BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORK

REDEEMING WORK

A project of Christianity Today

SIX GROUP SESSIONS
LEADER’S GUIDE
Contents

3 INTRODUCTION

7 SESSION ONE:
What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?
Why did God give us work to do? Rediscover the created goodness of work.

16 SESSION TWO:
But I Hate My Job
As kids we may dream of exciting careers. As adults, we more often lament the beginning of the workweek. Confront the reality of work in a broken world.

20 SESSION THREE:
Redeeming Work
When Christians succeed in the marketplace, everyone prospers as a result. Understand the role work plays in God’s larger story of redemption.

24 SESSION FOUR:
Calling or Career?
What if I don’t feel “called” to my job? Expand our view of calling beyond occupation to vocation.

29 SESSION FIVE:
The Powers That Be
Every workplace includes a power dynamic. God can use us both when we are powerful and powerless.

34 SESSION SIX:
The God We Serve
Too often our identity comes from our work. But our identity is in Christ and the meaning of our work flows from that relationship.
Introduction

**DISCOVERING WHY YOUR WORK MATTERS**

For many of us, work is where we spend one-third (or more!) of our lives. It’s what we talk about at parties. It’s how we introduce ourselves. It’s often where our social circles and networks originate. In fact, for a lot of us, it’s the reason we live where we live. Work dictates much of the circumstances and rhythms of our lives. So why does Monday morning feel so far from Sunday morning? For many Christians, there is a significant gap between work and faith. The two simply feel unrelated. This curriculum is meant to help bridge that gap.

**RESOURCES**

*Redeeming Work* provides several tools to help you and your group along the way. More than just a once-a-week meeting, we’ve provided ways to reflect daily on how faith and work connect. The curriculum offers:

- Redeeming Work Leader’s Guide
- Redeeming Work Videos
- Redeeming Work Study Guide
- This Is Our City articles and documentaries from Christianity Today

**WHAT TO EXPECT**

*Redeeming Work* is built around six powerful, video-driven small-group sessions designed to build relationships and spur thoughtful dialogue.

The video sessions are hosted by three members of the Christianity Today editorial team—Andy Crouch, Katelyn Beaty, and Skye Jethani. Your hosts will engage with some of the same issues you’ll be discussing in your groups. They also talk with key leaders and experts during each session. These guided conversations and interviews will help your group consider various angles of the topic at hand. Also contained within each of the six lessons are two to three short documentaries that show real-life examples of Christians engaging their calling and pressing into how God can use their unique skills, experiences, and giftings.
The Redeeming Work Leader’s Guide will help you facilitate the weekly group gatherings. Obviously, every group is different and part of your role as a leader is recognizing when your group may need to go “off script,” but we hope this resource will aid you as you guide your group through meaningful discussions.

In between sessions, participants can use the Redeeming Work Study Guide. It provides five daily exercises that build on the video and group session from the week before:

- **Read:** Discover stories of people seeking to serve God in their cities and careers
- **Study:** Explore a relevant passage of Scripture
- **Watch:** Watch a documentary or related video clip and consider the implications for your life
- **Pray:** Follow a guided time of engagement with God on this topic
- **Act:** Take a personal and tangible step in your own life

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

The Christian faith has much to say about the purpose of work—and even more to say about vocation, God’s call to us as individuals and as members of the human family. Redeeming Work will give your group a taste of the breadth and depth of what the Bible teaches us about this fundamental aspect of the Christian life. It will help participants recognize the profound connection between what they do every day and the larger story of God’s redemptive work in the world.

The number of resources included in this study may seem overwhelming at first, but as a small-group leader, please know that you need not use every resource or ask every question. There are several tools provided. Please use your discretion and creativity as you facilitate discussion and learning.

**THE STRUCTURE**

The curriculum is divided into six sessions. Each session begins with the group meeting, where the main principles of the week are laid out through teaching videos and group discussion. Group members are then sent away to study those concepts more fully throughout the week. Because of this, you may wish to begin each week following the first session with a short recap of the previous session.

This Leader’s Guide includes a suggested format for each session; however, please feel free to tailor the structure of your meetings to the needs of the group.

You may also find the This Is Our City website to be a great help to you and your small-group members. Much of the structure and content of this study is derived from the articles and videos on that site. There you will find many more helpful resources gathered into one location. You can find it online at: thisisourcity.org.
ROUND TABLE HOSTS

Andy Crouch

Skye Jethani
Skye is the director of mission advancement at Christianity Today. He is the author of Futureville: Discover Your Purpose for Today by Reimagining Tomorrow (2014) and With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God (2011). Skye is a pastor at Blanchard Alliance Church.

Katelyn Beaty
Katelyn Beaty is the managing editor of Christianity Today magazine and the cofounder of Her.meneutics, a daily website covering news, cultural trends, and theology from the perspective of Christian women. Katelyn has written for a variety of publications and has won awards from the EPA (Evangelical Press Association) for numerous articles.

