

Session Five My Vocation in Life

Finding Our Talents

As you think about what career or vocation you will have someday, lots of things probably come to mind. It's great to picture ourselves in a high-paying, prestigious job in the field that appeals to us most. And there's no reason to give up on that dream, even though few people actually make it (you might be one of the few who do!). But it's also a good idea to be open to other possibilities, just in case the dream doesn't become reality.

You may know what you hope to do, or you may be completely undecided about it. But how do you see your career? Let's look at it this way: MY CAREER WILL BE A CHANCE TO MAKE—something of myself?—My parents proud of me?—Jesus Christ real to other people?—Pots of money?—The love of God real on earth?—A decent living for my family?—A difference in the world?—Me feel good about myself?—A wonderful reputation? Mentally choose a few of these "chances-to-make" that are the most important to you.



Was it hard to make your choices? Perhaps you put money near the top of your most-important list and you feel a little guilty about it. That guilt may be unnecessary; it depends on how you plan to use your money. The Bible and Church history give us lots of examples of people who had money and used it to help do God's work. Perhaps you didn't put the items about Jesus Christ and the love of God on your most-important list, and you feel a little guilty about that. Well, we do tend to feel that that kind of thing isn't our job—the priests, the bishops, the people who work in our church offices are responsible for those things.

But this is a wonderful teaching of Christ: any honorable vocation can be used to bring people to him. If we can do our work honestly, with respect for others, and in a way that we know would be pleasing to him, we may indeed bring people to know him through our personal example.

But Can I Do It?

We've all met at least one person who seems to be able to do everything—speaks a couple of languages, swims like a fish, is an "A" student, is in great shape, picks just the right clothes and dances great. We may wonder what our talents are and even, sometimes, whether we really have any. Perhaps the reason your "chance-to-make" list didn't have Jesus Christ and the love of God at the top was that you aren't sure what talents you have that could be used to do the work of making them real to others.

Let's take a look at a parable Jesus told—one that you probably know well. But this time as you read



it in "modernized" language, think about what it says regarding how we can use our talents:

A wealthy man decided to travel abroad, and called his servants together before leaving. He said, "I have decided to put each of you in charge of some of my money while I am gone." He said to the first servant, "You are an able man and can handle many responsibilities. I will put you in charge of five talents." [A talent was a sum of money—about as much as a person would earn in twenty years in those days.]

To the second servant, the master gave two talents, according to his ability. And the third was given one talent.

Now the servants had to plan how to use their money, weighing the risk of investing and losing it against the hope of making a profit on it. They might buy sheep and make money selling the wool for a good price, but with the risk that the sheep could be stolen or killed by wild dogs. They might buy land, hoping to sell it for more later, but risking that they would not find a buyer. Or they might put it in the bank where it would not earn a great deal but would be safe. Or, of course, they might just hide it away someplace and make nothing on it, but with no risk at all.

Finally the master returned, and the first servant proudly placed a pile of money on the table. "You gave me five talents, Master," he said. "I have earned five more." The master beamed and said, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Since you have been faithful in the management of this, I will put you in charge of more. I am happy with what you have done, and I want you to share in my happiness."



The second servant showed his master two talents he had earned, plus the two given to him. Again the master said, "Well done! You have used your abilities well and will be put in charge of more, and will share in my happiness."

The third servant was shaking like a leaf. He stammered out, "Sir, I knew that you are a hard-hearted man who takes what doesn't belong to you. I was afraid of losing the money you gave me, so I buried it while you were gone. Here it is."

The master roared, "You foolish, lazy servant! You could at least have deposited the money to earn some interest! Instead you have done nothing!" And he threw the servant out of his house, giving his one talent to the servant who already had ten.

To think about:

This parable tells us something about the Last Judgment, when we will stand before God to answer for the things we have done or not done. Jesus is not afraid to depict God the Father as a stern judge, though we believe also in his great mercy.

The parable also tells us that we will answer for the use of the talents (meaning not money, for us, but skills and abilities) that God has given us. There seems to be no concern about the uneven distribution of talents—we are to use what God has seen fit for us to have, whether that is many talents or just a few or even only one. The only wrong use of those gifts is not to use them at all!

How can you relate this parable to your own life, talents, and hopes for the future?

