

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S CALLING

A High School Homeschool Elective Course

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Elective Course**



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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Understanding God's Calling is a high school homeschool elective course. The course guides students through an in-depth, thoughtful, biblical exploration of calling, vocation, and personal gifting. Students will read a variety of materials that examine calling as it generally applies to the Christian life and as it applies to specific areas of life, such as work, family, and community.

The course is divided into sections examining different aspects of calling in the Christian life. Beginning with the gospel, the first few weeks set a strong biblical foundation to understand the Christian call to obedience and faithfulness. In the final weeks, students will focus on practical exercises to help discern their own unique gifts and God's call in their lives.

The course does not guarantee that students will determine their dream job by the final module. Instead, students should gain a robust understanding of the comprehensive calling of Christians to faithfulness in Christ. In addition, upon careful reflection and consultation, students should gain a better understanding of and confidence in their unique gifts.

Understanding God's Calling, when coupled with prayer and dedication, can help students set a course to obey God's call faithfully in their lives.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. There are four books assigned for required reading.

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

Lucado, Max. *Cure for the Common Life: Living in Your Sweet Spot*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Veith, Gene. *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011.

Whelchel, Hugh. *How Then Should We Work? Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work*. Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2012.

2. There are also numerous readings, as well as optional reading suggestions, that can be found online at <http://homeschool.tifwe.org>.
3. A series of 1–2 page reflection papers assigned throughout the course aim to help students think reflectively about the material and their calling.

4. A Vocational Analysis Profile in module 15 is a practical tool designed to help highlight gifts and talents.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

While completing this course, students should:

- Gain a robust biblical understanding of the meaning of “calling.”
- Learn to apply the concept of calling to all spheres of life.
- Attain a rich comprehension of the gospel narrative.
- Evaluate their God-given gifts and skills, and find confidence in their unique talents.
- More fully appreciate how God is calling them to use their gifts and skills to his glory.

IS THIS COURSE FOR ME?

This course is designed for high school students who are considering work and education after graduation and who desire to fulfill God’s calling in their lives. The ideas and assignments in this course require students to think deeply about biblical concepts and reflect honestly on themselves. The course best suits students in eleventh or twelfth grade who are ready to consider college and careers after school, and who demonstrate capability and desire to think critically and self-reflect. Mature students should be able to navigate the material and assignments independently, but they may need to consult an adult at times in the course for further explanation on specific concepts.

Our hope and prayer for this course is that it might engage, inspire, and equip students to use their God-given talents to his glory in whatever vocation he calls them to.

COURSE LAYOUT

Each module consists of several sections designed to guide students through the material.

Modules begin with a brief **description** of content and review of the previous material.

Learning objectives state the main ideas for the module’s content. **Key ideas** highlight

important concepts not to be missed in each lesson. **Scripture readings** note all the scripture references for the introductory material. **Introductions** give the students a basis for their read-

ings and work to follow on the topic. **Reading assignments** list required and optional read-

ings for related content. **Study questions** are designed to ensure reading comprehension and

encourage reflection. **Assessments**, if listed, explain writing assignments designed to apply concepts presented in the material to the students' own lives. Family or group **learning activities** offer suggested group exercises to further apply and examine important concepts. A **summary** wraps up the module and prepares students for the next lesson.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS AND GRADING RUBRIC

A teacher's guide for this course, with a grading rubric, suggested answers, and guidelines, is included with the purchase of this curriculum.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Rev. Dr. Art Lindsley is the vice president of theological initiatives at the Institute, where he oversees the development of a theology that integrates faith, work, and economics. Most recently, he has served as the president and senior fellow at the C.S. Lewis Institute since 1987. Prior to that, he was the director of educational ministries at the Ligonier Valley Study Center and staff specialist with the Coalition for Christian Outreach in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

He is an editor of and contributing author to IFWE's recently released book, *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty*. In his chapter, Rev. Dr. Lindsley walks through Leviticus 25 to explain common myths about Jubilee. He also examines claims that Acts chapters 2 through 5 teach socialism and demonstrates how these claims are incorrect.

He is also the author of *C. S. Lewis's Case for Christ*, *True Truth*, and *Love: The Ultimate Apologetic*. He is co-author with R. C. Sproul and John Gerstner of *Classical Apologetics*, and he often writes articles on theology, apologetics, C. S. Lewis, and the lives of many other authors and teachers.

