

My Vocation in Christ: Priorities for Redeeming the Time

Bible Study

1. Read “The Doctrine of Vocation: Sacramental Blessing, Not Sacrificial Duty” (www.hausvater.org/articles/310) and discuss this summary statement: “Your vocation is how your station in life serves as a channel of God’s blessings to the people around you.”
 - Whom does God serve *through you* in your family? In your church? In your community?
 - “A person’s vocation is not so much about what he or she does, but rather about what God does through that person’s station in life.” How was this principle demonstrated in the life of Abraham? See **Genesis 12:2–3**. How does this principle apply in your own life?
 - What is the danger of viewing your vocation as a list of things that *you* must do?
 - Why is it comforting to view vocation as something that *God* accomplishes through you?
 - Are people always aware of the “good works” that God accomplishes through them within their vocations? See **Matthew 25:37–40**.
2. Read “Balancing Work and Family’ vs. ‘Redeeming the Time’” (www.hausvater.org/articles/230) and discuss this summary statement: “The Bible does not teach that I should balance work and family, but that I should prioritize family and recognize that my work is for my family (as well as for the community I serve).”
 - What does the world’s metaphor of “balancing between work and family” mean?
 - What does the biblical language of “redeeming the time” mean? See **Colossians 4:5–6** and **Ephesians 5:15–16,19**.
 - The Greek verb used in the preceding passages is *exagorazo*. The root *agora* means “marketplace”; the full verb means to “buy back” or “ransom” something from the marketplace in order to restore it to the appropriate owner.
 - What price did Jesus pay in order to redeem you from the bondage of sin? See **1 Peter 1:18–20**.
 - For what purpose did Jesus redeem you? See **Titus 2:11–14**.
 - How does your identity as a redeemed child of God impact the priorities that you recognize in your life?
3. Read “Thank God, There’s Always Enough Time in the Day” (www.hausvater.org/articles/314) and discuss this summary statement: “God is an abundant giver. He gives us time. He also gives us work to do. If we conclude that the first gift does not suffice for the second gift, then we are accusing God of failing to provide for our needs.” See **Ephesians 3:20–21**.
 - Recall a time when you felt overwhelmed by too many tasks to complete, as if there were not enough hours in the day. Which task was most important at that time? Which ones did not really need to be completed? How do your answers shift as you begin to consider *God’s* perspective of what is most important rather than the perspective of the *sinful human flesh*? Do God’s people run out of what He knows they need? See **1 Kings 17:16** and **Matthew 14:13–21**.
 - “[We] ... bow in obedience to our clocks and calendars and smart-phone reminders of to-do lists that hasten us 24/7, dictating our every move in the religion called ‘being stressed out.’” In what sense do we risk having our schedules, and the events we pack into the day, become an idol? See **Exodus 20:3**.
 - “Schedule-burdening temptations draw us away from the things of God—from the divine service, from home devotions, from being patient with our spouse, from listening to our children, from serving faithfully in the workplace, from pausing to console a grieving friend—from fulfilling our vocation. God overcomes those temptations for us. He blesses us by giving us enough time to accomplish what He knows is best for us and for those whom we serve, while also guiding us to prune from our schedules those tasks that He has not appointed for us to do.” What might need “pruning” in your life now? What is the purpose of pruning? See **John 15:1–2**.

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Practical Suggestions for “Redeeming the Time”

1. Establish a record of how you actually have budgeted your time:
 - Track everything you do for one week, recording in a notebook the starting and ending time of each major task or event.
 - Review your notebook at the end of the week and consider whether it reflects a typical week. Consider activities that you repeat twice a month or once a month that should be added to your log in order to provide a fuller picture of your typical routine.
 - Mark the most important tasks or events with a star. For example, having a personal devotion, or sharing dinner as a family, or having a date with your spouse should receive stars.
 - Mark the least important tasks or events with a question mark. For example, if you found yourself sucked into social media for an hour and a half on Tuesday evening, or watching television all Saturday afternoon, you might write a question mark. Granted, sometimes social media can be a helpful way to nurture friendships, and even to share your faith with others, and sometimes watching television can be a helpful way to relax, but it also is true that most people in our culture today overindulge in such activities and become distracted from things that are more important. What about you?
2. Complete the diagram on the last page to identify your multiple, overlapping vocations and to consider how God would have you prioritize various tasks and activities in your schedule.
 - Begin by recording the *higher* priorities *above* the line in each section:
 - **Means of Grace:** Typical high priorities will include attending the divine service at an orthodox congregation. Will you also place a daily home devotion in that category? Anything else?
 - **Family:** A married man will write “my wife” and if he is also a father, he will write “my children.” A young adult living with her parents, by contrast, probably will write “Dad and Mom,” perhaps adding “my brother and sister.” List also activities that can be established as a healthy routine, such as eating breakfast and dinner together, having a family game night every Thursday evening, or going for a family bike ride on Saturday afternoons. In other words, how will the prioritization of your family show itself in your regular schedule?
 - **Church:** Whereas the “Means of Grace” section focuses on how God serves you through Word and Sacrament, the “Church” section focuses on how God serves other people through you within your congregation. For example, simply attending church sets a good example for others. Singing in choir, teaching Sunday school, or serving as a greeter for visitors are other common examples of how God uses one person within the church to bless other people. Consider your gifts. Consider the suggestions that other people have made about how your God-given talents best can be used. Consider your congregation’s specific needs. Consider other ministries beyond your local congregation, too, such as volunteering at a Christian pro-life pregnancy counseling center.
 - **Community:** Begin with the people in your immediate neighborhood. Ponder also volunteer organizations that could use the help of you or your children. Contemplate your role as a citizen who votes, or supports the campaign of a worthy candidate, or writes a letter to the editor. (This also may be a good place to include one’s job, since it serves customers in the community; however, one’s job also could be included under “family” since it provides income to support the household. Recall, too, that Luther placed employment under the family when discussing the Fourth and Tenth Commandments.)
 - Next, write down examples that deserve a *lower* priority *under* each line:
 - **Means of Grace:** Consider additional Bible study opportunities beyond those listed above the line. Here you realize the benefit of those opportunities while also remaining realistic that one’s schedule cannot accommodate everything.
 - **Family:** Consider listing extended family, or activities with one’s immediate family that are desirable but not essential.

