

GOD'S WISDOM FOR VOCATIONAL LIVING

4-WEEK STUDY
AFLC YOUTH MINISTRIES
PART I

KEY VERSE: LET THE WISE HEAR AND
INCREASE IN LEARNING, AND THE ONE WHO
UNDERSTANDS OBTAIN GUIDANCE.
PROVERBS 1:5

The book of Proverbs opens up with a call for the follower of God to grow in wisdom. While there are many areas of life to obtain God's guidance in, one area that particularly stands out is God's desire for us to be wise in how we interact with other people. Whether it's with our family members, friends, or fellow citizens, God cares about how we live our lives and desires for us to glorify Him in our relationships with others.

It may surprise you, but the Bible actually teaches that the different relationships that you have aren't accidental. Instead, God has called you to them intentionally. Paul writes: "Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him." (1 Corinthians 7:17)

These "callings" in life, which have been assigned to us by

God, are sometimes referred to as our "vocations" – areas of life in which we serve God and love our neighbors.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT "VOCATIONS" THAT GOD HAS ASSIGNED TO YOU?

(SEE HOW MANY YOU CAN COME UP WITH.)

In whatever spheres of life we find ourselves in, we are invited to recognize them as opportunities to serve the Lord. As Paul writes: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." (Colossians 3:23)

So, as a student, you can serve the Lord as you study well. As a brother or a sister, you can serve the Lord by showing care for your siblings. As a member of society, you can serve the Lord by working hard at your job and by being honest and upright in what you say and do.

As we serve the Lord in these vocations, we do so by serving and loving our neighbors.

WHO IS YOUR "NEIGHBOR"?

READ LUKE 10:25-37

While our vocations pertain to what we do, as we live our lives as a holy sacrifice unto the Lord (Romans 12:1), they are principally about something that God is doing through us. For while on the outside it may look like you are the one showing love or acts of kindness, the Bible reminds us that God is the one who is working in us and through us in these moments.

READ GALATIANS 5:22-23

THESE ARE FRUITS OF THE ____?
WHY IS THAT SIGNIFICANT?

READ JOHN 15:4-5

APART FROM JESUS WE CAN DO ____?
WHAT POINT IS JESUS MAKING HERE?

The encouraging reality for us as believers is that when we think about the roles of life we find ourselves in, we have a promise from God – He is the One working in and through us! He is the one producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in our lives. He is the one who promises to transform us into the kind of people He calls us to be. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) He is the one working in and through our lives to serve and love our neighbors.

For example, when we are struggling with our sin, God brings fellow believers alongside of us to proclaim to us the forgiveness of sins offered in Christ. When we are feeling lonely, God brings alongside someone who befriends us and shows us love. Or, when God seeks to provide for our daily bread, He uses means (people) in order to provide for that.

GROUP PROJECT

SEE IF YOU CAN COME UP WITH A NUMBER FOR HOW MANY VOCATIONS GOD USES TO GIVE YOU YOUR DAILY BREAD. FROM SEED COMPANY TO FARMERS, FROM PACKAGERS TO TRUCKERS, HOW MANY VOCATIONS IS GOD USING TO ANSWER THE 4TH PETITION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER?

Although everyone in the world has a vocation, Christians have a different perspective when it comes to this. We recognize who has called us to the spheres of life we are in and how God is working through our lives. We recognize that we aren't in these positions by chance, but that God is working through our lives to bless,

"IT MEANS LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS."

help, or contribute to the needs of those around us. This ultimately starts for us as we live a life of faith as redeemed children of God, comforted by the assurance of salvation in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. From that, we are able to love in response to the love that has been shown to us (1 John 4:19). Instead of loving selfishly and seeking what we are able to get out of a relationship, we are able to love selflessly, looking to bless and love our neighbors, motivated by the gospel.

Throughout the book of Proverbs, this is referred to as living with the "fear of the Lord."

READ PROVERBS 9:10

WHAT DOES LIVING WITH THE FEAR OF THE LORD MEAN?

To live with a fear of the Lord is not to live with a terrified heart, but rather to live with a recognition of who God is and our position before Him. He is the Almighty God of the universe, who oversees all things, even our very souls.

Furthermore, He has the power to make a declaration about our standing before Him and how He desires to work in our lives.

When we turn to the Bible, we hear that very thing. We hear a pronouncement that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) and a pronouncement that we are God's workmanship, created for good works which God has prepared for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). This doesn't mean that we have to paint a cross on everything. Instead, it means loving our neighbors. As we do that, God promises to work through our lives to bless those around us.

PRAY

"God, would you use us in our vocations to glorify you and open our eyes to how you are working in and through our lives."