Rev. Dr. Lindsley earned his Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from Seattle Pacific University, Master of Divinity from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies from the University of Pittsburgh. Rev. Dr. Lindsley, his wife Connie, and their two boys Trey and Jonathan make their home in Arlington, Virginia.

ELIZABETH MOYER

Elizabeth Moyer is the publications manager at the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics, where she manages the production of print and digital publications, providing direction and support to publish high-quality content quickly, efficiently, and effectively. She also contributes to IFWE content in her writing about relationships, stewardship, and calling.

Before joining the Institute, Elizabeth gained non profit administration experience managing business operations at Oakseed Ministries International. She served as a Fellow at the Capital Fellows Program, a post graduate leadership development program at McLean Presbyterian Church in McLean, Virginia. She currently sits on the steering committee for the Capital Fellows Program.

Elizabeth graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill with her Bachelor in Arts in English and Religious Studies. Currently residing in Arlington, Virginia, with her husband Will, Elizabeth enjoys healthy cooking, yoga, and art in her free time.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR FAITH, WORK & ECONOMICS

The Institute for Faith, Work & Economics™ (IFWE) is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) Christian research organization committed to promoting biblical and economic principles that help individuals find fulfillment in their work and contribute to a free and flourishing society.

IFWE's research starts with the belief that the Bible, as the inerrant Word of God, provides the authoritative and intellectual foundation for a proper understanding of work and economic truths that, when properly followed, can help individuals, companies, communities, and nations flourish.

IFWE's research is based on three core principles:

1. Each person is created in God's image and, like him, has a desire to be creative and to find fulfillment using their God-given talents through work.
2. All work, whether paid or volunteer, matters to God, and we as Christians are called to pursue excellence throughout the week—not just on Sundays—stewarding all that we've been given for God's glory and for the flourishing of society.
3. Therefore, we as citizens must promote an economic environment that not only provides us the freedom to pursue our callings and flourish in our work but also reflects the inherent dignity of every human being.

Our desire is to help Christians view their work within the bigger picture of what God is doing in the world. Not only do we help Christians find personal fulfillment, but we also help them understand how to better alleviate poverty, address greed, and view possessions properly. With a biblical view of work and economics, we can partner together to be meaningful participants in God's plan to restore the world to the way he intended it to be.

We invite you to learn more through our other resources at <http://www.tifwe.org>:

- Our blog provides brief but powerful insights.
- Our book *How Then Should We Work?* is a perfect starting point for understanding the biblical meaning of work.
- Our research offers concise explanations of our most significant research and findings.
- Sign up for our newsletter and receive updates on our latest events and publications.

SYLLABUS

The links to reading assignments that can be found online are available at:

<http://homeschool.tifwe.org>. However, if you are accessing this book on a computer, you can access them by clicking the readings' links.

MODULE 1 – INTRODUCTION

1. Jenni Catron, “[Discover and Unleash Your God-Given Influence](#)”
2. Hugh Whelchel, “[What Is the Path to Your Greatest Fulfillment?](#)”
3. CruPress, “[What Is a Calling?](#)”
4. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 1

MODULE 2 – THE FOUR-CHAPTER GOSPEL

1. Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, pp. 8–13
2. Jeremy Treat, “[Kingdom and Cross: What God Has Joined Together, Let Not Man Separate](#)”
3. Taylor Barkley, “[The Four-Chapter Gospel in Our Work](#)”
4. Christina Fox, “[God Writes a Great Story](#)”
5. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 11

MODULE 3 – THE IMAGE OF GOD

1. Art Lindsley, “The Image of God”
2. Peter May, “What Is the Image of God?”
3. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 3

MODULE 4 – THE CALL TO CREATIVITY

1. Art Lindsley, “The Call to Creativity”
2. Joe Rigney, “To Name the World”
3. Jon Bloom, “What Will You Leave Behind?”
4. Stephen Altrogge, “Make God Look Great. Create”
5. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 6