INTERVIEWS WITH

Timothy Keller
Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. He is the author of a number of books, including Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering (2013), and co-author with Katherine Leary Alsdorf of Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work (2012).

Christopher Brooks
Christopher Brooks is the Senior Pastor of Evangel Ministries, a 1500-member church in Detroit, Michigan. He is host of the Equipped for Life radio broadcast and part of the executive team of E.A.C.H. (Every One A Chance to Hear), an outreach ministry in the greater Detroit area.

Amy Sherman
Amy L. Sherman is a Senior Fellow at the Sagamore Institute for Policy Research, where she directs the Center on Faith in Communities. She provides training and consulting to churches and nonprofits seeking to transform their communities for the common good. Dr. Sherman is the author of six books, including Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good (2011).

James K. A. Smith
James Smith is a professor of philosophy at Calvin College and the editor of Comment magazine. He is the author of several books, including Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works and Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation.
Katherine Leary Alsdorf
Katherine Leary Alsdorf is the founder and executive director of Redeemer’s Center for Faith & Work in Manhattan. Prior to this role, Katherine worked as a CEO for firms in the high tech industry. She is the co-author, with Timothy Keller, of Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work (2012).

Kate Harris
Kate Harris is the executive director of The Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation & Culture. She has worked for Chuck Colson and The Wilberforce Forum, served on Capitol Hill for U.S. Senate leadership, and helped lead the ministry of Faith & Law. She is the author of Wonder Women: Navigating the Challenges of Motherhood, Career, and Identity (2013).

Corey Widmer
Corey Widmer is co-pastor of The East End Fellowship, a multi-ethnic neighborhood congregation in Richmond, VA. Corey earned his Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and served three years as a research assistant for John Stott.
SESSION ONE:

What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?

Why did God give us work to do? Rediscover the created goodness of work.

*Genesis 1–2*
SESSION ONE: OVERVIEW
This session will focus on the created goodness of work. Why did God give us work to do? What is the inherent value of work? As children, we dream of what we will do when we grow up. At that young age, we recognize an excitement and adventure and purpose in work. This session will remind participants of the wonder of work and help them begin to ask: What work has God given me to do?

KEY SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1–2

GATHERING TIME
Discussion Starters
Before you begin this session’s video, answer these questions as a group (or divide into smaller groups):

> Since this is a small-group study about work, let’s begin by telling each other a little about what we all do with our days. What is the work that you do?

> Up until this point, how would you say your faith has informed what you do?

Video, Session One
After your group finishes the discussion questions above, begin this session’s video. The video session includes:

> Redeeming Work small-group study introduction

> Documentary: Coffee. And It Was Very Good with David Blanchard of Blanchard’s Coffee

> Roundtable discussions with Andy Crouch, Katelyn Beaty, and Skye Jethani

> Interviews with James K. A. Smith and Christopher Brooks

> Documentary: Business as God Meant It to Be with Katie Nienow of Juntos Finanzas

Questions for Video Discussion
Pause the video and ask the following questions during the indicated breaks in the video. You may want to have your group separate into smaller groups during these breaks to keep the discussions around 7-10 minutes.

Break 1:

> As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

> What do you think informed that desire?

> How is what you do now related (or unrelated) to that childhood dream?
Break 2:
Read Genesis 2 as a larger group, then break into smaller groups to discuss.

> In general, when you think about work, do you think about it as “toil” or as something God affirms as “very good”? Where do you think that perspective came from for you?

> Jamie Smith points out that work is part of the good of being human—that the biblical narrative redeems our work, it doesn’t redeem us from our work. What would it mean to see your work as part of God’s redemption and not just punishment?

> Many people have this idea that being “faithful at work” means evangelizing to their co-workers. But David Blanchard suggests that perhaps it’s a stronger witness to Christ when we enjoy creation and enjoy it to its fullest, living the way we’re supposed to live. How do you see that reflected in the biblical account of Eden? Have you ever felt that way in your own work?

Break 3:

> Christopher Brooks points out some very practical benefits of work: dignity, dollars earned, and discipleship. How do those resonate with you? Can you identify any other practical benefits to work?

> Christopher also talks about how the disciplines of work shape us even as we’re working. What are some disciplines or routines at your job (or a previous job) that have shaped who you are?

> How have you seen God use those disciplines or characteristics for good in your life outside of work?

Post-Video Discussion
After the video, choose two or three of these questions to discuss together as a larger group. If you have more time, work through more of the questions.

> What do you love about what you do?

> What are you especially proud of in your work?

> Do you believe your faith has much to say about the work that you do? Are your faith and work connected? Why or why not?

“There are certain things . . . I can’t develop apart from work. . . . These are things that are working on me while I’m working on the job.”

—Christopher Brooks
Do you believe your job could be part of some greater work God is doing in the world? Why or why not?

When you think of a Christian you know who is doing “good and faithful” work, who comes to mind? How does that person embody some of what you heard in the video today?

