

Real. Present. God.

Leading Lives that Matter

SESSION 1: VOCATION – CALLED TO CHRIST

Your first and most important calling is to Jesus Christ. In the waters of Baptism, you are welcomed into God's family as a redeemed child of God.

Isaiah 43:1-3a

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

Intro Activity

Discuss the theme verse from Isaiah, especially the phrase: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

What does it mean that God has called you by name?

Digging Deeper: The Conversion of Saul

Read Acts 9:1-22. Discuss the following questions either as a whole group or in smaller groups.

1. **Why is Saul traveling to Damascus?**
2. **Imagine being one of the companions of Saul, how might you have responded to Saul's sudden blindness and encounter with Jesus?**
3. **What would it have been like to be Ananias? What emotions did Ananias likely experience when God told**

him to visit Saul? In this instance, what was Ananias's calling?

4. **How does Saul's transformative experience exemplify how you are called by Jesus to live a life of faith?**
5. **God calls Ananias to go and lay hands on Saul, but it is God who restores Saul's sight. How does God restore our lives?**
6. **Saul is baptized after he is filled by the Holy Spirit and healed of his blindness. What is the importance of Baptism for Saul? How does your Baptism as begin your calling to follow Jesus?**
7. **In the following chapters in Acts, Saul takes on a new name—Paul. What is important about this name change? How does it illustrate how Saul has been called by name by God and invited to begin a new life in Jesus?**

Theological Perspectives on Vocation

“In encounter with Jesus Christ, a person experiences God's call, and in it the calling to a life in community with Jesus Christ. Human beings experience the divine grace that claims them. It is not human beings who seek out grace in its place, for God lives in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). Instead, grace seeks out and finds human beings in their place—the Word became flesh (John 1:14)—and claims them precisely there.

“...Only by the call of grace heard in Jesus Christ, by which I am claimed, may I live justified before God...”



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*From Christ's perspective this life is now my vocation;
from my own perspective it is my responsibility.”*
--Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics in Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Works, volume 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), pp.
289-290.

What does Dietrich Bonhoeffer mean when he emphasizes that only in an encounter with Jesus Christ does a person experience God's call? How was this true for Saul? How is this true for you?

What does it mean that God's divine grace claims you as a human being? How does this relate to Baptism?

Bonhoeffer emphasizes God's grace in Jesus Christ, but he also emphasizes responsibility within one's vocation. How do you live with both of these realities: grace and responsibility?

Wrap Up

How does Isaiah 43 and John 1:14 give you an identity that is different from those who do not know that they are created, redeemed, and loved by God?

Talk about ways to remember your Baptism on a weekly or even daily basis. How does your Baptism remind you about the identity and calling that you have in Jesus?

Read Psalm 25:1-3 and meditate on the phrase: "O my God, in you I trust." How will you trust God this week?

Close with prayer asking for God to give you strength to trust and follow Him.

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SESSION 2: VOCATION – CALLED TO WORK

There are different kinds of voices calling you to different kinds of work. It can be a challenge to discern which is the voice of God rather than society or your self-interest and wishes. God guides us in our vocational discernment. God's calling for you is to use your gifts, talents, and passions to serve the needs of the world through your work.

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful
and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have
dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of
the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the
earth."

Isaiah 65:21-22

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

Intro Activity

- **What do you do for a living? How did you decide on your career?**
- **How has God called you to live a life that matters in your family, work, church, and society?**
- **How is God calling you to a life of service?**
- **How has God called you to live a life that matters in your family, school, work, church, and society?**
- **What do you think you might do after high school? What are your goals for the next 1-3 years?**

- **How is God calling you to a life of service?**

Digging Deeper: Jesus Calls Zacchaeus

Read Luke 19:1-10. Discuss the following questions either as a whole group or in smaller groups.

1. **Why don't the people in the crowd like Zacchaeus? Why do you think Jesus takes special interest in this short man who climbed a sycamore just to see Jesus?**
2. **In what ways can your job and career be hijacked by your selfish desires? What can you do to guard against making your job and career all about you instead of others?**
3. **Jesus often ate with sinners. But Jesus doesn't just eat with them; instead, He transforms them by calling them to repentance and trust in Him. How does Zacchaeus exemplify a life transformed by Jesus? For Zacchaeus, he realizes his mistake and vows to give away half of his possessions to the poor. In addition, he promises to pay back four times as much to anyone whom he has defrauded.**
4. **What does it mean for Jesus to say to Zacchaeus: "Today salvation has come to this house"? How does the knowledge of our salvation in Jesus change how we approach our job, work, and career?**
5. **There are many different jobs that you may choose to do. All jobs run the risk of being used toward selfish ends. The story of Zacchaeus shows that God calls people to serve with integrity and compassion no matter what job they may have. Where in your life is God calling you to act with integrity and compassion?**

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6. *It's interesting that Jesus doesn't tell Zacchaeus to change his occupation. Tax collecting, even if unpopular, is a reality for most societies. But Jesus is very interested in how Zacchaeus lives out his calling to his work.*

7. *Consider again the quote by Frederick Buechner about vocation. He writes, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Discuss together the questions under the two headings:*

Your deep gladness:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- What are you good at doing? What gifts, skills, and talents do you have?
- How can you use these interests, skills, and talents to serve God and other people?

