

Statement on Human Flourishing

Nearly all that is said and done within the context of higher education stems from deeply held convictions about the nature and purpose of human beings. Consciously or unconsciously, colleges and universities articulate mission statements, develop curricula, assemble faculty, and educate students according to underlying convictions of what it means to be a human being and how humans should conduct their lives. We believe that the Christian worldview offers the most compelling vision available by grounding its conception of humanity in the purposes and plans of God.

The Christian worldview situates humankind within a world masterfully designed by a good God who formed men and women with intentionality, endowing them with value, dignity, and significance. Despite our inability to live up to the ideals of the Christian worldview fully, God continues to work redemptively to renew and transform individuals through Jesus Christ. Transformed individuals, in turn, bear tremendous potential for addressing the world's deepest needs through compassionate engagement and Christian service. The exemplar of compassionate engagement and service is Jesus Christ whose life was characterized by fidelity to the purpose and plans of God. He calls all who are willing to follow him, patterning their lives after his while teaching others to do the same. This alone, he taught, will lead to wisdom, peace, and a blessed life that may be described in terms of human flourishing.

Accordingly, Grand Canyon University, encourages faculty, staff, and students to find their purpose in Christ and to follow him within the context of various academic disciplines and vocational paths. While it will not be possible to articulate a comprehensive vision for humanity, we offer this statement in order to outline the biblical vision for flourishing and to provide insight into GCU's unique approach to Christian higher education.

Human Flourishing in Christian Perspective

Human flourishing refers to a state of excellence in which human beings, as individuals and in community, experience and enjoy fulfillment, peace, abundance, and completion. Flourishing entails thriving in all areas of life, encompassing the intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person and the communities in which people live. As creatures made in the image of God, flourishing in the most profound sense entails communion with God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. As individuals and communities pursue the purposes Jesus commends, it becomes possible to experience the blessing of God and the transformation he offers in Christ. Thus, GCU is committed to a Christ-centered vision for human flourishing that intentionally and consistently contributes to the common good and advances flourishing for all.

From the biblical perspective, humans are unique among all God's creatures in that God's purpose for their lives includes a mandate to increase in number, fill the earth, and cultivate good and just civilizations (Genesis 1–2). The instructions given to the first humans indicate that men and women are to cultivate the riches of creation and participate in the creative work of God (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). We are to do this by discovering and enjoying the vast potential that God has woven into the fabric of the universe, leveraging the unique gifts he has bestowed on each of us.

As we explore and discover the potential of creation, we will uncover new opportunities to shape the world in ways that honor God and contribute to the flourishing of all. The implications of humanity's stewardship as image-bearers is immense. This stewardship entails a responsibility to care for the creation, carefully managing its resources, conserving the natural environment, and attending to the fragility of its diverse ecosystems. The riches of creation are sufficient for all and serve as a continual reminder of God's abundant provision for his creatures. Accordingly, by cultivating the earth's

resources we are able to provide for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors without fear of scarcity or any need to deprive others.

By virtue of our status as image bearers of God, humans are uniquely capable of relating to God and working within God's world in ways that honor him and partially reflect his good and glorious nature. Our individual gifts and abilities do not enable us to excel at the same level in each of these areas but our combined capacity for cultural and societal development is a testimony to God's wisdom in creating human beings. We are blessed to have an abundance of natural resources and responsible for stewarding them in ways that reflect the character of God and contribute to human flourishing.

A Renewed Vision for Human Flourishing

From the beginning, the Lord designed men and women with potential for immense good or evil along with a commensurate level of responsibility to one another and to the Creator himself. When we choose to love the Lord and our neighbors, we most fully reflect our Creator who is love (1 John 4:8, 16). At each point that we choose to be unkind and unloving we deviate from the purposes and plans of God. Thus, we are capable of either contributing to the good of others or of detracting from the common good and diminishing our own humanity.

