



## THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD IN THE SECULAR WORKPLACE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF N.T. WRIGHT'S RENEWED HUMAN VOCATION

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Much of the literature on the topic of vocation provides either a secular viewpoint of skills to benefit humanity (Jaffery & Abid, 2020) or in the Christian viewpoint, participation in new creation and co-creation through one's skill set (Fujimura, 2020, Volf, 2001). This paper explores Christian vocation in the workplace through the lens of new creation and renewed human vocation (Wright, 2018). The framework for new creation and renewed human vocation includes a) sin/idolatry, b) Christ's crucifixion, c) the royal priesthood, and d) the Fruit of the Spirit. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this study tracked the shared experiences of professionals over four weeks as participants interacted with a devotional on the above framework. Five themes emerged, which include 1) observations of idolatry/sin in the workplace, 2) selfish motivations in the workplace, 3) authority of the Christian believer in the workplace through the role of the royal priesthood, 4) rescue from exile helps to establish identity, and 5) reliance on the Holy Spirit for the Fruit of the Spirit in workplace happenings. This paper utilizes socio-rhetorical criticism, specifically intertexture analysis via recontextualization, to explore 1 Pet. 2:9-10 which demonstrates the Apostle Peter's recontextualization of Ex. 19:6, Is. 43:20-21, and Hos. 1:6 and 9, 2:23.

**Keywords:** *vocation, royal priesthood, workplace, phenomenological study*

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## Introduction

According to Barna (2018), “What people really want...is a job that means something, that changes the world, that fulfills and stirs passions” ( p. 10). Approximately 1 out of 3 Christians are unclear on how their work has significance as a Christian. Some Christians see their work in the marketplace as less important than those who work in ministry (Keller, 2012; Wolters, 2005). Less than 1 out of 2 Millennials and slightly more than 1 out of 2 Gen X and Baby Boomers report “their church gives them a vision for living out their faith at work” (Barna, 2018, p. 81).

Vocation, the Latin derivative meaning *to call*, historically informs Christianity’s ideals around work and purpose (Keller, 2012; Volf, 2001). N. T. Wright (2018) expands on the topic of vocation. However, he does not double down on the idea that humans were created *to perform* a specific task with their lives. For instance, a person gifted to sing’s purpose is not to sing. Nor is the singer’s gift to sing primary or secondary to their purpose. Instead, Wright proposes the construct of “renewed human vocation” (p. 82), in which Christ’s death and resurrection restore humanity to its original function of the royal priesthood of believers as identified in 1 Pet. 2:9-10.

The problem addressed by this study was that some evangelical Christians in the workplace are unaware of their role as priests and kings (priestesses and queens) in the workplace. This phenomenological study aimed to explore the impact of the conceptual framework of N. T. Wright’s construct of renewed human vocation might have on the evangelical Christian’s identity and work. Thus, the author of this study developed a four-week devotional series primarily adapted from N. T. Wright’s work *The day the revolution began: Reconsidering the meaning of Jesus’ Crucifixion*. The four weekly devotional titles were 1) How does sin affect my work, 2) What does the cross mean for my work, 3) Priests/Kings and Priestesses/Queens, and finally, 4) Fruit of the Spirit. The significance of this qualitative phenomenological study was to add (a) to the knowledge of the topic of vocation through a qualitative study, (b) explore the efficacy of renewed human vocation for evangelical Christians, (c) and develop a foundational conceptual framework for potential future studies on the topic of vocation and renewed human vocation.

## Vocation

According to Keller (2012), “The Latin word *vocare* - to call” is where the term vocation derives (p. 2). The notion that one’s work is vocation hinges on the action of a person other than yourself *calling* you to participate in the work. Humanistic views of vocation are myriad and bypass the notion of Divinity calling one to work. Apart from the religious view, the “secular perspective says that calling should focus on self-fulfillment primarily and on social welfare subsequently” (Jaffery & Abid, 2020, p. 416). For instance, Max Weber (1958) lectured on the vocation of science, in which he identified qualities of dispassion and intellectual integrity to the role, bypassing Divinity to state that scientific discovery is on its own “worth being known” (p. 143). Another secularized view of vocation is that of a “motivation lense,” in which vocation is defined apart from Divinity as “an idealistic, yet practical ethos...” that highlights “self-excellence and self-fulfillment...to serve humanity” (Vogel, 2021, p. 81). Further uses of the vocation

construct include the necessity to maintain the quality and integrity of a job (Hackett, 2022), the use of vocation as synonymous with the term job (Carballo et al., 2020), to describe the quality of results of a task that impacts humanity (Kauffman, 2020; Martinez-Lavin, 2021), and one's self-identification of gravitation toward a specific work (Bullock, 2020; Mihaescu, 2019).

In contrast, Christians can see a connection between work and vocation through "the Christian Scriptures" as work is significant beyond one's own predilections (Keller, 2012, p. 2). As mentioned in the introduction, Barna's (2018) report indicates that people desire significance beyond predilections. This challenge is compounded by a percentage of Christians who continue to lack awareness of a connection between their vocation in a secular setting compared to a ministry-focused setting. Indeed, much literature exists on the connection between vocation and ministry. A few examples include the spiritual practices of nuns (Hancock-Parmer, 2019), missionaries (Lemke, 2020), calling to the pastorate (Matthews, 2021), and children's ministry (Larson, 2021), to name a few.