GOD'S WISDOM FOR VOCATIONAL LIVING

4-WEEK STUDY
AFLC YOUTH MINISTRIES
PART II

KEY VERSE: "THE NAME OF THE LORD
IS A STRONG TOWER;
THE RIGHTEOUS RUN TO IT AND ARE SAFE."
PROVERBS 18:10

Life can be hard sometimes, broken relationships, natural disasters, sickness, pandemics, temptation, rebellion, and our own sin can cause frustration, hurt, and a sense of hopelessness. But God has promised us a safe place that we can turn to in our time of need. Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe." Jesus is our strong tower. What's more, we don't even have to search for Him, as if He were hidden or trying to not to be found. He has given us a place we can go, where He has promised we can find Him. That place is the church. It's at church we find Jesus in God's Word (John 1:1 ff), whether it be preached from the pulpit or taught in Sunday School. It is at church where we find Him amidst the 2 or 3 (or more!) that are gathered together as the Body of Christ (Matthew 18:20).

INSTEAD OF RUNNING TO THE CHURCH TO FIND JESUS IN OUR TIME OF NEED, WHAT ARE SOME OTHER PLACES WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO RUN TO WHEN THINGS AREN'T GOING WELL FOR US?

In our last lesson, we learned how God calls us to various vocations. It is these vocations that help us see how we can serve God and love our neighbor. In this lesson we will focus on one specific grouping of our neighbors that God has called us to love and that loves us in return - fellow Christians in the church. Galatians 3:25-26 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." This passage reminds us that by faith, all those who have been baptized into Jesus are children of God. You may not have the same interests or pas-

sions as the 60-year-old couple that sits in the pew behind you, and you may not be able to relate to the 4-year-old who is struggling to sit still during the sermon in the chairs in front of you. But the common thread that binds you together with the other Christians in the church isn't your age, your hobbies, or what activities you are involved in, but that God has forgiven each of you in Christ. And now, because of this truth - that God has placed you alongside these other forgiven, baptized, children of God - God is calling each of you to love, serve, and encourage each other.

WHO ARE SOME OF THE PEOPLE IN YOUR CHURCH THAT EITHER GOD HAS USED TO TEACH, ENCOURAGE, OR HELP YOU IN SOME WAY... OR THAT GOD MIGHT BE CALLING YOU TO TEACH, ENCOURAGE, OR HELP?

Hebrews 10:24-25 has something to say about how we ought to carry out our vocation to our fellow Christians. It says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Amidst other commitments and hobbies that we may have, God is calling us to prioritize the relationships and gatherings we have with the other Christians in our church. This can be really hard when there are so many activities or responsibilities that we have at school, home, or work. When you graduate someday, and you no longer have your parents to keep you accountable, making time to prioritize church amidst college or career can be even harder. Saying "yes" to being with other Christians means you might have to say "no" to other activities or hobbies.

HARD QUESTION

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES OR HABITS THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE TO SAY "NO" TO IN ORDER TO PRIORITIZE MEETING TOGETHER WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS?

The passage above from Hebrews 10 not only talks about how we should prioritize meeting together, but that when we meet together, we should "...consider how to

gives us really great direction for not only how we can live a life of love and good works, but how we can stir up other Christians to live their lives in love and good works, too.

"WE DON'T JUST SIT IN THE PEWS NEXT TO OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS"

stir up one another to love and good works". Carrying this out means that we don't just sit in the pew next to our fellow Christians, but we should intentionally be developing community with them. This might look like sharing conversations before or after the worship service, volunteering with them, being in a Sunday School class with them, or committing to pray for them. Whatever it might look like for you, this takes time and intentionality.

The book of Proverbs is filled with wisdom for us, and

READ THE FOLLOWING PROVERBS, AND DISCUSS HOW EACH INFORMS US ON HOW WE SHOULD BE LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS. COME UP WITH SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES FOR EACH VERSE FOR YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE.

PROVERBS 3:27-28;
PROV 11:17;
PROV 12:22 ; PROV 16:24

PRAY

"God, show me how I can be used by You to encourage other Christians to live a life of love and good works."

GOD'S WISDOM FOR VOCATIONAL LIVING

4-WEEK STUDY
AFLC YOUTH MINISTRIES
PART III

KEY VERSE: "LISTEN, MY SON, TO YOUR FATHER'S INSTRUCTION AND DO NOT FORSAKE YOUR MOTHER'S TEACHING. THEY ARE A GARLAND TO GRACE YOUR HEAD AND A CHAIN TO ADORN YOUR NECK." PROVERBS 1:8-9

Before you find yourself on the court or field on game day, before the curtains lift to start the show or concert, and before you are able to get that seemingly magical piece of plastic that gives you the right to legally drive a vehicle by yourself, there is a requirement to practice. As good as an athlete may be, they don't simply walk on to the field and suddenly know the plays. A diva musician can easily sound beautiful on their own but ruin a concert if they don't spend time practicing staying in time with the rest of the musicians or learning to follow the conductor. Similarly, the Lord does not call us into a life of discipleship, obedience, and service without first entering us into a rigorous time of training. And where is this important proving ground to be found? Right at home.

