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This ministry focus paper entitled

INTEGRATING WORK AND VOCATION AT
BROOKWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



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INTEGRATING WORK AND VOCATION AT BROOKWOOD
COMMUNITY CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ROBERT O'NEAL
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ABSTRACT

Integrating Work and Vocation at Brookwood Community Church

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School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2012

This project implemented and analyzed a strategy using coaching and instruction to equip participants in Brookwood Community Church in Shakopee, Minnesota to approach work as a facet of their vocation. Shakopee is a suburban community on the edge of the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area filled with middle-class families working in professional capacities yet struggling to find meaning in their work. This project sought to help participants think theologically about their calling, vocation, and work.

This project defines vocation as the unique task God naturally and supernaturally shapes every follower of Jesus to do that shares his mission. It utilizes instruction and coaching to help participants discover the assets and experiences that inform their vocation within the context of God's mission and work. Finally, coaches help participants create personal development plans designed to use their refined vocational understanding to guide future decisions and actions.

Part One gives detailed consideration to the character of Shakopee and the identity of Brookwood Community Church. Specifically, it identifies historical trends that have shaped Shakopee and led to persistent values concerning work. Then it examines the church's ministry philosophy and specific ministries that already address work and vocation. Part Two delves into the theology undergirding vocation, its relationship to work and the Church's place in discerning both. First, key books present and challenge a schema for understanding vocation. Then Part Two examines both the challenges and resources free-church ecclesiology poses for relating work and vocation. Finally, Part Two outlines a theology of work and vocation. Part Three reviews the experiences of a test group that worked through a process to understand and identify their God-given vocation. Part Three analyzes and evaluates the effectiveness of this strategy and draws conclusions about steps to improve the process and implement it on a broader scale.

Content Reader: Tom Sine, PhD

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To my wife, Tammi O'Neal, whose work with special needs children
inspired me to think more deeply about work itself

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INTRODUCTION

“A person’s a person, no matter how small,” concluded the hero in *Horton Hears a Who!* by Dr. Seuss, a classic children’s book that captures some of the noblest features of work.¹ Horton the elephant’s journey began when he was playing in a pool of water during the heat one day and heard a small voice calling for help. Listening to the voice, he discovered that it came from a speck of dust blowing past him and realized that there was someone on the speck who needed protection.² Horton was uniquely suited for the job by his size and conscientious approach to responsibility. He started his work by placing the speck of dust on a clover for safe keeping, but he quickly incurred the scorn of the other jungle creatures who could not hear the voice and thought that Horton was dangerously deluded. Horton protected the speck of dust and its population, the tiny “Whos” of “Who-ville,” from multiple threats to their property and lives.³ Along the way, he showed courage and tenacity as he partnered with the Whos to save their land. In the end Horton was a hero and found his accomplishments fulfilling.

Horton demonstrates what work can be like. Work can be satisfyingly meaningful, it can fit a person’s talents and personality, and even can be prompted by a tiny voice that only the worker can hear. In Horton’s case, the tiny voice came from the mayor of Who-ville. However, the mission Horton accepted resonated with the will of God, the champion of the powerless (cf. Ps 68:4-6). When Horton acted on behalf of the

¹ Theodor Seuss Geisel, *Horton Hears a Who!* by Dr. Seuss (New York: Random House, 1954), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 1-6.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

powerless, he acted in concert with God's will and unknowingly served God (cf. Deut 10:14-22).

Day after day people go to work to do things that cooperate with God's own work and will. They use talents and dispositions given by God; they put experiences and training God has provided for them to good use; they even may exercise spiritual gifts to accomplish great things. Unfortunately, many people are confused about why they work and what their works means. Horton ultimately served his own values and the voice of the tiny Mayor of Who-ville. Like Horton, many people work in service to a voice that is small indeed. They simply work to earn a living, become wealthy, or get free time for recreation. They may even do jobs that destroy rather than give life. Working under such conditions naturally seems mundane or irritating and causes people to eagerly anticipate work's end. However, work can be something more.

The beginning of a solution can be found in a deeper understanding of calling, vocation, and work. In common usage there is a difference between having a vocation and having a calling. Having a vocation may mean simply having a job, particularly one taken immediately after high school without further education.⁴ A vocation can imply a repetitive, low-skilled job. In contrast, having a calling conveys having a career that may bring satisfaction and even fulfill the dream of work being something more than mundane or irritating. A career may be something one holds closely (too closely perhaps) and through which one finds meaning. A calling further implies that one has been drawn to or directed toward a task either intrinsically by the fit between the nature of the task and the

⁴ William Placher, ed. *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 1.

talent of the worker or by some outside circumstance or voice, possibly by the voice of God.⁵ It is common to speak of a calling when speaking of the reasons for holding religiously oriented jobs, such as pastor or missionary, or to engage in regular volunteer work through a church. Therefore, having a calling can imply that the work one does flows from one's relationship with God that provides direction and purpose.⁶ Vocations and callings, then, are viewed in some ways as fundamentally different.

Etymologically speaking there is little difference between the terms "vocation" and "calling."⁷ The word "vocation" is simply the English form of the Latin word *vocare* meaning "to call."⁸ The relationship between these words suggests that every vocation should be seen as more than simply a job; it should be considered a calling. This intertwining of meanings raises the possibility that there is something God wants every person to do and that every person is called.⁹

Grasping the implications of this profound relationship between vocation and calling suggests that a job can be something more than a nuisance to be endured. R. Paul Stevens asserts that "if one were called to business that person would not only be *allowed* to work in an enterprise as an acceptable human occupation but actually *summoned* by

⁵ R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 21.

⁶ Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, 20.

⁷ Placher, *Callings*, 1.

⁸ Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, 21.

⁹ Placher, *Callings*, 2.

God to this work to fulfill God's will and purpose.”¹⁰ Furthermore, if God is concerned with work and has work for people to do, if God calls particular people to particular work, then it follows that God prepares and shapes people for the work that they do. William Placher asserts, “To believe that a wise and good God is in charge of things implies that there is a fit between things that need doing and the person I am meant to be. Finding such a fit, I find my calling.”¹¹

This final project asserts that such is the case. Each person has a unique, God-given vocation. God summoned every person into a relationship with him, and that calling includes a summons to join God in important work. A person’s vocation is the task God naturally and supernaturally shapes every follower of Jesus to do. That vocation shares God’s work and flows from the person’s unique, God-given talents and personality. Those natural assets may be developed further through a person’s experiences and formal training. For the Christian, God’s natural shaping is supplemented by spiritual gifts (cf. Rom 12:6-8) and by the growth of spiritual fruit (cf. Gal 5:22-23).

This final project will propose a strategy using coaching and instruction in order to equip participants in Brookwood Community Church in Shakopee, Minnesota to approach work as a facet of their unique, God-given vocation. Grasping and owning one’s vocation begins with self-understanding. Using inventories and timelines, participants will begin to discern God’s sovereign shaping activity in their lives. They will discover the talents God has given them, construct a timeline of the events in their

¹⁰ Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, 21.

¹¹ Placher, *Callings*, 3.

lives through which God has fitted them for work. Using these insights they will begin to draw conclusions about what their best contributions could be to both God's Kingdom and the people and tasks around them. Helping participants understand that they have a unique, God-given vocation will help them to discover what they do best, that which flows from who they are, and that which they can do with joy and greatest success.

Working from one's vocation will mean working from a position of strength.

Understanding this calling provides people with the opportunity to get better at what they are shaped to do well already and improve their work performance.

Next, participants will receive direct instruction through a seminar to help them understand God's work better and use that schema to further illuminate how God's work flows through their own sovereign shaping to inform their calling. Instruction will be coupled with coaching on how to develop their natural talents and align their work with their vocation. Ultimately, understanding their unique vocation may mean that participants shape their current work to better fit God's purposes for their lives or change jobs in order to fit their employment more closely with God's calling.

This project begins with an understanding of Shakopee, the place where participants in this project live and where Brookwood Community Church is located. Shakopee is a suburban community on the edge of the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area with a vibrant local economy and strong regional economic ties. Shakopee's population has exploded in recent years after the completion of the Highway 169 Bridge that eased travel northward across the Minnesota River to the rest of the Twin Cities. Shakopee and surrounding communities are filled with middle-class families

working in various jobs. Many of them are professionals still struggling to find meaning in their work. Specifically, the project identifies historical trends that have shaped the Shakopee area, current economic realities that exacerbate existing frustrations with work, and underlying values concerning work. Finally, Part One of the project examines the church's basic ministry philosophy as well as how specific ministries already have been shaped to deal with work and vocation.

Part Two delves into the theology undergirding vocation, its relationship to work, and to the Church's place in the discernment of both. First, key books present and challenge a schema for understanding vocation, examine the limits the Church places on vocation, and push the Church's vocational thinking. Then the project examines both the challenges and resources free-church ecclesiology presents for relating work and vocation. Thinking clearly about the Church's relationship with the surrounding culture draws out contributions the free-church tradition makes. Finally, Part Two sketches out a theology of work and vocation.

This project asserts that work and vocation can and should be more closely integrated and defines local congregations as sound places for working through the steps involved in this integration. Part Three presents expected learning outcomes in more depth and casts a vision for what approaching work as a facet of one's unique, God-given vocation contributes to a person's satisfaction with work and effectiveness for God's Kingdom. Finally, Part Three closes with specific details about resources developed and used for this project, the test group's experience, lessons learned from the test group, and

recommendations for improvements to and further implementation of the processes outlined in this project.

Helping people approach work as an outflow of their faith rather than something apart from their faith is important for Christians and critical to the Church. Understanding one's unique, God-given vocation and developing a plan for work is an important part of becoming a disciple, because it answers this question: "What am I supposed to do with my life?" It is the Church's role is to make disciples, so the Church must help people answer this fundamental question about their lives. Discipleship, then, becomes a full-life process in terms of time and scope. One cannot become a disciple for an hour or two each day and on Sundays. Instead, to become a disciple, one must become a disciple all day, every day—even at work. Anything short of a whole-life approach to making disciples hampers the Church's ability to engage the world and diminishes the talent-pool available to do the work that the Church has to do. In short, it makes the Church small and weak. Approaching work as a facet of one's unique, God-given vocation gives the Church lawyers and factory workers, construction workers and utility experts, cooks and store managers as partners in the Church's work. Then the Church will be ready and able to engage the world.

PART ONE

CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

A PROFILE OF SHAKOPEE, MINNESOTA

Brookwood Community Church is located in Shakopee, a suburb on the outer, growing edge of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Shakopee's story in the past twenty years is a story of rapid growth. In those years, a town that began to connect with the Twin Cities metropolitan region became an exurb and the location of quick growth. The old community changed dramatically as new industry came to the region followed by new housing and new people. The newness in some ways created significant disruption in the social fabric. The old community saw its way of life change as new people moved to the community from elsewhere, and those newly-arrived left behind family, friends, and established support systems. New people required schools for their children, infrastructure for their houses and cars, and places to shop while they frequently worked elsewhere.

Shakopee is now a community in transition. New people moving to the area have driven the average age down as young families with children build homes and fill the schools. Generation X born between 1961 and 1981 represents the largest segment of the

population, more than would be expected in Minnesota. In addition, school aged children represent nearly 20 percent of the population. By contrast, senior adults represent only 6.2 percent of the population, roughly half the statistic for Minnesota as a whole.¹

Transition also has brought diversity to the ethnic and racial diversity to the region's population. Historically the region has been characterized by Caucasians of German, Norwegian, Swedish, and Irish descent. In recent years, however, Russian, Latino, Somali, and other immigrants have increased in numbers and as a percentage of the population.²

Today a guiding picture of Shakopee includes a row of new houses on a street, each looking much like the others built quickly by the same builder. In the morning, front-facing garage doors go up one after another as homeowners leave to take children to school before heading "north of the river" to work. In the evening, those same homeowners return in those same cars. On their way home, they pick up children, shuttle them to athletic practice, and eat dinner. A short while later the garage doors go up again, their owners go inside, and the garage doors close for the night. Inside families rush through homework and evening activities before going to bed without interacting with neighbors. This portrait is replaced on the weekends with recreation and frantic attempts to catch up on neglected household chores.

This chapter fills out Shakopee's story beginning with the city's development. Then the chapter catalogues the effects of a recent recession. Next it examines attitudes

¹ Scott County Community Development Division, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update: Making the Vision a Reality* (Shakopee, MN: 2007), 3-7.

² *Ibid.*, 3-9.

toward work in the area before finally exploring how disconnected faith and work have become for residents of Shakopee. Shakopee's story and the disruption that story has caused to both the social fabric of the community and the relationships that surround people in more established and stable communities contribute to the inability residents have to fully integrate faith and work.

A Brief History of Shakopee

Shakopee sits on the northern edge of Scott County along the southern bank of the Minnesota River. Humans have lived in the area for thousands of years. Ancient Native Americans left behind burial mounds, which dot the county to this day. The Mdewakanton and Wahpeton bands of the Dakota tribe inhabited the area when Europeans arrived. Both bands were semi-nomadic, occupying villages in the summer and dispersing to hunt for the winter. Treaties signed in 1851 and 1853 limited them to reservations.³ Scott County then was quickly created by the state legislature and opened for settlement. The first rounds of settlers came mainly from established states, particularly on the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Those first settlers were quickly succeeded by large groups of immigrants from Germany, Ireland, Central Europe, and Scandinavia each of which significantly impacted the region's culture.⁴

Shakopee started as an agricultural community. The town existed independently along the Minnesota River with an identity and industry of its own, separate from the

³ Scott County Community Development Division, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-2.

nearby Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. This local identity began to be supplanted by stronger ties to the metropolitan region as Shakopee slowly became a suburb in the middle of the twentieth-century. By the 1970s, suburbanization had linked most of Scott County, particularly Shakopee and the nearby cities of Savage and Prior Lake, to the rest of the region, and the population began to expand.⁵

Rapid Expansion

The Bloomington Ferry Bridge replaced an older Minnesota River crossing in 1996, and simultaneously a regional road, Highway 169, was rerouted and turned into a major four-lane expressway. Combined, these moves enabled the population to expand quickly.⁶ Transportation represents a major issue for the Twin Cities area as a whole. In annual surveys conducted by the Metropolitan Council—a Twin Cities regional planning and government body—transportation, particularly traffic congestion, has been the single most cited issue facing the region for many years.⁷ Residents have increasing access to public transit and alternative transportation methods. However, the vast majority of commuters continue to drive cars to work alone.⁸

Commuting to work is a reality in the Twin Cities and a critical issue for developing suburbs. Growing suburbs like Shakopee account for 32 percent of the

⁵ Scott County Community Development Division, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Metropolitan Council, *2009 Metro Residents Survey: An Examination of Minneapolis-Saint Paul Metro Residents' Concerns and Attitudes about the Region* (Saint Paul, MN: 2010), 2.

⁸ Scott County Community Development Division, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 10-11.

residents of the Twin Cities.⁹ However, most residents of Scott County in particular work outside the county. Over 65 percent commute on a daily basis and drive close to thirty minutes each way to get to work.¹⁰

The opening of the Highway 169 and the Bloomington Ferry Bridge kept commuting times from escalating as the county's population increased. In 1990 before the new bridge opened, the average commute to work for a Shakopee resident was around twenty-five minutes. During the 1990s, the county population increased 55 percent.¹¹ In total between 1990 and 2007, the Shakopee area population more than doubled.¹² Despite record growth, the average commute time remains around twenty-five minutes, revealing the essential role transportation improvements have played in the region's economy.¹³

Shakopee exists on the developing edge of the Twin Cities region. All fifteen of the most rapidly growing communities are located on the outskirts of the metropolitan area.¹⁴ Among those growing communities, Shakopee has grown the fastest for the past twenty years.¹⁵ Shakopee met the expectation that by 2010 it would grow to nearly

⁹ Metropolitan Council, *2009 Metro Residents Survey*, 22.

¹⁰ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 10-9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-2.

¹² Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile 2007: Stud Area Definition: Zip Codes 55379, 55372, 55352* (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Percept Group, 2008), 4.

¹³ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, X-10.

¹⁴ Metropolitan Council, "Population Growth on the Developing Edge," 1.

¹⁵ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-5.

35,000 residents as the population reached 34,691 by April 2009.¹⁶ Despite setbacks from the recent economic downturn growth is expected to continue for some time.¹⁷

Natural growth has been the larger driver of growth in the Twin Cities region for the past fifty years with total births exceeding total deaths for that period of time.¹⁸ Migration to the Twin Cities has happened, but net migration has contributed negligibly to growth as immigration and out-migration have been relatively balanced.¹⁹ At the same time, migration has happened. Many residents, particularly of Shakopee and other developing suburbs, are from somewhere else. They carry memories from these other places as well as traditions and expectations. Many residents of the area whose place of origin is in the Upper-Midwest or the Plains States have farming backgrounds. With strong rural ties themselves, they look with fond memories on life in rural areas and small towns. Consequently, many Twin Cities residents would prefer to live in a rural or small town setting. While only 5 percent of area residents currently live in rural areas and small towns, many express a strong preference that would lead them to make a change if it were feasible and available given their employment and lifestyle expectations.²⁰

¹⁶ Metropolitan Council, "Population Growth on the Developing Edge," 1.

¹⁷ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-6.

¹⁹ Metropolitan Council, "Population Growth on the Developing Edge," 1.

²⁰ Metropolitan Council, *2009 Metro Residents Survey*, 22.

Nature of Exurbs

Exurbs like Shakopee are communities that sit on the outer rings of their respective metropolitan areas. They are populated in large part by commuters who work closer to the urban core and provide amenities of both the urban and small town or rural experiences. Residents frequently mention that this exurban balance is exactly what they appreciate about life in Shakopee. When asked what she liked about life in Shakopee Janeece Oatman, an attendee of Brookwood Community Church, said:

I like that it's far enough away from the city to be like a little bit country, and you have that small town community feeling. I like that in the summer I can smell the pastures when I step outside. At the same time, it's close enough to the city that I can go into the city to work, go into the city to play. [My husband] and I are huge baseball fans, and I love being able to drive into the Twins games. It's a good combination of far enough out but not too far out.²¹

Proximity to work is just as much a factor in the development of suburbs as is the availability of both rural and urban environments and pursuits. Residents of Scott County note that the short, convenient drive to work coupled with the reasonable cost of housing drew them to the county. Wayne Boerger says:

I worked in Eden Prairie and [my family and I] lived in Minnetonka at the time. We were looking for a bigger house, because [my wife] was expecting, and we settled on our neighborhood in part because we found a builder we liked. We never really seriously considered Scott County, because it seemed so far south. Of course, your perspective changes when you realize that it is only ten minutes from 494, and I worked right there at 494 and 169.²²

The amenities of exurbs, the closeness of both city and rural life, the affordability of housing, an easy commute, and the predictable conveniences appeal to many residents.

²¹ Janeece Oatman, interview by author, Shakopee, MN, February 17, 2011.

²² Wayne Boerger, interview by author, Shakopee, MN, February 18, 2011.

In a discussion of exurbs, *Applebee's America* mentions Scott County by name and describes the similarities between Scott County and many other exurbs:

Generally populated by the same kinds of people (white middle- to upper-class families) who attract the same businesses (Home Depot, Lowe's, Wal-Mart, Best Buy, other big-box stores, and smaller chains that feed off them), the nation's exurbs are the vital heart of America in terms of population, commerce, job growth, and even politics. A housewife in Howell has more in common with a stay-at-home mother in exurban Lake Forest, California, than she has with a woman her age and income level who lives just thirty miles away in Ann Arbor, Michigan.²³

The only detail this description misses about Shakopee is the larger role played by Target. Target corporate headquarters are in nearby Minneapolis, which draws significant brand loyalty and fits local tastes better than Wal-Mart.

Applebee's America notes that exurbs are exit-ramp communities and carbon copies of other exurbs. Exurbanites are likely to be married and raise children. In the past it was expected they would have high median household incomes as well. Exurbs grow quickly and consume farmland. Their growth is fueled by the automobile and by cellular phones that make long commutes productive and telecommuting possible.²⁴ In these towns and cities, porches have resurged in popularity and great rooms proliferated, because community feels lost and residents of exurbs long for the sense of connectedness such spaces provide.²⁵

²³ Douglas B. Sosnik, Matthew J. Dowd and Ron Fournier. *Applebee's America: How Successful Political, Business and Religious Leaders Connect with the New American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 203.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 209-210.

Shakopee and Scott County followed a predictable process of growth similar to other exurbs and rapidly growing outer-ring suburbs. Industrial development arrives first. Distribution centers, warehouses, and manufacturing plants require what exurbs offer: large amounts of space, relatively inexpensive land, and accessible adequate transportation networks for moving products to the marketplace. Residential development follows to take advantage of the transportation network and still relatively inexpensive land. Next, retail development expands as the larger residential base demands more shopping options. Finally, offices, specialized industry, and high-tech industries move into an area as employers find the qualified and available labor pool.²⁶

Resulting Middle-Class Character

Shakopee has become a solidly middle-class community. In some ways it is a very educated community with 91 percent of the adult population of Scott County achieving a high school level education. That rate compares favorably with the 88 percent of residents of the Twin Cities area and 75 percent of the United States population as a whole who have a high school education. In that sense, Shakopee exceeds expectations. However, only 23 percent of Scott County adults have attained a college level education or higher compared with 28 percent of residents of the Twin Cities area. Still, that compares favorably to the rest of the country where 20 percent of the population achieved that level of education.²⁷ In short, Shakopee's population is somewhat well educated.

²⁶ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 10-1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-10.

Additionally, Scott County as a whole possesses a high income level. The median household income in 2005 was \$77,585 compared with a median household income of \$62,500 in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, \$52,024 for the state of Minnesota, and \$46,242 for the United States as a whole.²⁸ However, once again these statistics contain contradictions. The median income for households in Shakopee itself is lower than other areas of the county. Shakopee's \$69,300 median household income falls short of the \$88,250 figure in neighboring Savage and the \$86,925 figure in nearby Prior Lake.²⁹ At the same time, Shakopee could not be considered a low-income community. Households with an income of less than \$34,999 per year have increased slightly in absolute number but have declined dramatically as a portion of the overall population, now accounting for less than 15 percent of the population.³⁰ In addition, income levels in Scott County continue to rise. Households with an annual income of \$100,000 or more accounted for over 32 percent of the population in 2007. Both the absolute number and the percentage of households earning \$100,000 or more have risen consistently, and this trend is expected to continue.³¹ The picture that emerges is of an income level that is neither extremely high nor extremely low, a truly middle-class community.

The middle-class character of Shakopee is confirmed by the perception that it is a relatively affordable place to live. When asked what caused them to move to Shakopee, Brookwood attendee Andrew Nelson mentioned affordability of housing:

²⁸ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-11.

³⁰ Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile*, 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*

[My wife] and I got married in 2005 and landed on Shakopee as our first home for three reasons; the community, the affordability, and the proximity to our two occupations. We loved the small town feel yet still being within the metro and a short distance away from family. We also focused on Shakopee due to the cost of living. We enjoyed the idea that we could build a home that was more affordable than buying an existing one.³²

This sentiment is common. People move to Shakopee and to Scott County looking for quality of life, proximity to the amenities of the metropolitan area without the congestion and confusion of life closer to the urban core, and affordability.

However, the impression that Shakopee is an affordable place to live comes with some stigma. Despite its relatively high median income and the increasing percentage of residents whose income would label them affluent, Shakopee is viewed by other parts of the Twin Cities as “blue collar” and “affordable.” When asked how he would describe the community, Brookwood attendee Justin Jacobson who lives in a more affluent suburb nearby described it this way:

I would describe Shakopee residents as hard-working, blue-collar folks. They live in modest houses dictated by modest incomes and unlike some of the other suburbs, are responsible in trying to live within their means. Material wealth doesn't seem to mean as much to Shakopee residents. I don't see a lot of new BMWs driving around.³³

This sentiment is common and can be found expressed in discussions about the future of the community. When residents ask about the future of upscale dining and shopping venues, other residents commonly respond that such establishments never would succeed in Shakopee.

³² Andrew Nelson, interview by author, Shakopee, MN, February 16, 2011.

³³ Justin Jacobson, interview by author, Eden Prairie, MN, February 18, 2011.