In the final documentary, Katie Nienow mentions how rewarding it is to engage her whole mind, heart, and soul at her work. Which of these do you feel you are most engaging at work? What do you feel is missing?

Prayer Suggestions
As a group, gather to end the session in prayer. You might consider praying for:

- eyes to see how God is at work through the work you do.
- a sense of gratitude for the work God has given each of us to do.

OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION’S DAILY EXERCISES

Day One: Read
Read pages 104-106 from Playing God by Andy Crouch, included at the end of this session. In this excerpt, we see the greater narrative arc of creation: a move from good, to very good, to glory. And we see our call to participate in that arc.

Day Two: Study
Read Psalm 104 for a vivid picture of the whole creation working, day and night, in harmony and response to its creator.

Day Three: Watch
Watch the documentary Forging the Future with the Tip of a Pen with Jake Weidmann, one of 11 master penmen in the world. Jake describes his work as “preserving the past and forging the future.” Come up with a “tagline” or mission statement for your work.

Link: www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/7thcity/forging-future-with-tip-of-pen.html

Day Four: Pray
It’s easy, when we pray, to focus on things that are not working well. Use this prayer time to thank God for the ways your work uses your gifts and strengthens your character.

Day Five: Act
Tell a coworker or your boss one way you think your workplace and the work you do is contributing to the common good—to the overall flourishing of your city or the world.
Andy Crouch

Playing God
Redeeming the Gift of Power
©2013 by Andy Crouch

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press.

InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, write Public Relations Dept., InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 6400 Schroeder Rd., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895, or visit the IVCF website at <www.intervarsity.org>.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

While all stories in this book are true, some names and identifying information in this book have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

Cover design: Cindy Kiple
Images: © Pavel Khorenyan/iStockphoto
ISBN 978-0-8308-8436-0 (digital)
ISBN 978-0-8308-3765-6 (print)
The grand pattern of creation is good, to very good, to glory.

Creation begins good—as we already saw, that is the radical claim of Genesis 1, in spite of all the conflict and trouble we see in the world around us. “In the beginning it was not so.” The first truth about the world is that it is good.

And once God’s image bearers are present in the creation, then and only then the world is declared “very good.” For the essential function of the image bearers is, through tilling and tending, attention and intentionality, to cultivate the world in a way that unfolds its potential.

Nature is good. Culture—human beings acting with creativity and care upon the good gifts of the natural world—is very good.

Grain is good. It grows by the grace of God laid down over eons of evolution, the accumulation of nutrients in the soil and the cycle of water from ocean to cloud to ground to river. Grains were growing long before human beings were here. But then human beings arrive and begin to cultivate the grain. They harvest and thresh it, separating the nutritious germ from the tough chaff. They grind it and mix it with water, yeast and a bit of salt, and bake it, and the result is bread.

Grain is good—but bread is very good.

This is the essential pattern of all culture at its best. Eggs are good, omelets are very good. Trees are good, a beautifully wrought wooden chair is
very good. Sound is good, music is very good. When human beings do what they were created to do, the latent possibilities in creation come to fruition, a flourishing reality that would never exist without the application of human intelligence and intentionality. This is what image bearing is for.

And from time to time human culture is so carefully tended and developed that the artifacts that emerge are something even more than very good. They approach something we could call glory. Glory is the magnificence of true being, the captivating beauty of something that is so rich in realization that it leaves us in awe and close to worship.

So there is the goodness of sound, the whisper or roar of the wind, the chirps of crickets, and the babble of brooks—such sound is good. Then there is the very-goodness of music, the skillful tending and tuning of sound that is found in every human culture.

But from time to time, you hear music—whether Tuvan throat singing, a Beethoven symphony, a Bach chorale, a black gospel chorus—that shakes you to the core and leaves you both utterly satisfied and hungrier than you have ever been for true life. That is glorious music. The best of culture has this quality of transcendent excellence, the ability to be utterly itself and to speak of something far greater than itself.

There are not many human cultural achievements that embody this pattern better than the cultivation of the grape. Grapes are good. But when the grapes are harvested after countless hours of laborious tending, when they are crushed underfoot or in a press and then placed in vats to release their sugars and feed the little creatures we call yeast, and when this whole process is superintended by someone with great skill and discernment, you get wine. (Certain of my Christian brothers and sisters will have to make what follows apply to grape juice.) Wine, with its layers of flavors, its color and aroma, and initial burst of taste and lingering finish, its hint of the terroir where it was grown, its effervescence and sweetness and tannic tension. Grapes are good—wine is very good. And the best wine? The best wine, for someone prepared by years of observing and tasting and swirling (for all glory requires preparation and skill to be fully recognized), is among the most glorious experiences of which the human senses of sight, taste and smell are capable. The odd truth is that the most glorious things are the ones that begin as the simplest. A bundle of
grapes—the right grapes, at the right time, in the right hands—can become the glory and honor of the nations.

