

**Reintegrate
Your Vocation
With
God's Mission**

Bob Robinson

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Bob Robinson
Founder and Executive Director

The Center to Reintegrate Faith, Life and Vocations
www.re-integrate.org

Reintegrate is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Endorsements

“I remember when I was first wrestling with the vision that ‘all of life’ mattering, reading books, hitchhiking across America and asking questions of everyone who would talk, wanting to know if it was really true. Like most, I stumbled over a disposition to dualism. To say it simply: ‘spiritual’ concerns were more important than ‘secular’ concerns. But as a coming-of-age young man, that wasn’t adequate, and I wanted more, something more coherent. So, I pressed in on the question: what does the Bible teach? I wish that I had had Bob Robinson for a guide, and that I had been able to think through my questions in light of his new book, *Reintegrate* — a compelling study, shaped by Scripture, for seeing seamlessly, for a way of life where everything that matters, really does matter.”

- Dr. Steven Garber, Author of *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*

“Bob Robinson’s *Reintegrate* Bible study is an engaging, thoughtful, well-organized curriculum that will help many believers struggling to find their place in God’s Big Story. He has gathered together in one place the wisdom of the scriptures and the excellent thinking of numerous theologians on the creation-fall-redemption-consummation narrative. By providing practical, interactive exercises, the study helps users see the big picture and reframe their own identity and work in ways that will be both encouraging and energizing. Highly recommended.”

-Dr. Amy L. Sherman, Author of *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*.

“Bob Robinson has skillfully created a transforming pathway that will narrow the Sunday to Monday gap many followers of Jesus are experiencing in the complex and often confusing contours of modern life. Utilizing a robust theology of vocation, a coherent biblical framework and a transforming pedagogy of interactive dialogue, *Reintegrate* has the potential to truly change your life. I highly recommend it!”

- Dr. Tom Nelson, Senior Pastor, Christ Community Church in Kansas City; President, Made to Flourish national pastors’ network; Author of *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*.

“If you are a Christian, you don’t just have a job. You have a calling from God. So do it well. A great start is to study the content and questions of this Bible study with a group of friends who also yearn to serve the Lord Jesus in every square inch of their lives. For too long we have separated our Christianity from our normal, everyday routines. It’s time to Reintegrate God, Life, and Work. Bob Robinson will show you how.”

- Dr. Michael Wittmer, Professor of Systematic & Historical Theology, Director of the Center for Christian Worldview at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary; Author of *Heaven is a Place on Earth: Why Everything You Do Matters to God, and Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life?*

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

“Stories universally give context and meaning to all people in all cultures. Today, many narratives compete to explain who we are and why we are here. The only real question is which grand story will shape our lives? Bob Robinson’s Reintegrate is an excellent tool to help Believers understand that the Bible is the ultimate story of significance that applies to all generations in every era. It’s an evergreen explanation of truth told in four chapters: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation. This overarching four-chapter story lays a foundation that provides the meaning and fulfillment we all seek in life. Highly recommended.”

- Hugh Whelchel, Executive Director, The Institute for Faith, Work & Economics; Author of *How then Should We Work?: Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work*

“Every week, as Christians, we spend an average of 163 hours in non- church related activities. A great majority of this time is spent in our area of vocation and work. And yet many of us believe that only those activities related to our local congregation contribute to the advancement of God’s kingdom. Nothing could be further from the truth. How do we make an utterly essential paradigm shift in not only our minds, but also in our hearts? How do we re-view what may be familiar passages of scripture with new eyes? In this thoughtful and practical study Bob Robinson has provided us with fresh ways to engage the scripture, provocative case studies and helpful application to gain new perspective on whole life discipleship. If workplaces are primary places of spiritual formation, then this guide must be part of your journey!”

Lisa Pratt Slayton, CEO, Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation

“Many Christians are trying to live life and go to work with only half of the true story of humanity. They see their job as a necessary evil and the good news of the gospel as an exit strategy to get them out of a messed-up world. But Bob Robinson’s Reintegrate fills in the other two parts of the narrative that bring meaning, value, and tangible hope to our day-to-day work and the overall purpose of our lives. This study is a must!”

- Bill Hendricks, President, The Giftedness Center; Executive Director, Christian Leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary; Co-author of *Your Work Matters to God*

“Reintegrate Your Vocation with God’s Mission will help you make an essential, life-changing connection between your life and God’s life, between your mission and God’s mission, between your work and God’s work. This study is based on a careful examination of Scripture, shaped by the grand story of God’s creative, redemptive, and restoring work. You will be encouraged to see how this biblical story makes a real difference in your own life and work. This is one of the finest study guides I know for people who are eager to align their personal vocation with God’s mission in the world.”