Precept Group, a company that makes demographic research available to churches, divides the population of the United States into six broad categories. The largest is the category Percept Group labels “Middle American Families” which accounts for 58 percent of the population of the Shakopee area.³⁴ The next largest segment of the population, “Affluent Families,” account for another 29 percent.³⁵ There is little room left for the four remaining Lifestyle Segment Groups, which account for roughly 13 percent of the population: young professionals, senior citizens, rural families, and ethnic/urban diversity. Both “Middle American Families” and “Affluent Families” represent a disproportionately high percentage of the population compared to the population of the United States as a whole. Normally “Middle American Families” and “Affluent Families” combined would represent roughly 47 percent of the population.³⁶

When surveyed to determine what concerns they actually have, residents of the Shakopee area mention what could be considered middle-class concerns. When asked about their worries, the most common concerns had to do with hopes and dreams for the future. Long-term financial security topped the list, cited by nearly 60 percent of the people surveyed.³⁷ The financial concerns of the area have only been heightened by the recent economic downturn, sometimes called “The Great Recession.”

³⁴ Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile*, 13.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

An Economic Downturn

The economy emerged as an increasing regional concern during the Great Recession. The Metropolitan Council in its 2009 Metro Residents Survey found that 29 percent of Twin Cities residents named the economy as one of their top three concerns. This level of concern closely parallels the levels expressed during previous economic downturns. Simultaneously, the population that normally indicates great pride in the Twin Cities expressed concern in 2009 that the quality of life in the region had gotten worse in the past year, injecting an uncommonly profound sense of worry.³⁸

Unemployment Rising

Residents' concerns about the economy are backed up by economic realities. The Great Recession returned employment levels in the Twin Cities to the level of the late 1990s, wiping out a decade of job creation. Employment in the Twin Cities reached a relative peak in the beginning of 2001 before a previous recession began. Since that recession, job creation in the Twin Cities lagged behind the rate for the rest of the country. The gains made since the end of the recession that began in 2001 were wiped out and more making late 2000 and early 2001 the true high point in Twin Cities employment levels.³⁹ Since that true high in 2000, employment has fallen now by 8 percent in Minneapolis and by six percent in Saint Paul.⁴⁰ Employment in Minneapolis and Saint Paul is important to residents of Shakopee, because many residents hold jobs in the urban

³⁸ Metropolitan Council, *2009 Metro Residents Survey*, 2.

³⁹ Metropolitan Council, "Employment in the Twin Cities Region, 2000-2009," *Metro Stats*, December, 2010, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

core, particularly those who hold higher paying jobs. The trend was repeated in the developed inner-ring suburbs such as Eden Prairie and Bloomington where employment fell by 8 percent.⁴¹ Developed suburbs account for the largest share of Twin Cities employment as 42 percent of all the jobs in the metropolitan area are located in these developed suburbs.⁴² Job losses there impact the residents of Shakopee.

Since the year 2000, employment has grown most sharply in developing suburbs like Shakopee. However, from 2008 to 2009, employment in the developing suburbs fell by 5 percent. Manufacturing and retail sectors of the regional economy suffered the worst job losses.⁴³ During that period, Shakopee lost 1,241 jobs, a decline of over 6 percent.⁴⁴ Despite the recent downturn, Shakopee added 4,393 jobs overall between the second quarter of 2000 and the second quarter of 2009.⁴⁵ However, as demonstrated later, the job gains in Shakopee tend to be at a lower rate of pay than the jobs lost in the urban core and developed suburbs.

Lifestyle Changes

The impact on the way people think about work is substantial. Unemployment in the region is relatively high as companies have downsized, stores have closed, and some businesses failed. Even residents who have not lost their jobs have been impacted

⁴¹ Metropolitan Council, "Employment in the Twin Cities Region, 2000-2009," 3.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

substantially. Tammi O’Neal, an employee of the local school district, wants to move from a paraprofessional job into a teaching job. However, that possibility is unclear as the state legislature debates cuts to education funding due to decreased tax revenues. If that happens, the local school district is forced to scrap plans to open a newly built school, leave vacant positions unfilled, or even cut existing teaching positions.⁴⁶

Other residents have felt the impact of the Great Recession as they have seen wage stagnation. Boerger, a local employee of a large, multinational software company noted that while his company has not terminated employees, it quickly froze raises and promotions at the outset of the downturn. Currently, he worked over three years without a raise. At the same time, he considers himself lucky, because he knows many people who have fared poorer in this economic climate.⁴⁷

Diane McCormick, a Brookwood attendee and local real estate agent, has seen direct impact on her income. When asked about the impact, she gave the example of a \$200,000 home. In the past such a home would spend thirty to forty-five days on the market, and the real estate commission would be 6 percent. When the sale closed, she would receive or split the \$12,000 commission. During this economic downturn, the same house typically spends much longer on the market, usually 120 to 180 days. By the time the house sells, it will sell for a substantially lower price, around \$120,000. Before it sells, the family frequently falls into distress, and the house may go into what is called a “short sale.” Then the mortgage holder becomes more involved. In a short sale, the real

⁴⁶ Tammi O’Neal, interview by author, Prior Lake, MN, February 16, 2011.

⁴⁷ Boerger, interview.

estate commission is reduced to 5 percent or less. In addition to the financial difficulty, this scenario produces tremendous emotional difficulty. Moving is no longer a joyful process for families as they find new and better jobs and new and better homes. The sale of a home frequently involves stress for the family and requires much more support from a conscientious real estate agent.⁴⁸

Even residents who feel little direct impact see the Great Recession as a reason to exercise new levels of frugality. Nelson claimed that while his family has avoided layoffs and pay cuts, they have cut their spending significantly.⁴⁹ Some people see the Great Recession as a reason to reconsider their choice of careers; if their chosen career cannot provide them with adequate income or stability, they may need to seek more education and a new career.⁵⁰

Utilitarian Attitudes toward Work

As jobs changed and careers stagnated during the Great Recession, it exposed underlying limits placed on work, particularly in the Shakopee area. Residents of Shakopee in specific and the Twin Cities in general approach work with determination and expect their work to produce results. However, while people work hard, they view work as a means rather than an end in and of itself.

⁴⁸ Diane McCormick, interview by author, Shakopee, MN, February 18, 2011.

⁴⁹ Nelson, interview.

⁵⁰ McCormick, interview.

High Work Ethic

Stories abound of how the German and Scandinavian settlers who came to this region of the country worked hard and saved hard. These same values persist in many residents today. Migration in the region, particularly in a fast-growing city like Shakopee, is extensive. Many residents grew up somewhere else. When asked where they come from, many residents mention places like Iowa, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Many of these new residents grew up on farms where they worked long hours helping out on the farm during the planting and harvesting seasons. They retain that same work ethic.

The Twin Cities region also boasts a large and dedicated work force with 83 percent of working age adults participating in the labor force and 79 percent of the group working. Despite relatively high unemployment, this represents the highest level of work-force participation of any of the twenty-five largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the United States.⁵¹ In addition, their educational achievements prove that Twin Cities workers are well trained. When measured in terms of holders of bachelor's degrees, the Twin Cities has the fourth most educated populace of any of the twenty-five largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the United States.⁵² Consequently, the Twin Cities region is home to eighteen Fortune 500 companies including United Health Group, Target, Supervalu, Best Buy, CHS, 3M, U.S. Bancorp, General Mills, Medtronic, Land O'Lakes, Xcel Energy, Mosaic, C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Ameriprise Financial, Ecolab,

⁵¹ Metropolitan Council, *2010 Regional Economic Indicators* (Saint Paul, MN: 2010).

⁵² Ibid.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, PepsiAmericas, and Nash-Finch.⁵³ These companies started or moved to the region for the hard-working and highly educated work force.

Career Pathways

Agriculture continues to be surprisingly vibrant in the area, particularly in Scott County, despite its suburban nature. Agriculture actually grew between 1997 and 2002 from a \$46 million per year industry to a \$53 million per year industry. There were corresponding increases in the number of farms and in the acreage in the county devoted to farming. The primary crops grown were corn, soybeans, and hay. Cattle, hogs, fruit, sod, and nursery stock also contributed significantly to the overall agricultural production of the county.⁵⁴

The manufacturing, transportation, and construction industries are also surprisingly strong in Shakopee and the surrounding area, particularly when compared with the rest of Minnesota. Roughly 18 percent of the county's jobs are manufacturing, while only 15 percent are in the educational, health, and social services industries. Retail is the third strongest industry in Scott County and accounts for 12 percent of all jobs.⁵⁵

Within those industries, though, Scott County jobs tend to be management and other professional roles with 36 percent of all the jobs in the county falling into those two categories. Sales and other office jobs account for another 27 percent of employment. The remainder of jobs in the county are service, construction, maintenance, production,

⁵³ Metropolitan Council, *2010 Regional Economic Indicators*.

⁵⁴ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 10-7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-19.

and transportation types of jobs.⁵⁶ The five largest employers in Shakopee include ADC Telecommunications (an electronics and electrical goods manufacturer), Valleyfair Amusement Park, Seagate Technology (a computer peripherals hardware manufacturer), Scott County, and the Kmart Distribution Center. Many of the other largest employers in the area are categorized as light manufacturers.⁵⁷

Despite the professional and management tendency of the jobs in the local economy, many of the higher paying jobs held by Shakopee residents are outside of Scott County.⁵⁸ While Scott County's median household income is the highest in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, it had the second lowest wage level at \$37,272 annually. Well-paid Scott County residents tend to work outside of Scott County at major employers, including the eighteen Fortune 500 companies located in the core of the Twin Cities or in the developed suburbs.⁵⁹

Boerger's journey is typical. He started his career as a computer software developer and consultant for a local company. In an earlier economic downturn, he was laid off and became an independent consultant for a period. Next, he was hired as a consultant and product manager for a local software firm that implemented client solutions for a major software package. Eventually his company was purchased by the software manufacturer, a major multinational software firm, and he continued in his previous role. Both of these jobs were located outside of Scott County in a nearby,

⁵⁶ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-4.

developed suburb. During these years, however, Boerger and his family moved to Scott County. Recently he began a new job as senior product manager for a technology services company that offered him a larger salary, more responsibility, and more opportunity for advancement.⁶⁰ Now Boerger commutes farther to work, but he is able to work from home two days a week. Boerger's employment history has followed a path typical for many Scott County residents.

Disconnect #1: Value of Family

As important as work is in the Shakopee area, the value of work is limited and is viewed as a means to an end with limits that derive from other values such as that placed on family time. Residents of Shakopee place exceptional value on family. Shakopee was shaped intentionally to attract young families raising children, including the style of construction the city has encouraged. Having built single-family detached homes, Shakopee attracts younger families with larger household sizes.⁶¹

Consequently, Shakopee's average age was 33.2 in 2007.⁶² Residents in their late twenties, thirties, and early forties are frequently raising children which is reflected in the average household size in Scott County being nearly three people per household compared with 2.5 people per household statewide. The trend statewide is toward smaller household sizes, and this trend has begun to impact Scott County. The average household

⁶⁰ Boerger, interview.

⁶¹ Metropolitan Council, "Population Growth on the Developing Edge: the Metro Area in 2009," *Metro Stats*, July 2010, 2.

⁶² Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile*, 4.

size is larger than average. However, it is beginning to decline, and that trend is expected to continue.⁶³

For now families dominate the Shakopee area. Married couples account for 66 percent of the population compared with a national average of around 53 percent. In addition, slightly more than 80 percent of children aged zero to eighteen live in households with a married couple. This compares with a national rate of just under 69 percent. These statistics combine to indicate that Shakopee's population skews significantly toward married couples and traditional families.⁶⁴ There is a correspondingly low percentage of single-person households in Scott County which has the lowest number of single person households in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and is well below the statewide average.⁶⁵ Only 6.2 percent of the county is aged sixty-five years or older, roughly half the Minnesota average.⁶⁶

With so many married couples and two-parent families in the region, couple- and family-oriented concerns dominate. When asked about their concerns in life, residents of the Shakopee area responded with quality of life issues. Having a fulfilling marriage was a major concern to 28 percent of respondents. In addition, 19 percent indicated that one of their primary concerns was growing as a parent. Both of these responses exceeded national norms. A third concern that exceeded national norms was finding ways to deal with stress in their lives. Not only does this reflect the difficulty of raising children and

⁶³ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-11.

⁶⁴ Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile*, 6.

⁶⁵ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 3-12.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-7.

balancing multiple people's needs and multiple schedules, but it reflects an attitude toward work that intends to keep work in boundaries that provide for family time. Work that exceeds the boundaries around family time produces stress rather than suggesting opportunity for the residents of Shakopee. Furthermore, work itself is seen within the orbit of family life. Rather than expressing primary concern with job advancement, 26 percent of Shakopee area residents indicated that finding job and career satisfaction was one of their primary life concerns compared with a national norm of 19 percent.⁶⁷

Disconnect #2: Value of Recreation

As important as work is to Shakopee residents, they live for the fun they have after work. Recreational sport leagues for both children and adults abound. The lights of large local baseball parks run late into the night during both baseball and football seasons. Hockey also consumes passion and time for both adults and children. During the summer residents spend large amounts of time running, hiking, boating, canoeing, fishing, camping, and riding bikes. During long, cold Minnesota winters, those pursuits are replaced with ice fishing, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snow shoeing, and a host of other ways to get outdoors even during the cold. Minnesotans love to exercise and play. In fact, recreation and leisure is listed as a primary life concern by over 32 percent of the population, a result that exceeds national averages.⁶⁸

The amount of recreation in the area contributes to overall satisfaction with the quality of life. The vast majority of Twin Cities region residents feel that it is a better or

⁶⁷ Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile*, 16.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

much better place to live than other metropolitan areas (96 percent). This level has remained relatively constant over the past thirty years.⁶⁹ The natural environment around the Twin Cities provides many recreational opportunities. The Twin Cities region is known for an extensive network of well-maintained parks. In fact, 35 percent of residents identify those regional parks, their attendant trails, and the area's lakes as among the Twin Cities' most attractive features.⁷⁰

In addition to the natural environment and the parks, Scott County in particular became a regional tourist destination and offers multiple attractions that contribute not only to the culture but to the local economy as well. Valleyfair Family Amusement Park in Shakopee draws over one million guests each year. Canterbury Park is the Twin Cities' only horse racing track. Mystic Lake Casino is the largest casino in the state and while it is not located inside the Shakopee city limits, it provides roughly 3,600 jobs to the county and is the county's single largest employer. Other entertainment venues include the Renaissance Festival, which is open in August and September, Murphy's Landing historical village, the Scott County Fair, and two regional car racing parks.⁷¹ In addition, there are multiple golf courses in Scott County that have a regional draw, some of which could be considered elite and some of which are public, competitively priced and draw in not only beginner golfers, but children and teenagers who are learning the sport as well.⁷²

⁶⁹ Metropolitan Council, *2009 Metro Residents Survey*, 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Scott County, *Scott County 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update*, 10-2, 8.

⁷² Ibid., 10-9.

Shakopee residents frequently note the availability of the amenities of the developed suburbs and the urban core as factors they appreciate about life in the developing suburbs. Those amenities include many layers of dining options as well as the shopping provided by regional malls, the Mall of America located in nearby Bloomington, the Water Park of America located near the Mall of America, the region's multiple museums, and the State Fair. A growing number of residents also appreciate the Twin Cities' professional sports teams and large sports venues. The winning season for the Vikings professional football team in 2009, the construction of a new ballpark for the Minnesota Twins professional baseball team, and the completion of a new stadium for the University of Minnesota's football team have revived the region's pride and interest in these opportunities.⁷³ People in the Twin Cities love to play.

Segregating Religion to the Private Realm

A study by the Percept Group compared Shakopee to the country as a whole and revealed that in terms of education, income, and the presence of young families, Shakopee greatly exceeded national norms. In other ways, including generational diversity and ethnic diversity, Shakopee lagged behind the rest of the country. In terms of religious beliefs, however, Shakopee was average in almost every way. Percept Group's 2007 study estimated that 35 percent of the population was strongly involved with their faith which matched national norms almost exactly. Similarly, 33 percent were somewhat

⁷³ Metropolitan Council, *2009 Metro Residents Survey*, 3.

involved with their faith, closely mirroring the national norm of 30 percent.⁷⁴ That matches stereotypes of the Midwest being the average American place to live.

Shakopee also reflects the world of entertainer Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion*. The live radio show is frequently taped in its home base at the Fitzgerald Theater in nearby Saint Paul. In the program's regular feature, "The News from Lake Wobegon," Keillor draws on images familiar to Minnesotans. His characters are farmers and small town residents; they frequently come from Scandinavian and German backgrounds; and they tend to be confused but faithful Lutherans and Catholics with a smattering of atheists, agnostics, and evangelicals. Keillor's characterization matches the religious landscape of Shakopee. Catholics and Lutherans represent larger than expected percentages of the population with both numbers ranging substantially higher than the population of the rest of the country.⁷⁵ Residents joke that Minnesota is the Lutheran homeland.

However, faith for most Minnesotans is a private matter. Symbols of faith are considered inappropriate in many places of business. An exception would be Z-Tech Automotive in nearby Bloomington where the local Christian radio station plays in the waiting room, and the owner's business card displays a discreet fish symbol and a Bible verse. Such public displays of one's religious faith, particularly of one's Christian faith, are unusual. Again, Boerger's workplace expectations would be the norm. When asked, he said that with more than one hundred thousand employees worldwide in many

⁷⁴ Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile*, 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

countries, each with a different religious tradition, the multinational software firm understandably chooses not to encourage religious activities and displays of religious symbols in the workplace. “They simply stay out of it.”⁷⁶

In smaller companies, religious displays are somewhat more allowed. Oatman works for a company whose regional offices have more independence. In her workplace, religious symbols would be allowed in her personal workspace, as long as they did not interfere with her ability to perform her job or offend others.⁷⁷ In her office, as in Boerger’s, conversations about matters of religion and faith happen once other ties are formed and people know one another well enough to deem such conversations safe. Christians talk with Christians about their faith and encourage one another. Christian faith is allowed to be an element of conversation when aspects of Christian faith might be helpful to a co-worker or once a co-worker has sought advice or encouragement.

However, limitations placed on public religious observances do not capture the real gap between faith and work in Shakopee and in the Twin Cities. As a follower of Jesus, Boerger and others like him are clear that there are times when Christians can and should make their faith clear by their ethical behavior. They are also aware that there are times when, as followers of Jesus, they should share the story of what God has done in their lives and what God has done through Jesus.⁷⁸ However, applying Christian ethical standards to workplace behavior and occasionally testifying privately to one’s Christian

⁷⁶ Boerger, interview.

⁷⁷ Oatman, interview.

⁷⁸ Boerger, interview.

faith and to the benefits of Christian faith frequently form the limits of the link between faith and work.

When asked how faith prepared him for work, Boerger searched for an answer. “Good question,” he began and then uncharacteristically paused before struggling to say, “That’s a really good question. I don’t know. That’s a tough one.” He honestly admitted that he struggles to apply what he hears in sermons and worship on Sunday morning or in his Bible and devotional readings during the week to work. He added, “When I walk out the door and to the office, it’s hard for me to fully incorporate that, for that to truly sink in.”⁷⁹ Boerger is not alone. Applying one’s Christian faith to work is difficult, and the Church has not adequately equipped him to do so. Work can and should flow from one’s unique, God-given vocation. However, in Shakopee at least, multiple barriers prevent that from happening.

⁷⁹ Boerger, interview.

CHAPTER 2

ASSETS FOR INTEGRATING WORK AND VOCATION

Brookwood Community Church held its first public worship service on October 5, 2008 in the auditorium of the Junior High School in Shakopee. It began after six months of intensive preparations by a core team of roughly forty individuals gathered from within the parent church, Wooddale Church, in the nearby second-ring suburb of Eden Prairie, Minnesota. The congregation gathered for worship that day stood to sing two songs. Then, as they were seated, a worship leader stepped forward and welcomed the worshippers to Brookwood Community Church “where our purpose is to help people become extraordinary followers of Jesus.”¹

Helping people become “extraordinary followers of Jesus” is how Brookwood approaches and thinks about the mission of its parent to “honor God by making more disciples for Jesus Christ.”² Brookwood Community Church looks to both the mission

¹ Brookwood Community Church, “Brookwood DNA,” <http://www.brookwood.net/default/index.cfm/about-brookwood/brookwood-dna/> [accessed April 17, 2012].

² Wooddale Church, “What We Believe,” <http://www.wooddale.org/guest/believe/> [accessed April 17, 2012].

and values of Wooddale Church. Wooddale Church's stated values are being God-centered, Bible-based, outreach-oriented, disciple-making, kingdom-building, and future-looking. Since Brookwood's original core group came largely from Wooddale Church, those values were embedded in the culture of the new congregation from the beginning. For instance, on the first Sunday the person who welcomed worshippers never said, "Good morning. My name is Andrew Nelson." The identity of the service leader was second to the fact that people were gathered together to worship God, a detail that embodies Wooddale Church's value of being God-centered. The God-centered value means that every effort is made to avoid focus on the identity or presence of worship leaders. Instead, preparations give worship leaders a chance to fade into the background so that the worshipper's encounter with God remains the primary focus.

Wooddale Church also strongly values volunteers. This emphasis is seen by the fact that the church has a full-time volunteer development pastor whose job is not simply to recruit more volunteers to usher or work in the nursery but to create a climate that affirms, values, and equips volunteers. Every department of Wooddale Church is required to undergo training in how to recruit, equip, and celebrate volunteers. These steps undergird the church's commitment to do ministry through volunteers rather than replacing volunteers with paid staff. Those standards are reinforced through an annual audit of volunteerism practices in each department.

Placing an extraordinarily high value on the involvement of every attendee in ministry is natural for a new congregation like Brookwood. Brookwood Community Church's attendees are relatively young and raising families, a reflection of the

demographics of the surrounding community. These young families are building homes, raising children, and saving for retirement, which leaves them with less disposable income. Also, while excitement among a small, committed core group runs high in a church plant, loyalty to the congregation among new attendees is frequently relatively low, a fact that is reflected in their giving patterns. While per capita giving among attendees could be considered generous, the church attendance has stayed between two and three hundred people for its first couple of years, a size that does not allow for hiring of a large professional staff to complete all the work required to operate the church.

Despite the lack of paid staff, Brookwood Community Church launched with extensive ministry needs. The worship service required band members, vocalists, sound technicians, and volunteers to decorate the stage and monitor the service schedule. The children's ministry involved nursery workers, preschool workers, and elementary workers; these positions were broken down into teaching positions, small group leaders, administrative volunteers, greeters, and substitutes. The operations team included photographers, ushers, and volunteers to set up and tear down the equipment required for Sunday morning programming housed in a rented facility. A ministry called the connection ministry consisted of small group leaders, greeters, welcome center volunteers, and coaches charged with identifying and training volunteers. It took people in each one of these positions to make the church ready to open on the first Sunday and keep the congregation running smoothly since. During the first six months Brookwood Community Church opened, the church added an outreach ministry that included people focused on external communications, outreach activities, and interfacing with the

congregation's mission partners around the world. The church quickly began a ministry to students in grades six through twelve. Both of these new ministries required additional volunteers. With limited resources and substantial ministry needs, it was necessary to rely on volunteers from the start.

That philosophy meshes well with the historic character of the congregation's denominational partner. Brookwood immediately affiliated with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, an evangelical denomination committed to congregational polity, the authority of the Bible, and orthodox Christian faith. Wooddale Church is a member of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference, and the denomination was eager to participate in the launch of Brookwood. Historically Congregationalists have placed high value on the involvement of members of a congregation in the governance of the local church.

In February, 2009 this expectation of congregational involvement in governance led to the formation of a governing board in training. Governing board candidates began meeting together to study best practices in congregational governance, and began the process of writing a constitution and statement of faith. The group chose the term "elder" to describe the office. All candidates for the initial Board of Elders of Brookwood Community Church were interviewed and approved by the Board of Elders of Wooddale Church. The members of the board later presented a working constitution to the Wooddale Church's Board that was approved. With a constitution and governing body in place, the congregation officially became independent on January 1, 2010. The constitution, Board of Elders, initial budget, and list of founding members were all

ratified at a meeting of the congregation in February 2010. Brookwood Community Church became a church governing itself in the congregational tradition.

Brookwood Community Church's Values

As noted earlier, Brookwood Community Church's mission is to help people become extraordinary followers of Jesus. The phrase "extraordinary follower of Jesus" is little more than a definition of a disciple. In one sense the mission is simply to help people become disciples with the implication being that being a disciple is neither a matter of intellectual assent to a list of beliefs nor of simple church membership or participation. Brookwood Community Church's mission statement implies that to be a disciple of Jesus means to follow Jesus—to accept grace and forgiveness from Jesus, to seek to understand the teachings of Jesus and to implement those teachings in real life.³

The congregation added that to live as a follower of Jesus involves three commitments: to love God, love others, and make new disciples. The command to love God is found in the Old Testament, stated explicitly in Israel's basic prayer, the Shema, of Deuteronomy 6:4-6 in which Moses instructed the people of Israel, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts."⁴ This command lays claim to a person's covenant loyalty to God expressed in obedience to God's commandments, essentially making a claim to a person's complete and eager obedience. In Mark 12:28-30 Jesus was asked which of the

³ Brookwood Community Church, "Brookwood DNA."