"You must be kidding" may be the first words that come to

mind. After all, isn't home the safe place to unwind, to vent about our problems, the place where we are to be receiving love, devotion, and service from our parents? Instead of me answering the question for you, why don't you take a moment to consider for yourselves the answer by exploring these clarifying questions:

1. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT ROLES THAT EXIST IN YOUR PERSONAL HOUSEHOLD FOR EACH FAMILY MEMBER?

2. WHAT ARE TWO OR THREE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EACH OF THOSE ROLES?

My guess is that after doing that quick exercise, you may have realized that there are many more roles being played out by each person every day than you may have first considered. For example, let's consider the roles that your dad may have. Your

dad is called to be a follower of Jesus (1 Tim. 2:4), a son to his parents (Exodus 20:12), a faithful spouse to your mom who loves her like Jesus loves the church (Ephesians 5:25), the spiritual leader in your family (Ephesians 5:23), provider (1 Tim. 5:8), an honest employee (Luke 16:11), a contributing member of the local congregation (Hebrews 10:24-25), and on top of that, an earthly representation to you of the love, mercy, and grace of our Heavenly Father. Quite a list!

We are also called to love our brothers and sisters by considering them as more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Life at home may not seem to be anything special, but God has given each of us this gift to be able to practice living out His principles each and every day in a setting where we are all learning together and where we

hopefully have the loving and graceful instruction of our parents to tenderly correct us when we error and encourage us when we take a few more steps down the straight and narrow path of discipleship.

About this time when we start talking about how children are to obey their parents, it is easy to disengage and assume that whoever is leading this discussion on honor is in cahoots with your parents and has automatically taken their side. And honestly, that is correct. We do take the sides of parents when they say that their children are to honor and obey them. Why? Because that is also the declaration of God.

Why would God care about how we treat our moms and dads? Isn't He aware of how unfair and unreasonable they can be? I mean, He has never had to live in this house with them...if He did, He might change His tune! When we slip into that mindset though, we begin to miss the bigger

"We are also called to love our brothers and sisters by considering them as more important than ourselves"

picture. Of course our parents will have shortcomings...they are sinful people just like we are. But what we may fail to see when we focus on their failures is that God is using us honoring our parents as a crash course that prepares us to honor and obey Him.

"OUR SIMPLE HOME IS ONE OF GOD'S MOST IMPORTANT TRAINING GROUNDS"

Learning to say no to our own desire to throw the peas across the room or to sneak them onto a sibling's plate and instead dutifully eating what we consider to be the vegetable scum of the earth actually prepares us for denying our own desires for flashy things or the applause of man when Christ calls us to instead die to ourselves and live for Him. Learning to not just put up with our impossibly annoying sibling actually trains us for the times when we will be called to love our neighbor who seems unlovable.

Can you now see how our simple home is one of God's most important training

grounds in our lives? Let's explore that a little deeper by breaking up into groups of three or four and spending the next few minutes brainstorming other ways our life at home is actually preparing us for the life Christ is calling us to.

As a group, discuss:

HOW DOES THE WAY I TREAT MY FAMILY NOW HONOR OR DISHONOR GOD IN THE EYES OF OTHERS IN MY LIFE?

HOW HAS OUR HOME BEEN A LIVING EXAMPLE OF THE REALITY OF THE GOSPEL?

Read John 17:20-23

DISCUSS TOGETHER HOW FAITHFULLY LOVING OTHERS IS NOT JUST AN IMPORTANT PART OF BEING A PART OF OUR BIOLOGICAL FAMILY, BUT ALSO OUR CHURCH FAMILY.

PRAY

"Father, thank You for Your good gift to us of families in which we are loved and cherished, but also trained for living as your disciples in this world. Give us patience, humility, and grace to love our family well, and may we be able to rightly see our families as the blessing that they truly are."

GOD'S WISDOM FOR VOCATIONAL LIVING

4-WEEK STUDY
AFLC YOUTH MINISTRIES
PART IV

KEY VERSE: "TO DO RIGHTEOUSNESS AND
JUSTICE IS MORE ACCEPTABLE TO THE LORD
THAN SACRIFICE."
PROVERBS 21:3

As we dive into this final lesson, discuss with those around you:

**WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? (IF YOU NEED A REFRESHER, SEE LUKE 10:29-37)
HOW SHOULD I TREAT MY NEIGHBOR? (READ MATT. 7:12 & GAL. 5:14)**

Righteousness and justice (see the key verse) are not just concepts that we talk about. These are actual actions that we do. In this context, righteousness is defined as right living according to God's Word. Justice is about making things right while demonstrating fairness and equity. And these actions – the doing of righteousness and justice – are more important to the Lord than the keeping of outward, external religious duties.

