

# Understanding Our Calling in Life

## A Study in Christian Vocation

### INTRODUCTION

*The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.* (Genesis 2:7)

Dust. Ordinary dust. Heart, lungs, brain, skin, and intestines work together after being formed from the dust of the ground.

What the Lord did then, he still does today. He uses ordinary things to accomplish the extraordinary. He takes ordinary people, calls them into his kingdom and then causes them to bloom where he plants them. They become a planting of the Lord that he might be glorified, “oaks of his righteousness” (Isaiah 61:3).

1. **Read John 1:14**—*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Discuss how the Word became ordinary human flesh and led to extraordinary accomplishments.

2. Discuss further how the following ordinary elements lead to extraordinary blessings.

- Blood flowing from a cross
- Water in baptism
- Bread and wine in holy communion

3. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:10**—*We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*

What do we carry around in our ordinary bodies as we go about our ordinary affairs of life?

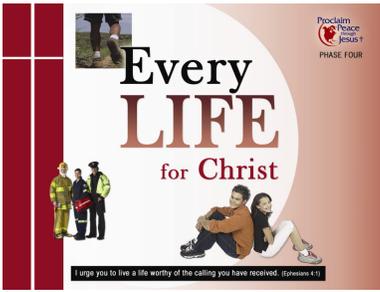
4. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:27-29**—<sup>27</sup> *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.* <sup>28</sup> *He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,* <sup>29</sup> *so that no one may boast before him.*

What personal comfort do you find in these verses?

5. **Read Isaiah 45:15**—**Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.**

The Lord is described as a God who “hides himself.” What does the Lord do behind the scenes in the lives of ordinary people like us?

In “**Understanding Our Calling in Life**,” we will be viewing what Scripture says about our vocation or calling by using the life of Abraham to look into the rest of Scripture. We will see how the Lord calls ordinary people like Abraham, even leaves them exist in ordinary callings of life to accomplish the extraordinary for his kingdom.



# Understanding Our Calling in Life

## A Study in Christian Vocation

### BIBLE STUDY #1 : THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*  
(Genesis 12:1-3)

The call of God through the message of the gospel is a powerful call. It transforms people. It brings them out of darkness into the light.

1. Underline some of the words from Genesis 12:1-3 that describe God's activity in the life of Abraham. How do these action words from God also change the human heart and work faith to believe?
2. Read Joshua 24:2,3—<sup>2</sup>Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. <sup>3</sup> But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac.'"

How did Joshua describe the pedigree of Abraham?

3. Read Romans 8:28-30—<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

How would you respond to someone who says: "God does his part by calling us and we do our part by responding to his call"?

Luther: "And this rule is universally true, that of himself man is nothing, is capable of nothing, and has nothing except sin, death and damnation; but through His mercy Almighty God brings it about that he is something and is freed from sin, death, and damnation through Christ, the Blessed Seed." (LW #2, p.247)

4. **Read Romans 4:13**—*It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

What is meant by the words, "It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise?"

5. **Read Genesis 15:6**—*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

What was transferred to Abraham because of the amazing call to faith initiated by the Lord?

6. Discuss wearing the robe of righteousness 24/7 and how it affects how you work at your various callings in life?

7. A popular book on Christian vocation opens with the attention-getting line, "It is not about you" (*The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren, p. 17). Why would a better opening be, "It is not about you. It is all about God and his call that changed your life"?

8. **Read 1 Peter 2:9,10**—<sup>9</sup>*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* <sup>10</sup>*Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

The Greek word for church literally means "\_\_\_\_\_." We were called out of darkness. What is our purpose in life?

9. Discuss: "There are no second-class citizens among those whom God calls into his kingdom. We mutually share the high calling of a chosen generation, royal priests, a holy nation, and a people belonging to God."