- Dr. Mark Roberts, Executive Director, The Max De Pree Center for Leadership at Fuller Theological Seminary

Endorsements

“In the truest Christian tradition, knowing is by doing. It isn’t sitting around having conversations or listening to lectures. This is why I like Bob Robinson’s book. It’s a ‘knowing by doing’ lab, a book chock full of ‘live case studies’—real life problems. If you, the reader, tackle them via a real-life problem-solving team, you’ll be forced away from banal generalities and into the toils and troubles of solving real problems. That’s where the better learning takes place; it’s where our loves are better reordered. Kudos to Bob for pulling this material together. I know firsthand that it is a lifelong calling for him. It will only become so for you if you follow his lead—and learn by doing.”

- Mike Metzger, President, Clapham Institute

“There are hundreds of fine Bible study guides and small group resources on every book of the Bible and on almost any topic. But none can compare with this remarkable study. Picking up Reintegrate will change the way you see the Bible, God’s work in the world, and your own calling and career; indeed, every aspect of your life. With truly insightful Biblical study and lots of helpful sidebars offering quotes from amazing books and authors, not to mention creative interactive questions, Bob Robinson has given us a true gift. This is one of the most important little books I’ve ever seen. It is simple to use but after going through it, you will never be the same again.”

- Byron Borger, Hearts & Minds

“Bob Robinson’s ideas about faith and work were the reason I hired him as an editor for *The High Calling*, and he is still as thoughtful as ever. ReIntegrate will help people go as deep as they are ready to go with each other—as they think together about God’s vision for their vocation and for all of creation.”

-Marcus Goodyear, Director of Communications Operations, The H. E. Butt Family Foundation

“Too many of us have neglected the opening and closing chapters of the Bible. Without them, we’ve developed a rather insipid vision of why God created us to begin with, what He intends to make of us and His creation, and the work He has called us to do today. Group participants who study through Reintegrate Your Vocation with God’s Mission will find themselves breaking free of shrunken thinking about life as they consider how they can live and work in light of the gospel in today’s broken world.”

- Dr. William C. Peel, Executive Director, Center for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University

“Reintegrate is a rich exploration of the big story of Scripture and the implications it has for our everyday, ordinary lives. Anyone seeking to connect their work with God’s mission in the world would greatly benefit from this robust study.”

- Dr. Terry Timm, Pastor, Christ Community Church of the South Hills; Pittsburgh City Director, Made to Flourish; Board Member, Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation; Author of *A Movable Feast: Worship for the Other Six Days*.

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

“Bob Robinson has written a compelling Bible study that deftly articulates the work and faith narrative. It is comprehensive, practical, and theologically approachable. Real-life scenarios coupled with applicable Scripture study makes Reintegrate an incredibly useful tool that will be a great resource for people to reference long after completion. It will deeply inform and reshape participants vision of flourishing and shalom in their day to day life.”

- Vincent Burens, President/CEO, Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO)

“Bob Robinson has given us a great gift by taking the truths of vocation and the whole Gospel and weaving them together in a way that is practical, biblical, accessible, and transformative. This book will be a great blessing to those who study it, and a great service to the church and even the world.”

- Rev. Bill Haley, Executive Director, Coracle; Associate Rector, The Falls Church Anglican

“This Bible study is creative and intriguing and will help Christians see how all of life matters to God, especially in all of the hours we spend away from environments typically labeled “spiritual.” Bob Robinson has done a great service to the church, helping us reintegrate our lives that are all too often insufficiently integrated with our faith.”

- Dr. Vincent Bacote, Associate Professor of Theology; Director, Center for Applied Christian Ethics, Wheaton College

“Bob Robinson assembles an impressive body of evidence as he makes the case for Christians to embrace Mondays just as we celebrate Sundays—to live an integrated life. The subject is not new to me, but Bob’s study taught me things that I didn’t know about work and human dignity.”

- Dan Dupee, Chairman of the Board, Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO)

“Bob Robinson has drawn on a lifetime of experience and study in writing this helpful Bible study on the integral connection between faith and work. You will find yourself surveying the complete arc of the wonderful story that the Bible tells, and tracing the meaning of that story for your own faith, life, and vocation. This is a great place to begin discovering the meaning of your work!”