⁴ All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

commandments was most important, and he replied with a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 6:4-6, thereby applying the call to love God by living a life of obedience to God's commands to his followers, the new Israel as well.

In Mark 12:31, Jesus continued with a second command to love one's neighbor as oneself. He said that the commands to love God and love one's neighbor together summarize the Old Testament law. In John 13:34-35 Jesus clarified this command further when he said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Loving one's neighbor and loving one another both give evidence that one is a follower of Jesus. They are identifying marks of Jesus' followers.

The final identifying mark of a follower of Jesus the congregation chose was making new disciples. Matthew 28:18-20 contains Jesus' famous commission to his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations." This commission from Jesus contains instructions to baptize those who become disciples, thereby including them in the community of those who identify themselves as followers of Jesus. Jesus also instructs his followers to teach people to obey the commands of Jesus, again reinforcing that essential characteristic of a disciple.

Brookwood was founded with a commitment to creating a straightforward process for implementing these three identifying marks of a follower of Jesus. As Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger noted in *Simple Church*, having a focused program for making disciples

has a high correlation to becoming a vibrant church.⁵ A commitment to a simple process makes sense in the Shakopee area as the busyness of the average person's life makes any other strategy futile. It is not uncommon in many families for both adults to work and at the same time juggle the educational, athletic, musical, and other extracurricular interests of their children. For a congregation's programs to be effective, they must be focused. For followers of Jesus to mature, the process of helping them mature must be straightforward and aligned with clear ends.⁶

Brookwood Community Church's core commitment to helping people become followers of Jesus flows into a three-part strategy that aligns with the marks of a disciple. The marks of a disciple are expressed through three simple verbs: "worship," "connect," and "go." These verbs align with commandments to love God, love others, and make disciples. They also form the basis for the disciple-making process at Brookwood. Attendees of Brookwood Community Church are encouraged to gather together for worship on a regular basis. Corporate worship is the place where the Bible is taught and applied to life. Worship is where followers of Jesus experience God's presence and are changed, challenged, and refueled by it. Brookwood's "connect" strategy consists of helping attendees form connections with other followers of Jesus who encourage them, pray for them and help them grow as followers of Jesus. This strategy happens through small groups consisting of two to twelve people meeting together regularly for Bible study, prayer, recreation, and encouragement. This is paired with worship as the second

⁵ Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 13-14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

place where personal and corporate spiritual practices are encouraged. The final purpose labeled “go” at Brookwood is the strategy of sending attendees into the community and the broader world to show God’s love through practical deeds and to share the Good News about Jesus verbally.

Brookwood Community Church’s structure is based on those three purposes as well. There is a Worship Arts Ministry, whose job is to provide excellent worship experiences on a weekly basis. The Connection Ministry consists of teams that connect people and help attendees find a small group and a place to belong. The Go Ministry consists of teams that engage in ministry to the community such as the congregation’s feeding ministry team and outreach events team. The Children’s Ministry and Student Ministry both incorporate all three strategies as basic processes. Both ministries provide worship opportunities, small groups and opportunities to share God’s love through actions and words. Brookwood’s Operations Ministry supports all of the other ministries.

Brookwood’s mission and strategies are driven by five values: passion, outreach, warmth, movement, and focus. The focus and movement values in particular have an impact on the church’s approaches to making disciples. The focus value states, “We say no to good things to leave room for great things.”⁷ Practically that value means the church limits the amount of programming offered to the worship service, small groups, and opportunities to share faith publicly through actions and words. Participants in each program are encouraged to participate in the other two; worshippers are encouraged to join a small group and find a way to share their faith, small groups are encouraged to

⁷ Brookwood Community Church, “Brookwood DNA.”

serve the community and teach spiritual practices like prayer and Bible study, and serving teams are encouraged to find ways to help people join a small group or the worshipping community. This process embodies *Simple Church* principles of having a clearly defined process that leads people toward maturity that is fully integrated into the church.⁸

The challenge is to eliminate or avoid clutter around that essential core process.⁹ Consequently, very few additional programs happen at Brookwood, because the focus value reminds the church that concerts, church-wide socials, and conferences distract from their ability with limited time to engage in worship, connect with a small group, reach out to the community around them, and still have time left over for personal spiritual practices. Anything that distracts an attendee from those core strategies may be helpful or fun, but it is distracting from the essence of becoming a disciple.

The movement value figures prominently into the design of Brookwood's few programs as well. It states, "We encourage people to continue growing as followers of Jesus."¹⁰ The assumption is that Christians should continue to grow for a lifetime, taking one step after another in the journey of following Jesus. Paul thanked God for this very process in the life of his supporters in Philippi when he wrote to them in Philippians 1:6 that he was "confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." The movement value means that Brookwood intentionally structures programming to encourage Christians to take the next right step in

⁸ Rainer and Geiger, *Simple Church*, 26.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Brookwood Community Church, "Brookwood DNA."

their faith journey and that no step is the final step until “the day of Christ Jesus.” Until that time a Christian’s life should be characterized by movement. For that reason, worship at Brookwood Community Church is constantly a time when next steps are suggested from starting a relationship with God through Jesus to making a decision to work on anger that may be tearing a relationship apart to joining a small group to find other followers of Jesus to encourage one to grow. Small groups, as they are designed at Brookwood, constantly encourage movement as well. Participants in small groups are encouraged to study the Bible together and seek to discover how the Bible applies to their lives. Small group leaders are given a core curriculum of habits that can encourage growth in a believer’s life, and are asked to evaluate how the group is doing in relationship to those habits at least each time they change from one curriculum resource to another and to make selections of study materials based on the needs of the group. Volunteerism is another important way the church encourages movement in the life of a disciple. As attendees grow, they are encouraged to try ministry opportunities that match their talents, available time, and interests. These ministry opportunities frequently give them opportunities to see God do new things through them that leave them feeling fulfilled and more connected both to the rest of the congregation and with God.

Brookwood Community Church’s disciple-making strategies emphasize customization as each person’s journey of following Jesus will look different. This customized approach begins with the Welcome Team on Sunday mornings. Welcome Team members listen to guests and discover what the guest needs and wants to know. Small groups are custom designed from the profile of the group to the curriculum chosen.

Brookwood's small groups are configured flexibly including the makeup of the groups, the time and place the group meets, and the frequency with which the group meets. Some groups meet monthly for an extended period of time and include a meal in each meeting, while other groups meet every other week. Some groups focus on intense Bible study while other groups are designed for newer Christians and contain topics immediately relevant to their felt needs. Even the breakdown in ages is customized to meet the needs of group participants. Existing groups are designed for couples with young children, families with older children, single adults, women only, men only, and retired individuals. There is even a group that is intentionally mixed in as many ways as possible for people who prefer the synergy produced through the interaction of people at various life stages. The groups emphasize customization in curriculum as well. There is no "church-wide" curriculum. Instead, groups choose their own curriculum based on the needs of the group. Curriculum resources used vary in depth, topic, and the amount of outside preparation involved, all based on the needs of the individuals in the group.

The Role of Connection Coaches

This customized approach becomes particularly important in relationship to volunteerism. Matches between volunteers and their places of service are made in the interest of equipping members and attendees to do ministry. These matches are based on the talents, time, and interests of the volunteer, and not based on the ministry needs of the congregation. Care is given first to ensure a good fit between the volunteer and the position; and that care is followed up with adequate training, resources, and influence to accomplish the job selected. Additionally, volunteers are limited in the number of

positions they can hold in order to ensure that their time is respected and that “church work” does not become a dominating part of their life to the exclusion of small group life, family life, and opportunities to serve the community and share faith.

The initial match between a volunteer and a place of service is best made through the work of a Connection Coach. Connection Coaches are volunteers trained to serve Brookwood attendees by helping them understand their talents and how those talents work. Frequently Connection Coaches help attendees choose volunteering positions within Brookwood Community Church that mesh well with their talents and time. Connection Coaches also help introduce attendees to a small group that meets the attendee’s needs.

Those participating in Connection Coaching begin the process by purchasing or receiving a copy of *Strengths Finder 2.0* written by Tom Rath and published by Gallup Press. Gallup conducted a forty-year study of human strengths and discerned thirty-four common Talent Themes and developed the Clifton Strengths Finder assessment to identify and describe a participant’s top five Talent Themes (commonly referred to as “strengths.”)¹¹ Once an attendee takes the Strengths Finder assessment, they receive a report online they forward to a Connection Coach. The coach reviews the report and schedules a time to meet and discuss the results.

Much of the coaching session is spent understanding the Talent Themes described by Gallup. Attendees are asked to share their understanding of the Talent Theme and provide examples of how the theme works in their life. The Connection Coach helps the

¹¹ Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), i.

attendee see how the Talent Themes work together and how they are expressed at home and at work. Then Connection Coaches help attendees think about how these Talent Themes equip them to make contributions to their families, their work, and God's Kingdom. At this point the Connection Coach asks if there are volunteering positions at Brookwood the attendee would like to explore that seem to be a fit for their Talent Themes. Any recommendations that come from this time are forwarded to church staff members who facilitate the conversations between the attendee and the leaders of the appropriate teams.

Connection Coaching fits with Brookwood Community Church's culture, because the church emphasizes that it stands in the position of a coach in each attendee's life. Church leaders offer resources, make suggestions, and ask questions; but it is the responsibility of each attendee to decide how best to grow as a follower of Jesus. Therefore, the coaching relationship represents an approach that does not pressure and instead adds value to the attendee's life. Volunteering is not the sole goal of Connection Coaching. The insights attendees gain about life at home and life at work are frequently as important as the insights gained about an appropriate volunteer match.

Connection Coaches are trained from the beginning to approach attendees in this manner. Rather than being trained as experts in volunteerism or in ministry placement, they are trained with expertise in the *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. Time is spent reviewing and understanding the Talent Themes not only in isolation but also in groups as the combinations of themes may greatly influence the way a theme works in a particular person's life. Connection Coaches are given a simple coaching form to follow that

contains a series of questions that guide the attendee's processing of their StrengthsFinder assessment results.

Since Connection Coaches seek to add value to the lives of attendees who meet with them, trust is built almost immediately. Attendees are clear that Connection Coaches are not simply recruiters. As representatives of Brookwood Community Church, their first desire is to help the attendee understand how God has shaped the individual and how God can use them for his glory at work, at home, and in ministry. It is clear that the attendee's interests and needs are in the forefront of the discussion and that any volunteering match made will be done for their benefit.

Problems and Possibilities Revealed by Connection Coaching

When Connection Coaches meet with attendees, the subjects of work, family, and marriage intentionally come up in the course of conversation. Since trust is established quickly with coaches, conversations frequently happen that cover job stresses, career dreams, family problems, and marriage issues. Connection Coaches make an effort to recast these issues in terms of one's Talent Themes. For instance, the Connection Coach may point out how a specific Talent Theme means that the attendee is committed to excellence and hard work while a spouse or co-worker is more concerned with process and feelings. Just giving attendees words to use to describe the problem more clearly may transform the situation. Seeing how two people are truly created differently provides an opportunity to build understanding as many attendees enter sessions assuming that everyone is created just like them with the same capabilities. The StrengthsFinder and similar assessments indicate that such is not the case. Similar instruments indicate that

people are genuinely different. With a deeper awareness of how an attendee is unique and of what they offer to their family and co-workers, those who go through Connection Coaching frequently come up with strategies for how to use their Talent Themes to work out the stresses they feel at work and home.

One of the frequent themes Connection Coaches hear is that work is a stressful experience. Many attendees begin Connection Coaching not because they are looking to make a quality volunteer placement but because of stress or dissatisfaction at work. That dissatisfaction may be a conflict with a co-worker or a manager. Frequently the dissatisfaction comes from a sense that they are not in a job that matches well with their personality and with their skills.

Connection Coaching conversations reveal that many attendees of Brookwood Community Church want to think of their work as meaningful. They sense that God has a purpose for their lives and are excited to have opportunities to live out that purpose as they volunteer. Still, they sense they could do more for God. They wonder if God might not have a job for them to do. Often they begin the conversation with a vague sense that God might want them to become a pastor or work in a church-related, non-profit service agency. They may not be sure which agency, and may be terrified of the thought of becoming a pastor. However, they are excited about the thought of doing something for a job that aligns with how God created them and that somehow contributes to what God is doing in the world.

Connection Coaching Assets

Thus, the Connection Coaches of Brookwood are well-placed to be assets in any attempt to help attendees hear God's calling, accept it as their vocation, and think about their work can flow from their vocation and calling. The Connection Coaches are well-trained not only in the use of the StrengthsFinder assessment but also in how to have honest, open conversations with attendees about work, life, and calling. Their experience with the Talent Themes gives them a good basis for talking about God's sovereign shaping activity in a person's life, because Talent Themes express themselves in life experiences, some of which may have happened years ago. Seeing the alignment between talents and experiences may help establish a long-standing pattern of God's activity in a person's life. Connection Coaches are trained to listen and draw connections between seemingly isolated pieces of information that help illuminate larger patterns.

The work Connection Coaches have done in the past makes them an established and trusted group at Brookwood. Frequent announcements during worship and feature articles included in church publications make the Connection Coaching process widely known to attendees. In addition the positive experiences attendees have had with Connection Coaches mean they are recognized as insightful and helpful. Attendees frequently consider time spent with a Connection Coach time well spent. In addition, for every person who participated in the process already, Connection Coaches opened the topic of work and calling. Moving to talking more deeply about work and calling would be a continuation of a conversation rather than the beginning of something new. In this regard, Connection Coaches are seen as reliable and their insights valuable.

Work is an important topic to attendees of Brookwood. Attendees frequently start conversations with Connection Coaches on the topic. Work is frequently the subject of prayer requests shared in small groups and sent to the church's prayer team. The conversation is ongoing about what God's will is for how attendees do their jobs and even about what God's will is for what attendees should do as a job. This insight is not just anecdotal, though. The Ministry Area Profile prepared by Percept to describe the community in which Brookwood Community Church is located showed that nearly 26 percent of area residents are concerned with finding a satisfying job or career. That compares with a national norm of just over 19 percent. That 33 percent jump in interest in the topic of workplace satisfaction represents a significant deviation from national norms.¹² Brookwood attendees want help discovering God's call on their lives, and they want help knowing how their jobs relate to that calling. Brookwood's culture is well suited to help, and the Connection Coaches can be a valuable asset in the process.

¹² Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile*, 16.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER 3

A REVIEW OF HELPFUL LITERATURE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK AND VOCATION

Vocation, calling, and work have been treated differently throughout history by Christian writers and thinkers. “Vocation” and “calling” are related words. However, simply equating vocation and calling does not sort out the complicated history both terms have taken throughout history, nor does it begin to address the meaning and place of work in a person’s calling. Several excellent resources help provide a guide to clarify how these terms have been seen in history and how they can be differentiated and related.

Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation

Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation, edited by William C. Placher, compiles selections on the topic of calling and vocation from writers spanning Christian history. Placher seems convinced there is something God wants each and every Christian to do, and refers to it interchangeably as a calling or vocation. Placher’s thesis is that what God has called Christians to do can largely be differentiated into four historical periods: the Early Church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation and the Post-

Christian age. While no era has answered the question univocally, Placher demonstrates that each era possesses certain similarities in approach.

The Early Church (100-500): Called to a Christian Life

Placher asserted that during the Early Church era, stretching from roughly 100 to 500 A.D., Christians thought of their call largely in terms of the call to live a Christian life. The era took its cue from biblical passages such as Romans 1:6-7 that talked about being “called” to belong to Jesus and being “called” to be saints. “Will I be or become a Christian?” and “How will I live my Christian life?” were two dominating questions.¹ Questions about the relationship between calling and work were rare as few people had a choice about their job or profession and looked at work as something that should be avoided or something that must be done in order to survive.

During the Early Church era, periodic persecutions led Christians to glorify the martyr's willingness to suffer and die as a witness for their faith. Every Christian at least had to consider the possibility that their life might end in martyrdom.² The passion Christians felt for their faith, the moral lives they led, and the courage they showed in the face of persecution made the Christian faith compelling at a time when the faiths of the Roman Empire seemed thin and unable to provide answers or make ethical demands of their adherents.³

¹ Placher, *Callings*, 23-24.

² *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³ *Ibid.*, 26-31.

When persecutions abated, the zeal of earlier years found new outlets. Again the question was, “How will I live my Christian life?” Rather than sacrifice the demanding lives and zealous faith of the martyrs, Christians turned to the deserts and wilderness as places where they could embrace asceticism, contemplation, solitude, and spiritual warfare. Not every Christian went to the desert, but those who did were seen as the ideals, and ascetic monasticism took root among Christians.⁴

The Middle Ages (500 to 1500): Called to a Religious Life

As the Roman era gave way to the Middle Ages, Christianity became the norm across much of the former Roman Empire and Christians lived surrounded by other Christians. The calling to become a Christian was no longer an issue as one was born a Christian. Instead, the calling was to a celibate life in service of the Church, the highest and only true vocation.⁵

The stakes in monasticism were high, and some even thought of it as the one road to salvation.⁶ The rest of society, including those who fought or engaged in commerce, fell below the religious orders. Commerce in particular carried the added stigma of selling goods and services for profit, which raised questions of engaging in the sin of usury.⁷ Work and calling were not related.

⁴ Placher, *Callings*, 31-32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

The Reformation (1500 to 1800): Every Work a Calling

Monasticism and salvation also played a role in the launch of the Reformation. Martin Luther, a monk, wondered how he could have certainty about his salvation. He tried to live up to the monastic ideal of a life filled with rigor, self-examination, and contemplation. However, reading Paul, Luther concluded that one is saved by grace alone. Therefore, one does not need to enter a monastery and become a “super-Christian” in order to earn one’s salvation.⁸ He proposed that every Christian is a priest and that people should stay in the station where God put them and serve one’s neighbors instead of joining a religious order.⁹ The essential difference in a Christian, he thought, was an inner change and not a change of station.¹⁰

Luther’s ideas spread quickly. Every Christian was called to become part of the people of God and to a particular line of work.¹¹ John Calvin in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* reasoned that Christians should not view themselves as self-directed. Rather, they should think of themselves as belonging to God and directed by God.¹² Gifts given by God, consequently, are given to guide an individual and show them what to do to serve God and bring him glory.¹³ Sixteenth-century Puritan theologians like William

⁸ Placher, *Callings*, 205.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, ed. William Placher, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 233.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 237.

Perkins eventually distinguished between the “general calling to become a Christian and the “particular calling” to a specific vocation that was ordained by God and prescribed for a particular person for the good of humanity.¹⁴

The Post-Christian World (1800 to Present): Callings

After the Reformation, the term “vocation” increasingly came to mean “job,” and jobs became problematic.¹⁵ Consequently, many Christians in recent centuries have been concerned with identifying work so closely with vocation.¹⁶ However, so many perspectives have arisen on the question of what God calls people to do that it is best to characterize the current era as a plurality of answers rather than by one.

Placher cited Max Weber whose *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* drew the famous connection between the spirituality that came from the Reformation and the growth of capitalism. Placher claims Weber’s thesis was that religious belief, particularly what he termed the “asceticism” or thrift of Protestants along with their dedication to hard work contributed to the birth of capitalism.¹⁷ However, by the early twentieth-century, Weber himself saw that work was already well unhinged from its religious roots. He concluded that capitalism had become almost a sport.¹⁸

¹⁴ Placher, *Callings*, 262-264.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 371.

¹⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, ed. William Placher, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 377.

During this era interest has revived in what a call to a genuinely Christian faith looked like, particularly as Christians once again became one population alongside of people of other faiths and no faith. At the same time, some Christian writers maintain that God has work for Christians to do. Placher included writings of Horace Bushnell, the nineteenth-century Congregationalist pastor and Sunday School advocate who wrote *Every Man's Life a Plan of God*, as an example.¹⁹ Bushnell pointed out that there is a purpose for every person's life and that people are free to discover that plan or reject that plan.²⁰ Bushnell went further and advocated that individuals could discern God's shaping activity in their lives and should look at the character of God, the contents of the bible and their life circumstances for guidance on what God wants them to do.²¹

Placher's chief contribution, consequently, is to distinguish among three main answers to this question: "What does God want Christian to do?" The answers given throughout Christian history have included embracing Christ and living publicly as a Christian, accepting a religious vocation such as pastor or nun, and working for the glory of God. The most recent era has blurred the lines between these three answers and suggested that there may be truth in each one of these three answers.

Luther on Vocation

Luther represented one of the most significant leaps in thinking about the question about a person's calling or vocation. Gustav Wingren's 1957 book, *Luther on Vocation*,

¹⁹ Placher, *Callings*, 353.

²⁰ Horace Bushnell, *Every Man's Life a Plan of God* in *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, ed. William Placher, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 354-356.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 356-358.

continues to provide one of the most illuminating looks at Luther's voluminous writings on the topics of calling, vocation, and work. Wingren's stated objective was to put what Luther had to say about vocation within the context of Luther's major theological concepts including law, Gospel, and the work of Christ.²² In analyzing Luther's thought, Wingren discerned three major themes that are most aptly expressed in terms of his vision of the eschatological future of people. In the future God has planned for his people, the earthly realm, and its law will be past, the devil will be conquered, and the old human will be gone.²³ These three themes are marked by conflicts that govern vocation and work: humans live on earth under the law while Christians belong to heaven, faith, and the gospel; humans are confronted by an unconquered devil even though Christians know that Christ is victorious; there is an old person with an old nature caught in the grip of sin, even though Christians know they are children of God.²⁴ Wingren finds Luther's thinking about vocation coming from these three tensions.

Earth and Heaven

In order to understand Luther's view of vocation, Wingren asserts that one must understand his translation of the Greek word *klesis* in 1 Corinthians 7:20, a word commonly translated into English as calling or situation. Luther translated *klesis* using the German word *Beruf*, which means station or office. To have a vocation, by

²² Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (1957; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), vii.

²³ *Ibid.*, 249-250.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

translation, was to occupy a station or an office.²⁵ Every Christian occupies not only one station, but generally multiple roles including those such as parent within a family.²⁶

Occupying a station or office is a way one shows love to a neighbor, because much of what one does through work benefits one's neighbor. In fact, fulfilling one's station was to participate in God's care for humanity, for God can work directly through a person fulfilling their station or calling. Work, belongs thoroughly to earth and not to heaven in the sense it is directed downward toward one's neighbor and not toward God.²⁷

God in heaven does not want work but faith, for faith is all that matters to the Kingdom of Heaven where Christ is king, Gospel rules, and law is vanquished.

Therefore, works do not matter in heaven. It does not lead to salvation or even matter in heaven where only faith in Christ's conquest of the law and of sin matters.²⁸

For Luther work on earth happens under the law.²⁹ It disciplines Christians.³⁰ The toil and trouble normally associated with work are present in order to cause the Christian to long for heaven.³¹ Ironically, work drives a person to faith and produces a love for one's neighbor that drives the Christian back to work.³²

²⁵ Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³² *Ibid.*, 40-41.

The Devil and God

Wingren demonstrated that Luther saw work occurring on the battle line between the devil and God. In the distinction between the Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of earth, both kingdoms belonged to God. The Kingdom of Heaven is where law's power is broken, faith alone is required, and Gospel rules; it belongs to God. The kingdom of earth is where the law rules, and it is the place where governments exercise authority, neighbors are served, and toil happens, but it is also a place under the sovereignty of God being used by God for his purposes.³³

In contrast, Luther saw a realm of influence belonging to the devil and one belonging to God, and these two potential masters battle over every person. Work, in this case, can be a barometer of the battle raging over a person. Toil and despair frequently reveal that the battle over a person is pitched, and that happens only when a person is doing what God wants them to do.³⁴

The Old and New Person

As Wingren presented it, Luther's thinking on vocation is caught between earth now and heaven in the future. Earth is the transitory home for humans where they live under the law. During this life on earth, the devil seeks to lead humans away from their rightful vocations, the law, the Gospel, and (eventually) heaven.³⁵

³³ Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

Heaven, by contrast, is the eternal goal of humans. Wingren seems to have thought Luther believed humans are body and soul creatures that will one day be resurrected as body and soul creatures once again.³⁶ However, Wingren seems to think that the resurrection will happen in heaven.³⁷ Consequently, this view of life after death does not include a future for the rest of the non-human creation. Wingren specifically said that heaven is for humans and not for animals.³⁸ One can only assume that he holds a similarly negative view of the destiny of creation and the products of work in this life.