10. Read James 2:21-24—<sup>21</sup> Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

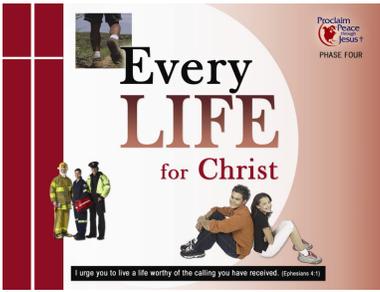
Abraham left behind forensic evidence that he was justified by faith. His works testified to the new position to which he had been called. How did the heathen world know that Abraham was God's friend?

11. How do people at your job know that you are also a friend of God?

12. What did Martin Luther mean when he said, "God does not need your works, but your neighbor does?"

13. A Christian college student told her mother, "I wake up every morning thankful for who I am. I know where I came from. I know where I am going. I know who I am. This puts a smile on my face. I am ready to face a new day to give glory to what Christ has done for me." How does this student show that she has a good grasp on her vocation or calling in life as Christian?

**Next Week: The Call to Live in a Family**



## Understanding Our Calling in Life A Study in Christian Vocation

### BIBLE STUDY #2 : THE CALL TO LIVE IN A FAMILY

*So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. (Genesis 12:4,5).*

The man who was known as a friend of God reflected this friendship by having a close friendship with his wife. She reflected this love for God by looking up to Abraham as her head.

1. Discuss: The family unit is the place to begin your real job, your highest vocation, your job of being salt and light, the job of loving your neighbor as yourself.
2. **Read Genesis 21:1-6**—*Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. <sup>2</sup> Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. <sup>4</sup> When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup> Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."*

Why was the name Isaac especially appropriate for the child that came into the lives of Abraham and Sarah?

3. **Read Genesis 2:21-23**—*<sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."*

It seemed so ordinary, taking the rib from the man and then forming a woman from the rib. How did Adam show that he did not regard the woman God gave him as someone who was ordinary?

4. Read Ephesians 4:1—As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Read Ephesians 5:21 – 6:3—<sup>21</sup> Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— <sup>30</sup> for we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup> “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup> However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

What calling do you see in the following verses?

Ephesians 5:21 –

Ephesians 5:22 –

Ephesians 5:25 –

5. How would our society be different today if every man took seriously his calling to be a faithful and loving husband to his wife?
6. The calling to live in a family is a sacrificial, self-giving calling. Why do husband and wife not have to fear taking the plunge by dying to self and loving each other according to the Lord’s timeless plan in creation?

7. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-8—<sup>4</sup>*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* <sup>5</sup>*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* <sup>6</sup>*These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.* <sup>7</sup>*Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.* <sup>8</sup>*Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*

What great responsibility and incredible privilege is included in the calling of Christian parents?

8. Read Ephesians 6:1-3--*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* <sup>2</sup>*“Honor your father and mother” — which is the first commandment with a promise —* <sup>3</sup>*“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”*

What calling do you see in these verses?

9. Children who obey their parents will live a long life on this earth (Ephesians 6:3). Why is a long life on this earth a blessing, not a burden, if we understand our calling as children?

10. Read Judges 2:10—<sup>10</sup>*After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.*

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Who is responsible for the falling away, the children or the parents?

11. Read Deuteronomy 8:6-14,17-18—<sup>6</sup>*Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him.* <sup>7</sup>*For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills;* <sup>8</sup>*a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey;* <sup>9</sup>*a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.*

<sup>10</sup>*When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.* <sup>11</sup>*Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.* <sup>12</sup>*Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down,* <sup>13</sup>*and when your herds*

*and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery....<sup>17</sup> You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."<sup>18</sup> But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*

Why was it so hard to live in the new land and still remain faithful to the Lord?

12. Where did the two elderly parents, Abraham and Sarah, get the strength to raise their child to be God's child?
  
13. How characteristics of a Christian congregation might show that it understands the importance of the calling to live in a family?
  
14. What are we doing here at Abiding Peace that shows that we understand the importance of the calling to live in a family?
  