- Dr. Gideon Strauss, Associate Professor of Worldview Studies, Institute for Christian Studies

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
How to use this study	xiii
Chapter 1 ♦ Introduction: The Full Story of the Gospel	1
Chapter 2 ♦ Creation	11
Chapter 3 ♦ Fall	27
Chapter 4 ♦ Redemption (Accomplished)	43
Chapter 5 ♦ Redemption (Applied)	57
Chapter 6 ♦ Consummation	71
Chapter 7 ♦ Callings	85
Leaders Guide	105
Bibliography	125
Scripture Index	129
Subject and Name Index	130
About the Author	133

Acknowledgments

This work is the culmination of many years of relationships.

First, my relationships with my family has been foundational. My mother Sandi and father Jack have always given me their loving support through the years, and my father's wife Sharon has been an amazing blessing. My father- and mother-in-law, Richard and Carolyn Eckart have always been remarkably supportive. My kids, Trey, Joel, and Kaira make me want to be a better man. And most important, my wife Linda is the best soundboard for ideas on the planet earth, always questioning, always digging deeper.

Second, I am grateful for the relationships with those I've worked with as the concepts found in this Bible study came into focus. I am forever grateful for the years I've worked in the Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO). The biblical worldview that drives the CCO transformed me into a person that sees God's mission as redeeming all things, including the work we do. Thanks to the leadership of CCO, Dan Dupee and Vince Burens (as well as the person who hired me and is the best boss I've ever had, Herb Kolbe), who have kept this ministry on task with great integrity and passion to see college students transformed so that these students can be transformative agents in and through their vocations.

I especially thank Byron Borger, bookseller at Hearts & Minds, for encouraging CCO staff to read, read, and read more. Byron has become a friend as we talk about the things that really matter: How our faith touches the difficult and lovely things of living as humans, from our families to our occupations. His influence on me shaped much of what you see in this book. Byron's knowledge of the vast number of books that tie faith into every aspect of life is encyclopedic.

One of those books was written by Michael Wittmer, who has also become a friend as we surprisingly found that he is originally from the small township in which I currently live! Mike's insight into the story of God's mission and how we fit into it was the first I ever read about this life-shifting paradigm.

Then there are the relationships that grew as an extension of the CCO family. None has been more influential on me than Steven Garber. Steve invited me into a doctoral cohort at Covenant Seminary that he was co-teaching with Donald Guthrie. The wisdom that Steve and Don bestowed on this group cannot be understated. Steve has convinced us all that (in his words), "Vocation is integral, not incidental, to the *missio Dei*." Thanks to Don and also to all those in the cohort – they were the first to see and critique this study, as it was originally done as part of that doctoral work.

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

Thanks to Scott Myers for providing the services of Good Place Publishing. He has been very kind and gracious. I am grateful to Susan Thomas who worked with me to develop the group interactive discussions, to Jeanette Deltour for all her hard work on the layout for this Bible study, and to Sami Shbeeb for all the artwork.

A thanks to Scot McKnight for his friendship over the past decade. When he asked me to be a reader for his book, *Embracing Grace: A Gospel for All of Us*, my understanding of the Image of God grew exponentially.

After printing this Bible study through a local Fed-Ex store, I began testing it in the field. I am thankful to all the students at Kent State University at Stark, Stark State College, and Malone University who have worked through these chapters with me over the years.

The first guinea pigs for this Bible study were members of the faculty and staff at Stark State College. We would meet every other week and plow through each chapter. Their insights and feedback were crucial to the development of this book. Thanks to Aaron McClure, Ann Starkey, Matt Robinson, Sheryl White, Claudia Barr, Darla Farage, and Fred Jarka for those formative studies.

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And last but not least, I'd like to offer a special appreciation to my friends on the Board of Directors of our non-profit organization, The Center to Reintegrate Faith, Life and Vocations, for their support and wisdom since we launched on Labor Day 2012. Without Tim Miller, Paul Sartarelli, Ann Starkey, Todd McKenney, Chris Tucker, and Joe Talamo, there would be no Reintegrate.

How to Use this Study

There are three ways you can use this study.

GROUP STUDY TRACK #1

I most recommend that it be done in a group setting, with each individual in the group doing the study, chapter by chapter, on their own. Then the group would come together to discuss what had been learned in that chapter's material using the "Group Interactive Discussion" at the end of each chapter. With the "Group Interactive Discussion," the leader/facilitator will be able to help the group discuss key aspects of that chapter's material.

At the back of the book, there is a **Leader's Guide** to help the leader facilitate these discussions. The Leader's Guide also has helpful answers to the more difficult questions and will help in dealing with some of the issues that might arise from the study (issues like whether the earth is destined to be destroyed or renewed).