This is the pattern of creation: good, to very good, verging on glory. The best of culture anticipates the time when all things are made new, when the glory of the Lord will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea.
As kids we may dream of exciting careers. As adults, we more often lament the beginning of the workweek. Confront the reality of work in a broken world.

*Genesis 3 and Exodus 5*
SESSION TWO: OVERVIEW
This session will confront the reality of work in everyday life. As kids we may dream of exciting careers. As adults, we more often lament the beginning of the workweek and look forward to our days off. Many adults feel bored, unfulfilled or under-challenged at work. Many others are working in broken or dehumanizing systems or under corrupt leadership. In a world far from Eden, work is toil.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Genesis 3 and Exodus 5

GATHERING TIME

Discussion Starters
Before you begin this session’s video, have everyone answer one of these questions for the larger group (these are based on the daily lessons from this past week):

> What was the “tagline” or mission statement you came up with for your work?
> How might your work or your workplace fit into God’s greater plan?

Video, Session Two
After your group finishes the discussion questions above, begin this session’s video. The video session includes:

> Roundtable discussions with Andy Crouch, Katelyn Beaty, and Skye Jethani
> Interviews with James K.A. Smith, Timothy Keller, and Katherine Leary Alsdorf
> Documentary: Gardening to Make Beauty Out of Blight with Riet Schumack of Schumack Farm and Brightmoor Youth Gardens

Questions for Video Discussion
Pause the video and ask the following questions during the indicated breaks in the video. You may want to have your group separate into smaller groups during these breaks to keep the discussions around 7-10 minutes.

Break 1:

> What was the worst job you ever had?
> What is one story that captures why that job was so awful?

“We want to be careful not to idealize this biblical, creational affirmation of work as if we are in the garden.”
—James K.A. Smith
Break 2:
Read Genesis 3 and Exodus 5 as a group. Then break into smaller groups to discuss the following questions.

> When does work most feel like “toil” to you?

> What are the elements of the Hebrews’ situation that are most difficult and degrading? What are contemporary examples of this kind of oppression?

> Without unnecessary complaining, what are some of the frustrations you experience in your job now?

> Would you say you are someone who “lives for the weekend”? Why do you think you feel that way?

Break 3:

> Think back to the most recent job you left. Why did you leave? How did you know when it was time to leave?

> Have you had that job where you were “learning the ropes”? What is your advice to those who are still in that position—how can you make the most of that time?

> Katherine Leary Alsdorf points out that our idols are always present with us—that we bring our sin into the workplace and “we all make work a little worse.” What are some idols you’d say are present with you at work on a regular basis?

Post-Video Discussion
After the video, choose two or three of these questions to discuss together as a larger group. If you have more time, work through more of the questions.

> When you think back on that “worst job,” are you able to identify how it might have ultimately benefited either a greater mission or your own development? Would you say those benefits made the job worth it, in retrospect?

> Have you ever worked in a place you might have said was corrupt or dehumanizing? How did that environment affect you?

> What are some of the sins that characterize your workplace? Would you say they are primarily institutional or personal?

> What are some organizational or systemic injustices in the broader world of work? What can we do in the face of these systemic violations of work’s purpose?

> Riet Schumack says we start the kingdom of heaven here “but it’s never perfect.” Why do you think it’s worth it to keep at it and keep building, even knowing it will never be perfect?
Prayer Suggestions
As a group, gather to end in prayer. You might consider praying for:

> individual requests regarding difficulties at each person’s workplace.
> discernment for where God might be asking each person to change—either to leave a job or to shift their perspective on that job.

**OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION’S DAILY EXERCISES**

**Day One: Read**
Read “Why All Your Impressions of Detroit Are Wrong,” to consider a seemingly insurmountable problem and why it’s still worth trying to fix.


**Day Two: Study**
Daniel 3 finds three Jewish believers in a very visible role in a corrupt system. Study the pressures they face in Babylon and how they respond. What idols are you pressured to worship in your workplace? What would it look like to refuse to fall down before those idols?

**Day Three: Watch**
Watch the documentary *Sex Trafficking: Beyond Storming Brothels*. While we applaud those who work to fight injustice and correct broken systems, we also must acknowledge the incredible personal toll of taking on such fights.

Link: [www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/portland/shoshon.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/portland/shoshon.html)

**Day Four: Pray**
Walk through your work building and pray for the work done there or specifically for each of your coworkers. Pray for specific difficult situations happening in your workplace right now. Ask for forgiveness and grace as needed and for courage to keep going even in the midst of brokenness.

**Day Five: Act**
Identify one personal “idol” you bring to work and do something very deliberate to counter it today. For example, if competition (a desire to beat others or get ahead) is an idol you bring, deliberately praise or celebrate a coworker in front of a supervisor or others.
SESSION THREE:

Redeeming Work

When Christians succeed in the marketplace, everyone prospers as a result. Understand the role work plays in God’s larger story of redemption.