On this page is a chart with three columns. In the first, put your four top career choices (or more if you wish). In the middle column, put the gifts and skills you would bring to this vocation. They might be things you now believe you are good at, or things that you are not sure you are good at but might become good at if you work at developing them. In the third column, write ways in which this vocation could serve God and make his love real to people.

My career choices:	My gifts and skills:	How I could serve God:
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Choices, Choices

To be able to make choices is one of the results of the free will God has given us. Though your years of working in your vocation may still seem rather far off, the choices you make now can affect that work in many ways. If you form good work habits now, you will have them later. If you cut corners now, chances are you will do so in your career too. Some years ago there was an anti-cheating campaign which asked the public, "Would you want to be operated on by a doctor who cheated all through medical school?"

Some people have made tragic choices in their vocations, and their choices deeply harmed others. With your group, consider these examples, and answer the questions presented in each one:



a. *Ananias and Sapphira*. This story may be familiar to you from session 2; review it in *Acts 5:1-11*. This couple probably had useful knowledge of finances and ability with money. How might they have used their gifts for God's work instead of working against the Holy Spirit?

b. *Josef Mengele* was a doctor who did bizarre and horrible medical "experiments" on inmates in the

concentration camps run by Hitler's government during World War II. He was a man of medical skill and training. How might he have used his gifts for good instead of evil?

c. *Vassak Sewni* betrayed the Armenian cause to the Persians in the Battle of Avarayr in order to gain personal benefits. He obviously had good diplomatic skills and the ability to impress people as a man who could "deliver." How might he have used these gifts to help rather than harm his Christian brothers and sisters in Armenia?



Share your group's conclusions with the whole class as you re-gather.

As a contrast to these stories, we know that Abraham Lincoln as a young man borrowed a book from a friend. His bedroom was in the attic, and when it rained the water leaked in and ruined the book. There was no other thought in his mind other than to tell his friend what had happened and pay for the book. No wonder that in his later business dealings, and in fact throughout his life, he was known as "Honest Abe." The pattern had been set in those early years.

Think about what choices you can make now that will affect your vocation later.

The Money Trap

Career and money are closely tied together in most people's lives. In one of his letters to Timothy, St. Paul writes about the trap that the pursuit of wealth can become. Read *1 Timothy 6:6-10*. Think about and answer these questions:



1. What words of St. Paul's mean, "You can't take it with you?"

Write them here:

2. How should the fact that we "can't take it with us" affect the way we live?

3. Do you think St. Paul is saying that money itself is evil, or that having money is evil? If not, what is he saying? (See verses 9 and 10.)

4. Why do you think many Americans are not able to be "content" in the way St. Paul describes?

5. How might St. Paul's words affect your vocational decisions?

Session Five

My Vocation in Life

1. Any vocation can be a God-centered one.
2. God asks us to use our vocation to make his love real to those around us.
3. The truest vocational fulfillment will be found in serving God, no matter what our career choice may be.

Students will:

1. Identify their top career choices right now.
2. Enumerate ways that those in any career or vocation can serve God and others.
3. Describe some ways the Bible can influence our view of vocations.

**Key
Concepts****Objectives**

Background for Teacher

Choosing their vocation may not, at first glance, seem to our students like something that has a lot to do with their Christian faith. This lesson is intended to help them see that service to God can be part of any vocation they choose, and that this service will be the thing that gives them the truest vocational fulfillment. Bible passages are used not because they speak specifically about "vocation" but because they have to do with how we conduct our lives—and our vocations are a big part of that.

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- pencils or pens

Procedure

1. Open with a prayer. Tell the class that you are going to talk today about choosing a vocation or career. Together read and discuss the introductory material. Then ask them to complete the chart on page 17 under **Finding Our Talents** in the student text. When they have finished, let them share whatever they wish to about the experience of completing the exercise. (20 mins)
2. Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4. Have the groups complete the exercise, **Choices, Choices** in the student text. Let them gather and report to the whole class. (20 mins)

Procedure

3. Have students do the exercise **The Money Trap** in the student text. Discuss their answers with them. There are really no right or wrong answers here, though you can point students toward Saint Paul's idea that integrity is more important than money, and that money becomes a terrible snare when we give up a lot of our integrity to amass it. (10 mins)

4. Ask students to take turns completing this sentence: "Today I learned that _____". Use their answers as an opportunity for review. Close with prayer. (10 mins)