

*LIFEWOR*K BIBLE STUDY

DEVELOPMENT



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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this Bible study is to help you begin to search the Scripture with “vocational eyes,” the eyes of the accountant, the farmer, or the health care worker. How does the character of God frame your vocation? God is the Master Communicator. What does He have to say about communication? He is the Master Architect. What does He have to teach you, His student, about design or construction? He is the Master Teacher. What does He have to convey to you about the philosophy and methodology of education? He is the Divine Healer. What does Scripture have to say about health, sickness, and healing?

In studying the Scriptures to develop a biblical theology of vocation, we are not looking so much for proof texts as “context.” The Bible does not speak exhaustively on any vocation. It does not give “ten easy steps.” It does speak in terms of principles¹ and precepts.² These provide a context for understanding our work and framing our mind, motivation, and method of our work. As you search the Scriptures, look for principles that have application to your vocation. Be careful not to put human attributes on God, but see things in His nature, as He reveals Himself in Scripture and in the person of Christ. God is the prototype/archetype for human activity.

As you do this study, look from two vantage points. If we think of the Scriptures as a forest, we must first spend some time *inside* the forest studying individual “trees”—verses—as well as their surroundings—the passage or book of the Bible. Second, we must look at the forest from the *outside*, viewing it from a mountaintop. This gives us the big picture—the meta-story, or worldview perspective. The entire Bible is God’s Transforming Story. We may learn details about vocation from examining individual verses—“trees”—of Scripture as well as gain conceptual understanding from looking from the mountaintop of the Biblical worldview. In Genesis 1:29 God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth...” This provides a mountaintop view of agriculture. God, the Creator of the universe, is The Agriculturalist—He created the concept of seed-bearing plants and the sowing/reaping system. John 15:1-2 reads, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” Here Jesus used a particular agricultural technique, namely “cutting” and “pruning” as a metaphor for our lives in Christ. Aside from the spiritual importance, we learn that for a vine or tree to maximize its potential, weak branches must be “cut off” and strong ones must be “pruned.”

As you study Scripture generally or in developing a biblical theology of vocation, be sure to spend time reflecting both on the details and on the big-picture Worldview of Scripture.

Some might say, “This is too much work!” I would respond by saying that developing a Biblical Theology of Vocation is not an event in a person’s life; it is part of traveling on the road of life-long learning. We spend most of our lives in some kind of a work capacity. How much more satisfying it could be if we understood the place of our work within the framework of God’s unfolding Kingdom.

In this study, you will find:

¹ Principle: “..., the cause, source or origin of anything; that from which a thing proceeds; ... A general truth;” [Noah] Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, © 1995, Christian Technologies, Inc.

² Precept: “..., any commandment or order intended as an authoritative rule of action;” [Noah] Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, © 1995, Christian Technologies, Inc.

- ◆ **Nature of God:** Offers insight on that part of God’s character from which the vocation may be framed.
- ◆ **Foundation verse(s):** Offers a potential starting point for exploring the vocation.
- ◆ **Discovery verses:** Identifies a few representative verses found in Scripture that may help to shape our vocational understanding. The verses used in the Discovery section are a small starting point. They are representative, not exhaustive.
- ◆ **Vocational insight:** Provides a place to write any insights you gain from the passage. Each vocation has one of the boxes filled in as an example of a potential insight.
- ◆ **Questions for further reflection and application:** Provides a place to answer the question, “How am I going to apply what I am learning?” It is a place to record questions the passage raises on which you may want to further reflect. Again, an example is presented in each vocation.
- ◆ **Quote:** Provides an insight from one of the “great cloud of witnesses” related to the vocation.
- ◆ The symbol * identifies similar vocations

As you study, pray and ask God to open your eyes of understanding as to how the truth of Scripture may speak into your vocation.

