

HUMAN VOCATION Study 1 – Follow Me

Introduction: *As Jesus was walking along he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me'. And he got up and followed him (Matthew 9:9).*

'Follow me'. These two small words from Jesus constituted a call to a new life of faith. They also entailed a change of **task** for Matthew the tax collector, a new vocation as a disciple of a Rabbi, and as an apostolic witness to Messiah. These same two words lie at the heart of the gospel call to the human race, to hear God (John 5:25) to repent, to come alive and join the most dynamic movement in human history, the *ecclesia* of the Living God, destined for eternal life by God's redeeming grace; saved by grace alone, through faith. Not by works – however wonderful or tainted our works may be.

What is Human Vocation?

The Latin word '*vocare*' means to call. It lies at the root of the English word 'vocation'. At Wartburg in Germany, where Martin Luther undertook his translation the New Testament, the words for 'calling' and 'vocation' are often used interchangeably. The logic of speaking of a person having been called to a task or having a calling assumes there is One who speaks, and who *calls* one to do something. Unfortunately, today the word has been reduced to the idea of 'a job'. So, we have *Vocational Training* such as a TAFE Course. The notion of a *calling from Jesus* to vocation is often absent or diminished.

The Scriptures teach us that God our Father has spoken to people of faith in many and various ways, including through the voice of the prophets. Abraham was called to follow God's leading and he, together with Sarah, was to be a blessing to the nations of the world. Primarily, God speaks to us in our day, through His Son, Jesus Christ, the co-creator of the world, and the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:1-2). He is not silent. In order that we may live in communion with God, the Holy Spirit comes to us, brings us the forgiveness of sins, moves freely like the wind (John 3:8), burns in human hearts like fire (Acts 2:3; Exodus 3:2; Luke 24:32), indwells our lives through faith, and flows out into our world like an invisible river (John 7:38). The Holy Spirit spotlights, and imparts the presence, power and love of God to us (John 16:14), as it is revealed in the Cross of Jesus Christ. This God is a good guide in our lives. This quote by Os Guinness expands our thinking towards biblical idea of vocation and calling:

...calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service... calling should not be a dismantled dead principle.¹

Spheres of Human Vocation:

(1) Christ (2) Family (3) Employment/Role (4) Church (5) Community (6) Heavenly (7) New Creation
These studies focus on human vocation as a calling. The aim is to see the LORD's call in all tasks, (*jobs, careers, pursuits, gigs, professions, walks in life, childhood, unemployment, retirement*) as well as *relational* areas of service in family, church, and community. It is all onward and upward (Phil. 3:14). We shall remember to include with faith and work, the highly significant aspects of rest, and play.

I enjoy listening to the biographical details, and humorous anecdotes of people's lives when given by family or friends, at a funeral service. When accompanied by photos and video clips, it often makes for quite a condensed, thought provoking, educational time. What are we to think of human vocation? Which leaf read from the book of another person's life might we take and benefit from, as we hear their story? Is it only the fact of their faith in Christ that is of interest to us? What of their deeds?

¹ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*, Thomas Nelson, 2003.

- *I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter (Matthew 12:36). ... and yet:*
- *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)*
- *the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done (1Cor. 3:13)*

I take it that all the details of our life do matter. The full forgiveness given in the gospel means that we are not and will not be condemned. In Christ, we are welcomed, sanctified, and justified.

Further to this. What if a life ends in infancy, in teen years, or in ‘the prime’ of a person’s life? From our view this is ‘too soon’. In the light of Christ’s victorious resurrection (1Corinthians 15), what—if anything—does our struggling, suffering, decaying life now, and our genuine contribution in love to the lives of others, and life lived unto the LORD, have to do with our glorious resurrection life in the age to come? Does ‘regeneration’ indicate there is genuine continuity (Matthew 19:28)? Does Paul’s exhortation indicate that our labour matters? If so, in what way? What does ‘deeds following’ mean?