*Proverbs 31:10–31*
SESSION THREE: OVERVIEW
This session you will begin to imagine what it looks like to redeem work, to restore vocation to its created purpose. This session will offer participants a definition of *vocation* and get them asking questions about finding the sacred in their own jobs—which perhaps they once merely considered “secular.” They will also consider how success in the marketplace—not just financial, but influence, creativity, accolades and so on—can lead to prospering for many. These are all ways God is both redeeming our work and using our work in his greater redemption story.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** Proverbs 31:10–31

GATHERING TIME

Discussion Starters
*Before you begin this session’s video, answer this question as a group (or divide into smaller groups):*

> Identify one business person you know who is doing good, ethical, and beneficial work—possibly in a role that might normally be viewed as dubious or corrupt. How is this person’s work making a difference?

Video, Session Three
*After your group finishes discussing the question above, begin this session’s video. The video session includes:*

> Documentary: *Business Declares the Glory of God* with Walter Crutchfield, a real estate developer

> Roundtable discussions with Andy Crouch, Katelyn Beaty, and Skye Jethani

> Interviews with Corey Widmer, Amy Sherman, and Christopher Brooks

Questions for Video Discussion
*Pause the video and ask the following questions during the indicated breaks in the video. You may want to have your group separate into smaller groups during these breaks to keep the discussions around 7-10 minutes.*

Break 1:

> Do you think your work—the actual work itself and what you produce—has value? Is it sacred in some way? Why or why not?

> Walter Crutchfield’s work is contributing to his city—he is approaching the actual work he does in such a way that his faith informs it. He is thinking about the good of his city when he builds—how his developments will benefit undervalued areas
and the people who live there. How is this different than simply, as Katelyn Beaty says, “slapping a Jesus sticker” on your sign?

> Have you ever considered that the work you do might be just as important to the kingdom of God as the work a pastor does? How does that make you feel? Do you believe it?

**Break 2:**
*Read Proverbs 31:10–31 as a group. Then break into smaller groups to discuss the following questions.*

> Would you say the work the woman is doing in this passage is “sacred” or “secular” work? Why do you say that?

> We’ve read and heard a lot about “the common good.” What do you think that means?

> How is the woman in Proverbs 31 doing work that benefits the common good? Or, as Amy Sherman put it, how is her work bringing about “foretastes” of the kingdom of heaven?

> How about your own work—what are some ways the work you do offers those foretastes?

**Break 3:**

> Do you feel “called” to your work? Why or why not?

> Why do you think it’s important for us as Christians to acknowledge that our own work is a ministry—it’s not just missionaries or professional clergy who are called into ministry?

> How could you approach your job as a ministry?

> How could you approach your work with a Christian worldview? How might that change your perspective? Your motivations? Would it change the work itself?

**Post-Video Discussion**
*After the video, choose two or three of these questions to discuss together as a larger group. If you have more time, work through more of the questions.*

> What are some ideas for how our church could bridge the gap between the sacred and the secular? How could our church acknowledge and celebrate the ministry each of us do through our work?

“We have this deep sense of dignity about our work because we understand that it’s connected to this amazing work that King Jesus is doing in the world.”

—Amy Sherman
If you could identify one area of your work that you feel brings about the wholeness, peace, justice, and beauty that Amy Sherman describes, what would it be?

Where did you grow up? How did that place—the geography or culture of it—shape you in the way Craig Goodworth suggests?

How does our view of the kingdom of heaven—as either up and above or as a restorative force here and now—change the way we view our work?

**Prayer Suggestions**

As a group, gather to end in prayer. You might consider praying for:

- a sense of how God is using the work each person does for the greater, common good.
- dignity and respect for our work, recognizing it’s not merely secular but matters to God and to his work in the world.

**OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION’S DAILY EXERCISES**

**Day One: Read**

Read “Why Every City Needs a Central Park.” Urban planning may seem like a purely secular undertaking—completely disconnected from one’s faith—but such work impacts the quality of life for thousands.


**Day Two: Study**

Proverbs 31 is about a model woman and wife, but a key part of her excellence is the way she works and the fruit of her work. How is her work described? How does her “mundane” or secular work benefit a wide community?

**Day Three: Watch**

Watch the documentary *The Art of Restoration Amidst Detroit’s Ruined Walls* to see how one artist is using mixed media to communicate hope for the restoration of her city.


**Day Four: Pray**

Write down three very specific tasks you have to do this week at work. Pray through each one and ask God to help you see sacredness or ministry in each one. Pray again when you actually have to do that task, and be mindful as you work.

**Day Five: Act**

Identify other people in your vocational field at your church. Plan a time to get together and “talk shop.” Discuss the ways good work is being done in your field, the things you are excited about, and the stuff you are worried about. See if there are ways you can support one another. Celebrate how God is using your church community (through each of you!) to do good work in that field. If your group clicks, consider making this a quarterly get-together.
SESSION FOUR:

Calling or Career?