As you study the Discovery verses, ask questions of the text in the following order:

1. **What does it say? (Hear the text!)** Look for new insights about God, man, and creation as they relate to your vocation. As mentioned earlier, look at both individual “trees” as well as the larger “forest.”
2. **What does it mean?** What light does this shed on my occupation?
3. **Look for principles.** For example, a principle for relief work may be found in Ruth 2:15-19. Boaz recognized that Ruth’s dignity was as important as her need for food. How would a relief worker do their work in a way that affirms the dignity of people caught in a crisis?
4. **Look for technical knowledge.** For example, under health care, Deuteronomy 23:12-14 establishes the need for “pit latrines.” In addition, note why pit latrines are necessary. What is the relationship between a Holy God and sanitation? What if there is no concept of a Holy God in the culture where a health promoter is working? What are the barriers of that for sanitation?
5. **How does it apply?** What am I going to do with this? What does God want me to do with this as it relates to my vocation? The passage itself may raise questions in your own mind that require further reflection. Those may be recorded in the column labeled “Questions for Further Reflection and Application.”

An individual may want to pick the occupation closest to their own and work through the study to gain a sense of how a Biblical Theology of Vocation can enliven and give depth to one’s work.

Enjoy!

DEVELOPMENT*

Nature of God: Creator/developer

Foundation verse: Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

Discovery

Verses	Vocational Insight	Questions for Further Reflection and Application
Genesis 1:26-28	<i>God blessed Adam and Eve for a purpose—to develop the earth, to expand the garden, to ?? Mankind is God’s vice-regent, the caretaker of His household. His intention is that His servants expand and beautify His creation.</i>	
Genesis 2:15		
Genesis 2:19-20		
Genesis 12:1-4		
Psalm 8:3-6		

* community mobilizer, community illustrator, contractor/consultant

Verses	Vocational Insight	Questions for Further Reflection and Application
Psalm 33:6-9		
Isaiah 11:7-9		
Isaiah 25:6-8		
Matthew 28:19-20		
Hebrews 11:3		
Revelation 21:23-26		

One of the nearer biblical equivalents to the word “development” is in fact “revelation”. Something revealed is un-covered, un-veiled, laid bare or disclosed. In the Bible God is usually the one who does the “revealing”. Who then is the chief agent of development? The object of human development is obviously man, himself. He is also in some sense the subject of the process, but is there not another purpose unfolding beyond his own? An attempt to define development in the light of Scripture, as well as in its modern context, must somehow relate to God, himself. Human development on such terms could be described as the progressive realisation of man’s potential and the enrichment of his life, according to God’s purpose, through the good use of the material and spiritual resources available to him. Perhaps as a working definition that formula will serve.

God’s purpose as it relates to development finds its echoes throughout the Scriptures. The greatest consummation is found suggestively in the book of Revelation, and the first references occur in the opening chapters of Genesis. God said to man, newly created, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ... over every living thing ... I have given you every plant for food.” This first great commission given to man was a commission to develop. It was world-wide in its scope, but it was to have a direct application to his immediate surroundings. We read that God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden “to till it and to keep it”. The suggestion here is that man was to have an active role in development, and that he was to start his work where God had put him. He had a global, but also a local, responsibility. Are we then to imagine that Eden was the location of the first development project? In fact a far greater enterprise preceded it. The whole creation is presented as a work of cosmic development. In the beginning the earth was “without form and void”, but with a craftsman’s skill God progressively shaped, filled, organised, beautified and peopled it. The framework of the “days” of creation make us think of one who “goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening.” This master craftsman rests, having accomplished his task; like a great artist, he stands back to appreciate his canvas. The writer to the Hebrews adds a final comment: “The builder of all things is God.”

In Scripture the Creator is revealed to us as the great Developer, and the development commission is given to man created in his image. It is within man’s nature to be creatively engaged in development, because that activity is part of God’s nature too. In this respect, as in others, man is called to reflect the divine genius.

Maurice Sinclair
The Green Finger of God
pp. 18-19

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