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Male Call: The Role of the Church in Awakening Young Men to their Vocational Purpose

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MALE CALL
THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN AWAKENING YOUNG MEN
TO THEIR VOCATIONAL PURPOSE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Many young adult men are struggling in their transition from adolescence to adulthood. Unique challenges converge in their quest for vocational discovery and career choice. The church is largely ignored as a guide as they make choices about work and career. Christian churches have been slow to provide practical guidance in faith and work; especially for disciples with an interest in professions and careers outside Christian ministry. There is a need for an informed church to guide young men so that they may reach their potential through the discovery of calling and vocation. I propose that the church must assume a vital role in the vocational formation of young men. Vocational discernment should be included in a more holistic approach to discipleship. Young men need to understand that their work life provides a significant place of service in the mission of God for the world.

In order to address this problem I will introduce the notion that personal calling and work function to fulfill the mission of God. In Chapter One I will provide an overview of the issues facing young men in their pursuit of vocational purpose. Chapter Two describes the biblical foundations of vocation and calling, highlighting the connection between personal calling and the mission of God. Chapter Three traces the meaning of vocation through church history, highlighting notable young adult men and their significant contribution to society. Chapter Four describes the changing meanings of masculinity in current culture; I will examine the impact these changes are having on male self confidence, motivation and vocational development. Chapter Five analyzes the effectiveness of the church in awakening young men with their vocational calling; this chapter provides guidelines for equipping young men in their pursuit of vocational

purpose. The concluding chapter offers the church practical applications for inspiring and equipping young men for vocational purpose.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Luke is a recent college graduate with a degree in business and few business prospects. The current job market offers no full-time opportunities. He works part-time as a barista, filling the balance of his time with school buddies. With outstanding college debt and no steady income, Luke resigns himself to moving back home with his parents. While he enjoys his carefree existence, he is discouraged about the future. He lacks motivation to pursue meaningful purpose in his life.

As a young person, Luke attended church with his family. While his parents still occasionally attend, Luke finds church offers little significance for his life. Church and the Christian faith seem out of touch with real-world issues. He believes there's little practical connection between his career pursuits and a life of faith, and that church has little relevance to his career goals. The blending of faith and vocation was not modeled by his parents or talked about at his church. Sadly, he has few sources of guidance regarding his goals. For him, the church isn't considered an option.

Unfortunately, there is a growing disconnect between young men like Luke and the church. Many young men sense no relevant assistance from the church with career plans. The church appears blind to the real needs of young men in Luke's age group, though it has significant spiritual, relational, and vocational resources that could assist young men in critical periods of their lives. Historically, awakening young people to their spiritual callings and vocations has been a central mission of the church. However, awakening the church to this critical mission is currently needed. The church can guide young men to reach their potential through discovery of calling and vocation, a discovery

that will unite young men with the mission of God for the world. This dissertation will inform the church about challenges facing young men and propose ways for the church community to awaken this vision in their lives.

I write with the church and its leaders in mind, in an effort to help church leaders comprehend challenges young men face, urging them to include vocational components in their plans for Christian discipleship. Evangelism and the practice of spiritual disciplines are essential to spiritual formation, but Scripture indicates that discipleship should include the totality of life. This includes one's work life. At the heart of the Great Commission is the call to go into all the world and make disciples. The mandate to make disciples throughout the world encompasses more than spreading the gospel message to every nation. It involves entering into every dimension of social life with the presence of Christ. God's call compels followers to be instruments of God's blessing in every dimension of society.

Paul describes the follower of Jesus as one who is "...filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:9-10). James Davison Hunter believes that making disciples "...requires intentionality and it entails the hard work of teaching, training and cautioning believers with wisdom in the ways of Christ so that they are fit for any calling and any service to him."¹ In this dissertation, I alert the church to the unique challenges and needs of young men. I challenge the church to expand its vocational vision for young adult men so they may be prepared to "bear fruit in every good work." Preparing young men for

¹ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 226.

every good work extends the vision of vocation beyond ecclesial work to a more comprehensive view of work throughout the culture. The purpose of this work is to appeal to the church to help young men discover their vocational “sweet spot.” In making this a priority, the church will enable young men to fulfill their God-given potential to bless the world and glorify God.

A Rationale for Focusing on Young Men

For generations, young men in their twenties have faced the challenges of “coming of age.” Today, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is as complicated as ever. The life-shaping decade of the twenties is crucial in forging one’s identity. Valued relationships are formed in this decade. Significant life events often take place. But today, many young adults in this age group are delaying life-defining decisions. This has an important impact on the pace of vocational discovery for young men and women.

Researchers and social scientists are focusing great attention on the generation of young adults between the ages of 18-30. Social scientist, Jeffrey Arnett, termed this life stage, “emerging adulthood,” the unique transition period between adolescence and adulthood. Arnett observes five characteristics common to emerging adulthood:

1. It is the age of identity explorations, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.
2. It is the age of instability.
3. It is the most self-focused age of life.
4. It is the age of feeling “in-between,” in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
5. It is the age of possibilities, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled optimism.²

² Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, 1st ed. (USA: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8.

This field of study has gained great popularity among many academic institutions. The Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood is gathering physiological, psychological and social data in an attempt to better understand and assist young adults in this age group.

For young men, the transition to adulthood includes adapting to significant social shifts in the way culture views them. The subject of young men has attracted interest in both academic and popular literature as traditional male roles have come under scrutiny. Much has been written about the changing role of men in culture and their inability to adjust to a changing social landscape. A 2010 issue of *Atlantic* magazine declared the end of men. The article's author, Hanna Rosin states, "Man has been the dominant sex since, well, the dawn of mankind. But for the first time in human history, that is changing with shocking speed."³ Changing perceptions of masculinity complicate the formation of male identity. Many young men appear to be languishing, uncertain about their purpose and contribution to the good of society.

Various studies reveal the challenges facing young men in their transition to adulthood. Michael Kimmell documents a study of 400 men in his book, *Guyland*. Kimmell paints a picture of irresponsible, immature young men in desperate need of help navigating these formative years. The possibility of a positive influence from the church is noticeably absent from Kimmell's proposed solution.

Christian Smith and a team of researchers designed the National Study of Youth and Religion to examine from a religious perspective the religious lives of American youth spanning adolescence to young adulthood. From 2001 to 2013, the study traced the

³ Hanna Rosin, "The End of Men," *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/308135/> (accessed December 11, 2013).

progress of young people in order to assess the effectiveness of programs and opportunities offered by religious communities to youth, and to create a national discussion about the influence of religion in youth's lives. Findings from the study were compiled in three significant books, *Soul Searching*, *Souls in Transition*, and *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. Their research indicates that young adults who have a seemingly clear and strong purpose in life are the minority. Smith states, "Most are still sorting out what their purpose in life might be, to what good they want to devote themselves."⁴

In the Christian community, other important studies have followed. The Fuller Youth Institute led by Kara Powell, Princeton professor Kendra Creasy Dean, and Barna Group researcher David Kinnamon, have published important works addressing the growing disconnect between young adults and the church. Kinnamon's book, *You Lost Me*, singles out the lack of vocational vision and training for young adults at the local church level as an important factor in the disinterest in church among young adults. These informative studies address the needs of the general age group of young adults rather than specifically young men. However, they stop short of drawing conclusions along gender lines. This dissertation will adapt these general findings to the unique issues of young adult men.

Several studies provide helpful insight into the role of young men and spirituality. *Coming of Age*⁵ is a study developed by the Young Male Spirituality Project. Interviews

⁴ Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 53.

⁵ David W. Anderson, Paul Hill, and Roland D Martinson, *Coming of Age: Exploring the Identity and Spirituality of Younger Men* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 9.

with young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five provide data on a range of faith practices. Vocational discovery is one small portion of general study on the influence of faith on young adult men. Christian higher education has taken the lead in providing resources for young adults in their pursuit of vocation. Through the efforts of the Lilly Endowment, numerous Christian colleges and universities are creating helpful programs and curriculum for vocational discovery among college students. Ironically, research on emerging men's groups on 14 college campuses was initiated due to the lack of involvement by young men in previous vocational discernment activities on those campuses. In initial vocational discernment activities, a gender interest imbalance was reflected. Sixty-six percent of participants were women, and while 33% were men.⁶ These fourteen colleges sought to improve male participation by discussing the relationship between vocation, spirituality, and gender identity. The data collected from the university studies is useful at a local church level.

While we draw on the findings of the aforementioned studies, we find that none of the studies directly addresses the local church and its ability to influence and support young adult men in their vocational pursuits. The juxtaposition of vocation, young men, and the church forms the central concern of this paper. I build upon interpretations of these findings.

Helping young men find purpose through their work becomes a primary goal. Churches must intensify their efforts to assist young men, providing resources and guidance in their pursuit of vocations. This requires the church to reconsider its mission

⁶ Gar Kellom, "Recent Research on Emerging Men's Groups," in *Forging the Male Spirit: The Spiritual Lives of American College Men* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 1.

and to expand its influence into multiple spheres of society, well beyond the church walls.

Definitions of Calling

Crucial to this study is a clear definition of vocation or calling. The definition of calling has undergone significant changes through the centuries. Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*, “to call.” Vocation implies a summons or invitation. The biblical record highlights this summons as the call of God to follow God’s ways and purposes. Jesus’ distinct call to his disciples to “follow” expresses this divine call. Throughout much of Christian history, vocation has been understood as a call to a religious order. This restricted view has led to notions that religious work is sacred while secular work is necessary but profane, secondary to the mission of God. This is a view that lingers in popular understanding today.

Cultural factors continue to reshape the meaning of calling. In today’s lexicon, the words “vocation” and “calling” have been stripped of much of their spiritual connection: people often describe work for which they have great passion as a “calling”. Researchers Brian Dik and Ryan Duffy find a growing secularization of the meaning of calling among United States university students. To the modern mind, calling arises from within oneself and centers on self-actualization.

Dik and Duffy represent a small portion of social scientists that seek to reclaim the historical meaning of vocation, with a strong sense of divine initiative in the passions and purposes of individuals. This is found in their detailed definition of calling as “a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a

particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation.”⁷ Michael Miller, editor of *Doing More with Life*, a book written to connect Christian Higher Education to vocational service, echoes the desire to preserve the divine priority of calling. Miller defines calling as, “a divine invitation to respond to the grace present in one’s life. In answering that call every aspect of our life, including the ordinary and extraordinary, is transformed. The end result is that we are no longer interested in our own good but are newly dedicated to the good of others.”⁸

An understanding of the historical meaning of vocation can be significant in influencing young men to pursue purpose. Douglas Schuurman states, “Christians must recover anew the language, meaning, and reality of life as vocation.”⁹ But one must question which historical meaning the church should return to. Clearly, a renewed understanding of a theology of vocation is needed, along with a realization there will always be multiple ways to interpret biblical references. While both Old and New Testament narratives bring clarity to an understanding of calling, Jesus Christ must remain the focus of the conversation.

Central to this paper is a conviction that God calls all people to participate in God’s mission and invites them to invest their lives in mission. Miller writes, “As created children of God we were made for a reason and God has a plan to reach that end. That plan is linked to our vocation. We, in fact, bind ourselves to God when we strive to live

⁷ Bryan J. Dik and Ryan D. Duffy, *Make Your Job a Calling: How the Psychology of Vocation Can Change Your Life at Work* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2012), 11.

⁸ Michael R. Miller, *Doing More With Life: Connecting Christian Higher Education to a Call to Service* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 12.

⁹ Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), xxi.

the life to which we have been called.”¹⁰ The church bears the responsibility to guide its young in this discovery.

God’s call requires a response. The choice to follow God results in a sense of belonging to God, and responsibility to become an active participant in God’s mission for the world. Individual gifts and passions find their greatest fulfillment when directed toward God’s purposes. At the center of human response is to love God with our whole heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Then, believers may follow Jesus into mission to make disciples and bless the world.

A widely quoted contemporary definition of vocation by Frederick Buechner states, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”¹¹ This notion also forms a practical basis for an understanding of vocation. Author Amy Sherman describes the place where personal gifts and passions intersect with God’s priorities and the world’s needs the “vocational sweet spot.”¹² Sherman encourages believers to seek to work in their “vocational sweet spot” by focusing on God’s stirrings, one’s individual gifts, and human need. Christian discipleship must include support for this journey of discovery.

I assert that the years of young adulthood are vital to the process of finding this sweet spot. The sweet spot implies a range of vocational opportunities rather than a distinct point. Churches must assist young men in their progress by helping them experience the needs in the world, by helping them integrate their passions and gifts with

¹⁰ Miller, *Doing More with Life*, 4.

¹¹ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 95.

¹² Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2011), 107.

meaningful work, and by supporting them in the discovery process. In order for the church to be this kind of resource, it must understand the unique issues facing young men today. It must value the various ways God uses human work to fulfill God's purpose. The church must encourage young men to seek jobs and careers that fit their God-given sweet spot. As young men discover their interests in job and career, the church serves an important role in inviting them to consider the spiritual implications of their interests. The church has the opportunity to inspire young men to use gifts and talents in multiple spheres of society to participate in God's mission.

Work, Calling, and Fulfilling the Mission of God

Work as a means to fulfill God's mission for the world is an important theme of this dissertation. Much of church life focuses on the development of spiritual practices, and on service within the church. I assert that the church must move to the forefront in preparing young adults to effectively enter spheres of labor, business, arts, education, medicine, and technology as places to fulfill God's mission. These spheres essentially represent all domains of culture and social life. All work, apart from that done for immoral purposes, must be valued as an expression of God's grace and a means of engaging and blessing the world. Ben Witherington contends that, "Work done by those in the image of God should mirror the creative, sustaining, and redeeming work of God; indeed, it should be an attempt to be God's co-laborers in these enterprises."¹³ This theme needs to be incorporated into a holistic discipleship plan by local churches.

¹³ Ben Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 163.

Finding one's vocational sweet spot outside the church also contributes to personal fulfillment, a by-product of using one's gifts in work life for the glory of God and the fulfillment of God's mission for the world. Through work, one's faith, talents, and efforts come together to accomplish a greater good. For a disciple of Jesus, work life fulfills the great commission to go into the world—not just geographically, but into all spheres of society—with the intention of blessing the world for God's glory. This recognition is vital for preparing young men for meaningful service to God's purposes and for personal vocational fulfillment.

Faithful Presence and Human Flourishing

John Davison Hunter introduces the concept of “faithful presence” as a primary way for Christians to shape culture through vocational engagement. Faithful presence describes Hunter's discipleship strategy for engagement in and with the world. It follows the Great Commandment, first that believers live in faithfulness to God, and secondly that they commit to the flourishing of others. Followers of Jesus are called to be fully present and committed in key spheres of influence—families, neighborhoods, voluntary activities, and places of work. Hunter writes, “What this means is that where and to the extent we are able, faithful presence commits us to do what we can to create conditions in the structures of social life we inhabit that are conducive to the flourishing of all.”¹⁴ A believer's commitment to the flourishing of all people is consistent with God's desire to bless the world. Christopher Wright states, “Blessing is connected with creation and all as the good gifts that God longs for people to enjoy in the world—abundance, fruitfulness

¹⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 247.

and fertility, long life, peace and rest.”¹⁵ Young men must be taught that responding to a call to join in the mission of God mobilizes them to be agents of blessing.

Faithful presence recognizes that Christians share a world with others and that they must contribute to its overall flourishing.¹⁶ To love God and to love one’s neighbor requires engagement in the world; a world that is becoming increasingly diverse spiritually and culturally. The church must teach young men how to work in this kind of world, to enter into the new city commons through the various dimensions of work life. Because God loves this world, believers must love and engage in the lives of people and organizations with compassion and respect, excellence and innovation. Hunter states, “Commitment to a new city commons is a commitment of the community of faith to the highest ideals and practices of human flourishing in a pluralistic world.”¹⁷ Through many career tracks, young men can fulfill the mission of God in this way.

This dissertation traces these themes as they impact the lives of young men aged 18-30. As I stress the importance of young men finding their vocational identity and purpose, I call for the church to take its place as a positive resource in their development. The beginning of this task is to understand the challenges young men face in finding their purpose in God’s mission.

Giving special attention to young men and vocation is not without controversy. Some might interpret the emphasis on young men as a sexist attempt to maintain male superiority in the church. Discussions of gender within the Christian community are

¹⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 221.

¹⁶ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 279.

¹⁷ Ibid.

highly sensitive. Most secular social scientists warn against a patriarchal bias found in Scripture and in much of Christian tradition. Though recent brain studies suggest biological differences between men and women, current scholarship lays stress on the similarities of the sexes rather than highlighting the differences. Amid the conflicting views of masculinity, young men need guidance about their role as men in a changing world.

Admittedly, I am a product of a generation with strong male stereotypes. This should not automatically disqualify my analysis. As a father of two daughters, a husband of a wife who is an executive in corporate America and a pastor in a denomination that has ordained women from its beginnings, the desire for equality at home, church, and workplace resonates in me. And I assert that as society moves toward greater equality among the sexes, young men need to demonstrate greater adaptability and awareness. They must be taught to act with confidence and humility as they find their place in jobs and careers. This point of view is in contrast to popular theological positions represented by outspoken church leaders who espouse patriarchy. Young men must develop a resolve to respect women as equals in the home, classroom, workplace, and church. Following the mind and attitude of Jesus becomes the core motivation in this discovery process.

The scope of this dissertation allows little attention to the formal call of God to professional church ministry. As an ordained pastor, I received extensive training and support from my denomination in my role as local church pastor. Most denominations offer great guidance for those called into parish ministry. At the same time, churches have largely ignored the training and encouragement of believers entering domains of work in secular society. Little preparation is given at a local church level for young

disciples to flourish in their work lives. There is little encouragement to pursue careers outside the constraints of church work. In coming years, this focus must shift.

This dissertation focuses on various aspects of young men and the discovery of vocation. In Chapter Two, I survey the biblical and theological nature of calling. Calling and vocation are anchored in God's mission to bless the world. God calls people to belong, and to join in the grand mission to restore and bless all of creation. I focus attention on the call of Abraham as a paradigm for the mission of the church and its followers. As God called Abraham to bless the world, so God calls the church to be an agent of blessing to the world through every domain of society. Jesus came to fulfill this mission and his Spirit empowers the church to continue this gospel message. Wright states, "...the essence of the biblical gospel, first announced to Abraham, that God has indeed made such a blessing to the nations available through the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the seed of Abraham. In Christ alone, through the gospel of his death and resurrection, stands the hope of blessing for all nations."¹⁸ This chapter sets the theological context for vocational discovery.

Chapter Three traces the practices of calling and vocation through church history. While the idea of calling has become more secularized, a reconsideration of the theological and ecclesiological influences on the church and general culture provides important understanding for church leaders today. The roots of a sacred/secular hierarchy of vocation run deep in the history of the church. This chapter serves as an overview of the vocation and work from the time of Jesus to the present. I have selected significant young man from each era to illustrate the power of the call of God to bring blessing to the world.

¹⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 221.

The church and its leaders must take seriously the significant life phase of young adulthood. Not only do young men face challenges because of their age but young men face challenges as they form their identity as men. In Chapter Four, I delve into these challenges, and the changing understanding of masculinity and gender roles in American society. Amid the challenges, young men can draw on significant metaphors and models to guide them into manhood. Young men need support in the integration of faith and vocational purpose. The changing understanding of masculinity requires a clear understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God. The local church can serve as a source of guidance and encouragement as young men establish their personal identities.

In many ways, the church is falling short in its efforts to resource and challenge young men in their search for life purpose and calling. Chapter Five explores the concerns facing churches in their effort to assist young men in vocational pursuits. We will examine reasons for this disconnect between young men and the church. We will also highlight factors that can create an atmosphere of discovery as young men search for their vocational sweet spot. Vocational development should be viewed as a key aspect of spiritual development and included in plans for discipleship. We affirm that investment in the lives of young men requires an investment by mature men within the church.

The final chapter concludes with several practical ways a local church can assist young men in finding vocational purpose. Local Christian communities can play a vital role in preparing young men to discover and apply their vocational skills in the broader culture. The mission of God does not end at the church. Through vocationally equipped disciples, it extends into every aspect of society.

Across the centuries, the call of God has inspired young men to commit their lives to fulfill the mission of God. Today, local churches must step up to the challenge of guiding young men to heed God's call to offer their talents and passion for divine purposes. This will be accomplished as churches intentionally create an environment that emphasizes God's calling, the needs of the world and the talents of individuals. Through the church, young men may be equipped to engage the world through the various realms of society. The believer's work life becomes an essential means to fulfill God's mission for the world; it is a primary expression of one's love for God and others. Christian communities must make vocational discovery a core part of their discipleship curriculum. In addition to traditional discipleship practices, churches must offer training tools that enhance vocational skills so that young men may flourish in a work environment as representatives of Jesus. Churches must expose young people to the various ways their work lives can influence the culture with the gospel. Immersion experiences in the various realms of work life must be encouraged. Supportive relationships are vital in the quest for vocational purpose. The local church must prioritize the development of relationships between young men and experienced older men.

Paul's prayer for the church in Thessalonica articulates my hope for young men in the writing of this dissertation, "To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes 1:11). This dissertation is an appeal to the church to awaken to its call to equip young men to

discover their purpose in the mission of God. The next chapter sets the theological basis of God's call and mission.

CHAPTER TWO

CALLING AND THE MISSION OF GOD

The words “Follow me!” are life-changing. With these simple words, Jesus challenged his followers to a life-changing relationship and a life-changing mission, one that would imbue their paths with eternal significance as they worked to advance God’s purposes in the world. They would enter into a new community of belonging and participate with Jesus in a mission to transform the world. This particular investigation into the biblical and theological roots of calling is motivated by a conviction that the Spirit of Jesus continues to challenge young people to follow him in blessing and transforming the world. This investigation focuses on the calling of young men.

The response of the four fishermen to the call of Jesus in Matthew 4 is reminiscent of Abraham’s encounter with God in Genesis. In both cases, obedience to the call activates a divine/human relationship and sets in motion their participation in the mission of God. God fulfills the mission for the world through followers willing to listen and obey the voice of God. Through the Holy Spirit, God continues to call people to commit their lives, skills and aspirations to help set the world right. God is calling the church to awaken young men to this vision.

God’s call to follow is comprehensive; it encompasses both a call to discipleship and the call to mission. Many commentators describe the call of God in two parts: a general call to discipleship and a specific vocational call. This view reflects the lingering influence of the Reformation on current understanding of vocation.¹ While the notion of a

¹ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 75–83; Darrow Miller, *LifeWork: A Biblical Theology for What You Do Every Day* (Seattle: YWAM Pub., 2009), 125–153.

particular and specific call is a helpful tool in teaching about personal calling, Scripture appears less clear in making this differentiation. Jesus did not say to his disciples, “first establish a right relationship with me and then I can give you a unique call on your life!” His statement was, “Follow me and I will send you out to fish for people (Mt 4:19 NIV).” The mission of God provokes people to follow Jesus and live out their call through a variety of vocational expressions. Call and mission are vitally linked in other key biblical call stories in Scripture. God called Abraham, Moses, Gideon, and Isaiah into a unique divine/human relationship that included a clear call to a mission. These men, representing various walks of life, became vital leaders in God’s plans for the world. The most dramatic example of this connection is found in the encounter of Jesus and Saul/Paul. Paul describes his conversion in his testimony to King Agrippa: “The voice of the Lord said, ‘Get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose. . . . I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God’” (Acts 26:16-18). This encounter established Paul’s relationship with Jesus Christ and set his vocation and purpose. Paul, the tentmaking rabbi, redirected his talents and passions in service to his new Lord. The call of God demands one’s whole life, a life surrendered to God’s mission. In following Jesus, disciples offer their interests and abilities to serve the mission.

Churches that invest in young men and their pursuit of vocational purpose need a biblical pattern to follow. I begin this chapter with a survey of the primary word for call in Scripture. In addition to the word study, I will focus on God’s decisive encounter with Abraham. This encounter shaped the trajectory of Israel’s identity and purpose, which were established in covenant relationship with God. I seek to show that belonging to

YHWH and joining in YHWH's mission are vital to the divine/human relationship then and now. This chapter proposes that vocational purpose flows from an understanding of the biblical themes of covenant, blessing, and calling. God's call to Abraham to bless the world becomes the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church. The church is called to be agents of blessing, preparing believers to utilize gifts and talents in all aspects of life to fulfill this mission. Followers of Jesus living out of their vocations are vital contributors of human flourishing in the world.

The Word "Call" in the Bible

Καλεω, forms the foundation for the theology of calling. It is the common New Testament term for calling or vocation. It is linked with the Hebrew verb *qārā*. In both testaments, the range of meaning for the word includes "to name," "to invite," and "to call with a divine calling." Both the Hebrew and Greek words share the idea of God's meaning and purpose bestowed upon a person or a thing.²

Furthermore, the process of naming in Scripture actually "calls" something into being and attaches the value of the creator upon that person, people, or thing. In the initial chapters of Genesis, God calls periods of time "day" and "night" and distinguishes the places of "heaven" and "earth". In God's act of creating and naming, value is added to the created thing. God's naming also instills value to places (2 Sm 5:9), to people, or to people groups, such as Israel. The Lord says, "I have called you by name, you are mine" (Is 43:1).

God's call is also an inviting summons. An individual, such as Moses (Ex 3:4), or a people (Hos 11:1), may receive a divine invitation to enter into God's work. In Isaiah,

² Lothar Coenen, "Call," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 271–276; Schuurman, *Vocation*, 18.

the call includes service rendered by the servant, “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles” (Is 42:6). There is an anticipated time when all nations will be called (Is 55:5).

In the gospels, Jesus uses the word “call” as a general invitation to enter into the kingdom of God: “For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:13). He also used “call” as a summons to join him in his kingdom work and to be sent out in mission (Mk 3:14; Mt 4:21; 10:1).

The apostle Paul expands the use of *καλεω* to include four themes: (1) salvation in Christ, (2) living as a Christian in community, (3) discipleship in a certain place in life, and (4) a sense of call to a particular ministry. Paul uses “call” as an expression of a life of faith in Jesus. In Christ all are called “into fellowship with his son” (1 Cor 1:9), “to be saints” (1 Cor 1:2), “heavenward” (Phil 3:14), to salvation (2 Thes 2:14), to eternal life (1 Tm 6:12), to hope (Eph 1:18), “to belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:6), “to be saints” (1:7), and “according to his purpose” (8:28). Romans 8:28-29 illustrates the way Paul unites *kaleō* with God’s saving purposes. In this passage the word is found in a five-verb progression explaining God’s saving purpose for believers. Paul affirms that God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified believers for his purpose and good.

Paul also links call language with life in the Christian community. Paul says, we are “called to live in peace” (1 Cor 7:15, Col 3:15), “called to be free” (Gal 5:13), “called to one hope” (Eph 4:4), called “to live a holy life” (1 Thes 4:7; 2 Tm 1:9). While modern readers might apply these verses to individual Christians, the intended meaning is to be understood as a corporate, communal calling.

The apostle also uses calling to describe a station of life we occupy: single, married, slave, or free. First Corinthians 7: 17-24 illustrates this aspect of calling. This passage influenced Martin Luther to infuse spiritual meaning into the common stations of life. Modern biblical interpreters have re-interpreted these views believing that Paul understood God's call to transcend a man or woman's standing in life.

In a few instances in the New Testament, call singles out someone for a specific ministry or mission: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work for which I have called them" (Acts 13:2; 16:10). Direct references to *καλεω* as a call to a specific ministry are remote in Paul's writings. However, the two references in Acts compliment the more implicit allusions to God's call to a specific mission found throughout the Scriptures.

A further distinction in the *καλεω* word group comes with the addition of the Greek prefix "*ek*." The "called out" ones or *εκκλησια* become the name and identity for Christ followers, or "church." The church are those called out, those belonging to God to fulfill God's purpose in the world. Believers within the church are also described in New Testament writings as those "called" to be saints.

While the study of *καλεω* reveals important meanings for calling and vocation, the biblical and theological meaning of calling extends far beyond the etymology of the word. In the passion of God to unite and restore all of humanity and creation, God calls a people to partnership and mission. The grand narrative of scripture portrays a God who loves all of creation and seeks to call a people to fulfill God's purpose. God speaks, God calls, and God demands a response: a response of love for God's mission of restoration. In an obedient response, the image of God is restored in humanity; God's people find purpose and bring flourishing to the world.

The Voice that Calls

Calling begins with a voice. The authoritative voice of God looms large in the testimony of Scripture. God’s speech creates. For the authors of the Old Testament, “Yahweh creates the world by speech—by royal utterance, a powerful decree that in its very utterance is eagerly and dutifully enacted.”³ Scripture reveals this creative word. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:6). God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gn 1:3). God’s word has power and authority.