What if I don’t feel “called” to my job? Expand our view of calling beyond occupation to vocation.

1 Corinthians 7:17-24
SESSION FOUR: OVERVIEW
This session, you will shift toward the practical and explore a tangible and personal idea of what “holistic vocation” looks like. Participants will be challenged to expand their view of “calling” beyond just career, and consider what a vision for vocation means even when your occupation doesn’t feel particularly purposeful. This session, participants will also begin to look at their own gifts, personalities, talents, and situations, and they’ll be challenged to see where they can begin using those qualities for the common good—at work and beyond.

KEY SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

GATHERING TIME
Discussion Starters
Before you begin this session’s video, answer the question below as a group (or divide into smaller groups):

> What are your hobbies? What do you most love to do outside of work?

Video, Session Four
After your group finishes the discussion questions above, begin this session’s video. The video session includes:

> Documentary: How to Abandon Homeless People with C.J. Speelman of Wrench Raiders
> Roundtable discussions with Andy Crouch, Katelyn Beaty, and Skye Jethani
> Interviews with Kate Harris and Katherine Leary Alsdorf
> Documentary: Yes, I’m the Mechanic with George Zaloom of Zaloom’s Auto Repair

Questions for Video Discussion
Pause the video and ask the following questions during the indicated breaks in the video. You may want to have your group separate into smaller groups during these breaks to keep the discussions around 7-10 minutes.

Break 1:

> Think back to the hobbies you mentioned earlier. Are there any common themes you can identify in your hobbies? For example: a love for the outdoors, a knack for capturing pictures, a passion for fixing broken things, or a draw toward good storytelling?
REDEEMING WORK
Calling or Career?
Leader’s Guide

> Do you think that theme might be part of your calling—part of the vocation God has asked you to do? How could that theme benefit the common good?

> How are you able to express that theme at your job? How might you be able to give more energy to that theme outside your job?

> Do you think your calling needs to be connected to the daily or paid work that you do? Why or why not?

Break 2:
Read 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 as a group. Then break into smaller groups to discuss the following questions.

> If you were to answer the question, “What do you do?” without actually naming your occupation or job title, what would you say?

> What are some interests or threads—as Kate Harris describes them—that you can see weaving themselves through various stages and parts of your life? These might be desires you have, activities you enjoy, or types of work you’re drawn to.

> Kate says perhaps it’s more of a question of responsibility: What is uniquely yours to do? This is reflected in the 1 Corinthians passage. How would you answer that for yourself? What is the work you would identify as yours to do in this time?

Break 3:

> What has most helped you discern your vocation or what God is calling you to do? Prayer? Friends? Experiences?

> If our calling comes, as Andy Crouch says, at the intersection of the Cross and grace, then our calling may very well come out of a painful experience we’ve had. Has that been true in your own life or in the life of someone you know?

> Have you been jealous of someone else’s calling? In what ways has it been tempting for you to compare your calling to other people’s?

Post-Video Discussion
After the video, choose two or three of these questions to discuss together as a larger group. If you have more time, work through more of the questions.

> Katherine Leary Alsdorf says we need to infuse our work with meaning—and part of that is doing our work for God and asking “Why would God have me doing this work right now?” What would you say to that?

> Why do you think God is having you do your work right now—whatever it is? Why does God care that you do it?
> How did you see George Zaloom infusing his work with meaning?

> What do you think Zaloom meant when he said his work and what he does at church are the same?

> When you think about all of the things you do—the many hats you wear or activities you pursue—where do you most feel you’re living out your calling? How could you bring that sense into other areas of your life?

> Do you think there are some things you need to give up in order to focus more on your calling. If so, what?

Prayer Suggestions
As a group, gather to end in prayer. You might consider praying for:

> discernment as a group and as individuals in hearing God’s call in each person's life.

> a sense of community and equality as you seek to help one another live into your callings.

OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION’S DAILY EXERCISES

Day One: Read
Read “This Old City: A Christian’s Dream of Renovating Richmond” for a thoughtful look at how a city’s scars and history are ultimately making it stronger and better.

Link: www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/richmond/thisoldcity.html

Day Two: Study
Read John 21. In this early-morning scene after Jesus’ resurrection, we see the disciples back at work fishing. How does Jesus redefine Peter’s calling in a new and deeper way? When Peter compares his calling to “the disciple Jesus loved,” how does Jesus respond? Are you tempted to shrink your calling to nothing more than your “fishing,” or to compare your calling to others’?

Day Three: Watch
Watch Sarah Kay's TEDx talk, “How Many Lives Can You Live?” As a child, Sarah thought she’d have a chance to do it all. Does this thinking resonate with you? She points out that in writing 30 poems in 30 days, she simply told the same story through each. She had a story to tell, and no matter what life she lived, she would tell it. Think of the story you are telling. How do you tell that story through the many facets of your life? Through your work? Through your relationships? Through your daily routines? What common themes do you see in your life? Values you pursue no matter where you are? How do you see God’s calling in those values?

