



Vocations and Occupations: Clarity on Callings and Jobs

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God's Mission and Daily Work

God's work in the world takes place primarily through people that spend their waking hours working.

Pastors and spiritual leaders are called to equip God's people for service to the kingdom (Ephesians 4:11-16), including making disciples and doing fruitful work (Matthew 28:19; John 15:1-15).

Amid all this fruitful work, the words, "vocation" and "vocational" and the synonymous terms "calling" "mission" and "purpose" are used often. **God's people need biblical clarity on integrating their vocations (callings) and their occupations (everyday work).** These two terms are connected but not synonymous.

Our vocations (callings)

The term "vocation" comes from the Latin, "vocare" – to call or receive a call. For much of church history, vocation referred to a religious calling: a monastic order, evangelistic/missionary work or pastoral leadership.

The Reformation rekindled the priesthood of all believers (Exodus 19 and I Peter 2) and started honoring everyday work as a calling from God. Martin Luther's delightful observation that Christian shoemaking is not about adding crosses to shoes but making good shoes was a breakthrough for workers in all classes.

Toward Clarity: Understanding Our Vocation(s)

Here are some definitions that will help us.

Vocation(s): General and specific callings from God that edify the Body, enhance the world and transcend current occupational assignments.



Occupation(s): Everyday labor for the glory of God and good of others that expresses our vocation(s) while not itself being the full expression of our callings.

All believers have four vocations – callings from God that supersede job descriptions, class, gender, race or national identity.

The first and greatest vocation is to enter a relationship with the Triune Lord through Jesus Christ. This is the “general calling” to repentance and faith unto salvation (Acts 2-3, Romans 10).

The second vocation is being single or married, according to God’s grace (I Corinthians 7). Each is a gift and includes duties and liberties. In our desire to honor marriage, we often dishonor singleness. Both are honored by our Lord.

The third vocation consists of discovering and doing the “good works” designed by Jesus Christ for each believer (Ephesians 2:8-10; 3:3-10; 4:1-16). These works include our daily tasks but are more than job assignments. These works include discovering and expressing our gifts (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12-14) and wisely investing the resources our Lord has entrusted to us (Matthew 25). *We are always more than our job title, but we never outgrow daily labor with excellence and integrity.*

A fourth area of vocation: God calls his people to specific arenas that are part of God’s providential ordering of society. Art and politics, business and charity, education and compassion – all of these are used by the Lord (Colossians 3; I Timothy 2).

Toward Clarity: The Goodness of all (moral) Occupations

Our vocations are fulfilled as we are faithful to our daily occupations.

Our Occupations or Work are all moral and meaningful activities apart from leisure and rest. It includes paid and unpaid activity, labor and leadership, creative and repetitious activity. Work is a primary expression of neighborly love and the context for extending God’s mission. Parenting is work! For some believers, it comes as a shock to realize that our reward for good work in this life is more work in the next (Matthew 25)!

Occupations change based on the local and global economy and the context of culture, geography and history. Our identity and vocation are greater than current employment. Occupations are also as fulfilling as the person’s personality, giftedness, education and acquired

skills. In the 21st century, believers must awaken to their God-given callings and discover how they should be expressed in a rapidly changing world.

Occupations involve competencies that include both natural abilities and acquired skills, and the spiritual gifts are often a delightful part of the process. **In our discipleship, we must help followers of Jesus grow in the unchanging ways of the Lord while gaining the skills and wisdom for employment in an ever-evolving economy.**

Three enduring principles concerning our occupations:

Godly character is primary in all aspects of work (Galatians 5:22-23). All good work is done for God's glory and the good of others, with full integrity. Creativity, peacemaking and servanthood should guide all daily work

The church operates under a new kingdom sociology (Galatians 3:28ff). All God's people enjoy equality before the Lord, in fellowship around the Table and in access to all God-ordained assignments. Economic class, ethnic identity, gender or religious background do not determine divine assignments.

We work in a fallen-and-being-redeemed world and must confront both individual iniquity and institutional injustice (Chris Brooks) as we labor for the Lord. We have a divine obligation to "do justice" (Micah 6:8) and "break the yoke" of oppression (Is. 58) so that all people can flourish. Practically, most of humankind does not go to work whistling a cheery tune and excited about their place in the economy! This can change with better teaching on vocation and the dignity of all good work.

For pastors, these ideas on vocation and occupation demand clear thinking and careful articulation. Beginning with the infusion of a joyful work ethic with children all the way to strategic deployment of retirees, clarity and commissioning are needed.

And leaders, if you work "outside" a church or mission agency, you are not "bi-vocational" – you are "multi-occupational" – no less a called leader, just funding the work and influencing the world uniquely!

All these ideas boil down to believers realizing they are more than their current jobs and yet their current placement is a kingdom opportunity. Being yoked to Jesus and abiding in his love and power are critical (Matthew 11; John 15) as God's called people advance God's mission – occupying until our Lord returns.



Resources:

www.madetoflourish.org – resources for pastors

www.oikonomianetwork.org – seminary teachings for the local church

www.discipleshipdynamics.com – a discipleship assessment that includes calling and work