God’s call brings new life and fresh hope. The stirrings from God’s voice to Mary announced that a new start is imminent through the birth of her son. Contrary to human pretension, the Bible asserts that God is the source of life and creativity (Eph 2:8, Jas 1:17). Furthermore, the spoken Word and the living Word together initiate new creation: “If anyone is in Christ, there is new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

The heart of God is revealed through speech and action. God intends something good for creation. The word of God discloses God’s purposes and love. The creation story combines a God powerful in speech with a God actively at work. The imagery in the creation narratives reveals God at work as a potter who forms humankind, and as a gardener who tends his garden. God is a manager and mentor. God is even shown as a tailor crafting protective garments for disgraced human beings. God’s actions and compassion for creation authenticates the spoken word.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology Of The Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Fortress Press, 2005), 148.

John Goldingay describes God's artful connection between work and speech through the colorful metaphor of magic:

So it is when God is at work. God says something and light replaces darkness, healing replaces sickness, forgiveness replaces guilt. All God does is speak. Speech is of the essence of work, it is how God works. It is another way to describe God working magic, alongside God's being creative and alongside the idea of God's spirit being let loose in the world.⁴

In the mystery of creation, God speaks hope powerfully for the world. Every human person—including young men in this generation—is instilled with the hope of a significant and meaningful life.

God's speech invites people into relationship. Yahweh declares his intention to choose Israel to be his special people, "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Gn17:7, Ex 6.7, Ex 19:5). This grand overture to partnership with God is both welcoming and daunting. Walter Brueggemann describes God's speech as both promising and claiming. "It is promising in that God vows fidelity to his partners. It is claiming in that God names and commissions the other to be his people-child-servant-heir."⁵ God calls people into a relationship of belonging and mission. Covenant describes this promising and claiming divine-human partnership.

Describing the divine-human relationship as a partnership is done cautiously. The relationship is dependent on the gracious initiative and superior status of the divine covenant maker. To consider the relationship an equal partnership is presumptuous and distorted.

⁴ John Goldingay, *After Eating the Apricot*, <http://infoguides.fuller.edu/content.php?pid=190354&sid=1706452> (accessed June 18, 2012).

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, "Covenanting as Human Vocation: A Discussion of the Relation of Bible and Pastoral Care," *Interpretation* 33, no. 2 (Ap 1979): 128.

The sovereignty of God and the free choice granted to humanity creates a dynamic tension in this covenant relationship. There is an imperative aspect to the divine summons. God's call requires obedience. The call of God assumes an affirmative decision to say "yes" to God's commands. Yet there are also occasions in Scripture for the one who is called to hesitate or doubt or resist the command of God. Abraham expresses doubts regarding God's promises (Gn 15:1-8; 18:16-33). There are multiple examples of people rejecting the call of God. The encounter between Jesus and "would be" disciples ended in their refusal to follow Jesus on his terms (Mk 10:17-27; Lk 9:57-62).

However, at the heart of God's call is the challenge to obey. In the story of the exodus, the one who liberates from Egypt became the new lord of the people; one to be obeyed and followed. Israel became a "slave or servant" to the new lord, Yahweh (Lv 25:42). The apostle Paul understood his relationship with Jesus in this way: he became a "bond servant" for Christ Jesus.

Entering into a covenant partnership with God demands a choice. Old Testament prophets challenged the people of Israel to follow YHWH instead of other gods. To choose YHWH was to choose the way of blessing (Dt 30:11-20). A partnership in the mission of Jesus is equally demanding: Jesus calls his disciples to take up their crosses and follow him (Mt 16:24, Lk 9:23).

Covenant and Calling

Covenant language shapes the biblical understanding of calling and mission. The word is rich with historical and theological meaning. Covenant theology is espoused by a number of influential biblical interpreters, such as noted scholar Walter Eichrodt, who

constructs the whole of his Old Testament theology around the grand meta-narrative of covenant. Yet recent scholarship is reticent to gather all Old Testament theology around this monolithic center. For example, Old Testament scholar Christopher Wright respects covenant as one of several vital descriptions of God's relationship to God's people. He contends, "It is futile to isolate any single theme or category as the sole organizing center for the whole discipline."⁶ Be that as it may, the covenant relationship remains vital to the understanding of Israel's theology and identity.

Throughout the Old Testament, God called Israel to a covenant relationship. A covenant represents a formal transaction between two parties that pledges loyalty and obedience. The covenants initiated by God with Abraham and Moses establish identity and purpose. Abraham and his offspring were called to be God's people and given the mission to bless the people of the world. In Genesis 12:1-3, God says, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." N. T. Wright ties together mission and calling in a simple definition of covenant. Wright describes covenant as, "God's single plan through Abraham and his family to bless the whole world."⁷ The repetitive use of the "I will": I will show ... I will make ... I will bless ..., firmly establishes God as initiator of the promise and challenge. Abraham is the passive recipient of God's call. Genesis 15 follows with God's confirmation of this initial summons, specifically with the covenant promise of land to Abraham and his family. The covenant is set in motion as he obeys the call of God,

⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 325.

⁷ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision*, 1st ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 67.

trusting God will do what he promises. According to the covenant, Abraham belongs to God. He is summoned to join with him as his instrument of blessing.

God's purpose for Israel and the world is declared in this message of promise and challenge. God's vision to bless the nations is both a promise to Abraham and a challenge for God's people. The covenantal call extends to future generations far surpassing the imagination of the ancient herdsman. From childless nomad to nation maker, God sought to birth his mission to the world through the faith of one man. Christopher Wright states, "The gospel and mission both begin in Genesis, and both are located in the redemptive intention of the Creator to bless the nations Mission is God's address to the problem of fractured humanity. And God's mission is universal in its ultimate goal and scope."⁸ In God's summons of Abraham, call, mission, and purpose come together.

The invitation of God to enter into a covenant relationship imbues humanity with deep value and meaning. "Human persons," according to Brueggemann, "are grounded in another who initiates personhood and who stays bound to persons in loyal ways for their well being."⁹ Brueggemann adds, "Covenant is the deep and pervasive affirmation that our lives in all aspects depend upon our relatedness to the other One who retains initiative in our lives and who wills more good for us than we do for ourselves" (Eph 3:20).¹⁰ There is personal blessing in belonging. God's favor fosters human purpose and flourishing.

⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 328.

⁹ Brueggemann, "Covenanting as Human Vocation," 116.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

A sense of belonging and of being chosen have deep significance for young men in search of personal identity and meaning. The life stage of young adulthood involves a search for identity. Selfishness and self absorption are common to this search. But to be called by God into partnership and mission challenges ego-driven quests for self fulfillment, and demands surrender to God's lordship.

God invites humans into a partnership that marshals human skills, gifts, and aspirations for the mission of blessing the world. In this covenant relationship, divine power elevates human talents and giftedness; individual lives are infused with divine meaning and purpose. As Brueggemann writes, "It is the voice of the initiating One who calls human persons to a destiny."¹¹ Again this call is not static but comes as a summons to participate in God's purpose. The call of God brings new life to the one called. God instills in herdsmen like Abraham, statesmen like Joseph, priests like Samuel a life purpose as they align themselves with God's mission. The mission of God can be fulfilled through a variety of meaningful passions, jobs, or pursuits.

Inherent in this mission is the vision of a restored world. God's vision stretches humans beyond their limited thinking (Is 55:6-9), and beyond their resources and plans. Personal identity and purpose come in giving oneself to God's grand vision for the world. Gary L. Chamberlain sums up the calling of God, "True vocation does not involve the search for one's true self so characteristic of contemporary psychology but rather joins that self found in response to God's initiation to service to community."¹² Vocational fulfillment begins with the surrender of the self to God and this vision. By the same token

¹¹ Ibid., 125.

¹² Gary L Chamberlain, "Protestant and Catholic Meaning of Vocation: Is Business a True Vocation.," in *Business as a Calling: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Meaning of Business from the Catholic Social Tradition*. (St. Paul: University of St. Thomas, 2005), 12.

tools developed through the social sciences can help in the quest for self identity and vocational understanding. Gifts committed to the purposes of God are enhanced through the use of discovery tools. Theology and psychology can be allies in preparing young people for vocational service.

The Mission of Blessing

The call of God to Abraham to “be a blessing to the world” establishes the vocational purpose of Abraham and his people: Abraham is blessed by God so that he may bless the nations of the world. This theme, introduced in Genesis 12, reappears as a key theme in Paul’s understanding of the mission of the church. The apostle makes a significant connection between God’s call to Abraham and the mission of Jesus. Paul writes, “Christ redeemed us ... in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:14). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the blessing of God given to Abraham became real and available to all who believe. This notion offers important implications for the vocational purposes of Jesus’ followers.

The rich promises of God given to Abraham extend to his children. Through Jesus Christ, believers are recipients of the blessing granted to Abraham and participants in his promise and mission, “For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ... And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26, 29). Paul saw that the seeds of the gospel were rooted in God’s call to Abraham (Gal 2:8), which was the “gospel in advance.” With the promise came the call to mission. As heirs of the promise, believers are called to follow Jesus and join as agents in blessing the world.

As mentioned earlier, the creation narrative points to the blessing of God. In the garden, Adam and Eve are God's partners, co-workers responsible for the ongoing care and management of creation (Genesis 1:22). As Richard Bauckham writes, "Wherever human life enjoys the good things of creation and produces the good fruits of human activity, God is pouring out his blessings. Wherever people bless God for his blessings, to that extent God is known as the good Creator who provides for human flourishing."¹³ Blessing is far more than mere good fortune. Abundance, well-being, and the fullness of God—spiritually and materially, represent blessings given to God's creatures. God's deep desire is for creation to flourish. Thus, on the seventh day of the creation story, God's blesses creation with the gift of Sabbath rest (Gn 2:3).

But it is here that the biblical narrative of humanity takes a lethal turn. Humankind chooses independence over trust in the creator. Humanity, alienated from God, seeks to build their own structures of self-reliance. The final scene in the prehistory of Genesis shows the Lord scattering the nations over the face of the earth. The curtain falls on this period of history with the world in chaos and humanity separated from God. The blessings of creation have fallen under the reality of a curse. Then a new gracious beginning emerges with these words:

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' (Gn 12:1-3)

The God of creation speaks again; now to the herdsman and nomad, Abraham. Through the obedience of Abraham to this call, God promised to replace the barrenness of the

¹³ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 34.

people and make them fruitful again. Brueggemann writes, Abraham “is presented as ‘the agent and instrument of Yahweh in the world, to bring a blessing to the world of curse.’”¹⁴ The call and promise of God to Abraham is so essential to the identity of Israel that it is repeated in some form on five occasions to Abraham and his family (Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).¹⁵ Wright adds, “Blessing for the nations is the bottom line, textually and theologically, of God’s promise to Abraham.”¹⁶ Brueggemann acknowledges the roots of the mission of God when he concludes, “this series of texts is as close as Israel comes to a ‘theology of mission,’ whereby Israel has a vocation of transformation vis-à-vis the nations.”¹⁷ God chose Abraham and his descendents to bring the blessing of God to the world. This is their vocation.

In the Genesis narrative, Abraham is clearly called, or as Richard Bauckham suggests, “singled out”.¹⁸ And according to Bauckham, “In Abraham’s case he is ‘singled out’ precisely so that blessing may come to all the nations.”¹⁹ God, through the obedience

¹⁴ Brueggemann, *Theology Of The Old Testament*, 498.

¹⁵ There is much dispute over the precise meaning of the word blessing “*barak*” in the story of Abraham. There are two verbal forms, niph'al (passive or reflexive or middle) or hithpa'el (reflexive), used in the five instances where blessing is connected with “all the nations of the earth.” There are three possible ways of reading the words: the passive, “will be blessed,” the reflexive, “will bless themselves,” and the middle, “they will find blessing.” Scholars are mixed in their choice. Christopher Wright opts for the reflexive, “will bless themselves” based on the contextual and missiological considerations. His position suggests that the nations must activate God’s promise through their acknowledgement of God as the source of blessing. The nations are not passive recipients of blessing. See *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 216–219 for Wright’s full argument. I concur with his position with the assurance that it does not diminish the responsibility of God’s people to initiate God’s blessing to all. The call to bless the nations is unconditional. Common grace is received by all nations. Receiving the full benefits of God’s blessings requires obedient, faithful response.

¹⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 194.

¹⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology Of The Old Testament*, 498.

¹⁸ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

of the “singled out” one, sets in motion a cycle. Abraham and his descendents in turn, will be a blessing to all the families on earth.

This promise of blessing impacts subsequent generations. In Genesis, the Lord expresses this blessing not only to Abraham, but to his son Isaac and grandson Jacob (Gn18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). A poignant moment comes near the end of Jacob’s life (Gn 48: 8-16). Jacob’s son, Joseph, brings his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to Jacob for a blessing. The grandfather’s blessing recounts the past provision of God to his family and looks forward to the future. In his invocation for his grandsons, he says, “Bless the boys.” This sums up the desire I have for the young men of this generation and the generations to come, that God will “bless the boys” with favor and well-being, and a desire to extend blessing to the world.

The notion of blessing continues in the Old Testament story. Even outsiders, like Potiphar (Gn 39:5) and the Egyptian Pharaoh, are recipients of the well-being of the blessing (Gn 47:7) through their association with the sons of Abraham. God’s rescue of the people from slavery, the giving of the law at Sinai, and the fellowship with God through the sacrificial system and tabernacle are evidence of God’s blessing. The theme of blessing becomes less obvious in the remaining Hebrew Bible, but a notable reference to the theme resurfaces in Isaiah’s vision for the future. Remarkably, Isaiah proclaims: “On that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage” (Is 19:24-25). Amazingly, God’s vision encompasses adversaries and mortal enemies united together under God’s blessing and favor. The mission of God seeks to bring redemptive and restorative

blessing to all people in all dimensions of society. God's vision is that all the nations know and partner with God.

Still, God's people must contend with a fallen world. In the call of Abraham in Genesis 12, blessing and curse are entwined in the first promise: "I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse." In this promise, God takes responsibility for both the blessing and the curse. God's people are invited to concentrate on being agents of blessing. Richard Bauckham makes clear that the curse should not be given equal importance. "Blessing predominates in the promise (as the difference between the plural 'those who bless you' and the singular 'the one who curses you' seems to suggest), and it is clearly blessing, not curse, that is the goal of God's calling of Abraham."²⁰

God is relentless in his effort to rid the world of the curse. God calls or "singles out" a people to extend blessing instead of curse. As Bruggemann contends, "One reason for Israel's existence is that creation is under curse for alienation, and Yahweh insistently wills that the world should be brought to blessing. Israel's life is for the well-being of the world."²¹ While history shows that God's people have failed at this task, God brings this well-being to the world through Jesus. His death on the cross redeems humanity from the curse (Gal. 3:13). Jesus called his disciples to join him in the redemptive mission so that all creation might now come under God's lordship and favor. This God "insistently" wills that the world know God's blessing. This becomes the vocation and purpose of the church.

²⁰Ibid., 35.

²¹ Bruggemann, *Theology Of The Old Testament*, 432.

Paul is not alone in linking the call of Abraham with the mission of Jesus, other gospel writers are careful to make the connection as well. Matthew begins his gospel announcing that Jesus the Messiah is the son of Abraham. Jesus “calls out” to his disciples, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Much like Abraham’s response to God in Genesis 12 Matthew says, “Immediately, they left their nets and followed him.” Matthew concludes with the command of Jesus the risen Christ to his disciples “to go and make disciples of all nations ... baptizing and teaching them ... I am with you always.” God’s call to Abraham now becomes the mission of the church. This is God’s great commission to go, be blessed, and bring the favor and well-being of God to every corner of the world.²² Christopher Wright states that the “Great Commission is a “Christological mutation of the Abrahamic mission.”²³

For Paul, the work of Jesus breaks the universal curse and extends universal blessing to all who believe—both Jew and Gentile. The apostle Paul says, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you ... For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed” (Gal 3:7,9). Freed from the curse, and recipients of blessing, believers are called to continue Abraham’s vocation of blessing. Bauckham states:

The gospel is that in Jesus Christ the curse has been set aside and God’s creative purpose for the blessing of his creation is established beyond any possibility of

²² It is important to acknowledge the important role women play in God’s mission, past and present. In the context of patriarchal Mediterranean culture, the gospel writers bring attention to the contribution of women in this mission. For example, Matthew includes five women in his opening genealogy, suggesting the important role they played, and John cites the sending or calling of Mary Magdalene by Jesus (John 20:17-18). While the focus of this paper is on engaging young men in God’s calling, this focus does not diminish the significance of women in the mission of God.

²³ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 213.

reversal. God's last and effective word is his blessing. It is a particular word, spoken in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, broadcast by those who like Paul cannot but pass it on, so powerful is its effect, overflowing with blessing from those who, blessed by it, become a blessing to others.

Exodus 19 further clarifies the role and vocation of God's people in the mission of God:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.²⁴

In the aftermath of their rescue from Egypt, God reminds the people of their historical place and purpose. The whole earth belongs to God. He chooses Israel to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation. As John Goldingay writes, "The fact that Exodus 19:3-8 is a form of reworking of Genesis 12:1-3 reminds us that this designation links with YHWH's lordship over the whole world and works toward the world's inclusion rather than exclusion. The stretching of the royal priesthood to include other peoples (Rv 1:6) is in keeping with the Abrahamic vision."²⁵

The vision of a royal priesthood and holy nation speak of Israel's particularity and universal significance within the larger purpose of God's care for the earth. Wright states, "The particularity of Israel here is intended to serve the universality of God's interest in the world. Israel's election serves God's mission."²⁶ Israel is chosen for a purpose. Uniquely, the particularity of Israel is expressed in the phrase "treasured possession." The Hebrew word, *segulla*, is used to describe the personal treasure of a monarch and his family (1 Chr 29:3, Eccl 2:8). Israel is God's unique and special prize. Well's careful

²⁴ Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 36.

²⁵ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 374.

²⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 257.

linguistic study links the succeeding metaphors “priestly kingdom” and “holy nation” to this relationship, as “explanation and intensification but also qualification of ‘treasured possession’, specifying Israel’s place at the heart of God’s earth.”²⁷ As a people called to be priestly royalty, Israel is to “mediate Yahweh’s will to the nations,” as Bartholomew writes.²⁸ Israel’s identity and purpose is restated at Sinai.

The priesthood of the people of God, then, is a missional function, which stands in continuity with their Abrahamic election and impacts the nations. Just as Israel’s priests were called and chosen to be the servants of God and his people, so Israel as a whole is called and chosen to be the servant of God and all peoples. Exodus 19:4-6 carries forward the intention of Genesis 12:1-3, in the saving purposes of God for the world.²⁹

In 1 Peter 2:9 the image of a royal priesthood is applied to the church. Peter draws from his knowledge of Exodus 19 to present the vocation of the church to “proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” As God’s holy people, they are called to conduct their lives with honor among the Gentiles so that the world “may see your honorable deeds and glorify God” (1 Pt 2:12). They are to bear witness to the mighty deeds of God, namely the saving death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection (1 Pt 1:3, 18-19, 23).

The theme of the kingdom of God, which dominates the teaching of Jesus, finds its origins in Exodus 19. Israel’s identity as a priestly kingdom and holy nation anticipates the people of God as a political entity. Much of the story of the Old Testament describes the challenges of Israel in their relation to Yahweh and the other nations of the

²⁷ Jo Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People* (New York: T. & T. Clark Publishers, 2000), 45.

²⁸ Craig G Bartholomew, “A Royal Priesthood?: The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically: A Dialogue with Oliver O’Donovan” (London: Paternoster Press/Zondervan, 2002), 2.

²⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 121.

world. Jesus is keenly aware of the central concept of kingdom of God that is embedded in Israel's identity, yet his mission and message present a radical reinterpretation of the kingdom idea. Followers of Jesus were called to follow him and to herald the immediacy of this kingdom.

Jesus' public ministry begins with an announcement that the kingdom of God is now present in the world (Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17). With these words, Jesus declares the beginning of a new eschatological era. The hope of Israel was that their God would "set the world right" according to God's promises. Jesus claims that through his coming this reign of God is present in the world in a radically new way (Lk 17:21). Through his words and actions Jesus brought the kingdom into the present (Lk 11:20). The healing ministry of Jesus represents God's power over evil and brokenness.³⁰ God's reign, witnessed in the activity of Jesus, overcomes evil in many forms: pain, sickness, death, demon possession, personal sin, and self-righteousness. Ultimately, through the cross Jesus redeems humanity so that God's blessing might come to all peoples (Gal 3:13-14).

Jesus speaks blessing to his followers (Mt 5:3-11; Lk 6:20). Kingdom blessing is given to the unlikely in society: the poor in spirit, meek, mournful, and persecuted. In Luke 4:16-30, a scene that unites the call and mission of Jesus in the context of the kingdom of God, Jesus teaches in his hometown synagogue. In the narrative, he articulates his call and his ministry priorities. Blessing is implicitly connected to this call. According to Luke's account, Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah these words:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

³⁰ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 32.

For he has anointed me;
 To preach good news to the poor he has sent me;
 To proclaim for the captives release and to the blind sight;
 To send forth the oppressed in release;
 To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.³¹

Jesus identifies himself as this anointed herald. He is called to bring God's blessing to the world. The three-fold use of "me" in the emphatic position underscores the intensity of Jesus' words: he is called to preach good news to the poor.

In the Mediterranean world of Jesus' time, the meaning of "poor" connotes more than economic poverty. In that culture period, one's status in a community was not just economic but involved many other elements. According to New Testament scholar, Joel Green, "'poor' would serve as a cipher for those of low status, for those excluded according to normal canons of status honor in (the) Mediterranean world." Those excluded in society and those with a "diminished status of honor" receive blessing in this new kingdom order. The poor, the sick, the outcasts, the Gentiles are included in God's favor under the reign of God.

"Blindness" is also understood in literal and symbolic ways. Under the reign of God, healing the physically blind was a sign of the in-breaking of God's kingdom (Lk 18:35-43). His calling to "make the blind see" extended to spiritual blindness as well (Lk 1:78-79; 2:9; 29-30; 3:6).

The reign of God breaks sin's power over people and institutions. The vision of God is to bring restorative blessing: to restore all creation to a place of abundance and blessing. The mission of Jesus included the "release" of the captives and the oppressed. This "release" takes the form of forgiveness, resulting in restoration in a community

³¹ The translation and structural analysis of Luke 4:18-19 is found in Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 210.

(5:27-32; 7:36-50). The power of Jesus also brings release from the satanic domination (Lk 11:20; 13:10-17). Jesus' call to proclaim the year of God's favor suggests a third use of the word release: the release from debts (Lk 11:4). Drawing on the tradition of Jubilee (Lv 25), Jesus proclaims the blessing of the Lord's favor for the present age. Jesus embodies the favor of God in the world. In his words and actions, Jesus is the embodiment and expression of God's presence among people. Furthermore, this is only the beginning; there is more to come.³²

Jesus invites people from all nations and walks of life into this kingdom life. George Ladd writes, "The kingdom of God is an offer, a gift which may be accepted or rejected. The kingdom is now here with persuasion rather than with power." Faith in Jesus is the key to entering this kingdom relationship and its blessings. Jesus did not call his followers to adherence to a set of propositions; he called disciple to follow him. As Dallas Willard put it, "To trust the real person Jesus, is to have confidence in him in every dimension of our real life, to believe that he is right about and adequate to everything."³³ This dynamic, interactive faith in God enables the blessings of God to be real and experienced. In the practice of this faith, blessing can be transferred to others.

Jesus brings God's blessing and favor to the world as a characteristic of the kingdom of God. In the midst of a world of conflict and struggle (Mt 10:34), Jesus offers the hope of blessing and peace through his living presence. He says, "Peace I leave with you: my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. (Jn 14:27). He extends

³² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 34.

³³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 47.

shalom and blessing to his followers (Jn 20:19, 21, 26) and to a hurting world. As

Nicholas Wolterstorff points out:

...Shalom is the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships: with God, with self, with fellows, with nature. ... But the peace which is shalom is not merely the absence of hostility, not merely being in the right relationship. Shalom at its highest is enjoyment in one's relationships. A nation may be at peace with all its neighbors and yet be miserable in its poverty. To dwell in shalom is to enjoy living before God, to enjoy living in one's physical surroundings, to enjoy living with one's fellows, to enjoy life with oneself.³⁴

Followers of Jesus are called to be agents of peace and bringing this life to the world. The apostle Paul describes the kingdom of God as "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:17). As N. T. Wright puts it, God desires his faith-motivated partners "to be a sign and foretaste of what God wants to do for the entire cosmos. What's more, such people are not just to be a sign and foretaste of that ultimate salvation; they are to be part of the means by which God makes this happen in both the present and the future."³⁵

Agents of Blessing

The mission of God has been passed on from Abraham to Jesus and now to the church. Essential to fulfilling this mission is the mobilization of God's people through the church. In Galatians, Paul declares the Holy Spirit to be the active agent of blessing in the world today. The blessing of God is bestowed on followers through the infilling and enabling presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul says Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham, comes to the Gentiles "so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal 3:14). The Spirit of God becomes the present day life-force of blessing. The infilling

³⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 69–70.

³⁵ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, Reprint (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 200.

Spirit brings blessing to those who place their faith in Christ and empowers them to bless the world. The Spirit of God initiates the partnership in mission.

In order to reach the world, the Holy Spirit is active in calling individual disciples to follow Jesus, receive his presence and belonging, and enter into mission. This call is not limited to a few paid professionals. The mission of blessing to the world expands to believers in all walks of life. Work life is infused with missional value. As Gordon Smith writes, “Any work that is good and godly, any work worth doing, can be done for the glory of God and the help of humankind.”³⁶ The life-giving Spirit is bursting forth to gift and “single out” people with multiple interests and vocations. Smith passionately advocates for diversity of calling: “We need to thunder from our pulpits and celebrate at every turn in the life of the church that God is calling people into education, the arts, public office, business, engineering, medicine, and the service professions—quite literally into every area and sector of human life.”³⁷ David Bosch quotes Jurgen Moltmann, “Christian theology ... will no longer be simply a theology for priests and pastors, but also a theology for the laity in their callings in the world.”³⁸ All believers are called to add value to the world through their unique gifts and abilities.

The call to bless the world is far-reaching, requiring the involvement of Spirit-filled disciples in all domains. Through work and cultural engagement Spirit filled followers bring God’s love and presence to all human needs. For Hunter, the mission of God brings God’s “faithful presence” into all aspects of culture. He writes, “A theology

³⁶ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage & Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*, 1st ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 1999), 25.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 467.

of faithful presence means recognition that the vocation of the church is to bear witness to and to be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God.”³⁹ The vocation of the church includes preparing disciples for their individual vocations as agents of blessing. The presence of Jesus enters the multiple domains of society through Spirit-filled agents.

“Faithful presence” in all spheres of culture requires a positive theology of work. While the reformers liberated the concept of sacred work from the monastery and released it into the marketplace, Miroslov Volf elevates all human work from the mundane to a vital part of God’s strategy to bless the world. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in bringing meaning to human work. In Volf’s view, “The Spirit of God calls, endows, and empowers Christians to work in their various vocations.”⁴⁰ It is in the gifts or “charisms” granted by the Spirit that human work becomes an instrument to fulfill God’s purpose. For Volf, the spiritual gifts are offered not merely for use within the church but for the purpose of human flourishing in the world. “One should not define charisma so narrowly as to include in the term only ecclesiastical activities,” writes Volf. “As the first fruits of salvation, the Spirit of Christ is not only active in the Christian fellowship but also desires to make an impact on the world through the fellowship.”⁴¹

Volf also believes, “Human work, however complicated or simple, is made possible by the operation of the Spirit of God in the working person; and all work whose nature and results reflect the values of the new creation is accomplished under the

³⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 96.

⁴⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 113.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

instruction and inspiration of the Spirit of God”(Is 28:24-29).⁴² With this in mind, the menial job or work done outside a worker’s preference can still bless the world and bring spiritual significance. God can use a part-time barista at Starbucks as well as a “mega-church” pastor for divine purposes. Even people who are not believers can contribute to the good in society and work through the direction and guidance of the Spirit.

The people of God filled with the Spirit can affect blessing through all domains of culture, including business. As Barbara Roels writes in her article, *Christian Call to Business Life*, “One task facing the church and its business community in the twenty-first century is the recovery and development of a Christian sense of calling for those in business. Christians in business need the church to find meaning in their daily work; and the church needs its business members to shape the business powers of a global economy.”⁴³ The church has been given the responsibility to prepare believers for cultural engagement and mission. This includes challenging believers to live out a Spirit-filled life. Young men need to come under the influence of the Holy Spirit as the primary source of their vocational development. .

