



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection
Institute for Faith and Learning
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Study Guides for

Work

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to explore work's goodness in the Christian moral life and diagnose its contemporary diseases. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

Consumer Culture and the Deformation of Work 2

Work can be a powerful source of livelihood, purpose, individual agency, social place, and connection to the divine, among other things. Yet work's ability to confer these positive meanings is threatened by the dynamics of today's consumer culture.

Working for Dignity 4

A job's goodness is not measured by salary, benefits, and 'intellectual' rather than manual labor, but by how well it preserves the dignity of workers and contributes to their fulfillment. This standard lends value to some jobs, particularly involving manual labor, that many people disdain.

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We undervalue work that cares for the weak, young, and old. And when we do value it, we prize it in the wrong way — as a display of our strength and virtues in caregiving. This reflects the individualism and consumerism of our culture, not the Christian Trinitarian perspective.

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Integrating Faith and Work 12

Christians sometimes separate work and faith into secular and spiritual spheres. But recent studies show that if faith-work integration is emphasized in congregations, members experience work more positively and contribute positively to their workplace.



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Focus Article:

📖 Consumer Culture and the Deformation of Work
(*Work*, pp. 11-18)

Suggested Articles:

📖 To Labor Not in Vain
(*Work*, pp. 84-88)

What do you think?

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Consumer Culture and the Deformation of Work

Work can be a powerful source of livelihood, purpose, individual agency, social place, and connection to the divine, among other things. Yet work's ability to confer these positive meanings is threatened by the dynamics of today's consumer culture.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:1-15

Meditation†

Somewhere along the line, Adam got a bad rap, or at least the God of Adam did. Someone...misread the story of Creation and Fall and came to the conclusion that work was a result of the Fall, not part of God's original creation design for human beings. On closer inspection, it is perfectly clear that God's good plan always included human beings working, or, more specifically, living in the constant cycle of work and rest.

Ben Witherington III

Reflection

"According to the book of Genesis," Darby Ray observes, "humanity's work is intended to mirror God's work, which is to say it is intended to be fundamentally life-giving: a means of establishing our place in a complex and chaotic world; an opportunity to act on the world—shaping, building, growing, and delighting in it; and an avenue for connecting generously and responsibly to the diverse others with whom we share the world."

But the ultimate purpose of work shifts in a consumer culture. "Put simply, we work so that we can buy," Ray explains. We do not buy just the things we need to live; rather, buying "is how we integrate into society, how we participate in today's world." As the products and services we purchase begin to define us, our work becomes a means to the end of consumption. She sketches how these other good ends of work are being deformed:

- ▶ *Helping people survive.* Both rich and poor people skimp on or risk necessities of life (healthy food, reliable transportation, adequate housing, clothing, and education) to buy consumer goods they need for social acceptance. "We should also consider the role consumer culture plays in the widening gap between rich and poor, the increasing difference between minimum wage and a living wage, and other contemporary threats to work as a means of survival in today's world."
- ▶ *Giving structure (routine, discipline, reliability, integrity) to life.* Consumerism engenders an "always on the move" mindset of seeking new and better products, services, and opportunities. Ray notes, "Loyalty to the 'old,' whether a car, a job, a marriage, a community, or the religion of our upbringing, is seen as a liability.... We are more mobile than ever, and although we have hundreds, sometimes thousands, of 'connections' and 'friends,' there are precious few who know us deeply." In work this does not foster craftsmanship or encourage loyalty to a company or team, but puts the focus on one's own self-advancement.



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► *Buoying self-respect.* “The flip-side of widespread and incessant consumer craving for new products is an economy focused on the promotion of cheap goods” that everyone can aspire to have, though they last or satisfy a short time. Thus, she writes, “more and more jobs today focus on the production or sale of cheap goods or spurious services no one really needs.” But not only craftspeople suffer. Medical caregivers have intense quotas and teachers “teach the test” to survive next quarter’s performance goals.

► *Supporting individual identity.* As the value of work is reduced to a paycheck, it’s not our contribution to the world but our buying power that “puts us on the social map or gives us a place in the larger whole.” Thus, “consumerism...reduces ‘the world’ to Walmart and Wall Street and invites us to leave our mark not through creative effort or hard work but by investing our money, time, and energy in the consumer market. Work is still important, but its main value is its bankrolling of that investment.”