The Leader does not need to be an expert! Simply follow the directions in the Leader's Guide for facilitating the interactive discussion.

For this group study track, the first time you meet, you will do "Chapter 1 – Introduction" together (not individually before a meeting). It will set the course for the rest of your study. From then on, each person can do each chapter on their own as preparation for the group meetings.

For Chapter 1, the group leader/facilitator should ask the questions as presented throughout the chapter and everyone can

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

then discuss them. Starting with Chapter 2, the group members will simply work through the section at the end of each chapter, “Group Interactive Discussion.”

GROUP STUDY TRACK #2

Some groups will want to go through all the material in the chapters *together* as a group. This can definitely work, but it depends on how well the leader/facilitator is able to keep things moving and is able to help members grasp the concepts in a quicker fashion. The real downside of this approach is that there will not be a lot of time for deeper self-reflection and prayerful understanding as the members interact with the biblical texts.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Some of you want to use this study on your own without a group. If this is the case, be sure to prayerfully answer the questions by taking pen to page, filling the study with your answers and thoughts. If you can, be sure to talk with a friend about what you're learning so that you have a sounding board for those answers and thoughts!

BE SURE TO PRAY!

No matter how you use this study, pray each time you work on a chapter. Pray before every group meeting. The concepts in this study may be familiar to you but may be very new to you as well. Pray at the end of each group meeting that the concepts would move from head to heart to hands – that what you are learning will change the way you live as a Christian to the glory of God.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Learning Objectives

1. Participants will connect the idea of “*shalom*” with everyday life by participating in a common case study.
2. Participants will identify themselves and their vocations as part of God’s larger story, something as yet unexplored.
3. Participants will discover an integrated way of approaching work and faith and use this Bible Study to learn how.

Framing the Conversation

This Bible Study has been created to give God’s people the biblical foundation for reintegrating their faith back into every facet of life, especially in that aspect of life in which we invest a huge amount of time and energy: our work. Work is not some supplementary part of being a Christian; work is central to our purpose as we participate with the mission of God. As Steven Garber says, “Vocation is integral, not incidental, to the mission of God in the world (the *missio Dei*).”

In fact, from the very beginning, God created everything in an integrated way. Complete harmony and universal flourishing (what the Bible called “*Shalom*”) were what characterized humanity’s experiences with God, themselves, and the rest of creation. The

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

“Vocation is integral, not incidental, to the mission of God in the world.”

- Steven Garber,
Visions of Vocation

first humans lived completely integrated lives: They worshiped God as they worked the Garden. They cared for one another and took care of the creation.

We need to move our lives back into that original integration that God wants for us. This Bible study is unique because it does not try to help us “bring our faith into the workplace,”

or to “create balance in our lives.” Instead, we will learn how our various vocations are intrinsic to being human and essential for our participation in God's mission. We need to reintegrate our lives.

“Vocation” comes from the Latin word “vocāre,” which means “calling.” In God's plan, he uses every person as they live into their particular callings. In addition to the primary calls that Jesus gives us to follow him and abide in him, he calls us to various ways to work as the means to participate in God's mission in the world. Each of us may be called to be a good spouse, parent, friend, student, community member, etc. Significantly, nearly 50% of our waking hours is spent at work. Therefore, we must pay particular attention to this time so as to be intentional to steward this vocation for God's glory.

There is no false dichotomy between “sacred” professions (like pastor or missionary) and “secular” professions (like businessperson, teacher, painter, or homemaker). Gabe Lyons, in his book *The Next Christians*, writes, “While some may be called to full-time religious work, (the “next Christians”) accept that many Christians should simply work to restore the needs right under their noses. They've grown tired of being regarded as second-class Christians and want to be empowered on mission right where they

Chapter 1 ♦ Introduction: The Full Story of the Gospel

are.” In his book *Work Matters*, Tom Nelson writes, “The doctrine of vocation properly understood weaves together a seamless life of true discipleship in all facets of life. Vocation is the path of daily life where we are called to be a faithful presence in the world.”

We are going to learn that each one of us, as a member of the human race, has incredible potential to glorify God as we participate in the larger story that is going on around us: the full story of God’s mission to restore his world.

Christ redeems us so that we can become reintegrated humans and then God equips us to participate in His purpose of reconciling everything in his creation back to himself.

“Calling is the key to tracing the story line of our lives and unriddling the meaning of our existence in a chaotic world.”

- Os Guinness,
The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life

Here’s a Case Study for your group to think about and discuss.

Imagine that you are part of a company that creates a diversified number of products, some more profitable than others.

