
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?

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)

^{1:1} In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² 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.

³ Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

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

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

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

⁹ Then God said, "Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear." And that is what happened. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land" and the waters "seas." And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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.

¹³ And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth." And that is what happened. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

¹⁹ And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

²⁰ Then God said, "Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind." ²¹ 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. ²² Then God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth."

²³ And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ 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."

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

²⁸ 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."

²⁹ Then God said, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. ³⁰ 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.

³¹ 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.

^{2:1} So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed.

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

⁴ 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.

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GATHERING (10 MINUTES)

Watch this video together: [College and Your Future Career](#)

- What would be your dream job?
- How might your faith inform what job you choose, or how you do your job?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (30 MINUTES)

Today we will read an encounter between Jesus and some of his very first followers. This comes from the account written by Luke, who tells the story of how God first invited the people of ancient Israel, and then all nations, to follow Jesus and experience salvation.

LUKE 5:1–11 (NLT)

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. ² He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³ Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

⁵ "Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." ⁶ And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! ⁷ A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

⁸ When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man." ⁹ For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. ¹⁰ His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!"

¹¹ And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?
- Jesus interrupted Simon and the other fishermen in order to reveal his identity and invite them to follow him. How do you see Jesus using Simon's work as part of his invitation? Why do you think Jesus uses the fishing framework to invite followers?
- This moment was the beginning of Simon, James, and John following Jesus, and there were many other moments of saying 'yes' that came later during their journey. What do you think it might have been like to be in their shoes, deciding how to respond to Jesus as he repurposed their career? (Consider their thoughts and feelings, what they gained, what they left behind, etc.)

NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

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

Perspective: Consider that vocation includes a journey of saying 'yes' to God moment by moment as the journey winds through life. Ponder how this aspect of a Christian worldview seems true or untrue from your perspective.

Engagement: When have you already sensed an invitation to something deeper through your work or field of study? How have you responded? What do you sense might be an upcoming invitation? Pay attention to that this week.

Investment: Draw a timeline that tells the story of your education and career journey. Mark highs and lows and anything else you think is noteworthy. Meet with someone else from this group and share your story with them.

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GATHERING (10 MINUTES)

Watch this video together: [God and Vocation](#)

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (30 MINUTES)

Today, we will read about a man named John who came before Jesus (and was actually his cousin). This comes from the account written by Luke, who tells the story of how God first invited the people of ancient Israel, and then all nations, to follow Jesus and experience salvation.

LUKE 3:1–20 (NLT)

It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. ² Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. ³ Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. ⁴ Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,

"He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,

'Prepare the way for the Lord's coming!

Clear the road for him!

⁵ The valleys will be filled,

and the mountains and hills made level.

The curves will be straightened,
and the rough places made smooth.

⁶ And then all people will see
the salvation sent from God.”

⁷ When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, “You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? ⁸ Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. ⁹ Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰ The crowds asked, “What should we do?”

¹¹ John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”

¹² Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”

¹³ He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”

¹⁴ “What should we do?” asked some soldiers.

John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.”

¹⁵ Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷ He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” ¹⁸ John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

¹⁹ John also publicly criticized Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, for marrying Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for many other wrongs he had done. ²⁰ So Herod put John in prison, adding this sin to his many others.

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?
- Who are the different communities John is confronting, and how does John want each of them to respond? Why do you think John is calling for this in preparation of Jesus (verse 4)?
- John is traveling from place to place and telling people that they “should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven” (verse 3). How would you define true “repentance” based on just this passage? How do you see repentance evident in John’s life?

NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

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

Perspective: Consider that following God in your vocation includes practical, tangible changes in behavior and daily habits. This means taking risks and acting boldly in ways that express and embody what you think and believe. Ponder how this aspect of a Christian worldview seems true or untrue from your perspective

Engagement: Examine your field of study and think of 1–2 aspects you think John might have challenged your community to change in response to his message. What would true “repentance” look like for your field in those areas? Make a plan and consider what it would look like to take steps toward that change personally.

Investment: John calls his listeners to economic change that reflects their faith in God. Gather a few people from your field of study and discuss economic and other practical pressures that affect your field. In what ways are repentance needed? Commit together to growing your understanding of those needs and seeking to learn more.

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GATHERING (OPTIONAL)

- Which next step did you try after our last study? How did it go?
- What did you learn about yourself, humanity, or God?

VIDEO INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

How can Christians make a difference in the world? Is it just about getting other people to become Christians? Or pushing certain political agendas? Gaining and using power?

This video series explores how Christians can truly make a difference in the world.

First, we refuse to accept that healthcare must be impersonal and not for everyone. We refuse to accept that schools must fail our poorest children. We refuse to accept that businesses are only accountable to profits and shareholders. We can imagine how things could be different.

Second, we focus on changing systems and structures. Institutions can be large and may seem impenetrable, which makes us feel paralyzed. But cultures only change when systems change.

And third, we build intentional, strategic networks among those who can bring about change. Research shows that what brings the greatest transformation is not individual heroes but vision-driven networks.