Spirit-filled believers living out God’s faithful presence in every arena of society fulfill God’s call to Abraham to bless the nations. According to Smith, God calls people in every segment of society. He writes:

All vocations are sacred because the kingdom is not merely spiritual. God is establishing his kingdom on the earth as the whole of creation comes under his divine authority. To that end God calls and enables his children to be his kingdom agents within every sphere of life and society. Each vocation reflects but one

⁴² Ibid, 114.

⁴³ Shirley Roels, “The Christian Calling to Business Life,” *Theology Today* 60 (2003): 368.

avenue by which God, through word and deed, is accomplishing the establishment of his kingdom.⁴⁴

Note that Smith states that God calls and “singles out” agents within every sphere of life and society. James Hunter emphasizes this point, “A healthy body exercises itself in all realms of life, not just a few. The failure to encourage excellence in vocation in our time has fostered a culture of mediocrity in so many areas of vocation.”⁴⁵ If the church is to fulfill the mission of God, it must prepare followers to be agents of excellence and blessing in work life as well as church life.

In order for young men to become agents of blessing to the world, guidance in faithful living is needed. Teaching and equipping young men to live out their faith at work is essential in the discipleship task. A church culture that encourages the discovery of vocational purpose provides young men the opportunity to realize their value and worth; that they are chosen, holy, and dearly loved by God (Col 3:12). Enabling young men to integrate their spiritual gifts and natural abilities toward vocational purpose will give meaning to their work life. As they are taught to recognize the stirrings of God, young men may better understand their role as agents of blessing to the world. The church must demonstrate and model to young men that their work life, vocation, and investment of skills and talents have a purpose in God’s redemptive, restorative mission to the world.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 25.

⁴⁵ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 96.

Vocation as Human Flourishing

God desires that creation flourish. Beginning with God's words to Adam to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, God bestows blessing on all of creation. Abraham is chosen and blessed by God. Through the obedience of Abraham, God intends that the blessing of flourishing should extend to the peoples of the world.

A letter from Jeremiah to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon is an example of God's desire for nations and cultures to flourish under the influence of the people of God:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons, and give your daughter in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find welfare. (Jer 29:5-7)

God intends that the people of God contribute to the betterment of their community, even if they are exiles in Babylon. The exiles are encouraged to flourish in a pagan environment. They are instructed to pray for the welfare of the foreign city. John Bright points out that praying to Yahweh for Babylon's welfare is remarkable, "for a command to Jews to pray for the hated heathen power is otherwise unexampled in literature of the period."⁴⁶ The welfare of this pagan city is God's priority. The promise "in its welfare you will find welfare" (Jer.29:7) demonstrates the divine principle that God's people will be blessed as they bring blessing to others. The welfare of all the nations is on God's mind.

⁴⁶ John Bright, *Jeremiah*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Anchor Bible, 1965), 211.

Proverbs 11:10-11 echoes God's desire for the flourishing of a community. God's people actively participating in a culture can bring a positive impact for the good of all: "When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. . . . By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted." The righteous, or the *tsaddiqims*, are those followers of God who align their gifts and abilities with God's purposes, including the well being of others. The righteous are those who trust God with their lives and work. As they experience personal blessings from God, the righteous seek to bless others. According to Amy Sherman, author of *Kingdom Calling*, "... the flourishing of the righteous is a cause for rejoicing. Because the *tsaddiqim* view their prosperity not as a means of self-enrichment or self-aggrandizement, but rather as a vehicle for blessing others, everyone benefits from their success."⁴⁷ Followers of Jesus share a world with others, and are called to contribute to its flourishing as mediators of God's blessing.

The declaration of Jesus, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" establishes an important theme in his ministry. Abundant life, well-being, and peace are hallmarks of the kingdom message of Jesus. As Jesus sent his first disciples on their maiden mission to announce the coming kingdom of God, he taught a protocol for entering the towns and villages. Before they were to preach or heal, Jesus said, first offer "peace to this house" (Lk 10:5). God in Jesus Christ mentored his followers in bringing shalom and well-being to the people. They were to seek out people of peace in the city. The message of peace included physical healing and spiritual hope. Increased shalom and human flourishing characterizes the ministry of Jesus and his followers. Paul characterizes life in the kingdom as "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"

⁴⁷ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 17.

(Rom 14:17). The person of peace became an agent of God's blessing to the community. In preaching the message, "The kingdom of God is near," the messenger anticipates well-being for entire communities. The disciples returned full of joy. As partners with Jesus, they witnessed God's power over evil and domination. In extending the message of the kingdom, they experienced the satisfaction of partnering in God's mission.

The pursuit of happiness and well-being is a primary goal for most people in our culture. But in our skewed perception, human flourishing becomes ego-focused, characterized by the selfish pursuit of appetite fulfillment. For many, surrender to God is seen an enemy of human flourishing. The lessons above can help shape young people's perceptions of human flourishing. We all flourish when we seek the common good. It is important that young adults learn to live out of a biblical understanding of flourishing.

The subject of human flourishing is a popular theme for youth development researchers and educators. Built on the ancient idea of *eudaimonia*, or happiness, educators and human development theorists focus attention on the productive ways humans find happiness and personal thriving. The fields of positive psychology and positive youth development give attention to the full potential of youth, refusing to focus on what's wrong with kids. The intent of their research is to help young people succeed and find positive purpose in life. Youth development theorists instruct young people to practice five key behaviors, competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion. A sixth behavior, contribution is also encouraged. The practice of these six behaviors is helping young people reach their full potential. This research provides valuable tools in the emotional and spiritual formation of young people.

Martin Seligman, an author and pioneer in the field of positive psychology, suggests that happiness, flow, meaning, love, gratitude, accomplishment, growth, and better relationships constitute human flourishing. Seligman identifies five endeavors crucial to human flourishing: positive emotion, engagement, good relationships, meaning and purpose in life, and accomplishment; cumulatively called PERMA. He examines each in detail applying these principles both to individuals and to groups as indicators of success.⁴⁸ These principles offer a worthy strategy for the development and maturing of young men.

Christian leaders can applaud insights discovered from this burgeoning field of study.⁴⁹ Some research in positive youth development connects human flourishing and spirituality. The six C's of positive youth development, competence, confidence, connection, character, compassion, and contribution are all qualities that support a Christ like lifestyle. Parents and Christian leaders should welcome tools and methods that encourage young people to develop a positive self-image and a positive approach to life and work.

Caution is needed, however, in the application of this approach. Positive psychology can, at times, marginalize God in the formation of purpose and meaning. Miroslav Volf fears that an absence of the divine minimizes human flourishing to merely a quest for personal fulfillment. In the absence of theological questions about God's

⁴⁸ Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, Reprint (New York: Free Press, 2012).

⁴⁹ See Amy Eva Alberts Warren, Richard M. Lerner, and Erin Phelps, *Thriving and Spirituality Among Youth: Research Perspectives and Future Possibilities* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011); Richard M. Lerner, Robert W. Roesner, and Erin Phelps, eds., *Positive Youth Development and Spirituality: From Theory to Research* (W. Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2008); and William Damon, *The Path to Purpose* (New York: Free Press, 2008).

meaning and purpose, Volf believes human flourishing devolves to a search for self-satisfaction through experience and feeling. For many in the west, Volf describes flourishing as the “managed pursuit of pleasure.” He elucidates, “Having lost earlier reference to ‘something higher which humans should reverence or love,’ it has now lost reference to universal solidarity, as well. What remained was concern for the self and the desire for the experience of satisfaction.”⁵⁰

Human flourishing can be easily misunderstood within the faith community. Young adults are particularly vulnerable to the mistaken understanding that God’s blessings are equated with material blessings. God is mistakenly viewed as the believer’s divine servant who caters to our needs and wants, rather than the creator who defines reality. Current practice among many believers suggests that the blessing of God ends in personal satisfaction not in fulfilling giving of oneself to the mission of God. The biblical call to belong to God and partner with God in mission offers an important corrective to these culturally influenced beliefs.

The church offers a biblical corrective to a secular view of human flourishing. Personal fulfillment is found in following Jesus: experiencing the sense of belonging and finding purpose in serving with Jesus in his mission is at the heart of human flourishing. Through faithful, sacrificial involvement with Jesus, attention shifts from love of self to love of God. Teaching young men to flourish requires this biblical perspective, shift in mind and action. Jesus calls his disciples to “deny themselves, take up their cross and follow.” Directing young men toward their vocational purpose includes a decision to make Jesus lord of all. The call of Jesus beckons seekers to “love God with all their

⁵⁰ Miroslav Volf, “Human Flourishing,” Institute for Theological Inquiry, http://www.yale.edu/faith/jewishchristianconference/documents/Miroslav_Volf.pdf (accessed August 17, 2012).

hearts ... and love their neighbors. In this young men will discover meaning and purpose. As Volf writes, “We lead our lives well when we love God with our whole being and when we love neighbors as we (properly) love ourselves. Life goes well for us when our basic needs are met and when we experience that we are loved by God and by neighbors—when we are loved as who we are, with our own specific character and history and notwithstanding our fragility and failures.”⁵¹ When young men focus on God and others, they will be blessed. As such, followers of Jesus share a common goal to witness the transformation of communities and cities for the common good. So while the language of blessing may appear foreign to many, the biblical concept of human flourishing can become a bridge to understanding. It was for the flourishing of the world—the redemption of the world—that Jesus came and called his followers to join him in mission.

Blessing for the Next Generation

In Genesis 22, Abraham, in obedience to the call of God, takes his only son Isaac to a mountain with the intent to offer him as a sacrifice. In the end, God provides a ram as a substitute for Abraham’s son. And in response to Abraham’s faith and obedience, God renews the promise of blessing. God further promises that “by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice (Gn 22:18). God pledges to Abraham that his offspring will continue the mission of blessing for generations to come. The regenerative nature of the seed of Abraham offers a message of hope for future generations. Paul is clear to state that this promise is fulfilled in one seed, meaning “one person, who is Christ” (Gal 3:16). In Christ Jesus, believers

⁵¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 21.

become “offspring of Abraham, heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29). Both testaments affirm that the message and mission of God must continue to succeeding generations. For this reason, the care and nurture of young men in their spiritual and vocational development must be a high priority for the church. The next generation of young men (and young women) will be called to carry forward the mission of blessing into the various dimensions of society and work. The church must encourage and develop these young men for this task.

God’s mission and call must be entrusted to the next generation in concrete and formal expressions, through words and appropriate physical gesture. Symbols and signs convey the identity and purpose of God’s call for the next generation of young men. God pours out divine blessing through means of grace as signs of God’s presence and promise that encourage and strengthen our faith. These expressions become living signs that God is with us.

Divine blessing was confirmed through signs and symbols in the Bible. The presence and promise of God to Abraham is sealed through signs; a smoking fire pot and flaming torch (Gn 15), a ram caught in the weeds, are signs that declare God’s promise-keeping blessing. The building of altars and the act of circumcision affirm Abraham’s obedience. Baptism, with the Spirit of God descending like a dove and the approving voice of the Father, sealed for Jesus divine approval and belonging (Mt 13:17). The appearance of Moses and Elijah coupled with the glowing appearance of Jesus’ face and clothing, confirmed to Jesus his identity and mission. The last meal with his disciples became a meaningful sign of mission and call. The presence and favor of God is made known through divine encounters and through the witness of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship

must include participation in the sacraments and an awareness of the present work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

Physical touch also signifies the blessing of God. Through physical contact, blessing was passed from father to son or friend to friend. This is done by the right hand (Gn 48:13f), or by the raising of the hand or the arms (Ex 17:11), kissing or embracing (Gn 48:10), placing the hand under the thigh (Gn 24:9; 47:29), or touching of clothing (2 Kgs 2:13) or staffs (2 Kgs 4:29).⁵² In many instances, the power of Jesus to heal was administered through physical touch. The laying on of hands and prayer became an act of sending disciples into mission. It is common that prayer and the laying on of hands is a part of the ordination service.

The next generation of young men must experience the blessing of God through word and act, sign and touch, and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, ritual and story can lose their meaning. The ancient practices must be remembered and infused with freshness. The sacraments of baptism and communion remain vital signs of belonging and mission for the contemporary generation of young men. Other ancient and present practices provide present reminders of God's presence and power in the life of the believer. A formal blessing of young people as they begin a school year, graduate from college, or enter the work force can be opportunities to express God's favor and purpose. The church must seek to provide other means of grace that remind young men God is with them on their journey.

The central theme of this chapter is that the call to follow Jesus is a call to join him in his mission to bless the world. This divine call continues the mission that began

⁵² H.G. Link, "Blessing," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 207.

with God's summons to Abraham. God extends his life-giving mission through those who follow Jesus. Followers of Jesus in all vocations become agents of blessing in God's restorative mission. N. T. Wright summarizes well this position: "God intends to put the world to rights; he has dramatically launched this project through Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus are called, here and now, in the power of the Spirit, to be agents of that putting to rights purpose."⁵³ Jesus is calling young men to be agents of blessing. The church is commissioned to inspire and guide them in this journey.

The focus of this chapter has been on the general theological contours of calling and mission. Practical applications for individual believers surface from this theological foundation. The church has the opportunity to help young men discover their role in mission. Informed and inspired by the Scriptures, a church can create an environment that encourages the next generation of young men (and women) to embrace their callings. The church may inspire young men to be agents of blessing through numerous vocational opportunities. In the next chapter, I will highlight some of the ways the church has shaped its understanding of vocation through the centuries. The next generation of young men can learn from its successes and failures.

⁵³ N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 204.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CALLING

The biblical narrative recounts many examples of God summoning people to purposeful partnership in the mission to restore and bless the world. Men and women from various walks of life—farmers, herdsman, fishermen, craftsmen, royalty and common folk—were called by God to join in this mission. In this chapter, I trace how an understanding of calling and vocation has influenced the church and the culture throughout the centuries. This overview provides an important resource for a church intent on guiding young men toward their meaningful life call today.

Since the time of Jesus, the meaning of calling and vocation has undergone some significant shifts from its biblical roots. For many centuries, the church defined the meaning and practice of vocation. Over time, ecclesiastical, cultural and economic factors have revised how calling has been understood. Evolving forms of ecclesial practice have created multiple interpretations of calling. Dominant among early definitions was the alignment of vocation with the priesthood and monasticism. However, the Protestant Reformation signaled a shift toward seeing divine vocation lived out in common life through various professions. In recent years, a further shift has secularized the concept of vocation altogether. “Vocational discovery” has become a buzz-word in the developing fields of career assessment and job development. Researchers Elangovan, Pinder and McLean state that the most recent thinking about vocation has “moved away from a religious connotation toward a broader secular view characterized by an individual doing

work out of a sense of inner direction-work that would contribute to a better world.”¹

Today, much of the popular teaching on vocation has removed any sense of a divine summons to fulfill God’s purpose. Vocation has become a quest to find personal fulfillment and satisfaction through service to self and others.

As a result of this historical progression, personal calling has lost its biblical foundation and divine empowerment. As many young men seem unclear about their purpose in life, a rediscovery of a biblical understanding of calling serves a valuable resource for their self discovery. The church must recapture God’s desire to call people in fulfilling God’s purpose for the world through various gifts, talents and spheres of influence. A review of history provides important insight into the causes of the drift from the biblical vision. A historical survey of vocation also highlights the positive role the church has played in the evolution of the term and its present meaning. This chapter will trace the primary theme of vocation through four historical eras: the early church years (0-500 A.D.), middle ages (500-1500 A.D.), reformation (1500-1800 A.D.) and the post-Christian age (1800-present A.D.).² These eras represent vast time spans, so only major themes in vocational development will be considered.

Many significant people throughout history stand out as guides in the discovery of vocational purpose. Through the stories of their young adulthood, important lessons in their spiritual and vocational development offer instruction for young men today. I have selected specific historical figures in each era that answered the call of God during their

¹ A. R. Elangovan, Craig C. Pinder, and Murdith McLean, “Callings and Organizational Behavior,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 76, no. 3 (June 2010): 430.

² William C. Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

young-adult years as examples for young men today. Their stories offer guidance for coaching and encouraging young men today.

Vocation and the Early Church 0-500 A.D.

The greatest model of vocational purpose is found in Jesus. His death and resurrection set in motion a movement that would impact the Roman Empire and ripple well beyond it. Jesus issued a call to his followers to go throughout the world to teach and enlist people to follow his ways. Much of the New Testament records the expansion of this movement, such that, in subsequent centuries, Christianity became the dominant religion in the Roman world.

His life and teaching provides the basis for understanding vocation and work. Born into a working class family, Jesus devoted most of his adult years to common labor. In keeping with the custom of most young boys of that day, Jesus would have apprenticed with his father by the age of 12. (His speech in John 5:19-20 echoes the language of a father and son in an apprenticeship relationship). Since Jesus began his public ministry at about age 30 (LK 3:23), Jesus would have applied his trade for nearly 18 years.

The people of his hometown, Nazareth, knew Jesus as a τεκτον (Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55) which is commonly translated as carpenter. A more accurate translation expands the definition to a builder or general craftsman; one who could work with both stone and wood.³ His vocation as a builder served as preparation for his future mission.

His teaching and work experience suggests that business had a significant influence on his life. Commerce and work were common topics in his teaching. The

³ J.I. Packer, "Carpenter," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 279.

stories, parables, and metaphors found in the gospels reflect experiences of everyday life in rural Palestine: sowing seeds, tending vineyards, and casting nets. Klaus Issler states that in the 32 parables he studied, 17 were based on a business setting.⁴ Unlike the language of philosophical treatises, the teachings of Jesus and most other New Testament writings were directed to common people. While Jesus studied the scriptures and communed with his Father, the formation of his character and his sense of mission (Lk 2:52) was also shaped by his work experience and interaction with common people. The portrait of Jesus in the gospels views a physical work and commerce in a positive light.

Most of the first followers of Jesus were common workers: tent-makers, fishermen, sailors, and merchants. Since the majority of the residents of the Roman Empire were common people, the first disciples were representative of most of the population. Two prominent leaders of the early church, Peter and Paul were noted in scripture by their professions, one a fisherman (Mt 4:18), the other a tent maker (1 Cor 4:12; 1 Th 2:9).

First-century Mediterranean life was predominantly dependent on agricultural and fishing activity. Central cities, such as Jerusalem, Ephesus, Antioch and especially Rome, were hubs surrounded by rural villages where farming and/or fishing took place. While the cities were market centers, they depended on the food, supplies, and raw materials that flowed in from surrounding villages. According to Bruce Malina, preindustrial cities contained no more than ten percent of the total population. Cities were characterized by social segregation. They were the dwelling place of elites, who comprised just two percent of the total population, and the dwelling place of artisans,

⁴ Klaus Issler, "Jesus at Work," *Biola Magazine*, Summer 2012, <http://magazine.biola.edu/article/12-summer/jesus-at-work/> (accessed October 10, 2013).

who made up roughly eight percent of the population. Urban craftsmen clustered in guilds, working largely from their homes creating items used by elites.⁵ The remaining ninety percent of the population of the preindustrial Mediterranean world were slaves—often working the lands of their elite overseers—and rural-dwelling laborers.⁶

The idea of God calling an individual to work in a “career” would have looked much different in the first-century. Life under Roman rule, along with the structure of preindustrial societies, allowed little opportunity for upward mobility or a change in job. The idea that you could become whatever you chose to be is a modern, largely American, concept. Workers in the first-century viewed the world as a closed economic system. Material and physical resources were limited. In a closed system, profits and abundance for some meant the taking of resources from others. Most of the resources were controlled by the state and wealthy landowners; there were few opportunities for the lower classes to move up in their social status.

Christians in the first century were called to a deep commitment to the way of Jesus. They were called to make Jesus lord above the lordship of any ruler or ideology. This call of God required a commitment to be “set apart” from the customs and practices of the world around them. As William Placher states, “Their call, ‘klesis’ placed them as outsiders to the society and the culture’s forms of entertainment.”⁷ Many would face hardship and persecution because of their loyalty to the lordship of Jesus. One’s work and labor was surrendered to the lordship of Jesus; all work became a means to witness to

⁵ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 85.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Placher, *Callings*, 5.

wholehearted devotion to Jesus. Paul encouraged believers, “whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17).

Some would argue that to follow Jesus one must leave their possessions and occupations as an act of devotion to God. While the New Testament offers significant examples of this practice, not all disciples left their jobs and homes to follow Jesus. There is no record that Zacheus left his occupation as a tax collector, or the jailer in Philippi left his position or Lydia and her business. Paul refers to Erastus, a believer in Corinth who served as the treasurer of the city (Rom. 16:23). The lordship of Jesus demanded complete loyalty and a willingness to abandon all to follow Jesus but the New Testament offers many examples of followers who made their work the place to fulfill this calling.

The value of physical work and labor in the New Testament—evidenced in part by the many work-related parables and metaphors used by Jesus—set Christianity apart from Greek and Roman philosophy and religion. Common to Greek thought was the valuing of mind and spirit over body and material existence. In an essay on work and vocation, Paul Marshall highlights competing views of the nature of man and their influence on conceptions of divinely inspired vocation.⁸ Many Greeks, influenced by philosophical dualism, denigrated anything material, including manual labor. The free man was a man of thought and leisure, while those working with their hands were relegated to low status as slaves, farmers, and artisans. For Aristotle and others, leisure was not considered laziness, but was an opportunity to use one’s mental capacity for growth in goodness and political activity. The Stoics, reflecting the thought of Seneca,

⁸ Paul Marshall, “Work and Vocation: Some Historical Reflections,” *The Reformed Journal* 30, no. 9 (September 1980).

viewed the body as “necessary rather than important” and thought that to “despise our bodies is pure freedom.”⁹ These ideals continued to be held in Roman culture.

In contrast to the philosophical dualism pervasive in the Hellenistic world, the New Testament bore witness to the incarnation and bodily resurrection of the divine, demonstrating a high regard for the physical body. Moreover, as Marshall writes, “The New Testament is a book immersed in the life and problems of working people. The apostles themselves came primarily from humble backgrounds and sometimes returned to their work after being called by Jesus.”¹⁰ From a biblical perspective, the human body, while fallible, is God’s creation and redeemable and physical work is to be valued.

This tension was brought to light through the life and letters of Paul. His missionary journeys introduced the gospel message to the various social strata throughout the Roman world. While Paul worked at a trade, his oratorical mastery and life experiences enabled him to interact with people in every class of society. His Roman citizenship and his rhetorical skill gave him access to the upper classes: his tentmaking trade was an occupation of the working classes. Among the social elite, common work like tentmaking was a slavish trade. The apostle lived in this social tension. Paul is careful to explain that his physical labor frees him from dependency on churches for his income (1 Cor 9:19; 2 Cor 11:7). Ronald Hock describes the confusion regarding Paul’s social status, “Paul’s working at a trade allowed him to be self-supporting and also free... but by entering the workshop he had brought about a considerable loss of status, since, as

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Cicero put it, “a workshop can in no way be an appropriate place for a free man.”¹¹ In the cultural milieu of the first century, the early church faced the challenge of maintaining physical work as a viable and worthy vocation.

Christians in the early years were not immune to the dualistic philosophies and practices of the surrounding culture. Living in this tension, early church leaders were compelled to reinforce the biblical value that the human body contains divine life, and that physical work honors God. Against heresies and Greek philosophy, theologians like Theophilus and Irenaeus affirmed that humanity, including the body, is made in the image of God.

In the second century Theophilus wrote:

Humanity did not lose divine life with Adam or because of him; rather it failed ever to achieve it.

This notion is central to a proper understanding of our identity and vocation, because it encapsulates our true condition and destiny; stated otherwise, we ought not have too high an estimation of ourselves, neither ought we be self-depreciating, for we are not divine, neither are we evil. We were created with potential for true growth and this belief lies at the heart of the vocational search.¹²

These second-century pastor/theologians believed that all human activity was sacred; underscoring the importance they placed on work, vocation, and worship.

Many in the early Christian tradition, however, still developed a negative and dismissive attitude toward physical labor. This was a result of several factors, including the fear of pagan influences on the Christian life, and the continuing general debate regarding dualism. The growing popularity of Christianity led to fears that the essence of

¹¹ Ronald F. Hock, “Paul’s Tentmaking and the Problem of His Social Class,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 4 (December 1978): 559–600.

¹² Ann M. Bezzerides, *Christ At Work: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Vocation* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), 133.

the faith would be compromised by the world. This precipitated many defensive elements within Christianity. Nonetheless, the decades in and around the fourth century, when theological debate within the church was especially ripe, were critical in the development of the church. And the embracing of Christianity by the Roman Emperor Constantine signaled even greater openness to the claims of the faith. Constantine's conversion to Christianity gave the church unprecedented influence and access.

Christianity's increased power and influence prompted some church leaders, on the other hand, to advocate retreating from the influences of the world. Basil the Great was one such leader. He valued the importance of work in the development of the spiritual life. He stated in his "Long Rule":

Thus, in the midst of our work can we fulfill the duty of prayer, giving thanks to him who has granted strength to our hands for performing our tasks and cleverness to our minds for acquiring knowledge, and for having provided the materials, for that which is in the instruments we use and that which forms the matters of the art in which we may be engaged, praying that the work of our hands may be directed toward its goal, the good pleasure of God.¹³

Basil, while influencing the political and ecclesiastical world through a public ministry, chose to enter the communal life of the monastery, attempting to free himself from the pollution of the world. This kind of separation indirectly encouraged a crucial shift in the understanding of vocation in the church. For many, human work and common activity became subordinate to a higher calling of God to spiritual service.

Writing in the first quarter of the fourth century, Eusebius (260-340), Bishop of Caesarea, became a prominent church spokesman. He documented the events surrounding the conversion of Constantine and the Council of Nicaea, and his writings

¹³ Orthodoxprayer.org, "Saint Basil the Great on Orthodox Prayer," <http://www.orthodoxprayer.org/Basil%20On%20Prayer.html> (accessed September 12, 2013).

reflect a shift from New Testament roots in the church's understanding of vocation. In his *Demonstration of the Gospel* he delineates a hierarchal, and notably dualistic, view of vocation that became representative for the church:

Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living; it admits not marriage, child-bearing, property nor the possession of wealth, but wholly and permanently separate from the customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone in its wealth of heavenly love! And they who enter on this course, appear to die to the lie of mortals, to bear with them nothing earthly but their body, and in mind and spirit to have passed to heaven. ...they gaze upon human life...with right principles of true holiness, and of a soul purified in disposition, and above all with virtuous deeds and words; with such they propitiate the Divinity, and celebrate their priestly rites for themselves and their race. Such then is the perfect form of the Christian Life.¹⁴

In response to the pressures of the non-Christian world, Eusebius articulates the call of the church to a higher form of spirituality and separation from the world that values contemplation and devotion to the service of God. While Eusebius acknowledges that there is a more humble, less perfect way of service to God through common work, this statement promotes the view of a two-tiered vocational view of life: the more holy life of contemplation, and the common life of work. For centuries, this understanding became the standard within the church. The biblical call for all believers to serve God in the midst of common acts of labor became secondary to the greater work of meditation and contemplation.

As we can see, the roots of vocation as a call to leave the world and enter lives of contemplation were clearly established during the early centuries of the church. According to this view, God-honoring people heed the call to the higher life and leave the evil and threats of the world. The desert and cloister become the sanctuary in which to

¹⁴ Os Guinness, *Entrepreneurs of Life: Faith and the Venture of Purposeful Living* (Colorado Springs: Navpress Publishing Group, 2001), 50.

pursue the call of God away from the chaos and uncertainty of a violent and changing world.

Augustine, the great theologian of the fourth century, was significantly influenced by Aristotelian dualism. He continued to apply the Aristotelian distinctive of the active life and the contemplative life in his Christian practices. The “vita activa” included almost all types of work while the “vita contemplativa” comprised meditation and reflection on God and truth. While the active life was necessary and good for his busy life as a bishop, the life of contemplation was preferred and of higher value. In light of the excesses of Rome, the life of contemplation was the way to the holy life.

Augustine’s life spanned the sack of Rome by the Visigoths. His theological classic, *The City of God*, helped make sense of the fears and suffering he witnessed, and offered hope of a future golden age of the Kingdom of God. Augustine reasoned that all humanity falls into two cities: the mass of the godless, which live the life of earthly men; and the company of the spiritual, born of grace and called to the City of God for all eternity. He contrasts a Worldly City drawn to a love for the temporal and a City of God united with love for God. Human work and secular enterprise are easily connected with spiritual ruin. Augustine witnessed the glory of Rome reduced to a city of starvation and poverty. The symbols of human enterprise were reduced to rubble; the glory of Rome was vanquished. Therefore, Augustine’s hope was not found in the world of human work. He trained his eyes on the City of God.