Nevertheless, in a study by Lemke (2020), participants who were missionaries expressed their perception that Yahweh's calling can lead to the secular. Important to add is that Lemke did not explore vocation in the secular. Vocation outside of a church setting received championship from Martin Luther, who held the view that vocation existed not only in answering the call to the priesthood, but that vocation also existed in the life of believers so they, too, can benefit creation with Yahweh's love (Veith, 2018).

A study by Bloom et al. (2021) details the positives of individuals' perceptions of being called to work. The authors posit the sense of calling provides the "most intimate" bonds between individuals and the work they perform to the point that one's "identity" is forged (p. 299). Moreover, the sense of calling comes either with a "discover(y)" of calling or the sense that Providence called the individual to work (p. 300). A challenge occurs when individuals who forge their identity with their profession then experience a change in occupation and fulfill the need to reconfigure their identity to satisfy the new work (Chreim et al., 2007).

In the qualitative study conducted by Lemke (2020), participants serving as missionaries emphasized the importance of "identity" (p. 313). Specifically, participants expressed identity in the sense of "who we are in the Lord" over performing tasks, primary identity "as a child of God" in secondary relation to work, and a mixture of identity and skill. Ultimately, these participants saw identity in relation to "calling." Somewhat in juxtaposition to Bloom et al. (2021) study, Lemke's (2020) study found participants expressed that changes from missionary work to another job would not deter "calling identities" (p. 315).

Keller (2012), in his book *Every good endeavor*, identifies the disconnect between believers who question their calling in a secular environment. He highlights the need for believers to understand their work (vocation) and calling for their setting through a Biblical lens. As stated before, believers desire to understand how they have significance, and their work has an impact (Barna, 2018), while Bloom et al. (2021) tie work to shaping one's identity. Lemke's (2021) participants touch upon the impact of Biblical truths around the *imago Dei* and the royal priesthood mixed with talents given by Yahweh to understand one's purpose/calling. However, the participants did not see

the two roles as vocation or calling. Instead, participants saw the two Biblical truths as a means to receive a calling.

Finally, Jaffery and Abid (2020) posit that vocation involves one's talents and interests to serve others. Christian thought holds the same idea, provided serving others has a Biblical worldview for culture building (Keller, 2012; Witherington III, 2011). Both Lemke (2020) and Bloom et al. (2021) participants posit the use of talent for others in the context of knowing they were destined for a particular job function. Garber (2014), utilizing multiple anecdotal stories, echoes the combination of awareness of a destined role with the talent to serve others. Thus, the construct of vocation between Christianity and secular ideals from the literature appears to have common ground in the idea of knowing a job function or role is *destiny* for a person while using one's talents to benefit others. To take Christian vocation one step further, Fujimura (2020), N. T. Wright (2018), and Volf (2001) connect work and vocation to eschatology, in that what Christians do in this life has eternal significance in new creation and humanity's ultimate destination.

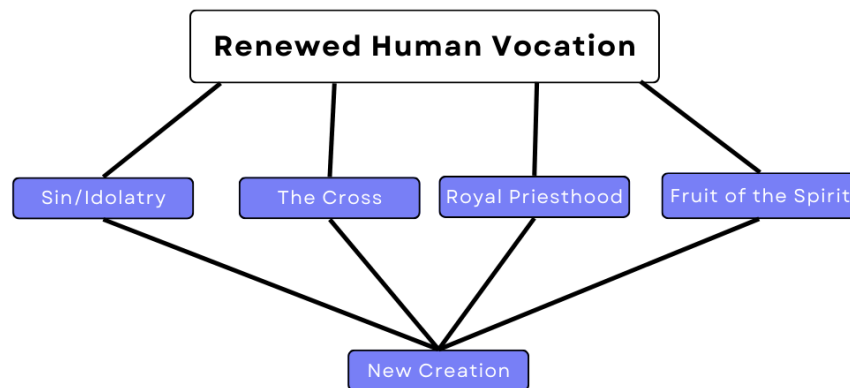
### Conceptual Framework

About new creation, N. T. Wright (2018) imagines a "renewed human vocation" (p. 82) for the purpose to re-establish human identity in 1 Pet. 2:9-10 role of the royal priesthood for man's participation in that new creation in anticipation of man's destination of new heavens and new earth. In his call for renewed human vocation, Wright does not dispense with talent or identity. Instead, Wright points the reader to Christ's vocation to atone for the sins of humanity to restore human beings to their true vocation, which are image bearers (*imago Dei*) and the royal priesthood. Wright does not focus on vocation as primarily Yahweh calling a person to perform a specific task. Instead, Wright focuses on vocation as identity of who human beings were created and intended to be as the royal priesthood of believers. All other co-laboring for co-creation toward new heavens and new earth are properly understood and undertaken.