Thus, Luther advanced the cause of theological reflection on work. He affirmed the idea that vocations can consist of the normal, everyday work people do. He also affirmed that every Christian has a vocation given them by God and their vocation is for the good of people. He even affirmed that work can cooperate with God's purposes for the world and spent enormous amounts of energy reflecting on the theological importance of the details of everyday life. Still, Luther fails to see the eternal impact of work.

***The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of
Abraham Kuyper***

According to Vincent Bacote, thinking about calling, vocation, and work took a major step forward around the turn of the twentieth-century through the work of a Danish journalist, theologian, and politician. Bacote's work begins, however, with his own experience of growing up among evangelicals who advocated a strong distinction

³⁶ Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 166.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

between Christians and the surrounding culture. He was taught he could engage in cultural activities only if the activity was distinctively Christian.³⁹ He found this approach unsatisfying and turned instead to Abraham Kuyper for an alternative worldview. Kuyper's understanding of common grace seemed to affirm the goodness and direction of creation, and it contained a call to involve Christians in every aspect of culture.⁴⁰

Bacote found that Kuyper's understanding of common grace provided encouragement to involve Christians in every aspect of culture. Without denying the reality of the fall, Kuyper seemed to push Christians to develop potential latent in creation that was essentially good.⁴¹ His work, therefore, sought to understand the interaction of common grace, creation, and pneumatology in Kuyper's public theology in order to discern how Kuyper would approach an increasingly complex culture.⁴²

Kuyper's Life

Bacote believes that Kuyper's life showed his public theology and reflected his convictions about how Christians should interact with the surrounding culture.⁴³ The Netherlands in the late nineteenth-century was dominated by secularism and progressive

³⁹ Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51.

humanism rooted in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Atheistic unbelief was common and left a diminished role for religion in public life.⁴⁴

In contrast, Kuyper thought that there was an important role for people of faith and insights from theology in the public sphere. First as a journalist and then as a parliamentarian, Kuyper wrote about a “clash of principles” happening on the topic.⁴⁵ His public involvement eventually led him to become Prime Minister from 1901 to 1905.

Kuyper's basis for involving confessional faith in the public realm was his conviction that there are “real, divine ordinances built into creation by God that can be discovered through experience” and are relevant to governance.⁴⁶ At the same time, Kuyper did not advocate a theocracy or the adoption of a biblical law code. Such measures were not necessary to discover and implement the divine ordinances contained in creation.⁴⁷ In fact, Kuyper’s 1880 inaugural address to the Free University of Amsterdam made it clear he saw society as composed of multiple spheres including government, education, the Church, and others, and that all spheres are independent of one another, each possessing their own authority while still ultimately answering to Christ. The implication of this doctrine was not that the Church should take over society but that Christians were called out to become involved in every area of public life.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*, 55-56.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

Common Grace

Bacote found Kuyper's critical concept of common grace grounded in his thinking about creation. Creation for Kuyper incorporated both the way that God constituted the world at its beginning and the Holy Spirit's ongoing providential work of preserving the biophysical universe.⁴⁹ Kuyper recognized that creation was made with potential, which was why God commanded humans to shape creation.⁵⁰ Common grace, consequently, was the ongoing activity of God in preserving the biophysical universe.

Common grace brings glory to God. In the post-fall world, that means snatching humans from the worst effects of sin and blocking or redirecting the consequences that could result from sin.⁵¹ Common grace continues the possibility for development. Because of that possibility, Kuyper saw it as incumbent upon Christians to participate in the drive toward progress, because it would go horribly wrong without them.⁵²

The Holy Spirit

Bacote found Kuyper's thinking about the Holy Spirit to be the driving force behind the operation of common grace in the world. Kuyper saw the work of the Holy Spirit as extending back to creation yet including an invitation to shape the world toward the future.⁵³ Bacote differentiates the work of the Trinity in creation with God the Father

⁴⁹ Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*, 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 21.

generating it, the Son arranging and organizing it, and the Holy Spirit perfecting it. This perfecting work of the Holy Spirit drives creation forward. The Holy Spirit is also the person of the Trinity that animates life and restrains sin. All of these activities link the Holy Spirit to common grace.⁵⁴

The work of the Holy Spirit similarly forms a bridge in Kuyper's thinking to eschatology. If the Holy Spirit moves history toward God's end, then it is possible that the Holy Spirit is the one who enables the discovery of cultural, legal, political, and other values that yield patterns of social organization reflecting what life will be like in the new creation. In this activity, the Holy Spirit is the one who works alongside human beings, calling and equipping humans to join in God's work.⁵⁵

Eschatology

Bacote's understanding of Kuyper, provides an important bridge to introduce not only a creation mandate as a drive for work but an eschatological one as well. In an address before the elections of 1891 entitled "Maranatha," Kuyper staked out eschatology as the basis for action by Christians in the present to reshape the world as it is in anticipation of the return of Jesus at the close of history.⁵⁶ Kuyper found the Christian notion that history has an end toward which God is moving to be a compelling reason for Christians to become involved. If God is sovereign over the end of history, then God is

⁵⁴ Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*, 113-114.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

sovereign over the present.⁵⁷ The expectation of Christ's return should not leave Christians apathetic about the present but should lead them to take action in every sphere of human endeavor.⁵⁸

The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work

As the title implies, Darrell Cosden's *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* represents a substantial attempt to examine work in light of eschatology. He asks, "Can work count for something in God's view of things?" Frequently, as in the thinking of Luther, the answer is "no." Instead, work counted only in an earthly view of things. However, Cosden disputes that opinion.⁵⁹ He also broadens the scope of work to include not only what a person does for pay but also every activity in "the realm of the ordinary" where human life is lived.⁶⁰ All of it, he claims, somehow adds to the shape of the ultimate new creation.

Problems with Work

However, right thinking about work begins by breaking down wrong thoughts. Those wrong thoughts begin with the Church. Theologians who have dealt with work in the past have frequently spoken of its value predominantly in terms of how it provides a platform for evangelism or helps a Christian grow spiritually. Cosden states, "Most in

⁵⁷ Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology*, 65.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁹ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

evangelical circles would concede that in the final analysis—from the perspective of eternity—only things that relate to the soul or a person's inner spiritual state really matter for eternity. At best, ordinary work is seen as a means to these “religious' ends.”⁶¹ Similarly, Cosden critiques practices within many congregations that lead to devaluation of work and the marginalization of work as a theological topic. Many congregations remain caught in the classic trap of clericalism, the belief that those in vocational ministry are somehow better than other Christians.⁶² The second highest calling in many congregations is to spend large amounts of time in church-related service or spend large amounts of effort at work in religiously oriented activities. Both provide the person who works outside of the church with a second path to recognition within congregations.⁶³

A second barrier to thinking clearly about the value of work as a calling comes from eschatology. Cosden recognizes that the value of one's work and of the products of that work comes from the view one has of the destination of creation.⁶⁴ In the Middle Ages it became common to think of the soul as the only part of a human that would survive into eternity. It was assumed, in contrast, that the material world would pass away. Hence, the thought arose that the only value of work was what it would do to the soul.⁶⁵ The thought, however, did not disappear with the Middle Ages. The real question that Medieval theologians were considering was how a person could go to heaven. Fear

⁶¹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 20-23.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

of not going to heaven sent many people into monasteries to ensure their salvation. The same questions and fear drove Luther to monasticism. Luther famously became disenchanted with the notion of getting into heaven based on works and proposed that one is saved through faith alone due to Jesus' finished work on the cross alone. However, Luther never fully recognized that the question of salvation and the future was bigger than the issue of "going to heaven when you die."⁶⁶ "Going to heaven when you die" was the goal for Luther, and the way was through faith and by grace. Work had no saving value. It could not get a person to heaven. Hence, work was of no heavenly value. Cosden recognizes this thought has prevailed since the Middle Ages. It is not uncommon even for evangelical Christians today to think the only thing that has a future beyond death is a person's inner, spiritual nature or soul. If that is the case, then the body and the entire material world have limited value.⁶⁷

The Future of Work

Cosden rightly diagnoses the critical question concerning work: what is the final destiny of creation?⁶⁸ He boldly asserts that thinking of salvation as belonging to the future and to souls alone makes little or no sense and does not mesh with the Bible. Salvation is for humans as a unity of spirit and body, and salvation is for the wider non-human creation as well.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 42-43.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

Cosden considers the life, person, and work of Jesus the right lens for interpreting the Bible in a Christian manner and for understanding the question of work. Within that framework, the resurrection of Jesus' body stands as the model of salvation for Christians and the entire cosmos.⁷⁰ Jesus was raised from the dead with a physical body that was transformed. It was both continuous with the body he had before and new in some ways. The critical point is that Jesus was raised physically from the dead and transformed. That is the way to understand the future of humanity and of creation.

The portrait of the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22 provides an important example for how Cosden sees the current world contributing to the new creation. As with the resurrection of Jesus, in Revelation 21 and 22 there is continuity with the old creation in that the fullness of humanity is represented by twelve tribes and twelve elders, the glories of the nations are on display and a city (aptly named New Jerusalem) is the image of the new creation rather than a return to a pre-Fall garden.⁷¹ At the same time, as with the resurrection, there is discontinuity with the old creation as some things including the sea are absent and God is now fully present with his people.⁷²

However, Cosden does not dismiss the importance of the original creation. Creation as it began had a purpose as well which is indicated by the fact that God chose to redeem creation rather than replace it with a totally new creation. The importance and purpose of the original creation is affirmed by the fact that God did not "reset" creation

⁷⁰ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 53-55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 74.

and return it to its original, pre-Fall state as a garden.⁷³ The eschatological imperative, does not negate the creation mandate to work as they function well together.

Cosden concludes that believers desperately need to grasp God's mission in the world and how human work is purposeful in and of itself. Human work looks back to God's original mandate that humans reflect his image and work alongside him. Simultaneously, human work looks forward, because God is drawing humanity toward a conclusion. It flows from the reason humans were created and why Christians have been saved.⁷⁴ Acknowledging that fact requires many people reorient their lives and see what they do every day has eternal value.⁷⁵

Work in the Spirit

In *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, Miroslav Volf advocates for a theology of work based on eschatology, but adds the theme of grounding a theology of work in pneumatology as well. The doctrines of the Holy Spirit and of the end times replace creation and providence as the guiding concerns in constructing a theology of work. Volf begins with the problems associated with work now.

⁷³ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 80.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

The Contemporary Situation

Volf argues that defining work is a problem, because, work is ordinary, and changes quickly and dramatically due to changes in technology.⁷⁶ The issues surrounding work begin to come out in defining work, because it is associated with toil and drudgery as well as with employment for pay. However, Volf points out that the challenge is to treat work in its essence and not as it is at any particular point. Toil and drudgery are not essential to work. Wages are secondary as well, for work can be done without being employed or paid, and wages can be gained without doing work.⁷⁷ Volf defines work in the following way:

Work is honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or their co-creatures, or (if primarily an end in itself) activity that is necessary in order for acting individuals to satisfy their needs apart from the need for the activity itself.⁷⁸

Volf argues that work is in crisis, because it is riddled with child labor, unemployment, dehumanization, exploitation, ecological damage, and other problems. He traces the evolution of work from the Agricultural Era, through the Industrial Era, and into the Information Era noting a trend away from workers as craftsmen connected to their products to machine operators and finally machine overseers almost completely disassociated from their products.⁷⁹ This succession of eras has seemed in some ways like

⁷⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers), 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-35.

progress, but it also involved alienation of the worker from the product and the treatment of workers as machines themselves.

Volf argued that much of the impetus for this movement came from the thinking of Adam Smith, a philosophical fountain-head of capitalism. Smith singled out labor as the source of economic wealth.⁸⁰ Before Smith, economic pursuits were seen as ancillary to society and happiness. Political, spiritual, and intellectual pursuits were viewed as the key to the good life of a citizenry. Volf contended that Smith reversed the order of traditional society by saying that political and intellectual pursuits should serve economic activity, the highest good, and the mechanism that ensured the good life of a population. People work, in Smith's view, in order to satisfy their physical needs and frivolous wants, all in the pursuit of leisure.⁸¹ Simply put, Smith taught that human labor leads to wealth, which leads to happiness.⁸² The key to increasing wealth and happiness, therefore, is to increase labor or the efficiency of labor. The way to do that, Smith argued, was to divide labor into ever smaller, repeatable tasks.⁸³ However, division of labor comes at the price of alienation. Workers become powerless, exploited, and estranged. Smith saw that at the bottom of the division of labor, those who perform a few simple movements repetitively would become a base type of human. Smith thought this was the price society had to pay

⁸⁰ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 48.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 52.

for economic advancement.⁸⁴ Volf wonders what the alternative might be to work that produced alienation, exploitation, and damage.

A Theology of Work Based on Eschatology

Thinking about such questions purely in ethical terms will not suffice. Volf argues that theological reflection on the topic of work should be grounded in dogma instead. A theology of work raises questions of meaning and the place of work, which come before particular questions about how one works.⁸⁵ Volf proposes life in the Spirit of God and new creation as the theological framework for discussing work. Grounding theological reflections on work in eschatology links it with the saving mission of Jesus. It also has the benefit of speaking about what work should be, because it arises from what God (who is loving and just) desires for his creatures.⁸⁶ In addition, an eschatological theology of work is transformative, because it implies leading the present world of work toward the promised world and calls upon current practices to change.⁸⁷

The issue of the future and work comes down to the question of continuity. If the world is to be annihilated someday and a new one made from nothing, then human work may have present significance but will completely pass away when the world is annihilated. Such a view obviously devalues work.⁸⁸ If the future is somehow continuous

⁸⁴ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 54-55.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

with the present world, then the products of human work may contribute directly to the new creation after a process of cleansing, perfecting, and transfiguring. Volf affirms the continuity view, which implies the value of work and cultural involvement.⁸⁹

In thinking of work leading in the direction of God's new creation, Volf cautions that human work should never be seen as actually producing the new creation as it is the gift of God that exceeds human capacity.⁹⁰ As the Bible states repeatedly, the appropriate human posture is to wait for God to institute the new creation (cf. Mt 25:13, Rom 8:18-25, Rev 22:17-21). However, Volf advocates a posture of waiting expectantly and actively within history as God's Holy Spirit works to use human actions to create "provisional states of affairs that anticipate the new creation in a real way." These activities may be dim reflections of the final consummation at the end of history, but work that anticipates the new creation will ultimately be caught up and transformed in the new creation.⁹¹

A Theology of Work Driven by Pneumatology

Eschatology and pneumatology are related topics for Volf as he views the Holy Spirit as the down payment of the coming eschatological transformation as well as the agent through whom "the future new creation is anticipated in the present."⁹² The Holy Spirit normally has very little to do with reflections on the nature of work, because

⁸⁹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 91-92.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 102.

thinking about the Holy Spirit is frequently limited to salvation, and salvation is usually thought of in terms of the human spirit.⁹³ However, Volf maintains that the Spirit of God is at work on the entire person, not just the “spiritual” aspect of a person, and the Spirit of God is at work in the whole of creation, not just in the realm of religious experience which means the Holy Spirit relates to mundane human work.⁹⁴

Consequently, Volf thinks of the process of a person being called to work in terms of gifts of the Spirit of God or charisms. Charisms are gifts of the Spirit related to specific tasks or functions the Holy Spirit fits a particular Christian to fulfill. Volf holds that charisms should not be thought of as limited to gifts that enable work to be done within the Church alone. Rather, he views charisms as gifts the Holy Spirit gives for work both inside and outside the Christian fellowship. Charisms belong to all members of the body of Christ and include both spectacular as well as ordinary types of gifts.⁹⁵

Volf relates gifts of the Holy Spirit and mundane work boldly. He asserts that such a link is biblical based on passages such as Exodus 35:30-35 indicating that certain people can be spiritually gifted and empowered to carry out certain tasks, even arts and crafts. However, Volf spans more broadly as well, asserting that God’s Spirit is given to enable Christian living and that work is no exception. This understanding of the work of

⁹³ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 102.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

the Spirit of God links the calling to follow Jesus and the calling to serve God in one great movement in a person's life.⁹⁶

Volf concludes Christians should understand their everyday work as “work in the Spirit” whereby God's Spirit calls and equips people to work to actively anticipate God's eschatological transformation of the world. Therefore, work is not an incidental part of a Christian's life. It is not a curse. It is a central aspect of what it means to be a Christian.⁹⁷

In a Spirit-driven understanding of work, an individual's calling is based on the person's moral character, their context, and the gifts God has given to them. That calling arises from what God has already done and from the gifts God has already given including context, talents, and experiences.⁹⁸ Therefore, in order to best understand how God is calling and what God is calling a person to do, it is necessary first to look back.

⁹⁶ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 113-115.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

CHAPTER 4

A CONGREGATION'S ROLE IN DISCERNING VOCATION

Brookwood Community Church participates in the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference. This denomination is characterized by free-church polity, a commitment to the authority of the Bible and orthodox Christian theology, tolerance on non-essential doctrinal differences, and redeveloping struggling congregations and starting new congregations.¹ These commitments drew Brookwood to affiliate with the denomination from its inception. Since the denomination comes from the broader Congregational tradition, it brings strengths and liabilities to the congregation as it seeks to help attendees discern their vocation and express that in work.

The Church as a Gathering of Believers

Broadly speaking, the free-church form of polity traces its root to the Radical Reformation, the Anabaptist movement and early Baptist theologians like John Smyth.²

¹ <http://www.cccusa.com/> (accessed February 27, 2012).

² Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 60.

This strand of the Reformation sought to go further than Magisterial Reformers like Luther and Calvin. They considered the established churches of their day compromised and therefore separated from them. What emerged was the conclusion that the Church on earth should be an assembly of true followers of Jesus, not a mixture of the converted and the unconverted from a geographic area as was the case in state churches.³

Such thinking became important in the English Reformation. In the sixteenth-century, most everyone in England belonged to a local parish of the established church, a church that expected absolute and unquestioning obedience. The bishops were responsible for interpreting the Bible, and the monarch was the sole governor of the Church of England.⁴ In 1582 the English Parliament went so far as to declare worshipping outside of the Church of England an act of treason.⁵

However, the sixteenth-century was also a time of theological questioning. Many people found control by the monarch and clergy to usurp the authority of Christ.⁶ So-called Puritans advocated staying within the Church of England to purify it. However, Separatists began clandestine meetings as they distanced themselves from the established church. Both groups experienced persecution.⁷ Fleeing persecution, Separatists moved

³ Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 61-62.

⁴ Arthur A. Rouner, Jr., *The Congregational Way of Life: What It Means to Live and Worship as a Congregationalist* (1960; repr., Oak Creek, WI: Hammond Publishing Company, 1972), 2.

⁵ Manfred Waldemar Kohl, *Congregationalism in America* (Oak Creek, WI: The Congregational Press, 1977), 2.

⁶ Rouner, *The Congregational Way of Life*, 2.

⁷ Kohl, *Congregationalism in America*, 2.

first to Holland and then to the Americas aboard the Mayflower.⁸ The Separatist Pilgrims founded a colony where they could openly practice their faith.⁹ Persecution continued in England, and eventually many Puritans emigrated to the Americas as well, where they settled in close proximity to the Pilgrims.¹⁰

Over the next century the Pilgrims and Puritans together articulated the foundations of Congregationalism including the fact that a local congregation is a true church. Congregationalists asserted that a local church should be governed by the people, under the lordship of Jesus and that ministers should be selected by the people.¹¹ English Congregationalists of the seventeenth-century added several ideas to this form of polity including respect for the authority of the Bible, the use of church covenants under which the congregation is gathered, respect for lay preachers, the evangelistic nature of ministry, and the practice of welcoming all professing followers of Jesus to participate in communion.¹² These principles continue to form the essence of Congregational polity.

Thinking of the Church as a local gathering of believers is one of the key innovations of Congregational or free-church polity. Membership in most Congregational

⁸ Kohl, *Congregationalism in America* , 3-4.

⁹ Ibid., 7-11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹¹ Ibid., 15-16.

¹² Ibid., 19.

churches is voluntary and not linked to a geographical parish.¹³ Consequently most Congregational churches distinguish between those who believe and those who do not.

It would be a mistake, however, to understand a democratic impulse as the driving force of Congregational polity. This polity begins with the conviction that the Church belongs to Jesus, and Jesus' authority over the congregation is expressed in multiple ways.¹⁴ Congregationalists believe that Jesus leads through the Bible read by God's people.¹⁵ Consequently, it is the responsibility of every member to read the Bible, seek God's will, and listen to the Holy Spirit. This gives rise to the equal voice and equal responsibility possessed by every person in a Congregational church.¹⁶

This concept has profound implications. It means that every believer has a right to engage in ministry as an equal partner. Ministry in Congregational churches never should be done by a few. If the true Church on earth consists of the gathering of believers, then it is only the gathering of all the believers that fully represents the true Church. Similarly, it is the gathering of all the believers that represents the fullness of God's gifts given to the Church. Members who choose to withhold their insights, talents, and gifts handicap the Church. There is no class of pastors, no monarch, no liturgy, no hierarchy, and no sacrament to point to that can take the place of the full gathering of God's people.

A second implication of this particular brand of polity is that it makes the gathering of believers the ideal place for vocational discernment. The gathering of

¹³ Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 63.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁵ Rouner, *The Congregational Way of Life*, 2-3.

¹⁶ Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 62.

believers should be accustomed to reading the Bible together, listening to God's voice, and discerning where God is speaking together. It should be a place where it is natural to talk about giftedness and where ministry opportunities and deployments are discussed.

Problems in the Gathered Church

There are practical and historical problems with this idea. Among those struggles is establishing the right balance between being a gathered group of believers who are adequately differentiated from the surrounding culture and being a group hostile to society. The acute nature of this problem even in the present can be traced to the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy of the early twentieth-century.

The controversy's roots go back to the development of a Protestant consensus in the United States after the Civil War. The late nineteenth-century was a kind of golden age of faith, attendance, reform, institution building, and cultural creativity among evangelical Protestants.¹⁷ However, by the turn of the twentieth-century, secularizing tendencies from Europe arrived and quickly gained broad influence. This way of thinking was represented by Darwinism as a scientific movement and the historical-critical approach to biblical scholarship. Together these ideas circulated quickly among a growing number of liberal theologians who assumed control of denominations and Christian institutions.¹⁸ The unparalleled violence of World War I then raised important questions about the future of morality and the ability of civilization to survive, which

¹⁷ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 200), 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

brought out an aggressive and idealistic modernism that began to assert itself in theological circles and in the broader society.¹⁹ Fundamentalism became a response to this assertive modernism.

Fundamentalism is primarily a religious movement among American evangelical Christians marked by complete confidence in the Bible and committed to a message of God saving sinners through faith in Jesus.²⁰ However, when it emerged in the 1920s, it was a loose coalition of anti-modernists who came together to fight attempts to accommodate Christianity to modernist thinking.²¹ Simply put, fundamentalists thought that Western society was going wrong and saw modernism and the theory of evolution as undermining both biblical faith and the foundations of American society.²²

The fight began on two fronts. First, fundamentalists battled theological liberalism within major denominations. Second, they fought the teaching of the theory of evolution as science within American Schools, a fight typified in the Scopes trial of 1925.²³ Scorn was heaped on fundamentalists following the Scopes trial, and they began to retreat from their campaigning posture and build a subculture of their own.²⁴

¹⁹ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870 – 1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) , 6.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Ibid., 3.

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* , 6.

Fundamentalists are now known frequently for what they are against. Sometimes they are seen as opposing science and intellect.²⁵ Sometimes they seem against culture and only in favor of rescuing souls for heaven.²⁶ They frequently gain a reputation for condemning facets of the larger culture and shying away from entertainment and even politics. They seem to express piety through negative choices like avoiding dancing or the movies.²⁷ However, it is difficult to influence the broader culture from such a posture.

At the same time, liberals and moderate modernists who retained power after the fundamentalists withdrew did so at a price. They maintained control of large denominations and institutions. However, power was shifting to the physical sciences and the social sciences to describe reality. In response the mainline Protestant story has largely been greater and greater accommodation of the culture and diminishing influence.²⁸ The decline of liberal Protestantism in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the population suggests that accommodation is not an effective strategy either.

This struggle between liberal and conservative elements came to Congregationalists as well. A series of mergers among denominations resulted in the formation of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches in the twentieth-century. In 1942 that body began to explore possible organic union with the Evangelical and Reformed Churches. By 1944 they reached agreement on a process for the merger

²⁵ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 7.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 84-85.

