

SESSION 1: God Calls us to Serve // YOU WERE MADE FOR THIS!

TO GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED...

Take a moment and think about a time in your life when you tried on something new, a new shirt or a dress or a nice pair of shoes. In particular, try to recall a time when the thing you were trying on fit perfectly. **How does it feel to wear something that seems like it was made just for you?** *There are no wrong answers to this question, but try to guide the conversation to the conclusion that having an experience like that makes you feel great, in the same way that living according to God's design does for us.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Read **Ephesians 2:8-9**. These verses are often used to summarize the wonderful truth of the Gospel: that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. It is entirely a gift and "not a result of works." **How is this truth a comfort to you?**
The main point here is that our relationship with God is established only on the basis of His free gift of grace – not on anything we do to earn His favor!
- 2) But the Bible does talk a great deal about our works. In fact, immediately after his ringing declaration of the Gospel in Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are saved by grace and not by works, Paul goes on to talk about "good works." Read **Ephesians 2:10**. **What does this verse tell us about the works we do?** *God prepared works in advance for each of us to do. He expects us to do them ("walk in them"). We are designed ("workmanship") and saved ("created in Christ Jesus") for this purpose.*
- 3) Can you think of times when God arranged circumstances so that you were in the right place at the right time to do a "good work"? *Allow each person to answer this question in their own way, as time allows. Bring out the great rewards that come from doing what God designed us to do.*
- 4) We are called to do these "good works" not only in special and memorable ways, but also in everyday life. Martin Luther, the 16th century church reformer, stressed that our everyday life consists of the *vocations* to which God calls us. At one point, he even went so far as to say, "God himself is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid."¹ His point is that God gives us our vocations – *whatever they may be!* – as places to serve Him by serving others.

Vocá·tion: where God places us in ordinary, everyday life to love and serve our neighbors on His behalf

Considering your own vocations, what "good works" have you done in the past week for your family? For your others at work? For others in your community?

Allow each person to answer this question in their own way, as time allows. The emphasis should be on the many different ways God uses us to serve others through the "good works" we do in our various vocations.

¹ *Commentary on Genesis*, WA 44,6; cited by Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999, pg 9)



- 5) The Apostle James emphasizes the close ties between our faith in Jesus and our works in his name. **Read James 2:14-26. Why does James say that faith without works is dead?**

James is addressing those who teach that Christians don't need to worry about what they do in life, since they are saved by grace. He emphasizes that what we do shows what we believe!

What is the difference between Christians who believe in God and demons who believe in God? *For demons, "believing" in God simply means that they know of and fear Him; for Christians, "believing" means that we trust and obey Him.*

- 6) How does Jesus tie faith and "good works" together in the following passages?

Jesus teaches that they are intimately connected, even inseparable!

Matthew 7:21 – *It's not our words ("Lord, Lord") but our deeds*

Matthew 25:31-46 – *Jesus takes our actions done to others as actions done to him.*

Luke 10:25-37 - *Loving our neighbor is "like" loving God. Loving our neighbor means actively responding to needs.*

- 7) The word "serving" is often used for the "good works" that we do as followers of Jesus, imitating His own life of service. On the night of His Last Supper with His twelve disciples, He took on a task usually performed by the lowliest of servants: washing the road dust off His disciples' dirty feet. **Read John 13:1-17.** In verses 12-17, note the different ways He emphasized the point He wanted His disciples to learn from His actions. *Here are a few observations: (v.12) Do you understand what I have done to you; (v.14) If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet; (v.15) For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you ; (v.17) If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*

KEEP THIS IN MIND!

As we begin to recognize the importance of demonstrating our faith through our "good works" [**James 2:18**], we must always keep a proper perspective on our works. The Apostle Paul emphasizes that we are justified by grace through faith *apart from works* [**Ephesians 2:8-9**] precisely because we, as sinful human beings, all too easily fall into the trap of self-righteousness. We need the constant reminder that our "good works" do NOT earn God's favor, but they flow out of those who believe and are connected to His power [**John 15:5**]. Because God has so humbly and graciously served us in Jesus Christ, we are invited and empowered to serve others. These "good works" are the necessary, tell-tale signs, the "fruits" of faith!

CLOSING IN PRAYER

Remember to thank God for His gift of salvation by grace through faith and the privilege of serving others in His name and by His power.

You can easily begin to serve one another by praying for each other's needs.