The world's deep hunger:

- What does the world need?
- What are the hurts of the world? Where is there a need for healing? Where is there a need for service?
- How do you want to help people around you, in the U.S., and around the world?

Theological Perspectives on Vocation

"Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental, and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God."

-- Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?" in *Creed or Chaos?* (London: Methuen & Co., 1947), pp. 47-64.

What does it mean for work to be "the thing that one lives to do"? Do you agree or disagree with Sayers?

Consider the opening Bible verses from Genesis and Isaiah. How do these passages support Sayers' claim that people should live to work?

How has sin distorted this reality? Read and discuss the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, especially God's punishment (Genesis 3:14-20).

Wrap Up

Brainstorm ways you can live generously—using your gifts, talents, and passions to serve others.

How can you live out their God-given responsibilities and vocations as a student? Sibling? Son or daughter? Paid worker? Teammate? Friend? Volunteer?

Discuss the meaning of the two opening passages of Scripture (Genesis 1:27-28 and Isaiah 65:21-22). The passage in Genesis describes God's original intent for creation, where work was meaningful, fulfilling, and life-giving. The passage in Isaiah describes how God will make all things new and God's people will again "enjoy the work of their hands."

Read Psalm 25:4-7 and meditate on the phrase: "Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long." How will you look for God to lead you this week?

Close with prayer asking for God to give you strength to trust and follow Him.

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SESSION 3: VOCATION – CALLED TO SERVE

Our vocation extends beyond our job or professional work. Everything we do, all our roles and relationships, are ways of serving God and serving our neighbor.

Romans 12:3-8

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Intro Activity

How did you use your gifts, skills, and talents in the servant event or service trip?

Which is easier: to help someone or to receive help from someone?

Digging Deeper: Mary is the Lord's Servant

Read Luke 1:26-56. Discuss the following questions either as a whole group or in smaller groups.

- 1. What is ordinary about Mary's call from God? What is not-so-ordinary?**
- 2. Theologians distinguish between the direct call experienced by Mary who is visited by the angel, Gabriel, and the mediated call experienced by Christians today. In our lives, God's call is mediated and discerned through conversations with other people and a process of prayer and discernment.**

- What people in your life do you turn to for guidance and wisdom about big, important decisions? (Note that after her encounter with Gabriel, Mary travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth.)**
 - Where do you see God leading and guiding you through the conversations you have with other people?**
 - Where do you see God leading and guiding you through your personal prayer and devotional life?**
- 3. Even though Mary's direct call by God was very unique and radically different from the mediated callings people receive from God, what can you learn from Mary's faithful response, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."**
 - What does it mean to be the Lord's servant?**
 - How does God's Word in the Scriptures serve to guide you in your process of vocational discernment and calling?**
 - 4. Martin Luther explains that people have multiple callings in their lives. In a contemporary context, the four main areas for your calling from God include callings to serve others in your family, work, church, and community.**
 - Where do you discern God calling you to serve in these four areas?**
 - Are there other areas where God is calling you? How is God calling you as a student?**

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5. *It's easy to focus so much on yourself when you think about your callings and vocation that you often overlook how the most important calling in the world is fulfilled in Jesus Christ when He takes up the Cross for your sake. How does knowing what Jesus has done for you enable you to approach your individual, personal callings with more freedom, grace, and humility?*

On a pragmatic level, what can you do to support and encourage others in your separate work? How do you guard against envy and jealousy of other people's skills, talents, and callings?

Theological Perspectives on Vocation

"We are all one body, yet every member has its own work, whereby it serves every other, all because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all alike Christians; for baptism, Gospel and faith alone make us 'spiritual' and a Christian people."

--Martin Luther, To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, in Three Treatises, trans. C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia, Muhlenberg, 1943, 1960), 13.

What does it mean for you to have your own work to do? What individual responsibilities has God given to you?

In Martin Luther's Small Catechism, he details a Table of Duties (<http://catechism.cph.org/en/table-of-duties.html>) based on the Scriptures where God calls you to live a life of trust and obedience. How do you apply these duties to your own calling as a young man or woman? Consider the following examples:

- *The commandments...are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Romans 13:9*
- *I urge...that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. 1 Timothy 2:1*

How can people all have separate work, yet also be together as one body?

