

The Spirituality of Work

Various Occupations

**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.

My Work Environment

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 workplace? 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 spirituality of work must take into account the context of a person's work environment—the norms and customs of the business, industry and even the larger international economic system. For retired people, students, homemakers, or the unemployed, the environment in which they spend most of their waking hours provides the context for their lives.

Acknowledged or not, the business norms and customs - and those of an environment outside of a typical workplace, - are of a moral character. And over time the work environment, apart from the intentions of any one leader, forms workers for better or for worse.

These work environments are different for different occupations. For a stay-at-home parent, they may encompass the neighborhood, PTA, grocery store,, and sports league. For a retired person, it may involve the

senior center and a local nonprofit where he or she volunteers. For a college student it may include their school and dormitory. All of these environments have a way of doing things that makes a difference.

"An authentic Christian spirituality has to evaluate what work conditions are acceptable for a whole, holy life," explains John McDermott. "The spirituality of work must address strains and problems in the marketplace."

Some companies and some economic systems, because they are well organized and consonant with the best of human aspirations, make it easier to live a healthy spirituality. On the other hand, when companies—and other work environments—are poorly organized or out of touch with what is good, they hurt the people they are intended to serve and, therefore, actually impede spirituality.

McDermott furnishes a general example of current marketplace culture which the spirituality of work must consider: "There is a trend today to return to a 1920s way of thinking that labor is a commodity. A spirituality of work must insist that the economy is for the sake of the person; the worker is not for the sake of the economy. I know, for example, that a spirituality of work, or any other ideal, cannot force a company to stay in business and keep people on the job. But I believe that a humane economy can be fashioned and I believe that Christian action can play a part in improving the economy and keeping people employed. A Christian spirituality of work can challenge some of the defects in the marketplace."

"A humane work environment relates to spirituality," says Jennifer Morrow, an industrial psychologist in Chicago, Illinois. "As a Christian, I believe that a humane environment is a reflection of the Incarnation. The greatest spiritual being, Christ, took on humanity. Now humanity can reflect Christ as it becomes more human and more humane. In business this means, among other things, being fair. Thus, business ethics is one expression of this spirituality."



The subject of business ethics is experiencing a boom time. It would be a shame, however, if all the current talk about business ethics actually led to a benign neglect of ethical behavior. Business ethics cannot be confined to case studies about corporate scandals and promulgating codes of conduct. As understood by the spirituality of work, business ethics is a pro-active style of leadership which challenges us to seek out areas of the corporate culture for improvement.

Is my work done in solidarity with all workers and does it add a little something to the common good? Or is it isolated and only self-serving? Am I concerned about my subordinates—not only about their productivity, but about their overall well-being? What about those I am in daily contact with, perhaps my children, or an aging parent, or my neighbors?

The practical spirituality of work demands periodic reflection on these questions and others such as these: Do my priorities serve who I am or only what I do? Does my schedule serve to remind me that the people I meet during the day are dignified in themselves, or does my schedule reinforce an attitude that people are valuable only as a means to my other ends?

"I'm on the fast track by nature," says William Farley. "I move fast. I eat fast. It's my style. I see a receptionist on the way into my office. I ask her about her weekend but I don't really mean it because before she answers, I am down the hall. I fail to celebrate her individuality and mine. I have to learn to pause for celebration; to be present."



What does all this talk about institutions and practices have to do with a spirituality of work? In the past, spirituality was often an inward, private search for peace and the resolution of tensions.

In its basic sense, though, spirituality is about seeking and responding to God's presence. Sometimes God comes in splendor and majesty; other times God comes in a quiet place and time. But quite often God comes disguised amid the daily chores of laundry and shopping, medical charting, lesson planning, or raking leaves.

A spirituality of work recognizes that God not only comes to us through Scripture, worship, nature and neighbor, but also through the institutional environment we have created. A spirituality of work, therefore, requires an appreciation for all the institutions in which God might be found—in the

hospital or clinic, around the home and in the wider community. "You don't have to be in a church to be near to God," quips Margaret Alice Maye. "You can talk to God in my hospital too."

Reflection

1. Are there any conflicts for you between the way your work environment operates and your Christian beliefs? If so, give an example.
2. Discuss an ethical or moral dilemma in your current work situation that concerns you.
3. Name a decision you have made in your work career that has been influenced by your religious values.
4. Share about a time when you were called to work for "the greater good" in spite of an imperfect system.

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. St. Augustine once said we should “hate the sin but love the sinner.” When in your career have you been called to do that?
3. How are you called to overcome evil with good in your profession?
4. What helps you to hold fast to what is good when you are tempted to give into apathy or despair?

Action Response

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

What might you do differently this week in your workplace in light of this reading and reflection?

Closing Prayer

Read this prayer aloud together:

Jesus, our Lord and our guide,

You worked tirelessly on behalf of the dignity of all,
especially those most often
neglected, forgotten, or outcast.

You know what it is like
to try to bring love and compassion
into an imperfect world.

Teach us how we are called to serve like you.
Show us how you would have us fight for justice.
Grant us hope and perseverance
when we are tempted to lose hope.
May we do what we can to bring about
your reign of justice and love.

Amen.