- *Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain (1Corinthians 15:58).*
- *Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the LORD. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them’ (Rev. 14:13b-c).*

We contribute in different ways, at various stages of our Life

1. Even before his birth John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit and while in Elizabeth’s womb, he bore witness to the LORD Jesus in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:15; 41-45).
2. The life of Jesus of Nazareth in childhood, proved to be a timely blessing for the aging Simeon, a man living in Jerusalem. Having seen the Lord’s Messiah, God’s salvation for the nations—he was able to depart from this life in peace (Luke 2:25-33).
3. Jesus was known to be a carpenter: *‘Is not this **the carpenter**, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Jo’ses, Judas and Simon and are not his sisters here with us’ (Mark 6:3)*
4. Jesus was handed over to the Romans by the Israelites, to be crucified according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:223). Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection are central within his life’s unique purpose, as Saviour of the world. *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil (1John 3:8).*
5. Paul’s apostleship was a calling, and his task was to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations (Romans 1:5; 15:18; 16:26). Though he considered it rubbish (Phil. 3:8) in contrast to gaining Christ, Paul’s earlier life as a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) was a significant factor.

I trust and pray in Christ Jesus, that this topic of human vocation—which is deeply embedded within Scripture (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8; 1Corinthians 13, Ephesians 3:8-10; Esther 4:14; Revelation 21:24-26)—will be not merely useful to those who attend, but inspiring to those who are just setting out to think about what they will do in life. I am also convinced that this can be a timely reminder to retirees, the ageing, and to those in mid-life that our whole lives matter far more than we have realised.

God who is rich in mercy, saves us through Jesus Christ’s life, by grace alone, through faith. This grace flows to us from the Cross of Jesus Christ. But note this, good “works” are our new way of life. *For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Eph. 2:10).* Paul also says: *‘Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the LORD and not for people; knowing that from the LORD you will receive the inheritance as your reward; **you are serving the LORD Christ**’ (Colossians 3:23).*

When Luther saw God’s love rightly expressed in every vocation, monasticism was no longer superior:

Appendix: Vishal Mangalwadi writes convincingly about **The Secret of the West's Economic Success:**

"Five hundred years ago my country, India, had more wealth than Europe. Then came a dramatic change. Some European countries began to develop faster than the rest of the world. What happened?"

It is tempting to credit the West's success to greed and guns, germs and steel. For these did play a role. A responsible analysis, however, would look at Katherine von Bora — a runaway nun who married a monk, Martin Luther. She began the change that Sociologist Max Weber discussed in his classic, "Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism."

Prior to this nun's marriage, the Medieval Europe exalted celibacy and virginity, not marriage and family. Europe's religiosity honoured asceticism over enterprise. Katherine, who became Mrs Martin Luther, changed that. She played a key role in creating the new world that respects marriage, commercial enterprise, and economic success.

The newly married nun and the monk had no money to buy a house. Her husband, a priest doubled up as a professor in the small university of Wittenberg. The German town had about 2,500 people. The local Prince, Fredrick the Wise, was the university's patron. He gave the empty monastery to Martin and Katie Luther. For he agreed with Luther's study of the Bible that marriage was God's sacred gift to human beings. Living in a large house created a problem: How was Katie to maintain it on her husband's salary of a couple of hundred gulden a year?

Katie turned her home into a paying guest-house for boys, studying in the university. That required her to feed 30-40 people everyday. These included international guests, who came to meet Dr. Martin Luther. **How do you feed so many people?**

Katie became a gardener — growing her own fruit and vegetables. Then she went on to turn her home into an animal farm. Hers was the second home in town, permitted to keep goats: for she learnt how to manage her household's man-power to keep her animals from destroying neighbors' gardens.

Katie saved some money and invested it in buying a second, third, fourth, and then the fifth land. A creek flowed through one of the lands that she bought. Katie turned it into a fish-pond!

By 1542, the Luthers owned more real-estate in Wittenberg than any other citizen. Katie practiced the Bible's work-ethic that Luther talked about. Max Weber described that work-ethic as the most important factor behind modern economic progress.