Ray concludes, “If we want to have lives and work that are not enslaved to consumerism, then we will have to become nonconformists. This means training our hearts and focusing our desires on the most worthwhile things—the love that endures, the work that gives life—and allowing those things to take priority over everything else.” She warns that this will “require hard work, stubborn persistence, and a community of support, for the market’s version of reality and value is pervasive and deeply ingrained.”

Study Questions

1. What central roles does human labor have in the biblical creation story? How does this give meaning to our daily work?
2. What positive meanings can work—whether paid or volunteer, full-time or part-time—confer on our lives, according to Darby Ray? Which of these meanings have been most important in your personal experience?
3. How does consumerism alter our ultimate goal for working? Consider how this change can deform the positive meanings of work that have been most important to you.
4. According to Ray, what are some concrete steps that we can take to resist consumerism and to retrain our hearts to seek the most valuable goods of work? How might your congregation encourage and support this transformation of desire?
5. Ben Witherington III defines good work as “any necessary and meaningful task that God calls and gifts a person to do and which can be undertaken to the glory of God and for the edification and aid of human beings, being inspired by the Spirit and foreshadowing the realities of the new creation.”[†] How does this point to the sort of work we should seek?

Departing Hymn: “I Offer All I Am to You”

[†] Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 2.

[‡] *Ibid.*, xii.



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Focus Article:

📖 Working for Dignity
(*Work*, pp. 19-25)

Suggested Article:

📖 Working in Fields of
Sunshine
(*Work*, pp. 42-43)

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Working for Dignity

A job's goodness is not measured by salary, benefits, and 'intellectual' rather than manual labor, but by how well it preserves the dignity of workers and contributes to their fulfillment. This standard lends value to some jobs, particularly involving manual labor, that many people in our culture disdain.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 15:58

Meditation†

If work's primary aim is humanization instead of economic output or gain, then we have a new moral plumb line for evaluating work practices and systems. The abiding question is this: Does work promote or thwart human flourishing? ... In this analysis, ... it is not the content of the work that is important but its impact on the worker's humanity.

Darby Kathleen Ray

Reflection

The encyclical *Laborem Exercens / On Human Work* (1981) from Pope John Paul II is a landmark of Christian reflection on the positive meaning of work as well as the grave injustices that threaten working people today. It famously defines good work as not only useful and enjoyable, but "worthy" because it "corresponds to [and] expresses [human] dignity and increases it" (§9).

Dignity, of course, is a divine gift: it results from being created in God's image, and we don't work for it or earn it. So how can work "increase" our dignity? Joel Schwartz finds an answer in Karol Wojtyla's writings before he became Pope John Paul II in 1978. "He often wrote about the dignity of the human person," Schwartz observes. "He believed human dignity is not simply a static reality (just a property or status that the person possesses), but also a teleological calling on the individual (a goal for the person to understand, embrace, and grow toward)." To respect human dignity is not to let people do whatever they want, but to encourage and assist them to develop into the fullness of their humanity, even when they fail to grasp this for themselves. "On this view it makes sense for an activity to 'dignify' persons by enabling them to become more fully human."

Schwartz explains, "Jobs that diminish rather than dignify workers are not limited to those that treat people in (what is typically agreed to be) sub-human ways, but include those that prevent, distract, or disorient people...from recognizing, embracing, and pursuing their *telos* of becoming fully human." Thus, a job will fail to dignify workers when:

- ▶ *it objectifies workers* by valuing them only as a means of production, a replaceable 'cog in the machine.' "Manual labor is especially exploitable in this way," Schwartz notes, when it requires little specialized education. But other jobs can be equally exploitive. "Some white-collar workers exploit themselves, offering themselves as a commodity for sale, willing to do whatever the job requires for the right price."
- ▶ *workers mistakenly think they are dignified by their work*. Perhaps they have a bad job (it is undercompensated, unnecessarily risky,



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demeaning the workers or clients, etc.), but for some reason (laziness, or really needing the salary or benefits) they make the best of it, and even come to enjoy it. “What started as a conscious strategy to cope,” Schwartz says, “may evolve into a genuine, but mistaken belief that their job is dignifying.” They may be responsible for this, but, of course, “their employers are more at fault for creating or allowing a work environment that is contrary to the dignity of the workers.”