Sharing Moment on Vocation:

Wrap Up

God fulfills His promises in Jesus. Christians live in hope of the coming Kingdom of God as spoken by the angel Gabriel to Mary. Brainstorm ways you can live in hope this week at work, school, and home.

Talk about opportunities in the congregation where you can become more involved in serving others.

Read Psalm 25:8-15 and meditate on the phrase: "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies." How is the Lord steadfast in love and faithfulness? Meditate also on the confession: "For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great." What sins of disobedience need to be confessed? Turn to your Lord in prayer asking for His grace and forgiveness.

Close with prayer thanking God for the forgiveness offered in Jesus and ask God to give you strength to trust and follow Him.

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SESSION 4: VOCATION – CALLED TO WITNESS

God makes us new in Christ. We serve God and our neighbor through our many roles and relationships. Jesus is real, present, and risen from the dead. We join God's church in proclaiming the great news that Jesus is alive.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Intro Activity

Share some good news that has happened to you (especially good news that has made you metaphorically—and even literally—jump for joy).

What did you do when you heard this good news?

Most of the time, we tell people about the good news we experience (or we post it on social media). In the same way, the Christian Gospel about God's love for us in Jesus is good news that we can't help but want to share with others. The point is to help youth see that telling people about the good news of Jesus is something that flows from the realization that the Christian Gospel is good news for me—and for everyone. And yes, the good news of Jesus is so good that we can literally shout it out loud and jump for joy!

Digging Deeper: Mary Magdalene Proclaims the Risen Christ

Read John 20:1-23. Discuss the following questions either as a whole group or in smaller groups.

1. *In John 20:1-10, Mary Magdalene finds the tomb of Jesus empty, so she runs to tell Simon Peter and John (the disciple whom Jesus loved). What are their*

reactions? What are their emotions? Notice that they are perplexed and even afraid at first, because they do not know what has happened.

2. *Once Jesus appears to Mary, how does she respond? How does the presence of the resurrected Jesus change everything for Mary?*
3. *What does Jesus tell Mary to do? What does Mary immediately go and do?*
4. *What is the significance of Jesus' greeting: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19)?*
5. *What is the significance of Jesus breathing on the disciples and giving them the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be sent by Jesus (John 20:21)?*
6. *What does it mean for God's people and the Church to proclaim the risen Jesus and share the forgiveness of sins?*
7. *What makes the announcement of Jesus' resurrection great news for you today? Why does the Gospel bring about joy? Think back on the warm-up activity about hearing good news—especially news that's so good it makes people want to shout and jump for joy.*
8. *Brainstorm ways to share the great news of Jesus with your own family, friends, co-workers, teammates, and church members.*

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Theological Perspectives on Vocation

Lecrae, "Tell the World."

*I know one thing's true
I don't even really deserve to know you
But I am a witness that you did this, and I'm brand new
So, I'm ready to go*

*And I'mma tell the world what they need to know
A slave to myself, but you let me go
I tried getting high, but it left me low
You did what they could never do
You cleaned up my soul and gave me life
I'm so brand new, and that's all that matters
I ain't love you first, but you first loved me
In my heart I cursed you, but you set me free
I gave you no reason to give me new seasons
To give new life, new breathin'
But you hung there bleedin'
And ya' died for my lies and my cheatin'
My lust and my greed, and
What is a man that you mindful of him?
And what do I have to deserve this lovin'?*

*Tryna make the moments last
Holdin' onto the past
But like a hero in a dream
Christ came and he rescued me
Now, I'mma tell the world, tell the world, tell 'em
I'mma tell it everywhere I go
Tell the world, tell 'em
Yeah, I'm a billboard
Tell the world, tell 'em
And I'm broadcastin' like a radio
Tell the world
You ought to know, I'm brand new*

How is Lecrae a witness to Jesus and the good news of salvation through this song? How can you incorporate being a witness to Jesus in the things and activities that you frequently enjoy?

What does it mean to be a billboard for Christ? Sure, you can wear Christian t-shirts, but what are the more signifi-

cant and meaningful ways you can witness to others the love, joy, forgiveness, and hope that you have in Jesus?

The starting point for Lecrae's witness for Jesus has everything to do with how God has made him "brand new." How has God made you brand new? How is being made brand new an ongoing occurrence in the Christian life?

Wrap Up

We are called to Christ in our Baptism, work, service, and witness. How does 2 Cyru. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. O my God, in you I trust." How will you trust God this week?

Close with prayer asking for God to give you strength to trust and follow Him.