²⁸ Ibid., 82-84.

that culminated in the formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957.²⁹ However, some Congregationalists opposed the merger on several grounds including the change it would mean to Congregational polity.³⁰ Two alternative bodies resulted, one being the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC), Brookwood Community Church's denomination.³¹ The CCCC formed in response to what it saw as the liberal tendencies within other strands of the Congregational movement.³² The formation of the denomination as a response against modernism, liberalism, and denominational control left the CCCC ill-equipped for a time to engage its community.

Neo-evangelicalism represented by the unifying power of William "Billy" Graham and the National Association of Evangelicals sought a more constructive relationship with the surrounding culture as they differentiated themselves from fundamentalists.³³ Graham became a unifying force for evangelicals and a prominent spokesperson. Rather than standing apart from society, he used cultural forms like advertising, television, news, radio, books, and movies to communicate to the culture.³⁴

²⁹ Kohl, *Congregationalism in America*, 51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

³² *Ibid.*, 56.

³³ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 957.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 957.

At the same time, the National Association of Evangelicals sought to provide a less divisive and more constructive voice for conservative Christians.³⁵

By the 1950s, neo-evangelicalism was shedding fundamentalism's former suspicion of intellect without modifying its commitment to scriptural infallibility or the need for a conversion experience.³⁶ Neo-evangelicals even engaged social issues. By the end of the 1950s, fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism together formed a rapidly growing, conservative movement within American Christianity.³⁷ Neo-evangelicals found more constructive ways to approach society in Jesus' name demonstrating that neither accommodation nor hostility were unavoidable.

Given that Congregational and other free churches place a high emphasis on the role of every member, it is ironic that several trends that have proven true in many Christian congregations in the later twentieth-century have proven true in these churches as well. Prominently, students of the church noted in many places the role of pastors has been elevated at the expense of the role of so-called "laity."³⁸ In *The Once and Future Church*, Loren Meier noted that for many years the life an average person lived as a responsible member of society expressed the bulk of their responsibility as a Christian.

³⁵ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 958.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 959.

³⁸ Michael Bennethum, *Listen! God Is Calling! – Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003), 32.

They attended church, paid dues, and left theological matters to paid clergy and theological scholars.³⁹

In terms of mission, participation by laypeople took the form of prayer, financial support, and encouraging a few young people to go to a mission field that was elsewhere. In addition, lay people were to avoid certain negative personal behaviors like immorality or breaking the laws of society.⁴⁰ Ministry was something to be done by the clergy who carried an aura of authority in such matters.⁴¹ The role of laypeople in ministry was through auxiliary, helping roles. They served on committees and boards and were expected to constantly engage in ever more activity at church.⁴² This trend toward clergy authority and away from lay ministry is destructive to helping attendees discern their vocation and implement it through work. At the same time this trend does not represent the heart of Congregationalism.

Sometimes even the recruitment of future clergy and missionaries undermines the dignity and importance of the work most people do in cooperation with God. This entire vein of thinking has the opportunity to confuse and rob the strength from free-church ecclesiology. Resources like *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby and Claude King typify this form of reasoning. The *Experiencing God* materials have been enormously helpful in elevating the importance of every Christian seeking a relationship with God

³⁹ Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1991), 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 35.

through Christ, listening to God's voice and looking to obey God's direction. However, they also subtly undermine the importance of what most people do daily.

Blackaby and King begin with a bold statement that "those who come to Jesus as Savior and Lord join His mission to reconcile a lost world."⁴³ They quickly assert the importance of a personal and intimate love relationship with God and follow with a summons to join God in the work God is doing already.⁴⁴ However, Blackaby and King use illustrations that devalue the work of most people. For instance, to illustrate the way God does extraordinary things through ordinary people, they told the story of D. L. Moody who was an ordinary shoe salesman but left that occupation behind in order to become a pastor and an evangelist.⁴⁵ They told a similar story about a college campus ministry whose effectiveness they measured through the number of people who became Christians and by the way many students "surrendered to full-time ministry and are now serving as pastors and missionaries all over the world."⁴⁶

Repeatedly they emphasized the importance of listening to God's will that would be revealed. They reiterated that God's will was not something that someone could simply come to understand.⁴⁷ When God's will works in a person's life, it will necessarily change that person. That person will receive new spiritual gifts that will fit for

⁴³ Henry Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

a task not envisioned before.⁴⁸ Then, in direct contradiction of Luther's thinking on the same topic, Blackaby and King boldly asserted that when God calls a person it requires major adjustments to a person's "thinking, circumstances, relationships, commitments, actions, and/or beliefs."⁴⁹ They stated it would be impossible for a person to stay where they are and go with God at the same time. Resources like *Experiencing God* are helpful in encouraging congregations to listen to God's voice and take bold steps as followers of Jesus, but undermine a congregation's ability to help people think clearly about the lives God gave them and the calling God placed on their life if that calling does not involve serving as a pastor, evangelist, church planter, or missionary.

Even outstanding resources designed to address what they see as a crisis in discipleship in Western churches do some damage to a congregation's ability to discern calling and integrate an attendee's vocation and work. They do so by introducing and elevating personal spiritual practices that have monastic and clerical overtones.

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster is one such resource.

Foster begins his work by asserting there is a desperate need today "not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."⁵⁰ He proposes spiritual disciplines as a way to call people to move beyond shallow living into deeper lives. He criticizes how many people only dabble in their inward journeys and

⁴⁸ Blackaby and King , 74-77.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁰ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Revised ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 1.

miss how the disciplines point one to a life of intimacy with God.⁵¹ He theorizes that the role of disciplines in a person's life is to fill the gap between self-reliance and passive waiting. Instead, the disciplines put a person before God in a posture where God can do the hard work of transformation.⁵² His goals are noble and largely helpful.

However, Foster unintentionally contributes to a dangerous trend in Christian theology. While he worries about the emphasis most people give to the outer, material world over the inner, spiritual world, Foster at least theoretically and theologically elevates the interior, spiritual world over the material world, creating a kind of dualism that is problematic for those seeking to value work. In addition, Foster encourages practices that appeal to some people. Prayer, fasting, meditation, and solitude may help some people connect with God on a deeper level. However, those same practices may leave others deeply frustrated not because they are created to prefer activity or relationship. They are led to wonder if they are somehow created poorly. Finally, those same practices have a long tradition that arises from the Bible, but that tradition has been the property of monasticism and the clergy for such a long time that encouraging them as the main way to connect with God unintentionally continues to elevate the clergy over the vast majority of Christians which is contrary to Foster's real goal.

Resources from philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard present similar problems. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard makes even more explicit that the critical problem he sees is that ordinary people must become transformed into disciples

⁵¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3-4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 7.

who follow Jesus.⁵³ He worries that such is not the case and asserts that continuing to rely on current practices to accomplish the new end of discipleship is not realistic.⁵⁴ He theorizes that in order to become like Jesus, his followers must do things like Jesus did.⁵⁵

Willard recognizes the stakes. He asserts the world needs fully formed Christians, because it has been left to the like of “mere diplomats, politicians, and business leaders” who have failed to provide adequate leadership.⁵⁶ The times call instead for heroes with faith, spiritual character, and power to lead. He views spiritual disciplines as a way to shape followers of Jesus who are ready to come forth and engage in tasks in the world.

Willard places a much more helpful context around spiritual disciplines. They are something undertaken to “bring us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom.”⁵⁷ However, while Willard considers spiritual disciplines to prepare a person for a public life, none of them arise from a public life. It may be true that private spiritual disciplines prepare one for public life. However, the Church must do more to equip people to value lives lived publicly as an act of discipleship itself.

⁵³ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1988), ix.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

The Primacy of Evangelism in Thinking about Work

Congregations and denominations in the free-church tradition frequently are dedicated to personal evangelism by members and world missions.⁵⁸ This is a natural development of thinking of church as a gathered community of believers who experience a personal conversion or rebirth. The same can be said of evangelical Protestants in general. Evangelicals are defined in part by the view that conversion is an essential part of Christian experience and personal witness is part of normal Christian activity. Admittedly, congregations frequently turn inward and forget the importance of witness and mission. However, failure to engage in witness and mission does not change the underlying theology, and that theology frequently comes out in resources offered, even those offered on the topic of work.

Going Public by William Carr Peel and Walt Larimore is one such resource. In the introduction the authors assert that people want to make a difference in the world and the desire to make a difference is healthy. They claim that making a difference for Christians, particularly for evangelical Christians, is found “largely in terms of their efforts to share the gospel—to spread the Word, to see others at home and abroad come to faith in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹ As the title implies, they seek to help readers “go public” with their faith.

Peel and Larimore’s work is important in two regards. First, they distinguish their approach from traditional methods in advocating evangelizing within the context of

⁵⁸ Kärkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 63.

⁵⁹ William Carr Peel and Walt Larimore, *Going Public with Your Faith: Becoming a Spiritual Influence at Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), 11.

relationships rather than through confrontational conversations with strangers.⁶⁰ Second, they claim the workplace rather than either the Church or a distant mission field is now the primary setting for doing effective Kingdom work. They make the related assertion that sharing faith in the workplace has been the consistent means of growth in Christianity throughout its history.⁶¹

The advantage of viewing the workplace as a venue for evangelism, according to the authors, is it capitalizes on the large number of Christians distributed in many different workplaces to provide access to more people at the point where they find community and experience need.⁶² Approaching evangelism this way has the benefit of involving many more people in evangelistic witness. It also corrects the tendency in many churches to place the responsibility for evangelism and ministry on the few.

Consequently, thinking of the workplace as a place for Christian witness represents progress for many people. Many Christians see an insurmountable divide between faith and the workplace.⁶³ However, workplace evangelism still ends up devaluing work and making it difficult to find the importance of the work itself. Peel and Larimore affirm that when people go to the workplace, they may work for God. If they meet legitimate human needs, they do God's work.⁶⁴ They also recognize that work can

⁶⁰ Peel and Larimore, *Going Public with Your Faith*, 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

be a tool for making a Christian into a better disciple.⁶⁵ They even affirm that work done well is an opportunity to bring God glory and suggest work somehow counts for eternity.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, their reflections on the importance of work stop there, and the rest of their book is dedicated to a rationale, plan, and set of tools for relational evangelism in the context of the workplace.

Making missionaries and pastors the guardians of ministry obviously hampers the effectiveness of any ministry or mission by limiting the number of people and talents engaged in the effort. At the same time, diminishing the importance of what every follower of Jesus does robs the church of vital talents available through the work of good, talented, and hard-working people. Peel and Larimore point out, involving every believer in relational workplace evangelism is a far more effective delivery system than relying on a few talented evangelists, the clergy, or even the media. However, Peel and Larimore stop short of realizing the effort of every one of Jesus' followers is needed not just for evangelistic witness but for the full work God has in mind. Anything less diminishes the effectiveness of the Church. God's mission requires every Christian hear their calling, own that summons as their vocation, and respond with work that flows from both.

Rethinking the Gathering of Believers' Stance toward Culture

In order to effectively equip the people of God for this work, the Church must also rethink its stance in relationship to the culture. D. A. Carson in *Christ and Culture Revisited* turned to H. Richard Niebuhr's classic work, *Christ and Culture*, to begin the

⁶⁵ Peel and Larimore, *Going Public with Your Faith*, 43.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-45.

conversation. Niebuhr presents a schema of five possible relationships between Christ and culture that Carson believes reveals two sources of authority competing in the culture: Christ and everything that is not Christ.⁶⁷ Christians are those who have at least nominally submitted themselves to the authority of Christ. Theologically speaking, all of culture is under the authority of Christ. However, the fact that Christians acknowledge Christ's authority sets them apart from the surrounding culture.⁶⁸ Christians consequently live in a tension as part of a culture that defies Christ's rule.⁶⁹ Christians and non-Christians develop different worldviews based on their divergent understandings of God, human origins, evil, salvation, human significance, and the end of time.⁷⁰

Carson sees secularization not just as a passive competitor with a Christian worldview. In common usage, the terms "secular," "secularization," and "secularism" all refer to the "squeezing of the religious to the periphery of life."⁷¹ Secularization, however, is a process that "progressively removes religion from the public arena and reduces it to the private realm" and secularism is a stance that knowingly promotes secularization.⁷² Carson finds secularism unrelenting and determined, a worldview so

⁶⁷ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 116.

different from the Christian one that the two are bound to endorse and encourage different types of culture. Conflict between them is inevitable.⁷³

However, Carson asserts that Christians should not only try to confront other cultures. He also advocates a stance of seeking to enhance surrounding cultures. Following the biblical image of being salt, he suggests that Christians by their very nature will enhance the surrounding culture by becoming the best possible citizen they can.⁷⁴

Carson tentatively also mentions a posture of “servant leadership,” a term he finds somewhat ambiguous as it can overly emphasize the servant nature of the posture without giving adequate expression to the leadership component. Carson reminds that leadership must be exercised but it must happen within the context of a life lived sacrificially for the sake of others.⁷⁵ Still, such a posture must never negate the Christian claims that Jesus already possesses all authority and that he will reign until he has destroyed all of his enemies. Sacrificial living is seen when Christians alone and in groups help people. When Christians feed people, mentor children, help people learn to read, or serve the sick, Christians influence the world. Carson argues this is work that Christians must do.⁷⁶ In a sense, Carson argues that Christians engaging in the work God gave them to do is one healthy way of engaging with the surrounding culture.

Andy Crouch presents another strong way to think about approaching the surrounding culture in *Culture Creating*. Borrowing from Ken Myers, Crouch defines

⁷³ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 121.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

culture as that which human beings make of the world.⁷⁷ Like Carson, Crouch deals broadly with Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* scheme and says most Christians who study it come away with a sense of identification with Niebuhr's language of transformation.⁷⁸ They have a desire to change the world and bring it under the conscious authority of Christ. However, Crouch reminds Christians with such a desire, this transformation happens slowly, over long periods of time and following large investments of work. Sudden change, as in a revival or revolution, happens from time-to-time, Crouch asserts.⁷⁹ However, such changes more frequently destroy culture than build it. Hoping for a revival or a revolution to fundamentally transform the culture is badly conceived.⁸⁰

Crouch reminds Christians of the pivotal role God plays in transforming culture. In understanding and applying *Christ and Culture*, Crouch claims many people substitute "Christians" for "Christ" when identifying a posture.⁸¹ Crouch notes God transforms culture over the grand sweep of history and it is easy to equate what God does over a long period of time with what Christians hope to do themselves quickly. He implies the need for patience and trust, because transformation of human culture remains a gift of God and something that ultimately will only arrive at the end of history as a gift from God.⁸²

⁷⁷ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 182.

However, Crouch still claims Christians have a constructive role to play in culture and a helpful posture to adopt in relationship to society. He argues, as the title of his book implies, that Christians should basically become the patient creators of culture. He is careful to point out that people do not actually make culture. Rather, people create “artifacts” or “goods” that become part of the framework of the world.⁸³ Artifacts are goods like a book, an omelet or a road. These artifacts, when shared, take on a life of their own and shape the world.⁸⁴ The only way genuinely to change the culture, according to Crouch, is to create more of it.⁸⁵ He argues, for Christians who are deeply serious about cultivating their unique abilities and talents and use them to create more culture. He looks for people who will “wear that seriousness lightly—who are not desperately trying to change the world but who also wake up every morning eager to create.”⁸⁶

Christians indeed are caught between worlds. There is the tension between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. There is the tension between the Kingdom of God that has already dawned but still has not yet come in its fullness. There is tension in belonging to a gathering of people whose fundamental loyalty is to Christ but who live in a world whose fundamental loyalty is to anything other than Christ. Living in this tension, there is a natural pull to resolve it. Called by this tension, Christians seek to transform the world. In the worst moments, that means battling or falling into step with the other side. Carson and Crouch suggest rightly that what is

⁸³ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 28.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 40, 63-64.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

needed is an understanding of all that is not of Christ and for Christ, what could be broadly called “the world.” Both call for a coherent way of responding, and the Church desperately needs that. Somehow the thought of getting very good at creating culture, of working hard at what Christians are good at, and contributing in small ways that greatly impact makes sense. Carson points to Jesus himself saying such a stance makes Christians salt, a flavor that enhances everything around it. Somehow creating culture, flavoring the world, and cooperating with God in his work form the basis for Christians to approach the world is a productive way.

Broadening the Gathering of Believers’ Thinking about Mission

Churches in the free-church tradition have traditionally valued evangelism and mission. Both thoughts are in need of expansion and challenge. Numerous authors call churches of all types to think more broadly about mission. Mission was something people did for God elsewhere. Clearly today mission is something that happens in neighborhoods, cities, and workplaces where Christians already live. Mission in some ways is the dividing line between the gathering of believers and the rest of society or creation. Mission is also something God does and which followers of Jesus join. It is not primarily a human enterprise. It does, however, have a human dimension.

Mission can be thought of primarily in terms of evangelism and starting more churches. Both are indispensable aspects of mission. However, when thinking of mission in terms of God’s work throughout history, mission clearly includes more. Evangelism itself must be rethought in the gathering of believers. Evangelism was thought of exclusively in terms of conversions. Focus was placed on the moment of conversion, and

too little thought was given both to the process involved and the context of evangelism. Conversion happens as a result of God's work in a person's life and usually after a process. Conversion also happens when a credible witness enters a person's life.

To establish the credibility needed for effective evangelism, the Church must think more broadly. Conversions are limited when Christians are not deep and different; Foster, Willard and others are correct about that. The Church must develop Christians who are weighty, admirable, and available. Evangelism requires another type of credibility as well. It requires the credibility that martyrs and servant-minded Christians produced in the earliest centuries of Christianity's spread. In the days of the Roman Empire, that credibility came from acts of selfless service and boldness in the face of persecution. Today it needs to be seen that Christians care about the world and are not just eager to escape it. What is needed are Christians who are excellent at what they do. Salespeople admire excellent salespeople. Executives admire successful executives. Artists admire and listen to inspired artists. Police officers respect other police officers who are honest and outstanding. To gain a hearing, Christians must think deeper about the context of evangelism and the issue of credibility.

Joining God in the fullness of his mission is another avenue for establishing credibility. When the Church becomes simply a vendor of religious goods and services, it loses credibility. When the Church serves the world around it, that service is noticed and appreciated. In a world that increasingly values activism, service becomes an important piece of establishing credibility for witness and testimony.

The gathering of believers must become a place where identity is shaped in relationship to the culture. Future Christians relationship to the culture hangs in the balance. The dramatic edges of opposition and accommodation seem to have the natural draw. Left unconsidered, most Christians either slip into hostility toward the competing culture, or accommodate themselves to it and eventually become indistinguishable from it. Both approaches have serious drawbacks. As a unique group of people, the gathering of believers needs to think coherently about its stand in relationship to culture. Churches in the free-church tradition are uniquely suited to do this. For centuries they have realized the Church and surrounding culture are not one and the same. The gathering of believers must articulate what that means. It must make choices rather than allowing itself to slip toward hostility or accommodation. There must be a better way, and members of the gathered church need guidance on how to articulate their own position.

Appropriating a sense of vocation happens in light of the understanding of one's relationship with the surrounding culture. For instance, if a person is part of a church that is hostile to the surrounding culture, it guides one's sense of vocation. One is called to combat or subvert the culture. If a person is part of a church that accommodates itself to the surrounding culture, then his or her vocation would in some ways be simply to extend the culture.

The gathering of believers is the right place for discerning vocation. The gathering of believers is already conscious not only of its distinction from the surrounding culture but also of its loyalty first and foremost to Christ. That provides the critical new basis for vocational discernment. One's vocation in life comes not from the

culture, not from a choice made in isolation, and not from a random chance. One's vocation flows from the authority of Christ who calls. In the free-church tradition it is incumbent upon people to listen for that calling. The gathering of believers is already the place where the Bible is read and the Spirit is heard. It is meant to be a place of discernment and wisdom. It is time to turn that discernment to the topic of calling and vocation for those seeking wisdom on the topic.

Furthermore, the free-church provides an appropriate context for thinking about the significance of work. As a unique people within the culture, the gathered church is already aware of the dynamic of being gathered with other believers and then scattered in the midst of people who are different. This dynamic of gathering for support and scattering to a different place is already the topic of pastoral care and conversations among believers. They seek support in a work environment that is sometimes draining or toxic. They seek understanding of the stresses of work and of the dynamic of being surrounded by people who are different. It is natural in the gathered church to talk about the significance of work itself and not just of the work environment. To the support and encouragement the gathered church frequently provides, it would be natural to provide support to the work itself.

These assets have the possibility of fulfilling the promise of the cherished Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of every believer. In some ways that doctrine has never been fully realized. In its beginning that doctrine meant simply that every Christian had the ability to pray for another Christian. At times the doctrine comes to mean that every Christian is a minister and that all are equal. At its height the doctrine implies that

every Christian has equal responsibility and that every Christian has been sent by God to join him in his mission. Discerning vocation means thinking about how that summons from God is received in a person's life. Considering how work fits into that summons means pushing a person's vocation and priesthood out to the very edges of their lives. That may advance the promise of the priesthood of all believers and the charge to make disciples.

CHAPTER 5

A THEOLOGY OF VOCATION AND WORK

A theology of vocation and work will naturally begin with definitions. Since the terms “calling” and “vocation” are related closely in meaning and in etymology, authors frequently equate the two. However, it is possible not only to suggest meanings for these terms but differentiate them as well. Similarly, “work” is such a common word and a reality that its meaning is either assumed, or it produces lengthy and technical definitions such as Volf’s:

Work is honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or their co-creatures, or (if primarily an end in itself) activity that is necessary in order for acting individuals to satisfy their needs apart from the need for the activity itself.¹

A theology of vocation and work that ultimately will help Christians come to an understanding of God’s calling, their own vocation, and work ultimately will require a more accessible definition of work.

¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 10-11.

Defining a Person's Unique, God-Given Vocation

The term “calling” implies first of all that someone is speaking. That voice can be seen as the characteristic that differentiates “calling” from “vocation.” For the purposes of this project, the speaker is God. In contemporary usage, calling tends to be reserved for those who hear God’s summons to enter a religious profession as a pastor or missionary. However, God summons his people into relationship with him and to do something that aligns with his purposes in the world (cf. Gen 12:1-4, Eph 4:11-13, 1 John 3:1). That summons may be issued supernaturally through auditory or visionary experiences or through natural means (to be delineated later), and the summons may be heard, missed, or ignored by the one being summoned. Calling, consequently, is God’s summons to a relationship with him and to work that aligns with his purposes in the world.

If “calling” implies God’s summons given, then perhaps “vocation” implies God’s summons received. In all of its iterations throughout history, “vocation” has leaned in this direction. In the Middle Ages, a “vocation” was a religious occupation or station. The Reformation shifted the term toward an occupation that was dignified by a sense of cooperating with God’s purposes in the world. Since the Reformation, vocation has suffered from being identified exclusively with a job without reference to God’s summons. In each case, the emphasis is on the calling received of God. Vocation is God’s summons received and lived out in a person’s life. Defining vocation in this manner answers the question history has raised: Does God summon his people to follow Jesus, to a religious vocation or to secular work? The answer includes all three.

Work is activity that may be done for reasons inherent in the work itself, or done for external rewards such as pay or leisure. Work does not have to be done, however, within the context of a paid job. Work includes washing dishes, mowing the lawn, and transporting an aging parent to a doctor's appointment. Work is simply effort exerted to produce an end, sometimes in the context of employment.

In order to integrate work and vocation, it is first necessary to discern how God calls. God's summons of his people may be issued in supernatural ways. When God called Moses in Exodus 3 and 4 to the vocation of confronting the Egyptian Pharaoh and leading the Hebrew slaves from captivity, God spoke to him in a visionary and auditory experience. These experiences are supplemented by gifts given by the Holy Spirit for particular purposes. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." This passage claims that at least every Christian has some type of spiritual gift and those gifts are given for a purpose or end. Based on such passages, it is not uncommon for Christians to ask what their spiritual gift is and what the purpose of the gift might be. However, identifying a spiritual gift can be difficult and take both time and discernment. Additionally, identifying a spiritual gift such as evangelism or prophecy as well may not provide guidance relative to careers and other daily activities.

Life experiences provide some guidance that helps a person understand God's calling. This aligns with the pattern of God's calling in the Bible. When God summoned a person in the Bible to do work, he rarely used supernatural experiences. Prophets and

apostles saw visions and heard voices.² However, figures such as Nehemiah received his vocation through natural processes unfolding in his life. In Nehemiah 1:1-4 the reader discovers Nehemiah was born into a Jewish family with roots both in Judah and Persia. The reader notes Nehemiah's Jewish roots led him to hear messages about life in Jerusalem and sympathize with the suffering of the people there. Then in Nehemiah 1:11 the reader discovers that Nehemiah's life led him into a position of influence with the king. The mechanisms of Nehemiah's calling were strikingly natural and flowed from his life experiences. Those experiences come together in providential rather than random ways. Nehemiah's position, his inclinations, and ultimately his developed leadership abilities came together for God's purpose of securing the peace of Jerusalem. Life experiences can providentially be made holy and purposeful.