MODULE 5 – FLOURISHING

1. Jonathan Pennington, “A Biblical Theology of Human Flourishing”
2. Hugh Whelchel, “Your Relationships Play an Essential Role in Biblical Flourishing”
3. Anne Bradley, “Salt, Light, and a Stockbroker: A Story of Flourishing”

MODULE 6 – CALLING

1. Art Lindsley, “Calling”
2. Jon Bloom, “Christian, Your Job Is a Ministry Job”
3. Andrew Spencer, “What Is the Vocation of a Student?”
4. Matt Perman, “How Do You Make Good Career Choices?”
5. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 4
6. Gene Veith, *God at Work*, Chs. 1–4

ASSESSMENT

In about one page, typed and double-spaced, apply the principles in the last six modules to your own life. Many of the concepts and principles may be new to you. In your reflection, summarize what you have learned about the biblical foundation to calling. Consider the following questions in your paper:

- *What new concepts and insights about the gospel have you learned?*
- *How have these concepts impacted your personal faith?*
- *How do these principles build the foundation for a biblical perspective on calling?*

MODULE 7 – RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. John Piper, “What Does It Mean to Have a Relationship with God?”
2. Erik Raymond, “Do You Have a Dysfunctional Relationship with God?”
3. Dan Cruver, “Adoption Is Bigger than You Think”
4. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 5

ASSESSMENT

Reflect on how your relationship with God affects your calling. In about one page, typed and double-spaced, summarize what you have learned in this module about your calling to have a relationship with God. Consider the following questions in your reflection:

- *What does the Bible say about your relationship with God?*
- *What are ways you can strengthen and grow your relationship with God?*
- *Why is your relationship with God important for your understanding of calling?*

MODULE 8 – FAMILY

1. John Piper, “Do Not Forsake Your Mother’s Teaching”
2. Richard Pratt Jr., “Broken Homes in the Bible”
3. Tedd Tripp, “The Ordinary Christian Family”
4. Gene Veith, *God at Work*, Ch. 6

ASSESSMENT

Reflect on your relationships within your family. In about one page, typed and double-spaced, summarize what you have learned in this module about your calling as it relates to family. Consider the following questions in your reflection:

- *What does the Bible say about your family relationships?*
- *What are ways you can strengthen and grow your relationships with your family?*
- *How does your relationship with family affect your understanding of calling? Why is it important?*

MODULE 9 – THE CHURCH

1. Jonathan Parnell, “The Local Church and the Supremacy of Christ”
2. Jon Bloom, “Why We Shouldn’t Neglect to Meet Together”
3. Richard J. Krejcir, “The Call of Commitment to the Church”
4. J. I. Packer, “The Church”
5. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 12
6. Gene Veith, *God at Work*, Ch. 8

ASSESSMENT

Reflect on your relationship to the church. In about one page, typed and double-spaced, summarize what you have learned in this module about your calling to the church. Consider the following questions in your reflection:

- *What does the Bible say about the church?*
- *What are ways you can participate in your church?*
- *How does the church affect your understanding of calling? Why is it important?*
- *What is your personal experience in the church?*

MODULE 10 – COMMUNITY

1. Hugh Whelchel, “Why Should Christians Care to Vote?”
2. Jennifer A. Marshall, “The Christian Calling to Citizenship”
3. Timothy Keller, “The Gospel and the Poor”
4. Kristine Zambito, “When It Comes to Alleviating Poverty, Here’s How Your Church Can Avoid Help that Hurts”
5. J. P. Moreland, “A Biblical Case for Limited Government”
6. John Piper, “Love Your Neighbor As Yourself, Part 2”

MODULE 11 – THEOLOGY OF WORK

1. William Messenger, “Calling in the Theology of Work”
2. Hugh Whelchel, “Is Evangelism the Sole Reason for Our Work?”

3. Timothy Keller, “How Faith Affects Our Work”
4. Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, Chs. 1–2
5. Gene Veith, *God at Work*, Ch. 5

MODULE 12 – HISTORY OF WORK AND CALLING

1. Greg Ayers, “Martin Luther’s View of Faith and Work”
2. Hugh Whelchel, “John Calvin’s Contribution to the Biblical Doctrine of Work”
3. Leland Ryken, “The Original Puritan Work Ethic”
4. Christian History Institute, “A Quick Survey of Vocation throughout Church History”
5. Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, Chs. 3–4
6. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 18

MODULE 13 – CALLING AND CULTURAL RENEWAL

1. Timothy Keller, “Work and Cultural Renewal”
2. Abraham Cho, “Transfiguration in Cultural Engagement”
3. James Davison Hunter, “To Change the World”
4. Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, Chs. 5–6

MODULE 14 – WHAT IS SUCCESS?