Link: www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kay_how_many_lives_can_you_live
Day Four: **Pray**
Ask God to help you discern what is uniquely yours to do—and the areas in your life that you’ve claimed responsibility when it wasn’t yours to claim.

Day Five: **Act**
Choose one of the values you’ve identified running through your life and place it within a new context—outside of work. For example, if a theme or value you’ve identified is networking and connecting with people, host a dinner party of literal neighbors and discuss one neighborhood project to work on together in the next year. Or if you value stability and strategizing, call a friend who seems particularly stressed out right now and offer a day to help plan and organize with him or her.
Every workplace distributes and limits power. God can use us both when we are “powerful” and when we feel powerless.

*Proverbs 11:10, Psalm 72*
SESSION FIVE: OVERVIEW
A study on vocation would be incomplete if it did not acknowledge the power dynamics of the workplace. This session will look at both what it means to possess power and what it means to be powerless—because everyone in the room will find themselves in both situations at different points in life. How can you pursue your calling and obey God in both situations? How do you steward power well and use it to create good work, healthy environments, and comprehensive flourishing? If you are under another’s power, how do you serve well and work well—especially in unhealthy situations?

KEY SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 11:10, Psalm 72

GATHERING TIME

Discussion Starters
Before you begin this session’s video, answer these questions as a group (or divide into smaller groups):

> When have you felt most powerful?
> When have you felt most powerless?

Video, Session Five
After your group finishes the discussion questions above, begin this session’s video. The video session includes:

> Documentary: A Local Pastor Turned Public School Champion with Don Coleman of East Richmond Public School Board
> Roundtable discussions with Andy Crouch, Katelyn Beaty, and Skye Jethani
> Interviews with Amy Sherman and Corey Widmer
> Documentary: Furniture Fit for the Kingdom with Harrison Higgins of Harrison Higgins, Inc.

Questions for Video Discussion
Pause the video and ask the following questions during the indicated breaks in the video. You may want to have your group separate into smaller groups during these breaks to keep the discussions around 7-10 minutes.

Break 1:

> What comes to mind when you think of the word “power”? Is it a positive or negative word to you? Why?
Many of us think of power as a negative thing. And that’s perhaps because we’ve often seen it misused. How have you seen power abused in the workplace or elsewhere?

Personally, do you think you’d like to have more or less power? Why?

**Break 2:**
Read Proverbs 11:10, Psalm 72 as a group. Then break into smaller groups to discuss the following questions.

> Both of these Scripture passages paint a picture of rulers using power well. Amy Sherman says these righteous rulers are the kind of people we want in power. We all benefit when they are in power. When have you seen power used well? What was the result? How did you or others benefit?

> Have you ever worked under someone or in an organization where power was used well? What was different about that experience? How were the organization and the employees better for it?

> Who uses power well in the Bible? Who uses power poorly? How does God himself use power?

> What power do you have (at home, at work, or elsewhere)? How might you use your power to benefit others—to add more seats at the table?

**Break 3:**

> In what arenas do you most feel limited or powerless in your life?

> What would it mean for you to live in that space and do that work “as unto the Lord”? Would that change anything for you?

> Do you ever think about the “end user” of your work—the final customer or person who benefits from your labor? How might keeping that person in mind change your posture toward work?

**Post-Video Discussion**
After the video, choose two or three of these questions to discuss together as a larger group. If you have more time, work through more of the questions.

> When have you seen the righteous prosper and then ultimately bless those around them and advance the common good? Or, maybe, when have you personally flourished because someone righteous was prospering?

“You realize that these things—these beautiful things—are built into this creation that God has placed us on. These things are here because God loves us. It means we handle them differently.”

—Harrison Higgins
When have you lost your power or felt powerless? How did that affect you?

What did you think of Harrison Higgins’ story? How is he an example of someone using power well?

Think about the times in your life right now when you chafe under power—at work or elsewhere. How could you respond differently in the future?

Are there examples of corrupt power in your life or community? What might you do to change these situations?

Prayer Suggestions
As a group, gather to end in prayer. You might consider praying for:

- those in power over each of you—that they would steward their power well for the benefit of many.
- those of you in power—that you would steward your power well for the benefit of many.
- the commitment to work “as unto God” in the places where you don’t have power.
- those who may be in situations under corrupt power—that God would grant discernment for how to act, what to say, and even when to leave.

OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION’S DAILY EXERCISES

Day One: Read
Read “An Unlikely Defender of Trafficked Women” as an example of the transformation in someone who once used power to hurt and manipulate but now uses it to defend others.


Day Two: Study
Read the Book of Esther (chapters 1–10), and make a list of the people with various kinds of power in this narrative. What kind of power does each of them have? Who uses power in surprising and beneficial ways? Who do you think provides the best model for your own use of power?