Thus, this study sought to develop a conceptual framework out of N.T. Wright's work on vocation from his book, *The day the revolution began*. The framework consists of understanding:

- Sin/Idolatry and how it affects one's work
- The cross and how it affects one's work
- The royal priesthood and one's identity
- The Fruit of the Spirit in one's work

These four concepts integrate and lead to individuals living out their vocation in the workplace as co-laborers in the new creation. Sin (idolatry) enters the world and our work when humanity chooses to worship created things instead of the creator. The cross conquers the dark forces that Adam and Eve released into the world through their worship of the created thing - the forbidden fruit. Yahweh's original intent for humanity, Adam and Eve, was to serve over creation as the royal priesthood, expounded upon in 1 Pet. 2:9-10. The Fruit of the Spirit is how we express our co-laboring with Christ in the new creation. This framework was developed into a four-week devotional series.

**Figure 1***Renewed Human Vocation*

*Note.* This chart is an illustrative adaptation of N. T. Wright's concept of renewed human vocation. *Wright, N. T. (2016). The day the revolution began: Reconsidering the meaning of Jesus's crucifixion. HarperCollins.*

### Socio-Rhetorical Criticism

This study utilizes Vernon K. Robbins' (1996a) socio-rhetorical criticism methodology to exegete 1 Pet. 2:9-10. There are five textures of Robbins' methodology: inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture and sacred texture. Gowler (2010) asserts that intertexture analysis focuses on the relationship to "phenomena" outside of the material itself (p. 195). Intertexture involves four ways to interpret a text: 1) "oral-scribal," 2) "historical," 3) "social," and 4) "cultural" (Robbins, 1996b, p. 96). This paper utilizes oral-scribal intertexture and the device of recontextualization to explore 1 Pet. 2:9-10.

### Oral-Scribal Intertexture

"Oral-scribal intertexture" is the use of "text" other than itself (Robbins, 1996a, p. 40). This use includes scripture in the Old Testament now transmuted in New Testament writings. Ultimately, the examination of the text utilizes the content of the "world outside of the text" to understand better what the text might hope to communicate. This includes using language relevant to the normative practices and values of a specific culture the text wants to connect. O'Day (1990) defines

intertextuality as “the ways a new text is created from the metaphors, images, and symbolic world of an earlier text or tradition” (p. 259). Specifically, intertexture contains “recitation” and “recontextualization” of different oral and scribal materials than the text itself (Robbins, 1996b, p.102).

This paper utilizes recontextualization, which is the wording from an original text used in a new composition (Gowler, 2010, p. 197). The distinction from recitation is that recontextualization omits referencing the utilized text (Robbins, 1996b). For instance, this paper’s use of 1 Pet. 2:9-10 demonstrates Peter’s use of Ex. 19:6, Is. 43:21, and Hos. 1:6,9 without any mention of the original authors or that the utilized text is found in a previously written text.

### **1 Peter 2:9-10: The Royal Priesthood**

The passage under analysis describes the royal priesthood and reads thus:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,  
but now you are God’s people;  
once you had not received mercy,  
but now you have received mercy.  
(NRSV)

In the Apostle Peter’s epistle, he utilizes Robbins’ (1996a) “replication of exact words with one or more differences” (p. 41). According to Wright (2018), the Apostle Peter recontextualizes much of his text from Ex. 19:5-6:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant,  
you shall be my treasured possession out of all peoples.  
Indeed, the whole earth is mine,  
but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.  
These are the words you shall speak to the Israelites.  
(NRSV)

The first epistle of Peter contains more overt references to the Old Testament than any other letter (Davids, 1990). 1 Pet. 2:9 utilizes Ex. 19:6 in the composition (Gonzalez, 2011; Elliott, 2007), to which the use of Ex. 19:6 is undeniable (Grudem, 2009). Peter’s passage under examination creates the opportunity for “redactional interpretation and application” (Elliott, 2007, p. 407). Furthermore, it seems apparent that Peter has access to and utilizes LXX for word choices from Old Testament texts like Ex., Is., and Hos. given the comparisons to Greek words he utilizes (Elliott, 2007; Grudem, 2009). Ultimately, Peter’s use of LXX language appears to utilize Old

Testament sources to communicate the person and work of the Messiah, which creates room for an intertextual examination of the overall letter (Williams, 2007).

Thus, this socio-rhetorical analysis through oral-scribal intertexture, specifically recontextualization, of 1 Pet. 2:9-10 identifies at least three separate texts from the Old Testament as present. The Apostle Peter utilizes Ex. 19:5-6 (as well as Is. 43:20-21 and Hos 1:6 and 9, 2:23), in order to connect Christian believers' identity to the event of Yahweh calling his people to himself (Taylor, 2021). The Apostle utilizes these, and other scriptures, to help Christians understand that like Yahweh called Israel to be his holy people, Yahweh again calls Christian believers to be his people (Elliott, 2007). Peter utilizes Ex. 19:6's language found in the chart above to make this connection (Clowney, 1989) Yahweh's new people are defined by their faith in the Messiah instead of hereditary features or the boundary lines of nations (Grudem, 2009).

Furthermore, Peter informs the identity of Christian believers while providing the "purpose" of the believer in light of this reality (Clowney, 1989, p. 31). As previously mentioned, Peter also utilizes recontextualization from Is. and Hos. language to communicate "my people" and "your God" (Taylor, 2021). Where Israel of the Ex. did not become the royal priesthood, Peter claims that at the least Jewish Christians can now grasp the position (Sibley, 2016). Indeed, Peter indicates believers *are* the royal priesthood in the reception of the prestige of the believer holding such a position (Elliott, 2007).