Augustine as an Emerging Adult

Augustine represents a significant figure in the history of the Christian church. His leadership and writings influence Christian thought to this day. Since the focus of this paper is young-adult males, age 18 – 30, a brief analysis of Augustine’s crucial young-adult years provide unique insights for contemporary young men.

As a young adult, Augustine struggled with youthful passions, peer pressure, spiritual and intellectual doubts, parental control, and independence. His twenties and thirties were crucial years of discovery, discontent, and identity formation. As a young man, Augustine showed academic promise, though he was not always diligent as a student. Monica, his devout mother, encouraged his devotion to Christ, while his father provided financial assistance to further his education. Around age seventeen, Augustine moved from his home to study in Carthage. While in Carthage, Augustine entered into a relationship with a young woman who would be his mistress for over ten years. During that time, a son named Adeodatus was born to them.

Through his twenties, Augustine was sorting out the “big questions” of life, and the rhetoric and the writing of Cicero captured his imagination. During this time, Augustine rejected Christianity as too simplistic. Instead, he embraced the teaching of Manichaeism. Manichaeism viewed the world in conflict between two powers: a good creator and an evil destroyer. Augustine viewed his own weaknesses and personal torment as a result of this cosmic struggle—and thus not entirely his fault. James J. O’Donnell states, “He was torn between the conventional pleasures of adolescence and

the conventional rigors of philosophy.”¹⁵ Manichaeism became a temporary solace for his inner turmoil.

Around the age of twenty one, Augustine began a career in teaching, becoming a formidable scholar and orator. According to O’Donnell, “Education in a university town like Carthage at that time was a free-market enterprise, with each teacher setting up independently around the city center to make a reputation and inveigle students into paying for his wares; it was a competition in which many young men like Augustine must have fallen by the way.”¹⁶ Augustine chose to move to Rome and seek more stable opportunities to pursue his teaching career. While in Rome, he interviewed and was granted a prominent teaching position in Milan. At age thirty, he won the most visible academic chair in the Latin world. Such teaching positions offered the potential of influential political careers.

However, Augustine’s vocational direction took a different turn. In Milan, he came under the influence of the famed bishop of Milan, a man named Ambrose. In the light of his preaching, Christianity began to appear fresh, and intellectually respectable. Augustine’s sense of his own personal wickedness met with the saving grace of Christ. Ambrose also showed Augustine how the Christian interpretations of scripture gave life and meaning to sacred texts. Beyond the logic and elegance of words and speech, Augustine was drawn to the man and his faith through friendship. Augustine states, “And

¹⁵ James O’Donnell, “Augustine the African,” <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/> (accessed May 19, 2013).

¹⁶ Ibid.

I began to love him, not at first, indeed, as teacher of the truth, which I entirely despaired of in Thy Church, but as a man friendly to myself.”¹⁷

In 387 A.D., at age thirty three, Augustine, in answer to his mother’s prayers, converted to Christianity and was baptized. Leaving his teaching position in Milan, he returned to Africa and was conscripted into the priesthood. His preaching and pastoral wisdom led to his appointment as bishop of Hippo, where he guided the church through several significant controversies. His writings would shape Christian theology for centuries.

As it is for young men today, the decade of Augustine’s twenties to early thirties was a significant period of searching, upheaval, and discovery. It was a period of personal formation about God, life, and identity. The grace of God dramatically changed the trajectory of Augustine’s life as he entered his thirties. His writings and leadership encouraged believers to a life devoted to God. In the *Confessions*, Augustine pens the words, “Our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you”¹⁸ as a record of his own realization of God’s call upon his life. He also taught that the contemplative life was preferred as most honoring to God. Augustine championed life lived in service to God apart from the distractions of the world. For many parents and concerned observers of young men today, his story provides encouragement to the persistent grace of God directed to young men in the emerging adult years.

¹⁷ J. G. Pilkington, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (International Collectors Library, 1950), 88.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Vocation in the Middle Ages

After the fall of Rome and through the middle ages, the church became the glue that held society together. The splendor of Rome was replaced with chaos and cultural upheaval. Placher says, “The standard medieval social division was among those who pray (monks, priests and nuns), those who fight (the nobles), and those who work (mostly peasants in the fields).”¹⁹ Amid the chaos and collapse of the Roman Empire, the church, and particularly the monastery, maintained a stable place in uncertain times. Bredero states that monasteries became places “towering over the world,”²⁰ serving as guardians of civility and the interests of the military elite. While one could express religious devotion through service in the priesthood, entering the monastery as a monk or nun represented the highest calling.

In the final years of the fifth century, a twenty-year old followed a call of God to live as a solitary hermit. As others followed his example, Benedict of Nursia established a monastery. He established a rule of discipline to add guidelines and structure for the growing number of men and women answering the call to monastic life. Vocation, stressed Benedict, was a life-long call to communal prayer *and* work, *ora et labora*. In the rule of Benedict, he states, “Idleness is the enemy of the soul; and therefore the brethren ought to be employed in manual labor at certain times, at others, in devout reading.”²¹ The daily routine for the monk now included time for physical labor, as well as reading and prayer. This “Benedictine rule” would become a standard for monasteries

¹⁹ Placher, 107.

²⁰ Adrian H. Bredero, *Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages: The Relations Between Religion, Church, and Society*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1994), 13.

²¹ *Saint Benedict's Rule for Monasteries*, 48, trans. by Leonard Doyle, <http://www.osb.org/rb/text/toc.html#toc> (accessed June 11, 2013).

for centuries. According to the rule, divine vocation included vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. And the vocation of the monk became a honored model of manhood.²²

At the same time, the sacred office of priest or monk offered spiritual and cultural ballast to a sinking culture outside the church. The literacy of the priesthood and the use of classic Latin promoted cultural renewal and respect. But most of the nobles and peasants were illiterate. Therefore, the gap between sacred and secular among the classes increased.

Most of the documents of the early Middle Ages are silent as to labor and laborers. Le Goff states that the church controlled most of the writing and dissemination of information regarding labor and economic enterprise, and “scarcely any but the upper strata of society are encountered in the documents, and the Church’s very strict control over cultural production further contributes to masking the realities.”²³ Between the fifth and eighth centuries, clues about labor are discovered through the examination of the monastic rules and the hagiographic literature. As a result, there is great ambiguity about forms of labor and non-labor beyond agricultural work. Le Goff states that information about the sacred ironsmiths and goldsmiths responsible for the creation of weapons and decorations become the exception.

In the medieval west, certain trades were forbidden and held in contempt by the clerics. Due to religious rites and customs, certain medieval professions were characterized as unholy and unsavory. Innkeepers, butchers, jugglers, bankers, alchemists, doctors, surgeons, soldiers, saddlers, dyers, pastry makers, and cobblers were

²² Aaron Raverty, “Are We Monks, or Are We Men? The Monastic Masculine Gender Model According to the Rule of Benedict,” *Journal of Men’s Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 269–291.

²³ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 2d ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1982), 71.

viewed as sinful at various times due to taboos about blood, impurity, economics, and usury.

Still, the economic renewal beginning in the ninth through the thirteenth centuries broke down the prejudices against labor, artisans, merchants, and technicians. Many trades remained dependent on the church and their patron saint. While the church remained the primary authority in medieval life, commerce and economic enterprise began to operate outside the church's control.

In reaction to the growing excesses of wealth in the church and aristocracy, and the awareness of the needs of common people, mendicant, or "begging," religious orders were formed. Rejection of worldly goods and voluntary poverty as an expression of love for God was common among these orders. For Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and his followers, vocation meant to "sell all possessions and follow Jesus." In "The Earlier Rule" that Francis brought to Pope Innocent III for approval in 1209 or 1210, Francis stated that brothers who knew how to work and practice a trade should be allowed to do physical labor, provided the work did not conflict with the "good of their souls and can be performed honestly."²⁴ Brothers could also have tools and instruments suitable for their trades. They were not permitted to carry or receive money, but begging for alms was allowed. While Francis rejected the excesses of the world, he also considered idleness an enemy of the soul. Physical work had merit as it was combined with prayer and devotion.

In the flow of progress throughout this long period, the church remained the center of learning and education. The call to be the custodian of learning, philosophy, arts, and sciences enhanced the vocation of the clergy. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

²⁴ Regis J. Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi - The Saint: Early Documents, Vol. 1*, annotated edition (New York: New City Press, 1999), 68.

followed a line of scholar-priests who fulfilled the call of God in service through letters. A Dominican, Aquinas refined the teachings of Aristotle with biblical interpretation to address the issues of church and life in his day. While he could appreciate work, Aquinas maintained that “the contemplative life is more excellent than the active.”²⁵ He quoted Pope Gregory (540-604), writing that the active life is bondage while the contemplative life is freedom. “It is impossible for one to be busy with external action and at the same time give oneself to divine contemplation.”²⁶ His exegesis of the story of Mary and Martha provides strong biblical support for the contemplative life over the life of work. The thread from Augustine supporting the superior life of prayer and meditation over activity and work is maintained in the writings of Aquinas.

During this period, a few dissenters advocated that vocation might be found in work outside the church or monastery. Mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) championed the linkage of calling and active work in society. Our occupations, Eckhart reasoned, were our purpose for being on earth. “We are brought forth into time in order that our sensible worldly occupations may lead us nearer and make us liker unto God.”²⁷

Eckhart and Dominican John Tauler were the exceptions to the common understanding of calling in this period. As Marshall states, “Basic to the pattern of medieval Christianity was a conception according to which the only true Christian calling, or at least, the highest calling, was a priestly or monastic one. In fact the term

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, 182, Art.1, ad.1,trans, Fathers of the English Dominican Province, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum440.htm> (accessed May 10, 2012).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 182, Art.3, ad.1.

²⁷ Paul Marshall, *Kind of Life Imposed on Man—Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 22.

‘calling’ or ‘vocation’ was used only to refer to such pursuits.’²⁸ This idea was soon to change amid the movements of reform in the following centuries.

Vocation after the Reformation

The Reformation marked a seismic shift in the history of the Christian church. A new understanding of vocation was just one of many significant changes associated with this era. The intellectual and spiritual stirrings among certain key people of the period had a catalytic influence on the whole of Christianity. Their understanding of vocation and the changing social-economic climate freed people to discover God’s call outside the walls of the church. Though Luther and Calvin dominated the conversation about vocation in this time period, the idea of calling for all believers became a key theme among Protestants across the continent and Britain during the Reformation.²⁹

One cannot separate the thoughts and actions of individuals from their life stories. Theology and vocation are formed out of personal narratives. For Martin Luther, the son of a farmer turned miner, physical labor was witnessed and experienced in his early upbringing. Luther’s theology and ethics were influenced by his law studies, his call to the priesthood, and his family history. The call of God is received by humans in a historical context. Therefore, as Brendler explains, “we should not lose sight of the fact that Martin Luther came out of the transitional milieu from agronomy to early capitalistic entrepreneurship. The climate of the parental home in which Martin grew up must be

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Paul Marshall, “Work and Vocation: Some Historical Reflections,” *The Reformed Journal* (September 1980): vv. 18–19 (accessed June 2, 2013); Max Stackhouse, “Vocation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*. ed. Gilbert Meilaender, [http:// www.oxfordhandbooks.com](http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com), 199-200, (accessed September 11, 2011).

attributed primarily to the fact that the farm had been replaced by the city in the life of the family”³⁰

While calling even among the reformers appears to be more a duty than motivated by personal happiness, freedom to pursue God’s call outside the auspices of the church was emerging for common people. Luther introduced the idea of vocation for all. In his mind, no vocation was better than another. A rediscovery of “general calling” merged with one’s personal calling. For Luther, every Christian had at least two vocations: the call to become part of the people of God (Luther called it “spiritual calling,” the Puritans later called it “general calling”) and the call to a particular line of work (for Luther, “external calling,” for the Puritans “particular calling”).

For Luther, God has established “stations,” or particular lines of work, for people’s lives. He summarizes the stations as ministry, marriage (this station includes family, business, and economy), and secular authority. Each person belongs to a variety of stations simultaneously with a duty to serve God and others. “God’s will takes on definite and specific form for a person in the context of the particular station in which he is functioning.”³¹

Luther’s use of scripture casts new light on the theology of the times. His controversial translation of 1 Corinthians 7:20 and Ecclesiasticus 11:20-21 to include the word *Beruf* (call) suggested to Luther that all believers were called by God. As Marshall explains, “In introducing this novel translation, Luther took a word previously used only

³⁰ Gerhard Brendler, *Martin Luther: Theology and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 24.

³¹ Paul Althaus, *Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Pub, 1972), 38.

for a priestly or monastic calling and applied it to all worldly duties.”³² Luther maintained that the station or role of husband, wife, peasant, or magistrate was equally ordained by God. In his treatise entitled *The Babylonian Captivity*, he asserts that the captivity is the church’s denial of rights to the laity. In Luther’s view, exalting the position of priest only elevates a life dominated by works. For Luther, the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous, do not differ in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about household tasks; all works are measured before God by faith alone. Os Guinness states, “In one blow, Luther undermines the medieval universe with its sacred/secular, contemplation /action, higher/lower distinctions.”³³ And Paul Marshall concludes, “Luther appropriated the religious aura which surrounded the clerical vocations and permeated all worldly tasks with it. To work in one’s estate was a divine calling.”³⁴ Through Luther and other Reformers, the value of work and labor as designed by God is reclaimed and re-emphasized.

For Luther, the gospel influenced all of life, including, in his view, work. He held that everything a believer does in faith, including sleeping, eating, and drinking, is a “holy work that pleases God.”³⁵ Work was understood as a partnership between God and the believer, albeit an unequal partnership. Luther saw it necessary that each partner contribute. “God gives all the good gifts; but you must lend a hand and take the bull by

³² Marshall, 23.

³³ Guinness, 53.

³⁴ Marshall, 23.

³⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Lectures on Genesis: Volume 2, Chapters 6-14*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan and Daniel E. Poellot, 1st ed. (Saint Louis:Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 349.

the horns; that is, you must work and thus give God good cause and a mask.”³⁶ Luther reasoned that God could easily give individuals grain and fruit without planting and plowing—yet he does not. Instead he gives his gifts through human labor masking his work through human work. He says, “In all our doings He is to work through us, and He alone shall have the glory from it. . . . Men should work diligently and faithfully, each according to his calling and profession, and then God will give blessing and success.”³⁷ Luther’s thinking opposed hierarchal superiority but did not promote social mobility outside of one’s station in life. Though, in Luther’s view, there is freedom to integrate work life and vocation, he rejected movement beyond one’s station. His thinking in this regard remained medieval.

John Calvin expanded vocation to allow flexibility of choice when responding to calling or vocation, even if it took one beyond one’s station. Calvin’s influence on the Protestant view of vocation cannot be underestimated. His full devotion to the total service of Christ included a vision of society transformed into the kingdom of heaven. In his mind, the idea of calling or vocation was primarily about being called to serve God within the world. “We are consecrated and dedicated to God,” says Calvin, “in order that we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory. For a sacred thing may not be applied to profane uses without marked injury to him.”³⁸ Calvin’s vision for a kingdom of heaven on earth found structure through the divine callings of God. “Therefore to prevent universal confusion being produced by our folly

³⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Volume 14* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 115.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Placher, 233.

and temerity, he has appointed to all their particular duties in different spheres of life, styled as vocations or callings.”³⁹ Calvin taught that all callings were important to the purposes of God, that “there will be no employment so mean or sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God.”⁴⁰ Activity in the world expressed through one’s calling was a means to demonstrate thankfulness and commitment to God.

In the view of Calvin, every aspect of a person’s life may bring glory to God. Honesty, thrift, diligence, and moderation in daily work bear witness to the glory of God. This new, “Protestant” way of thinking opened up God-ordained enterprises within the secular world. “For coupled with the demand for actively glorifying God in one’s daily occupation was a new openness toward the world of commerce and finance. The medieval feudal economy was rapidly giving way to embryonic capitalistic forms of economic organization....”⁴¹ Subsequently, new understandings of vocation were emerging in England as well. William Tyndale’s voice echoes the words of Luther on this point. He affirmed that preaching the word is no more pleasing to God than the washing of dishes. For him, one was called to do “whatsoever cometh into thy hands ... as time, place and occasion giveth, and as God hath put thee in degree, high or low.”⁴²

Political stress and uncertainty in Britain greatly influenced the church and various developing religious groups in Britain. The Puritans represented one of the

³⁹ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board, 1949), 649.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:650.

⁴¹ John & Welch Claude Dillenberger, *Protestant Christianity* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1954), 234.

⁴² Marshall, 32.

dissenting groups that resisted the authority of the Church of England. Their strong reliance on the Bible countered the traditions of the religious hierarchy. Puritan pastors spoke clearly about God's call in every domain of work life.

William Perkins (1558-1602), a Puritan pastor and theologian who was schooled at Cambridge, represents a strong voice for vocation for all people. His, *A Treatise of the Vocations*, provides rich insight into the Puritan thinking on this subject. From Perkins emerges a powerful definition of calling from the Puritan perspective, "A vocation of calling is a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God, for the common good."⁴³ One's personal calling comes from God and must be consistent with a general calling to all believers. "Every man must joyne the practice of his personall calling, with the practice of the general calling of Christianity."⁴⁴ For Perkins, God's call was imposed or mandated for the common good of all the people.

Hard work in contrast to idleness underscores the Protestant ethic linking vocation and work. George Herbert, a noted writer, scholar, member of Parliament, and pastor, represents this attitude in his book, *Country Parson*. "Each day", for the parson, "requires his focused effort which he likens to the worker at the market. . . . An efficient use of time, a concentrated, calculating application of thought, a spirited attention to profit and success—these qualities characterize the merchant engaged in business as well as any diligent man pursuing his vocation."⁴⁵ Dedicated work in the marketplace becomes the example for pastor's in their sacred work. This work ethic sets a standard for all types of

⁴³ William Perkins, "A Treatise of the Vocations," in *Working: Its Meaning and Its Limits*, ed. Gilbert C. Meilaender, Jr. (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 108.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁵ Cristina Malcolmson, *Heart-work: George Herbert and the Protestant Ethic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 39.

work. Max Weber, in the influential *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, connects this attitude of hard work to economic success.

Careful reading of Calvin and Perkins elucidates an important element of calling according to their thinking. For Calvin, God “appoints” duties or callings for every way of life. Perkins says calling is “imposed on man.” While there are various vocations for all, calling, for these reformers, originates with God—not from the inner wishes or feelings of humankind.

From Perkins, Herbert, and other post-Reformation thinkers, we are made aware of God at work in the callings of individuals for the common good of the church, society, and economy. But this rosey view of vocation must be viewed in the light of other factors. The emerging industrial society begins to create a gap between religion and economy. The leveraging of the value of personal satisfaction over the value of service to others changed the meaning of vocation. Meilaender offers a caution regarding optimism about vocation in days following the Reformation,

The concept of vocation gives an enhanced religious aura to the world of work—reinforcing and perhaps in part giving rise to the modern idea that work is integral to human identity and fulfillment. Indeed, even among religions thinkers, the idea of vocation has often lost much of its original accent and has been transmuted into an emphasis upon work as the sphere in which one fulfills oneself. Perkins would have been astonished. In this way, the concept of vocation may reinforce the dubious idea that the human being is essentially and primarily a worker.⁴⁶

Finding one’s meaning or desire-fulfillment through work can result in vocation losing its theological and historical grounding.

⁴⁶ Meilaender, 13.

Wilberforce, Calling and Emerging Adulthood

The eighteenth century saw a world-changing event orchestrated by a leading British politician. At the height of British power and influence, William Wilberforce led the call to abolish slavery in Britain and its colonies. Significant to this paper is the spiritual awakening and calling Wilberforce experienced in his young-adult years that prepared him for his leadership as an abolitionist.

Wilberforce was born in 1759. At the age of nine, his father, a merchant in Hull, died. William's mother subsequently sent him to live with his devoutly Methodist aunt and uncle. His spiritual sensitivities were awakened in the atmosphere of spiritual fervor he witnessed among Methodists. But alarmed by these radical spiritual influences, William's mother brought him back home, seeking to reverse his early evangelical conversion.

In his emerging adult years, Wilberforce attended college at St. John's College, Oxford, and demonstrated charm and wit, and the charisma of a natural leader. He went on to seek public office, winning election to Parliament at age 21.

When Wilberforce was 25, he embarked on an extended tour of Europe. He invited the brilliant scientist-mathematician Isaac Milner to be his traveling companion. Wilberforce was amazed at the way Milner, a respected intellectual, embraced sincere Christian faith. While traveling, the two read the Greek New Testament together, and Doddridge's *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. In October, 1785, at age 26, Wilberforce committed his life to Jesus Christ in what he termed the "Great Change." For Wilberforce, the seriousness of this commitment to Jesus led him to consider stepping away from his political career to enter the ministry. But under the counsel of John

Newton, Wilberforce was convinced that God had called him to the political arena with a vision to abolish slavery in Britain. William's formative young-adult years steeled his devotion to the Christian faith and his vocation, compelling him to challenge the institution of slavery and to ultimately succeed.

The story of Wilberforce highlights the importance of spiritual mentors and guides in the critical young-adult years. Through the counsel of wise Christians and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Wilberforce found his calling and purpose in the political arena. His political influence became a conduit for God's blessing to many in the British Empire and the United States.

Post Christian Era- 1800- Present

The meaning of vocation since the Reformation continues to be redefined in our present post-Christian era.⁴⁷ Vocation evolved beyond purely clerical associations; initiating a rethinking of work and labor. Now modern conceptualizations of calling reflect a greater emphasis upon the individual, with duty to self replacing duty to God as the primary motivation for following a call. For many today, vocation is the discovery of personal meaning through work and a contribution to general human flourishing—a clear shift from a sense of duty and devotion to fulfill God's call. In the changing culture, finding fulfillment and meaning in work has lost much of its Christian influence. The world that emerged out of the industrial revolution shifted its devotion away from a religious center to a world driven by economics. For Dillenberger,

...the Calvinistic ideal of a total society toward the glorification of God had been dimmed to the point of invisibility. In its place

⁴⁷ Placher, 327-332.

appeared a sharp distinction between the specifically ‘religious’ and the secular. Religion is concerned with a man’s private relation to his Creator ... the world of economic activity is left to its own immutable laws, and in this world the law for individual action is the pursuit of self interest.”⁴⁸

Social scientist Max Weber’s 1905 landmark book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, linked the rise of capitalism to the reformers’ teaching and their respect for vocation and work. He attributes the expansion of “calling” to encompass multiple secular domains as an important catalyst for the economic transformation of Europe. Yet he failed to fully comprehend the divine impetus behind the rigorous diligence exhibited in fulfilling the call. For Weber, Luther and the Reformation offered a “moral justification of worldly activity,”⁴⁹ freeing economic pursuits from the constraints of the church.

In a post-Christian environment, calling became secularized, internally and personally motivated. In this period in the United States, work and career became a primary way of find meaning and purpose outside of a spiritual tradition. Today, the meaning of vocation is being influenced by unprecedented pluralism. A secularized connection between work life and vocation remains common in job and career development. Social-scientific research on vocation and calling suggest that calling and personal satisfaction are on the minds of college students. In a study of college sophomores, Brian Dik and Ryan Duffy found that a surprising 68% of young people studied viewed calling as a relevant concern when considering a job and/or career. However, these young people define calling quite differently. The young adults surveyed

⁴⁸ Dillenberger, 236.

⁴⁹ Max Weber and Anthony Giddens, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), 32.

reflect two dominant approaches: the transcendent, traditional view, and the internal, modern view. Dik and Duffy's study suggests that present conceptualizations of calling share three common themes: 1) the notion of a force guiding them to a calling, 2) a sense of personal "fit" with a job, and 3) a sense of satisfaction or a contribution to a greater good. Thus, both traditional and modern views are represented in the student sample.⁵⁰ Calling in the traditional sense originates from an external transcendent source like God. This view stresses the value of contribution to the greater good. The modern conception suggests that calling comes from an inner urge and places great emphasis on personal happiness for its own sake.

The word "vocation" is used in a variety of ways. The growing emphasis upon an interior, personal call with a view to personal economic satisfaction is reflected in the article, "Generation Y and Flexible Capitalism," by Peter Kelly. Kelly counsels young people entering the work place on the priority of nurturing the inner call to wealth and personal success.

The essence of the spirit of twenty-first century, flexible capitalism ... is that the cultivation of an entrepreneurial self is the calling to which individuals should devote themselves. That is, the self is the enterprise to which all efforts should be directed in the pursuit of wealth and success. Twenty-first century, flexible capitalism is energized by a spirit that sees the cultivation of the self as an ongoing, never ending enterprise—an ethically slanted maxim for the conduct of a life.⁵¹

Financial self-aggrandizement drives the type of calling Kelly offers Generation Y as they face a changing, globalized workplace. Personal devotion to the development of the

⁵⁰ Bryan J. Dik and Ryan D. Duffy, *Make Your Job a Calling: How the Psychology of Vocation Can Change Your Life at Work* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2012), 9.

⁵¹ Peter Kelly, "Generation Y, Flexible Capitalism and New Work Ethics," In *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood: New Perspectives and Agendas* (London: Routledge, 2009), 403.

entrepreneurial self is tantamount to survival. A call to serve others is muted by a call to a never-ending enterprise of cultivating the material self.

A changing and volatile job environment confronts all workers, even those who take a traditional view that God “calls” people. A linear, hierarchical approach to career advancement is being supplanted by a more “free agent” approach to work. As baby boomers retire and leave the workforce, economists foresee less demand for job loyalty within companies and more short-term employment relationships. Dik and Duffy propose that young workers will need to develop a “protean career orientation”⁵², which calls for workers to take charge of their career path rather than depend on corporations or organizations for promotions and job security. Increasingly, adaptability and looking out for oneself are becoming important competencies for success.

This trend amplifies the need for a clear sense of personal purpose and individual direction. It will also require that young workers develop entrepreneurial skills in problem solving, innovation and adaptability. The church can become a vital resource in the development of these skills. Churches that adopt a more holistic view of discipleship that integrates basic life skills for faith and work will aid their followers in their search for meaningful employment. Anticipating the changes in the contemporary workplace, Dik and Duffy state that “a sense of calling helps you thrive in the changing world of work.”⁵³ In a “free agent” work environment, workers who are guided by a sense of calling are motivated to learn, to adapt to change, and to contribute to the greater good.

⁵² Dik and Duffy, 217.

⁵³ Ibid., 218.

Supported by faith communities these workers will be able to add value and meaning to their work environment.

Growing counter movements within the business world are challenging the trends of individualism and separation. Some business leaders promote the view that business is service. John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods, advocates for Conscious Capitalism. Mackay believes calling offers value beyond the paycheck. Service of others is valued along with profit. For Mackay, work allows the individual to show passion about real-world needs.

Across the spectrum of business and the general world of work, the post-Christian world exhibits diverse understandings of vocation. Sadly, Christian tradition offers no uniform conception of calling. Theologians are divided on the importance of work and calling in the post-Christian world. Gilbert Meilaender frames his anthology on the nature of work around four diverse typologies: work as co-creation, work as necessary for leisure, work as dignified but irksome, and work as vocation.⁵⁴ French social theorist and theologian Jacques Ellul rejects the notion that work should be considered a calling. Ellul views work as necessary for life but not an example of a calling for the glory of God. In his essay, *The Ethics of Freedom*, he explains "...I am not saying that work is bad. What I am saying is that its value is purely utilitarian and that it is one of the necessities of life. We should simply accept it as such without exalting it and without confusing it with the call of God."⁵⁵ Unfortunately, Ellul's position undervalues the ability of God to work in everyday life. The presence of Christ in the believer makes work life more than just a

⁵⁴ Meilaender, 2-12.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 99.

necessity of life, but an opportunity to practice the Christian faith in all of life. Work allows laborers to deploy their skills and abilities in meaningful ways for the common good. For followers of Jesus, work becomes a vehicle to extend the blessing of God to the world. Ellul's view is too limited and shortsighted.

Others moderns offer a more hopeful, yet guarded, approach to a theology of vocation and work. Christian author, Dorothy Sayers' monograph entitled *Why Work?*, written in the 1940's, offers a positive affirmation of work and vocation. "Christian people, and particularly perhaps the Christian clergy, must get it firmly into their heads that when a man or woman is called to a particular job of secular work that is as true a vocation as though he or she were called to specifically religious work."⁵⁶ She also states that work "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."⁵⁷

One is left with many options on how to integrate work with vocation today. Frederick Buechner's popular description of calling best mediates a blend of divine summons and personal satisfaction: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."⁵⁸ Buechner blends the divine summons and the inner personal promptings to meet the needs of the world. It is a contemporary call to follow the voice of Jesus to bless the world.