Jesus himself summarized the purpose for which God made man with reference to the wonderful complexity of human creatures. When asked which of God's commands is greatest, Jesus reminded his followers that their primary purpose was to love the Lord God with their entire being—heart, soul, strength, and mind. As complex and wonderfully diverse creatures were to respond in reverence to God through our unique volitional, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical capacities. Indeed, true flourishing depends on living in right relationship with God, which enables us to relate rightly to others. Thus, Jesus also reminded his followers of a vital secondary purpose. They were to love their neighbors just as they loved themselves, living at peace in community with one another as they enjoyed the fullness of God's goodness and glory together.

Early in the biblical narrative the divine vision for human creatures was thwarted by the rebellion of the first man and woman. Within a now-fallen world, every facet of human nature and every endeavor that should reflect the goodness of God has been corrupted. The fall of humanity into sin and rebellion resulted in broken relationship with God, but also extended to human relationships negatively impacting the entire created order. Nonetheless, through Jesus Christ, God is making all things new (2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 21:5). Accordingly, as the remainder of the biblical story unfolds God graciously persists in reminding his creatures of his plans for them and the purpose with which he made them. This gracious response to human failure is most visible in the person of Jesus Christ who displayed the heart of God perfectly throughout his life and ministry.

Jesus' teaching and life clarified his Heavenly Father's vision for flourishing even as he labored to redeem the brokenness of the human condition, ultimately sacrificing his own life to make redemption possible. From the start of his earthly ministry, Jesus led his followers back toward the Father and the blessings he promises to all who humbly trust him and obey his teaching. The journey began for Jesus' first followers with a simple call, "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19). The call is simple and straight forward. More literally translated he said, "come behind me," meaning follow in my steps, watching the way I live, and patterning your lives after my own.

The Lord places a similar call on each of our lives that requires a similar response. We are first called to follow, through faith and repentance, and then to obey within the context of our unique gifts, abilities, and opportunities to serve and care for others. Jesus instructed His followers to live as salt and

light, or agents of positive transformation, which implies a call to live out our lives in ways that contribute to the common good. Thus, all Christians are invited to join in the work of the church for the life of the world. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to be a pure and transformative presence in our communities, offering hope in a fallen world just as bright light pushes back the surrounding darkness (Matthew 5:13–16). Like a city on a hill, the combined glow from our individual efforts will shine brightly to the glory of God in ways that cannot be ignored.

In this way, those who follow Jesus become a transformative presence within their communities. Consequently, the message of Christ can transform, not only individual lives, but also the broader society in which we live and work. This is not to suggest that the Christian life is one of comfort and ease. In many cases we actually experience the opposite. Indeed, Jesus clearly challenged his followers to pattern their lives after his own sacrificial way of living even when this lifestyle results in difficulty and suffering. God’s plans for our lives do not easily align with the self-centered and consumeristic ideals of a fallen world. Rather, in following Jesus we find the freedom and power to serve others, placing their interests and needs before our own (Philippians 2:3–4).

Finding Our Purpose in God’s World

We are convinced that Jesus’ call on our lives extends to the workplace and that our respective vocations represent vital opportunities to glorify God by serving others in ways that promote human flourishing. It is our hope that graduates of GCU will carry the hope of the gospel into the areas in professional areas for which they are being educated and formed. For no matter what he calls us to do, those who choose to follow will find that the Lord still transforms lives. Thinking of work in terms of vocation suggests that purpose and intentionality pervade the world and that individuals are part of a grand design. Finding one’s purpose within this grand design, or one’s vocation, has much to do with the notion of calling.

The notion of a purposeful calling that originates outside of oneself is at the very heart of vocation as conceived within the Christian tradition. Christians have long conceived of work in terms of a calling that has been placed on human beings by God himself. The word vocation in English derives from the Latin *vocare*, which means “to call.” As a result, the notion of calling is bound up in the term “vocation.” If work is purposeful, creative activity by which people cultivate the world, then vocation adds another dimension to the concept of working. While the term is sometimes used as a synonym for occupation, vocation within the Christian tradition entails a richer understanding of the purposes with which one works and performs various functions. As a result, from a Christian perspective, vocation may be defined as a strong impulse and inclination toward engaging in specific activities and particular kinds of work as a matter of individual purpose. Distinguishing between three general types of calling clarifies the ways that Christians should follow Christ in general and in connection with their individual gifts and abilities.