## Figure 2

### *Recontextualization in 1 Peter 2:9-10*

#### **Recontextualization in 1 Peter 2:9-10**

Exodus 19:5-6	I Peter 2:9
my treasured possession	chosen race God's own people
priestly kingdom	royal priesthood
a holy nation	holy nation
Isaiah 43:20	I Peter 2:10
might declare	that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him
Hosea 1:6,9 & 2:23	I Peter 2:10
no-mercy	received mercy
not a people	now a people

*Note.* This chart illustrates the relationship between Old Testament texts Peter recontextualizes in his first epistle.

### ***Chosen Race with Treasured Possession with God's Own People***

The author recontextualizes Is. 43:21 in verse 9 (Keener, 2021), to communicate that Yahweh “elected” or *chose* his people (Elliott, 2007, p. 435). Is. 43 already had ties to Ex. 19 itself (Grudem, 2009), especially since Ex. 19 is foundational to many “pericopes” found across the Hebrew Bible (Mullenberg, 1959, p. 352). Thus, Peter combines the Ex. 19:5 language of *treasured possession* with Is. 43:21 use of *chosen people* to communicate the prestige of being chosen by Yahweh to be his people (Elliott, 2007). Ultimately, where ancestry in Israel made the group chosen, now faith transcends lineage to make the believer Yahweh’s chosen people (Grudem, 2009). Just like Israel was elected/chosen by Yahweh, faith in the Messiah now transmits this prestige upon Christian believers (Elliott, 2007).

### ***Royal Priesthood with Priestly Kingdom and Holy Nation***

The author recontextualizes the *priestly kingdom* to the *royal priesthood* in verse 9. Keener (2021) translates royal priesthood as “royal community of priests,” to which the designation gives the community “identity” (p. 34). Furthermore, Yahweh lives in the midst of this royal community of priests (Grudem, 2009). Finally, this community is not a community of individual priests; this community is a “body of priests” who are a “community of holy persons enjoying, like priests, direct access to God and functioning in this capacity” with Yahweh living among this community of priests (p. 420). As will be expanded upon in a later section, the function as priests is to help people see Yahweh’s marvelous deeds (Keener, 2021).

### ***God's Own People with People Whom I Formed for Myself***

Peter utilizes Is. 43:21 to demonstrate Yahweh’s choice (Keener, 2021) through the use of *the people I formed for myself* with the author’s recontextualization into *God’s own people* in verse 9. Again, the Is. passage has a connection to Ex. 19:5 and the use of possession (Elliott, 2007). The use of the two OT passages drives home the idea that just as Yahweh chose Israel from all the nations on the planet (Grudem, 2009), Yahweh now chooses believers in the Messiah to be his “covenant community” and “particular possession” (Elliott, 2007, p. 439).

### ***Holy Nation***

Peter again recontextualizes the *holy nation* mentioned in Ex. 19:6, without identifying the original text, into verse 9. *Holy nation* has a connection to the *priestly kingdom* (Keener, 2021). Furthermore, Elliot (2007) identifies the use of “apposition” to connect the *priestly kingdom* to the *holy nation* (p. 438). Ultimately, Peter’s purpose is to reinforce that similar to Yahweh’s consecration of Israel in Ex. 19:5-6 in distinction from other people groups, Christian believers are now a *holy nation* consecrated to the Lord in contrast to unbelievers.



### ***Might Declare and May Proclaim***

Peter continues the recontextualization to communicate that just like Yahweh chose Israel, Yahweh now chooses Christian believers (Grudem, 2009). This new holy nation of chosen people, too, has a “purpose” (Gonzalez, 2011), which is Yahweh’s chosen people *make known* his “greatness” (Keener, 2021, p. 36). This purpose is not to be separate from non-believers, though distinct (Elliott, 2007). Instead, the purpose is to carry Yahweh’s regenerative power to creation (Wright, 2018) and, according to Gonzalez (2011), to “intercede” on behalf of humanity that does not trust in Yahweh (p. 52).

### ***Who Receive Mercy***

Due to Yahweh’s mercy to call believers out of darkness into his marvelous light, the Apostle Peter utilizes Hos. 1:6,9 and 2:23 to communicate Yahweh’s extension of choosing and extending mercy (Grudem, 2009). In this instance, Hos. 1:9 communicates Yahweh’s words that Israel was no longer his people nor he, their God. Hos. expresses this by naming one of his children “Not-my-people” (Keener, 2021, p. 37). Nevertheless, Hos. imagines a future where the no-mercy of Israel will one day be changed to receiving mercy. This reversal is pronounced in 1 Pet. 2:10, and concludes the Apostle’s thoughts on Christians incorporated into the “ancient” family of Yahweh (Elliott, 2007, p. 443; Grudem, 2009).