⁵⁶ Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?," 1942, 7, <http://johannesburgcitypartnership.ic3lovestheweb.com/backend/media/Wed22Sep2010130240/Dorothy%20Sayers%20%20Why%20Work.pdf> (accessed June 21, 2013).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁸ Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, 95.

Amid unprecedented pluralism, a renewed biblical vision of calling is needed. I applaud social psychologists Dik and Duffy for their re-emphasis on calling as a transcendent summons deriving a sense of purpose or meaning that is directed to prosocial values.⁵⁹ This definition of calling supports the idea of God’s agency in personal vocations. However, voices within the church community must echo this message.

The biblical call of Jesus, to follow him and to be his disciples, needs to be articulated to young people. It is a radical call to a total commitment to Christ’s lordship. It becomes the vocation for all believers, not just a few. New Testament scholar Ben Witherington sums this up well, writing “In terms of vocation, every Christian has a primary obligation to fulfill the Great Commandment and Great Commission. This is ‘job one.’”⁶⁰ There are important secondary callings, but for Witherington, “our primary task as persons recreated in the image of Christ is to do the very thing Christ came to earth to do—share the Good News of salvation, healing and the coming Kingdom.”⁶¹ Faithful witness in every domain of society is the vehicle for sharing this good news. Witherington’s optimism about human vocation is shared by Miroslav Volf. Volf writes, “The significance and meaning of Christians’ work lie in their cooperation with God in the anticipation of the eschatological *transformation mundi* [transformation of the world].”⁶² God desires to transform the world and calls humankind to participate. God’s

⁵⁹ Dik & Duffy, 221.

⁶⁰ Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor*, 221.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 37.

people are called to follow and to bless the world through acts of service and quality work. This message from the church needs to be a priority in the present age.

Scott Harrison – Vocation and Charity:Water

There are numerous examples of young men who have awakened to the call to follow Jesus in the present age. There is growing motivation to employ passion, entrepreneurial vision, and giftedness to meet the world's needs through multiple avenues. Recent examples of young men serving Jesus and applying their gifts and passions in career domains are growing. The story of entrepreneur, Scott Harrison, stands out.

Rejecting the Christian faith of his youth, Scott Harrison embarked on a decade of work as a New York City club promoter. The goal of his job, as Harrison admits, was getting “people wasted for a living.”⁶³ At twenty eight, after a decade of selfish, decadent living, Harrison acknowledged he needed a change. While on a vacation that combined doing drugs and reading A.W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God*, Scott chose to make a radical change in his life.

Harrison left his job in the entertainment industry to volunteer aboard a floating hospital with a group called Mercy Ships. He became the ship photojournalist documenting the medical work done in West Africa. Interactions with people in need helped put a human face on poverty, a face that impacted Harrison.

⁶³ Bits Blog, “One on One: Scott Harrison, Charity Water,” <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/02/one-on-one-scott-harrison-charity-water/> (accessed May 22, 2013).

As a result of this experience, Harrison returned to the United States with a passion to serve the world. On his thirty-first birthday, he launched charity:water, a non profit devoted to providing clean and safe water for every person in the world. Now, after five years, charity:water has received over \$50 million and provided 8,661 water projects in 20 countries. Charity:water is pioneering new technologies for donor participation and communication as well as supporting new methods for providing water in different parts of the world. Harrison seeks to reinvent charitable giving so that young people in his generation will become active participants. Important ideas in fund raising, including a campaign encouraging individuals to donate all of their “birthday money,” has captured the young-adult imagination and gone beyond.

Harrison sums up his personal mission, “Charity is practical. It’s sometimes easy, most often inconvenient, but always necessary. It’s the ability to use one’s position of influence, relative wealth, and power to affect lives for the better.”⁶⁴ He quotes Colossians 3, “Put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” Harrison seeks to “wear charity.”⁶⁵ Harrison, like Augustine, Luther, and Wilberforce, was awakened to God’s call to service during his young-adult years.

Several themes appear to be constant across the centuries regarding young men in these formative years. First, emerging adulthood is a life stage and not an end. For many of the greats of history, it was a preparatory time for future, meaningful service. This should be sealed in the minds and hearts of every parent, educator, and church leader. In an era when we expect our sports stars to reach their peak in emerging adulthood, it is

⁶⁴ Charity:Water, “Scott’s Story | Charity: Water,” http://www.charitywater.org/about/scotts_story.php. (accessed May 22, 2013).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

vital to recognize that in most cases, the greatest contributions of our vocational lives happen beyond the years of emerging adulthood.

Second, God spoke to emerging adults throughout history and we must live in the hope that God speaks to young men today. God is engaged with young men as they form their sense of identity and purpose. The church needs to champion this hope. The church must be skilled in assisting young men in vocational formation. The church needs to encourage young men to listen for God's call.

Finally, emerging adulthood is a period of uncertainty and questioning—even as it was for giants of church history. In this period of life, young men who became great were experiencing and writing their “redemption stories.” It could be that this “liminal” period is necessary for moving toward wholeness in the journey of life. As God calls young men, so God is renewing this call in mentors and guides who influence their spiritual development. If the church is to provide meaningful vocational guidance for young men, there must be Christian leaders spiritually renewed and equipped to serve them.

History is filled with stories of redemption, of young men awakened to God and a call to meaning and purpose. Their stories resonate with passion for service and for blessing the world. As the world becomes more secularized and self-serving, the retelling of the stories of calling and service can awaken visions of vocational purpose for the next generation of young men. The church can be the story teller. And building on the stories of history, young men and women, can fulfill the call of God to serve the world through multiple expressions.

In order to effectively fulfill the mission of God, the church must be attentive to the unique challenges young men face, challenges attached to age and gender. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to these challenges.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAKING OF YOUNG MEN IN A CHANGING WORLD

Throughout history, a successful man was expected to do three things well: procreate, provide, and protect. Although monastic communities represent a notable exception, nearly every society has been anchored by these three pillars. Men have been expected to create offspring, provide for their families and communities, and protect the welfare of those under their care.

Today, the world has changed and the rules that delineate masculinity are not as clear. In a society where a single income is inadequate to support a household, women share the workplace and fewer men are the sole providers for their families. The proliferation of information technology diminishes in the eyes of society the value of strength-based manual labor, an arena where men have historically excelled. Fathering multiple children is discouraged due to concerns of overpopulation, economic challenges, and hardship for women. And in a shrinking and increasingly complex world, the ability to protect loved ones becomes less certain. The time honored pillars of manhood are weakening.

At the same time, women are responding positively to growing opportunities in education and the workplace. The achievement of young men in academics and in the workplace appears to be stalled while the trajectory of women in these areas is ascending. Recent college-enrollment statistics show the percentage of young women attending college surpassing that of young men. Currently, sixty percent of college students are women. Trends suggest this ratio will soon grow to be 70/30. Young women are coming

to college campuses with better grades, more honors, and seem more directed and motivated than many young men.

Historically, men have been more likely than women to finish college, but since 1991 the share of women ages twenty five to twenty nine with a bachelor degree or higher has exceeded the share of young men receiving the same credentials. The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that in 2009-2010, fifty-seven to fifty-eight percent of bachelor degrees were conferred to women, suggesting a growing gap between graduation rates between men and women.¹ According to recent US census data, for every 100 women ages twenty-five to twenty-nine years who have at least a professional degree, eighty-four men have achieved similar honors.²

Employment trends indicate near parity between men and women in the workforce. This follows a continued influx of women in the workplace. In 2010, women made up almost half of the labor force (46.7%). In 1997, women made up 46.2% of the labor force, and in 1970 women made up only 38.1% of the labor force. There was some speculation that women's share of employment would surpass men's during the 2007-2009 Great Recession—often referred to as the “Mancession” because of disproportionate job losses in male-dominated fields like construction and manufacturing.³ According to the Pew Research Center, young women now place more importance on having high-paying careers or professions than young men. Two-thirds

¹ The National Center for Educational Statistics, “Fast Facts,” <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72> (accessed September 22, 2012).

² Data Integration Division, US Census Bureau, “Educational Attainment,” <http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/> (accessed November 20, 2012).

³ Eileen Patten and Kim Parker, “A Gender Reversal On Career Aspirations,” *Pew Social & Demographic Trends*, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/04/19/a-gender-reversal-on-career-aspirations/> (accessed October 3, 2012).

(66%) of young women ages eighteen to thirty-four rate having a career high on their list of life priorities, compared with 59% of young men.⁴

While young men are not keeping pace with women in education and job success, there are categories where men continue to participate at higher levels than their female counterparts. Psychologist Dave Verhaagen cites research that young men are more likely to engage in risky behavior than young women. They will abuse alcohol and drugs more than young women. He also notes that young men are more resistant to seeking help when facing medical, drug and alcohol, or mental problems.⁵ Among twenty to twenty-four year-olds, 20.7 suicides per one hundred-thousand occurred among males, compared to 3.5 per one hundred-thousand among females. A 2006 Pew research study indicated that young men ages eighteen-twenty-nine represent the least happy demographic group in the United States.⁶ These signs indicate that young men find it difficult to adapt to cultural shifts in work and home life.

Traditionally, men have gleaned self-worth from what they do, what they earn, their physical prowess, and their public power. Cultural shifts evidenced in the workplace and in academics, leave young men confused about their place in the culture. Many feel depressed and perceive themselves as threatened. They feel ill-prepared for the changing world. In many cases they feel left behind in the pursuit of educational and economic success. About interviews with young adult men on college campuses, Michael Kimmel comments, “Guys tell me that they feel they are making up the rules as they go along,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dave Verhaagen, *Therapy With Young Men: 16-24 Year Olds in Treatment* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 10–12.

⁶ Pew Research Center, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/?ChartID=26> (accessed October 10, 2012).

with neither adequate adult guidance nor appropriate road maps, and, at the same time, that they feel they are playing by the rules that someone else invented and which they don't fully understand."⁷ Old valuations of male worth are outmoded and are no longer adequate. Many women are seizing new opportunities offered to them. Young men must learn to seek new motivations and goals in their pursuit of purpose in a world of greater equality.

In light of this confusion, many young men cope by demonstrating two extremes of behavior: passivity or aggression. However, these options become negative motivators for personal fulfillment and success in life. Life satisfaction and purpose will not be experienced through passivity or the exercising of male domination. A third alternative is needed: The fulfillment that comes through the hard work of creating a more adequate sense of manhood and a renewed vision that young men can contribute to the flourishing of the society and the world. Young men must learn to work with confidence in a changing world where women are rightly viewed as full and equal partners.

Richard Rohr states, "In almost all cultures, men are not born, they are made." What type of man is our society making? This is the important question to be considered by families, communities, and most importantly, the church. The formation of a young man requires courage and will. The goal of this paper is to help young men find their calling and vocational purpose. As part of that quest, young men need help to understand their purpose as men. They need courage to become responsible men as they seek their vocational and life purpose. The next chapter will delineate steps in this discovery.

⁷ Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 2008), 21.

The Mosaic of Masculinities

The image of what it means to be a man is changing in American culture. For many generations of men, this image was clear. Today, young men must choose from diverse cultural meanings of manhood as they form their personal identity. Most young men lack clarity and confidence in forming this identity and as men, need help in their discovery. Kimmel comments, young men “feel incomplete and insecure, terrified that they will fail as grownups and that they will be exposed as fraudulent men.”⁸

In American culture, an unwritten “male code” has guided the formation of personal identity among young men. This code is governed by a traditional, socially constructed set of rules that most young men inculcate in boyhood. In 1976, social scientist Robert Brannon articulated this code as:

- (1) No sissy stuff—”don’t appear feminine,”
- (2) Be a big wheel—”success and power make you a man,”
- (3) Be a sturdy oak—”be a rock in a crisis,”
- (4) Give ‘em hell—”live life on the edge.”⁹

In summary, a man must be strong, successful in a career or in a position of power over others, and guarded in expressing emotion. Even as American culture changes, this code remains a standard for many young men.

While this “male code” continues to imprint male self-identity in American culture, the advent of feminist theories of male gender-identity calls into question its veracity. Feminist writers brought into focus the inequality and disrespect many women encounter in a male-dominated culture. Attention to the empowerment of women in modern culture has also helped to redefine masculinity, casting doubt on the time-

⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁹ Ibid., 45.

honored male code. R.W. Connell pioneered the social theory of gender relations expanding the scope of feminist studies to include issues of men and masculinity. *Masculinities*, a far reaching study on men by Connell,¹⁰ asserted that the study of masculinity was not monolithic and that men are diverse.

In the mid-seventies, sociologists like Connell made clear distinctions between biological differences and gender. For him, sex roles are determined by biological differences: male and female. Masculinity and femininity, however, are categories of gender. Social scientists like Connell propose that gender distinctions are shaped by the dominant, socially accepted norms in culture. Gender identity becomes a reflection of the religious, political, legal and linguistic influences of the culture. Gender differences are based on social expectations adhering to learned cultural scripts.

In the last several decades, the social-constructionist theory became the primary method of interpreting gender in the social sciences. Gender differentiation, masculinity and femininity, came to be viewed according to social-constructionist theory as a product of socialization. The emergence of this theory overshadowed traditional views of biological essentialism. As a social construct, maleness is formed by a conditioning of the culture, while essentialism holds that gender is formed by an innate psychic and physical nature. Michael Messner describes the distinction: "I view gender identity not as a 'thing' that people 'have,' but rather as a process of construction that develops, comes into crisis, and changes as a person interacts with the social world."¹¹ Similarly, Connell concludes

¹⁰ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹¹ M.A Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports & the Construction of Masculinity," in *Men's Lives* 2d ed, (New York: Macmillan,1992), 161.

that gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction but is constructed in interaction. These considerations require significant reinterpretation of long held theological views.

Theologians and church leaders must attend to this shift of understanding about sex and gender roles in culture today. The social constructionist view is the dominant position among social scientists and educators. Central to Christian theology is the view that humankind, both male and female, is created in the image of God. Christian faith should celebrate the unique anatomical, hormonal and chromosomal differences between men and women as part of God's creative design. While biologists claim that the differences are few, the differences should be recognized and not minimized. Here the church can play an important role in highlighting the complimentary ways these biological differences in men and women contribute to the greater good of society and the kingdom of God.

At the same time, the church must realize that established gender roles are influenced by the culture, a culture that has been deeply influenced by the fall. Thus, socially accepted roles, even within a Christian culture, need the redeeming work of Jesus. The restorative work of Jesus and his ethic of love that lays down one's life for another must influence the formation of gender identity. This perspective is missing in the secular analysis of gender development. The extreme dichotomy of essentialism and social constructionism must be moderated by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Male power, and its misuse, constitutes an overriding theme in current gender studies. From the feminist perspective, the bitter fruit of male power is violence against women and other males. In theory, the dominance of men or hegemonic masculinity is an age-old social construct. Traditional male roles have fostered an atmosphere of abuse and

inequality toward women and other men. According to Connell, “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”¹² According to feminist theorists, patriarchy has held and continues to hold the dominant position in our culture. While few individual men represent the strict stereotype of dominant patriarchy, many sociologists conclude that white men as a group are culpable for the abuse of that power and its effect on women and society.

While popular feminist theory places much of the responsibility on white men for the power imbalance in our culture, this is an over generalized, limited view of the issue of power. Research suggests that women have not been given full opportunity in work and social settings. Evidence of the abuse of women by men is real and unacceptable. A culture of male dominance contributes to this problem, but social scientists are reluctant to consider human sin as a contributing factor in the problem. Issues of power and dominance are a result of the principalities and powers at work in the world. An underlying anger is pervasive among men and women. This does not excuse men from their actions. Paul cautions men as well as women to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21). This becomes possible through a transformative faith in Jesus. Young men must both apply this principle of submission and respect in all their relationships and at the same time learn to navigate with confidence in a culture that views them as the major cause of gender inequality.

¹² Connell, *Masculinities*, 161.

Young men must develop their self-identity in the context of a difficult paradox. The paradox, according to Michael Kimmel, involves the lingering cultural assumptions about male patriarchal dominance and a perceived sense of powerlessness felt by most individual men.¹³ For young men in their twenties, this is particularly acute. They do not feel they can measure up to the diverse expectations placed upon them, namely expectations of patriarchal dominance on one hand, and the expectations of gender equality on the other hand. Most young men feel powerless. According to the research of Keith Edwards and Susan Jones, young men “put on a man face” in an attempt to meet these perceived expectations. The “man face” is most times inconsistent with their true selves.¹⁴

The behaviors of many of these young men reflect the polarities of aggression and passivity. The aggressive behavior among young men shows itself through underlying anger, excessive drinking, drug abuse, competitive heterosexual sex with many women, and abusive actions toward women and other men. The violent massacres at Newtown, Connecticut and elsewhere may exemplify young men’s struggles with dissonance and with perceived powerlessness. Passive responses to this conflict include not studying, pretending not to care about academics, homophobia and/or fear of other men, pornography, or obsession with video games. According to psychologist, Laurent Daloz, many young men created a unique blend of extreme behaviors—both aggressive and passive. He calls these young men “armored boys,” or boys that compensate by forming

¹³ Shaun Harper and Frank Harris III, *College Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research, and Implications for Practice*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 23–31.

¹⁴ Keith Edwards and Susan Jones, “‘Putting My Man Face On’: A Grounded Theory of College Men’s Gender Identity Development,” *Journal of College Student Development* 50, no. 2 (April 2009): 210.

armor and refusing to grow up. Both extremes of self-protection stifle personal growth and promote separateness from others. This sense of powerlessness inhibits their ability to move with confidence into adulthood. They are stuck in boyhood. Many young men are stranded in a cultural maze that is very difficult to navigate.

The lack of confidence and social isolation of a lot of young men is alarming. In his interviews with 400 young men, Kimmel finds that many aged sixteen to twenty-six are choosing to drift casually through college and beyond in a place he calls “Guyland,” where hanging out, partying, playing with tech toys, and watching sports are the norm.

Many young men are shying away from social interaction with women and other men. Philip Zimbardo and Nikita Duncan, in their TED eBook entitled *The Demise of Guys*, believe the demise can be traced to the rise of technology—from texting and tweeting, to online chatting and sports-watching. They conclude that most of all, “they’re burying themselves in video games and in getting off on all-pervasive online pornography.”¹⁵ One study states that eighty-nine to ninety-two percent of young men look at porn; 40 percent on a weekly basis.¹⁶ Pornography and gaming provide participants with a sense of power and control in isolation, without involvement with other people.

Power remains an inescapable element in interactions between men and women in most societies, and certainly in American culture. The church as an institution bears some guilt for power abuses not only in male-female relationships but also in interrelationships

¹⁵ Philip Zimbardo and Nikita Duncan, *The Demise of Guys: Why Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It* (TED Conferences, 2012), 56.

¹⁶ Mark Regnerus, “Sexual Behavior in Young Adulthood,” <http://www.changingsea.org/regnerus.php> (accessed September 20, 2012).

among men. However, Jesus modeled a radical reinterpretation of power in relationships. According to Jesus' teaching and example, power is demonstrated through sacrificial love for God and others. Self-emptying love was his strength. In the incarnation, God sent his son into the world, emptying himself of power. Jesus took on a position of powerlessness. At his death, the dominating powers of the world appeared to have triumphed over his humble obedience. But the resurrection and exaltation were witnesses to a divine power that transcends human weakness, or even works through it (Phil 2:6-11). God's purposes were accomplished through the loving self-emptying of Jesus. The gospel declares that God uses the power of love to fulfill his purpose in the world. In Jesus, young men find a model of love, humility, and confidence to guide them through the social paradoxes of power. Following Jesus' way of "being" provides a positive alternative to the extremes of passivity and power.

We need a re-imagining of manhood. The traditional valuing of male domination presents a roadblock to mutual respect among women and men in society. Young men need new, fresh paradigms of masculinity and male strength that reflect a redeemed manhood in the image of Jesus Christ. Social science has failed to offer a clear image of what it means to be a man. Social theorist Jeffrey Weeks sums up the position of social science this way: "There is no essence of masculinity which transcends time and space, no single quality which is a biological or psychological constant in men, which dictates their behaviour."¹⁷ The uncertainty is clearly expressed:

We can no longer regard ourselves as one thing throughout all our lives. Identities are 'projects', 'narrative quests', 'performances'. We are no longer today what we were yesterday or will be tomorrow. We are hybrids. This does not mean a

¹⁷ Jeffrey Weeks, "Fallen Heroes: All About Men," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 14, no. 2 (2005), 56.

dissolution of the self, but recognition that the task of finding an anchor for the self, a narrative which gives meaning to all our disparate potential belongings, is a task of invention and of self invention, in which the meaning of what it is to be a man is problematic as never before.¹⁸

While the old ways of being male are not adaptive to the world we live in, the current socially constructed images of masculinity are also incomplete and ambiguous. The multiple cultural influences that shape personal identity create a confused sense of self. Ambiguity is uncomfortable. Finding one's self remains an important quest for young men. They are in search of narratives and models that will help them find meaning and purpose. Amid the uncertainty, models of biblical faith offer a positive perspective in this time of searching. The personal qualities exhibited by Jesus serve as a solid basis for establishing a positive, healthy self image for young men. Jesus demonstrated a self giving love; he surrendered his rights for the good of others. The apostle Paul regards the presence of the Spirit of Christ as the source that produces, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the lives of believers. These Jesus-like qualities serve to establish a foundation for true manhood. The Christian community can be a vital resource in directing young men to this counter cultural way of life.

While the images of manhood become more diverse and varied, Jesus remains a solid example for young men to follow. Ironically, prevailing metaphors from the past offer insight for the construction of their mosaic of manhood.

¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

The Heroic Journey

Throughout antiquity, the story of human development is framed by the metaphor of the journey. Journey evokes adventure, courage, and daring. The metaphor envisions progress, growth, and development. The stories of journey are rich with heroic tenacity and perseverance, as protagonists overcome hardship and suffering while progressing with greater knowledge and wisdom. The ancient stories become vicarious adventures that awaken a common spirit of human yearning in the soul.

Both secular and religious stories feature the journey motif. The grand story of the Bible is the journey of God and a chosen, called people. Abraham and Moses represent the heroes called to follow God in a sojourn of purpose. In the gospel narratives, Jesus embodies the archetypical heroic figure journeying toward his fate in Jerusalem. His life journey inspires a desire for adventure and redemption, for involvement in a story that is bigger than oneself. His journey from obscurity to death and resurrection demonstrates the victory of good over evil. Throughout the biblical story, God's followers are called to join with God's hero on a journey that leads to a Promised Land, a new kingdom—a new heaven and new earth.

In recent years, a male-spirituality movement has called men to enter this journey as a way to find personal identity by discovering their sacred selves. Far from advocating passivity, this movement calls men into a demanding, sacred adventure. While men's spirituality appeals to men from multiple faith traditions and cultures, the metaphors and archetypes offer a strong correlation with the Christian faith and the development of purpose in young men. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, captures this aggressive blend of male spirituality and Christian faith in his book *The Wild Man's Journey*.

Rohr is straightforward about the centrality of the call of Jesus to men. “The gospel of Jesus is not a theory for reflection but a plan of action. . . . He (Jesus) tells us to love God above all and to love our neighbors as well.”¹⁹ Men are called to a decision. “Following Jesus means following in his footsteps,” writes Rohr. “The only choice we have is to follow or not, to be a disciple or not, to be a Christian or not, even though none of us will do it perfectly.”²⁰ Clearly, calling begins first as a call to follow Jesus. Vocation and meaningful work flow out of this central call.

Rohr describes a man’s life journey as having two phases: the early years (age 1-32) of ascent, and the wisdom years (age 35+) of descent. According to Rohr, the “making of a man” begins with an initiation process—a practice common in many cultures but sadly missing for most American men. In the spiritual journey, the movement from boyhood to manhood includes the involvement of a community of men guiding the younger men through this transition. Robert Bly, a noted spiritual leader in the men’s movement, says, “Only men can initiate men.”²¹ A boy becomes a man through the active intervention of older men. A boy learns what he is made of in the company of a man or of men. Conversely, in his study of young college males, Kimmel observes, “In Guyland, it is not men who are initiating boys into manhood. It is boys playing at initiating other boys into something they, themselves, do not even possess—that they cannot possess.”²² Hazing, drinking, and improper behavior toward women

¹⁹ Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos, *From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), 8.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Robert Bly, *Iron John* (Cambridge: DaCapo Press, 2004), 16.

²² Kimmel, *Guyland*, 101.

become the hallmarks of this youthful initiation. Young men in American culture are in need of older guides and clear pathways that will lead into manhood.

For Rohr, five vital messages must be communicated to young men as they embark on the journey from boyhood to adulthood. These messages are:

- (1) Life is hard
- (2) You are going to die
- (3) You are not that important
- (4) You are not in control
- (5) Your life is not about you.

Initiation involves a death to self, and includes suffering that leads to new life. Rohr points to the life and death of Jesus as the model for young disciples to follow. A period of initiation introduces these guiding principles. Such principles could easily be incorporated into initiation practices for young men within a church setting.

In traditional cultures, the three pillars of manhood—namely the ability to provide, protect, and procreate—are tested in the presence of the community. The elders create painful, demanding challenges that young men must achieve before crossing into manhood. Jeffrey Arnett suggests that specific qualities of character accompany the mastery of the three skills:

Manhood requirements in traditional cultures typically involve not just the acquisitions of specific skills in these three areas but also the development of certain character qualities that must accompany these skills to make them useful and effective. Learning to provide involves developing not just economic skills but also the character qualities of diligence and stamina. Learning to protect involves not just learning the skills of warfare and weapons but also cultivating the character qualities of courage and fortitude. Learning to procreate involves not just sexual performance but also the character qualities of confidence and boldness that lead to sexual opportunities.²³

²³ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach*, 4th ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 2009), 138.

American society affords limited formal opportunities for young men to develop these skills and character qualities under the tutelage of older men. Young men are expected to learn these skills and character qualities on their own. The professional and technological advances in our culture cannot replace the skills and character qualities learned under the watchful eyes of community elders.

The initiation process into manhood is vital in the ascent phase. The ascent phase is a season of adventure. During their twenties and thirties, young men combine idealism with toughness, challenge, competition, and achievement. In our culture, the hero's journey is linked with battle and the triumph of conquest.

The heroic images of cowboy, warrior, and knight shape a young man's imagination in this stage of life. It is likely that the knights of antiquity were *twenty-somethings*. Physically, young men are building physical strength, testing themselves, and seeking a mate. The desire to be a hero, to answer the call of duty, and to make a difference in the world seems to be imbedded in the male soul. The spirit of adventure, the pursuit of a noble cause, and the call to self-sacrifice are all awakened as young men are called out of passivity into action. The image of a brave warrior or noble knight has motivated many males to pursue causes and vocations of service throughout the centuries. One young man I interviewed spoke for many of his generation when he said, "I am looking for a cause to give my life to." For Rohr and others, the spirit of the warrior is embedded in the nature of men because it reflects the nature of God. The spirit of the warrior is found in Jesus when he showed his willingness to risk suffering and death in order to confront domination and injustice.

The ascent portion of the journey becomes a search for a cause and the discovery of one's identity. A central task in the finding of self is separation or differentiation from family, leaving the security of home and mother to set off on a new adventure. Sharon Daloz Parks states that for a culture of immigrants, like the United States, the dominant experience has been departure and journey without return.²⁴ Like the early explorers coming to a new world, those in American culture tend to "burn the boats" or destroy home base never to return.

While differentiation is particularly salient for young men, for young women, finding one's self requires relation, belonging, and communion. Parks says the development of self-understanding for young women is more richly comprehended when cast in metaphors of home. Parks concludes that this yearning for home is not isolated to women. She suggests that both young men and women are pulled by both the yearning for autonomy *and* home. She states, "There may be polar preference between genders, but each gender has the capacity and the need to fulfill both yearnings."²⁵

The interplay of the metaphors of home and journey is significant in light of trends among many young men today. There remains a tension between separation and connection. The hero must leave on a journey, but he will return home, perhaps many times! The growing number of young men in their twenties and early thirties living with parents suggests a juxtaposition of contrasts. Differentiation and connection appear less clearly delineated for young men today.

²⁴ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 49.

²⁵ Ibid.

Jesus' call "follow me" unites the yearnings for connection and differentiation. The call to follow Jesus is a call to belong to him and to join him in a grand adventure. The fulfillment of vocational purpose is grounded in the dual yearnings for home and mission, the call to belong and the call to go out and bless the world. In the words of Jesus, however, we also find a clear call to leave family and to follow him without reservation (Lk 9:57-62).

For Rohr, the years of ascent are not the end of the journey. The years of ascent and achievement are followed by a life transition toward reflection and holiness, an era of descent. In the second half of life, the passions and attention of men shift from heroic self-effort to the desire for wholeness, the way of holiness and maturity. The energy and affections of a man shifts from physical conquest to the pursuit of wisdom.