This video series shows us how that can be done. We profile people and communities who are literally changing their part of the world. You'll meet Christians who believe the vision of Jeremiah 29:7—when God tells his people to “seek the welfare of the city” where they are held captive—and who are doing exactly that in medicine, business, education, technology, and other career fields. They refuse to accept the status quo. They seek to change the system. And they create new networks to take collective action.

We call this approach to culture change “faithful presence,” and this set of videos is all about what that can look like.

You may not agree with everything that is said in the videos. They are unscripted, raw conversations. But we hope they spark dialogue among leaders, mentors, parents, and teens who want to discuss what it means to live faithfully in a broken world.

Change is possible. These videos show us how.

VIDEO DISCUSSION (40 MINUTES)

Let's watch and discuss three videos about God and vocation.

VIDEO 1

Discuss (3 minutes): What does God have to do with your field of work or study?

Watch (5 minutes): Please select the field that is closest to your own.

Discuss (5 minutes): What do you appreciate about this video content? What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?



[Business](#)



[Education](#)

VIDEO 2

Discuss (3 minutes): How might your field of work or study fuel inequity?

Watch (5 minutes): Please select the field that is closest to your own.

Discuss (5 minutes): What do you appreciate about this video content? What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?



[Business](#)



[Education](#)

VIDEO 3

Discuss (3 minutes): What's good and what's hard about your field of work or study?

Watch (5 minutes): Please select the field that is closest to your own.

Discuss (5 minutes): What do you appreciate about this video content? What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?



[Business](#)



[Education](#)

(Entire video library of "God and Vocation" titles [available here](#).)

Conclusion: What is one thing you want to remember from our conversation today?

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GATHERING (10 MINUTES)

- What stuck with you from the videos we watched in our last study?
- What did you learn about yourself, humanity, or God?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (30 MINUTES)

Today we will read an account called "The Tower of Babel" from the Hebrew Bible. This is a sacred text of both the Jewish community and followers of Jesus, and it tells the story of God (the Lord) bringing people back to God's original plan: "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it" (Genesis 1:28 NLT). Following this plan would have naturally led to the development of many different cultures around the world.

GENESIS 11:1–9 (NLT)

At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words. ² As the people migrated to the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there.

³ They began saying to each other, "Let's make bricks and harden them with fire." (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.) ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let's build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world."

⁵ But the Lord came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building.

⁶ "Look!" he said. "The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! ⁷ Come, let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other."

⁸ In that way, the Lord scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why the city was called Babel, because that is where the Lord confused the people with different languages. In this way he scattered them all over the world.

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?
- God opposed the people in their attempt to consolidate power and build structures that would make them famous (in contrast to God's original instructions that they would spread across the earth and care for the community of creation). Why do you think God intercepts their plan and scatters them?
- What does God's opposition against the great city and tower have to do with vocation (or human participation in God's work of renewing all things)?

NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

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

Perspective: Giving different languages and scattering the people caused the development of many different cultures, which the Spirit of God later affirmed by speaking to a diverse crowd such that each person could hear God's voice in their own language (Acts 2:1–13). Ponder how this aspect of a Christian worldview seems true or untrue from your perspective.

Engagement: One way that humans consolidate power today is through accumulating wealth while others are left with too little. Research the cost of living in your area and compare that to the range of salaries earned in your community. Visit livingwage.mit.edu to begin your research. Look for information about whether those earning the least in your community are able to cover basic needs (food, clothing, housing, etc.). Share what you find with a friend.

Investment: Clinging to healthy and just motives in your field of study and career journey can be difficult in the long run, so take time now to begin a regular practice of examining your motives. Write 2–3 questions you can ask yourself perhaps weekly or monthly. These questions should help you examine areas such as the choices you are making, the impact of your choices on yourself and the broader community, your motives, how you feel in relation to God, your level of joy, and so on. Consider interviewing someone in your field to learn about how they have cared for their own ethical formation as they participate in helping the whole community flourish.

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GATHERING (10 MINUTES)

- Which next step did you try after our last study? How did it go?
- What did you learn about yourself, humanity, or God?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (30 MINUTES)

Today we will look at another story from Luke's account about Jesus and his ministry. During this time, tax collectors were known for building personal wealth by extorting their own people (taking more money than they should in their tax collections). They were Jewish people who had been hired by the Roman government, so they were despised by their communities and viewed as traitors.

LUKE 19:1–10 (NLT)

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. ² There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. ³ He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today."

⁶ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. ⁷ But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled.

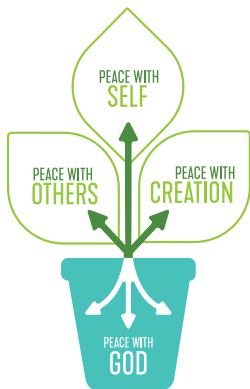
⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

⁹ Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?
- Zacchaeus was an outsider in his own community because of the way he built wealth at the expense of his neighbors. Encountering Jesus changed everything. Why do you think Zacchaeus responded so radically to his interaction with Jesus?
- What Jesus calls “salvation” in this section involves redistribution of wealth in a way that would have deeply impacted the whole community. What is attractive to you about this example of Zacchaeus following Jesus? What concerns you or makes you hesitate?

NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

This study series has helped us explore God and the lives of people like Zacchaeus. In just a moment, we will have a chance to make a decision about making peace with God for ourselves, but first, I will explain more about what it means to follow Jesus and find peace with God.



Humanity craves peace with God. Peace with God is the soil from which we were created. The creation story tells us we were made “in God’s image,” made to be intimately connected to the God who formed us.

Shalom is a Hebrew word meaning wholeness, health, and complete peace. *Shalom* was God’s intent for creation—with Creator, within ourselves, with one another, and with creation.



God intended *shalom*, but *shalom* has been broken by the injustices we have done toward God, ourselves, one another, and creation.



The way of Jesus is the journey toward *shalom*. Through Jesus, we can find peace with God, ourselves, and the world around us.

To restore *shalom* and find peace with God, we must admit that we have broken *shalom* and that we need forgiveness. We decide to believe that Jesus is the way to peace with God, and we commit to following him.

The way of Jesus is a team effort. Jesus-followers need a community of other Jesus-followers with whom to seek shalom. Jesus told his followers to pursue him and his way of life above our own needs, trusting God to take care of us. We learn how to live this way by reading the books of the Bible that are firsthand accounts of Jesus' life—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Would you like to become a follower of Jesus? Jesus is the way to peace with God, and he is available today to walk with you, talk with you, and guide you in his paths. To begin following Jesus, we can pray this prayer:

“Jesus, I want to live your way of shalom. I admit I have broken shalom, and I need your forgiveness. I believe you can give me peace, and I commit to following you. Teach me how to experience peace with you, within myself, with others, and with creation.”

It takes courage to pursue Jesus and follow his way of life. Are you ready to do that? It's important to interact with Jesus about this, just like Zacchaeus had the chance to do. Let's take a silent moment to ask, "Jesus, are you inviting me to follow you?" (allow 30 seconds of silence)

Discussion: Would anyone like to share about their moment of silence? If you sensed Jesus inviting you to follow him, what was that like for you and how are you responding?

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GATHERING (10 MINUTES)

- What stuck with you from the conversation about following Jesus in our last study?
- What did you learn about yourself, humanity, or God?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (30 MINUTES)

Today we will read from the book of Daniel, an ancient prophetic text considered sacred in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Daniel was a Hebrew man who was taken captive along with many others by the Babylonian empire after they attacked the city of Jerusalem. The third year of Jehoiakim was 606–605 BC (verse 1), and the first year of Cyrus' reign over Babylon began in October 539 BC (verse 21).

DANIEL 1:1–21 (NLT)

During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god.

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. ⁴ "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon." ⁵ The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service.

⁶ Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. ⁷ The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names:

Daniel was called Belteshazzar.

Hananiah was called Shadrach.

Mishael was called Meshach.

Azariah was called Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. ⁹ Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel. ¹⁰ But he responded, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded."

¹¹ Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ¹² "Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said. ¹³ "At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's food. Then make your decision in light of what you see." ¹⁴ The attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. ¹⁶ So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.

¹⁷ God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams.

¹⁸ When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service. ²⁰ Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.

²¹ Daniel remained in the royal service until the first year of the reign of King Cyrus.

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?
- Make a list of everything Babylon is doing to force Daniel and his companions to assimilate. What do you imagine it was like for Daniel and the others to face this situation after being forcibly removed from their homeland?
- Daniel resists by refusing the king's food, one of the very few choices remaining in the total program of assimilation. Why do you think Daniel was trying so hard to preserve his identity while being held captive?

NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

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

Perspective: In your field of study, where do you notice forces of assimilation? How have they affected you? Others around you? Ponder which aspects of these forces are healthy and helpful and which are difficult or potentially damaging to you or others.

Engagement: Research institutions in your field that have worked hard to create welcoming spaces for a diversity of people. What have they done well and what impact has it made? What could they still do better? You could also look at institutions that have not worked at welcoming differences. How has this decision impacted their work?

Investment: Gather a few people in your field of study to talk about forces of assimilation and what it could look like to influence the institutions and structures around you. Invite people to share from their unique background how their field has felt aligned with their culture and practices and any places where alignment has been more difficult. What might renewal look like in these places?

GOD & VOCATION BIBLE STUDY

PURPOSE

Remember that 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.

GATHERING (5 MINUTES)

- Which next step did you try after our last study? How did it go?
- What did you learn about yourself, humanity, or God?

SCRIPTURE DISCUSSION (35 MINUTES)

Today we will look at the story of Esther, an ancient Hebrew woman who played a critical role in saving the people of God from destruction. Since this story is 10 chapters long, we will receive it by watching a 9-minute [summary of the book of Esther](#) from the Bible Project.

- What do you appreciate about this content?
- What makes you wonder? What do you disagree with?
- Who are the key characters in this story, and what is at stake for each of them?

This text is most known for the moment when Mordecai challenges Esther to advocate for her people despite the risk: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13–14 NLT).

- If you were in Esther's position, how would you have responded? Why?

NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

Discuss: In your field of study and work, what positions might you find yourself in that could contribute to rescuing or greatly blessing people? How willing are you to take risks to use your position for serving others?