As previously mentioned, Peter’s recontextualization of Ex. 19:5-6, Is. 43:20-21, Hos. 1:6 and 9, and 2:23 serve to help Christian believers understand their incorporation into the “ancient” family of Yahweh (Elliott, 2007, p. 443; Grudem, 2009). Just as Yahweh called the children of Israel to be his treasured possession, priestly kingdom, and chosen and holy nation, so too are Christian believers now participants and fulfillments of these passages (Wright, 2018). Not only do Christians receive the prestigious placement of treasured possession and royal priesthood, but they also get to participate in the purpose to *proclaim the mighty acts* of the one who bestowed this prestige. This purpose is to declare Yahweh’s excellence (Keener, 2021) through an active role and participation in the new creation (Wright, 2018). Ultimately, Wright utilizes 1 Pet. 2:9-10’s recontextualization to demonstrate Yahweh’s intent to restore humanity to a renewed human vocation as a royal priesthood.

## **Methodology**

There exist many qualitative approaches to analyzing the observations of human beings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McCartan & Robson, 2016). This study deemed the qualitative phenomenological approach the best means to gain “a detailed description of...experiences” of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 203). Furthermore, the phenomenological approach helps shape participants’ experiences into methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allows the researcher to conduct research that highlights specifics of feedback in place of “generalizations” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 205).

Creswell and Poth (2018) posit that “social constructs such as professionalism” can receive phenomenological exploration (p. 79). Therefore, this study’s exploration of the Biblical recontextualized text of 1 Pet. 2:9-10 demonstrates social constructs created by the God of the Bible as expounded through N. T. Wright’s (2018) assertion of God’s call for “renewed human vocation” (p. 82). Moustakas (1994) utilizes the phenomenological approach to garner the experiences of roles individuals participate. Furthermore, Lemke (2021) utilized a phenomenological qualitative study to probe the construct of vocation with missionaries. Thus, the use of phenomenology to explore Christians’ experiences in the role as the royal priesthood identified in 1 Pet. 2:9-10 was deemed appropriate.

This phenomenological study utilized five participants. Pokinghorne (1989) recommended a range of 5 to 25 participants who shared in the phenomenon be interviewed. Invitations to participate were sent between July 14, 2022, through July 17, 2022, via text, Facebook Messenger®, and personal invitations. With the invitation was a video presentation and an invitation to participate in the study.

Moustakas (1994) holds that two very general questions be asked of the participants during the interview: 1) “what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 79) and 2) “what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” The purpose of the two questions is to generate a “textual and structural description” from the shared experiences to generate a commonality of experiences from the participants. One method of collecting data is through journal entries. This study utilized a feedback form with questions as prompts to gather feedback to satisfy the construct of journal entries. Journal entries were received from participants weekly beginning July 23, 2022, through August 22, 2022.

Phenomenological data analysis begins with the first two questions identified in the previous paragraph. This study utilized journal entries to identify themes throughout the responses. Interviews were conducted to identify further additional “clusters of meaning” from the “significant statements” to identify further themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Ultimately, the significant statements and themes help to develop a description of what the participants experienced through the four-week devotional. Each participant provided their workplace setting, the type of work performed, and how the devotional role of the royal priesthood influenced their experience with the phenomenon of the study. Interviews took place between August 22, 2022, through August 25, 2022.

The “essential, invariant structure (or essence)” is conducted, which utilizes the written feedback of the participants to form an understanding of the common experiences of the participants” to identify “an underlying structure” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80). The underlying structure of this study is identified in the analysis section with five emergent themes.

Finally, a “general reporting structure” is utilized to aid the reader of the study in grasping the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80). This reporting might include the researcher’s own experiences while conducting the study. A description of the process and reasoning to utilize a phenomenological approach may be included. Finally, a written report of how participants expressed their experiences with “significant statements” followed by “a conclusion with a composite description of the essence of the phenomenon” completes the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80).

## Analysis of the Study

This study garnered and utilized five participants who share the orthodoxy of the Christian faith. Since individuals who work in ministry settings seem to express a sense of purpose in their work (Barna, 2018; Bloom et al., 2021; Lemke, 2020), this study did not seek individuals who work in ministry or non-profit settings. Instead, the author created the delimitation of the study to only utilize individuals who work in commonly labeled *secular* settings. Below is a brief description of each participant:

Participant 1: Formerly worked in Christian higher education. The participant now works in the financial investment field.

Participant 2: Works as a physician's assistant, commonly known as a PA.

Participant 3: Works as a nurse.

Participant 4: Works as a seafood manager in a grocery store chain.

Participant 5: Works in the field of banking.

Techniques utilized to complete interviews included:

- Aggregate spreadsheets of journal entries (Google Spreadsheet titled Weekly Compilation 4 through 1)
- Notes taken by the researcher (Google Spreadsheet titled Weekly Compilation 4 through 1)
- Coding significant statements into common themes (titled Common Themes in Google spreadsheet)

## Results

Five themes developed out of the responses to the weekly response questions and journal entries. A Google spreadsheet with compilations of responses as well as Participants 1 through 5 is found in the appendices. This section explores five derived themes with responses from participants to illustrate how the themes emerged.

### Theme 1

Idolatry/dark forces are identified primarily in two examples: 1) corruption for monetary gain/greed and 2) the selfishness of self-interests via co-workers and customers, and 3) my own selfish self-interests.

