

Bethel Seminary's Work with Purpose Initiative
Church-Based Course Series

FAITH AND WORK

A BIBLICAL LOOK INTO OUR
FAITH AND WORK

LEADER'S GUIDE

Developed by Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Edited by TediAnne Hasapopoulos



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3949 Bethel Drive

St. Paul, MN 55112

<https://www.bethel.edu/seminary/about/initiatives/work-with-purpose/>

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Work with Purpose Initiative

Bethel Seminary

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PREVIEW

A NOTE TO COURSE LEADERS

This course seeks to be both informational and formational in its approach. It aims to introduce modern Christians to reflections about the relationship between faith and work. These reflections come from many eras of the Christian church and from theologians, Biblical scholars, and pastors. A few even come from the secular world, where select thinkers and writers are questioning what sort of people the modern workplace is making us into. The hope is that, as participants go through the readings, case studies, Biblical passages, and other material, they will begin to develop a deeper and more vital Christian understanding of how to respond to the modern workplace and how to live faithfully in it.

The course is designed to be flexible. While the material makes the most sense when covered in the order presented over a period of six weeks, the individual group characteristics may dictate how quickly or slowly the leader moves through the material, and how much (if any) of the outside readings can be dealt with in the group's time together. Suggested prayers and brief Scripture readings for each week are also included, but these may be used—or others substituted—at the leader's discretion.

The course is intended to be discussion-based. Short opening videos are suggested for each week, but the group's time together should be spent working through the discussion questions. Depending on the size and wishes of the group, the leader may want to divide people into smaller groups to process the questions while sharing the results with the entire group, or allow some quiet reflection time before group sharing.

The most crucial requirement for the leader is an openness to lovingly guide discussion and keep a group on-topic. For those who want more background on any week's topic, one or two short overview articles are recommended for the leader to read in advance each week. Not every point made in the article(s) needs to be brought up in discussion; they are meant as background reading only. In every case, articles listed for leaders are also among the material excerpted in the participant journal or noted in the journal for further reading.

The participant journal is intended to be distributed to group members in its entirety. It contains all of the course content and reflection questions without any of the instructions to the leader. If the group is willing to do "homework," members should be encouraged to complete readings and questions at home prior to the group session. But if this is not the case for your group, more time will need to be allotted to work through the material in class.

WEEK ONE: FAITH AND WORK

Leader Preparation Resources

Informational goals for participants

- To begin to redefine “work” more broadly (beyond only paid occupations)
- To begin to redefine being faithful at work more broadly (beyond only personal evangelism)
- To begin to understand their particular faith tradition’s attitudes to work

Formational goals for participants

- To reflect on why they do what they do in their work
- To begin to see unpaid work as valuable
- To see possible areas of disconnect between their own attitudes about work and what they have learned from their faith tradition (in preparation for addressing those areas of disconnect in subsequent weeks)

Suggested prayer and Scripture for opening or closing devotions

- Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ in his earthly life shared our toil and hallowed our labor: Be present with your people where they work; make those who carry on the industries and commerce of this land responsive to your will; and give to us all a pride in what we do, and a just return for our labor; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(*Book of Common Prayer*)
- Psalm 19

Suggested opening video

“Work as Worship,” <http://www.theologyofwork.org/resources/work-as-worship/>

Background reading helpful to the leader for guiding discussion

“Business People,” <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2012/03/06/business-people-michael-kruse/> and “Business People 2,”

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2012/03/08/business-people-2-michael-kruse/>

(the series continues, and the other posts can be read here:

<http://www.patheos.com/search/jsp/templates/primaryJSP/fullview.jsp?Submit=Search&keyword=business+people>)

WEEK ONE: FAITH AND WORK

A Preliminary Exercise

What does faith have to do with work? Fill in the blank to begin unpacking your ideas about your work and how it relates to your faith.

Throughout this course, the word "work" is meant not only to include things done for a paycheck, but the work of those who feel called to, or who find themselves in a season of, unpaid tasks: caring for children or the elderly, volunteering in retirement, etc. We will discuss this idea further as the course goes on, but keep it in mind as you answer the questions below.

1. I am happy about my work because _____
2. I am unhappy about my work because _____
3. When I was younger, my ideal profession as an adult was _____
because _____
4. If money were not an issue, my ideal profession today would be _____
because _____
(This quite possibly might be the profession you already have!)
5. I feel called to the kind of work I do today because _____
6. What I have learned from my church about work is _____
My church thinks these kinds of work are important: _____
My church thinks these kinds of work are unimportant: _____
7. When I think about what the Bible teaches about work, I think it tells me to _____

8. My co-workers know I am a Christian because _____
9. If the church could help me do one thing better in relating my faith to my work, it would be _____

Ideally, the leader should take time to go around and have each person share a little of their background and their answers to these questions as they feel comfortable. At least #6, #7, and #9 should be discussed by the whole group.