15. How can we improve in this regard?

When the time came for Abraham to sacrifice his son, we are never told the words that were spoken between father and son "when the two of them walked on together." As Abraham tied the hands of his son for the sacrifice, he saw in his eyes a simple trust and faith in the promise of God that came from all the years of teaching, guiding and leading. Some of the best moments in the life of a Christian parent are those close moments when conversations are shared about deeper, more-important things in life related to promises we have in Jesus our Savior.

The Reformers insisted that moms and dads and kids were not second-class citizens in the kingdom of God compared to priests in the church and monks in the monastery. In his table of duties in the Small Catechism, Martin Luther highlights the importance of husbands who are considerate to their wives. He encourages wives to submit to their husbands and children to obey their parents in the Lord. Review this Table of Duties (printed for you on the next 2 pages).

## **TABLE OF DUTIES**

### **PASTORS**

A pastor must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. He must not be a recent convert. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (1 Timothy 3:2-6; Titus 1:9)

### **WHAT WE OWE TO OUR PASTORS AND TEACHERS**

Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. (Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 9:14)

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "The worker deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrews 13:17)

### **GOVERNMENT**

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1-4)

### **HUSBANDS**

Husbands, be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. (1 Peter 3:7; Colossians 3:19)

### **WIVES**

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. (Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:6)

## **PARENTS**

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21)

## **CHILDREN**

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise-- "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

## **EMPLOYEES**

Obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does. (Ephesians 6:5-8)

## **EMPLOYERS**

Treat your employees in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (Ephesians 6:9)

## **YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young men, be submissive to those who are older. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (1 Peter 5:5-6)

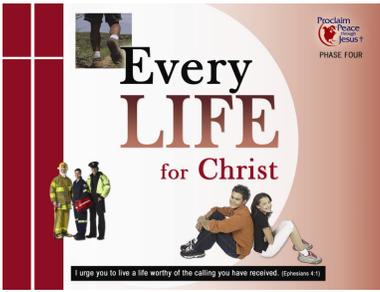
## **WIDOWS**

The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. (1 Timothy 5:5-6)

## **A WORD FOR ALL**

Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the sum of all the commandments. And continue praying for everyone. (Galatians 5:14; Matthew 5:43-44)

Let each his lesson learn with care,  
And all the household well shall fare.



## Understanding Our Calling in Life A Study in Christian Vocation

### BIBLE STUDY #3 : THE CALL TO WORK

*"...Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD. (Genesis 13:17,18)*

1. Abraham was no stranger to work. Based upon the passages below, what are some of the tasks Abraham performed in his daily life as part of his calling to serve the Lord in the new land?

*Genesis 13:18—<sup>18</sup> So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.*

*Genesis 18:2-5—<sup>2</sup> Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. <sup>3</sup> He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. <sup>5</sup> Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."*

*Genesis 21:29-30—<sup>29</sup> and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?" <sup>30</sup> He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well."*

*Genesis 13:8-9—<sup>8</sup> So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. <sup>9</sup> Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."*

2. Luther called the various responsibilities we have in daily work "the masks" of God. What are some of the vocations (masks of God) involved in providing you with your morning breakfast?

3. **Read Psalm 145:15,16—<sup>15</sup> *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.* <sup>16</sup> *You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.***

Discuss the variety of ways the Lord opens his hand to provide for people with more than food.

How does this verse help you take a different view of the people serving you in your community?

“We thank You, Lord, for the busy people everywhere: those fine, long ranks of men of conscience who march straight and steady on the business of Your world and live on the small, gray satisfaction of their work well done. How good they are, these devotees of duty! What a piece of work is the working of Your will in their wills! Work gets done. Contracts are filled. Buses and trains and planes arrive on time. Letters get delivered. My morning paper and my milk are at my door. Roads are repaired, streets are swept. Lighthouses wink steadily through the unwatched hours. (*Pray for Joy*, Martin Franzmann, p. 38)

4. The Lord honored ordinary tasks of life by using them to illustrate important truths about his kingdom. Read the following verses and note the occupation used to illustrate an important truth of Scripture.