Participant 1: "I see idolatry in the form of greed. Working hard to make more money to buy and possess more materials. I see dark forces in terms of patients who deliberately create chaos in order to get their way and the same for coworkers who don't care for unity in the office, but instead create drama to bring attention to themselves. I say thoughtless hurtful things to others with considering how they will be

interpreted. It ends up creating distance between me and the other individual, which causes them to be unable to trust me as they previously had.”

Participant 2: “One of the big ways I see evil at work is, through greed at the expense of the patient. Another way of the darkness coming in is through the lack of the fear of God which has led to “god persona” among healthcare professionals (Covid made this worse). And the advancement of self/career at the expense of anyone else. There are many more ways the darkness comes in, but these are more of the common ones.”

Participant 3: “In the financial and fintech sector, the idolatry of the Spirit of Mammon is alive and well. For most people in this field, their NET worth determines their HUMAN worth. Fellow employees dedicate exorbitant amounts of their time and energy to pursuing status symbols of wealth, including sporting clothes and cars beyond their pay grade to look like the financial idols they aspire to. Other financial workers cut corners of quality and legality in effort to boost performance so they can earn lucrative bonuses and incentives.”

Participant 4: “Working for a 30K+ corporation, idolatry and dark forces are at play with the motivation of the organization - to survive as long as it can do so without breaking any laws and making people feel like good is happening. Any agenda will be pushed if it is perceived to make its mainstream membership or employees happy...and not out of kindness but out of getting as much business as possible from the membership and extracting the most productivity out of its employees. There are many good employees and frontline leaders but the higher one goes up the corporate ladder the more that greed becomes a common theme.”

Participant 5: “(1) Great levels of concern over status and position. (2) Arguments having to do with one having power over another. (3) Insubordination in subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle ways) when employees don't feel like doing the work as told.”

### ***Theme 1c: Giving in to One's Own Self-Interests***

Participant 1: “I say thoughtless hurtful things to others with considering how they will be interpreted. It ends up creating distance between me and the other individual, which causes them to be unable to trust me as they previously had.”

Participant 2: “I am embarrassed to admit, how easy it is to be influenced by the ugliness of the healthcare world. Unfortunately, healthcare had jaded me in the way I saw humanity, which led to an apathetic attitude towards my patients.”

Participant 3: “When I give in to the competitive, hierarchical nature of my field I say things overly critical and judgmental of others that are underperforming.”

Participant 4: “When I think about myself first I become selfish in how I approach things and at the end of the day no matter what the outcome is I always feel empty when I give over to the dark forces (or essential not living in alignment with God).”

Participant 5: “Mostly I see evidences of sin in my own pride - that is, when something I did or thought of is challenged, I feel that I have to defend it. And while it's not necessarily wrong to defend a position, it is sinful when the real issue is the fact that

I am the one who did it or thought it, not that I was working in love for the betterment of my company and for those around me.”

## **Theme 2**

This devotional caused participants to be introspective to think about the dark forces at work.

Participant 1: “This question has motivated change. Reiterating the intentionality of the morning. That time with God shapes the rest of my day. It has made me more aware and vigilant in what I do.”

Other participants simply made a general statement that the devotional and this topic moved them to be more introspective about their actions coupled with the importance to have daily devotions.

## **Theme 3**

Authority over work begins with devotionals/worship of God and focusing on doing good in the workplace to counter the idolatrous environment of my workplace. Several general statements were made during the interview process in which most participants stated this devotional reminded them to act on what they already knew. Specifically, the importance of devotions before work, instead of after work, best-equipped believers to Biblically address the challenges of the day.

## **Theme 4**

Rescue from Exile allows me to work out of a place of established identity in which my royal priestly role allows me to have ownership and impact in my workplace as God’s presence is active through my being present. This identity also requires I put forth my best efforts for the good of the organization.

Participant 1: “Spiritual authority in the workplace! The title of priestess and queen carries a ton of weight. ...it changes your perspective on your spiritual responsibility...” Participant 1 also expressed the knowledge of the royal priesthood took her from a passive role to an active participant.

Participant 2: Expressed the importance of eternal impact and the realization that her actions in the workplace have eternal impact. She also stated this realization took her from a passive role in Yahweh’s Kingdom to an active role via the royal priesthood. She is conscientious to care for babies individually instead of simply working by “protocol.”

Participant 3: “I can work, not from a place of status and value, and I can work from an established place of identity.” This participant also expressed that “If you hire me you are getting God's blessing on your company if you hire me.” They do not realize what they are getting.”

Participant 4: “This devotional is a good refresher as I do not think in this terminology a lot. I definitely have not heard this content in the vein of priest and king. Kingdom of God. Being a king priest helps me see the importance of being

in the workplace. - being in touch with the Spirit and in-sync with God.” And “God gave us our particular gifts and guided us to our particular workplaces for a reason.”

Participant 5: “Among other things, it allows me to face challenges as opportunities - not only opportunities to improve in my work, but as opportunities to bless and serve others and to show Christ working through me to get tasks done without grumbling and complaining.”

## Theme 5

Praying to exercise the Fruit of the Spirit in my workplace made me more aware and reliant to exercise the Fruit, specifically patience and self-control.

Participant 1: Expressed the importance of exercising self-control in her work while working with challenging patients.