As you reflect on your role in this project and what others are suggesting, what does the situation make you feel? What do you think about the situation? What would you want to say to the team? What would you want to do about it? Where would you like to see things end up in the future?

Read the case study on the next page.

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

For the past two years, you've been on a development team to create a new product. If the product is produced within the specs your team is setting forth and is marketed well to those who will need it, it will fill a gap and meet a need in society and therefore will be extremely profitable.

You went into the project believing that the product will be beneficial to those who purchase it. You have genuinely enjoyed the development of something that you know will be of great help to a number of people.

As your team researches the means for producing the product, some are suggesting that in order for the product to be even more profitable, it should be produced in third-world factories where the wages are extremely low, thus lowering the labor cost.

Also, the marketing team is creating promotions that make promises beyond the product's ability and attempts to sell it to those who really have no need for it.

On the next page, write down short ideas that come into your head based on the phrases in each row. You don't have to write an essay; just write a few words that come to mind for each row. In a few minutes, you'll be asked to share with the group what you wrote and you'll get insights from the others as you hear from them as well.

Chapter 1 ♦ Introduction: The Full Story of the Gospel

How it ought to be for this company

What's wrong with the way it is in this company

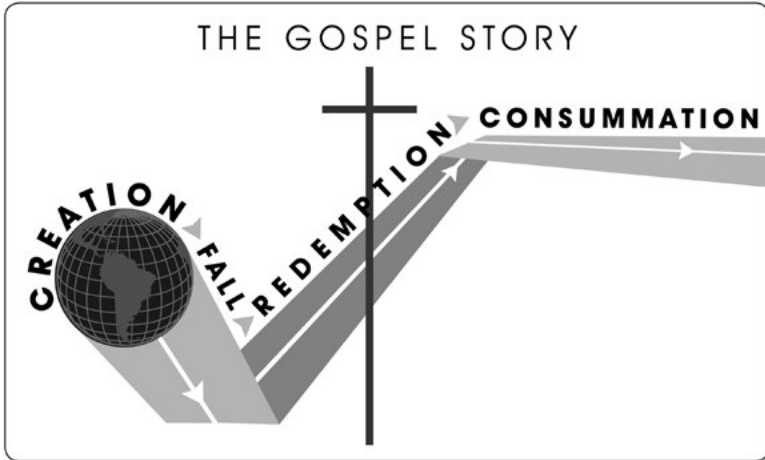
What we can do to make positive changes

What the future should look like for this company

Everything in life can be broken down into these four categories. It is what Mike Metzger, in his book *Sequencing*, calls the “DNA” of life: that if we learn to sequence the DNA of our life situations into these categories, we will be able to better make sense of our world. When we reframe issues, situations, and problems into these categories, we are able to find solutions that were not at first recognized. This exercise opens our eyes to the whole story and gives better insight to solutions, rather than just the focusing on two aspects of the issue: what's wrong and what we might immediately do about it.

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God’s Mission

These four categories match the four acts of the “Good News Story” revealed in the Bible.



In the weeks to come, we will study each of these acts in the Good News Story one-by-one.

Creation is how it ought to be.

Fall points out what’s wrong with the way it is.

Redemption both asks “What can we do about it to make positive change?” and by God’s grace, provides the means to live life the way God intended.

Consummation looks forward with hope to the future when things will be as they should be.

Chapter 1 ♦ Introduction: The Full Story of the Gospel

In order to become reintegrated human beings, we need to wholly live into this full story, recognizing each of these acts as it relates to our work in this world.

Gap Analysis

Make a list of simple situations you've faced recently where work and faith seemed miles apart.

Share your list with a person sitting next to you.

Debrief the lists as a group, noting how it ought to be different.

Vocation, Work, and God's Mission

Imagine what it might be like if work and faith could coexist more easily. Brainstorm together as a group if this were more the case.

What do you think of when you hear the word "vocation"?

Reintegrate Your Vocation with God's Mission

How do you think your job might be of use to God?

King/Queen for a Month

Imagine you have been appointed King or Queen of your work environment for one month. Everyone would have to do what you said and like it! What changes would you make? What would you leave the same? What effects would you expect from those changes? Why are those effects important?

Vocation/Callings:

List every vocation that you can think of that God has called you to in your present circumstances. Are you called to be a parent. A student? A neighbor? A friend? A salesman? A nurse? A volunteer? A housekeeper? List all that come to mind.

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Chapter 1 ♦ Introduction: The Full Story of the Gospel

Wrap up:

What can you take away from this study, either from the reading, the case study, or these learning exercises?

For the next meeting: Read and answer all the questions in Chapter 2, “Creation.”