

SHARING GOD'S GOODNESS AND LOVE: A 40 END GOALS STUDY ABOUT VOCATION

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Vocation Study 1 – Joseph

This is the first of four-character studies on the topic of vocation. You'll note the definition of vocation listed below. The goal of this study is to show that vocations are not limited to employment but are God's callings to a wide variety of roles, relationships, and responsibilities. Also, of note, particularly with Joseph, is that God works through His people in unexpected ways.

- What's your favorite thing to do when you have free time?
Allow for answers.
- What do you already know about Joseph? (the Old Testament Joseph, not Jesus' adoptive father)
Allow for answers. Don't give anything away in the story.
- How would you define vocation?
While we often think about vocation in terms of our employment, vocation is a term that means "calling." What are the roles, responsibilities, and relationships God has called us into? God calls His baptized children to love Him and serve their neighbor. Every Christian is called to unique roles or tasks through which God cares for His creation. Vocation encompasses all the various ways we are called to serve in our homes, churches, communities, schools, and beyond."

Joseph is biblical character with a broad vocation. He is given several roles, takes on numerous responsibilities, and has lots of messy relationships. But the refrain running through all of Joseph's vocations is this: God was with him.

Read Genesis 37:1-36.

- How would you describe Joseph's relationship with his brothers?
It's clearly strained. They hate him, plot to kill him, then sell him into slavery.
- How would you describe Joseph's relationship with his father?
It feels like Joseph is spoiled a bit. His father, Jacob, favors him over his brothers. Yet Jacob bristles at the idea that he would bow down to Joseph.
- Consider the relationships in your life that are broken or strained. How are you doing with that brokenness?
Allow for answers. Don't worry about it if people aren't willing to share too much. Let them think on it.

Read Genesis 40:1-23.

- What role does Joseph take on in this chapter?

(We skipped over Joseph being in Potiphar's house and being put in prison after being falsely accused of wrongdoing. He is now in prison and in charge of all the prisoners.) While Joseph was the dreamer before, now he is the dream interpreter.

- What does Joseph ask of the chief cupbearer (verse 14)?
"Remember me." "Mention me to Pharaoh." Joseph wants to get out of prison and believes his dream interpretations will be the ticket out.

Activity: Testing your memory.

There are a variety of ways to play this memory game. My favorite way is to begin with one person saying, "I want a pizza with..." and then naming one pizza topping. Then next person then would say, "I want a pizza with..." and name what the previous person said, plus add another pizza topping to the list. Keep going around the room adding as many ingredients as possible until someone makes a mistake. If you have a large group, you can split off into smaller groups.

Read Genesis 41:25-45.

- What new responsibilities is Joseph given in this section?
Joseph is made second in command of all Egypt, particularly charged with saving Egypt from the famine to come. He also becomes a husband to Asenath.

Read Genesis 49:15-21.

- Why are Joseph's brothers afraid in this section?
(We skipped over the part where Joseph's brothers come to Egypt and Joseph plays tricks on them before revealing himself to them.) The brothers think that perhaps Joseph was only kind to them out of respect for their father, Jacob. Now that Jacob is dead, they are afraid Joseph will harm them.
- What does Joseph say about all that had happened?
Though the brothers intended their actions for evil, God transformed that evil into good, setting up Joseph to save thousands, perhaps millions of lives during the famine.
- What's something bad that has happened, but you can now see how God created good from that bad situation?
Allow for answers.
- List all of the vocations (roles, responsibilities and relationships) you see Joseph take on in this story.
Joseph was a son, a brother, a prisoner, in charge of Potiphar's house, in charge of the prison, in charge of all of Egypt, in charge of preparations to withstand the famine, a dream interpreter, a husband, a father,

In Joseph we see one example of God's presence through a tumultuous life. Vocations can change and develop over time, but God is faithful through it all. Through the good and the bad, God will continue to work through his Baptized children to care for the world and share the Gospel.