Participant 2: “Working in healthcare really exposes all the areas where the fruit of the Spirit is needing growth. I have definitely seen my weakness with a lack of patience (listening to crying/screaming babies, monitor alarms constantly going off, work phone alarms also going off, and parents can really wear on you for 12 hours plus working nights), but when I sense my patience is wearing thin, the Spirit tells me to pray for patience and I do. Through prayer it places everything back into perspective for me and reminds me who I’m representing at work. It’s through this rhythm that my patience has grown and I don’t get so easily annoyed

by things that used to frustrate me.”

Participant 3: “I discovered that seeking the Spirit’s help for walking in the fruit of the spirit is a lot different than trying by my own effort to act the part of having the fruit of the spirit.” And “In my role you need a lot of patience and grace to work with people.”

Participant 4: “The spirit in my work is weak as a result of an negative attitude and this can be changed my getting with God and finding the root of my dilemma. In this case it is I feel like I am not where I belong because of my own interior motives and not stopping, reflecting, and waiting on God.”

Participant 5: “I think it is often difficult for me to experience and demonstrate joy in my work. But, interestingly enough, I have discovered more and more that my announcements give people laughter and fun - which are likely reflections of spiritual joy. So it would behoove me (and be of benefit to others) to make those announcements with joy in my own heart - not dreading their impact, but seeking to delight others... and with that, opening up doors for a witness of Christ as lived out through me, and perhaps even direct verbal expressions of the gospel.”

## Discussion

The problem addressed by this study was that some evangelical Christians in the workplace are unaware of their role as priests and kings (priestesses and queens) in the workplace. This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the impact of the conceptual framework of N. T. Wright’s construct of renewed human vocation might have on the evangelical Christian’s identity and work. The goal of this

phenomenological qualitative study was to answer the research question: How does the conceptual framework of renewed human vocation affect one's identity and work?

This phenomenological study centered on the perceptions of five participants working in sectors of healthcare, finance, and grocery management. These individuals participated, separately, in a four-week devotional created by the author of this paper. After the evaluation of journal entries and follow-up interviews, five themes emerged as found in the previous section. Based upon the data and the emerging themes, the conceptual framework of renewed human vocation revealed that workplaces continue to exhibit toxicity and ungodly practices, especially where motivation of the individual and organizational directives. Second, Christians who are employees of organizations find themselves participating in the ungodly work culture. This devotional and study caused the Christian employees to become aware of their work environment and their own participation with the dark forces at work against Yahweh's Kingdom. Third, the awareness of their priestly and royal roles created a shift in how the Christians in the study see their identities and activity in the workplace - they can now see themselves as a force for change through their thoughts, words, and actions. Fourth, participants became more conscious of their need for daily devotionals before work. Fifth, praying for the Fruit of the Spirit to be active in their daily work lives caused an introspection and awareness of reliance on the Spirit as well as the impact the Fruit has on the workplace and co-workers. Participants expressed the need for patience, self-control, and joy in their workplace interactions.

In relation to Lemke's (2020) aforementioned study in the vocation literature review section, identity emerged as a theme as well as the royal priesthood. The exception would be this devotional and study focused on the royal priesthood as recontextualized in 1 Pet. 2:9-10 while Lemke's mention of the royal priesthood has the semblance of a passing comment instead of a weighty insight. Bloom et al., (2021), similar to Lemke's study, surveyed the topic of vocation with respondents working in various non-profit and ministry roles. In contrast, the themes that emerged from this study originated from individuals working in *secular* workplaces and careers with no respondents working in ministry.

Ultimately, it appears from the emerging themes that participants became more aware of the dark forces operating in their workplaces as well as their commission with the dark forces. Instead of a defeatist attitude, the theme emerged that participants became aware or were reminded of their identity as royal priests. This realization empowered participants to see their role as active and a force for change in the workplace.

Furthermore, the participant's interaction with the conceptual framework for renewed human vocation demonstrated recognition of identity as the royal priesthood rather than the traditional view of calling to simply perform a function from an ineffable will. Bloom et al., (2021) expressed the need to adjust one's identity when moving to a new job and function. This study resulted in at least three participants expressing the desire for a job change without the need to adjust one's identity from their current function and specialization - in essence, no matter which role the individuals move to, their identity as the royal priesthood with their ability to benefit others in the workplace does not change.

Finally, Fujimura (2020), N. T. Wright (2018), and Volf (2001) connect work and vocation to eschatology and the eternal significance of new creation and humanity's ultimate destination. Specifically, the conceptual framework of the study connects renewed human vocation to new heavens and new earth. Participants demonstrated an awareness that how they serve in their workplaces as the royal priesthood informs and impacts their eschatology and new creation.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

There are five suggestions for future research. The first suggestion is to replicate the study with a larger sample size to ensure validity. Second, a future study should explore the royal priesthood with individuals who are homemakers and retired, as these roles operate outside of nominal work settings. Third, a phenomenological study that includes or concludes with a focus group could be beneficial in generating more identifiable shared experiences. Fourth, a future study should be conducted quantitatively, allowing for a generalization of results. Fifth, N. T. Wright's construct of renewed human vocation is multi-faceted. Future studies should include stronger explorations of the topic of Exile as well as a socio-rhetorical oral-scribal criticism of 1 Cor. 15:3b. Paramount is that all future studies continue to utilize participants not connected to non-profit or ministry roles with the intent to identify strategies to help participants see their vocation as vital to new creation.