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- **Church:** List items similar to those suggested earlier, prioritizing some to be above the line and others to go below the line. Serving on church council, singing in the choir, teaching Sunday school, and being an usher—for most people, that would be too much to do all at once. Put one or more of these suggestions below the line. Perhaps some of them do not belong on your worksheet at all.
 - **Community:** Repeat the same process. Whether you included your job here or in the “Family” section, consider placing your regular duties above the line and overtime hours below the line. True, working overtime helps your company to serve its customers, and, also true, it brings in more money to support your family, but if your schedule needs to be streamlined, those overtime hours should be cut—don’t ever let them usurp the priority of the “Means of Grace” and “Family” items you placed above the line earlier.
4. Review your answers, asking a Christian friend to assist you in discerning God’s will for your life:
- Did you forget to include anything pertaining to your own vocations?
 - Is each item properly prioritized, or should some items move above the line and others move below the line? Consider:
 - What is essential for God to serve you? (Examine your priorities in the “Means of Grace” section.)
 - What is essential for you to serve as God’s channel of blessings to others? (Examine your priorities in the “Family,” “Church,” and “Community” sections.)
 - Is it realistic to expect yourself to accomplish everything above the line? If you have too high of an expectation for yourself, then move some things below the line, or even cross them out entirely.
 - How might different people identify and prioritize their vocations differently depending upon whether or not they are married, whether they are a student or an employee or a stay-at-home mother, etc.?
5. Finally, build a weekly schedule that includes everything above the line for “Means of Grace,” “Family,” “Church,” and “Community” in a routine. Guard those priorities carefully against things that are below the line or not even on the page at all.
- Did you include the items you had marked with stars earlier?
 - Did you have to delete some of the items you had marked with question marks earlier?
6. Conduct a “reality check” in one week and again in one month.
- Is your routine sustainable, and does it glorify God who desires to bless you through the Means of Grace and through the vocations of others?
 - Or, are you burning yourself out by prioritizing the wrong things—or too many of the “right” things?
7. Finally, consider how the following passage from the Lutheran Confessions can assist you in keeping everything in perspective as you seek to redeem the time within your vocation:

“Augustine well says, ‘All God’s commandments are fulfilled when whatever is not done is forgiven.’ ... When starting to fulfill the Law, faith ought to be present, which certainly believes that we have a reconciled God for Christ’s sake. ... We must conclude that we are counted righteous for Christ’s sake being reconciled through faith. This is not because of the Law or our works. Because of faith, beginning to fulfill the Law pleases God. Because of faith, there is no charge that we fulfill the Law imperfectly. ... Christ’s death and satisfaction ought to be placed far above our purity, far above the Law itself. ... We have a gracious God because of Christ’s satisfaction and not because of our fulfilling of the Law.” (*Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, V [III])

- How does the doctrine of the Law apply to your vocation and to *your use* of your time?
- How does the doctrine of the Gospel apply to your vocation and to *God’s redemption* of your time?

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	<p><i>God blesses me, especially through the Means of Grace ...</i></p> <p>_____</p>	
<p><i>I am blessed by God to serve as a channel of His blessings in my family ...</i></p> <p>_____</p>	<p>vocation</p> <p><i>how God “calls” me to serve as a channel of His blessings to the people around me</i></p>	<p><i>I am blessed by God to serve as a channel of His blessings in the church ...</i></p> <p>_____</p>
	<p><i>I am blessed by God to serve as a channel of His blessings in my community ...</i></p> <p>_____</p>	
	<p><i>Ponder the “neighbors” whom God blesses through you in the Family, Church, and Society:</i></p> <p>ABOVE each line, write examples of HIGHER priority</p> <p>_____</p> <p>BELOW each line, write examples of LOWER priority</p>	