**READ ISAIAH 1:12-18 & JAMES 1:19-27.
WITH EACH PASSAGE, ASK:
WHAT HAD GOD'S PEOPLE BEEN NEGLECTING? WHAT DID THE LORD ASK THEM TO DO?**

The truth is, God cares about your neighbor and their well-being. He cares about righteousness and justice being done for them. Your neighbor – whether or not they acknowledge it – is a part of His creation. We have been created in His image (Gen. 1:27). Each person is a special and unique individual whom He has knit together in the womb of their mother (Ps. 139:13-16). And the Lord cares for His people.

Did you know that God also demonstrates His love and care for your neighbor and their needs through you? It's true! Just as He provides our daily bread through means of the farmer, the trucker, the miller, the baker, the guy stocking shelves, and the cashier, He also uses you to care and provide for your neighbor.

He does so through the

various gifts, talents, and abilities that He has given you.

If you are a believer, then you have been given a **spiritual gift** through the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good," (1 Cor. 12:7).

**LIST THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN:
1 COR. 12:8-10 AND
ROM. 12:6-8.**

HOW DOES HE USE THE INDIVIDUAL GIFTS GIVEN YOU TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR?

Right now, you may not know what your spiritual gift(s) are. That's okay! Sometimes it takes a while to cultivate those gifts. If you are curious what your gift may be, ask someone who knows you well, like your parents or youth leader.

Talents are those things that you are just naturally good at and enjoy doing: playing guitar or basketball, swimming or singing. These are

also given to us by God and can (and should!) be used to glorify Him and to love and serve our neighbor. But they aren't listed in Scripture as spiritual gifts. And, yes, it does take time and practice to develop and to mature your talents. Nobody is born with the talent to run a sub-4-minute mile; it takes dedication and determination to improve and get better.

THINK: WHAT ARE YOUR TALENTS? HOW CAN YOU LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR USING YOUR TALENTS?

Abilities are a bit different than gifts and talents. While the first two have been given by God, this third category is unique because abilities do not take special skills or divine blessings to perform. Abilities are simply the things that we – as we seek to love our neighbor – are able to do. For example, it doesn't take a special superpower to rake leaves for an elderly neighbor or to scrub the toilets at church. It just takes a willingness to do it! God often uses the ordinary things that we are able to do to love and to serve our neighbor.

BRAINSTORM

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL THINGS YOU ARE ABLE TO DO THIS WEEK TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR?

GET SPECIFIC!

We use our gifts, talents, and abilities to love and serve our neighbor. We are to love and serve not only those who are lovely or those who can repay our kindness; Jesus teaches us to love and serve "the least of these." In one of His final lessons before His arrest, Jesus spoke of the importance of extending love to all.

"CHRIST IS HIDDEN IN OUR NEIGHBOR"

He was looking ahead, prophesying the final judgment on the last day when the sheep (believers) will be separated from the goats (non-believers).

READ: MATT 22:31-46

When we volunteer at soup kitchens and donate clothing to homeless shelters, we are providing food, drink, and clothing to those who otherwise might go hungry and without basic necessities. When we show hospitality or visit those who are in the hospital or are incarcerated, we exhibit kindness and love to them. But Jesus says that we are not only serving our neighbor when we do that. As we serve "the least of these," we are really serving Christ Jesus. "Christ is hidden in our neighbor," author Gene Veith says.

Christ is hidden in the homeless Vietnam war vet who stands on the street corner in tattered clothes, begging for change. Christ is hidden in the lady who comes to church from a group home; you know – the lady who's missing teeth and brain cells because she spent so long strung out on meth. Christ is hidden in the kid with no friends who sits

alone at lunch, wondering if life is worth living. Christ is hidden in the dysfunctional family in the trailer park whom the cops visit weekly. Christ is there. Christ is hidden in "the least of these."

DISCUSS WHAT EFFECT DOES THE TRUTH THAT "CHRIST IS HIDDEN IN OUR NEIGHBOR" HAVE ON HOW YOU VIEW YOUR NEIGHBOR.

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS THAT YOU CAN SHOW LOVE TO "THE LEAST OF THESE?"

PRAY

"Father - You have created everything; this world and all those who live in it. You love me enough to send Your Son to die for me! Thank You! Forgive me for the times when I have not used my gifts, talents, and abilities to love the least of these. Help me to use what you've given me for your glory and to love my neighbor. In Jesus' name. Amen."