**Isaiah 55:10,11—<sup>10</sup> *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,* <sup>11</sup> *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.***

**Matthew 13:3,4—<sup>3</sup> *Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup>As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.”***

**Matthew 13:47—<sup>47</sup> *“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.”***

**Luke 15:4—<sup>4</sup> *“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?”***

**Matthew 20:13-16**—<sup>13</sup> *“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’* <sup>14</sup> *Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.* <sup>15</sup> *Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’* <sup>16</sup> *So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

5. **Read Genesis 2:2,15**—<sup>2</sup> *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work...* <sup>15</sup> *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

Explain. God gave to man the gift of work to be a joy and not a burden.

6. **Read Genesis 3:17-19**—<sup>17</sup> *To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.* <sup>18</sup> *It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.* <sup>19</sup> *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

The Lord continues to provide the blessing of work even in a world cursed by sin. As Luther said in a sermon of 1525, “He gives the wool, but not without our labor. If it is on the sheep, it makes no garment.” Name some of the ways that sin affects our work today.

Discuss the validity of the following statement: “The problems associated with work do not negate the blessing of work for the benefit of mankind.”

7. **Read Luke 2:8,9**—<sup>8</sup> *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.* <sup>9</sup> *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

**Read Luke 5:5**—<sup>5</sup> *Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”*

What comfort do you find in knowing the Lord chose ordinary working people such as shepherds and fishermen to experience special manifestations of his glory?

8. **Read Colossians 3:1-3**—*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

Why do Christians who see their lives hidden in Christ and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms treasure their earthly callings in a real world of dirty diapers, freeway commutes, group meetings, customer complaints and spreadsheets?

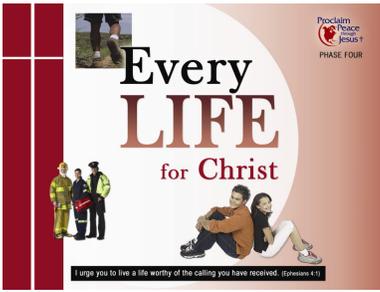
As Gene Vieth points out in his book, *God at Work*: “Many religions consider ‘the material world’ to be evil or at least unspiritual; salvation lies in escaping the bonds of mundane experience through meditation or asceticism. Christianity, though, values the material world. God created it (not a demon as in Hinduism) and ‘saw that it was good’ (Genesis 1:10,12,18,21,25). Moreover, God entered this material world, becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ. He was born into a family, into a particular culture, where as the son of a carpenter He must have worked with his hands” (p. 69).

9. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:11**—*<sup>11</sup> Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you.*

How could the Christians in Thessalonika show themselves as model Christians?

10. How has work changed since the industrial revolution, the advent of large box malls, or even work shipped over seas to China?
11. Agree or disagree. In our 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have lost some of the direct satisfaction that comes with jobs that provide for other people.
12. Do you think that the way “work” has changed presents more or fewer opportunities to show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness?

**Next Week: The Call to Civic Responsibility**



## Understanding Our Calling in Life A Study in Christian Vocation

### BIBLE STUDY #4 : THE CALL TO CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

*When Abram heard that his relative Lot had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. (Genesis 14:14)*

1. Read Genesis 14:1-2,11-16—*At this time Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim <sup>2</sup> went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).*  
*<sup>11</sup> The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. <sup>12</sup> They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.*  
*<sup>13</sup> One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. <sup>14</sup> When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup> During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup> He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.*

How did Abraham carry out his calling as a responsible citizen in the land?

2. Share what you know about the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.
3. With that in mind, read Romans 13:1-6—*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. <sup>2</sup> Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. <sup>4</sup> For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring*

*punishment on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup>This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.*

Who has established the authorities under which we live?

Name some of the "masks" that the Lord uses in government to protect his people.

4. **Discuss:** The everyday reality that some governments are bad does not nullify the authorities set up by God, just as bad marriages do not nullify the marriage instituted by God.
  