The journey metaphor underscores the progressive nature of male development. Self-focus and experimentation in the young-adult years are anticipated and encouraged as a part of the journey of life. Yet a young man will rarely experience full emotional and spiritual maturity in the years of ascent, during the eighteen to thirty age span of life. The elders in the community thus provide stability and guidance for young men through this stage.

Male spirituality does not shy away from the images of warrior or king, as these images reflect important aspects of God's nature. It advocates, unashamedly, masculine power, as a power used for service. Rohr and Martos explain this image of power:

Our sisters are often convinced that patriarchy ("the rule of the fathers") is identical with maleness, and maleness is always about domination, war, greed and control. We have to show them and ourselves that maleness is about power, but power for good, power for others, power for life and creativity.²⁶

²⁶ Rohr and Martos, *From Wild Man to Wise Man*, 200.

Rohr states that young men are fascinated with the power of the warrior. He urges young men to discover the meaning of the spiritual warrior; an image of courage, persistence, stamina and devotion to a cause. It becomes the role of the elder to teach and model this image of power.

In many cultures, the power of the warrior encompasses compassion and care. David Gilmore's anthropological study of men across multiple cultures found that men's ideologies consistently show a selfless generosity even to the point of sacrifice. In his book, *Manhood in the Making*, Gilmore concludes that with few exceptions, "real" men are those who give more than they take, and who serve others. This care across cultures is demonstrated by a man's willingness to defend, protect, and provide for his family and community.²⁷

Young Men as Learners

In a changing world, the warrior spirit is not enough. Young men need to be learners if they desire to succeed in a technological age. As a part of the life journey, young men must acquire basic learning skills for success. Basic communication skills are necessary for young men to contribute meaningfully to society. Academic proficiency in reading and writing are essential to life success, so the passion of the warrior must be combined with the wisdom of the learner.

It is well documented that young men are academically falling behind young women. Furthermore, young men today are not performing as well as their male

²⁷ David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*, 1st ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 229–230.

counterparts twenty and thirty years ago. For many adolescent boys, school is not cool. Getting good grades does not appear masculine. Formal education is failing to motivate young men. A lack of interest in school not only impacts academic performance but will also impact young men's abilities to function and flourish in the workplace and society. There is a growing need for young men to connect academics with life skills. This has become a significant concern for parents, educators, and public policy makers. It should also be a concern for the church. Some conclude that the decline of educational and vocational success in men is attributed to an educational culture that is hostile to men. Christina Hoff Sommers, the author of *The War against Boys*²⁸, is an outspoken advocate for greater support of boys and young men in education. She believes that disproportionate emphasis on feminist studies has led to the ignoring of young men's problems, shifting the explanations for young men's low academic performance from gender struggles to race and class struggles. She concludes that "conventional masculinity", as she puts it, has become politically incorrect. Sommers' suggestions for greater support for young men include single-sex classrooms for boys in public elementary schools, the funding of men's studies programs at colleges and universities, and the establishment of a White House Council of Boys to Men after the pattern of President Obama's 2009 order to establish a similar council for girls and women.

These suggested efforts are aimed at restoring a positive image of men in the culture. Advocates believe that there must a renewed campaign to highlight the unique needs men face in an effort to gain an equal footing in American culture. A group advocating measures similar to those spelled out by Sommers, the Foundation for Male

²⁸ Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men*, 1st ed. (Simon & Schuster, 2001).

Studies, convenes annual symposiums to discuss ways to restore a positive view of men in American culture. Their 2011 conference featured academics, social scientists, and marketing executive, Matthew Willcox, Director of Strategic Planning for DraftFCB.²⁹ Willcox reported on a national Dockers ad campaign he orchestrated called “Wear the Pants.” The campaign targeted young men, calling them to positively take charge of their lives.

The tone of these Males Studies conferences encourages men to “take back” what they have lost. Unfortunately, the tone of the aforementioned movements is adversarial and borders on defensiveness—defending young men as if they are victims. Such a tone does more harm than good. Greater efforts should be made to enhance a positive image of men without creating an attitude of victimization, which offers no benefit for young men in our culture.

A mediating position on the future of young men is found in the work of psychologist, Roy Baumeister. In his book, *Is There Anything Good about Men*, he admits a cultural bias against men in America. He criticizes an educational trend that favors young women at the expense of young men. He acknowledges differences between young men and women, but recognizes that these differences can be viewed as complimentary rather than adversarial. Gender, for Baumeister, should not be viewed in terms of conflict but in terms of respect for each other. Baumeister believes that the key to higher academic performance among young men centers on motivation and on encouraging educational methods under which males thrive.

²⁹ DraftFCB is one of the largest global advertising agency networks. More information about their international work can be found at <http://draftfcb.com>.

Baumeister's research suggests that men innately have a stronger urge to strive for greatness and a competitive drive for success. This drive has led to exceptional contributions to society. He fears that the "feminization" of educational styles is a significant factor in reducing male initiative towards success. He believes that encouraging personal competition and challenge in learning will increase male interest and improve academic performance.

Baumeister believes that academic potential is innately similar between boys and girls. Achievement in science and technology or any academic discipline is not based upon biological aptitudes unique to gender. Instead, Baumeister attributes superior academic performance to motivation: "The differences between men and women—that is, the big, meaningful differences that have an impact on what happens in the world—are in motivation rather than ability."³⁰ He argues that the larger number of men in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields is based on personal motivation rather than gender superiority.

While Baumeister's conclusions suggests that young women can flourish in STEM fields which are more greatly populated by men, the argument also implies that young men have the potential to excel in areas of study dominated by women. Thomas Newkirk, professor of English at the University of New Hampshire believes this is true for reading and writing:

With the exception of the slow start boys get, I doubt that there is any fundamental biological reason why almost all of them can't become proficient readers and writers. I just feel we can't give up on them; we can't accept the idea that they just aren't naturally good at language (any more than we can accept the

³⁰ Roy F. Baumeister, *Is There Anything Good About Men?: How Cultures Flourish by Exploiting Men*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 51.

claim that girls aren't good at math —they're proving now that they can do just fine).³¹

Motivation rather than biological makeup is the key to academic success. Research in education offers important clues that may be transferred from academia to issues of vocation and calling.

In order to discover how to motivate boys in school literacy, educators Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm studied the literacy habits of 49 boys from different backgrounds across the United States. The boys kept reading logs, were interviewed on reading preferences, and engaged in public discussions on what they were reading. The authors applied Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow"³² to encourage teachers to concentrate on creating experiences in class that provide challenges boys can meet, focus on the intrinsic rewards of the experience, set clear goals, provide immediate feedback, and create a sense of competence and control. Their methods created experiences where boys exercised self-motivation.

Smith and Wilhelm found that many "flow" learning experiences occurred in group-learning situations with other young men. They state, "virtually all of the boys reported to having a small close knit group of male friends."³³ Unfortunately, few of these learning moments happened in a school setting.

³¹ Thomas Newkirk, "Understanding and Raising Boys," <http://www.pbs.org/parents/raisingboys/school04.html> (accessed September 22, 2012).

³² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi pioneered research on the study of optimal experience or flow. Flow experiences are those moments of complete concentration and involvement in an activity that create enjoyment, creativity and happiness. The work of Csikszentmihalyi has gained great acclaim within the fields of education, business and popular psychology. See his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1991).

³³ Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Michael Smith, *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*, 1st ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 42.

Smith and Wilhelm recognized that the optimum learning environment for young men included interesting content and immediate feedback in the learning process. They found that video games offered an unlikely example of this blend of content and feedback experiences. The authors' state, "...video games are designed to hook their players by providing flow experiences. Because they get more difficult as players become more accomplished, they provide both a feeling of competence and an appropriate level of challenge. Because the goals are clear, they provide unambiguous feedback."³⁴ The latest technology in gaming also provides opportunity for socialization among a group of players. While the amount of time spent in playing video games must be monitored, video games can be a tool to stimulate learning among young men. In their book *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, Smith and Wilhelm challenge educators to develop similar ways of sequencing the learning experience with action, challenge, and feedback that enhance "flow" experiences. Gaming as a source of learning is an emerging field worthy of further study.

A positive teacher-student relationship has a significant impact on young men and their motivation to learn. A study by Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley confirms the importance of an affective relationship with subject matter and, more importantly, with the teacher as a precondition for successful learning. While love for subject matter is a motivator for learning, their findings strongly indicate that the key to engagement and motivation in school subjects is the relationship with the teacher.³⁵ Michael Thompson, author of *Raising Cain*, echoes this sentiment in a lecture given at the Aspen Institute,

³⁴ Ibid., 51.

³⁵ Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley, "Reaching Boys: An International Study of Effective Teaching Practices," *Phi Delta Kappan* 91, no. 4 (January 2010), 38.

“Girls work to please the teacher, boys only work when they have a strong relationship with the teacher.”³⁶

Hawley and Reichert also introduce the concept of “transitivity” as an important stimulus for learning in men. By “transitivity” they mean, “the capacity of some element of instruction—an element perhaps not normally associated with the lesson at hand—to arouse and hold student interest.”³⁷ Physical activity, group interaction, and competition associated with a learning activity awaken the minds of young men to learn. Exposure to experiences not directly related to the subject matter becomes a potential learning moment. Summer camps and retreats, cross-cultural experiences, and physical activity can spur unexpected insight and moments of learning.

In general, there are few differences in the way young men and women learn. However, discovering methods that motivate young men to develop as learners will help them with vocational discernment and success. It is important to recognize the danger of judging all men or women by rigid categories. Individual giftedness and learning styles must be considered for each unique young adult. At the same time, to seek strategies that will encourage young men as learners is a wise endeavor for the sake of the individual and the well-being of society.

Young Men as Workers

Work plays an important role in the lives of most adults. An occupation or profession helps define a person by giving him or her a sense of identity, meaning, and

³⁶ Michael Thompson, “Raising Boys, Engaging Guys, and Educating Men,” <http://www.aspenideas.org/session/raising-boys-engaging-guys-and-educating-men> (accessed July 1, 2013).

³⁷ Reichert and Hawley, 39.

accomplishment. Along with the metaphorical role of warrior/knight and the role of learner, the role of worker must define young men. The Christian faith offers significant insight into the formation of young men as workers. One's calling from God is manifested in the way a life is lived through work.

Work is a part of the divine plan for human beings created in God's image. God's vision of the worker is as partner with God in the flourishing of all creation (Gn 2:15). The worker is created in Jesus to do good works (Eph 3:20). God calls followers into many vocations to fulfill God's purpose of blessing the world, and gifts of the Spirit are granted to individuals to fulfill that purpose. In partnership with God, the worker finds personal blessing and vocational fulfillment.

In today's culture of consumption, values associated with comfort, convenience, and covetousness predominate. These values influence the attitude of young workers. The current generation of young adults shows a different attitude toward work than previous generations. According to a 2005 MonsterTRAK survey including over 10,000 participants, young adults age 18-30 rated work as less important than young workers in 1982. Today, young adults value interesting work, good benefits, job security, and chances for promotion as the most important characteristics in a job search. These characteristics were generally rated more important than a high income.³⁸ These findings suggest that work values are changing among young people.

The journey through young adulthood provides an important opportunity for young men to find their identity in vocation, and Christian tradition provides a foundation of important values to help them navigate the changing environment of work. Christian

³⁸ Georgia Chao and Philip Gardner, "How Central Is Work to Young Adults?" http://ceri.msu.edu/publications/pdf/work_young_adults.pdf (accessed December 2, 2012).

faith affirms that work is good. God made us for work. Work is not a part of the curse of sin, but a part of God's purpose for all people (Gn 2:15). Jesus worked as a carpenter. In her essay "Why work?", Dorothy Sayers suggests that work should not be viewed, "as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself to the glory of God."³⁹

Christian faith affirms work as an important part of God's mission fulfillment—to bless the world and bring people in touch with God's kingdom. Vocational engagement provides a way for young men to see firsthand that God loves and cares for creation. Much of the way God provides for human needs is through human work. God endows young men with gifts and talents so they can participate. As men adapt from being sole family providers, they must understand that this doesn't diminish the value of their work. They must see themselves as contributors to a more expansive role—as provider to the common good of both family and community.

Tim Keller, pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City, draws several important implications from this. Keller believes that "All work, even menial tasks, has great dignity."⁴⁰ We are God's hands and feet sustaining and caring for creation. This has significant meaning both for young men entering a career, and for those working in jobs that do not match their vocational ideals. Every constructive job has meaning. Keller

³⁹ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Why Work? An Address Delivered at Eastbourne April 23rd, 1942*, 1st ed. (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd, 1942), 1.

⁴⁰ Timothy Keller, "How Faith Affects Our Work," http://redeemercitycity.com/blog/view.jsp?Blog_param=459 (accessed December 4, 2012).

states, “Every good endeavor even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God’s calling, can matter forever.”⁴¹

Young men are called to do work well, thus bringing glory to God. Excellence in work contributes to the transformation of culture and opens up opportunities to go deeper in one’s journey of service to God. Furthermore, young men should show respect to female workers, and to elder workers with more skill and experience than themselves. Youthful arrogance can limit the possibility of learning from those with greater acumen and ability, or from those who do not share their beliefs and experiences.

Work gives young men opportunities to discover, use, and develop God-given gifts, aptitudes, and abilities. As life is a journey, the discernment of vocational purpose is a process. Finding one’s vocational purpose involves the testing of abilities through various work experiences. Work becomes an important place to practice and test out one’s calling. Over time, vocational fulfillment comes together as passion, needs, and skills align. Work experience sets the stage for this alignment to take place.

Christian faith offers a corrective to secular perspectives on success, failure, and boredom at work. Believers base their core identity in Jesus Christ rather than in job performance. Thus, the highs and lows of work can be viewed from this perspective. The drudgery that accompanies boring and uninspiring work is balanced as believers are challenged to work for God’s glory. The gospel motivates believers to think of each job as service to God (Col 3:23) rather than merely a paycheck. Likewise, Christian faith provides an important basis for creating a healthy balance between work and rest. The

⁴¹ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Dutton Adult, 2012), 29.

biblical teaching of Sabbath offers an important corrective for the sloth and workaholic alike.

Family and Community

As young men forge their identities, the images of worker, learner, and warrior/knight are vital. Yet in most instances, young men cannot discover their identities as warrior, learner, and worker alone. They need the love and support of family and community.

Young men need guides that lend support and wisdom for the journey into manhood. While the influence of friends is particularly strong during this stage of life, family and community are pivotal resources. The roles of warrior, learner, and worker are best learned in the context of family and community, including the church. Michael Kimmel writes, “Research suggests we dramatically overestimate the importance of parents in our children’s early lives, downplaying both the impact of heredity and the impact of peer groups and media. Just as important though, I believe we underestimate the role of parents in guy’s lives from adolescence onward, as ballast against the impact of media and peers. And we do so at our peril.”⁴²

An ironic dance of dependence and independence engage the young man and his parents. Studies indicate a rise in young adults living at home. And males age 20 to 30 are more likely than women to live with parents.⁴³ At the same time, adulthood, according to Arnett, has been regarded as a time of separation from parents. This period

⁴²Kimmel, *Guyland*, 271.

⁴³ Richard A. Settersten Jr. and Barbara Ray, “What’s Going on with Young People Today? The Long and Twisting Path to Adulthood,” *The Future of Children* 20, no. 1 (April 1, 2010), 23.

evokes ambivalent emotions toward parents, he explains, that are “nearly the strongest they have for anyone in their lives.”⁴⁴ Young men live in the tension of separation and connection.

The opportunity for parents to inform and guide emerging young men is greater during this period than one might expect. William Pollack, a researcher in men’s studies, encourages active participation by both mothers and fathers in a young man’s journey to adulthood. Pollack remarks, “The absence of a close relationship with a loving mother puts a boy at a disadvantage in becoming a free, confident, and independent man, a man who likes himself and can take risks, and who can form close and loving attachments with people in his adult life.”⁴⁵

In the period of adolescence and early adulthood, there is a common assumption that young men distance themselves emotionally from parents, particularly their fathers. Fathers also seem to pull away from sons as they enter the twenty-something stage. According to Pollack, “we are often taught that adolescents—especially male adolescents—need or want to separate from their families, [yet] this is another dangerous myth about boys.”⁴⁶ Young men need their fathers during this significant transition. Daloz believes that as a part of identity formation, young men must push away from their mothers but need to reach out to father figures for nurture, encouragement, and security.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 71.

⁴⁵ William Pollack, *Real Boys : Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* (New York: Holt, 1999), 82.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁷ Laurent Daloz, “Mentoring Men for Wisdom: Transforming the Pillars of Manhood,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* no. 131 (Fall 2011), 79.

A yearning for the approval of a father or father figure looms large in the minds of young men as they form their identities. Based on their study of college men, Edwards and Jones state that the father-son relationship is most valued of all relationships in this time frame. They write, “The relationships the participants had with their fathers, or lack thereof, were one of the most significant influences on them and their conceptualizations of themselves as men. Gaining their father’s approval was as elusive as it was important to the men.”⁴⁸ Young men yearn for their father’s support. A father who exhibits honest emotions and struggles offers a significant model for a son forging his own identity. A father’s affirmation anchors the ability for a young man to establish himself and form meaningful mature male relationships.

Play between fathers and sons imprints the social and emotional development of young men for a lifetime. As the researchers explain, “when fathers take the time to play zestfully with boys during their infancy and as youngsters, at adolescence these children often need less guidance from adults when handling difficult feelings and are more capable of handling emotionally intense situations in a graceful and socially acceptable way.”⁴⁹ Fathers who play with their children are more likely to encourage their children to embrace risk.⁵⁰ Shared activities and play allow for important bonding, confidence-building and transitive learning opportunities between father and son.

The significant impact of fathers on sons comes with a word of caution. A 2010 study on fathers notes, “In aggregate, men are becoming less intensely involved with and

⁴⁸Keith Edwards and Susan Jones, 219.

⁴⁹ Pollack, *Real Boys*, 114.

⁵⁰ Stephanie Pappas, “The Science of Dad: Engaged Fathers Help Kids Flourish,” *LiveScience.com*, <http://www.livescience.com/37435-fathers-importance-kids.html> (accessed August 8, 2013).

committed to children, whether reflected in higher proportions of never-married men, [or] lower fertility among married couples ... Divorce is particularly important because it often results in a loss or restriction of fathers' ties to children."⁵¹ Kimmel writes, "Over half of all divorced fathers have no contact with their children; even one third of the non-custodial fathers who have visitation provisions have not seen their children in the past year."⁵² Daloz states, "it is clear that a torn or missing relationship with the father touches deep pain, often acknowledged only years later."⁵³ Many young men face their future without the benefit of a caring, supportive father.

In light of these challenges, the importance of a larger community is extremely important for the success of young men. Young men want to be connected; rarely do they wish to cut their ties from family and the community of teachers, coaches and ministers. Kimmel states, "...parents cannot do it alone. Part of that help has to come from the communities in which we live. As a society, we must be active, engaged, and interventionist, helping America's guys find a path of emotional authenticity, moral integrity and physical efficacy, and thereby ease themselves more readily into an adulthood in which they can truly stand tall."⁵⁴

Strong support from parents and other adult mentors was a common factor among highly purposeful youth in William Damon's study. In many cases, an interested adult other than a parent set in motion a path to purpose. Damon writes, "It is often an outside

⁵¹ Settersten Jr., Richard A. and Cancel-Tirado, "Fatherhood as a Hidden Variable in Men's Development and Life Courses," *Research in Human Development* 7, no. 2 (2010), 89.

⁵² Michael Kimmel, *The Gendered Society*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176.

⁵³ Daloz, "Mentoring Men for Wisdom: Transforming the Pillars of Manhood," 80.

⁵⁴ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 21.

adult who introduces the purpose or encourages the young person to take up the cause.”⁵⁵ Highly purposeful youth look for multiple mentors. His study of highly purposeful youth reveals that adult interest is a stronger motivator than peer support.⁵⁶ These findings hold great significance when applied to a church context. The church is afforded a unique opportunity to support and encourage young men in their development as adults. It is important to consider how responsive local churches will be to this opportunity.

During their twenties and thirties, men should be testing their strength and dreaming big dreams about their contributions to the world. They should be engaging in competition, achievement, and adventure. They should be challenged by their elders to a life of passion and purpose. The metaphors of warrior, learner, and worker should shape a young man’s vision of who he is called to become. The positive call of Jesus to follow beckons them to a life of service beyond themselves. Yet many young men appear to be stalled in their journeys. Many lack motivation. They seem ill equipped to adapt to the shifting expectations of manhood. They need help, encouragement, and guidance.

While education, community, and family support are necessary, this support appears inadequate in light of the magnitude of the need. The church as a representative of Jesus has an opportunity to step into the void through spiritual renewal and mentoring support.

Many young adults are turning away from the church because the church appears irrelevant to their needs. But the church has the potential to become a vital tool in the transformation of young men, spiritually and vocationally. The church can provide spiritual and vocational guidance for the development of these young men. Through the

⁵⁵ Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 101.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

resources of the church, young men can find vocational fulfillment that has impact on the world. An important question remains: Will the church step up to the challenge to teach and mentor young men in their journeys? Can the church help young men find their way through personal vocations? The next chapter will discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the church in its call to help young men find purpose.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHURCH AND THE CALLING OF YOUNG MEN

Young men need help in their discovery of meaning and purpose as they journey through the decade of their twenties. This life-defining decade poses significant challenges as they sort out their identity in a changing culture. Parents, educators, and employers can serve as interested partners as they integrate questions of purpose with everyday life decisions. The church also shares great concern for their welfare and spiritual development.

Sadly, research indicates that young adults are less inclined to view church as a valued partner in their discovery of purpose and life direction. In increasingly greater numbers, young adults see the church as irrelevant to their needs and vocational interests. As a result, the spiritual and relational resources of the Christian community that could help them find purpose and vocational meaning are being passed over by many young people.

This gap must be a concern for churches and Christian leaders. The church needs to reverse this trend, taking responsibility for the growing disconnect between faith and work. Furthermore, personal faith development must remain a ministry priority when discipling young men. Teaching the value of vocational contributions to the “common good” is a vision the church should embrace. Furthermore, the church must demonstrate their love for young people by equipping them to contribute through their work as a part of their spiritual development.

This chapter will outline reasons why young adults are disconnecting from church. It will also highlight how the integration of faith and work/vocation provides a

valuable resource for young men in their pursuit of purpose and meaning. I propose that the church serve young men by helping them discover their “vocational sweet spot” through a focus on the mission of God, the needs of the world, and development of individual skills and gifts. Churches that provide spiritual and vocational direction to young men must view this as key to the mission of the church. Kenda Dean says, “The single most important thing a church can do to cultivate missional imagination in young people is to develop one as a church, reclaiming our call to follow Christ into the world as envoys of God’s self-giving love.”¹ Helping young men in their call to follow Jesus begins with a call to the church to embrace the call. Mature men in the faith must first accept the challenge themselves, then commit to guiding and mentoring young men in their discovery processes.

Bleak News for the Church and Young Adults

Current research shows a steady drop in church involvement among young adults. A recent Pew research poll indicates that the number of Americans who don’t identify with a religion is growing at a rapid pace. Leading this trend away from formal religion are young adults under thirty. A third of adults under 30 have no religious affiliation (32%), compared with just one-in-ten who are 65 and older (9%). And young adults today are much more likely to be unaffiliated than previous generations at a similar stage in their lives.²

¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 195.

² “‘Nones’ on the Rise” <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx> (accessed October 9, 2012).

This trend includes many young adults formerly involved in church activities. In a 2011 survey, David Kinnaman, President of the Barna research group, reveals that 59 percent of young people who were regular church attendees have currently dropped out of attending church. Thirty-eight percent say they have gone through a period when they significantly doubted their faith. Fifty-seven percent say they are less active in church compared to when they were fifteen.³

In a 1997-2010 study, Kinnaman found that “the problem is not that this generation has been less church-ed than children and teens before them; the problem is that much spiritual energy fades away during a crucial decade of life – the twenties.”⁴ He calls this decade the black hole of church attendance in which there is a forty-three percent drop off between teen attendance and the early adult years. This number represents eight million twenty-somethings who were active church goers as teenagers but who won’t be engaged in church by their thirtieth birthdays. This report is a sad commentary on the influence of church on young men and women in these formative years.

Chuck Bomar, a pastor and college-age church consultant, believes the departure from church begins before students leave high school. Several research projects support this conclusion. Kara Powell and the Fuller Youth Institute Group studied faith and the transition from high school to college. Powell concludes that forty to fifty percent of students who graduate from a church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in

³ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

college.⁵ Somewhat more promising is their claim that thirty to sixty percent of these youth group graduates will return to faith during the concluding stage of emerging adulthood.⁶

The 2002-2005 National Study of Youth and Religion also cites the “cracks” in the professed faith of youth. Interviews of 3,300 youth aged 13-17 (which make these youth in their mid-twenties today) suggested that most American teenagers did not care much about religion, were very inarticulate about their faith, and practiced a religion that was more moralistic and deistic than the biblical Christian faith.⁷ Princeton professor of youth and culture, Kenda Creasy Dean, in her book, *Almost Christian*, levels a judgment that this blasé youth faith is the “result of a watered down gospel so devoid of God’s self-giving love in Jesus Christ, so immune to the sending love of the Holy Spirit that it might not be Christianity at all?”⁸ The religion experienced by many young people in the church has been described as “moralistic therapeutic deism,” the worship of a god who wants people to be nice, who is generally personally uninvolved except when needed, and who allows everybody to make it to heaven.

For young people in their twenties, peer relationships and social media are shaping core values and identity development more than academic and religious institutions. According to sociologist Christian Smith, “Most emerging adults live this crucial decade of life surrounded mostly by peers—people of the same age and in the

⁵ Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 17–21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

same boat—who [do not] have ... more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective or balance than they do.”⁹ For many, peer relationships exert greater influence on life choices than parents or prior religious training.

Young people are trying to make sense of their world and seeking new realities to guide their lives. Sadly, the church contributes little to this search. David Kinnaman examines six problems the young generation experiences in current church life. Young adults view the church as: overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive, and doubtless. His research indicates that young people feel the church to be overprotective and isolationist. Young people value creativity and cultural engagement; in contrast, the church seems restrictive. Kinnaman says, “They want to reimagine, recreate, rethink, and they want to be entrepreneurs, innovators, starters. ... The church is seen as a creativity killer where risk-taking and being involved in culture are anathema.”¹⁰

Among young people in this life stage, the church also seems shallow and boring. “Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults, leaving them with no idea of the gravity and power of following Christ. Few young Christians can coherently connect their faith with their gifts, abilities, and passions. In other words, the Christianity they received does not give them a sense of calling.”¹¹

⁹ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 234.

¹⁰ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 92.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Jesus called his disciples to follow him and commit themselves to the mission of the kingdom. The actions of Jesus are a sharp contrast to the image of the church expressed by many young adults. A recovery of the core of the gospel mission is needed. The message of the church must reflect the summons of Jesus to full surrender to his mission. It must challenge our youth to offer themselves, their talents, and their passions to bless the world. The church environment must change to encourage risk and discovery.

Churches will have greater effect as they consciously guide young men toward what Amy Sherman calls their “vocational sweet spot.” The sweet spot, according to Sherman, is “that place where our gifts and passions intersect with God’s priorities and the world’s needs.”¹² Three overlapping circles represent these three important dimensions of vocational discovery. The vocational sweet spot is the place where the three converge. The goal of the Christian community is to teach and guide believers toward their unique center. By initiating practical steps, a church can help believers integrate these three dimensions to find vocational purpose.

Four important factors are vital in aiding the progress of young men toward this center: 1) an environment or “call culture” that engages young men in the mission of God, 2) exposure to the needs of the world, 3) practical discipleship that encourages the discovery of personal skill and gifts, and 4) mentoring opportunities that include older men as guides for younger men. A church that guides young men in these areas will greatly enhance their ability to discover vocational purpose and meaning in life.

¹² Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 107.

A Church Culture of Mission and Calling

Each local church is a unique social system. Theology, history, practice, and people shape the identity and culture of a church. Andy Crouch describes culture as what we make of the world God created. He believes that God gives humans the ability to make meaning and create culture. Crouch states that a culture, “defines the horizons of the possible and the impossible in very concrete, tangible ways.”¹³ A church forms its culture around what it values, its practices, and its activities. Few churches prioritize the value of work and vocational purpose as an important dimension of their practices and culture. Congregations that value calling and work create a receptive environment for young men. In this atmosphere, they create opportunities to integrate the call of Jesus and vocational purpose.