End in Prayer

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Vocation Study 2 – Naomi

In this vocation character study, we look at the life of Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law.

- Who is someone in your family that you wish you could spend more time with?
Allow for answers.
- What do you already know about Naomi?
Allow for answers. They may not know very much and that is okay.

Read Ruth 1:1-5.

- Where is Naomi's family from?
They are from Judah, particularly the town of Bethlehem, the same town Jesus is born in.
- What happens to Naomi's family?
First (and don't miss this), her family is forced to leave the land of Judah because of a famine (Ruth 1:1). They go to Moab. Naomi's husband and two sons all die. She is left with her two daughters-in-law in a foreign land.
- Has someone you loved ever died? How did your world change after that death?
Allow for answers. Something to note is that when people die, our vocations change. For example, I am no longer anyone's grandson. When relationships no longer exist, we lose part of our vocational identity. Part of grief is coming to terms with that loss of identity.

Read Ruth 1:6-22.

- How does Naomi seek to provide care for her daughters-in-law?
Culturally at that time, women would have relied on their male relatives for financial and social stability. Women were typically not allowed to inherit land or money. Naomi tries to send her widowed daughters-in-law back to their families so that their fathers or brothers can care for them because she has nothing with which to care for them. Orpah goes back to her family. Ruth refuses to go back and travels with Naomi to Judah.
- What does Naomi say people should call her? Why?
Naomi's name means pleasant or delightful. She says that people should instead call her "Mara" which means bitter. Naomi says that God has dealt very bitterly with her, she left full (even in a famine she left full) and has returned empty with no husband and no sons.
- What's something that has happened to you that made you feel bitter?
Allow for answers.

Activity: Blind Taste Test

Despite the fact that Ruth feels this bitterness toward God, she still relies on God to take care of her, to provide her with daily bread. She relies on God to provide, even though she cannot see how God will take care of her.

Gather some foods in different flavors and have the group blind taste test these foods. For example, purchase five different flavors of Pringles, or five different flavors of soda. Set each flavor before each person, have them taste one-by-one, and see if people can guess which flavor is which. You might do Coke, Diet Coke, Cherry Coke, Dr. Pepper, and Root Beer.

In Ruth 2, Ruth meets Boaz, and he treats her kindly. Read Ruth 2:19-20 and Ruth 3:1.

- What does Naomi say about Boaz?
Boaz is a close relative. He is also a redeemer. A redeemer was someone who could claim and buy back the land of a relative who had died. By claiming the land, the redeemer would then be responsible for the widow of the last heir of the land, being expected to marry her.
- What is Naomi hoping to do for Ruth? Why is this an important part of her vocation?
Naomi is hoping that Boaz will redeem their ancestral land and marry Ruth. This is important because Naomi still feels obligated to see her daughter-in-law cared for, and this is one beneficial solution.

Read Ruth 4:13-17.

- What happens to Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi?
Ruth and Boaz get married. They have a son named Obed. Naomi's fortunes are restored. She is cared for and protected by Boaz. And Naomi is blessed with a grandchild.
- What new vocations does Naomi take on in this section?
She becomes not only grandmother to Obed, but also his nurse, raising him alongside Ruth and Boaz. Just as the death of a person removes our vocations, the birth of a person adds vocations to our lives.
- List all of the vocations (roles, responsibilities and relationships) you see Naomi take on in this story.
Naomi is a wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, nurse. She is responsible for her daughters-in-law's future and safety.

Sometimes in life, we feel empty like Naomi did. Sometimes the roles and responsibilities we love are taken away from us. Sometimes things change, and those transitions are always difficult. In the midst of such transitions it is almost impossible to see what God is up to. But God has a way of calling us into something new, into new relationships, new responsibilities, new roles. For Naomi, that was being the nurse to her grandson Obed. And from Obed comes an unparalleled dynasty. Among Obed's descendants are King David, King Solomon, and the King of Kings: Jesus.