5. **Read Romans 2:14,15—<sup>14</sup>(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, <sup>15</sup>since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)**

How does the law written in the heart help our government carry out its responsibilities?

6. **Read Matthew 22:21b—Then [Jesus] said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."**

The Pharisees and Herodians were trying to engage Jesus in a political discussion (or, more accurately, trying to trap Jesus with a political question). What happened to the old fashion town square where people could talk about politics and where can it be found today?

What insight do you find for your everyday calling in Jesus' answer to their question?

7. **Read 1 Timothy 2:1,2—***I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

Why were the Christians good citizens of the Roman Empire?

8. **Read Jeremiah 29:4-7—**<sup>4</sup>*This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:* <sup>5</sup>*“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”*

Besides prayer, what are some things involved in good citizenship?

Why are these “private” things an important part of good citizenship?

9. One of the prayers we use in worship says: *“Bless our land, our people, and those who hold offices of high trust. Keep our government and schools upright and strong for the advancement of good citizenship and useful vocations, that we may enjoy your gift of peace, security and well-being”* (Christian Worship, p. 42).

How do we expand upon these prayers during the week in our personal lives?

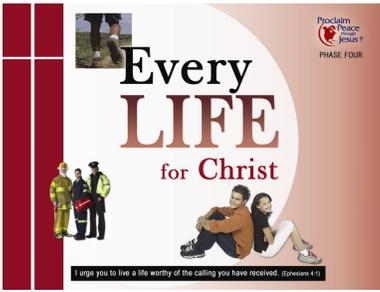
10. Read Romans 13:4—<sup>4</sup>*For [the one in authority] is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.*

Read Matthew 28:20—<sup>18</sup>*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

What difference is there between the government and the church in:

- their God-given role in society?
  
- the tools which God has given them to carry out that role?

**Next Week: The Call to be in the World but not of the World**



## Understanding Our Calling in Life A Study in Christian Vocation

### BIBLE STUDY #5 : THE CALL TO BE IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

*<sup>6</sup> Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. (Genesis 12:6,7)*

1. Genesis 12:6 (above) may seem like a simple description of events, but how does it speak volumes about the daily challenges facing Christians?

How did Abraham respond to those challenges?

2. *Read Hebrews 11:9,10—<sup>9</sup> By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

What hope did Abraham carry with him as he lived among the Canaanites?

3. *Read 2 Corinthians 4:18—<sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

What "other world" view do our friends and neighbors see in us as we carry out our daily tasks and challenges of life?

4. Agree or disagree: People who fix their sights on a better world lose perspective and become useless in their calling for this present life.

5. **Read John 14:27—<sup>27</sup>** *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

The peace we have in Jesus is so different from the peace this world gives. What are some striking contrasts between the peace this world gives and the peace that Jesus gives?

6. **Read 1 Peter 2:11,12—<sup>11</sup>** *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. <sup>12</sup>Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

How does living as an alien and stranger help us be different from the world?

7. **Read John 17:11,20,21—<sup>11</sup>** *“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>20</sup>My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”*

Why did Jesus leave his disciples in the world?

8. **Read 2 Corinthians 4:6,7,10—<sup>6</sup>** *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. <sup>7</sup>But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>10</sup>We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*

Here Paul reminds us how God uses the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary. From where do we—ordinary jars of clay—get our purpose and our power?

9. **Read Romans 6:1-4**— *What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

What impact does your baptism have on your life?

What impact does your baptism have on the lives of those living around you?

10. **Read Romans 12:1,2**— *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

The comfort of God's grace and forgiveness moves us to offer our lives as living sacrifices to the Lord. Why will the Christian who offers his life as a sacrifice to the Lord stand out as different from the world?

11. **Read John 17:14**—<sup>14</sup> *"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."*  
**Read Ephesians 5:8-11**—<sup>8</sup> *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) <sup>10</sup> and find out what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.*

On each of the scales below, indicate with an ↑ how God wants us to live our lives. Then indicate with an ↓ where you think you are in your life right now.

