

# DEEPENING THE ROOTS SYSTEM – SESSION 8

## Academy of Christian Discipleship

### Vocation

The word “vocation” is a popular word around Whitworth these days. We think of the Christian life in this world in terms of “vocation,” or God’s call on our lives, though we often misunderstand what our true vocation is. It has less to do with our formal professional work—say, the work of a teacher or banker or nurse—and more to do with life in the secular world as followers of Jesus. It is true that we should do our professional work “as unto the Lord,” but we should function as spouses, parents, children, neighbors, friends, volunteers, quilters, climbers, athletes, and woodworkers as unto the Lord, too. God’s call (the meaning of “vocation”) on our lives is to belong first to him, and then to do everything else as unto him.

We will be exploring this theme over the next few weeks. The very idea that we should do everything as unto the Lord runs counter to how we function as religious people. Our Christendom past has bequeathed to us a habit. We confine faith to the religious sphere—church attendance, for example—in the same way we confine our work to a certain number of hours every week. This is why the New Testament often seems excessively demanding to us. We tend to confine our faith to certain times and certain activities. But, God wants more; in fact, God wants all of us, all the time. He commands us to order our lives—our time, money, relationships, and work—entirely around him. He will be satisfied with nothing less.

### Notes (Sessions 8.1 – 8.3)

Definition

History of the term

Vocation and secular professions

God’s call on our lives: old to new (Ephesians 4:17-5:20)

## The Three “Greats”

1. The Great Commission
2. The Great Commandment
3. The Great Commitment

## Matthew 5

## Spheres of Calling

## The problem with a Christendom mentality

1. Radical faith and radical obedience
2. Calling to relationships
3. Calling to communities

#### 4. Calling to secular work

#### Becoming Kingdom People

What is real?

Analogy: resistance movement

Parables:

1. Mt. 13:24-30
2. Mt. 13:31-33
3. Mt. 24:36-44
4. Mt. 25:1-12
5. Mt. 24:45-51
6. Mt. 25:14-30
7. Mt. 25:31-40

## Project

As we have already observed, Christianity in Christendom tends to confine itself to specifically religious activities, which is why we think of the most religiously active people as the most devout Christians. That puts pastors or priests at the top, and people who

show up at church almost every day of the week just slightly below them. Christendom Christianity is religious—or churchy—Christianity. But, in a pre-Christendom or post-Christendom setting, Christians think less in terms of formal religious activities and more in terms of following Jesus in everyday life. Formal religious practice does not exist unto itself but serves the end of discipleship. Christians HAVE to think this way because faith itself would not survive if they didn't. The impact of being a Christian spills over into everything. This is what it means to be a disciple.

The special project this month is to challenge you to think in terms of everyday discipleship. On most mornings (I am trying to be realistic here, hence “most” mornings rather than “all” mornings!) spend a few moments being still (if that is at all possible, considering your circumstances). Turn toward God in silence and submit yourself to him. Then take some time reviewing the schedule for the day. What will you be doing? Whom will you see? What opportunities will you have to be salt, leaven, and light? How can you strive for human flourishing? How can you represent and advance God's kingdom? How can you live for Jesus in every moment of every day? Walk through the day, at least in your imagination. What do you see? Pray God ahead of you; pray him into your day. Then say, “Establish the work of my hands.”

1. Do you see someone for whom you can pray? What do they need? How do they need Jesus? Pray God into that situation.
2. Do you see challenges for which you need God's wisdom? Pray God into those situations.
3. Do you see conversations you will have that require courage, conviction, and compassion? Pray God into those situations.
4. Do you see opportunities to witness to the Gospel? Pray God into those situations.
5. Do you see people whom you can love? (Salesclerks, restaurant servers, colleagues, students, program assistants). Pray God into those situations.
6. Do you see problems that need solutions? How can you pray for those situations? Pray God into those situations.
7. Do you see wrongs that need to be made right? Pray God into those situations.
8. Do you see institutions that desperately need godly leadership? Pray God into those situations.
9. Do you see opportunities to strive for excellence in what you do? What would that look like? Pray God into that situation.

As you imagine the day ahead, what do you see? How do you see God working through you? At the end of the day, reflect on what happened. Thank God for what he has done.

Memorize this verse: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17)

# Spiritual Exercise

Considering the above, practice these spiritual exercises two or three times a week over the next month:

- **WEEK ONE:** Pray very specifically for opportunities to share the faith with someone who does not know Christ.
- **WEEK TWO:** Pray for the people closest to you, your children or spouse or roommates or parents, whomever you interact with most every day. Pray God's blessing on them.
- **WEEK THREE:** Pray for your work, no matter what it is (students, this means your studies). Pray that God "establishes the work of your hands."
- **WEEK FOUR:** Pray for the welfare of the organizations, communities, and city in which you are most involved.

## Assignments

### FIRST WEEK:

- Read Psalm 36 three times this week.
- Read Mt. 28:16-20. Spend time pondering this encounter. What is happening here? Why the worship? Why the doubt? What does Jesus say to them? Why mention "authority" in this encounter? What does it mean to "go"? To "make disciples"? How does Jesus explain it? What is his final promise?
- Can you break this down in a practical way? How can you begin the process of making disciples?

### SECOND WEEK:

- Read Psalm 73 three times this week.
- Read Mt. 5:13-20. What does it mean to be the "salt of the world"? The "light of the world"?
- What does Jesus mean when he says that he came to fulfill the Law and Prophets rather than abolish them? Does this seem excessively legalistic and demanding to you?
- How is it possible to exceed the righteousness of the most religious people? What is Jesus after here?

### THIRD WEEK:

- Read Psalm 103 three times this week.
- Jesus taught in parables. Matthew includes two sections of "kingdom parables." The first is in Matthew 13. After reading this text, consider the meaning. What is the overall point Jesus seems to be making about discipleship?
- What does the parable of the sower teach? The parable of the weeds in the field? The parables about the mustard seed and the leaven? The parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price?

- Read Mt. 6:19-21. What does it mean to lay up treasures in heaven? How can we understand this in practical, everyday terms?

**FOURTH WEEK:**

- Read Psalm 145 three times this week.
- The second main section of kingdom parables is found in Matthew 25. Read the following on successive days:
  - Mt. 25:1-13
  - Mt. 25:14-30
  - Mt. 25:31-46.
- Is there a main point to these? What do you learn about living for the kingdom every day even when the kingdom seems unreal and irrelevant?

## Small Group Questions

1. Pray for each member of the group, or for your prayer partner. This is the discipline of intercession. We pray as if we were advocating for a friend before a judge who just happens to be a loving father.
2. How does a Christendom mentality affect the way we live as disciples of Jesus? As we move into a post-Christendom setting, how might we have to change?
3. Discuss the Bible study first. You will notice that the focus is on the Gospel of Matthew, which has a great deal to say about how we live for the kingdom.
  - a. What did you learn about salt, leaven, and light? About what Jesus means by saying not one thing will pass from the law until all is accomplished? About what Jesus means by insisting our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees?
  - b. What did the parables teach you about living for the kingdom?
4. Why is it so hard to live for a reality that we cannot experience with our immediate senses? Do you think this has always been difficult or are there characteristics in the modern world that make it more difficult?
5. What happened to you as you prayed God into your ordinary life, and as you imagined him working in ordinary ways? Did it change the way you lived your day?
6. What does it mean to do all of life “as unto the Lord”?
7. How did it change your perspective to think about vocation as God’s call on our lives, to seek him and live for him in everyday life?
8. Pray for each other.

Further Observations/ Notes/ Reflection

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