

My Vocation in Christ

• Lesson Two •

Through My Vocation, I Love and Serve My Neighbor

1. Our vocations place us into relationships with other people
2. God works through our vocations to bless the people around us

Worship

Why do people covet positions of authority? For some, it's the prestige. For others, it's the power. They dream about being able to have and do whatever they want, whenever they want.

Jesus' attitude toward his high position was far different. And it's a good thing for us that it was! Today we read selected verses from Philippians chapter 2 that speak of Christ's attitude toward his position.

Leader: Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Group: **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,**

Leader: But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Group: **And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!**

Leader: Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

Group: **That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

Leader: And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

Group: **To the glory of God the Father.**

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came not to be served but to serve and to give your life as a ransom for many. Send your Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith in you and to create in us the same attitude of humble service. Amen.

Introduction

“What's in it for me?”

By nature, human beings take that attitude toward just about everything. If someone wants us to do something, they usually have to convince us that it's to our advantage. If it's not, we're not interested.

When the Scriptures speak to us about our vocations, however, they don't address us as we are by nature. They address the new creatures we are in Christ. New creatures in Christ don't ask, "What's in it for me?" They have a whole new way of looking at things.

Studying God's Word

Our vocations place us into relationships with other people

In the last lesson, we learned that our vocations are really the different roles God assigns us in life. But our vocations are more than just roles we fulfill. A Christian mother doesn't get that name unless she's *somebody's* mother. A Christian employer is always *somebody's* employer. By calling me into a vocation, God has placed me into a unique relationship with special people who surround me. Why has God done this?

- Read Luke 10:25-37.

1. What does the expert's question (verse 25) imply about the way of salvation?

It implies that one can inherit eternal life by doing something. This is why Jesus leads him to the answer that comes from the law, not the answer that comes from the gospel. The expert first needed to be shown that the law's demands were impossible for him to meet.

2. Jesus' answer probably made the expert feel a little foolish. Why?

Jesus showed the expert that he already knew the answer. Jesus also showed that there's nothing difficult about understanding what God's law demands. Doing it is another matter.

3. In one word, what does God's law demand? For whom?

Love, for God and our neighbor.

4. Jesus' story richly illustrates the meaning of two key words in verse 27. From the context (see especially verse 37), explain the meaning of:

a. *neighbor*—Someone to whom we have an opportunity to show mercy.

b. *love*—To have mercy on someone and help the person by meeting his or her needs.

5. How did the Samaritan find his neighbor?

The Samaritan simply opened his eyes. The only way he could have overlooked the injured man would have been to avoid him purposely, as the priest and the Levite did.

6. The Samaritan knew what to do for the man. His needs were obvious: he was naked, beaten, and half dead. Compare that to the way we know what to do for our neighbors.

In the same way, the needs of the people around us—our neighbors—are usually very easy to spot. Serving others in our vocations is a simple matter: (1) Ask yourself, “What does this person need?” (2) Give it to him!

7. Did Jesus practice what he preached in this parable? How? For whom?

Jesus “went around doing good” (Acts 10:38) throughout his ministry. Above all, by giving his life to save us, Jesus—our neighbor and friend—loved us and met our deepest need.

God's Word in My Life

A homeless person says: “The church down on 3rd Street has real Christians in it. I’m not so sure about the church on 10th Avenue. When I stop by the 10th Avenue church, all I get is a prayer and a tract. The 3rd Street church gives me a hot meal and a place to sleep.”

Respond.

James 2:15,16 and 1 John 3:17,18 give us something to think about. God warns us against using pious words as a substitute for action when we see our neighbor in need. We are not loving our neighbor as ourselves if we simply hand him a tract when he’s hungry. But we should never take this to mean that sharing God’s Word with someone is a lesser act of love than feeding him. Why not do both?

Thus we must now learn to follow this example of Christ and observe this injunction in our mutual relations, each one in his own calling toward his neighbor.

