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# GOD & VOCATION BIBLE STUDY

## PURPOSE

Welcome! We are meeting together to discover and discuss any connections we see between spirituality and vocation. Although our study will flow from a Christian worldview, we welcome perspectives from other faith and non-faith traditions. What we do with our bodies and our lives, our *vocation*, matters deeply. We will explore how our vocation can be a participation in God's work of renewing all things and how vocation is related to the career we are pursuing.

"The word *vocation* is a rich one, having to address the wholeness of life, the range of relationships and responsibilities. Work, yes, but also families, and neighbors, and citizenship, locally and globally—all of this and more is seen as vocation, that to which I am called as a human being, living my life before the face of God" (Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 12).

How will we contribute to flourishing in our own lives, the lives of those around us, and the global society in which we live? What will we do with all that we know and all that we have experienced?

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**This study series will focus on vocation through the work we do, which is just one slice of our broader vocation as human beings.** Our work is often seasonal, evolving over time. Work is also a mix of good and bad, beauty and brokenness. Our work can contribute to flourishing and it can also perpetuate injustice and dehumanization. Followers of Jesus look forward to when God's new creation will be our reality, and in the meantime, we participate with God in bringing renewal to all things. Where we see brokenness, we can actively disrupt the status quo and build something different through the way we treat people and the land.

Our hope through this series is that we will grow more attentive to how our fields of study are opportunities to participate in God's renewal of all things. We often separate the sacred and spiritual from our everyday experiences of work, but instead, we will ask ourselves, "How does what we believe about the universe connect with what we are doing in our careers?" Seeing our spiritual lives as integrated with our work lives is important because we are spiritual beings, and what we do matters in both material and spiritual ways.

## GATHERING (5 MINUTES)

Why did you decide to attend this first study?

## WARM-UP (15 MINUTES)

First, let's cover a few group norms / rules of engagement that will help us care for each other as we interact together. We want this group to be inclusive and hospitable so that everyone feels free to share their thoughts and experiences in this space.

- Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
- Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
- Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
- If you tend to be quieter, step out and offer your thoughts
- Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
- What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

Second, let's acknowledge that all of us come into this conversation with a lifetime of thoughts, feelings, and experiences about the topics of career and vocation. These perspectives can be a wonderful part of our discussion because we can learn from each other, yet they can also cause us to misunderstand and mistrust one another. Openly acknowledging our perspectives and where they come from can help us function well as a group with a variety of backgrounds represented. We can begin to see the perspectives or "lenses" we bring to the conversation as gifts to one another.

## SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (20 MINUTES)

Today we will read the very beginning of the Hebrew Bible. This poetic section is a sacred text of both Jewish people and followers of Jesus, and it answers the basic questions of life. *Who are we? Who is God? Where did we come from? Why are we here? How should we live?*

## GENESIS 1:1–2:4 (NLT)

<sup>1:1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

<sup>3</sup> Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

<sup>6</sup> Then God said, “Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.” <sup>7</sup> And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. <sup>8</sup> God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

<sup>9</sup> Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. <sup>12</sup> The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>13</sup> And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

<sup>14</sup> Then God said, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years. <sup>15</sup> Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth.” And that is what happened. <sup>16</sup> God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup> God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, <sup>18</sup> to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>19</sup> And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> Then God said, “Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” <sup>21</sup> So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

<sup>23</sup> And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> Then God said, "Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals." And that is what happened. <sup>25</sup> God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup> And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life." And that is what happened.

<sup>31</sup> Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

<sup>2:1</sup> So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed.

<sup>2</sup> On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

<sup>4</sup> This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?
- God designed the entire community of creation with the plan that humanity would serve *with* God in helping everything and everyone to flourish, that humans would both fill the earth and also *fulfill* God's beautiful purposes (Genesis 1:28). How have you seen humanity doing this well? How have we been failing at this? Why do you think God decided to partner with humanity for such an important task?
- How does this type of work that God originally intended—God partnering with humans to care for the flourishing of all—compare to your own sense of vocation in your work or in any other area of your life?

### NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

Which next step will you take this week based on our discussion today? Choose one.

**Perspective:** Consider that vocation includes the human beings partnering with God as we bear God's image and promote the flourishing of creation together. Ponder how this aspect of a Christian/Jewish worldview seems true or untrue from your perspective.

**Engagement:** In the area of work you are doing or preparing to do, where do you see value and deep meaning? Where is it monotonous, meaningless, or without purpose? How do you hope to bring beauty and benefit through your work? How is this area of work sometimes in opposition to flourishing? Journal your thoughts and feelings.

**Investment:** Find something that needs to be physically renewed or restored, something that is currently unusable. With your hands and through your efforts, make it usable again, either for its original purpose or for a new purpose. Reflect on what it's like to bring renewal and restoration through your actions.