

The Spirituality of Work

Homemakers

**A six-session
small group guide**

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Small Group Guidelines

Ground Rules

Here are some guidelines for your gatherings. Your group leader will help facilitate.

1. **Our goal** is to grow together into a deeper intimacy with Christ and to connect our faith with our work. Keeping this goal in mind will help us get there!
2. **Confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in group, unless you have the permission of the person who spoke it.
3. **Start on time—and end on time.** Your group leader will try to pace the sessions, but everyone can help by arriving promptly and being attentive to time.
4. **Discussion involves everyone.** Make it possible for everyone – even those who are naturally more quiet – to take part. Don't share a second time until everyone has had an opportunity to share the first time.
5. **Remember your manners.** Avoid dismissing the thoughts of others, don't laugh at others when they've shared (unless they've just told a joke), and no putdowns of any kind.
6. **Share from your own experience and speak for yourself.** Don't try to problem-solve for another person or tell them what to do, but you can share what you have found helpful in your own life.
7. **It's OK to agree to disagree.** It's just a fact of life that everyone has different opinions. If the group has differing thoughts on an issue, there's no requirement that everyone agree. Respect everyone's opinions and where they are at in their journey.
8. **Turn off mobile phones** before the group begins! Put your electronic lives on hold for this short time to be fully present to others.

Leader Guidelines

Thank you for being willing to help lead your group and make this a great experience for everyone! Here are some things to keep in mind as you do so:

1. **Ensure good hospitality.** Members of your group may be new to a small group experience or the larger community. Facilitate introductions and be sure everyone feels welcome.
2. **Go over the ground rules** at the beginning of the series, and quickly review them at the start of each session. Some of the material is challenging, since it explores how the Gospel challenges us to change our lives. Make sure that the below ground rules are followed so everyone feels comfortable in the group.
3. **Gauge the dynamic of your group.** If necessary, you (or another designated facilitator) may need to gently facilitate to keep the group on schedule, remain on-topic, and/or allow all voices a chance to enter the circle. You may feel timid interrupting someone, but this can be a very important role that helps the whole group. Apologize in advance when reviewing the ground rules with the group. However, don't put people on the spot by compelling them to share.
4. **Facilitate answering reflection questions.** Sometimes sharing times can be a little awkward waiting for people to initiate. You can rotate around the circle, but we recommend that you try something called the "popcorn" method. One person starts, and when they are done sharing they choose the next person (who is always allowed to pass and pick another person). We have found that in practice this works very well, sometimes adding a little levity.
5. **Listen to the feedback from the group along the way.** Pace the time for the different sections based on the total time available and what works for your group.

Aware of God in My Work

Opening Prayer

Read this prayer aloud together:

Creator God,
you worked to create the world
and you are still working and laboring
on our behalf today.

Help us to cooperate with your grace
so that we may grow as disciples
who are doing the work
that you need done in our world.

Amen.

Sharing

How did you do last week with your resolution to be “salt” or “light” in your home or neighborhood? Did you follow through? What did you notice about doing it?

Background

Read this passage aloud, with each participant reading a paragraph. Anyone who prefers not to read is welcome to pass.

The homemakers who contributed to this report identified particular people, places and situations in their work environment where they glimpse God by using their spirituality of work looking glass.

Among God's refractors, children are most frequently mentioned. "The closest that an average person can come to seeing God is to observe children," maintains Patricia Coover. "It is unlikely that I will meet a holy person like Mother Teresa. But, if I am observant, I encounter holiness in my children. They are pure, like God is pure. They are innocent. They are wise in a certain way. Children are like God because children are funny and God is full of humor. Their forgiveness is almost immediate.

"My daughter had a fight with her friend. The friend stormed home, but my daughter seemed unconcerned. 'She'll be back in a few minutes,' my daughter said, 'as soon as she sees that her mother is sleeping.' Sure enough, the friend came back for that very reason. The two of them then played for several hours and not a word was mentioned of the incident. There is wisdom there. It is almost as if children realize that life is short. I know that in many ways children act as if they will live forever. But in a profound way they also understand how valuable each moment is."

Coover thus concludes that "it is an honor to be in the presence of children. Not only at the big moments like graduations. But even in the moments when they are driving me insane. I was standing at the kitchen sink preparing the dinner. My son was pulling on me; making me irritable. Then, in a moment, I was able to look down at him and it occurred to me that I was his whole life. My attention was his complete need. Suddenly the feeling of duress left me."

Anita Eberhardt shares her story of an encounter with God's forgiveness through children: "My eight year old is a perfectionist. She has so many routines in the morning that it is a struggle to get her to school on time. One day I was yelling to get her out of the door. I must admit that I used abusive language. She started to cry. 'I can't even hear God telling me that He loves me,' she said tearfully. This was a revelation to me. It meant that most of the time she *did* hear God through me. It also meant, as she said, that she was not hearing God through me at this time. And, for me, it meant that I was now hearing God through her. Well, she was certainly late for school that day because we held each other as we both cried. And we spent some time mending our relationship."