**In the World** ----- **Not In the World**

**Of the World** ----- **Not Of the World**

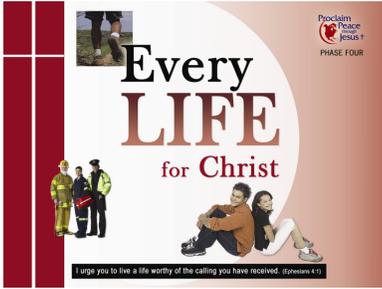
What makes it difficult for a Christian to balance this dual calling of God?

12. Read John 17:15-17—<sup>15</sup> *“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”*

Where do Christians get the strength to better live in the world but not of the world?

13. A church newsletter once had at the bottom of the page these words: “I am a nobody, telling everybody, about somebody, that can save anybody.” How would you change these words to reflect more clearly the high calling the Lord has given you to be in the world but not of the world?
14. Agree or disagree: The longer someone is a Christian, the easier it is to be in the world but not of the world.

**Next Week: The Call to Carry the Cross**



## Understanding Our Calling in Life A Study in Christian Vocation

### BIBLE STUDY #6: THE CALL TO CARRY THE CROSS

*<sup>2</sup> Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Genesis 22:2)*

1. **Read Hebrews 11:17-19**—*<sup>17</sup> By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, <sup>18</sup> even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." <sup>19</sup> Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*

What did Abraham reason on the basis of what God had revealed to him?

Martin Luther wrote: "Thus Abraham relies on the promises and attributes to the divine Majesty this power, that He will restore his dead son to life; for just as he saw that Isaac was born of a worn-out womb and a sterile mother, so he also believed that he was to be raised after being buried and reduced to ashes, in order that he might have descendants, as the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:19) states: 'God is even able to give life to the dead'" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 4, p. 66).

2. Even though Abraham knew the final outcome of his faith, why was it still a major challenge to carry through with the sacrifice of his son?
3. **Read Genesis 22:14**—*<sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

Abraham offers a special name for this place where the Lord came through. How does this name help you with the challenges or crosses you may be asked to bear in your life?

4. Read and discuss Matthew 26:36-46—<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” <sup>37</sup> He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

<sup>39</sup> Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

<sup>42</sup> He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

<sup>43</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup> So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

<sup>45</sup> Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup> Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

What temptation existed for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane?

What pivotal question does Jesus ask indirectly in verse 39, and what answer does the Father give for his question?

5. Read Mark 8:34-36—<sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Read 1 Corinthians 1:23—<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

What does it mean to carry the cross for Jesus in a world of people who despise the cross of Jesus?

6. **Read 2 Corinthians 2:15-16**—<sup>15</sup> *For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.* <sup>16</sup> *To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?*

In what two ways does Paul describe “the aroma of Christ”?

Why do we carry with us the smell of death?

How is this a challenge for you in a pluralistic society?

7. **Read Revelation 7:10**—<sup>10</sup> *And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”*

Someday we will gather around the throne of the Lamb to sing a powerful song of praise, “Salvation belongs to God and to Lamb.” Why is it so hard to sing this song on this earth and what implication does it have for your relationship to people in this present life?

8. **Read and discuss 2 Corinthians 4: 7-12**—<sup>7</sup> *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* <sup>8</sup> *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;* <sup>9</sup> *persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.* <sup>10</sup> *We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.* <sup>11</sup> *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.* <sup>12</sup> *So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

Paul writes about bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is this also true of every soldier of the cross?

9. The refrain for one of our hymns says, “*Lift high the cross; the love of Christ proclaim Till all the world adore his sacred name*” (Christian Worship 579). If we take this call to carry the cross seriously, what implications will it have for our lives everyday?

Pastor Steven Degner writes: "If we believe that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, then we are compelled by love to take up the challenge to do whatever we can to lift up the eyes of people to the cross and 'preach Christ crucified.' We will work and pray for the message to come to those who don't believe. We will suffer pain, tremendous pain, whenever we see people taking their eyes off the cross and becoming blinded again by the god of this age. We will personally suffer pain as we take our own sinful actions, place them beneath the cross, and see them forgiven. In the eyes and on the faces and through the words of those who bear this cross, the world will see Jesus. That is our calling in life as we wait for the Lord to take us home."

