

LIFEWORK ADVANCED STUDY



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LifeWork: Developing a Biblical Theology of Vocation

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Introduction to the Advanced Bible Study

If you have found the concept of developing a biblical theology of vocation (BTV) helpful from the Basics exercise, you are able to move on for an advanced, more serious study.

The Basics exercise was meant to “get you on the road” to developing a BTV. Advanced will help you “walk the road” of being a life-long learner, of connecting your vocation to the Kingdom of God.

A young Japanese Christian thanked me one time for sharing my thoughts on BTV. She had studied city planning while in university in Japan. She knew that God was building a city (Hebrews 11:10), and thus He must be interested in cities. She told me that during the four years of university studies, she read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation to see what God had to say about cities. Intuitively she wanted to integrate the Word of God with her profession. This should be common practice for Christians. Hopefully this Advanced exercise will give you a tool to begin to develop a BTV for your profession.

There are two different tools offered here. One is a Word Study (WS) tool and the other is a Reading through the Scriptures (RS) tool. The RS tool can be used by anyone. All you need is a Bible.

The WS tool will give you a means to examine the Scriptures through the study of words related to your vocation. (See “Why Words?” in the Appendix.) Because this tool uses the Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary of English as a necessary resource, the process will only work for people who read and write English and who have internet access. The dictionary is found at www.christiantech.com.

In either exercise you will need to journal. For information on journaling, please see the Appendix at the end of this booklet.

Tool #1

Reading through the Scriptures

In this Reading through the Scriptures exercise you will find a suggested plan for doing a search of the entire scriptures to help you have a more in-depth, comprehensive look at your vocation. Feel free to customize this process to meet your own needs.

This comprehensive look, in addition to being done by an individual, can be done by a group all working in a common vocation. For instance, the Bible might be broken up into a number of different sections, and each person could study one section and then communicate their insights with the larger group. As an example, the following eight divisions could be used for a group process.

- ◆ Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible)
- ◆ Historical Books part 1 (Joshua-II Kings)
- ◆ Historical Books part 2 (I Chronicles-Job)
- ◆ Wisdom Literature (Psalms-Song of Solomon)
- ◆ Prophets part 1 (Isaiah-Lamentations)
- ◆ Prophets part 2 (Ezekiel-Malachi)
- ◆ The Gospels and Acts
- ◆ The Letters and Revelation

Enjoy the adventure!

Step 1:

Have a clear concept **or** at least a general sense of your vocational calling. In the space below, identify your vocation and briefly list some of the key elements of your work.

Example: Agriculture

Key Elements of Agriculture: harvesting, plowing, planting, nurturing, cultivation

Your vocation:

Key Elements of Your Work:

Step 2:

Prayerfully read the Bible through in one year (or whatever time frame you want to establish), from Genesis to Revelation.

Step 3:

Keep a daily journal of your reading. As you read through the Scripture, ask the question, “Does this text speak in any way to my vocational calling?” If it does, then:

- a) Identify the chapter and verse of the text.
- b) Write down the insight that you have gained from that text in relationship to your vocational calling.
- c) Identify questions for further reflection.
- d) Identify potential answers to the questions, “So what? How could I potentially apply what I have learned in my vocational sphere?”

Step 4:

As you are doing your reading, begin to share some of the insights with others. This will reinforce what you are learning and also begin to help others understand their need for developing a vocational theology.

Step 5:

As you reflect, identify a “foundation verse” for your vocational theology. This should be the primary verse that “ties everything else together” or is the end of the “thread” that you are going to pull on throughout the Scripture. You will find examples of foundation verses in the Basics section.

The foundation verses should clearly reflect something of the nature of God because it is His character that is to be manifest into our vocational areas.

Step 6:

After you have read the scriptures through in one year, go back and review your journal.

- a) Organize the materials you have discovered.
- b) Consider the questions for further reflection.
- c) Begin to develop a biblical framework for your “life work.”

This should result in the establishment of a series of principles to guide your vocation.

Step 7:

Develop a series of inductive Bible studies in your vocational sphere. This can be used to teach others who share your vocational calling.

Tool #2
Conducting a Word Study

Step 1:

Identify the key word that describes your vocation.