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### **About the Author**

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## Appendix A

(Below are slightly modified titles of videos made and uploaded to youtube by the writer of this paper, whose name is the name of said Youtube channel. To prepare this paper for the review process, the links were removed so that no personal information about the author is included.)

Invitation to Participate

<https://youtu.be/pBN3o3bHR-Q>

Week 1: How does it affect my work?

<https://youtu.be/SjtFCUdrgLc>

Week 2: What does the cross mean for my work?

<https://youtu.be/hmjblK5svZ0>

Week 3: Kings/Queens and Priests/Priestesses

<https://youtu.be/vOmAl7Vnt-l>

Week 4: Fruit of the Spirit

<https://youtu.be/TBJ1dEQCIWc>

## Appendix B

**Link to Google Feedback Forms:**

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UM0O5NvCDurcPw\\_BkPX4ayAJiDVyQ3xL?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UM0O5NvCDurcPw_BkPX4ayAJiDVyQ3xL?usp=sharing)

## Appendix C

	Common Themes
Week 1	
	Idolatry dark forces are identified primarily in two examples: 1) corruption for monetary gain/greed and 2) the selfishness of self-interests via co-workers and customers.
	Idolatry/dark forces are released when I act selfishly through negative words and actions toward co-workers and customers.
	This devotional caused participants to be introspective to think about the dark forces at work.
Weel 2	
	Authority over work begins with devotionals/worship of God and focusing on doing good in the workplace to counter the idolatrous environment of my workplace.
	Rescue from Exile allows me to be who I authentically am instead of trying to be someone I am not in the workplace, which is a form of idolatry of self.
Week 3	
	I can now work out of a place of established identity by Yahweh instead of my own identity.
	My royal priestly role allows me to have ownership and impact in my workplace for eternal consequences.
	My organization is fortunate to have me as it allows God's presence to activate through my role as a royal priest.
	Putting forth your best effort with customers, utilizing the resources of the organization wisely, and fostering a healthy environment with co-workers are key to reflecting God's wise stewardship into and back from creation.
Week 4	
	Praying the prayer allowed me to be more mindful to make positive impacts on the organization.
	Praying for the fruit of the Spirit to work in

	my life in the workplace made me more aware and reliant on exercising the Fruit. My presence and attitude can foster an ungodly work environment, or my presence and attitude can change an ungodly work environment.

## Appendix D

### Week 1 Journal Questions

1. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Gospel. Our sin began in the Garden of Eden. Sin is idolatry that are dark forces at work in our lives and the world. What are ways in which you see Idolatry or dark forces at work in your work or workplace? (Please provide 3 to 5 sentences).
2. Adam and Eve's actions released the dark forces into the world. When we sin, we abuse our calling, privileges, and possibilities, which means our thoughts, words, and actions have consequences. What are examples of your thoughts, words, and actions having consequences in your work when you give yourself over to the dark forces? (Please provide 3 to 5 sentences).

### Week 2 Journal Questions

1. In this week's devotional, we learn that Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden due to their idolatry. Is. and the Maccabees envision a means of suffering to atone for sin and end man's exile. Exile is ended through Jesus, the suffering servant's crucifixion and resurrection. Christ's work restores you from Exile and gives you authority over creation once again. What are some opportunities you see in your work to have authority over your work instead of the dark forces/idolatry having authority over your work? (Please provide 3 to 5 sentences).
2. In this week's devotional, we learn that we are rescued from Exile, restored to the Presence of God, restored to the image of God, and made genuinely human again. How does this realization affect your personal life?
3. In this week's devotional, we learn that we are rescued from Exile, restored to the Presence of God, restored to the image of God, and made genuinely human again. In what ways does this realization affect your profession and workplace?

### Week 3 Journal Questions

1. In this week's devotional, we learn that we learn that our truest vocation is to be restored to our true humanity, which means we are created in the image of God as kings and queens or priests and priestesses. How does this vocational role change the way you see yourself in the workplace and work in general?
2. Doc Brown shared the idea that your bosses and workplace did not hire you to do your job. Instead, your workplace hired you to be a king/queen and priest/priestess that intercedes on behalf of the organization you work. How did this story impact your idea around your place in the workplace and the work you do?

3. Doc Brown provided a quote several times: "We reflect the Creator's wise stewardship into the world and reflect the praises of all creation back to its Maker." What are way you can live out reflecting the Creator's wise stewardship into the workplace? How might the workplace reflect praises back to God as its ultimate maker?

#### **Week 4 Journal Questions**

1. In this week's devotional, we learn and pray to reflect God's wise stewardship into the earth then reflect back Creation's praises to the Creator. After praying this prayer for a week, what observations did you make about your work?
2. In this week's devotional, we learn and pray to discover where we are not living out the fruit of the Spirit in our work. What did you discover about the fruit of the spirit in you and your work?
3. In this week's devotional, we learn and pray to press harder when we notice we do not want to complete a task. How did you see yourself as more of a priest and king (priestess and queen) and co-laborer with Christ this week?
4. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share from your experience? Are there ways to make this study better?