lord Christ.**

As you go throughout your day, be aware of what is actually going on. Know the why behind every what.

- When you're brushing your teeth in the morning, what are you doing?
- When you're driving through traffic, what are you doing?
- When you're answering the phone or making that call, what are you doing?
- When you're hauling that load, what are you doing?
- When you're changing that diaper, what are you doing?
- When you're writing that email or sweeping that floor or running that errand, what are you doing?

You are loving the Lord your God. You are loving your neighbor. You are serving the Lord Christ.