—Martin Luther (*Luther’s Works* 24:247)

God works through our vocations to bless the people around us

Suppose you have been hired by a charitable agency to distribute food to a famine-stricken region in Africa. Picture the people as they crowd around you, taking their food, and thanking you over and over. Think how gratifying it would be to know you were truly helping someone. Think how embarrassed you would be by all their thanks and praise—because you know that it isn’t really you, but someone else they can’t see, who is providing the food.

Through your vocation, someone else is really at work to help the people around you—someone they can’t see.

- Read Matthew 6:25-34.

1. What gifts of God does Jesus describe in these verses?

Food and clothing.

2. We don’t always think of the fact that God works through our vocations. But as an example, think of a pair of your jeans (made of cotton). Beginning with the cotton grower, list as many people as you can who handled them before you first put them on.

The cotton had to be grown, harvested, spun into thread, woven into fabric, dyed, cut out and stitched into jeans, stored, shipped to a retailer, advertised, displayed, and sold. People fulfilling their vocations were involved at every step.

3. If all these people did the work, how can Jesus say that *God* clothes us?

God clothes us through the people who serve in their respective vocations.

4. Evaluate these statements:

- a. “The people who sold me my jeans don’t ‘love’ me. They weren’t trying to help me in my need for clothing. They were trying to make a buck.”

God, who is behind it all, certainly wasn’t trying to “make a buck.” He sincerely wanted to bless you and care for you.

Some of the people God used may well have been Christians who look at their jobs as their vocations—their opportunity to serve you, their fellow human being. (Providing us with clothing may seem to be an unspectacular way to serve, but it’s a good thing there are people who do this.) Others may have been unbelievers who were simply trying to “make a buck.” But God does not require good intentions in order to bless us through others (see Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28). He does not even require good intentions on our part in order to bless us (Matthew 5:44,45).

- b. “All God did was to set up the process—the laws of nature that make the cotton grow, the laws of economics that get the jeans to market, and such. Then he sits back and watches it all work. But it’s not really God that’s doing it.”

This is Deism—the belief that God is not continually involved in his creation but simply sits back and lets it work. Scripture rejects Deism very emphatically. See Deuteronomy 8:3,17,18; Matthew 4:4; John 5:17; 2 Corinthians 9:10,11; and the like.

God’s Word in My Life

A young person comes to you and says: “I don’t know what to do with my life. I’ve taken tests that show what aptitudes I have, but the careers they recommend for me sound really boring. I have hobbies I enjoy but none that would provide a decent living. What should I do?”

How might it help this person to study what the Bible says about our vocations?

Often we make decisions like this more difficult by focusing on ourselves—our needs, our aptitudes, our interests, and so on. The Bible’s discussion about vocation teaches us to get our eyes off ourselves and onto our neighbors. Suppose this young person asked different questions: “What do the people I know seem to need? With the aptitudes that I have, how could I serve others best?”

This question concerns a young person on the brink of a career decision. This person is not in danger of abandoning one vocation in order to pursue another—something that Luther said is extremely dangerous (*Luther’s Works*, 3:65). More about this in the next lesson.

What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but just such a child's performance, by which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.

—Martin Luther (*Luther's Works* 14:114)

Life with God

- Day 1: Reread Colossians 3:23,24. Prayer suggestion: Read or sing “Take My Life and Let It Be” (*Christian Worship* [CW] 469).
- Day 2: Read Genesis 1:1–2:3. What clues do you see that God intended, from the start, to work through his creation to bless humanity? (Note especially verses 1:11,14,24,26,28, and 2:3)
- Day 3: Read Exodus 16:1-35.
- Day 4: Read Judges 7:1-25. Who saved Israel from the Midianites? What do you learn from the account of Gideon that you can apply to your own work and life?
- Day 5: Read 1 Samuel 17:1-51. Think of ways God has used historical figures to bless us.
- Day 6: Read 1 Kings 17:7-16. Consider how important our faith in God is as we honor him through our vocations.
- Day 7: Pray Psalm 104.