Although we often speak of work as how you make your living, any compassionate worker also experiences work as how you break your heart. In this way we work like Jesus.

(<http://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/john#life-and-looming-death-john-10-12>)

WEEK ONE: FAITH AND WORK

Case Study: The Church and Work

Woodlake Church is a thriving suburban church in a fairly diverse area of a metropolitan city. Under the leadership of the senior pastor, Martin, the church has grown from 300 to 800 members in five years he's been there. Martin is committed to mentoring leaders and has a growing staff that he's invested himself in via mentoring. In his second year at the church, the church hired Karen, a dynamic youth pastor who has helped the youth group grow in positive ways. Being mentored by Martin was such a helpful part of her own growth as a pastor that she has developed a mentorship program for the youth, in which various adult lay members mentor teens in 1:1 discipling relationships that involve Bible study and prayer in addition to participating in social activities occasionally.

Karen has recently begun to solidify expectations for the mentor volunteers as she continues to recruit for the program. One recent expectation is for volunteers to attend the youth Sunday school and then choose one other event during the week to attend, either the Wednesday night youth teaching time or the Friday activity night. As Karen sees it, "Teens will benefit from interacting with adult mentors as a group, and the mentors will have a better sense of what we're doing in youth group."

Since the new expectations were sent out to volunteers, there has been an undercurrent of dissatisfaction. Charles, a small business owner with children already grown, had joined the mentor program, in part, because it allowed him to meet with the boy he was mentoring around his hours of business—10am-8pm, Mon-Sat. Charles spoke to Sarah one Sunday morning: "Do they really expect me to close shop early during the week to attend a youth function? I really love meeting with Ty, but I'll need to reevaluate my involvement if this rule becomes fixed in stone." Sarah, a hospital administrator working 50-60 hours a week, agreed and added, "I'm OK with attending one night a week, but I can only attend one thing Sunday morning because of my family. I look forward to Sunday morning and hearing the sermon and participating in worship. If I have to be at the youth Sunday school instead of the worship service, I will lose my energy for mentoring."

Karen was troubled by the responses expressed by a number of the volunteers. She thought that the dissenting voices were losing sight of the needs of the teens. In response to the pushback, Karen developed a volunteer recruitment campaign, "Tithe Your Time." She made the new requirements clear and drew upon Paul's example of being a tent-maker to support his work of preaching the gospel to encourage those with "non-ministry" jobs to reconsider their role in the work of the church.

As a result, a number of potential new volunteers emerged. But a group of current mentoring volunteers, led by Charles, went to Pastor Martin with their concerns. Charles spoke for many of them, "We have been giving our time to youth mentoring for quite a while, but we simply can't add any more hours to our day."

WEEK ONE: FAITH AND WORK

Martin decided to raise the issue at the next staff meeting to get input and to give voice to these concerns. Karen was at first somewhat defensive. "I think this is an important part of moving the program to a new level and making it even more fruitful for the teens. There have been some mentors who are out of touch with what we're trying to do in the youth group—they just do their own thing. I don't think the ministry is as strong as it could be."

Another staff member, Victor spoke up on Karen's behalf: "I have plenty of volunteers in Outreach who are working full-time and ministering for quite a few hours during the week. I think we should stand behind this new policy and see who the really committed volunteers are."

While Martin wants to support the decisions his staff has made, he has a sense that the implications of the "Tithe Your Time" campaign have not been fully thought out.

Discussion questions

1. What are the unexamined assumptions about what ministry is and is not of each member in this scenario? Martin, Karen, Charles, Sarah, Victor?
2. How would the situation look different if people's vocations outside the church were taken into consideration?
3. Is the application of the "tent-maker" analogy legitimate?
4. What are some solutions "outside the box" of the way the situation is set up?
5. Finally, what are some Scriptural passages, and models from the lives of people in the Scriptures, that folks might name which apply to this situation? (If you can't think of any, don't worry. The next lesson will be about equipping you with the beginnings of a biblical toolbox on faith and work.)

Further reading

Michael Kruse's series of posts on "Jesus Creed" about faith and work, accessible via this link: <http://www.patheos.com/search/jsp/templates/primaryJSP/fullview.jsp?keyword=business+people+kruse&advancedmatchselect=none&date=Date+To&datef=Date+From&Submit=Search&FilterList=&advancedSearch=&sort=&pagination=&myIntKeyword=>