10. **Read Colossians 2:2-3**—*<sup>2</sup>My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, <sup>3</sup>in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

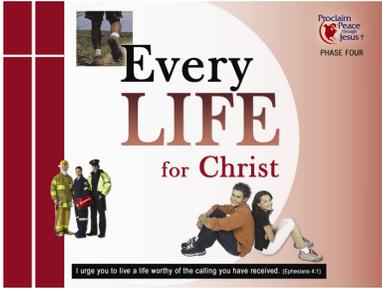
How are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" hidden in Christ?

How does God hide his wisdom and knowledge in us and slowly reveal it as we carry the cross?

11. How does life lived under the cross proclaim powerfully for all to hear, "The Lord provides!"?

Gustaf Wingren writes, "From the roughness of earthly life there opens up a vista of life and freedom in the coming kingdom, and only one way leads to it--subjection to the cross here" (*Luther on Vocation*, Gustaf Wingren p. 58).

**Next Week: The Call to Serve God's People Publicly with the Gospel Message**



## Understanding Our Calling in Life A Study in Christian Vocation

### BIBLE STUDY #7: THE CALL TO SERVE GOD'S PEOPLE PUBLICLY WITH THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

<sup>18</sup> *On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."* (Genesis 15:18)

1. Read Exodus 19:5,6—<sup>5</sup> *"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

What plan did the Lord have for his Old Testament people?

2. The Lord calls unlikely candidates to support others in their Christian calling. Discuss how each of the following were unlikely candidates for special service to the Lord.
  - Moses (Exodus 4:10-12—<sup>10</sup> *Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."* <sup>11</sup> *The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup> Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."*):
  - Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5—<sup>5</sup> *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*):
  - Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5-6—<sup>5</sup> *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."* <sup>6</sup> *"Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."*):
  - Fishermen from Galilee (Matthew 4:18-19—<sup>18</sup> *As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."*):

- Paul the persecutor of the church (1 Timothy 1:12-13—<sup>12</sup>*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.* <sup>13</sup>*Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.*):

3. Read Ephesians 4:11-13—<sup>11</sup>*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,* <sup>12</sup>*to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* <sup>13</sup>*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

The risen Lord and Savior still provides the necessary people to serve others in their important callings of life. How do these special leaders in the church help the body of Christ?

4. Read the first part of chapter 4 of Ephesians—*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.* <sup>2</sup>*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* <sup>3</sup>*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* <sup>4</sup>*There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—* <sup>5</sup>*one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* <sup>6</sup>*one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* <sup>7</sup>*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*

Why is it significant that the first part of this chapter speaks about our calling or vocation and then it is followed with an emphasis on the Lord raising up leaders in his church (verses 11-13 above)?

5. Read Acts 20:28—<sup>28</sup>*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

Who appoints leaders of the Church?

6. If God gives and appoints leaders of his church to serve his people publicly with the gospel, what is our role as individuals?

As a congregation?

#### CONCLUSION TO "UNDERSTANDING OUR CALLING IN LIFE": LOOK AT THE STARS

7. **Read Genesis 15:5—<sup>5</sup> [God] took [Abram] outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."**

When Abraham had questions about his calling and his future, God gave him a glimpse of the future by pointing him to the stars. Who are the offspring of Abraham that we need to see to help us get a better grip on our calling in life?

8. **Read Revelation 7:9—<sup>9</sup>After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.**

How do these words put our calling in life into the right perspective?

9. **Read Isaiah 64:8—Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.**

What does this add to our perspective of our calling in life?

*"I need to see the stars, not just the beauty of God's creation, but the greater beauty of all those who will believe through the message that we are privileged to carry with us, wherever we are planted."*

**God Grant Us that Vision!**