1. Marshall Segal, “The Lethal Drug in Your Dream Job”
2. David Leonard, “Is Career Success a Zero-Sum Game?”
3. Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life*, Section One
4. Hugh Whelchel, *Monday Morning Success*
5. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 9

ASSESSMENT

Reflect on the ideas of work and success that we have been exploring in the last several modules. In about one page, typed and double-spaced, summarize what you have learned about your calling to work. Consider the following questions in your reflection:

- *What does the Bible say about work?*
- *Why is work important?*
- *How has your understanding of calling as it relates to work changed, if at all?*
- *How should you consider success in terms of work?*

MODULE 15 – WHAT ARE YOU GIFTED TO DO?

1. Elise Daniel, “How to Find Your Calling”
2. Art Lindsley, “Gifts of the Spirit in the Old Testament”
3. David Leonard, “Should Your Passion Determine Your Profession?”
4. Timothy Keller, “Discerning and Exercising Spiritual Gifts”
5. Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life*, Section 2

VOCATIONAL ANALYSIS PROFILE

MODULE 16 – WHO ARE YOU?

1. Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life*, Section 3
Focus time and attention on the “Sweet Spot Discovery Guide,” pp. 147–71

ASSESSMENT

Summarize all insights from this exercise in a short one- to two-page reflection paper.

- *What did you learn?*
- *What did you already know?*
- *What do you think about your results?*

MODULE 17 – FINAL REFLECTIONS

ASSESSMENT

Read over all the reflection papers you have written. Consider what you have learned over the course of these modules about calling and how God has uniquely gifted you. Write two to three pages, typed and double-spaced, with your final thoughts. Include a brief summary of your interview activity in this module, commenting on how the interview has affected your interests in the profession.

PART 1

THE BIG PICTURE

OVERVIEW

What is my calling? What does God want me to do with my life? What are my gifts, and how should I use them to glorify God?

These questions resonate with almost every heart and soul. We all question our purpose and meaning on earth. We spend hours, days, years, and decades searching for fulfillment. We expend significant time, money, and energy on education, training, and direction to find the perfect fit. The question is, how do we know? How do we know what God wants us to do with our lives?

To begin exploring what calling means in the Christian life, we must begin with scripture and the big picture. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells a grand story of God's purpose for his creation and his people. This story speaks directly to our lives.

God created the world for a purpose—ultimately to glorify himself. He created humans in his image to reflect his glory, to care for the earth, to accomplish his purposes, and to flourish. God created each individual with completely unique talents, preferences, gifts, skills, and passions so that together, we may flourish. He calls each person to use his or her gifts in a distinct way. To understand that calling, we must begin at the beginning. Understanding the context of our creation informs everything that we do in relationships at school, at work, at home, at church, and in our communities.

So, let's begin at the beginning—the big picture—to understand *how* and *why* God has made us each with a specific purpose in mind.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

MODULE 1 – THE INTRODUCTION

The course is organized into sections that will take students through a theological understanding of calling to a practical application. Each module has several sections designed to support the student's comprehension of each topic.

MODULE 2 – THE FOUR-CHAPTER GOSPEL

The good news about Jesus is not just that our souls have been saved for heaven, but that Christ in his return will restore the entire creation (as opposed to discarding it altogether).

MODULE 3 – THE IMAGE OF GOD

Humans are unique in bearing God's image, and while sin has corrupted this image, it has not eliminated it entirely.

MODULE 4 – CALL TO CREATIVITY

Being made in the image of God means we have the ability and the responsibility to create. Creative activity is for all people in all fields, not just certain people in "artistic" fields.

MODULE 5 – FLOURISHING

God desires for us to flourish, and flourishing encompasses not just our material well-being, but all areas of life.

MODULE 6 – CALLING

The idea of "calling" or "vocation" is not limited to what kind of job or career we have. Rather, we have multiple callings in our lives beyond our career paths.