Day Three: Watch
Watch a documentary or historical movie on a significant leader, like Lincoln (2012), Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom (2013), or The Iron Lady (2011). Identify how this leader used power—in both good and bad ways—and consider the implications. What are the crucial decisions he or she had to make about the use of power?
Day Four: Pray
Look up and write down the names of those who have power over you: people in your state or city government, leaders in your church, your CEO or supervisor. Go down the list and pray for each one—that they would be righteous in their use of power.

Day Five: Act
Think of some ability or capacity you have to act—some source of power. It could be authority, physical capacity, or even the capacity to speak an opinion in a public forum. Find a way to use that ability or capacity to benefit someone else today, ideally by giving others an opportunity to act themselves.
Too often we reduce our identity to our work. But our identity is in Christ, and the meaning of our work flows from that relationship.

*Genesis 45:4–15*
SESSION SIX: OVERVIEW
In a study on vocation, it would be easy to affirm culture’s message that our identity comes from our work—that work is the most important thing. But we have to remember God is at the center. We find meaning in God first, and then infuse our work with the purpose that comes from that relationship. This session will also emphasize the importance of Sabbath and true rest in enabling people to live out their vocation well.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Genesis 45:4–15

GATHERING TIME

Discussion Starters
Before you begin this session’s video, answer the question below as a group (or divide into smaller groups):

• Would you say you are someone who works to live or lives to work? Why?

Video, Session Six
After your group finishes the discussion questions above, begin this session’s video. The video session includes:

• Documentary: Rudy Gonzalez of the H.E. Butt Foundation
• Roundtable discussions with Andy Crouch, Katelyn Beaty, and Skye Jethani
• Documentary: Bolder as I Got Balder with Kim Newlen of Look Better Than You Feel
• Interview with Kate Harris

Questions for Video Discussion
Pause the video and ask the following questions during the indicated breaks in the video. You may want to have your group separate into smaller groups during these breaks to keep the discussions around 7-10 minutes.

Break 1:

• When have you put too much significance in your job or calling? Why do you think that’s a temptation for you?

• Skye Jethani identified three types of calling: our highest calling, our common calling, and our particular calling. Do you have a hard time prioritizing in this way? Why or why not?

“If our highest calling is to be in communion with Christ, what we’re ultimately called to is a relationship and not to a task.”

—Katelyn Beaty
• After these weeks of thinking about vocation, what do you now know about the importance of identifying the limitations of our vocation and the significance we place on it?

Break 2:
*Read Genesis 45:4–15 a group. Then break into smaller groups to discuss the following questions.*

• How has your life, like Joseph’s, been marked by a particular tragedy or a difficult event that changed the course of your life? How has that event shaped the work you do, the place you live, and the things you care about?

• When have you seen God use weakness, hurt, or brokenness in your life to do his work?

• How was that experience humbling for you? In what ways did it help you center your sense of calling or identity on God instead of your own accomplishments?

Break 3:

• Do you truly believe God loves you whether or not you are accomplishing anything? Why is that such a hard message for us to believe today?

• Do you live in an economy of abundance or one of scarcity? Why? How would you describe the difference between the two?

• Have you ever experienced a law of “diminishing returns” when you’ve worked more but accomplished less? Why is rest—Sabbath—such a critical component of work?

Post-Video Discussion
*After the video, choose two or three of these questions to discuss together as a larger group. If you have more time, work through more of the questions.*

• How might taking a Sabbath help to realign those priorities of calling: our highest calling, our common calling, and our particular calling? (Or, inversely, how might neglecting the Sabbath skew those priorities?)

• Kate Harris says rest isn’t just about looking at a wall and doing nothing. What types of restful activities rejuvenate and satisfy you? How could you incorporate those into your daily or weekly routine?

• Identify one other person in the room, perhaps the person to your left or right. How do you see his or her particular calling contributing to the flourishing of the world?
• After this study, what could we do as group to continue supporting one another in the vocational ministries that we are individually pursuing?

**Prayer Suggestions**
As a group, gather to end in prayer. You might consider praying for:

• a recognition that our work is not about us or about what we do, but about God’s work in the world and in us.

• a sense of community and accountability within the group—that you could be a source of support for one another as you seek to follow God’s callings on your lives.

**OVERVIEW OF THIS SESSION’S DAILY EXERCISES**

**Day One: Read**
Read “Believers in Every Borough” for examples of the many, different ways people are serving in their vocations.


**Day Two: Study**
Read Matthew 6:19–34 for a compelling reminder of where our real identity and security lie.

**Day Three: Watch**
Think through the stories and documentaries you’ve watched over the past six weeks. Choose the one that resonated most with you, and rewatch it today. What did you connect with in this story? What are the applications you see in your own life?

**Day Four: Pray**
Meet with someone from your group this week to pray for one another in your callings and workplaces.

**Day Five: Act**
Take a true Sabbath. Prepare for it, think about it, plan activities that will nourish you emotionally and physically, and consider turning off your phone (or at least e-mail!) during your day of rest.