

**Study on Calling
By Vince Burens**

Week 1

The Nature of a Calling

How would you define the nouns "call" or "calling"? Discuss the different meanings of "calling."

We speak here especially of "calling" as that work of God, whereby he communicates his will and purpose to a specific Christian believer. Why is "calling" an appropriate picture to use in this context?

Calling as Godly Character—What we are to be.

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

Historically, to whom is Paul speaking here? Who is the modern equivalent?

What "calling" is Paul speaking of here? How is this calling specific to believers?

What does it mean "to live a life worthy" of something? Can you give examples from your experience of living worthily?

Note the order of things here: what comes first, the "calling" or the "worthy life"? Why are we to live a worthy life?

From verses 2-6, describe what "a life worthy of the calling" looks like.

Read Hebrews 3:1

What do we learn about our calling here? What is the connection between "holiness," "brothers," "Jesus," "confession," and "fixing our thoughts"?

From these passages...

Who receives a calling? What is the essence of this calling? What character is being sought after here?

Calling as Godly Service—What we are to do.

Intro Question: When you think of "calling" as service or as vocation, what do you think about? Why?

Read Genesis 1:26

Here we read that God determined to make man and to give him a charge or purpose. What do we learn of this purpose in this verse?

How does that relate to our calling to service in this world?

Read Genesis 1:28

To whom does God give this series of commands?

Do you think these commands are restricted to a certain age? (i.e., are they addressed only to the first man and woman?)

Whose responsibility is it to fulfill these commands? Do you think that they have been satisfactorily fulfilled?

What are the specific commands God makes here? What is involved in making each happen?

Describe some acts that might be involved in "subduing the earth."

What parallels might be drawn between these acts and modern jobs? Or, to ask the question another way, how do modern vocations (medicine, engineering, business, politics, teaching, etc.) help further the task of "being fruitful, increasing in number, filling, subduing, and ruling over the earth"?

Was God's command to humankind to "work" a good thing or a bad thing? What does this say about the moral quality of work (i.e., is work good or bad)?

How do these passages counter the notion that work is a curse or "a necessary evil"?

Making the Connection

Scripture refers to Christians by many titles. What lies behind the call for all Christians to be these things? Then, do we do that in everyday life?

A servant?

A slave?

A laborer?

A minister?

Week 2

The One Who Calls

Make a list of reasons why people work. How important is each one in motivating you in your work?

Discuss the different ways in which the word "image" is used. Formulate a few definitions and then compare with a dictionary definition.

Calling as Part of Being in God's Image

Read Genesis 1:26-28

What does it mean that humanity is made "in the image" of God? What do the different nuances of the word "image" imply about our creation and/or our purpose in creation?

What does it mean for a person to be "in the spitting image of their father/mother"?

List some ways in which every person is intended to "image" God. In what ways are we NOT to "image" him?

What is the connection between the first part of God's statement in verse 26, "let us make man in our image," and the next part, "let them rule..."?

God does three things in verses 27-28: He creates, he blesses, and he commands.

A. In what ways can we "image" God by "commanding" as he has done?

How does this passage clue us in that this is part of our imaging job?

What might this "commanding" look like? What kind of work might be implied here? What does "commanding" NOT look like?

B. In what ways can we "image" God by "blessing" as he has done?

What might this "blessing" look like? What kind of work might be implied here? What does "blessing" NOT look like?

C. In what ways can we "image" God by "creating" as he has done?

What might this "creating" look like? What kind of work might be implied here? What does "creating" NOT look like?

God's work of creating out of nothing (creation ex nihilo) is clearly limited to his divine power. However, there are other aspects of the creating process God employs in Genesis chapters 1 & 2 with which we can "image" him. Read or scan Genesis 1 & 2 for ways in which God brings about the universe. What does he do that we also are to do?

How are these things connected to the modern concept of a job or vocation?

Speculate on the reasons why God might have given these commands to humankind.

The Purpose in Being an Image

Read Psalm 8

Spend some time analyzing the psalm. What are some different themes in this psalm? What primary message is the author trying to communicate?

In this psalm, the author employs a literary technique called an inclusio, through which he intends to emphasize his point. In an inclusio, an author states his main idea both at the beginning and at the end of a passage, while using the middle section to support his message. What then is the main message of Psalm 8?