MODULE 1

INTRODUCTION

DESCRIPTION

All of humankind asks questions about purpose and meaning because God designed us to find fulfillment and to flourish. This module will introduce the idea of calling as well as familiarize you with the different module sections and the layout of the course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Learning objectives will briefly summarize the main points of the module. Consider the learning objectives the key takeaway for the material that you should feel confident in explaining by the end of your study.

The course is organized into sections that will take students through a theological understanding of calling to a practical application. Each module has several sections designed to support the student's comprehension of each topic.

KEY IDEA

In each module, this section will briefly explain key ideas from the material that we don't want you to miss. These ideas will help you grasp each module's content. Keep in mind that some definitions are contextualized for the material of this course. You can find all key ideas in the glossary at the end of the course.

1. The **Christian concept of calling** is robust. It involves understanding that we were made for a purpose and we can find fulfillment in work. It's a comprehensive and inclusive concept that applies to all of life, not just a job.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Make sure to review the listed scripture readings before reading the introduction and assigned readings. This scripture provides biblical context and support for the ideas presented in each module.

- Genesis 1

INTRODUCTION

Why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing? What is God's plan for my life?

Questions like these plague most people at some point in life. The idea of being called to something bigger in life, a purpose that may even transcend a particular job, is familiar to almost everyone. We search for meaning and long for satisfaction and fulfillment in life because God made us to want something *more*. Our deepest longings are only fulfilled in God himself. God designed us to know *him* better and more deeply. Out of his love for us, he also designed us to work and be fulfilled in glorifying him. The problem is that we mistake other things as substitutes for the importance of knowing God. A natural place to look for this fulfillment is in our work, but we look elsewhere too. Sometimes people search for this meaning in volunteering, family, achievements, and relationships. These things can quickly become idols that take the place of God in our lives. The idea of calling may seem elusive and mysterious, like a puzzle or riddle we have to figure out to gain access to whatever lies behind the door in front of us. But don't worry. Through the modules in this course, we will help you unpack and demystify the idea of calling.

For Christians, calling is a robust and rich idea—it means far more than a job. The biblical understanding of calling is founded on the understanding of how God made his people and what his plan is for creation. It's comprehensive, extending far beyond what we do to earn a paycheck. Calling is also inclusive. Pastors, missionaries, and others in “full-time” ministry are not the only believers who are appointed to specific positions in God's kingdom. All believers are invited to do what God has created them to do. Throughout the modules in this course, we'll explore many aspects of calling to gain a better understanding of how to answer God's call in our own lives.

First, we will look at the biblical foundations of calling. The Bible explains the grand narrative God has for his people. From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, we can read about God's plan for all of his creation. The importance of this story applies to our individual lives; our personal stories fit within God's larger narrative.

After we explore the biblical foundation of calling, we will examine the different aspects of calling. God calls us to work and to relationships in other areas of life, like to himself, to family, to church, and to community. Learning about the different types of calling builds a stronger foundation for us to find the path to fulfillment.

Finally, we will get practical. In the last few modules of the course, you will take a series of exercises and tests to help determine your unique gifts. These assessments are designed to help illuminate your strengths and weaknesses so that you can better pursue your talents to God's glory.

Throughout the course, brief reflection papers will inspire personal reflection. These will complement the practical applications at the end of the course.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

This section will list required and optional reading assignments for each module.

All articles are available online at <http://homeschool.tifwe.org>

1. Jenni Catron, “[Discover and Unleash Your God-Given Influence](#)”
2. Hugh Whelchel, “[What Is the Path to Your Greatest Fulfillment?](#)”
3. CruPress, “[What Is a Calling?](#)”
4. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 1

OPTIONAL READING

This section lists suggested, optional readings that may further your understanding of a topic. These readings are valuable to each module but not required to complete a module successfully.

There is no optional reading for this module.

STUDY QUESTIONS

This section will give you questions to answer after completing the assigned readings.

In a few sentences, answer each of the questions below after completing the assigned reading.

1. Write down a definition of calling as you understand it right now.
2. What has influenced your understanding of calling? Culture? The Bible? Your parents? Friends?
3. What do you hope to gain from this course?