A call culture prioritizes the mission of God; a mission to transform the world through God’s love through the gospel of Jesus Christ. In an earlier chapter, I discussed the connection between the mission of God and personal calling and vocation. From Abraham to Jesus, personal call and mission were vitally linked. This biblical theme must be commonly articulated in the local church. Alan Hirsch describes a missional church as “a community of God’s people that defines itself by, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God’s mission to the world.”¹⁴ A church focused on the mission of God organizes its practices, values, and vision around this biblical call. The church nurtures people with an outward focus. As such, personal purpose is fulfilled within God’s broader kingdom mission. As David Jacobus Bosch writes, “Mission is seen

¹³ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 34.

¹⁴ Alan Hirsch and Lance Ford, *Right Here, Right Now: Everyday Mission for Everyday People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 66.

as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is a church because there is a mission. ... To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."¹⁵ The whole church, with its variety of talents and skills, is sent as God's missionary to the world.

This missional concept is a shift for many established churches that have understood mission as just one of many departments in the church. In contrast, Bob Roberts, pastor of NorthWood Church in Keller Texas, prioritizes mission as the central guiding principle for all of his congregational goals and plans. For Roberts, all members of the church are called to participate in God's mission through every dimension of their lives. Roberts encourages his members to apply their vocational abilities at their workplace, in their community, and also in global and local church projects. At NorthWood every aspect of life contributes to the mission of God. Robert's philosophy is summed up in the introductory words on the NorthWood website, "At NorthWood, we believe that God created you to be unique, and to fulfill a unique plan and purpose for your life. Our goal is to help you identify your God-given gifts and talents, and use those talents for a greater purpose."¹⁶ Every area of life, including work and career, can be aligned to the greater purpose of God's mission.

The call culture at NorthWood is woven into every ministry area. Men are invited to participate in the men's ministry with a challenge to follow God's calling. They are asked:

¹⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

¹⁶ "Find and Fulfill Your Calling at Northwood!" *Northwood Church*. http://northwoodchurch.org/who_we_are.php (accessed March 18, 2012).

Men, what dream, vision or passion has God put in your heart? We're here to help you transform your life into one God can use to accomplish great things! Whether through fun events, learning opportunities, or weekend conferences and retreats, you'll not only connect with other men who are seeking the same things you are, but you'll find the hope and encouragement to pursue God's calling in your life.¹⁷

Following Jesus and finding a personal calling is woven into every aspect of congregational life.

In 2010, I attended the Global Faith Forum hosted by NorthWood church. Roberts invited Christians, Jews, and Muslims to come together in multifaith dialogue. Roberts enlisted various speakers to stimulate conversation between the faith communities, celebrating the common bonds and appreciating the clear differences. The conference offered important training for Christian's who seek to fulfill Christ's call through informed interaction with other faith traditions.

God's call to every believer was a core theme at the summit: Christian believers were encouraged to view every domain of work life as a tool in serving the needs of all people in Jesus' name. Roberts highlighted a group of business leaders and educators from his congregation who are modeling marketplace excellence and "glocal" mission ("glocal" being a word Roberts uses to describe the missional movement that includes local and global interests). At NorthWood, Roberts and other church leaders value believers who are serving in all types of professions or "domains" in society. God's kingdom mission to bless the world is fulfilled through their work and passion.

Churches with a missional perspective hold a key to awakening young men to God's call and to vocational purpose. Alan Hirsch views this focus as essential, writing: "Unless the church recovers its role as a subversive, missionary movement, by re-

¹⁷ "Men's Ministry," *Northwood Church*. http://northwoodchurch.org/adults_ministry.php?id=5 (accessed December 12, 2012).

instilling the vision within the people of God that we are all indeed God's missionary people, the present and the subsequent generations will find very little interest in our static agendas."¹⁸ God naturally calls people to work in all domains of society; this is talked about, encouraged and modeled. In this environment, discovering your calling becomes a natural part of the discipleship journey. Several distinctive characteristics from churches like NorthWood create a "call culture."

First, missional congregations foster a spirit of expectancy and encourage productive exploration of vocational purpose. They understand the church's role is a partnership with the Holy Spirit to nurture and encourage the discovery process. This attitude is evident in their leaders, in their worship gatherings, and in the atmosphere of the church.

Such congregations acknowledge that calling comes from God. They teach the importance of surrender to God's vision and purpose for individuals and the church. James Fowler warns of a modern heresy purporting that individuals have within themselves the capacity to create a fulfilled, self-actualized life. As Fowler writes, "Vocation is something that God's Spirit works and re-works in persons."¹⁹ Missional churches acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is forming the call and vocational purpose of the individual.

Second, a local church with a call culture affirms the universal call of God to all believers. Traditionally, "calling" referred only to those summoned to the priesthood, pastoral ministry, or career missions. Yet churches with a call culture teach that all of

¹⁸ Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 64.

¹⁹ James W Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 101.

God's people are called by God to the work of the kingdom through many dimensions of society. God has uniquely designed and gifted all believers. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism captures the inclusive mission for all believers, "The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world."²⁰ The mission of God is fulfilled through all believers in all walks of life. All of God's people are transformed by God so that they may transform society.

Many religious people still need to overcome the false dichotomy by which some professions are viewed as secular and unspiritual, and others as sacred. Dallas Willard states, "There is no sacred secular divide except what we have created."²¹ He suggests that the church must universalize the traditional category of "holy orders." All believers should approach their vocation, whether farming, industry, law, education, banking, journalism, or other, with the same zeal given to evangelism, pastoral care, or traditional "missionary" work.

A third characteristic of a call culture involves a renewed understanding of the term "laity". In New Testament parlance, "laity" describes all the people of God. As stated above, churches too often operate from an understanding that non-clergy vocations are secondary to the callings of clergy. Thus, many assume that the role of the laity is to assist the clergy in their work of ministry. This minimizes the expression of gifts and vision for the vast majority of people, stifling the creativity and talents of many in the church. In general, the polarity between clergy and laity is a significant factor in young

²⁰ "The Lausanne Movement." <http://www.lausanne.org/en/> (accessed July 30, 2013).

²¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 215.

adults drifting away from the church. Kinnaman states that many young professionals and “creatives” do not feel that their gifts are appreciated or needed in the church.²²

As a high school student in the 70s, I found my denomination placed great emphasis on the calling of men and women to full-time ministry. Each summer at the regional summer camp meeting, a service was devoted to encouraging young people to answer the call of God to full-time Christian service. At the close of the service, those who sensed a call were invited to come forward for special prayer. Pastors and laity would gather around the chosen few and pray prayers of blessing and encouragement. It was a meaningful and significant affirmation of the call of God upon my life. But upon further reflection, I realize the church sent a message to the other 90% of my peers: God is not as interested in your occupational pursuits. This message fosters a “second-class attitude” among many Christians, who are “just laymen,” and is a manifestation of flawed thinking. By this practice, the church diminishes the significance of the gospel in the public life of many believers and devalues the full value of calling for all.

Churches that value the gifts and talents of all believers will encourage vocational discovery in professions and other jobs. Churches can help all believers discover who God has made them to be. Individual gifts are given to enable the whole church so the church might fulfill its mission not only to itself but to the world. The roles of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher (Eph 4:11) equip the church to function effectively, but these gift are not intended to exalt the status of some over others. An appreciation of the call and giftedness of all believers brings a fresh creativity and dynamic to a local congregation.

²² Kinnaman, 30.

A heightened appreciation for work is the fourth distinctive in a church with a vocational vision. A church with a call culture will provide clear, definitive, objective teaching about work and calling that values believers who serve and work in all spheres of society. Work is understood as a gift from God. Labor is honorable to God. Work is an expression of God's grace extended to the world as loving service, and is not independent of mission. It is interwoven with the mission of God. The gospel reminds us that the fruit of our work brings glory to God and witnesses to God's care for God's creation. When we work well, we foster the human flourishing of others and the kingdom of God is advanced.

Good work in all domains fulfills the two great commandments to love God and to love others. The church must rediscover that work is a major instrument in God's providential care for people's needs. God's loving care comes to us largely through the labor of others. As James 1:17 states, "every good and perfect work comes from above." The practical extension of God's grace to the world comes, in most cases, from the fruit of our labor. A greater emphasis is often placed on giving financially to aid the needs of others. But labor is what provides people with funds to give to those in need. Work adds value to others and to the community as a whole. Local churches can help recast work as a means of witness and service.

With this understanding, the vision of the church is enlarged. The mission of the church expands beyond only equipping believers for evangelistic witness to equipping people for public life and vocational purpose. Many pastors and churches maintain a practice of training people solely in areas of prayer, Bible study, and evangelism, failing to appreciate the challenges facing believers in their work life. They seem more

concerned about how their congregation will serve inside the church environment than in equipping people to serve in the public sphere.

Unlike NorthWood Church, most local churches give little attention to equipping people for excellence in work life. Amy Sherman says, few congregations “are actually facilitating ‘serving God with your talent’ in an intentional, sustained, practical and strategic way that pays attention to members’ vocational gifts, passions and power.”²³ As a result, most young people within the church are bereft of role models prioritizing service in the broader culture. This missed opportunity sends a message to young adults that faith and work have little connection. Sherman states, “We must do a better job of inspiring our members about the role they can play in the mission of God and equipping them to live missionally through their vocation.”²⁴

As a result of this lack, disciples find limited support for their work-related missions. For example, many business-minded disciples find local churches haven’t prepared them for service in their professions. Yet as believers excel in “secular work,” they can function as salt and light (Mt 5:13-16), being Christ-like in work environments that are at times antithetical to Christian faith. The church should equip people for this.

A call culture also understands that the local church is one small part of the larger kingdom mission. Cooperation among faith communities sends a positive message to young adults of Christian unity through service to global and local needs. Non-profit organizations founded by Christians like charity:water and Not for Sale are captivating the imaginations of young people. At a recent Christian conference, 60,000 young adults raised over three million dollars for efforts to help end worldwide human trafficking.

²³ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

These organizations attract young people with their vision and energy. They create opportunities for young adults to give a tangible witness of their Christian faith through service and financial support. These organizations encourage participation and welcome entrepreneurs, and they enlist creative people with business and marketing skills to help achieve their missions. These groups seek people from all spheres of society to participate in God's mission to bless the world. Many young people desire to make a difference through their gifts, skills, and passions. Young men must be challenged to look beyond their own needs, and be invited into a larger vision of service. Rather than viewing other ministries as threats to the church's mission, the church must connect with the many ways young men can engage in the global mission of blessing the world. Worship, community, service, and evangelism are essentials in the work of the local church but the church must expand its vision. God's people are called to bring the faithful presence of Jesus to the marketplace, school, and public square, displaying truth, beauty, and justice in all domains of society. The church with this atmosphere will create a compelling culture that welcomes young men into the discovery of God's call for their lives.

Conversion and Vocational Discovery

A call culture awakens young men to the realization that a life devoted to Jesus—whatever its shape and context—contributes to God's mission for the world. Participation in the mission of God motivates young men to move from passivity to action. The Spirit of God works through the imaginations of young people, with their individual skills and gifts, to make a difference, and this is energizing. For young men motivated by

competition and challenge, a call to join in God's mission is a call to action. Exposure to mission opportunities is an important first step; yet a passion to serve is incomplete apart from a commitment to follow Jesus. The call of Jesus requires a decisive step of faith.

Church leaders must reconsider the meaning of conversion and their methods of evangelism as they encourage young people in their commitment to follow Jesus. The old conversion/profession paradigm in which a seeker prays a prayer and "crosses over the line" of faith seems narrow and reductionistic to many young adults. Responding to the call of Jesus is more complex and progressive than merely praying a prayer of commitment. Instead, young men and women need to be taught that faith is learning to live a life of trust in Jesus. God invites followers into a bigger story of redemption and restoration for the world as well as one's personal life. A passion to serve the needs of the world becomes the means of grace to awaken the need for an ongoing relationship of trust in Jesus for life's decisions and direction. Leonard Sweet states, "Faith is not a commitment to a cause. Faith is the acceptance of an invitation to join Jesus on his journey and to live life in the mystery of God made flesh."²⁵ To live life in the mystery requires a dynamic relationship of trust that will shape life decisions and direction. This journey of trust in Jesus leads followers to realign their loyalties, making Jesus lord of their lives. All dimensions of life, including work, play, and future plans come under this lordship. Hirsch and Ford write that the source of abundant life and joy lies in "following his (Jesus) lead regarding how we dispense (spend) our lives. This is fundamental to what it really means for Jesus to be our lord."²⁶

²⁵ Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 141.

²⁶ Hirsch and Ford, *Right Here, Right Now*, 79.

There are many contrasting methods employed to invite people into a relationship with Jesus. While millennials are resistant to the public confession of faith, many young men are drawn to a direct challenge to devote themselves to Jesus Christ. Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill, a growing church in the Seattle area, finds great results in a direct evangelistic approach to young men. In a video interview, Driscoll stated that Mars Hill places an “evangelistic bull’s-eye on young men in their 20”s.²⁷ His core message to young men is “come to Jesus” and “come to the fatherhood of God.” He states that many young men are converted and commit to radical life change in response to this core message.

Driscoll’s personality and style are controversial. He is an outspoken advocate of a clear-cut, complementarian view of gender roles. He describes his position: “men and women are partners in every area of life and ministry together. Though equal, men and women have complementary and distinct gender roles so that men are to lovingly lead and head their homes like Jesus, and only men can be pastors in the church.”²⁸ Driscoll believes men are given vital responsibility to lead in the church and in the home. He challenges men to accept these responsibilities. Critics of Driscoll warn that his dogmatic approach is a dangerous misinterpretation of scripture that encourages the domination of men over women. Driscoll’s interpretation of Scripture rejects the possibility of women in church leadership. There is a concern that this view creates an environment that promotes male dominance, an unhealthy adaption of the gospel. Yet, men and women

²⁷ Mark Driscoll, “Manhood & the Fatherhood of God,” The Resurgence. <http://theresurgence.com/2011/09/09/manhood-the-fatherhood-of-god> (accessed September 11, 2013).

²⁸ Mark Driscoll, “Complementarianism,” The Resurgence. <http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/29/complementarianism> (accessed June 20, 2013).

alike are drawn to his teaching and his direct call to follow Jesus. Driscoll says that Mars Hill is discipling men to love their families, wives, and children. Because of the theological differences and Driscoll's strong personality, it is easy to discount any of the positive impact Mars Hill is having on the development of young men. While I do not agree with much of Driscoll's "New Calvinism," including his limited view of women in ministry, I am impressed by the commitment of Mars Hill to reach young men with the gospel.

Affirming Jesus Christ as the model for young men must be the core emphasis. Young men transformed by the love of Jesus will create positive relationships, families, churches, and workplaces. God's self giving love in Jesus Christ serves as the model for young men who choose to join the mission of God.

Discipleship and the Discovery of Vocational Purpose

A declaration of faith in Jesus begins a journey of discipleship with Jesus. In this relationship, the mission of God, and the believer's role in that mission, will emerge. David Kinnamen writes, "Following Jesus means finding a vocation."²⁹ Followers commit to be taught and lead by Jesus. For Dallas Willard, discipleship is best described through the metaphor of apprenticeship. Willard says, "Jesus has made a way for us into easy and happy obedience, into personal fulfillment. And that way is apprenticeship to him. It is Christian 'discipleship.' His gospel is a gospel for life and Christian

²⁹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 210.

discipleship.”³⁰ Vocation and purpose in life is discovered by “being with” and learning from the master. Young men must be invited into this ‘being with’ relationship.

Discipleship involves bringing the whole of life into this relationship, including what we do and how we live on a daily basis. In this regard, discipleship and vocation converge in the living out of mission. The evidence of a life lived with Jesus is one that reflects the redemptive love of God in the world. The Spirit of Jesus helps equip a believer to serve and bless the world. Following Jesus will help lead the believer toward one’s vocational “sweet spot”: the place where one’s truest desires, skills, and gifts meet the world’s needs.

For Willard, an apprentice of Jesus learns from the master craftsman how to live, in simple, practical ways. Willard explains this relationship: “Being with Jesus implies a desire to learn from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I.”³¹ Meaning in work and vocation emerges from “being with Jesus,” and the discovery of personal calling becomes the fruit of a growing relationship with Jesus. The secular models of vocation miss this important element. Church and faith communities must emphasize the importance of this “being with” as a vital component in the vocational fulfillment of young men.

Unfortunately, many discipleship programs fail to apply a practical “being with” relationship to work life. Kinnaman laments that there is “an utter lack of clarity that many young people have regarding what God is asking them to do with their lives.” He views it as a modern tragedy that young Christians raised in a church environment have

³⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 273.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

no idea how faith connects with one's work-life.³² The church will be ignored and rendered irrelevant if it cannot help make this connection. According to Kinnaman, twenty-somethings are turned off by faith that does not integrate with life, "They want to follow Jesus in a way that connects with the world they inhabit, to partner with God outside the walls of the church, and to pursue Christianity without separating themselves from the world."³³ Young people want to know how following Jesus impacts their daily life and work.

The "be with" Jesus principle enhances work and vocation, even if the type of employment is not in one's vocational sweet spot. With the limitations of the current job environment, many young men are not granted ideal employment opportunities. They are necessarily approaching work and careers with lowered expectations. As a result, many appear unmotivated and passive in their pursuit of meaningful work.

While work requires a significant investment of time and energy, many Christians approach work with a negative attitude. Yet with the principle of being with Jesus, work hours can become a valued time for discipleship. A career or job becomes a crucial place to practice the apprenticeship of Jesus. Through work, we together raise the level of our culture, keep its order, supply its needs, and point to its promise of better living for more of the world's peoples. Berghoef and DeKoster describe work as a decision of will, a discipline. "Such willed acts of service not only make and sustain the fabric of civilization and culture, but also develop the soul."³⁴ All believers must reimagine their

³² Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 207.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, "Work & Play," *Acton Institute*.
<http://www.acton.org/pub/religion-liberty/volume-23-number-1/work-play> (accessed June 10, 2013).

work life as a training ground for their growing faith, bringing the presence of Jesus into daily experience. Even common work life forms the disciple as work serves to bless the world and create a platform for witness. Personal purpose can be found even in menial jobs.

As young men enter the workforce, they need practical guidance and training in how their work connects to life as a disciple of Jesus. According to James D. Hunter, “Young people in the early stages of a job or career cannot figure out their formation by themselves either. At all levels, formation into a vision of human flourishing requires intentionality and the social, economic, intellectual and cultural resources of a healthy, mutually dependent, and worshipping community provided for Christians by the church.”³⁵ Biblical and doctrinal teaching is not enough; churches must also equip believers to apply their faith to all aspects of their lives, including their work life. The goal of the church must be to equip young people to witness to the love of Jesus and to use their creative gifts and skills for cultural transformation. Because few young men are inherently equipped for this task, they will need training and coaching.

The Mission of the Church and Vocational Purpose

Christian communities must focus more attention on equipping believers to see the value of work. Since work is an important place for disciples to impact the world, the church must prepare them for service. This is true in the development of young men.

Social scientist, James Davison Hunter sums up the mission of the church in this way:

The church is to go into all realms of social life: in volunteer and paid labor-skilled and unskilled labor, the crafts, engineering, commerce, art, law architecture, teaching, health care, and service. Indeed, the church should be

³⁵Hunter, *To Change the World*, 283.

sending people out in these realms—not only discipling those in these fields by providing theological resources to form them well, but in fact mentoring and providing financial support for young adults who are gifted and called into these vocations. When the church does not send people out to these realms and when it does not provide the theologies that make sense of work and engagement in these realms, the church fails to fulfill the charge to “go into all the world.”³⁶

It is critical that young men under the influence of Christian leaders are taught that their gifts and aspirations about work can be used for the glory of God and in service to God’s mission. In the discipleship process, finding the “vocational sweet spot” and learning to work with excellence must be a greater priority.

In some cases, God will lead people to work and service completely within a church context. Denominations tend to specialize in training young people who feel called to Christian service within the church. However, most believers will find a career path distinct from their service in church ministries; a majority of believers must learn to integrate their love and service to God both through the church and through secular engagement. Even churches with a priority on mission assume God will lead many disciples into areas of cultural transformation beyond the scope of the church. Ministers to young adults can help prepare disciples for their careers and vocations beyond the church walls.

For many, the needs of the world inspire vocational direction. God awakens young people to the needs of the world through their experiences and feelings. For the view of Tim Keller, the first step in the discovery of life calling is the awareness of needs. He believes affinity is the foremost indicator of God’s calling. He describes affinity as the concrete needs one is drawn to or what moves one to action. The

³⁶ Ibid., 257.

awareness of a need can focus one's attention, abilities, and gifts toward meeting that need. Personal gifts and abilities find purpose when applied to the needs of the world.³⁷

Passivity and a lack of vocational vision among young adult males can be countered by an exposure to the needs of others. Involving young men in projects and activities that expose them to the needs and opportunities around them is an important tool in moving them toward a vocational sweet spot. For most young men, exposure to human need through immersion experiences awakens a sense of calling and purpose. The supplementing of real-life experiences with teaching and peer dialogue offers a positive learning method for young men. In Luke 10, Jesus sent an inexperienced group of young men into the surrounding communities to practice fulfilling his mission. Important teaching and discussion followed the field experience. Jesus used the expedition as a training session for the future.

Two high school graduates in my church youth group, Alex Grob and Kevin Bell, served eight weeks in India. They entered a cross-cultural adventure with little formal instruction. The experience was life-changing and formative for their future vocation and calling. On their return, Kevin enrolled at a local community college majoring in computer science. He works part-time in a local restaurant. While he's not pursuing a career in missions or social work, his future vocational choices are being shaped by his mission experience. Alex moved to China to teach English as a second language. His overseas experiences reinforced his call to serve in a cross-cultural way.

Many churches, universities, and mission organizations provide global and cross-cultural immersion experiences for youth. Most of the opportunities focus on service to

³⁷Timothy Keller, "Discerning Your Calling," *The Resurgence*.
http://cdn.theresurgence.com/files/2011/06/06/Vocation-Discerning_Your_Calling.pdf?1307425464
(accessed August 1, 2013).

inner-city and global needs. This priority is fitting. However, there is also value in offering experiences for young people interested in service in other domains of culture; business, government, arts, and education. Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City has captured this vision. They sponsor vocational groups that provide a Christ-centered forum for industry-specific dialogue, fellowship, collaboration, and innovation, to support individual discipleship and cultural renewal. Recently, their Faith and Work ministry sponsored *Re-Imagine NYC*, inviting participants to experience various cultural events. The events highlighted local needs and the work of God in various domains of New York life. The faith and work initiative is currently developing three-month-long Vocational Intensives that will provide an in-depth look at career paths through the lens of the gospel. These initiatives offer people with similar interests a new commons in which to discover and discuss the integration of faith and work. The new commons or vocational gathering places create an environment for young men to interact with like-minded professionals in discussion and engagement with the culture. Redeemer is providing significant resources for the development of work and life. This model can be adapted for use in other Christian communities. In this way, the Great Commission can be understood not only geographically but as a summons to reach all realms of social life.

The Discovery of God's Design through Strengths and Giftedness

Specific training about individual strengths and giftedness is an important component in the vocational discovery process. There are a number of helpful tools for this process. The church, and ministers to young adults, can offer significant guidance in this area. A survey of many tools has led me to several recommendations for church use.

The Life Calling Conceptual Model developed by Bill Mallard, director of the Center for Life Calling and Leadership at Indiana Wesleyan University, offers a comprehensive model of calling. The model explores three crucial life components: foundational values, unique design, and personal leadership. The foundational values include faith, character, and service. The unique design qualities addressed are strengths, passions, and experiences. The personal leadership component includes mission, vision, and action. Mallard developed a textbook that details the content of the course along with additional website resources. First-year students enroll in a life-calling course developed by Mallard, in which the concepts of the life-calling model and discovery process are introduced. The curriculum has also been adapted for use in Christian high schools.

The Life Calling textbook is comprehensive and detailed. It provides a strong biblical and theological framework for the discussion of calling and personal design. It is created for an academic setting and is designed to be used as part of a four-year focus on calling on college campuses. Local church leaders will find the textbook a great overview of calling and useful for church communities committed to a focus on vocational discovery and development. Yet this systematic and academic approach to calling may be overwhelming for many young adults outside the university setting.

Another valuable resource in the discovery of specific work and vocational opportunities was developed by Ralph Mattson and Arthur Miller. Their book, *Finding a Job You Can Love*, offers a specific, practical approach to creating a life-work plan. Their resource blends Christian discipleship, human resources, and business practices into a discovery process.

Miller, founder of the consulting firm People Management International, developed a vocational discovery process called SIMA (System for Identifying Motivated Abilities). SIMA is based on the idea that God has a unique design for individuals, and that the design can be revealed through a survey of one's lifetime achievement history. Identifying personal strengths and vocationally significant motivations is the purpose of SIMA. As Mattson and Miller write, "every act or event in your personal or organizational life that you would describe as outstanding is the result of a God-given gift."³⁸ By observing themes, patterns, and behaviors, a person will discover their own unique "motivational pattern of giftedness." According to Miller, the script is "motivational, because it was driven; pattern, because it was systemic; giftedness, because it was innate and not developed." Miller believes the discovery of one's motivated abilities and gifts adds significant meaning to work. It can transform a job into a personal mission.

In their book, Matteson and Miller offer a modified version of SIMA for personal self-discovery, complete with surveys and questionnaires. Various assessments and questionnaires probe past and present experience for vocational discovery. The discovery process connects the pursuit of vocational meaning with core theological principles. Mattson and Miller offer a local church a practical tool that can be used as a self-guided study or in a small-group setting. Though the book was written in 1982, it speaks to the needs of young adult males today. The book affirms the belief that one can fulfill God's purpose and design in multiple ways, including through work outside the scope of church. The authors are conscious, however, of the important role the church plays in

³⁸ Ralph Mattson and Arthur F Miller, *Finding a Job You Can Love* (Phillipsburg: P&R Pub., 1999), 57.

fulfilling God's mission and providing a context for personal fulfillment through work. They appreciate the unique value of both natural motivational gifts and spiritual gifts.

The Clifton StrengthsFinder³⁹ is a complimentary tool to Mattson and Miller's model. StrengthsFinder is a popular and effective tool to identify natural, recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behaviors around thirty-four themes. An online assessment identifies a respondent's five dominant strengths. The assessment also recommends strategies for maximizing these dominant talents. Since StrengthsFinders was originally developed for the business domain, it integrates well into a vocational discovery process. Combining these two resources provides a solid practical pathway to understanding one's individual strengths and gifts.

The personal assessment tools require respondents to reflect on past life experiences and successes. This assumes young men will take the necessary time to reflect, something neglected among young men of this age group. Furthermore, many young men lack multiple work experiences to reflect upon. Because of these challenges, young men benefit from working through the book and discussing the survey results in a small-group setting with other young adults, guides, and coaches. Dialogue and feedback enhance the discovery process. A small-group setting encourages young men to surrender their gifts and strengths to God's purposes. These resources provide a solid basis for helping young men discover vocational purpose.

The church must expand its reach in preparing disciples to serve in multiple spheres of society. In order for the church to fulfill the great commission and bring God's message of blessing to the world, Christian discipleship must not only focus on spiritual

³⁹ Tom Rath, *A New and Upgraded Edition of the Online Test from Gallup's Now Discover Your Strengths* (Omaha: Gallup Press, 2007).

transformation, but on equipping believers with skills and tools for cultural engagement through work.

Harvard educator, Tony Wagner, argues that the American educational system is not preparing college graduates with the necessary tools for success in the job market. Since the teaching methods used in Christian discipleship programs often mirror secular education models, this critique applies to the church's methods as well. In today's job market, the acquiring of knowledge is no longer enough to guarantee success in work life. Wagner observes that knowledge has become a commodity, "because opportunities for learning are ubiquitous and accessible on every Internet-connected device, students who know more than others no longer have a competitive advantage."⁴⁰ In the present job environment, what you know matters far less than what you can do with what you know. Though interviews with numerous business leaders, Wagner has discovered seven vital survival skills needed for the work environment of the future. They are critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration across networks and leading by influence, agility, and adaptability; initiative and entrepreneurship; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; and curiosity and imagination.⁴¹ In the new world of work, teamwork, communication, and critical thinking are necessary essentials in addition to basic academic knowledge. Workers will need the capacity to innovate. They will need to demonstrate curiosity, persistence, and risk taking. Wagner found that

⁴⁰Tony Wagner, "Graduating All Students Innovation Ready." <http://www.tonywagner.com/resources/tonys-latest-ed-week-commentary-graduating-all-students-innovation-ready-now-available> (accessed September 9, 2013).

⁴¹ Tony Wagner, "Seven Survival Skills." <http://www.tonywagner.com/7-survival-skills> (accessed September 9, 2013).

intrinsic motivation and a desire to make a difference will be guiding values for future work success.