What role does humankind and the creation of humanity play in that main message?

List the things that God does in this passage. What is so amazing about God?

List those things that man is to do. How does the author view humanity?

What, then, is the ultimate purpose of having a job?

Making the Connection

What do these passages, and especially the emphasis on "imaging," tell us about the purpose of our creation?

What do they tell us about what it means to be human? Can one be fully human without imaging God?

Given the connection between imaging and working, can a person truly image God without working?

How important is work to the nature and purpose of a human?

How are vocation, your creation as a human being, and God all tied together?

Week 3

The One Called

How does the concept of "gifting" relate to the way in which we image God (and go about the tasks of commanding, blessing, and creating)?

What does the term "gift" mean and how is this an appropriate term to describe the talents, abilities, and desires of an individual believer?

Calling as it relates to individual giftedness

Read I Corinthians 12:4-11

What does Paul teach us here about different gifts, services, and working? Where do they all come from?

What is the purpose of the Spirit's gifting of individuals?

What are some of the ways in which the Spirit gifts?

Who determines how the gifts are dispersed?

Are all individuals gifted equally or identically (see I Cor. 12:27-31)?

What is the relationship between "spiritual" gifts and "natural" gifts? Who determines how "natural" gifts are dispersed, and are they dispersed equally?

Read Romans 12:3-8

In light of our different gifting, how should each individual go about serving in the church?

From these passages...

In light of our different gifting, how should each individual go about serving in the world through vocation?

What are some of the ways we can determine what our gifts are?

How can our fellow believers assist us in discovering our gifts?

What are your gifts? List them and, if possible, ask others to list them for you.

For what services in the church do these gifts equip you? For what vocations do these gifts equip you?

Vocational options—thinking broadly

In considering individual giftedness and vocational options...

Read Genesis 4:20-22

What vocations are described in these verses?

Why take the time in the midst of a genealogical account to describe "raising livestock" and "forging tools"?

How do these activities relate to the human task of "imaging" God?

If "raising livestock" is an activity worthy of Scriptural attention, what vocations are unimportant?

Making the Connection

What are the criteria for determining whether or not a given vocation is honoring to God?

Do my vocational goals reflect good stewardship of the gifts which God has given me?

How can I best "image" God vocationally in light of my gifting?

Week 4

Called with a Purpose

In addition to "imaging" God, living a worthy life, and using our unique gifts, what other factors relate to our sense of vocational calling?

To what degree should the needs of the world around us impact vocational decision-making?

Called in order to...

Read Ephesians 2:10

How does Paul describe believers here? What is the purpose for which we are created?

If "good works" are integral to who we are to be as the people of God, how should this impact the options for Christian vocation?

Read James 2:14-17 and I John 3:16-18

What is the relationship between faith and works (to use James' terms) or between action and truth (to use John's terms)?

What examples do each of these authors use to make their points?

What actions are expected of the audience of these epistles?

Does the plight of our fellowman affect our call to a given vocation? To a given specialty? To a given location?

How do we apply the union of faith and works in determining God's call on our lives to a given vocation?

Does this allow us to divorce our faith from vocational decision-making? Is it possible to be a Sunday-only Christian?

What would it look like to put faith into action in my vocation?

A Case Study in Calling

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4; 2:1-5

What news does Nehemiah receive about his fellow Jews?

How does this information affect Nehemiah? What does he do for the next several days?

What is the ultimate result of Nehemiah's request?

What does Nehemiah's example teach us about the importance of external factors in helping to determine vocational calling?

How does Nehemiah "image" God? Live a worthy life? Use his unique gifts and circumstances?

Making the Connection

What priority should looking at the needs around us have in relation to other factors when seeking to determine our vocational calling? Is it more important or less important than factors such as prestige, comfort, passion, money, gifting, purpose, commute time, family proximity, etc.?

Do my vocational goals take into account God's call on my life to do good and to help meet the needs of those around me?

Have I my vocational decisions been based in part on my gifting and the need to serve others? Have other selfish motives influenced these decisions?

Do my vocational goals allow me to honor God by imaging him? Are my goals set up in a way that my gifts and the needs of the world are prioritized?

If not, what vocation would best allow me to do this?