



Group Guide for the Workplace

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The Way We Work: How Faith Makes a Difference on the Job

I'm excited that you've chosen to use the book *The Way We Work: How Faith Makes a Difference on the Job* in a group setting. Whether this discussion group is part of a book club, work group, or lunch conversation, it's my hope that this guide will help you craft meaningful discussions aimed at a better understanding of faith in the workplace.

AT THE FIRST MEETING: Begin by getting to know each other. The first group meeting might be a dinner or social time in which you set up group expectations and specifics such as meeting time and meeting place. Also, work on establishing group goals such as these:

- To encourage interested participants to gain new understanding of the difference faith makes in how we approach our work
- To create a safe group environment where members can relax and openly share thoughts and ideas

PRIOR TO MEETING: Read the assigned chapter in *The Way We Work*, and review the discussion questions. This will help you dig deeper into the topic of the upcoming session. All group members should do their best to complete the corresponding reading prior to the meeting time to help foster the best possible discussion. Also, group members might want to look over the discussion questions so they are familiar with them ahead of time.

DURING THE MEETING: Most group sessions will have the following three components:

- Social time (catching up on each other's lives)
- Curriculum time (going through the book)
- Discussion time (reading and answering the discussion questions)

Your group might like to begin with social time or end with it. As a group, you can discuss what format is most comfortable to you and then settle into a routine so that group members will know what to expect. Finally, plan to begin and end on time so that group members feel their time is respected.

Chapter 1

A Christian Theology of Work

1. Is there a reason that country music has a lot of songs about work?
2. In what ways does the Hebrew word *hebel* describe the experience that many people have in their work? Do you know someone who would use this word to describe his or her experience?
3. Are we required to remove the consequences for nonwork as an act of human compassion? Where do consequences for laziness end? And where does mercy begin?
4. How does society require someone to work? How responsible is society for those who choose not to work?
5. In what ways is a person's value judged on the basis of his or her work? When is this good? When is it destructive?
6. Can you remember a time in your career when you were nothing more than a measurement of productivity? How did it make you feel?
7. How can a successful workplace be productive and life affirming at the same time?
8. Will you be remembered for your work? How much does it matter to you if you are or aren't?
9. In what ways is work a gift?

Chapter 2

The Evolution of Work

1. Which of the five work ethics was modeled in your childhood home?
2. Did you grow up hearing any memorable philosophies about work (e.g., “Early to bed, early to rise . . .”)?
3. Were you created to do the work you are now doing?
4. In your current job, is it more like the career ethic or the self-development ethic?
5. Have work and play swapped places as life priorities? What is the appropriate balance of the two?
6. Using the Genesis story of creation, how would you define “being human”?
7. Many people believe that work is a curse that God put on Adam and Eve when they were evicted from the garden of Eden. How would you respond to this idea?
8. What word from the chapter would you use to explain your work—“calling,” “career,” or “occupation”? What is the difference between these terms?

Chapter 3

Moses: Union Organizer and Political Activist

1. In what ways do you feel uniquely prepared to do the work you are currently doing? Did you know this before you took the job or later?
2. Which of the definitions of work in this chapter ring most true in your experience?
3. Why does the world need you to do your job? What human need calls for it?
4. How did you know what kind of work you should do? Did you have a “burning bush” experience, hear a whisper in your head, or just know yourself well?
5. Is it easier to understand our work looking back than being in the middle of it? What do we gain from a backward perspective that we miss while in the middle of the job?
6. Has there been a time in your life when you failed to do the work in front of you because you were hoping for another job? Do you work with anyone whose mind is somewhere else?
7. The author suggests three ways that God leads us. Have you experienced any of these?

Chapter 4

Beginning with the End in Mind

1. Do you see the end of a task before you begin it?
2. In what ways might you be a cocreator with God in your work?
3. How do you see the future unfolding? Already predetermined by God with you playing your part? Or you as a person, given free will, participating with God? Which concept values the human most?
4. If human work continues to change in the ways it has during your lifetime, what will the world be like fifty years from now?
5. If the kind of world God is building informs how we do our work, what does this say about your work?
6. Have you ever been in a position to do something similar to the factory worker who healed the rift? What was the issue and how did you help resolve it?
7. What takeaway do you get from this chapter?

Chapter 5

The "Gods" That Have to Be Carried

1. In what ways are companies like the Borg and the Babylonians?
2. The author lists the gods of our post-Christian America who intend to assimilate us into their way of thinking. Which of these gods are most seductive in their lure?
3. How does the worship of these gods seep into the workplace?
4. What gods have humans crafted by their own hands and then bowed to?
5. In what ways do we expect from our work what we should expect from our God?
6. Is it easy to know the difference between worshipping our work and doing our work for God?
7. How would your employer react if you informed him or her that you are actually working *for* God and *with* him or her?

Chapter 6

The Size of Our Work

1. Describe a time in your life when you resigned, quit, or were ready to do so.
2. What is it like to feel like a failure at what you are doing?
3. What makes a person feel that his or her work is meaningful?
4. Is there someone at your workplace who is extremely discouraged? Why? What might you do to bring meaning to that person's work?
5. Some jobs make people feel little. What are the five most underappreciated occupations?
6. How would you encourage people in the five occupations you listed? Is there any way that these people might hear this affirmation now?
7. If you had a to-do list from this chapter, what is on it for the coming week?