GROUP OR FAMILY ACTIVITY

This section includes optional learning activities that promote discussion, personal reflection, and sharing among your family or a group. The activities are suggestions, so feel free to adapt them to your group or come up with your own.

Write a letter to yourself, explaining your present ideas about calling in your life. What do you feel like God is calling you to do? How have you come to this conclusion? Date the letter and seal it. At the end of the course, read the letter and reflect on how your idea of calling has changed, if it has.

SUMMARY

This module briefly introduced the idea of calling. We also looked at the different elements you can expect in each module. Next week, we will start with scripture and examine the four-chapter gospel to dive into calling. Get ready!

MODULE 2

THE FOUR-CHAPTER GOSPEL

DESCRIPTION

To begin, we are going to examine how our story and ability to create are specific parts of God's plan. The stories in the Bible are all part of one larger story, called a metanarrative. The large, overarching story of the scripture is also known as the four-chapter gospel, which includes Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. Understanding this grand biblical narrative helps us find our part in God's story.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

The good news about Jesus is not just that our souls have been saved for heaven, but that Christ in his return will restore the entire creation (as opposed to discarding it altogether).

KEY IDEAS

1. **Four-chapter gospel** – The grand narrative of the Bible that explains God's story for all of creation; a context for us to understand our purpose on earth.
2. **Creation** – The story of how God created the earth good and perfect. Adam and Eve knew communion with God that was unhindered by sin.
3. **The Fall** – The story of sin entering into the world when Satan tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God and seek independence from him. God's perfect creation became broken and marred. The curse of sin touches every aspect of life from physical to relational. When sin came into the world, it damaged our relationship with God and our view of ourselves. We still reflect aspects of God despite our sin because we have been saved through faith by God's grace. We are redeemed by Christ and are clothed in his righteousness.
4. **Redemption** – God's redemptive plan includes saving humankind and restoring them back to himself. He desires a right relationship with his people, and he sent his son to pay

the price for sin. Redemption extends to every aspect of life, not just to our relationship with God.

5. **Restoration** – God's plan will not be fully realized until Christ returns to create new heavens and a new earth. Sin will be no more and we will once again know a full and right relationship with God. Restoration applies to the whole of creation.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

All scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.

- Romans 8
- Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15, 23
- Genesis 3
- Romans 6:23
- I Corinthians 12:13; 15:58
- Acts 3:21; 20:27
- Revelation 21:4, 24–26
- Matthew 22:36–40; 28:19–20

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps you read the title of this module and immediately thought, *What are you talking about—a different gospel?* No, certainly not!

Nothing is meaningful without a context. Many people understand the gospel in two chapters: Fall and Redemption. While this is accurate, they are part of a larger story, the “four-chapter gospel”: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

The two-chapter gospel is profoundly true. It is the fundamental message we preach. Essentially, we are all sinners and we desperately need to repent, and Jesus died for our sin and was raised from the dead. Therefore, we are justified by faith in what Christ has done. We can rejoice that “Christ died for us, rose for us, reigns in power for us and prays for us” (Rom. 8:34). Well then, what is wrong with this message? Nothing; nothing else is necessary for our salvation. This is the gospel.

What then is this four-chapter gospel? It includes what we are saved *from* and what we are saved *for*—our purpose here on earth and how that purpose relates to our final destination. It is a gospel that applies to all of life, not just personal salvation and eternal life.

While sin and salvation are undeniable realities, they are not the complete gospel. This abridged version leaves out God's original plan for his creation as described in the first chapters of Genesis

and characterized by *shalom*: universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. It also leaves out God's future restoration of all things at the end of the age, which is also characterized by *shalom*. The two-chapter gospel is an incomplete story that:

- Does not tell us about our true destiny.
- Does not tell us why we were created.
- Does not tell us about what we were created to do.
- Tends to emphasize the individualistic aspects of salvation; salvation becomes all about us.
- Tends to lead to an escapist view of redemption.
- Becomes just a gospel of sin management.

This two-chapter gospel portrays salvation only as a bus ticket to heaven. Christians often believe that what they do while they wait for the bus doesn't really matter. This is not what the Bible teaches. If we leave out the first chapter, Creation, we do not know why we were created. If we leave out the last chapter, Restoration, we do not know about our glorious future.