Example: Agriculture

Step 2:

Make a list of words that are synonyms or related words to your vocation. This list may be used to identify other words to study. Make sure you have a minimum of six additional words:

Examples:

- ◆ Farming
- ◆ Farmer
- ◆ Seed(s)
- ◆ Planting
- ◆ Nurturing
- ◆ Harvesting
- ◆ Food
- ◆ Garden(ing)
- ◆ Cultivation
- ◆ Weeds
- ◆ Soil
- ◆ Plough

Step 3:

NOTE: This step will require you to have or to purchase a copy of Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary.⁵ Look up the words and write down the definitions. Highlight or underline other critical words or phrases that you observe in this definition. (See examples in *italics* below). Keep track of your insights and questions in your journal.

AG'RICULTURE, n. [L. ager, a field, and cultura, cultivation. See Acre and *Culture*.]
In general sense, the *cultivation* of the ground, for the purpose of producing vegetables, and fruits, for the use of man and beast; or the art of preparing the soil, sowing and planting seeds, dressing the plants, and removing the crops. In this sense, the word includes gardening, or *horticulture*, and also the raising and feeding of cattle, or stock. But in a more common and appropriate sense, it is used to signify that species of

⁵ Why this particular dictionary? Dictionaries are tools that shape our thinking and reasoning as through them, words are given precise meanings. The writer of the dictionary determines the worldview that is propounded through it. The Noah Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language, defines every word both in the original language and *from the biblical usage*. Modern dictionaries reflect current cultural corruptions and erosions of vocabulary by atheistic philosophies.

cultivation which is intended to raise grain and other crops for man and beast. It is equivalent to *husbandry*.

Agriculture is the most general occupation of man.

OPTIONAL – For additional insight, look up the same word in a modern dictionary, such as a Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary. Pay particular attention to whether the definition of the word has changed over time as a result of the secularization of western culture.

Step 4:

Choose a significant word (or words) within the definition in Step 3 and look up this word in Webster’s 1828. Write down the definition and highlight or underline any key significant words or phrases. Step 4 can be repeated to create as deep or broad a study as desired.

Example: We chose the word “culture.”

CULTURE, n. [L. See *Cultivate*.]

1. The act of tilling and preparing the earth for crops; cultivation; the application of labor or other *means of improvement*.

We ought to blame the culture, not the soil.

2. The application of labor or other means to *improve good qualities* in, or *growth*; as the *culture of the mind*; the *culture of virtue*.

3. The application of labor or other means in producing; as the culture of corn, or grass.

4. Any labor or means employed for improvement, *correction* or growth.

Step 5:

Scripture Search a) Look up the Scripture passages that might have been found in Webster’s 1828 definitions. Then begin to cross reference in your study Bible, to other passages where this theme is found. b) Use a concordance, in the back of your study Bible, or an exhaustive tool like Strong’s Concordance to trace the word throughout Scripture. c) Use a Bible dictionary or biblical encyclopedia as a study tool to further explore the word or topic in Scripture. Step “c” should be done after you have done a rather exhaustive search on your own through “a” and “b” above. Keep track of your insights and questions in your journal.

Examples:

- ◆ Genesis 1:11-13: Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.
- ◆ Genesis 1: 28-29: God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.”

- ◆ Genesis 2: 8-9: Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.
- ◆ Genesis 2:15: The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
- ◆ Genesis 2:19-20: Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.
- ◆ Psalms 104:14-15: He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.

Step 6:

Repeat steps 4-5 with other words from Step 2.

Step 7:

Deduce basic biblical principles from the word study in Steps 3-5.

Examples:

- ◆ God is the First Farmer and He planted the first garden (Genesis 2:15).
- ◆ God designed the miracle of the seed (Genesis 1:11-12, 29).
- ◆ Farming is a godly profession.
- ◆ Man was put in the garden to conserve the land (make it healthier) and to progress it (to increase its production).
- ◆ In naming the animals, man is having dominion over nature and is a creator of culture.
- ◆ There is a wonderful relationship between *agriculture* and culture.

Step 8:

Establish some applications for the principles in Step 6:

Examples:

- ◆ A farmer should establish practices for leaving the soil on his farm in better condition than when he inherited it.
- ◆ A farmer needs to *think* about farming, so that his work is consciously contributing to cultural creation.
- ◆ A farmer should seek ecologically sound ways of increasing the yields of his land.

Step 9:

Write down a definition of the word that relates to your own vocation.

Example: Agriculture, the first and most general occupation for man, involves the cultivation of the soil to both conserve it and make it bountiful; it also includes the cultivation of the soul and mind as the agriculturalist is to name the animal and extend culture.

Step 10:

Develop a series of inductive Bible studies on your vocation, for sharing with others who are part of you vocation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

If you are interested in reading further about *lifework*, I recommend the following books.

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