

You Matter!

You Matter to God: Faith Study for Faith Formation & Small Groups

Session 5: Listening to Your Life: Your Work & Vocation Matters

Opening Questions

- If you could do any type of work, what would you choose to do? If you could work for any organization or company, who would you like to work for?
- What is a new hobby or activity you'd like to try (if you had unlimited time and money)?
- Tell us about something that amazes you or leaves you in awe or wonder.

Opening Prayer Practice

God, we come together today to be with you and with one another. In the silence, we give you all the things that filled our day, all the distractions that fill our minds, and all that is on our hearts – so that we might be present to listen to one another and to listen for you.

(2-3 minutes of silence)

Open our hearts, God to be filled with your love. Open our hearts with wonder, to see one another as your beloved creation. Open our hearts with love, to listen deeply. Open our hearts with imagination, to see your hopes and dreams for the world. Open our hearts, God, to be your love for the world. Amen.

What Does the Bible Say?

Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 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.

Think About...

- What words or phrases stand out to you, as you read these Scripture texts today?
- Where in the text do you hear one of the themes from this series: *You Matter to God; You Matter to Your Neighbor; Your Gifts Matter; Tending the Soul or Your Vocation Matters?*

What Do Others Say?

As we've moved through this *You Matter to God* study, one of the themes that has been woven throughout is vocation. Vocation is one of those terms that deserves some unpacking because there are layers of meaning. It is common to see "vocation" used interchangeably with "occupation", work that someone is drawn to, trained for, suited for or qualified for—think *vocational school*. In this usage, vocation is often equated with paid work or an unpaid role that is still an occupation, like a stay at home parent.

Often people will talk about *vocation* as primary work and *avocation* as a hobby, interest or passion outside of one's main profession; but that feels too siloed to me. I think about my cousin's husband who works as a computer system engineer at a racetrack. For him, it is a job he does the job to pay for life while he invests his time and energy outside of his job in meaning-making work that empowers young people; but he's also done his work at his job faithfully and with great integrity for a long, long time. Both are important.

Our impulse to separate things into categories like vocation and avocation puts pressure on us to identify a grand purpose for our lives and misses a beautiful invitation of the Christian life that we hear in our reading from Colossians 3: Everything you do, in word or deed, do it in the name of Jesus. This is why I find theologian Kate Harris' definition of vocation so profoundly helpful. In her *Q Ideas* talk, she defines vocation this way:

Vocation is a big word. It is derived from the Latin word Vox—meaning "voice" or "vocal." Vocation quite literally means "one's entire life lived in response to God's voice or God's call."

Calling is the same word. It comes from the Greek root kaleo. It adds a little bit of dimension that means "to give name to" or "receive name from." It reminds us that calling is mostly a word about identity and belonging. It's a word about who we are and to whom we belong much more than it is a word about what we do.

—Kate Harris in *Defining Vocation*, *Q Ideas*, www.qideas.org.
Find information on this video at the end of the reflection.
Permission granted to use in this session.

This definition reminds me of a quote from Rick Warren's book *A Purpose Driven Life*, "We are human beings, not human doings." When we start from the place of who we are and whose we are—beloved, chosen, marked by God's love, pride of God's life—then vocation becomes about how our lives, our ways of being in the world as well as what we do, are shaped by the expansive love of God that we see most clearly in Jesus.

Years ago, I participated in a discernment group online called *Big Picture Big Purpose*. One of our activities was a guided series of exercises to help us develop a personal mission statement. It

was really an exercise in paying attention to how God had already been speaking and leading us into action throughout our lives. As I listened and played with words, I found my way to a statement that still resonates deeply today. One way I understand my sense of vocation and call, my way of living in the world in response to God's voice, it is this: *Cultivating experiences that allow people to flourish.*

When I consider the work of my life that is most meaningful and dear to me, it comes back to that statement. In my role as a pastor, I try to cultivate experiences that create space for people to explore and grow in faith and participate in community in a deeper way. With family and friends, this finds expression in acts of hospitality. As a parent, I chose when to set clear boundaries and when it's okay to grant the easy yes. In ordinary interactions, I can choose to be fully present with someone rather than being distracted by my phone or to-do list or whatever is occupying my brain that day. Again, I didn't craft that statement as my aspirational mission statement—who I wanted to become; it grew out of noticing patterns in the way I had already been responding to God's voice in my life.

For me, one of the gifts of this understanding of vocation is that invites us to an ongoing practice of listening for God's voice. It invites us to be attentive to the nudges that will shape how we engage in the world. It invites us to view all parts of our lives as holy work. It invites us into the present moment as well as to dream of God's future and how we might participate in creating it. It gives us grace to just be as a beloved child of God and to respond from that place of being known and loved. What has God's voice been speaking (or whispering) to you?

-Pastor Jeanne Hartfield

Hear more from Kate Harris in:

The Language of Calling: www.qideas.org/qmoments/the-language-of-calling/

For the full version of her talk, go to (subscription may be needed):

Defining Vocation on Q Media: www.qideas.org/about-qmedia/

A Moment for Individual Reflection

Spend 1-3 minutes in silent reflection on the writing or these questions:

- What are some of the common threads or the themes in your life that keep showing up across time in how you do things or in what you do?
- What are your vocations right now? How might your faith be part of how you live out those vocations?
- What other vocations have you lived out in your lifetime? What was meaningful for you about each?

Think About...

- It's been said that *"The purpose of your life is to discover your gift. The work of your life is to develop it. The meaning of your life is to give it away."* Where are you on this journey? How could you give your gift in some new way?
- Who is someone who lives their life in a way that makes a difference, not because of what they do but because of *how* they do it? What changes could you make in *how* you do something to bring more meaning or joy?
- What patterns do you see in your life for what energizes you? What is something you do that brings you great joy?
- What experiences have given your life meaning? How does your vocation and how you live it out, create meaning?
- How has your sense of vocation changed over time? How have you been able to move through times of transitions and change, losses and blessings?
- Has your vocation been shaped in any way by difficult experiences, grief or loss? When have you lived out a vocation that you "didn't sign up for" or want? What makes it possible to live out a vocation in the worst of times?
- What injustices or needs in the world are close to your heart and might be part of how you understand your vocation in the world?
- When have you felt like you didn't have a sense of vocation? How were you able to live out God's love for others in that time?
- How are the concepts of vocation and community related? What aspects of vocation seem to apply to us as individuals? What aspects of vocation draw us into community?

Connecting Faith with Daily Life

- Next session will be the last in the series. Look back through the themes and reflect on a theme that spoke to you (see www.incarnationmn.org/ymg/). What has someone in the group said that has stayed with you? Make it a point to thank them!
- Write a prayer by journaling. Start with a statement like:
 - God, I feel you are calling me to something new...
 - God, right where I am now, I want to know how to live out your love more fully...
- Read more about vocation. Find out more about the resources below www.collegevilleinstitute.org/vocation-projects/books-from-our-projects/
 - *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* by Parker Palmer
 - *The Stories We Live: Finding God's Calling All around Us* by Kathleen Cahalan
 - *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons* by Bonnie Miller-McLemore
 - Articles at: www.collegevilleinstitute.org/vocation-projects/bearings-articles/
 - Life stories on vocation videos at: www.collegevilleinstitute.org/vocation-projects/resources-for-congregations/lives-explored/

Closing Prayer

The Lutheran Prayer of Good Courage (LBW p. 153)

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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