

VOCATION: RESPONDING TO GOD'S VOICE

OVERVIEW:

In her article, “The Heart of Vocation”, author Kate Harris claims that compartmentalizing our calling into a role, title, or skillset simplifies our understanding of vocation, but fails to account for the complexity of our lives. In this discussion, you’ll explore four key principles that clarify what vocation is—and the practical ramifications of calling in our lives.

Pre-Reading: “The Heart of Vocation” .pdf by Kate Harris (3 pages)

DISCUSSION:

- What stood out to you in Kate Harris’ article?
- In your opinion, what do most people mean when they refer to a person’s vocation?

(i.e. a person’s career, in Catholic tradition one’s vocation often referred to a specific religious occupation such as the priesthood, some people view service-oriented jobs such as education or medicine as more of a “vocation” than other careers, like business)

What is vocation?

The words *vocation* (Latin, *vox*) and *calling* (English) are synonymous – they both mean to live in response to God’s voice.

Vocation includes our occupation, but also transcends it. The Puritans believed that our primary calling is “By God, to God, and for God” and our secondary calling is to “Everyone, everywhere, and in everything.”

- How does this perspective inform your understanding of what it means to be “called”?

**As we seek to understand and practice our vocation,
four principles can guide the discovery process:**

1. “General” Call vs. “Specific” Call

Before God reveals a detailed plan for our lives, He offers the general, but life-changing invitation to “Follow me” (Mark 1:17). Consider the following words from Os Guinness:

“We are not called to do something or go somewhere; we are called to Someone. We are not called first to special work but to God. The key to answering the call is to be devoted to no one and to nothing above God himself... 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, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service.”

- Os Guinness¹

- Why do you think so many of us expect to receive a “special call”?
- What consequences could result from delaying action until you receive a special call?

“There is not a single instance in the New Testament of God’s special call to anyone into a paid occupation or into the role of a religious professional. Others feel that, without a special call, they have had no call at all. So they wait around for guidance and become passive, excusing themselves by saying they have had ‘no call.’

- Os Guinness²

2. Central Call vs. Peripheral Call

Our vocation flows through the various roles and responsibilities of our lives. It is the guiding theme running through every area and season of our lives. It’s not something on the edges or periphery of our lives, but is integral to our purpose and identity.

“We all have a vocation, a calling. And it is important to recognize that a calling is much more than a career; it is the **empowering summons of God to participate in his grand plan of renewing everything**. A career isn’t big enough for us. A career is something we choose, something we push to succeed in. But **a calling is something for which we are summoned**.

And God has our telephone number and he keeps redialing.”

- Tom Nelson³

- In what ways is this perspective freeing?
- How could you use this principal to explain vocation to someone in the early stages of a career, or even to a child?

3. Mystery vs. Clarity

It takes time for grasp the nuances of your calling. Don’t let seasons of questioning or doubt discourage you!

The expression your vocation may change as you move through various life stages or job assignments. Vocation is not fixed, but fluid.

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

² Ibid.

³ Nelson, Tom. *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*.

“That I am who I am is not a result of chance, a mere cosmic accident. Rather it is the result of God’s intention. There is a reason why I am who I am, although that reason may not be immediately apparent to me. I was placed here for a purpose, and that purpose is one which I am, in part, to discover, not invent. The facts about me are indicators of the divine intent for my life, indicators which are to be interpreted in the light of God’s revealed Word.”

- Lee Hardy⁴

- Is it wrong to seek clarity regarding our callings? How can we find direction in seasons when we lack vocational clarity?

4. Just because you’re practicing your vocation, doesn’t mean it will be easy.

We live in a fallen world. The adage “Do what you love and you’ll never work a day in your life” has become a popular saying among the creative or “maker” class, but it fosters a faulty perspective of calling.

It’s unrealistic to pretend that all our work will be exciting, fulfilling, or profitable. Much work is drudgery, but simply must be done. Lawns have to be mowed, diapers changed, and trash collected. Examine these words from Karl Barth:

“The greatest reward of faithfulness to vocation is to be able to develop ourselves to our concern not only with our interest but with desire and love, with gladness that we are what we are. But this is a reward which we cannot expect or demand, and at which we are not to aim. ***Our task is to do justice to what is demanded at the place which we have occupied, whether gladly or otherwise...*** There will always be exceptional cases of men who can gladly fulfill their sphere of operation from first to last and in all its dimensions; just as there will always be those who do so with the greatest reluctance. For most of us the reality will lie somewhere between. We shall have much cause for sighing, yet also for joy, and *vice versa*. There will be much to make us glad but also to depress us.” - Karl Barth⁵

- How do Barth’s comments relate to your current work situation?
- In light of what we’ve discussed, what will it mean to live out your vocation today?

⁴ Hardy, Lee. *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work*.

⁵ Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics, Volume 3*.