Natural talents and inclinations fit on top of the background of life experiences. Esther who became Queen of Persia possessed natural talents that became useful for God's purposes. Esther, apparently, was attractive and understood beauty products and luxury foods. Esther 2:8-9 reveals her talents led her to find favor with Hegai who was put in charge of the king's harem. Later it became apparent that Esther was a talented hostess and diplomat, and used those talents to lure the king and Haman into a conflict that would end in the deliverance of her people. Esther found her calling through the alignment of the life experience of growing up in a Jewish family of influence in the Persian Empire when Queen Vashti fell out of favor. Her beauty, facility with luxury

² Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, 35-36.

products, ability to entertain, and diplomatic skills all came together in her vocation of delivering the Jewish people from destruction.

Some events in life have unique significance, however, and are constituted or interpreted as messages from God. *Focused Living* by Terry Walling suggests helpful categories for understanding such messages. For example, *Focused Living* mentions an “integrity check” that is simply a life event that becomes “a test God uses to evaluate the heart and consistency of inner convictions with outward actions.”³ Categories such as these are helpful in evaluating the significance of life events and in determining what message God is communicating during that event.

Life experiences, natural talents, spiritual gifts, messages from God, and supernatural experiences come together in God’s calling in a person’s life. When God’s summons is received and accepted, that becomes a person’s unique, God-given vocation. Operating from that vocation brings a particular level of alignment as human talents and will come together with God’s gifts and will. This alignment provides a person with an opportunity to make a truly extraordinary contribution in life.

Objections to Linking Work and Vocation

For fifteen centuries Christians held exclusively to the thought that God’s calling in a person’s life was to become a Christian or live a particular kind of Christian life. In the first few centuries as minority Christians lived within a majority pagan empire, confessing faith in Jesus was bold and risky; to do so represented a Christian’s calling. At

³ Terry Walling, *Focused Living Resource Kit: Retreat Workbook* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2001), 13.

the same time, there was little or no choice in what one did for a career, and work was viewed with some suspicion, something to be done from a sense of obligation.⁴ As Christianity became accepted and then, the majority faith within the Roman world, living a rigorous, ascetic Christian life in the wilderness became an honored calling.⁵ During the Middle Ages the situation in regard to calling and vocation changed very little. Government, commerce, trade, and even raising a family were seen as necessary activities that were still secondary to contemplative, ascetic religious vocations.⁶

The Reformation changed the options on a Christian's calling dramatically. As the world became more complex and theologians rethought the priesthood and monasticism, it became common to think of the work all Christians do as being a vocation.⁷ Luther and Calvin encouraged Christians to look to the lives they led for God's calling.⁸ In England, the Puritans developed this idea further, distinguishing between a general calling that belongs to everyone to become a follower of Jesus and a particular calling that is one's unique contribution to God's work and to the world. Particular calling eventually became synonymous with one's occupation. Over time particular calling became simply a self-chosen career and lost any link it had to discipleship or to faith in Christ.⁹ This secularization of vocation led to multiple abuses of work: workers became vulnerable to

⁴ Placher, *Callings*, 23.

⁵ Ibid. 31-32.

⁶ Ibid., 107-113.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ Ibid., 207.

⁹ Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, 49.

justifying their value or God's favor by their works, to over-working, and to being motivated simply by self-interests.¹⁰ By the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, theologians became rightly concerned about easily linking vocation and work. Not only did such a link lead to destructive behaviors by individuals, but, it paled in comparison with the calling to follow Christ or to live a rigorous Christian life.

Work in the past two centuries was riddled with problems arising from dramatic changes in work. Volf categorizes the change as a movement between three eras—the Agricultural, Industrial, and Information Eras. During the Agricultural Era, the vast majority of people in any society produced food.¹¹ Craftspeople in the Agricultural Era used manual production to create their own products and consequently are connected to and in control of their products.¹² As industrialization begins, work changes. At first workers are drawn into a relationship with work that Volf categorizes as “total work” where workers toil tremendously long hours in production of industrial goods in factories.¹³ Industrial workers become machine operators rather than tool users, with machines replacing craftspeople as the primary agents of production, thereby distancing the worker from the product and from control of the product. Operating machines devalues the experience of workers and favors manual dexterity and flexibility,

¹⁰ Stevens, *Doing God's Business*, 50.

¹¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 27-30.

¹² *Ibid.*, 30-32.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

frequently leading to younger workers, lower wages, and even child labor.¹⁴ Finally, in the Information Era workers become machine overseers who read dials and printouts to ensure that machines function properly. Information Era workers have little control over and little connection with their product.¹⁵ Volf argues rightly, that work is in crisis. Worldwide child labor, worker exploitation, unemployment, underemployment, discrimination, dehumanization, inequality, and ecological damage are rampant.

The Bible presents problems with work that must be accounted for. It presents work as good and part of the original creation. Work's beginning includes the fact that the world God created in the beginning was deemed to be good; creation was made intentionally and was made to be a home and not a prison for humanity.¹⁶ As Cosden points out in *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, the opening chapters of Genesis are filled with ways in which work was part of God's original plan for humans. Humans were created to relate to one another and to God, were commanded to fill the earth, were charged to tend and keep creation, and were instructed to bring order to creation by naming the animals.¹⁷ The very fact that humans are created in the image of God implies doing the work of reflecting God's image to the rest of creation.¹⁸ Even the limit God

¹⁴ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 32-33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

¹⁶ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 86.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88-93.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

placed on work through Sabbath rest serves as a reminder that work is a part of the human condition.¹⁹

Work, however, was marred by sin's entrance into the world. Humans' choice to take and eat forbidden fruit represented an attempt by humans to do work apart from God. Certainly sin carried with it consequences that affect work. The effects of sin directly pertain to human work: childbirth will be infected with pain, relationships will involve difficulty, and work will involve frustration and toil.²⁰ However, humans almost immediately began to engage in city building, textile manufacture, animal husbandry, performing arts, metallurgy, and tool manufacture.²¹

The Bible is likewise ambiguous at times about the value of work. Biblical authors, like many thinkers throughout history, viewed work as necessary for survival. Proverbs abounds with wisdom about work and sloth such as Proverbs 20:4 which suggests that "a sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing." This thought is picked up in the New Testament as well in 1 Thessalonians 3:10; Paul wrote he had given a rule that anyone who would not work would not eat. Work, therefore, is clearly linked with survival. With so many neutral or negative associations with work, it is easy to understand why contemporary thinkers are reluctant to link calling, vocation and work.

¹⁹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 99.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

Vocation as being called for others

However, the Bible is also permeated with the thought that God has a special people who have the job of representing him in the world. God's special people serve as a sign to the nations they are called into relationship with him, and join God in his mission. God's sending of his people took a definitive turn in Genesis 12:1-3 when God called Abraham into a relationship with him and promised that his family would become a blessing to all of the nations. In the end, the Bible concludes with people from every nation, tribe, and language worshipping God, a clear fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 12:1-3.²² In between, God's people have a role.

As Christopher Wright points out in *The Mission of God*, God's first calling to Abraham came after the protological history of humanity and the nations. Rebellion against God was the dominating theme, constantly threatening the cosmos. In contrast Genesis 12:1-3 seems to be a new and creative act by God. God sent Abram from one land to another, and in that new land, blessing took place.²³ The world then became blessed through Abram and his descendants, but it is important to note that blessing came not from the world itself. It came from outside as a gift of God.²⁴

The life and work of God's people then would be relevant. The children of Abram were to live lives of faith and obedience that would be the essential credentials they

²² Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 194-195.

²³ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 199-200.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 201-202.

needed in order to be effective participants in the mission to bless the nations.²⁵ Israel was created as an agent through which God extends blessing to the nations and cosmos.²⁶

Jeremiah the prophet showed in Jeremiah 29:1-9 what it looked like to have a calling to be a blessing to the nations in a letter he wrote to Jewish exiles in Babylon. At a desperately difficult time in the history of God's people, the exiles wondered when they might come home, how they might be delivered and what to do in the meantime. He told them to put their hope not in being removed from the nations but in being called to the nations. He encouraged them to build houses, plant gardens, marry, and raise children. Their job was to carry on life as God's people in the midst of the nations and seek the peace and prosperity of their new home. Rather than dreaming about returning to their enclave in Jerusalem, they were to live as a light to the people around them, for that was their vocation.

Jesus made it clear to his followers that their vocation involved being called to others as well. In Matthew 10:1-10, Jesus called his disciples together and designated some of them "apostles" or "sent ones." He sent the apostles out with a mission that clarifies how his people are always sent. They were to carry a message that the reign of God is breaking in through Jesus, and do work that showed the nature of that reign. The mission of those apostles involved miraculous deeds with practical implications—they were to heal the sick, raise the dead, and overcome demonic powers. Jesus added the

²⁵ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 207.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

posture of freely giving as they had been generously supplied by God, a calling that God's people are to share life and blessings with others.

The very nature of spiritual gifts given to God's people demonstrates how they shape God's people to fulfill their vocation of being sent to others. In 1 Corinthians 12:7 Paul emphasizes that spiritual gifts are not given for personal enjoyment but rather for the common good. In Romans 12:6-8, he emphasizes that a person with spiritual gifts has a calling to use those gifts for the purpose for which they were given. Romans 12:9 implies that spiritual gifts should shape one for loving service.

Ephesians 4:7-16 applies this principle specifically to leaders within the Church. Ephesians 4:11 notes apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching offices, all of which are specifically designed to build up God's people. Clearly possessing one of these vocations means that one is called to and for others.

Missional Church adds a vision of what the Church can look like as it seeks to embody the vocation of being called to others. It begins with the Church thinking of itself as a sent people rather than as a place where religious goods and services are available for those who want to approach the Church.²⁷ *Missional Church* hypothesizes that static models of the Church are never appropriate. Since the Church was sent by Jesus, it should constantly be in motion. That motion is driven in three ways. First, the Church is driven by God's mission. Rather than existing for its own mission or even for the purpose

²⁷ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 4.

of extending itself, the Church is constituted and gathered around God's mission.²⁸ God's mission reveals a second movement that drives the Church, the motion toward the future. The Church should move constantly toward God's reign breaking in through Jesus.²⁹ The Church pulled forward toward the reign of God should seek to discover how to anticipate that reign and act on behalf of that reign in the public realm.³⁰ The third motion driving the Church is the motion of inviting people to join this journey.³¹

Eschatology as a Calling

Eschatology, emerges as a fundamental driver for the mission and shape of the Church and for the calling, vocation, and work of individual Christians. In some ways the entire Bible can be read through an eschatological lens. It begins with a problem. God's good and perfect creation is marred by the sin and rebellion of the human race. The plot of the Bible is driven forward by a central question: "What will be done about that rebellion and the effects of that rebellion?"³² It is clear, however, from the beginning that the story is not mainly about what God's people do about their own rebellion but what God does about that rebellion and about its effects. The central mission of the Bible is not

²⁸ Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 81-82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 97, 108.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

³² C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 195.

one that belongs in the end to God's people primarily but one that begins with and comes from God himself for the sake of the entire creation.³³

The New Testament demonstrates that the Bible read as God's eschatological mission coheres. In Luke 24:45-47, Jesus indicates that the thrust of the Old Testament ("what is written") is the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. It led to a mission to the nations preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins.³⁴ Reading the Bible around the mission of God, consequently, is to read the Bible as a story that leads up to Jesus and away from Jesus toward a grand conclusion God has in mind.³⁵

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament make it clear that sin, salvation, and God's mission are matters not just of personal, private sin but of a broader issue. The Exodus itself makes clear that sometimes people need to be saved from their own sin while at other times people need to be saved from the sin of others or even of society. The New Testament extends the message of the Old Testament. Rather than exchanging the social message for a personal, spiritual message, the New Testament reveals the true depth of sin and salvation and gives the final answer to the human predicament.³⁶

The cross on which Jesus died showed the extent and cost of God's mission. In the cross God dealt with the guilt of human sin, defeated the power of evil, overcame death, broke down barriers of alienation between and enmity between people, and made

³³ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 277-279.

possible the healing and reconciling of all creation. The cross made it all possible.³⁷ In that sense, the cross showed the shape of God's mission.

However, the final destination of that mission is critical. God's mission is inherently eschatological; it is heading somewhere. The shape of where it heads describes and determines the shape of God's mission. N. T. Wright argues in *Surprised by Hope* that one traditional picture of people dying and going to heaven or hell in a "one-stage postmortem journey" represents a serious "distortion and diminution of the Christian hope."³⁸ He argues this distortion came about through Medieval piety and displaced a more ancient hope in the resurrection.³⁹ That more ancient hope in the resurrection had a stronger pull on the Christian view of life, death, what lies beyond, and the end of time until the late eighteenth-century. Until that point the common thought was that the dead would be resurrected at some future point after an intermediate sleep or state. Hence, many Christians were buried facing east, the direction from which they thought they would see the risen Lord come when he resurrected them.⁴⁰

N.T. Wright argues that at least two common misconceptions need to be corrected in order to arrive at a correct eschatology. The first is the concept of the soul. The current thought that humans possess an immortal soul that leaves the body upon death to dwell in heaven or hell forever finds little support in the Bible. He claims the word "soul" in the

³⁷ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 312-313.

³⁸ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 148.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

New Testament does not refer to a potentially disembodied entity hidden inside the shell of a disposable body. Rather, the term reflects the Old Testament concept of the entire person.⁴¹ There is no indication that anything about a human is immortal. In fact, 1 Timothy 6:16 declares that God alone is immortal, and 2 Timothy 1:10 asserts that it is the Gospel alone that make immortality available.

The second misconception surrounds heaven. Wright argues that heaven is not simply a place a Christian goes upon death. Rather, it is a present reality, another dimension of present life, the dimension where God dwells.⁴² Jesus upon his ascension went into heaven which means simply that he is now simultaneously present everywhere, especially with his followers.⁴³ Heaven is now the place from which Jesus rules and gives instruction and guidance to his people, and it is the place from which he will return to make his rule complete.⁴⁴

The resurrection of Jesus, N.T. Wright argues, is the logical place to start when thinking about the future of a Christian.⁴⁵ When Jesus rose again from the dead, he had a body and did not appear as a ghost or a disembodied soul.⁴⁶ Jesus' body had been changed to the point that he was not readily recognizable to those who saw him.

⁴¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 28.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 111, 117.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

Jesus' resurrection was in some ways actually the first act in the new creation.⁴⁷ As a foundational event, Christians expect that what Jesus' resurrection began someday will be completed.⁴⁸ In multiple places, the Bible indicates not only humanity but all of creation eagerly waits for the moment when the same power that produced the resurrection of Jesus bursts forth in all of creation.

This is the hope surrounding the second coming of Jesus when he will be personally present and God will remake the cosmos.⁴⁹ In that time Jesus who is now spiritually present but bodily absent will be physically present in creation as well. He will appear as the rightful king and rule creation in person. Then all of God's enemies will be conquered, the dead will be raised, and living Christians will be transformed.⁵⁰

For individual Christians, hope for the future starts with life after death. As N. T. Wright says, "For those who die in faith, before the final reawakening, the central promise is of being 'with Jesus' at once."⁵¹ However, resurrection is a way of talking about what happens after that intermediate state of existence, what he calls "life after life after death." For the world, the hope is the cosmos will be radically healed. Eschatology brings these two thoughts together in a belief that history is "going somewhere under the

⁴⁷ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 128-133.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

guidance of God and that where it was going was toward God's new world of justice, healing, and hope.”⁵²

One key question in eschatology deals with the relationship between the present and future orders: Will there be continuity or discontinuity between this present creation and the future new creation? Volf stresses that in a discontinuity view the world is annihilated and new creation starts again out of nothing.⁵³ The continuity view, by contrast, stresses that the old creation passes through a process of judgment that involves cleansing, perfecting, and transfiguring and that parts of the old creation become part of the new.⁵⁴ The implications for mission and ultimately for calling and work are profound. An annihilationist view means that mission is predominantly about “saving” individuals, because all other products of human work and the world itself are destroyed in the coming judgment. However, if the continuity view is correct, then products of human work and cultural engagement are both relevant.

Volf and others argue for the view that the world is transformed rather than replaced. Volf notes that the resurrected and glorified bodies of humans call for a resurrected and glorified environment. The Bible notes that the Kingdom of God will finally be located on earth. It only makes sense the earth will be resurrected and glorified.⁵⁵ Volf also notes that the Bible (in passages such as Romans 8:21) indicates that creation is looking forward to such a moment when it is liberated from bondage to

⁵² N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 122.

⁵³ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 89-91.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

decay and transformed.⁵⁶ Both are based on the notion that the world was made and declared “good” by God in the beginning, which indicates that creation is not destined for destruction.⁵⁷

The Bible comes together, as the story of God, humanity, and creation. It is a recounting of what went wrong, what God has done to put it right, and what the future will be like as God’s plan is fulfilled.⁵⁸ That is the contour of God’s mission, and it flows through Jesus becoming the current basis for the mission of God’s people.⁵⁹ Understanding that mission begins with God and is primarily God’s mission means that from the point of view of the Church mission is simply “our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.”⁶⁰ It flows both from the grace of redemption that has been accomplished already and from the grace of a future God has promised.⁶¹

That mission, shapes the Church. It creates an ethical demand on God’s people to live in ways that express and facilitate God’s mission rather than undermining it.⁶² At the same time, God’s mission is vast which means God is now working through his entire

⁵⁶ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁵⁸ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 357.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 357.

people to accomplish it.⁶³ Salvation is about whole people, body and soul; the present, not just the future; and what God does through humans, not just what God does in and for humans.⁶⁴ This mission is so broad it requires the whole people of God with each one doing their piece, a fact that has profound implications for calling, vocation and work.

Secular Work as a Sacred Vocation: Refuting a Utilitarian Approach to Work

The Bible shows that secular work matters in God's mission. As Israel entered its period in the wilderness, the people of God sought a place to meet with God and experience his presence. God responded with plans to create an ark to be housed in a Tabernacle, a tent where his presence could dwell and he could meet with his people. In Exodus 31:1-11, God told Moses he selected two people to oversee the work. Bezalel son of Uri and Oholiab son of Ahisamach were set apart for the job of making the ark, the Tabernacle, and all the furnishings. They were called upon at once to be skilled craftsmen, competent designers, able managers, and even reasonably good teachers. God told Moses that he filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God, skill, ability, and knowledge. The gift of the Holy Spirit paired with natural gifts ensured the job could be done. It is important to note that while the articles in question were intended for sacred use, design, management, and craftsmanship are not inherently sacred but secular.

The work Nehemiah did was equally secular and important. As governor, Nehemiah carried on relations with neighboring states, supervised the flow of food and

⁶³ C.J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 322.

⁶⁴ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 200.

other goods, and carried on a massive civil engineering project. In reconstructing the wall around Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to gather plans, motivate a massive work force, overcome diplomatic challenges, negotiate a balance of power with local leaders, and manage a complex building schedule. The end result was the greater security of Jerusalem and its ability to prosper as a light to the nations going forward. However, the work was secular.

Esther's work as queen of Persia involved secular roles. In the king's harem, her job was to understand current fashions and adapt the best beauty secrets of her day in order to attract the attention of the king. As queen she was involved in political intrigue that would rival reality television. Her work eventually led to the saving of God's people, but it is necessary to ask if that secular work was calling and vocation. Mordecai, her uncle, in attempting to reinforce her courage for the risky diplomatic work ahead of her, wondered aloud in Esther 4:14, "and who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" While the voice of God is never heard in the book of Esther, it is implied that the question is answered positively. God called Esther to be queen, and saving her people was her vocation. It was secular work but important to God's mission.

The importance of secular work does not end with the Old Testament or even with the second coming of Jesus. The portrait of the future in Revelations includes a city, the New Jerusalem. Emphasis is placed on the miraculous features of the city. According to Revelation 21:4, there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain in the new order. God will dwell with his people. The city will be enormous and encrusted with precious jewels and metals. It is easy to miss in the midst of the miraculous description that it is

still a city, and the maintenance and running of any city involves large amounts of work. New Jerusalem, it seems, will be a place of artistic creativity and artistic expression. However, it will also be a place where food is prepared and served and possibly where dishes are washed and floors are cleaned. New Jerusalem will be a place where work happens.

PART THREE
STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING CALLING, VOCATION, AND WORK

Having established at least the contour of a theology of calling, vocation, and work, practically they need to be integrated. Issues include how to summarize a theology of work in such a way that it can be taught and become useful. In addition, it is necessary to describe God's mission in terms of work and make that work accessible. Finally, it is necessary to ask about the rationale and practical steps for helping Christians discern God's calling in their lives, embrace it as their own unique God-given vocation, and leverage their work in the direction of their vocation.

Foundations for a Strategy to Integrate Calling, Vocation, and Work

The best beginning point for a strategy integrating calling, vocation, and work is with the basic theological principles that need to be communicated to attendees of Brookwood Community Church seeking to integrate God's calling, their own sense of vocation, and the work they do on a daily basis. That begins with understanding that God can and does call people to work. Theologians rightly assert God calls all of his people to follow Jesus and live a life in intimate communion with him. That calling is central to a

Christian's vocation. It is also true that some people are called to religious vocations. While it is difficult imagining anyone is called to separate themselves from other humans to privately engage in a battle against their own flesh in order to earn their salvation, it is true that some who have chosen ascetic and contemplative lives have blessed others with what they learned in the process. In addition, it is true that some are called to vocations that in today's society involve employment in churches. They are called to be pastors, missionaries, and teachers, and these offices should not be diminished. At the same time, the calling placed by God on other people is essential as well. That calling produces a vocation that expresses itself through work. Despite the distortions work has suffered, God calls his people to do work.

Next, it is important to communicate the influence of eschatology to calling, vocation, and work. The end times suggest that work moves in a direction. God's mission pulls history in the direction of the new creation; and God invites his people, the Church, to both anticipate the new creation and build for the new creation. The task of anticipating the new creation and building for the new creation suggest that the Church is called to join God in transforming and redeeming the culture around it. Such a suggestion is wide-reaching and implies that the talents and energy of every Christian is required for the task at hand. Work has a purpose. Work cannot be divided into important, religious work done when one is gathered with the Church and meaningless, secular work done for selfish motives or simply to survive. The work individual Christians do should move culture and creation in the direction of God's new creation. Under God's eschatological

call, work participates in anticipating the world as it should be or transforming the world as it is.

Underpinning any strategy to help attendees of Brookwood integrate vocation and work is the conviction that Christians indeed can be equipped in such a manner. It is possible by studying one's talents and life experiences to at least begin to understand how God summoned a person to follow Jesus and do work that cooperates with God's mission. It is possible to develop an understanding of that summons that expresses a held sense of vocation. It is even possible to integrate that vocational understanding of how God's summons was received in terms of the daily activities one performs, including what one does for employment.

Finally, the Church is the place where this integration should happen. It is the Church that asserts that there is a divine being who summons people to a relationship and to work. The Church asserts that this God moves history toward a conclusion and that the conclusion of history makes claims against the present. It is the Church that approaches people fully, addressing not only their concerns about money, time, and leisure but also their spiritual nature as well. Within the Church as well it is the role of the pastors and teachers to equip the gathered followers of Jesus, and equipping followers of Jesus involves equipping them to live every moment of their lives under the summons of God. That begins to fulfill the component of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus' command to make disciples includes teaching a disciple to recognize every command and summons he has given, and that understanding is marked by obedience. Being a disciple of Jesus, therefore, must include understanding of and obedience to

God's summons to every disciple to do work that cooperates with his work and mission. To stop short of that goal would be to stop short of making fully formed disciples.

Casting a Higher Vision for Work

Integrating calling, vocation, and work involves casting a higher vision for work. To do so requires rescuing the role of pastors from being the experts on theological and biblical matters alone. Henri Nouwen addressed the problem of clergy professionalism and of pastors thinking of their value in relationship to their theological expertise in *Creative Ministry*. He asserted the pastoral need to be thought of as an expert actually creates barriers to effectiveness and leads to unhappiness, emptiness, exhaustion, and disappointment for pastors.¹

Casting a higher vision for work in a congregation begins with a higher vision of pastoral ministry. That begins by overcoming thinking of pastors mainly as the guardians of doctrine and possessors of biblical knowledge that creates barriers between a pastor and the congregation. The congregation listens to the pastor, particularly in the context of preaching, but not understanding. The problem frequently relates to the fact that pastors answer questions congregants are not asking.² The reason is pastors do not know the needs of congregants. Rather, they become consumed with learning, debating esoteric theological concepts, and serving enormous organizational needs of congregations.³

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, Revised ed. (New York: Image Books, 2003), 3-4.