Chapter 7

Channeling Proverbs

1. Do you have a favorite proverb? If not, take a minute and scan the book of Proverbs and read aloud some of the ones that address work.
2. Read Peterson's introduction to Proverbs. Why do Christians spiritualize these wise, life-savvy sayings instead of letting them out into the world?
3. In your workplace, what is the difference between the wise person and the fool?
4. Review Kidner's description of the sluggard in Proverbs. How does your workplace deal with laziness?
5. If someone claims to be a Christian and is lazy, what harm is done? Should that person be confronted? Fired?
6. Why are people lazy? Can they be motivated?

Chapter 8

Sloth

1. Okay, confession time. Of the list of sloth descriptions that begin this chapter, which are you guilty of?
2. Are you bored with repetition in your work? Or do you find security in repetition?
3. What percentage of your days would you label as mundane? What percentage would be ideal?
4. Why is it hard to find meaning in routine, mundane work?
5. Tell the story of someone who did repetitive work his or her whole life and found joy in it.
6. The author writes, “Ours is a God of pots and pans, lesson plans, common work, daily bread, care for the neighbor, care for the body. The things we wish to transcend are God’s sacred meeting places.” How does God meet with you in your daily work?
7. In what ways have you become a better person through the challenges of work?

Chapter 9

Words in the Workplace

1. Which is your workplace more like—Piranha Pond or Gossip Graveyard?
2. How many people do you know at work that you can trust to keep a confidence? Are you more trusting or guarded on the job?
3. Can you share a time when you risked your reputation and defended a person who was not present?
4. How do you deal with gossip?
5. Is backstabbing common where you work? Have you ever been stabbed in the back by a coworker?
6. If you could wave a magic wand where you work and make the piranhas all go away, how would it change the atmosphere?

Chapter 10

When Work Is a Pain

1. What is the hardest work you have ever done?
2. When have you suffered on the job?
3. Can you describe a time when you believe you needed to stay in a difficult situation and make a difference?
4. American Christianity seldom talks about suffering as the way of God in the world. Everyone wants blessing. How can we recapture the suffering Jesus for the sake of redeeming the world?
5. Do you have a friend who needs your support to stay in a difficult work situation? What might this support look like?
6. Name some people who do hard work for no money or recognition. What if they walked away from their work?
7. What sins are Christians most guilty of in the workplace?
8. At what point should a person confront injustice at the risk of losing his or her job? Have you ever been there?

Chapter 11

Blessing

1. What is the biblical difference between a blessing and a curse?
2. What blessings do you receive from your work?
3. What curses?
4. What harm are the TV preachers doing when they tell people that God wants to make us all millionaires?
5. How big of a difference is there between experiencing blessing as God's personal favor and experiencing blessing as God's gift to others through us?
6. Amy Sherman wrote that too often religion "focuses believers on getting a ticket to heaven, but doesn't say much about what their life in this world should look like. Put differently, it focuses only on what we've been saved *from*, rather than also telling us what we're saved *for*." What are your thoughts about this?
7. Do the gifts we receive from God obligate us to others?

Chapter 12

Dancing with the Law: Sabbath

1. Do you remember the days of “blue laws,” when businesses could not open on Sunday? What was that like and how is culture different in our seven-day business world?
2. Did you grow up with a repressive or liberating view of the Sabbath? Was it a gift or a rule?
3. What surprised you about the biblical story of Sabbath?
4. Define “workaholic.”
5. How is your work like Pharaoh’s brickmaking enterprise?
6. Describe your most energizing Sabbath.
7. Are you too busy? What would it take for you to practice Sabbath?

Chapter 13

Parables about Workers

1. Jesus was a carpenter. Do you think that influenced his parables? In what way?
2. The author writes, “The kind of work we do when no one is looking is a key determinant of our character.” Is this a lost value in the workplace?
3. Do you know a Perry Bigelow in your town? What did that person do?
4. In what way are we accountable for what we do with the money, power, and responsibility entrusted to us?
5. Does God expect us to be successful?
6. Which of the parables speaks most directly to you?

Chapter 14

Work That Will Last

1. How would you want to be remembered by the people you work with?
2. In what form will our work follow us into eternity? Or be revealed at the resurrection?
3. If you had to list a single accomplishment that will outlive you, what is it?
4. The chapter talks about the coworkers of the apostle Paul in establishing the church. Who are your coworkers with whom you are building something of eternal value?
5. Describe a time when someone built a shoddy foundation (establishing a company or doing a project) and later the whole thing collapsed because the foundation was faulty.
6. How responsible are we for the wise use of the earth's resources?
7. Do you believe there will be work in heaven?

Chapter 15

When Work Messes with Church Relationships

1. Have you ever worked for someone you attended church with? What was it like?
2. Should Christians try to hire people from their own church?
3. What are the benefits/dangers of doing this?
4. What implications does the Thessalonian situation have for you?
5. How do you guard against favoritism in the workplace?
6. Have you ever employed relatives? What are the benefits/dangers?
7. Have you ever tried to help an unemployed person find work? What lessons did you learn from this?

Chapter 16

When We All Get to Heaven

1. Does this chapter challenge popular views of heaven and earth at the end of time?
2. How is this different from the Left Behind, “raptured off the planet” view of the end times?
3. How does the way the world will end make a difference in our work?
4. Read the Andy Crouch statement aloud. Are you doing New Jerusalem work?
5. As you reflect on your group discussion across the past weeks, how has your view of work changed?
6. If you were to describe your theology of work, what would it be?