Rosemary Cronin also sees God's love in the action of her children: "Last year, both of my parents died within a month of one another. During an illness they stayed at our home. My mother had poor circulation in her feet and had to soak them. Our son was seven at the time. He saw her in pain. Like firemen in a brigade, he took his three year old brother in tow into

the kitchen. They prepared a large cooking pot of cold water and dish washing liquid, then managed to carry it into the room where my mother was staying. Never mind that the cold water would probably worsen her condition. The boys responded, on their own, to someone in need. My husband and I looked at each other with tears in our eyes."



Several homemakers point out that God, who once resembled a disgraced outcast, is revealed in a special way through special people. "Every family is dealing with a special need," Tom Samway of Oakland, California, reminds us. "Maybe it's a child with a disability, or an alcohol problem, or an aged grandparent who needs care. Homemaking is spiritual as I respond to the various needs around me."

"We see the blessings of God in our retarded daughter Dorothy," says Helen Long of Waban, Massachusetts. "She is the cause of great frustration at times, but a very special blessing. For example, Dorothy has influenced my children's careers, directing them toward interesting work. One of my daughters is getting her degree in special education. Another son teaches in a special school. Another daughter is a lawyer and she does plenty of work for the disabled. Dorothy has been responsible for great solidarity within our family and with other families of the developmentally disabled."



Other homemakers point out that God, who once walked among the derelicts and the neglected on the streets and in the alleys of Nazareth and Jerusalem, is revealed among the forgotten people in their own neighborhoods. In particular, some homemakers understand that God, whose parents could not find a place to stay in Bethlehem and who wandered as illegal refugees in Egypt, is revealed in the homeless.

"A homeless woman with serious mental problems came to our door two and a half years ago," says Patricia Coover. "I brought her in for a little food. She returned the next day and every day since. Over 800 times now we have given her a meal. It's to the point where if I am not at home, one of the children takes care of fixing something for this person. Often times my husband sees a homeless person hanging out around a local fast food restaurant. He ushers the person inside and buys him a meal."

"To me spirituality means addressing social problems," says Anita Eberhardt. "We can't address the far away world problems except by donating money and prayers. But part of homemaking is to be available to the upset and the unsettled. More than once we had someone stay overnight at our home because of some difficulty they were experiencing. It's inconvenient, I admit. But the good that we do snowballs. As a homemaker I have to make a home out of the whole earth."

Using a spirituality of work, Denise Prue sometimes sees God in the less fortunate. She also sometimes sees "the difference that my spirituality can have in my own life reflected in my children's behavior. For example, my daughter Katheryn was given a dollar by her godfather on her fourth birthday. She had that dollar spent a hundred ways in her imagination. Then one Saturday my husband took her shopping to spend the dollar. On the way they stopped at a restaurant where my daughter saw a collection box for sick children. Without hesitation she put her dollar in the box. 'They need it more,' she said. Even at her young age, she was impressed by the plight of the poor and the obligation of Christians to respond."

Catherine Corbett and her husband are involved in various charitable organizations in their Needham, Massachusetts, community—aiding sick children, providing special recreational facilities. "All of this pertains to the spiritual life," Corbett says, "because it is about making a neighborhood, indeed a whole society, into a home. Jesus taught us to be loving, to care for one another. His teaching is practiced in its most elemental form in the home. From there the practice extends to the neighborhood, the community, the world."

Reflection

1. If you have children, describe a time when they helped you to experience God.
2. "Every family is dealing with a special need," said Tom Samway. Name a special need(s) in your family. How is it both a frustration and a blessing?
3. Describe any opportunities you have to be present to a neglected or overlooked person in your neighborhood because you work at home.
4. Through whom do you most easily experience God at this time in your life?

Scripture Reading

Read this passage aloud.

Romans 12:9-18, 21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Reflection

1. When, in your work, is it difficult to “be ardent in spirit and serve the Lord”?
2. How are you called to overcome evil with good in your home, neighborhood, or community?
3. What helps you to hold fast to what is good when you are tempted to give into apathy or despair?

Action Response

Consider this suggestion for your week ahead. It does not need to be discussed now with the group, but we will reflect on it briefly next week.

Try to be especially conscious this week of looking for God in the people you care for in your home or those you come into contact with in your wider community.

Closing Prayer

Read this prayer aloud together:

Jesus, our Lord and our guide,

Many in our society are not aware of the work
that we do behind the scenes
in our homes and neighborhoods.

But you see it and bless it.

Help us to remember its great value.

Fill our hearts with gratitude
for the opportunity to do this necessary work.

Remind us throughout our days
of your presence amidst the ordinary.

May we see your face in the faces of those
we care for and meet along our way.

Let us be especially attentive to
those who are most often neglected,
forgotten, or outcast.

May we be a reflection of God for them.

We pray this in your name. Amen.