² *Ibid.*, 30-32.

³ *Ibid.*, 35-39.

In relationship to work that means many pastors do not understand the work of congregants. Some have never held a job outside of pastoral ministry, nor spent time in the world of business and commerce with congregants. Some have not heard about the frustrations, concerns, and even joys that people experience at work on a daily basis. They are not equipped to address those concerns. There must be something more. Hence, casting a higher vision for work means rethinking the work of pastors.

A higher vision of work necessarily involves changing the popular perception of work. The fact that work is frequently associated with toil and drudgery is no accident. People frequently view work as something that must be endured in order to get a paycheck, provide for the present and future, and make it to leisure time. In addition, the thought is held widely by congregants that the only work that serves God is pastoral work or social service work. Work must be rescued as a concept and infused with new meaning, opening up new ways to find satisfaction in work.

In order to do that, work must be recast as relevant to God's mission. The Bible is ultimately the story of God's mission to save people and creation. The same is true of history; in history God is on mission saving people and creation. That is equally true of every era of history. God is constantly working and on mission, which means God's people are constantly receiving a summons to join him in his work and mission. Work is relevant; it matters. The task is demonstrating how human work relates to God's work. That requires categories to describe God's work and categories that simultaneously align with God's work and describe human work as well.

God's work and summons to his people to join him in that work are just the beginning for a Christian. That summons must be received and understood. It must be developed into a sense of vocation describing how God called and how that calling comes through in an individual's story, talents, and spiritual gifts. Having articulated that vocation, it is necessary for the individual to embrace it and seek to discover how that vocation lines up with the work the individual does or ask how one's life can better align with one's received vocation.

The higher vision of work calls on every believer to see that they are significant to God's mission. Christians must be called upon to see that while God is on mission, God works through the entire body of Christ to implement that mission. A higher vision of work must open up the possibility that God is working to anticipate the new creation right here and right now and the possibility that God will transform the world as it is in provisional ways to look more like the world that he has planned for the future. That conviction gives an individual Christian a context. They are part of something bigger than themselves. They are on a team and part of a large advance team God is using to bring relief to the world and to open up new possibilities.

Expected Outcomes

Any process that helps Christians integrate calling, vocation, and work will be driven by certain expectations that can be measured and observed. The process must be designed to produce these benchmarks, and success in the process can be judged based on whether the expectations are met. Chief among those expectations is the idea that learners understand the contours of God's mission. Practically that means learners will develop a

basic understanding of an orthodox Christian eschatology. This eschatology begins with creation that is good, it continues through a presentation of the problem of sin and the effects of sin, it includes the broad outlines of how God's saving plan was implemented throughout the biblical narrative, and concludes with an understanding of the principles of the coming of Jesus and the inauguration of the new creation.

In addition to grasping the basics of eschatology, understanding the contours of God's mission means finding categories for discussing God's work. Eschatology provides the direction for God's mission, but discussing God's work also requires discussing it in terms of creation itself. This project proposes five categories for God's work for the purpose of presenting them to learners.

The first category is that God creates or makes things. God created the cosmos out of nothing in the first place and did so with amazing diversity (Gen 1). Still, God continues creating and giving life, which leads to the second category: God sustains or keeps creation running. God's sustaining activity comes through in ensuring that creation continues to exist (1 Cor 8:6), keeping creation run smoothly (Job 38:22-27), placing appropriate boundaries on creation (Jer 5:22) and giving government so that human society is sustained in an orderly fashion (Rom 13:1).

God also relates, bringing his people to himself and creating human community. God's relating is seen in God's statement in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image." God's relational activity came through in the fact that humans were created in God's image with a need to relate (Gen 1:27). It came through in the face-to-face relationship God had with humans in the Garden of Eden and in the covenant community

God envisioned with Israel in Exodus 6:6-8. Relating is even part of God's plan for the future in Revelation 21:1-3.

God redeems or brings his people back to himself. That was demonstrated as God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt (Ex 12 and 13), as God brought his people back from sin through the Old Testament sacrificial system (Lev 4:1-6:7), when God brought his people back from Babylonian Exile (Ezra 1), and ultimately as Jesus redeemed God's people from sin and evil on the cross (Eph 1:7-10). Ultimately, God redeems all creation from its bondage to death, decay, and chaos as can be seen in Romans 8:19-21.

All of God's work pushes out from creation and is drawn forward toward God's final work of transforming or making all things right and new. God's transforming work is seen from the beginning as he prevented the worst effects of sin by providing clothing for the original humans before expelling them from the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:21-24). God's transforming action happens in the present as God transforms followers of Jesus into new creatures (2 Cor 5:17). God's transforming work pushes in the direction of a day when the effects of sin will be wiped away finally as envisioned in Revelation 20:7-15. Learners engaged in a process integrating God's calling with their own sense of vocation and their work need the ability to articulate these five categories to describe God's work.

Next, learners should be able to describe their own approach to the culture around them. Crouch notes four common strategies that guided the approach Christians used with culture, particularly with changing culture. These include condemning the culture around them because of its short-comings and critiquing culture, which includes

understanding what happens in the culture and commenting on it.⁴ Some Christians even began to copy the culture by imitating cultural forms and replacing anything within that form that might be offensive, as seen in Christian Contemporary Music that embraces traditional Christian theology but imitates the rock music of the culture.⁵ A fourth strategy is consuming culture selectively.⁶ However, Crouch worries that it is easy to abandon selectivity in consuming culture to become increasingly caught in simply consuming culture.

Crouch describes these strategies for approaching the culture as gestures, and gestures that are repeated become postures, the basic way a person approaches the culture.⁷ He recommends a different posture, that of creating culture. He offers the image of an artist who contemplates what has been and then creates. He also offers the image of a gardener who tends what has been and makes the most of what is good while weeding out what is bad.⁸ Participants need to think through their own approach to culture.

It is necessary for participants to discern their unique, God-given vocation. This happens through a process of looking back at the timeline of their lives for lessons taught, looking clearly at who they are today and what talents they possess, and looking forward to where they hear God directing them. Discerning their vocation involves hearing clearly

⁴ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 68-69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 69-72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

the summons of God to an individual. To refer to God's calling as a vocation requires that an individual be able to receive the summons of God and give voice to it.

In facilitating speaking about how an individual was called, it is necessary to help them discover how human work relates specifically to God's work and mission. Human work is described in relationship to God's work. For instance, just as God creates, human work involves creating as people make things. While humans do not create out-of-nothing in the same way that God does, humans creatively multiply and fill the earth, humans describe and shape creation, and humans make genuinely new things or at least genuinely original combinations of already created things. Humans creating can be seen, for example, not only in artists but in architects, engineers, venture capitalists, scientists, and others.

Just as God sustains creation, humans tend creation and maintain what has already been made. Humans were commanded to tend creation from the beginning in Genesis 1:27-28. Additionally, humans place barriers in place that bring order and restrain the effects of sin in the world. People provide needed goods and services, repair broken things, heal sick people, and nurture families. Nurses, farmers, store-owners, truck drivers, garbage workers, maintenance workers, police, government officials, and others tend the creation God has made.

In addition, humans build community in ways similar to how God relates; people bring people together. People live in interdependent relationships with one another. Sometimes they facilitate right relationships in places of business, and other times they facilitate right relationships in families and society. Jesus makes it clear in John 13:34-35

that when people live in good and loving relationships, they identify themselves as his followers. Counselors, teachers, community activists, salespeople, event planners, restaurant operators, parents, and others all build community.

Fourth, just as God redeems people by bringing them back to himself, humans at times engage in evangelism and discipleship directly, opening up channels for people to come back to God. It is important in discussing the value of human work not to devalue the work of evangelism and discipleship. These tasks belong to some people who engage in them as part of their career. At the same time, others engage in them within other contexts such as in an office, school, or club.

Finally, people mirror God's work of transforming by anticipating or making things now like they will be in the future God has planned. People prophetically call the marketplace and society to account for injustice and ungodliness. It is possible to engage in activities that roll back the effects of sin in the world. For instance, researchers who find cures to diseases roll back the effects of sin in the world. Special education teachers help students who are disconnected from the real world around them to apprehend the world as it really is are pushing back the effects of sin. Human rights activists, reporters, government officials, and many others help to make the world as it is look more like the world as it will be one day.

Those seeking to integrate calling, vocation, and work help by understanding how human work lines up with God's work. It helps them see how their work is of consequence. If they identify how their work lines up with God's work, they know that their work matters deeply. Knowing their work lines up with God's work helps them see

how and why what they do matters. Simply recognizing that fact gives their work greater value and gives them dignity.

Practically these goals come together in a Personal Calling Statement that articulates a person's purpose, values, talents, understanding of how their work relates to God's work, and vision for the future. Giving voice to those elements facilitates the process of identifying how God summoned and called them in the past. Thinking these issues through to the point where a person puts them on paper facilitates the process of owning them as a vocation. Owning a vocation opens up greater possibilities for aligning the work they do with that vocation.

Steps toward Integrating Work and Vocation

The focus of this final project is a process for attendees of Brookwood Community Church to examine God's calling, their vocation, and their work. It begins with an assessment instrument that measures their talents. The Gallup *StrengthsFinder* 2.0 is designed for this purpose. The *StrengthsFinder* is based on the work of Donald O. Clifton who in 1998 started to study "what is right with people." His conviction was that psychology had focused too much on identifying and categorizing what was wrong with people.⁹ He worked with a team of Gallup scientists analyzing the results of more than 100,000 interviews with people of various professions.¹⁰ They identified thirty-four common talent themes and designed an assessment instrument to measure them.

⁹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, i.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

Participants in this process begin by taking the Gallup *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. After taking the assessment, they receive a report describing their top five talent themes. Then they meet with a Connection Coach who reviews the report with them. Together they discuss the five themes. They look for ways in which the themes show up in relationships and work and discuss how the themes interact with one another. Their time together involves discussing how knowledge, skill, and practice help those talent themes turn into real, substantive strengths.¹¹ Then they discuss an action plan that includes leveraging the talent themes in relationships, at work, and in a place of volunteer service.

The *StrengthsFinder* coaching process is followed by portions of the *Focused Living* seminar. This seminar was developed by Walling and originally intended as part of a refocusing process for leaders that leads to a refocusing process for a local church looking to increase its effectiveness.¹² The elements of *Focused Living* include creating a personal timeline, discerning a personal purpose statement, examining the timeline for lessons learned that have become life values, taking a vision retreat, and developing a mentoring plan to help the leader follow through on commitments and decisions made.¹³ The *Focused Living* seminar calls participants to produce document referred to in the seminar as a “Personal Calling Statement” that includes an individual’s broad sense of purpose as a follower of Jesus, set of five to eight values, and a vision statement. That document provided the inspiration for the Personal Calling Statements produced by

¹¹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 18.

¹² Walling, *Focused Living*, 1-3.

¹³ Ibid.

participants in this vocational discernment process. For the purpose of this process, however, participants only used the personal timeline exercise, wrote a purpose statement, and produced values statements. Those elements were critical to discerning their vocations.

The next step in the process is a seminar called “Your Unique, God-Given Vocation.” This seminar is designed to define and show the biblical roots of work. The seminar examines how work became separated from faith and raises the question of whether this separation is appropriate or not. The seminar also defines calling, vocation, and work, and briefly traces these concepts throughout Christian history. Then the seminar outlines God’s work and gives a brief overview of orthodox Christian eschatology, raising the question of where work ends. It raises the issue of posture in relationship to the culture and examines how human work aligns with and flows from God’s work. This leads to asking the question about the roles a person fills by working and how those roles line up with the categories of divine and human work.

After the seminar, participants are instructed to complete their Personal Calling Statements. To their purpose and values statements they add five statements that reflect what contributions they make to work, home, and God’s Kingdom based on their *StrengthsFinder* Talent Themes. They then add a statement about the roles they fill through work and how those roles line up with the categories of God’s work and human work. Finally, they return to *Focused Living* materials writing a personal vision statement that serves as an integrating statement to describe their vocation. Participants meet at least twice with a Connection Coach during this process. The first meeting is to monitor

their progress on their Personal Calling Statements and answer any questions that remain outstanding. The second meeting with a Connection Coach celebrates the completed Personal Calling Statement and affirms their vision for how to live out their unique, God-given vocation.

Discerning One's Vocation through Coaching

Coaching plays a key role in the process of discerning vocation. The main alternative attempts to guide the process through a large group instructional approach. Large group instruction—typified through preaching or lecture-style teaching—is well-suited to imparting information but leaves little room for the interaction necessary to the work of clarifying strengths, identifying the key lessons in a person's timeline, reflecting on the values a person identifies, hearing thoughts on how a person's work lines up with God's work, or reflecting on the vision that emerges. Large group instruction actually shuts down such communication as the dynamics simply become too complex.

Nouwen describes a preferable communication scenario in *Creative Ministry*. He talks first about a redemptive teacher-student relationship that tries to evoke the potential in the other. It involves the mutual sharing of life experiences, weaknesses, strengths, and needs.¹⁴ It also involves pointing out signs of hope in the present that indicate that a future is possible.¹⁵ Nouwen talks about the importance and value of asking questions. Those who have influence and value in another person's life are ones who listen and

¹⁴ Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

learn the needs and concerns of their listeners.¹⁶ Conversation, therefore, is critical to discerning vocation.

Nouwen pushes far in the direction of a coaching relationship. Coaching, according to Robert Logan and Gary Reinecke, is “the process of coming alongside a person or team to help them discover God's agenda for their life and ministry, and then cooperating with the Holy Spirit to see that agenda become a reality.”¹⁷ Coaches partner with people in order to help them succeed through encouragement, equipping, and good questions.¹⁸ Oftentimes coaches find that people start the coaching relationship with a general direction in mind of where they want to go. In this case, they begin with an idea they want to find their vocation and discover how their work can be more fulfilling and fit in with what God wants them to do. At the same time, coaching sharpens their understanding of destination and clarifies their journey of reaching that destination.¹⁹

Coaching corrects the model of the pastor/expert with all the answers, because coaching emphasizes that the coach comes not with answers but with questions. Good coaches actually avoid giving answers but instead lead people to make discoveries for themselves.²⁰ This is appropriate particularly in relationship to calling, vocation, and work, because the coach does not start the process knowing how God has called a person.

¹⁶ Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, 35-36.

¹⁷ Robert E. Logan and Gary B. Reinecke, *Coaching 101 Handbook* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003), 3.

¹⁸ Robert E. Logan, Sherilyn Carlton, and Tara Miller, *Coaching 101: Discover the Power of Coaching* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003), 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

Even less can the coach know the person's vocation and how work fits into that vocation. A process of discovery is called for, and the coach cannot and should not shortcut that process.²¹

Instead, coaches ask questions, clarify goals, brainstorm plans, help to examine those plans, assist in revising those plans, and celebrate insights and successes.²² A coach's job in short is to listen well to a person, ask good questions, and listen well to God. Listening to God and hearing how God is speaking into the life of a person, discovering who God has created that person to be, and helping the person discover that for themselves will advance God's interest and his kingdom.²³

A coaching model fits well with the role given to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in Ephesians 4:11-13 to "prepare God's people for works of service" and to equip them to become "mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." Coaching describes the process of helping another person grow and mature. Other models may deliver content more quickly, but do not accomplish their ends as effectively.

Building the Appropriate Coalition

Integrating a vocational discernment process into Brookwood Community Church cannot be done by one person alone. Every process at Brookwood exists as part of a larger ministry. In this case, the Connection Coaches work as part of the Connection

²¹ Logan, Carlton and Miller, *Coaching 101*, 26.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 21, 24.

Ministry. The broad objective of the Connection Ministry is helping attendees become connected with community through a small group and connecting with other followers of Jesus in some type of volunteering opportunity. In order to expand the work of this Ministry and the Connection Coaches, it is first necessary to secure the agreement of the Connection Ministry Director. That happens by making a proposal to the Connection Ministry Director and having the proposal approved by that Director.

The next step in building the appropriate coalition is working with existing Connection Coaches to develop a strategy for follow-up coaching. The Connection Coaches were previously trained to work with the Gallup *StrengthsFinder* facilitating attendees grasping how God gave them talents that help at home, at work and in serving God. Expanding their work requires their agreement and their assistance in designing additional coaching protocols and forms.

Next, this strategy requires a test group. Rather than offering the process to the congregation as a whole, it is best to begin with a limited trial run of people who have expressed some interest in pursuing the topic. Their interest is helpful since the process is somewhat lengthy and involved. Their interest as well makes them ideal for giving feedback and for adjusting the strategy going forward. Finally, if the test group is successful, this strategy can be made available to the entire congregation.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

The theological process is clear: God summons his people through a calling. God's people appropriate that summons and receive it into their lives; when they own God's summons, it becomes their vocation. Once a person articulates their vocation, they are able to plan for how their work flows from and reflects that vocation. That work relates to God's work and mission; it starts with God's creative activity and moves toward his plan to culminate history. The goals of this process are important.

In order to assist participants in Brookwood Community Church as they listen for God's calling and discern their vocation, information is needed, categories and insights must be provided and discernment is essential. Participants must read the Bible, think about what it says and sift through the details of their lives along with wise partners and coaches who can help them focus on what is most relevant to their vocation. In order to accomplish this, the process must be clear.

Connection Coaches

Implementing a strategy to help attendees of Brookwood integrate God's calling, their own vocation, and their work began with making revisions to the work of Brookwood's Connection Coaches. Connection Coaches have a background in helping people integrate their talents with their work, home life, and church volunteerism. This includes an understanding that their talents are given by God and received not only as gifts from birth but through experiences and the processes that unfolded in their lives. It is not difficult for them to make the jump to help people think more broadly about how God has summoned a person through their experiences, talents, and roles in life.

First, it was necessary to secure the agreement of the Connection Coaches to participate in this process and do the extra work the process requires. They were eager to participate as it increased their skill set and the contribution they could make to the lives of people they coach. The process required extra training and a commitment by the coaches to add roughly two coaching sessions per participant.

Those coaches who agreed to be part of the new process gathered for a discussion about how coaching procedures for this process would differ from existing protocols. This session included a far-ranging discussion of what worked with Connection Coaching, what coaches learned in their process and how coaching needed to evolve for this new process. Key topics included listening as Connection Coaching is already based on listening carefully for the stories participants tell that illuminate, contradict, or complicate the presence and operation of a talent in a person's life. Coaches agreed the new process required more listening than Connection Coaching had in the past. That

highlighted the need for good questions, and the coaches decided they needed to develop a set list of questions to cover during sessions that arose from this process. Good questions were deemed essential, because the subject in this new process is indeed a person's life, and the participant is the expert in that subject. The Connection Coach's role is simply to help the participant discern the key parts of their own life story and align the meaningful elements with an understanding of what God is doing through them and calling them to do in the future. Coaches agreed having an agenda in this process was dangerous and participants must arrive at their own insights as insights given to them will be resisted rather than accepted. Finally, it became apparent that Connection Coaches needed to be patient with participants as the map of their life and of their future emerged over time rather than in one quick session.

After discussing changes that happened to Connection Coaching itself, coaches needed to be familiar with the content and process of the *Focused Living* retreat. Coaches examined the retreat workbook and looked at several examples of personal timelines produced during the retreat. They examined several Personal Calling Statements produced during and after a *Focused Living* retreat. Finally, they discussed the elements not used from *Focused Living*. There was general agreement that the elements not used were not immediately helpful to the process of helping participants discern the relationship between God's calling, their vocation, and their work.

Development of Resources and Materials

With the presence of strong brand recognition and positive associations with Connection Coaching at Brookwood Community Church, it was decided to call the new

process “Connection Coaching 2.0.” The process involves the following steps: participants first complete Connection Coaching using the Gallup *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. Next, participants prepare for the *Focused Living* retreat; preparation includes developing a draft personal timeline and reviewing passages from the Bible relating to personal purpose and mission. Then the *Focused Living* retreat itself involves a full day of work together followed by assignments to complete a draft Personal Calling Statement that includes personal purpose, life values, and statements describing how each of the talent themes identified by the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* becomes an asset for work. Participants take the “Discovering Your Unique, God-Given Vocation” seminar after which they write a second draft of their Personal Calling Statement that includes a statement about how their roles in life match up with the categories of God’s work and human work as well as an integrative vision statement. The goal of the entire process is the integrative vision statement that describes how God summoned a participant, how they come to own their vocation and how that vocation is lived out through their work. Developing this branding made it possible to tell participants exactly what to expect and what was required.

It was necessary to develop the “Your Unique, God-Given Vocation” seminar. This seminar was designed to last for approximately four hours and integrate with the *Focused Living* retreat. The seminar uses themes identified in this project and of biblical passages related to the ideas being presented. The seminar was designed for a small group of between four and twelve participants allowing for maximum interaction between participants and the instructor. Participants were provided with manuals that

included content, discussion questions, and places for taking notes. The seminar made extensive use of discussion in small groups of two to three participants.

Follow up coaching after the “Your Unique, God-Given Vocation” seminar required specific new coaching protocols. Connection Coaches were given the task of working with participants to ensure clarity of the elements of each Personal Calling Statement including Purpose, Values, Talents, Roles, and Vision. Purpose and Values were developed as part of the *Focused Living* retreat, so the role of the Connection Coaches was to ensure participants followed the guidelines provided in that material. For instance, *Focused Living* calls for participants to produce a Purpose statement that reflects the reason a person exists. It is meant to be primarily an identity statement rather than a doing statement since it reflects a person’s identity before turning to questions of what a person is meant to do.¹ The Connection Coaching protocol called for coaches to work with participants ensuring their Purpose statement was an identity statement.

Next the Connection Coaching protocol calls for the coach to review a person’s Values statement. The number of values stated matter, as it is possible to note so many values that they become useless in guiding daily decisions. Again the *Focused Living* retreat material served as a guide suggesting participants not list more than eight values.² Coaches look at values seeing if they represent how a person is actually living or if they represent how a person would like to live. The language of aspiration is easy to recognize as a participant will frequently say, “I would like to” or “Someday I want to.” Values to

¹ Walling, *Focused Living*, 10.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

which a person aspires are not helpful in determining vocation, so coaches encourage participants to describe what their values actually are rather than what they wish their values were. The coach's role, however, is to encourage the participant to think, not to make judgments or decisions for participants.

Connection Coaches examine the five statements participants make to describe what benefit they receive from their five talents identified by the Gallup *StrengthsFinder*. They look first ensuring the statements made actually arise from the talent theme; this is a question of accurate understanding and based on the Connection Coach's familiarity with the themes from prior training. If the statements reflect an accurate understanding of the talent theme in question, then the Connection Coach examines them determining if the participant was able to describe how that talent actually brings benefit to work. For instance, a participant might have an "ideation" talent theme. That theme indicates they have a natural ability to come up with new thoughts and new possibilities.³ A participant might write in their Strengths statement, "I am able to come up with new possibilities when some people get stuck" or "I can always see what is possible instead of getting discouraged by what already is."

Next the Connection Coach listens to the roles identified by the participant. Participants identify roles they fill at home such as husband, mother, scheduler, or counselor. They identify formal roles at work such as accountant, reporter, or teacher; sometimes they identify informal roles such as life-of-the-party, connector, or emotional glue. If the participant is not clear on their roles in life, the coach presents categories and

³ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 113-116.

offers to generate ideas with the participant. Then participants identify three top roles that best describe the largest segment of their work. Finally, participants identify how each of their work roles lines up with one of the five categories of human work identified in Chapter Six: creating, tending, building community, evangelizing, and anticipating. Coaches are prepared to clarify these categories if participants need further assistance.

Finally, Connection Coaches read the participant's draft vision statement. At the end of the "Your Unique, God-Given Vocation" seminar, participants are referred to pages in the *Focused Living* retreat workbook that assist with writing a vision statement. However, the vision statement is meant to be a place where participants write freely and dream. The stated goals for this statement are that it reflects how God called them, how they have accepted that calling as their vocation, and how that will come out in their work. The main goal for the vision statement is that they express their best understanding of what God created them to do in words inspiring to them. Connection Coaches listen, ask clarifying questions and affirm what participants have gleaned from their process.

Frequently, participants meet a first time with a Connection Coach reviewing their Personal Calling Statement and asking questions. After the first meeting, most participants want to continue working, thinking, and praying as the information they received and the process they went through requires thought over time. The protocol calls for at least one follow-up meeting to clarify additional insights and encourage the participant to turn their vision statement into a plan for the future.