This perspective on work is highly instructive in developing a church strategy for the vocational development of young men. This strategy should include an intentional inclusion of young men on projects and planning in church life. Most preaching and teaching in church reflects the idea that there is one expert in the room—the pastor. Rather than fostering engagement and the skills Wagner finds useful in today's workplace, this reinforces passivity. On the other hand, church ministries that include young men in projects and leadership simultaneously benefit from their skills, insights, and energy, and foster skills and insights. The young man develops skills in problem solving, communication, and intergenerational collaboration. Extending meaningful responsibility and coaching to young adults fosters commitment and develops skills that can be transferred to work life. Projects and planning that require risk and faith allow young men to watch other leaders practice trust, and allow young men to witness the work of the Holy Spirit. Creating opportunities for innovation in church life transforms the church, and helps believers acquire tools for influence in work environments. Christian communities can extend their discipleship vision to include preparing young men, through meaningful involvement on these ministry teams, for engagement with the culture.

Wagner's research included interviews with young adults who have developed mastery in problem solving and innovation. They attributed their prowess to the encouragement received from mentors, parents, and teachers. Many of their most influential teachers were described by Wagner as outliers; those who used innovative

methods that were outside standard teaching norms. Churches that encourage spiritual outliers will help young adults expand their vision for cultural engagement through work. The relationships young men form with spiritual outliers are a key to developing young men with vocational purpose.

The Value of Older Guides

A young man's journey toward a "vocational sweet spot" is a gift and a challenge. Realizing the powerful gifts given to young men through relationship with Jesus can bring focus to the pursuit of purpose. The journey to vocational purpose is greatly enhanced by traveling in the company of elders who are also followers of Jesus. Both men and women can provide significant encouragement and expertise in this regard, but the relationships between fathers and sons and young men and elders hold particular importance. Mark Driscoll has rightly observed that discipleship could also be described as "fathering" since many young men are in need of strong father figures and guides. The influence of mature men serves to establish meaning and purpose in a young man's life. The relationship may take the form of informal friendship, or more formal mentor/apprenticeship relationships providing significant spiritual and vocational direction.

Many times young men are unaware and inattentive to the benefits of these relationships. As they realize the possibilities of learning from their elders, the path to vocational discernment can become more clear and encouraging. Christian communities that bring together the various generations of men around a shared purpose and mission offer a positive resource in the spiritual and life development of all men. Barna research

indicates that most young people in church do not know an adult other than their parents.⁴² Thus, as David Kinnaman states, “Cultivating intergenerational relationships is one of the most important ways in which effective faith communities are developing flourishing faith in both young and old. In many churches, this means changing the metaphor from simply passing the baton to the next generation to a more functional, biblical picture of a body— that is, the entire community of faith, across the entire lifespan, working together to fulfill God’s purposes.”⁴³ The connection of older men with young men is vital for a healthy congregation; the relationships are mutually beneficial. Furthermore, they are essential assets in the life-formation of young men.

Chuck Bomar, pastor of Colossae church, deems this kind of relationship-building as his number one priority as pastor and leader. Before planting a church in Portland, Oregon, Chuck served as college pastor in Southern California. He is a popular speaker and author of numerous books on young adult ministry. I interviewed Bomar about his philosophy of ministry to young adults. He summarized his core strategy for reaching and discipling young adults thus: “prioritize relationships.” All evangelism, spiritual development, discipleship, and vocational discovery flow from relationships. In his book, *the Slow Fade*, Bomar challenges older adults to initiate friendships with young people. In my interview with Bomar, he restated that older men must overcome fears of talking with young men in order to build relationships. He encourages older men to seek areas of common interests as entry points to initiate conversations with younger men.

⁴² Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 29.

⁴³David Kinnaman, “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church.” <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church?q=lost+excerpt> (accessed September 13, 2013).

The value of the relationship-building process with young men can be seen in the men's ministry of my local church in Puyallup, Washington. Every Second Saturday a group of two hundred men of all ages gather for breakfast and a fun-filled program of humorous video clips, sports reports, and a five-minute coaching moment on a practical life issue. Many times the coaching segment deals with life purpose and personal calling. This intergenerational gathering provides affirming connections for men in all age groups. The interaction among the generations does not happen without intentional effort. The "Second Saturday" event serves as an informal place or "commons" for friendships to develop.

This large group gathering has birthed many men's group activities: small groups, team leadership meetings, monthly business leader gatherings, and weekly mentoring sessions for young adult men. Junior high young men gather each week for "Danger Zone." This after-school activity gives young men a chance to gather together and interact with adult sponsors, with a healthy balance of age-specific interests and intergenerational connections. The intergenerational contacts offer a positive starting for deeper relationships to develop, including mentoring opportunities around job and career interests.

The Positive Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring is a concept that has grown in popularity in the professional, educational, and management fields. Common to all definitions of mentoring is the concept of a supportive relationship between an experienced mentor and a younger protégé. The assistance of mentors and guides can provide a positive benefit to young

men in their pursuit of vocational purpose and life direction. A mentoring or apprenticeship process for young men in the church community holds an important key to the discovery of purpose and vocation. While mentoring is a popular topic in professional and educational literature, Sharon Parks suggests that the actual practice of mentoring has weakened in current society. She writes, “We compensate for this loss with a professionalism that is too often delivered without the life-giving, caring field once provided by elders.”⁴⁴ Professional expertise cannot replace heart and soul shared in personal experience. Parks believes that restoring mentoring as a cultural force can “significantly revitalize our institutions and provide the intergenerational glue to address some of our deepest and most pervasive concerns.”⁴⁵ Here lies the great potential of the church as an agent of revitalization by means of dynamic, life giving discipleship. Mentoring relationships between professionals mirrors in many ways the biblical pattern of discipleship modeled by Jesus. While there is an opportunity for the church to lead in this area, Leonard Sweet laments that most churches tolerate a “nod-to-God-hour model of preparing disciples.”⁴⁶ Sweet challenges the church to be more intentional in its discipleship processes through structured learning times, like Sunday School. He says one must be schooled in following Jesus. Mentoring for life skill and vocation brings the support and expertise of the mentor into a relationship with the student. This can have great effect in the lives of young men.

⁴⁴ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Sweet, *I Am a Follower*, 195.

Mentoring is a mutual, intentional relationship between two individuals in which the older, wiser person assists the younger in the ways of life. For those in business and education, the mentor's role is to enhance the protégé's professional development by passing on insight and experience. In most cases, the younger initiates this relationship. According to Laurent Daloz, mentoring's highest art is to "cultivate wisdom through artful dialogue."⁴⁷ Mentoring requires time and openness to enter into conversation about work and life experience with another.

Daloz outlines three key aspects in the role of mentor. Mentors provide the protégé recognition, support, and challenge—both spiritually and vocationally. Recognition means simply viewing the protégé as a person, acknowledging their worth and value. Additionally, it is important that a mentor assist the mentee through support and challenge. David Stoddard views the mentor relationship as a partnership. He emphasizes the importance of creating a safe place for young people to ask questions about life, work, and purpose. The qualities of a strong mentoring relationship mirror the characteristics of a healthy discipleship relationship. In many instances, the terms "mentoring", "coaching", and "discipling" could be used interchangeably. The difference lies in the emphasis: while mentoring and coaching focus on professional development, discipleship focuses on faith development. In order to best aid young men in the pursuit of vocational pursuit, the church must raise up mentors who can blend an intentional desire to follow Jesus with a practical understanding of vocational enterprise in the world. Instead of young men initiating these relationships, a church with a call culture encourages mentors to seek out young men as their protégés.

⁴⁷ Daloz, "Mentoring Men for Wisdom: Transforming the Pillars of Manhood," 77.

The Power of Mentoring Communities

While one-on-one mentoring is the most common means of guiding professional development, mentoring communities are proving very effective in awakening vocational possibilities among individuals. According to the Harvard Assessment Seminars, students reported that positive learning experiences were found not only in one-on-one settings, but in mentor/teacher interactions with small groups of students.⁴⁸ The formation of meaning, purpose, and vocation is shown to be enhanced by mentoring through networks of belonging. Positive examples of this can be found in several church models.

The Ministry Institute at the Foursquare Church in Puyallup, Washington is an example of a mentoring community in a Christian setting. This fast-growing, dynamic congregation involves and trains twenty-somethings through this leadership development institute. Modeled after a similar ministry at The City Church in Kirkland, Washington, Foursquare's institute attracts young men and woman to a two-year leadership development residence program. Their stated purpose for the institute is, "take those who have a call on their life and prepare them to take the next step."⁴⁹ The program's dean, Nate Dumlao, a young adult in his twenties, reported that fifty one young adults were enrolled in the program in 2011. The initial vision of the church was to begin a Bible College, but this plan morphed into the current leadership school for young people. Most of the students are recent high school graduates, but some college graduates join the cohort.

The program offers one academic class through Northwest University in Bible and Christian ministry each term, a practical ministry curriculum taught by church

⁴⁸ Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 127.

⁴⁹Puyallup Foursquare Church, "Interns." <http://foursquareinterns.com> (accessed April 22, 2012).

pastors and ministry leaders experienced in various ministries of the church. In addition to these requirements, participants clean the church weekly at 5:30 am each Tuesday, attend daily chapels, mentor high-school and junior-high students and attend all services at the church. They intern with various age group pastors on a rotating basis. The tuition for the program is \$6,000 per year, and the church provides housing. Students may work outside their church responsibilities no more than 15 hours per week. The Ministry Institute provides a mentoring community and practical experience. Personal calling and vocation are tested in a real-life setting. This model prioritizes active ministry involvement in a church setting rather than academic pursuit.

In an interview with Damlaio, he stated that the majority of interns in the program were women. Damlaio reasoned that the image of the program appeals to women more than men. He suggested that many young men are not drawn to the program because of self-reliance and pressures from their families to enter into formal academic studies.

The program creates a tremendous energy in the church as a whole. The mood and atmosphere on the campus and in the services signals that young adults are welcome; and this attracts other young adults. Church ministries benefit from the enthusiasm and participation of the interns. The church does not pay for this staff support, in fact the interns are paying to participate. The young adults in the program are exposed to biblical training, practical experience, and exposure to a dynamic church. They have an opportunity to test their ministry aptitudes as a part of their vocational discovery.

Puyallup Foursquare's Ministry Institute is designed to train and equip young adults for Christian ministry in a local church. Could a local church adopt or adapt this model to help young men pursue their callings in business, education, or trades? The

question requires additional study. I am pursuing a conversation with the dean of business at Northwest Nazarene University and members of their religion faculty as to the possibility of establishing a residence-internship, based on this model, for young men entering business and education. The program would combine the pursuit of an academic degree, possible internships in local businesses and community agencies, and discipleship training. The pursuit of vocational opportunities in the marketplace would include time with experienced mentors. Mentors would discuss best practices for their professions as well as strategies for cultural engagement.

Gotham Fellowship, developed by Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City, is another effective mentoring model. The program represents the vision of an urban church that is committed to the renewal of a city, through an investment in next-generation leaders who will impact culture and marketplace with the gospel.

The purpose of Gotham Fellowship is to provide the theological, spiritual, and relational foundations needed for meaningful and sustainable integration of faith and work in the world. The Fellowship integrates three primary elements to further the social, cultural, and spiritual renewal of New York City: Gospel Worldview Engagement, Spiritual and Personal development, and Community Formation. The fellowship is a nine-month program (similar to an Executive Education program) for 36 men and women between the ages of 25-35 working in fields ranging from law, finance, education, government, medicine, and the arts.

Unlike Puyallup Foursquare's Ministry Institute model, Gotham Fellowship seeks young adults who are employed full-time in New York City and have at least two years of working experience. This nine-month program includes participation in daily

devotionals, weekly two-hour discussions of the extensive reading of major texts from various eras of church history, monthly Saturday gatherings that provide in-depth training, city excursions, mentoring with experienced professionals from the church community and three retreats. Tuition for the program is \$2,250. The Gotham Fellowship seeks young adults who share a common passion to see the gospel renew the world. It unites young people from various vocational callings around this shared purpose.

The Gotham Fellowship offers a valuable model of vocational discipleship. While grounded in biblical and theological principles, the focus of the program is the equipping of young adults to bless the world through their unique vocations, including in the workplace. Redeemer Presbyterian sees its mission as sending people into the world to influence and change culture for the glory of God. While Redeemer is a large church positioned in an influential city, I believe the core values of the Gotham Fellowship can be adapted to many other locations and church contexts. Smaller churches and interfaith gatherings of young professionals can create mentoring communities that integrate theology, spiritual disciplines, and vocational development. While this paper gives primary attention to helping young men discover their vocational place, young women and men both benefit from this type of mentoring format. This vision must begin with local church leaders who believe the church can be a force in preparing young people to flourish in their work life.

Gideon Strauss, director of the Max Dupree Center for Leadership envisions an emphasis on faith and work at the center of the discipleship programs in the local church. He says, “How wonderful it would be if vocational discipleship—catechesis and spiritual direction for the integration of faith and work—was the experience of all Christians, as

common in the life of churches as prayer meetings, small groups, or twelve-step programs!”⁵⁰ This vision includes the mobilization of experienced professionals from various domains of work across culture to serve as mentors and guides for the emerging young adults.

The Call of God to Mentors

Vocational mentoring incorporated in a discipleship process is a key to helping young men find life purpose and vocational direction. Mentors who are motivated and equipped are essential to the success of these partnerships. As churches focus on the vocational development of young men, older men are needed to invest in friendships and mentor relationships. Faith communities must call upon older men to accept the challenge to invest time and energy in this way. The enlistment of mentors requires prayer and intentional recruitment.

Many churches are filled with older men that have experience, expertise, and success in jobs and careers. They need encouragement to overcome their reluctance to get involved. Many older men in church circles lack confidence in their ability to pass on expertise to young men; especially in sharing their spiritual walk. They feel inadequate as spiritual mentors because their spiritual life is immature, or filled with doubts. Many assume their failures and struggles at work and faith disqualify them as mentors to young men. Yet, there remains a desire to encourage the next generation of young men. Men in the business community express an interest in giving back to the next generation of

⁵⁰ Gideon Strauss, “The Faith and Work Movement We Need Now (Part 1),” *Fieldnotes Magazine*. <http://www.fieldnotesmagazine.com/admin/the-faith-and-work-movement-we-need-now-part-1/> (accessed September 27, 2013).

young men. In interviews, many told me they wished a mentorship program would have been available to them when they began their careers.

Church leaders must give clear guidance to men who will serve as mentors for young men. Basic training tools to equip mentors for the integration of faith and life are needed. Resources suggested in a previous section of this chapter are helpful training tools for mentors. Also, Radical Mentoring, a Christian organization, provides valuable resources to equip older men in the mentoring process. Practical guidelines for meeting times and potential discussion topics can also be part of the preparation. Of primary importance is a willingness to get involved in the life of the mentee as a friend. The role of the mentor is to listen, acknowledge, support, and challenge. Research indicates that among young men, the personal bond with a teacher is a key factor in learning. Similarly, establishing friendship increases the success of the mentoring relationship.⁵¹ As spiritual mentors, older men are challenged to live in vital relationship with Jesus. They experience growth in their faith.

The call of God to follow Jesus and to join him in mission must become the vision of every generation of men in the church. Young men will awaken to their purpose through the example of elders who are awakened to their God-given purpose. A revival of vision and passion for God among the older, wiser men in the Christian community will have a positive effect on future generations of men.

The current trend of young men and women opting out of church is alarming. The thought of a generation of young people drifting from the Christian faith is unacceptable. The church must rally to reverse this shift. This will require a significant investment of

⁵¹ Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley, "Reaching Boys: An International Study of Effective Teaching Practices," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91 (January 2010):35-40.

attention and effort. The investment includes the transformation of the church culture into a missional culture; one that prioritizes service to the world through the use of the God-given skills, gifts, and abilities within the church. It demands that we make work-life a priority in the discipleship process. It requires that the church prepare and guide young men in the discovery of their vocational sweet spots. It requires that the church mobilize mature men and women as mentors and guides for the next generation of young people. It calls for church leaders to actively train mentors for ministry to young men. It requires a willingness to unleash the next generation of young men to practice their faith and work in a grace-filled church environment. The task means that the church must renew its love for young men. I have confidence that God is calling the church to this mission, the church is called to respond.

CONCLUSION

REASONS FOR HOPE

Young men confronting today's challenges can be similar to a batter confronting an all-star pitcher with two strikes against him. In the pressure of the moment, the rookie batter can be tempted to choose the extremes of wild aggression or timid passivity. In one instance, the hitter will be prone to violent, undisciplined swings at the oncoming fastball, while in the other, the batter watches under duress, standing idly with bat on shoulder as the ball rushes past into the catcher's mitt. Both options offer little prospect of success.

Today, young men are under pressure, and they tend to drift toward extremes of aggressive self-actualization or, more commonly, passive resignation. Both approaches offer little hope of long-term success. Like the batter in our illustration, young men must find a third, more positive option. The resources and support of the Christian community offers guidance toward this third alternative. Through spiritual growth and vocational discovery young men may face the future with confidence; this is a confidence forged through practice and support from the community. Young men can be awakened to the reality that their lives contribute to the mission of God. In this conclusion, I offer six action steps for churches. The local church can realize a central role in the training and encouraging young men in their vocational pursuits.

Hope emerges from the voluminous attention given to the plight of young men and boys today. Media, academia, and families are awakening to the problems they face. National television networks devote special programming to the growing academic achievement gap between young men and women. Research mounts on the subjects of masculinity and emerging adulthood. Professional organizations mobilize for the cause of

men and young people. Organizations, many connected to academic and research institutions, focus on the needs and challenges of young men. The Male Studies Foundation for the Male and the Future of Children network represent the growing emphasis of research into special needs of men and young people. The Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood is capturing the growing momentum of research for study of youth moving to adulthood. The findings of these diverse groups are bringing a wealth of information to the study of young men.

There are positive signs of hope emerging from churches. The Barna group reports “Millennials who have remained active [in church] are three times more likely than dropouts to say they learned to view their gifts and passions as part of God’s calling (45% versus 17%). They are four times more likely to have learned at church “how the Bible applies to my field or career interests” (29% versus 7%).”¹ This data supports the premise that a holistic approach to discipleship helps young adults connect God’s mission with the unique work they are called to do. The study also states that young adults who stay in church are twice as likely to have a close personal friendship with an adult inside the church (59% of those who stayed report such a friendship, versus 31% among those who are no longer active). The same pattern is evident for intentional relationships such as mentoring—28% of millennials who stay in church have an adult mentor other than a pastor at their church, compared to 11% of dropouts. Supportive friendship and guidance from adults creates a sense of belonging that is needed by young people.

Building on the success of their book, *You Lost Me*, the Barna group is continuing their research on the vocational development of young adults. Furthermore, the Fuller

¹ The Barna Group, “Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church,” <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/635-5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church#.UqpwJScyuRM> (accessed December 12, 2014).

Youth Institute recently reported a funded research project focusing on churches with thriving ministries to 15-29 year olds. This project, entitled *Church Engaging Young People*, purposes to help churches deepen the faith formation of young people.

These are all positives signs as the church seeks to resource and encourage young adults. Additional resources are needed that directly address the concerns of young men and their spiritual and vocational development. There are several important steps local churches can take to encourage young men in this process.

Value the Potential of Young Men

In most churches, ministry to children and youth receive the largest investment of time and resources. Yet with the growing trends toward prolonged adolescence, ministry to young adults up to age 30 demands greater attention. Churches will need to consider their strategy that includes staffing and programming needs. While parents observe the challenges facing their young adult children, many times the church at large is unaware of the unique issues facing young people in this age group. Barna's, *You Lost Me* video series or Fuller's *Sticky Faith* curriculum are excellent tools to inform the church to the needs of young adults. These resources can be enfolded into the adult education program. Discipleship plans for young adults should include practical instruction on calling and vocation. This teaching should begin in children and youth ministries, with increased attention given during the young adult years.

Young men need a sense of belonging, as well as validation that their skills and talents matter to God. Churches can seize the opportunity to fill this need for young men. Tapping into their interests and talents can provide positive results for the church and the

individual. Many young men have time and energy that can be used in volunteer service. Including young men in ministries that utilize their skills in computing, graphics, media, or music becomes an important way to incorporate young men into service to God. For some young men, teaching children or assisting in sports or camping programs establish a sense of purpose and belonging. Involving young men in projects with more seasoned leaders adds value and significance to their church experience and gives church leaders a youthful perspective on church life.

Prioritize Intergenerational Male Relationships

Male role models are vital in the development of identity and belonging for young men in this age group. A strategy for creating intergenerational friendships needs to be a high priority in a ministry to young men. At Puyallup Nazarene Church, the monthly Second Saturday event, is a first step in creating these conversations. Chris Howard, president of Hampden-Sydney College, encourages intergenerational friendships through regularly scheduled vocational reflection dinners. At this all-male university, Howard invites sophomore students and faculty members to join in a meal and conversation around the topic of purpose and vocation. These gatherings give young men the opportunity to enter into meaningful dialogue with older men about life and career issues. By inviting young men to a dinner hosted by older men, similar interactions can be developed at a local church level. In my experience, there is great readiness among older men to participate in this kind of event.

It is incumbent upon church leaders to challenge older men to invest in the lives of younger men as a part of their own discipleship journey. Praying that God would call

older men to this task is an appropriate place to start. Older men need role models as they seek to serve younger men. Stanford professor Bill Evans stands out as a model of this kind of leadership. Evans was the vice president and co-founder of the software publisher Electronic Arts. He also led the introduction of the mouse and laser printer at Apple. He is now committed to helping college students find purpose and vocation, and teaches a course at Stanford called “Designing Your Life.” When asked his motivations for teaching about vocation at Stanford, Evans stated, ““The truest reason for what I do is that I can't not do this work. It came and got me and I really have no choice. I think when the apostle Paul says, ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel,’ he's describing the experience of God bringing him to a place of ‘can't not,’ which is where I now find myself too. In my experience, deep call often rises out of one's narrative, and so it is with me.”² For Evans, the vocation of mentoring found him as he offered his skills, experience, and passions to meet the needs and opportunities of young people he saw around him. The vocational development of young men will be enhanced as God awakens mature men to the deep call to mentor young men.

Through informal relationship building, the potential for long-term friendship and mentoring relationships become a possibility. Inviting young men into relationships with older men who share similar vocational interests becomes an added benefit of these interactions. The young adult not only gains information about his career interests but also discovers how personal faith can be lived out in real life. The mature man gains the satisfaction of passing on experience to an interested younger man. Church leaders must invite older men to invest their lives in these relationships.

² “What Will You Be When You Grow Up?” *Cardus*.
<http://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/3530/what-will-you-be-when-you-grow-up/> (accessed July 7, 2013).

Cast a Positive Vision of Work

It is important that church leaders free the word “vocation” from its ecclesiastical constraints and restore a meaning of calling that includes all people. The incarnation supports this wider interpretation. Work that honors God in the public arena must be celebrated in public worship settings. Pastors can encourage the importance of work as mission through sermon series and regular references to work life in public services. A local church can reinforce this idea by scheduling times of special recognition and prayer for people who serve in various work domains throughout society. As an example, a church could recognize and pray for a specific career field like health care, education, business, or public safety on a given Sunday. This type of recognition sends a message that work-life is vital to the mission of God.

The church should be at the forefront in assisting young men to discover their vocational sweet spot. In the discovery process, specific teaching that integrates calling, personal giftedness and the needs of the world should form the core of this instruction. The use of books like *Finding a Job You Can Love* and *Strength Finder 2.0* offer a basic curriculum that will help young men discover their strengths and interests in career development. Accessible resources like Dan Miller’s *48 Days to the Work You Love* combine spiritual wisdom and practical methods for a successful job search. As churches look to the future, practical vocational guidance incorporated with spiritual discipleship will better equip young men for their transition into the world of work.

Provide Experiences in the New Commons

Young men must learn to function and flourish in diverse work environments. They need guidance as they enter what Hunter calls the “new commons” in the world. The new commons describes the current cultural environment that is becoming increasingly secular. Christian young men must be given tools and experiences in order to navigate a challenging work environment.

Church communities may better equip young men to enter the volatile world of work by providing immersion experiences to various work settings. Local churches can create “mission trips” not only to serve the poor but to give young people exposure to the world of business, health care, government, and the arts. The model of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City stands out. Redeemer’s NYC Re-Imaged program encourages participants to experience various cultural events in the city with a vision to see God at work in all sectors of society. In this experience, believers witness the needs around them and become aware of ways they can serve the city through their work-life. The establishment of affinity groups organized around specific career interests will also give young men a positive outlet to develop methods to engage the culture through their work experiences.

Pursue Church-Work Internships

Churches can seize the opportunity to create networks with profit and not-for-profit groups to provide paid and volunteer work opportunities for young men. This could be developed through partnerships with community groups, local business and education leaders. Since many Christian colleges and universities are providing vocational

resources for their students, partnerships could be established between churches and these academic institutions. Cooperation with universities in the establishment of internships that integrate work experience with teachings on the mission of God in the world would fill a need for many young men in their transition into the world of work. In a recent conversation, a denominational leader expressed his need for an enlarged workforce at a time of budget reductions. Establishing internships for students with an interest in international business, marketing and accounting could provide the people resources he needs without extending his budget dollars. The model of Puyallup Foursquare's Ministry Institute could be adapted to prepare young adults to serve God in all spheres of society. Career development resources should become a part of a church discipleship strategy. Churches can also create job placement centers, job incubator groups, and provide classes and counsel in developing job-interview skills. There is a need for more churches to awaken to ways they can encourage young men in their pursuit of vocational purpose.

Point Young Men to Jesus

Young men need guidance about what it means to be a man. Scripture offers young men a clear image of manhood in the person of Jesus. For the Christian, God's word became flesh and demonstrated to the world the true example of human life. Hunter calls the incarnation "the most breathtaking demonstration in history of the reality of God's love for his creation and his intention to make all things new."³ Though traditional gender roles have blurred, young men can establish an identity around the character and qualities of Jesus.

³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 240.

Ironically, similar qualities are being taught by secular leaders as they help reform the values of male identity. The qualities of honesty, integrity, responsibility, and courage are re-emphasized as vital values for the new “boy code.” William Pollack offers a “new boy code” based on “honesty rather than fear, communication rather than repression, connection rather than disconnection.”⁴ Love and empathy are not only acceptable but admirable qualities in this emerging code for men. “Love, tenderness, nurturance; competence, ambition, assertion—these are human qualities, and all human beings—both women and men—should have equal access to them.”⁵ These qualities are embodied in Jesus. Jesus taught that to love God and to love others was the essence of a fulfilled life. Followers of Jesus represent him through faithful presence in the world. By pointing young men to Jesus, the church is well positioned to offer a positive image of manhood.

It is the responsibility of the church to help young men answer the call to follow Jesus. In a world that is consumed with issues of power and personal gain, the way of Jesus offers young men an alternative witness. Jesus embodied sacrificial love for God and others. Self-emptying love became a radical expression of strength and power. Through the power of this love, Jesus brought profound peace and new life to the world. In answering the call to follow Jesus, young men will be challenged to exhibit the qualities of Jesus in all of their life endeavors including their vocational pursuits. Meaning and purpose in life will not be measured by the amassing of material resources but by a work life that reflects Christ-likeness. Beyond career success, personal fulfillment will be experienced through a life devoted to Jesus and his mission. To embody the life and presence of Jesus becomes the goal of the follower of Jesus. Young

⁴ Pollack, *Real Boys*, 396.

⁵ Kimmel, *The Gendered Society*, 410.

men are admonished to live out the words of Paul, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1).

The present atmosphere in many churches is difficult. There is a struggle to maintain optimism in the midst of cultural threats and pressures. People in general, and young people in particular, appear to be drifting away from church activities and religious practices. At the same time, there are promising signs of spiritual vitality among young men. In these days, churches need a renewed vision of the mission of the church for the world. The talents and passions of young men (as well as young women) are vital in fulfilling God’s call to bless the world. It is time for the church to be re-awakened to the living presence of Jesus at work in the world. It is time for the church to realize that God continues to call people to join in the mission to restore the world. Now is the time for church leaders to equip and send young men into all realms of society. This is the hope the church must convey to youth. Young men must realize that their lives, passions, and gifts matter to God’s work. They must be inspired in the hope that to follow Jesus and use one’s talents and gifts in all the realms of social life brings honor to God.

While the task appears great, local churches can begin with the goal to help one young man. If a local church can help one young man find his vocational sweet spot the mission of God is advanced. If a church or leader can inspire one young man to devote his work life to bringing the presence of Christ into one’s social sphere, God’s work will be advanced. If a church will help one young man recognize that his life’s work matters to God, the world will be blessed. And as many individuals and local churches take this

responsibility, God's vision for the flourishing of all creation will be further realized throughout the world.

God is calling young men to follow. It must become the goal of the church to create a support system where they can.

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