Close in Prayer



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Vocation Study 3 – Priscilla and Aquila

Priscilla and Aquila are relatively obscure characters in the biblical narrative, yet they exemplify service to God and neighbor as they sacrificially put others first to show hospitality. Goals of this lesson include the reality that one does not need to be famous to live a meaningful and abundant life.

- What is your favorite form of creativity?
Writing, drawing, acting, music, woodworking, etc.
- What do you already know about Priscilla and Aquila?
Allow for answers. They may know very little as these are not prominent characters in the biblical narrative.

Read Acts 18:1-3.

- Where is Aquila from?
- Where are Priscilla and Aquila when they first meet Paul?
- Why are they there?
Pontus. I like to use maps to show the distance between places. You could perhaps utilize a map of Paul's missionary journeys (included in many Bibles) to show the locations of this story including Pontus, Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Priscilla and Aquila are in Corinth. They had been living in Italy/Rome, but Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome in 49 AD. This ban likely lasted until 53 or 54 AD.

- Have you ever had to move from one place to another?
- Why did you move?
- What was that like for your family?
Allow for answers.
- What line of work are Priscilla and Aquila in?
The text calls them tentmakers. This likely meant they dealt with canvas and perhaps leather to build not only tents, but also sails for ships.

Activity: Build a Fort

Gather as many blankets as you can and invite the group to make their own fort with blankets, chairs, and whatever else makes sense. Hopefully it is a bit of nostalgic fun.

Read Acts 18:18-21.

- Where do Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila go next?
They set sail for Syria (Paul's eventual destination), stop at Cenchreae, and Priscilla and Aquila stay in Ephesus.
- Why do you think Priscilla and Aquila stay behind while Paul travels on?

Allow for answers. My best guess (and it's just a guess) is that part of Priscilla and Aquila's business is that they are traveling merchants particularly to seaport towns.

- Who is someone who has moved away that you miss?

Allow for answers.

Read Acts 18:24-28.

- Who do Priscilla and Aquila hear preaching? Why do you think they feel the need to correct him?

Apollos is preaching in the synagogue. While he is a great speaker, Apollos is unaware of certain things. Whoever proclaimed the Gospel to Apollos failed to teach him about what Jesus had instructed regarding baptism, so Apollos only knew about the baptism John used before Jesus' death, resurrection, and commissioning. Priscilla and Aquila teach him more accurately so that he understands better and can speak more clearly about the Gospel.

- Have you ever tried to correct somebody who said something inaccurate? How did that go?

Allow for answers. In today's world, this does not tend to go well.

Paul also mentions Priscilla (or Prisca) and Aquila in a few of his letters. Read Romans 16:3-5.

- What does Paul say about Prisca and Aquila?

Paul says Prisca and Aquila are his fellow workers who risked their necks for his life. We are not told that story in Acts, but it makes me curious! We also hear that Prisca and Aquila are hosting a congregation in their home. Since Paul is writing to Rome (probably around 55 AD), it seems Prisca and Aquila have made their way back to Rome and the ban on Jewish people has ended.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:19.

- What does Paul say about Prisca and Aquila here?

This time the greetings are not to Prisca and Aquila, but from Prisca and Aquila to the church in Corinth. 1 Corinthians is likely written from Ephesus (probably around 54 or 55 AD). Again, they are hosting a congregational gathering in their home. It would seem then that Prisca and Aquila move from Ephesus back to Rome around 54 or 55 AD.

- List all of the vocations (roles, responsibilities and relationships) you see Priscilla and Aquila take on.

Priscilla and Aquila married. We are not told if they have children. They are friends and traveling companions of Paul. They are tentmakers by trade. They are teachers of the Way of Jesus. They host worship gatherings in their homes both in Ephesus and in Rome.

Priscilla and Aquila live out Peter's words so well, showing love and hospitality and using their gifts to serve others. May we be encouraged by their example to do the same.