Having developed the "Your Unique, God-Given Vocation" seminar and the new Connection Coaching protocols, the next step was developing an assessment process for

test group participants. The assessment process involved a combination of focus group questions and a written, free-response questionnaire. The first free-response questionnaire was used before the *Focused Living* retreat and included questions about group members' understanding of God's mission as well as their own calling, vocation, and work. Focus-group questions were asked immediately following administration of the questionnaire and dealt more specifically with the topic of work and the relationship between God, faith, and work.

The second questionnaire was designed for use after the *Focused Living* retreat and before the "Your Unique, God-Given Vocation" seminar. It included questions that dealt with calling, vocation, and work. The goal of those questions was discovering the benefit they received from the *Focused Living* retreat and seeing what thinking they had done on the topic between the two parts of the process.

The Personal Calling Statements serve as the final assessment instrument. Personal Calling Statements that reflect a deepening understanding of God's calling, their own sense of vocation, and plans for how their work can align with their vocation represent success. Additionally, feedback from participants and Connection Coaches provides valuable insight into how the process can and should be modified and whether or not the process has merit for the future.

In order to prepare for the *Focused Living* retreat and the "Your Unique, God-Given Vocation," it was necessary to purchase copies of the *Focused Living* retreat workbook and secure use of the church's conference room for the sessions. Food was arranged for the event in order to smooth conversation and make participants

comfortable. Fresh fruit was available at every session, but participants were particularly glad to find candy, coffee and caffeine-laden soft drinks to keep them engaged.

Workbooks for the “Your Unique, God-Given” seminar were photocopied in the church’s office and did not have to be purchased.

Recruitment of Test Group

Test group participants were selected from among attendees of Brookwood Community Church who completed Connection Coaching. Reviewing reports of previous coaching sessions revealed participants who expressed a desire to discuss further how their *StrengthsFinder* talent themes might give them insights into their careers. Bias was given to participants whose talent themes indicated they would be naturally curious and find the Connection Coaching 2.0 process engaging. Invitations were sent to around twenty-five people along with a deadline to respond. Invitees were informed that in order to start the process they needed to participate sequentially in every step of the process within a defined period of time. This criteria forced several people to decline. However, eight participants were identified who met all of the criteria.

Participants in the test group ranged in age from their late twenties to early sixties. Professions represented included a nanny, two administrative assistants, a medical claims examiner, a real estate agent, a fleet-maintenance specialist, and two engineers. Some participants expressed deep satisfaction with their career choices before Connection Coaching 2.0 began. Their rationale for participating was they wanted to make sure they were doing everything possible through their career to bring glory to God. Other participants expressed hesitancy about their careers. A few were even actively seeking

new careers and wanted to engage in the process to find guidance on what that new career might be. Test group participants ranged in educational background from some who completed high school, to others who possessed a master's degree.

The intake questionnaire for the focus group confirmed the importance of this process. When asked to describe God's mission in the world, all eight respondents indicated that God loves the world and tries to draw the world to himself. Each one used different language. For instance, one response described God as bringing "glory to himself through the active redemption of mankind" while another mentioned a "mission of unification under him." Three distinct themes emerged: a love relationship from God to people, love relationships between people, and a relationship of love and obedience from people toward God. When asked how participants came to these positions responses included worship, preaching, Bible study, and small group experiences.

Participants also were asked to identify their vocation. Five participants responded with answers directly related to their current careers. One participant did not answer the question and one asked in response, "What is the difference between vocation and calling?" Another participant responded, "I am not sure. I currently work in mortgage operations. It takes attention to details, but I don't work at this as my vocation." This was the most significant separation indicated between a participant's vocation and work. What the responses revealed, however, was that all participants strongly identified vocation with work.

The next question on the questionnaire asked about their understanding of calling. Participants had a more difficult time answering that question; two questionnaires had no

response. Three responses included vague statements about helping others, loving God, and living good lives. Three others responded they hoped the current process would help them discover the answer to that question.

A third and less specific question seemed to confuse the group. Participants were asked, “What has God put you together to do?” Responses varied widely with some participants mentioning caring for their families and others naming a desire to bring glory to God. Four participants directly indicated they did not know the answer to this question.

Participants were more unified in their opinions about work itself. Three prominent themes emerged when asked, “Why do people work?” The overwhelming consensus of the responses was that people work to pay bills with six people noting this as the main reason for work. Several participants directly mentioned that work was a result of sin entering the world; work for them was not an inherent part of being human but an unfortunate side effect of sin. Participants also indicated growth, avoiding boredom, and building relationships at work as reasons for working. (Most questionnaires noted more than one purpose for work.)

These written responses were confirmed in the intake focus group. When asked in a group about the reasons why people work, income, sin, growth, and relationship building were all mentioned. During the focus group, one participant asked, “I was thinking about Adam and Eve too. Would we be working if they hadn’t messed things up?” Their response drew laughter and agreement from the entire group. In following up on that response, one participant distinguished between a job that must be done for income and work. The participant hypothesized that having a job is part of the results of

sin but work might be something people were created to do because it might have purpose. This led other participants to reflect that work might now have purposes other than earning a wage. One participant added again that work might help shape character. The group's final consensus on the topic was work provides a context in which one has to learn to live as a follower of Jesus and that doing so would be one of the benefits of work.

The focus group demonstrated exactly what demographic studies indicated. Participants in Brookwood, like people in the surrounding community, felt ambivalently about work. For them work was at once something that must be endured but also something onto which they attached aspirations. They were at least open to finding some sense of fulfillment in their work. However, like many people, they thought of their vocation as simply what they did to earn a living, something entirely separate from their calling. They were somewhat clear about their vocation, but they were almost entirely unclear about their calling and about the relationship between the two. Several participants began thinking about how their work reflected a calling from God; they were, in that sense, already developing a deeper understanding of their vocation. However, most participants struggled with calling, vocation itself, and the relationship work has with both. At the same time, they were open to learning and experiencing more.

Test Group Report

The *Focused Living* retreat went smoothly for the test group. As an established retreat, the materials were well-tested in advance. Participants enjoyed constructing personal timelines using post-it notes. Interactions in groups of two and three provided important opportunities to be heard and receive clarifying feedback. The biggest

challenge with the *Focused Living* retreat was completing materials in the time allotted. Since it requires participants thinking about their lives and processing events in order to learn lessons, *Focused Living* is best taught allowing for long breaks, periods of reflection, and small group interaction. Participants ended the retreat with drafts of a Purpose statement and of Values. They were asked to complete revisions before the next seminar.

After *Focused Living*, participants were asked to describe what they learned so far. Responses varied greatly. The first person to respond indicated the retreat had provided him with a powerful look at his life through the timeline. The second respondent indicated that it helped him know himself better and be able to articulate the things he felt were important. Two respondents noted specific lessons they learned from looking at their timelines. The final response indicated that one participant began already to think of how her happiness in life might be related to living out her calling.

Before the “Your Unique, God-Given Vocation” seminar, participants completed the second questionnaire designed to draw out their perception of the role of human work. When asked two respondents still indicated work was for the purpose of earning wages in order to support a family. At the same time, however, after thinking more deeply about their life purpose and values, several participants mentioned that work helped them glorify God, find personal satisfaction, feel useful, and express their purpose in life. *Focused Living* addresses the topic of personal purpose and mission, and that seemed to influence the group’s thinking about work.

Participants were asked what God thinks about work. One respondent still indicated that work was a consequence of sin. Every other respondent indicated God is pleased with work in some way. Either God directly mandates work and is pleased when completed or God is honored simply by the work being done in virtuous ways. This topic was not directly addressed in the *Focused Living* retreat and seems to have been the result of participants' private discussions and thoughts simply in light of the topic at hand.

A final set of questions asked participants to define culture and think about the role the Church plays in relationship to the surrounding culture. The set of questions really focused around the final question that asked, "What is the best thing a person can do in the culture around us?" This question was designed to discover what participants thought about what work actually accomplished in society. Two large themes emerged. First, participants thought they could live as a positive example within the larger culture. Responses included lifestyle descriptions like living as light, living Christ-like lives, and being positive. A second set of responses included direct actions that influenced the culture. These were divided into responses about loving neighbors and serving neighbors.

The "Your Unique, God-Given Vocation" seminar went smoothly as well. Participants found the workbook easy to follow. However, the material in this seminar involved more content than the *Focused Living* retreat. It was challenging to cover and absorb all the content within the four hours allotted. At the end of the seminar participants were encouraged to write full drafts of their Personal Calling Statements. Seven of the eight participants scheduled follow-up appointments with Connection Coaches. Scheduling this appointment indicated the participant's intention to complete a

full draft of their Personal Calling Statement. Six of the eight participants kept their appointments and produced Personal Calling Statements.

Follow-up appointments with Connection Coaches lasted an hour on average. During the first follow-up appointment, participants presented their products and had an opportunity to ask questions. Coaches found the most difficult part of the process had been identifying life roles. No participants successfully completed that exercise. However, Connection Coaches helped participants identify formal and informal roles they filled in their families, circles of friends, at work, and in volunteering positions. Having identified those roles, participants successfully linked each of their roles with an aspect of human work. This follow-up exercise proved to clarify their resulting vision statements. After the first coaching appointment participants scheduled a second coaching appointment to review one more draft of their Personal Calling Statement.

Evaluation of Test Group

After completing the process, the Connection Coaches met again to evaluate the process. The consensus was that developing an appropriate protocol for Connection Coaching 2.0 sessions was a challenge but, successful. For each Connection Coach, their first follow-up appointment proved difficult. However, subsequent appointments demonstrated that the coaching protocol was appropriate and helpful. At the same time, coaches made recommendations for changes to the seminar, “Discovering Your Unique, God-Given Vocation.” Input included making the categories of human work clearer and including more biblical references. Examples and passages from the Bible made points easier to understand and more tangible. The key problem Coaches found with the seminar

was participants did not understand how to identify their roles. Inadequate time was left in the seminar to explain roles, have participants identify them, and get feedback from colleagues. However, once participants identified work roles with help from Connection Coaches, they successfully correlated each role with an aspect of human work.

The insights given by Connection Coaches matched the feedback of the test group immediately following the “Discovering Your Unique, God-Give Vocation” seminar. Participants affirmed that the seminar was helpful to them in that it provided them with more information and more categories to help them understand God’s calling on their lives. They mentioned that the section on eschatology was particularly helpful and the categories describing God’s work gave them an entirely new way of thinking about God. At the same time they expressed the seminar involved so much content they felt somewhat overwhelmed and needed time to process what they learned. They also asked for more opportunities to examine texts from the Bible and see how the Bible provided examples of and guidance on the topics at hand. Then they expressed excitement that they would get a chance to meet with a coach who would help them continue moving toward an understanding of their own vocations.

The Personal Calling Statements participants wrote after the seminar provided the best evidence of what they learned. Documents with robust purpose statements, clearly articulated strengths, and vision statements that demonstrate developing ownership of a vocation indicate the value of the process. Participants’ Personal Calling Statements begin with purpose statements of varied quality. Most indicated an understanding of their identity as followers of Jesus. Test group participant Deb Brantner wrote, “I am a child of

God. I love him wholly and desire to live a life so full of him that others will see him in me and want what I have.” Eric Wadleigh wrote the purpose of his life is “to reflect the image of Christ in such a way that people know that God is.” Both statements demonstrate they understand that one’s purpose flows from one’s identity.

Several purpose statements included expressed desires to obey God in particular ways. For instance, participant Lori Peterson wrote: “The purpose of my life is to be a servant of God, to be in a relationship with him and to give him control of my life so I can fulfill the plans he has for me.” The phrases “give him control” and “fulfill the plans” both reflect a desire to obey God. Shelly Rademacher added the notion that her relationship with God would lead her to the point where she could more accurately hear God’s instructions. She wrote, “The Purpose of my life is to remain in an intimate relationship with God and to follow His will for my life as He reveals it to me.”

One Personal Calling Statement already deeply reflected the participants’ sense of vocation. Diane McCormick wrote: “I am a child of God, called to build personal relationships with others, to be encouraging, to be creative and to be an ambassador of Christian fellowship.” Saying that she wants to build relationships, encourage others, foster creativity, and represent Jesus to people who do not follow him are all action statements at heart. Strictly speaking they could be challenged in a purpose statement. However, these concepts were reflected as well in her values, roles, strengths, and vision. Diane’s Personal Calling Statement may not be correct in some ways, but it is consistent and shows her developing sense of vocation.

Most participants articulated clearly how their life experiences, values, and talent themes were gifts God gave that prepare them to make contributions to their families, their work, and God's Kingdom. For instance, Brantner was able to see that she dislikes conflict, which can either give strength or become a liability. However, she was able to say about the fact that she disliked conflict that it led her to "try to avoid it by anticipating possible problems." Brantner works as an administrative assistant, and anticipating possible problems makes her effective at her job as well as in volunteer roles associated with operational details. In that context she added that she has the ability to be adaptable. In the midst of chaos, she wrote, "I remain calm and figure out what to do instead."

Several participants wrote very clear statements that demonstrated they understood ways that they make contributions. Wadleigh wrote, "I have the ability to break large complex problems into smaller, simpler parts that can be resolved in an orderly fashion." McCormick saw about herself that she is able to "support and relate without judgment and act in kindness and in love."

There were examples in the group, however, of people who did not understand that aspirations are not strengths. Peterson wrote: "I like to experience new things." This is something she wants to happen, not a value or the outgrowth of a talent theme. Also, Rademacher wrote: "I try to keep my life as simple as possible." Upon discussion with a coach, however, she revealed she likes to keep her life simple in order to maximize her financial resources in order to give generously to missionary sending organizations and other charities. This does not currently describe her life. Together all of these statements

represent progress among participants toward identifying the talents and strengths God gave them to enable them to serve him. However, their understanding is still incomplete.

Coaching was able to produce significant progress for some participants. For instance, Rebecca Westerberg wrote, “I see problems that need to be fixed.” This was the beginning of a statement about the contributions she makes. However, simply seeing problems may or may not be received well in a family or organization. It also did not fit with other themes in her life and other talent themes identified by the Gallup *StrengthsFinder*. After sharing examples of life experiences that led her to this understanding, she edited her statement to say, “When I see problems that need to be fixed, I am able to compassionately suggest solutions.” Meeting with a Connection Coach must be seen as an indispensable part of helping participants identify their vocation.

In some ways every aspect of a Personal Calling Statement leads toward writing a vision statement. The vision statement provides space for participants to write broadly about where they hear God calling them and how they have appropriated that calling as their own vocation. It also provides space to address the very real practical concerns of how that vocation relates to work broadly and specifically. The vision statement is the final test of the effectiveness of this entire process.

It is important to note that two participants did not write Personal Calling Statements at the end of the process. In addition one participant who wrote most of a Personal Calling Statement was unable to write a vision statement. However, he asked for further coaching in order to continue the process of clarifying his thoughts.

Of the five participants who wrote vision statements, all five demonstrated ownership of a developing vocation with some making very specific links with their work. Westerburg wrote she felt God called her to be “A person who is caring and loves to nurture others, both young and old.” By the phrase “both young and old,” she means children and senior adults. She feels strongly called to raise children personally; she and her husband are attempting to adopt a child and anticipate placement of a child in their home within one year. She also feels strongly called to serve elderly patients in a nursing home. Because of this calling, she plans to volunteer in a local nursing home and begin education that will prepare her to work as a Licensed Practical Nurse.

Brantner wrote: “I love to help things grow and develop, watching them take shape until they are complete or able to stand on their own.” This vision aligns directly with values and strengths she noted in her Personal Calling Statement and with experiences she identifies in her timeline. Within her vision statement she draws the conclusion that “I see myself in a support role helping small but growing businesses, church planters or something that is in the development phase take root and grow.” This vision enables her to make career choices that grow from her current career rather than making a radical change to her work.

Rademacher made two very specific claims in her longer vision statement that demonstrate a high degree of ownership of her vocation. First she wrote: “I see God leading me to work specifically with women and children.” By that statement she means building disciple-making relationships with women and caring relationships with children. She illuminated her intentions further by adding, “At this time I believe that

God is looking for me to mentor younger women and help them to put living for Christ as a main priority in their lives.” With training in counseling and experience as a nanny, she is uniquely suited to this role.

Peterson’s vision statement expressed continued wonder. She entered the process without an understanding of her life’s purpose and with little vision for the future. During the process she repeatedly expressed frustration that she does not know what God wants from her. In her vision statement she even said, “God has a plan for me and I don’t know what it is, but he is in control and I trust him.” She immediately added, however, “I know it involves serving, and by serving I build Godly relationships with others.” As a middle-aged widow whose only child recently moved away to attend college, Peterson longs for new relationships and new purpose in her life. Her lack of clarity is no surprise after single-mindedly devoting her life to raising her son alone and working to support her family for a long time. What is more surprising is that after this process Peterson is able to say that she knows that God wants her to serve other people somehow.

These Personal Calling Statements in general and the vision statements in particular reveal that the process helps attendees of Brookwood hear God’s calling, own it as their vocation, and integrate it with their work is at least partly successful. The process requires modification and constant improvement. However, the process is fundamentally sound. More attendees would benefit from a streamlined process.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the fall of 2008, my wife began working as a para-professional in a public school special education program. After seven years away from the education profession to raise our children, she began serving students with autism for the first time in her life. The work was frustrating and tiring. She had students who sat rocking back and forth, others who attempted to run from the building and one who even undressed and defecated on the floor. If progress is measured in terms of grades or test scores, progress can be rare with students with moderate to severe autism. If progress is measured in terms of changed behaviors, then that can be difficult to achieve as well. Many evenings she would ask, “Why can’t I do something that matters?”

People with autism experience life through a veil. That veil separates them from the world as it truly is. Autistic people experience sounds and other sensations in ways that are different from other people. Sensations can easily overwhelm them. The same veil is draped over their ability to communicate. Frequently behaviors others deem strange and inappropriate are just attempts to comfort themselves or convey a message. My wife’s job was helping students with autism perceive the world as it really is and help them communicate what they actually think and feel in ways that are understood. Deep inside she wanted her work to matter to the world and, more importantly, to God. She wanted to do something to bring God glory and join him in his work.

Her dilemma led me to think more deeply about work. It occurred to me that while no one contracts autism because of sin, autism represents an image of sin. Sin is a

veil that hangs over humanity separating people from the reality of God and grace. It causes people to see things in ways that are distorted and causes humans to engage in behaviors that God deems inappropriate. Then again those behaviors are attempts to communicate what people really think and need. Helping autistic students pierce the veil of distortion in any small way is participating in God's work of transforming creation. As a public school employee, my wife was not able to engage in verbal evangelism with students or parents. She saw very few opportunities with colleagues to engage in either disciple-making relationships or direct evangelism. Her work even prevented her from being as involved in her congregation to the extent that she had been in previous years. However, God clearly used her work for ends that when seen clearly brought him great glory. We spent weeks thinking and praying about work, and those reflections led me to start this project.

Her frustrations reflected what other attendees of Brookwood Community Church were saying to Connection Coaches. It gave voice to what they were saying in small groups. They wanted their work to matter. They wanted their work to somehow make a difference in God's understanding. Simply earning a paycheck and living for the weekend did not seem enough to them.

This project, has been an exploration of helping people integrate God's calling with their own sense of vocation. It has tried to link work other than volunteer service through Brookwood with that sense of vocation. Part One demonstrated that work is an issue to attendees of Brookwood, and to the Shakopee area. In addition, it demonstrated that Brookwood's values and systems made it an ideal place to begin drawing these links.

Part Two provided important theological underpinnings. It demonstrated that history agreed work is one possible Christian vocation that arises from God's calling to his people. Each person's vocation is unique. It is God-given through a summons not only to a relationship with God through Jesus, but to a life of serving him. A person has a vocation once God's summons has been received, understood, and owned. Then that vocation is lived out in many kinds of work that flow from one's vocation.

Part Two also demonstrated that people are shaped for work by the Holy Spirit. The ways the Holy Spirit shapes a person for work are discernable. While the entire process happens providentially and can be called "supernatural," many of the individual elements that shape a person for vocation and work seem entirely natural. The talents a person possesses and develops from birth, their life experiences, and training seem natural at first glance, and are the very things that can be discerned and analyzed for guidance.

Part Two pointed out as well that work has motion to it. Work flows from God's creative work in the beginning and moves toward God's promised climax of history. It happens in the tension between the world as it is, and the world as it will be. The world as it will be calls all Christians forward, and speaks a normative world that says even now how the world should be. Here and now Christians work anticipating the coming world and transforming the existing world.

Part Three described a process for helping participants in Brookwood discern God's calling, articulate their own sense of vocation, and adapt their work to match their vocation. The process works. Results showed that the process is imperfect and in need of

further revisions. However, those revisions concern details and not the essence of the process. Small group instruction followed by coaching is a sound process that helps people discern God's calling.

The success of the process can be seen in Personal Calling Statements like that provided by Brantner. Before this process she doubted seriously the value of her profession as an Administrative Assistant. She too wanted to do something else, something that she could value more. However, at the end of the process she affirmed her own talents and even articulated how she found her vision in life through using those talents in a context that she valued.

This project shows that God's mission is deeper than rescuing souls in order to take them to heaven someday. God's mission is to engage the world as it here and now. God's mission is to engage people and even the non-human created order. God had a plan for the direction that creation would take in the first place. That plan was disrupted by human sin and disobedience. However, God is working to get that creation project back on track. God will not wipe out history and all that has happened. Instead, he will transform it one day in the direction of something better and even more glorious.

If God's mission is bigger, then God's calling is deeper. People are called not just to assent to a set of beliefs. People are called to follow after God who is on a mission and join him in the bold work of leading history toward its grand conclusion and anticipating that conclusion even now. A summons that big means God is addressing more than just the private thoughts of those who follow him. God is addressing his people in ways that touch every human relationship and task. God is addressing his people on Sunday

mornings and all week long—at church, at home and at work. All of these realms exist under the sovereignty and summons of God.

Theologians are only now beginning to think big enough. What God has in mind touches government, business, the structure of nations, and the nature of family. That means what people do matters. Work matters. It also means the future of mission and Christian engagement with the culture requires the best efforts of every follower of Jesus and not just the clergy. It involves the best efforts of every follower of Jesus in society and not just in the gathering of believers. It is time to think more broadly.

The benefit of a new thought about work is that it engages more of God's people. Doing business in a godly way cannot be done by the pastors; changing business cannot be done by the pastors. It is good news that not every follower of Jesus is called to be a pastor or an apostle to another culture. However, every follower of Jesus does something for God's glory and cooperates with his mission. Not everyone will rock babies in the church nursery, count money, or serve on the building committee. God's people can build buildings, cure diseases, make just laws, or grow food and deliver it. It is time to equip them and unleash them.

Equipping and releasing God's people to work for his glory is a matter of discipleship. Foster and Willard worry about the state of God's people as disciples, and there are reasons for concern. The pathway forward certainly involves spiritual practices that give God's Spirit opportunities to shape his people. At the same time claiming work for God and enabling God's people to think about how work flows from God's calling in their lives provides an even fuller experience of God's sovereignty and a greater

transformation in a person's life. Work, therefore, is a matter of discipleship. A person cannot truly become a disciple until work is under the conscious sovereignty of God.

Such a view of work has implications for Christian witness as well. In *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark demonstrated that the rapid spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire could be attributed to many factors including population changes, birth rates, and epidemics. At the same time things Christians did changed the world. Christian efforts to care for neighbors during epidemics demonstrated not only the viability of faith in Jesus but also its attractiveness and compelling character, particularly when compared with the other faiths of the day.¹ A fuller engagement of Christians with the surrounding culture today would be no less compelling.

Christian engagement with work is indeed about evangelism. That is not to say that work is simply a platform for Christian witness. Using work as a platform for Christian witness is valid and important, but there is something more to work as well. Christian work can serve as the credentials needed for compelling witness.

Ironically, Connection Coaching 2.0—the process described in this project—may provide an opportunity for Christian witness. Participants in Brookwood Community Church have only expressed a sentiment that is common in the Shakopee area that work should be something more than it is. If Connection Coaching 2.0 helps attendees understand their vocation better and use their sense of vocation to inform their work, it is

¹ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 82.

possible that members of the community at large would respond to such a process. It could even provide opportunities to discuss matters of faith.

Work should be something more than toil and burden. It should be something more than an activity endured to earn a wage or to provide for recreation. Work should matter. In God's mission, it does. First for Christians, God's calling means that their work has meaning. Helping them discover that meaning and own it is essential. Helping others outside the gathering of believers understand that their work is under the sovereign shaping of God could be transforming.

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