The four-chapter gospel involves the whole biblical narrative: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

Let's explore each chapter in depth.

CREATION

The Creation chapter of the gospel details how God created the universe from nothing. God saw what he created and called it good, before sin disrupted it. He created humankind through Adam and Eve to bear his image in the world and to have an intimate, loving relationship with him. He also tasked Adam and Eve with a job and a purpose: to cultivate the earth, to multiply and fill it, and to exercise dominion over it. All relationships were complete and unbroken. In complete unity and without sin, the whole world flourished. This was how the world ought to have been. This chapter of the gospel is often left out, but it is vital to understanding how God intended the world to be. He made it with pleasure and delight, a world to reflect his glory and one that he loved.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve had the ability to respond to creation in three main ways:

- They had the ability to respond to God (personal). They walked with God in the garden (Gen. 3:8).

- They had the ability to respond to each other (corporate). Note Adam's first response to Eve (Gen. 2:23).
- They had the ability to respond to the creation (cosmic). God charged Adam and Eve with caring for the garden and exercising dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26–28 and 2:15).

These three responses play out in our relationships. We have a relationship with God, with others, and with the world around us.

FALL

We know the events of the Fall well. Sin entered the world when Satan tempted Adam and Eve and they chose independence from God. After the Fall, sin marred all relationships for all generations to come. Our three spheres of relationships were damaged; there was now alienation from God, others, and creation.

- Adam and Eve hid from God (personal; Gen. 3:8).
- Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent (corporate; Gen. 3:12-13).
- The ground was “cursed” because of the Fall (cosmic; Gen. 3:17).

Notice how all healthy dimensions of creation are impacted by the fall into sin. We witness the effects of sin daily. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally—every aspect of life is broken and in need of redemption. All relationships suffer from sin. There is nothing that we can do on our own to reverse the effects of sin. We need a savior.

REDEMPTION

Sin entered the world and corrupted God's good creation. The price we must pay for sin is death (Rom. 6:23). We do not deserve to live in the presence of God forever, because he is perfectly holy and righteous. So, he kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, out of his presence, and us along with them. However, God had a plan to save his people, whom he loves unconditionally. God paid the price for all the sin of his people by sending his son to die in our place. By doing so, he redeemed each one of us. Redemption does not just affect us personally; it applies to every area affected by the Fall:

- We are saved from our sins (personal; Rom. 8:34).
- When we receive Christ by grace through faith, we are “baptized with the one Spirit into the one body”—the church (corporate; I Cor. 12:13).
- Acts 3:21 shows that God’s intent is the “restoration of all things.” Colossians 1:20 maintains that God’s purpose is “through him to reconcile all things to Himself” (cosmic; see also Rom. 8:19-21).

The Redemption chapter is a beautiful one. While we experience the weight of sin every day, we are still able to witness God’s redemptive work in our relationships, in our thoughts, in creation, and in every area of life. This is where we are today. Jesus’ death on the cross allows us to experience redemption in all of our relationships, but not completely. We are still experiencing the effects of the Fall; we are redeemed, but we are not yet fully restored.

RESTORATION

Restoration is the final chapter in which all of creation is restored to new heavens and a new earth. There are two Greek words for “new.” The first Greek word is *neos*, which means “totally new.” The second Greek word is *kainos*, which means “renewed.” Almost every time the Bible uses the word “new” (referencing new birth, new selves, new creation, new heavens, and new earth), it uses the Greek word *kainos*. God will not throw away creation, but renew it. Albert Wolters says, “God does not make junk, and he does not junk what he has made.”¹ God’s plan for creation has been and always will be to free it completely from the bondage of sin and restore it to the glory he intended.

God will renew his creation and all the relationships in it. Our hope rests in the assurance that we, Christ’s people, will live with God forever in a complete, right relationship with him. Our relationships with Christ and others will be unbroken and there will be no tears, no sorrow, and no death (Ps. 23:6, Rev. 21:4). God will restore his creation in every aspect: personal, corporate, and cosmic.

Revelation 21:24–26 indicates that there will be some of the productivity of different nations in the new heavens and new earth. The kings of the nations “will bring their glory...[and] the glory and honor of the nations into it.” The unique cultural diversity and productivity of every nation will last.

1. Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 42.

What does this mean for you? It means that what you do matters to God. I Corinthians 15:58 indicates that work that is done in the Lord is not in vain. Pastor and theologian N. T. Wright develops this theme in his book *Surprised by Hope*. He says about this verse:

What you do in the Lord is not in vain. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that's about to be dug up for a building site. You are—strange as it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God's new world.²

The four-chapter gospel gives us a larger vision about what God intends to do in his creation. The four-chapter gospel also gives us meaning and context for our work. God created man with a purpose: to help cultivate the earth and bring it to full restoration and glory. The work that you do plays a role in this grand story. Your work as a baker, a student, a taxi driver, a marketing specialist, an IT consultant, a gardener, a pastor, or a missionary is equally significant. It serves a role in God's plan to further creation, to propel it forward in progress as an act of worship of the Creator.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, pp. 8–13
We will read this whole book in a later section on work, but we will give you a foretaste in this module.
2. Jeremy Treat, “[Kingdom and Cross: What God Has Joined Together, Let Not Man Separate](#)”
3. Taylor Barkley, “[The Four-Chapter Gospel in Our Work](#)”
4. Christina Fox, “[God Writes a Great Story](#)”
5. Os Guinness, *The Call*, Ch. 11

2. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 208.

OPTIONAL READING

- Anne Bradley, “[Three Reasons You Shouldn’t Be Content](#)”
- Art Lindsley, “[The Meaning of Work in Life—and Death](#)”
- Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*
- N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*
- Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*
- Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*
- Michael Wittmer, *Becoming Worldly Saints*
- Michael Wittmer, *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*
- Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God’s World*

STUDY QUESTIONS

In a few sentences, answer each of the questions below after completing the assigned reading.

1. How does each chapter of the gospel affect our response to personal, corporate, and cosmic relationships?
2. How does the prospect of renewed heavens and a renewed earth affect the way we live?
3. Tim Keller says that when we neglect this story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration, “we lose the power of the gospel for cultural transformation.”³ Why?
4. How are the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26–28), the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20), and the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:36–40) related to each other?
5. How does this larger vision affect what we are called to do?
6. We live in the chapter of redemption, which means we can see God redeeming his creation. Where do you see glimpses of redemption? Think particularly about your relationships with God, others, and creation.

GROUP OR FAMILY ACTIVITY

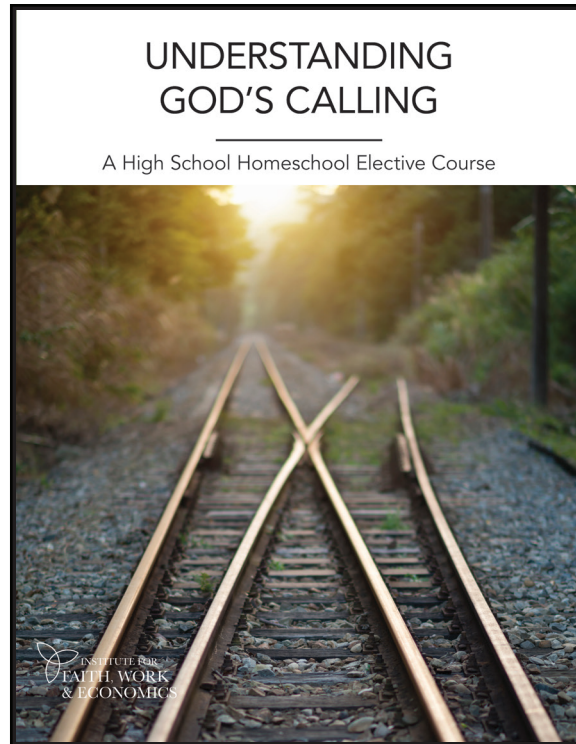
We often think in images. Have each group member or family member draw the four chapters of the gospel. Take turns sharing your drawings and explaining the significance of each chapter.

3. Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2012), 10.

SUMMARY

The story of the Bible can be told in four overarching chapters. Understanding these chapters gives us context for our calling. The four-chapter gospel helps us see that our work matters to God because it is part of God's redemptive plan to restore all of creation to his intended glory. In the next module we will take a look what it means to be image-bearers of God.

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