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Vocation Study 4 – Jesus

This study looks at the vocations of Jesus. We frequently consider Jesus' divine vocations. He is Savior, Lord, Son of God, the Resurrection and the life. We often overlook Jesus' vocations that are more similar to our own. He is a part of a family. He has friends. He is a teacher. The goal of this study is to note that Jesus has similarities to us, but there are things Jesus is called to do that no one else is called to do. They are His vocations alone.

- What is one job you definitely do not want to have in your lifetime?
Allow for answers.
- What is your favorite thing about Jesus?
Allow for answers.

Read Luke 2:41-52.

- How old is Jesus in this story?
He is twelve years old. I ask this so the class can think back to when they were twelve years old and how they behaved. A follow up question might be "What would have happened to you if you had stayed behind after a vacation somewhere at twelve years old?"
- What relationships does Jesus have in this reading?
First, notice that Jesus is an observer of Jewish customs and celebrations. He also is a son to Mary and Joseph. He becomes a student of the teachers in the temple as He asks them questions. Jesus is also in His Heavenly Father's house. He is God's Son as well.
- How is your relationship with your parents? Share one misunderstanding you've had with your parents before.
Allow for answers.

Read Luke 9:10-17.

- Name three things Jesus does for the crowds gathered.
Jesus teaches them about the kingdom of God (verse 11) and heals anybody in need (verse 11). He also feeds them all so that thousands eat and are satisfied.
- What vocations do you see Jesus living in this section?
Jesus is a teachers, healer, and miracle worker. He is a caretaker for those who are hungry and in need.
- This is quite the memorable meal. What is the most memorable meal you have ever had?

Allow for answers. This can be a regular meal (pizza on Sundays, annual Thanksgiving traditions etc.) or a once-in-a-lifetime meal (for me that would be eating kangaroo in a Mexican restaurant in Wittenberg, Germany).

Activity: Create a Memorable Meal

Provide a sampling of foods. The more random the foods the better. Have each person create a sandwich out of whatever is provided. I'm imagining a sandwich with gummy worms, Oreos, and peanut butter.

Read Luke 24:13-25

- What do the two Emmaus disciples say about Jesus?
They call Him prophet (verse 19), redeemer (verse 21), and Lord (verse 34). They refer to Him as crucified (verse 20) and risen (verse 23). Jesus refers to Himself as the Christ (verse 26). Talk through what each of these names means and why they apply to Jesus.
- What is something that everyone else seemed to know, but you only realized much later?
The formula I often hear for this is "I was today years old when I realized..." Allow for answers. Be sure to have one or two of your own. Something I learned yesterday was that palm trees aren't actually trees. They're more closely related to bamboo than trees.
- List all of the vocations (roles, responsibilities and relationships) you can think of for Jesus.
Allow for answers. There are so many. See if you can get to 50 as a group. Prophet, priest, King, Lord, Redeemer, Deliverer, Savior, the Messiah, Creator, healer, teacher, son, Son, Light of the world, the Good Shepherd, the Door, the Resurrection and the Life, etc.
- Which of these vocations do others share with Jesus? Which are for Jesus alone?
Others can be prophets, priests, kings, healers, teachers etc. Only Jesus can be the Savior and Lord of all. Only Jesus can die for the forgiveness of our sins. Only Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.
- What vocations do you have because of your gift of faith in Jesus?
We are children of God, servants, disciples, new creations, ambassadors for Jesus, and many more possible answers.

Jesus' various vocations show us two things. First, that He is like us in so many ways, with relationships, roles, and responsibilities that are so similar to us. But second, we see that there are some relationships, roles, and responsibilities that only Jesus is called to hold. That means we are not called to hold them.

We are not chosen to rule the world, Jesus is. We are not responsible for saving ourselves. Jesus is responsible for saving us. We are not called to overcome death, that is Jesus' task.

Close with Prayer