Back then, cities did not provide clean drinking water. The goats and the cows did not yield the quantity of the milk that they now give. Therefore, the milk was primarily for the sick in Katie's large household. In order to provide safe drinks to her large household, Katie ran a brewery. One can still buy "Luther Beer" in Wittenberg's tourist market.

As soon as Katie bought a plot of land, she began developing it. Every farm needed buildings for agriculture as well as housing for her employees. Therefore, Katie spent her married life supervising building construction. She mastered Planning, Buying, Managing, Negotiating, and Accounting.

Had Martin Luther followed the Buddha as his guru, he would have remained a religious ascetic, begging for his food. But Luther followed the Bible. It taught that God was a worker, not a meditator. God created this wonderful world and made man creative like Him. God required Adam and Eve to look after the garden and the earth. Later, after liberating Jews from slavery, God commanded them to work for six days diligently and rest on the seventh.

The Bible condemned laziness as sin. Therefore, Apostle Paul left his pupil, Titus, in the island of Crete to transform their culture. Crete lived out Consumerism. They were known as “lazy gluttons,” (Titus 1:12) for they coveted more than they needed. They did not work for what they consumed. Paul asked Titus to appoint Elders in Crete, who will model “good work” and teach believers to work hard and produce enough to bless those who were in need.

Martin and Katie Luther understood God’s Ten Commandments. The tenth commandment, “You shall not covet” meant that people must create wealth. A person who was given five talents must multiply them into ten.

The eighth commandment, “You shall not steal” meant that every person had a fundamental right to the property that he inherited or created. While the state was responsible to protect a citizen’s property, the family, church and the school were responsible to produce citizens that would not steal a neighbour’s fruit, vegetable, animals or other goods. Nor should an employee steal the milk, the eggs, the fruit, vegetables, or fish that belonged to their employer.

I grew up in North India. The land and the climate were perfect for all kinds of fruit, vegetables, milk, eggs, and fish. These agro-products, in turn, could have created vibrant agro-industries. Average peasant did not grow fruit and vegetables because it was virtually impossible to protect his produce. Upper caste men would come to his farm in broad day light to help themselves to his produce. If he left his wife to protect his farm, she would be raped. In spite of such hardships, toiling Indians did produce wealth. The tragedy was that our caste-system, in a culture without the Ten Commandments, prevented my people from enjoying the fruit of their labour. During the 20th Century, Atheism governed Soviet Union’s Communist Empire. Atheism did not believe that God had commanded, “You shall not steal.” So it did not respect private property. Russia’s atheist dictator, Stalin, took over citizen’s agricultural land because atheism gives the State absolute power over citizens. Katie would have had no motivation to buy lands and develop them in an atheistic culture.

Absence of Ten Commandments created additional problems in India. Our people worshipped the cows, the land, and the rivers. That robbed them of the right to establish their dominion over nature. Our culture that gave people the freedom to covet and steal, robbed citizens of the motivation to produce more. Katie’s entrepreneurial abilities succeeded because the Bible created a different moral and philosophical culture.

Economics has become an extremely complicated subject now. Therefore, it is difficult for many well-trained economists to understand a simple secret of the West’s economic success. That secret was a woman — Mrs. Katherine Luther. She did much more than feed a few dozen students. Every single day, Katie helped her husband disciple Germany’s future spiritual leaders. She transmitted to German pastors the Bible’s spirit of economic enterprise. That is the art of making money with whatever little you have.

Katie exhibited the art of managing money, saving money, investing savings, managing people and property to multiply talents. After eating dinner at her table, the boys would often sit with her husband, Dr. Martin Luther. They will ask questions and note down his answers. Katie’s household was producing more than food. It was shaping Germany’s future intellectual and spiritual leaders. Centuries later, scholars such as Max Weber would continue to read the notes the boys took and published as Martin Luther’s Table Talks. Those informal, post-dinner discussions applied the Bible to everyday life, including the economic life of ordinary families. It was through those young men, disciplined in Katie and Martin Luther’s home, that the Bible transformed national economies.²

² <https://www.revelationmovement.com/meet-katherine-the-secret-of-the-wests-economic-success-2/>