The first and most fundamental type of calling is simply the invitation to follow Jesus. This may be referred to as a gospel call or a call to respond in faith to the person and promises of Christ. Christ has called all his followers to trust in him for the forgiveness of sin and to follow him humbly throughout their lives. Failure to respond in faith to the gospel call closes one off to the fullness of blessing and abundant life offered in Christ alone.

A second type of calling relates to the broad ways in which Christ-followers are to respond to the needs of those around them and fulfill responsibilities that demonstrate love for neighbors. This general type of calling includes one’s obligations to love family, friends, neighbors, and enemies in the ways that Christ loves. One may have a deep sense of calling to be a father, mother, friend, or responsible

citizen, for example. The significance of this type of calling must not be overlooked since it encompasses much of what God requires of all human beings in general.

Nonetheless, a third type is more relevant to the mission and goals of a university. In alignment with the unique giftings and abilities of individuals, Christ places a specific and personal call on his followers that clarifies the specific ways in which individuals are to follow him. This kind of calling is often accompanied by supernatural provision by which God himself equips people with special capacities and gifts by which they can serve and edify others. These gifts and abilities enable them to function uniquely within the larger body of believers, or the church, in ways that honor the Lord and benefit others. Accordingly, in addition to the gospel call and a general sense of calling to Christian obedience, this type of calling serves to define a specific purpose or mission that may be conceived of in terms of a vocational calling. Individuals can only fully understand and fulfill their vocational calling as a result of responding in faith to Jesus' call to follow. Yet all are called to follow the Lord in some ways that are shared and in some ways that are unique to who they are as individuals, how God has made them personally, and the opportunities God places in their lives.

Our Purpose Together: A Shared Foundation

GCU distinguishes itself as a Christian university by instilling a sense of vocational calling and purpose in our students, faculty and staff. All members of the university community are encouraged to find their purpose in Christ and to live out that purpose in ways that honor God and serve others. As members of the GCU community find their purpose in Christ, we strive to assist them in living out that purpose within the context of a chosen vocational pathway.

For the individual, the process of bringing the values of Christ to bear on one's work requires thoughtful reflection on the ways that the Christian faith can and should inform thought and action within various vocations. Jesus intends to be Lord of our homes, our communities, and even our work. As the Son of God, he offers God's vision for our vocations which will inevitably result in his glory and our good. Work should not occur in isolation from God or without reference to our Creator. Rather, work should be conceived of as an activity one does in cooperation with God as he continues to order and provide for his creation through the efforts of human creatures. As a result, work from a Christian perspective bears a value and dignity that surpasses secularized conceptions.

Jesus calls us to follow in all areas of life including our work. By following Jesus we learn that his vision for our lives encompasses every aspect of our lives. In a well-known illustration, Christ instructed his followers to build their lives wisely on a foundation that was sufficient for the challenges and trials of life. Failure to do so will have disastrous consequences (Matthew 7:24–27). His point was simple: a life that is carefully constructed on the basis of a solid foundation will not be susceptible to changing circumstances and mounting adversity. Rather, a life built on the right foundation will be adequate to the challenges of life and sufficient for all who follow the Lord faithfully no matter what he calls them to do or where he leads them to serve.

GCU's One Foundation represents the university's commitment to carrying out its mission on the immovable bedrock of Jesus' vision for human flourishing. When we trust God's purpose for our lives and follow him by putting his teaching into practice, we learn through experience that he is trustworthy. May he be glorified in all our humble efforts and may we enjoy the many blessings he has promised to those who follow him daily.

*The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands (Psalm 138:8).*