- ▶ *workers do not realize their work is dignifying.* They may internalize society’s disdain for hard physical labor, and wrongly think their job is unworthy and beneath them. “They do not appreciate how their work contributes to their own well-being as persons and to their society’s survival and flourishing.” Schwartz generalizes from Pope John Paul II’s example of farm labor: when “society fails to recognize the value of a profession, the treatment of workers in that field can become dehumanizing [and] this can inadvertently encourage workers to leave the profession, undermine the work done within the profession, and thereby hurt not just those workers but all the people who depend on the work they do.”

Study Questions

1. What does it mean for workers to be objectified, and why is that a bad thing? Consider some ways that employers objectify workers, and that workers objectify themselves.
2. Identify some cases in which workers mistakenly believe their work is dignifying. To what extent are they to blame for this? Can you think of excusing circumstances?
3. In order for a job to dignify workers, why is it important that not only is the job dignifying, but also the workers realize and take some measure of joy in this?
4. According to Joel Schwartz, what steps can we take to make work more dignifying? How can your congregation help members seek and value dignifying work?
5. Consider how Vincent van Gogh’s *The Red Vineyard* (on the cover) reveals the dignity of manual labor.

Departing Hymn: “Forth in Your Name, O Lord, We Go” (vv. 1-3)

Forth in your name, O Lord, we go
our daily labor to pursue,
determined only you to know
in all we think or speak or do.

Oh, let us cheerfully fulfill
the task your wisdom has assigned
and do your good and perfect will—
in all our work your presence find!

May we find you at our right hand;
your eyes see truly what we do.
We labor on at your command
and offer all our work to you.

Charles Wesley (1749), alt.
Tune: CANONBURY

† Darby Kathleen Ray, *Working* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 95-96.



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Focus Article:

- 📖 When Work Disappoints
(*Work*, pp. 60-66)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 The Theology of Work in the New Economy
(*Work*, pp. 75-79)
- 📖 Dismissed
(*Work*, pp. 44-45)

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When Work Disappoints

When work is linked to personal identity, this heightens the spiritual toll of underemployment and unemployment. No balm is to be found in modern motivational mantras, but in practicing the presence of God in our work.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:23-24

Meditation†

When we see work as tedium or unimportant, we diminish ourselves or others. Seen as a calling, work is lifted to a higher plane. Recognized as an essential part of being human, work becomes infused with holiness.

When we take work seriously and as a partnership with the Creator, we participate with God's work in the world. When we work as stewards of God's creation, our work becomes a gift to God, a blessing to others, and a labor of love for ourselves.

Jeanie Miley

Reflection

"We often experience work as an integral aspect of our personal identity; it could be described as our identity in motion," counselor Matt Beal explains. "Vocationally suitable work is both the accurate embodiment of our current identity and the realization of adequate progress toward our aspirations. In other words, our work takes on the *telos*, or goal, of our identity being developed." Beal serves clients who face disappointment in work, so he knows, "When adequate jobs are scarce, and excellent ones are even rarer, life becomes more difficult than anticipated. Dreams sometimes die, and the spiritual toll of underemployment becomes steep."

Many today would respond to this problem by urging those who have suffered disappointment to "dream big." Beal notes the secular version of this motivational strategy is consonant with the American Dream: "'if you can dream it, you can do it' because the economic environment allows single-minded, energetic persons to attain whatever financial goals and attendant lifestyle accoutrements they desire." And a theological version is lurking in the neighborhood: it is the "prosperity gospel" that says God blesses the faithful with wealth. In business seminars and congregations, then, "Dreaming big has blossomed into an exquisite flower of modern capitalism," Beal writes. "However, its pollen is an allergen hazardous to many."

The dreaming-big model promises we will find purpose in our work at the intersection of passion, mission, vocation, and profession, when these are understood in peculiarly modern ways. But Beal protests that this commonplace "promotes an unrealistically high ideal"; is misleading because people find purpose when some of these elements are missing; "makes flourishing depend too much on external, transitory conditions" of the workplace; and focuses too much on workers' "subjective responses to those conditions." He believes when Christians employ this model, "They will add insult to injury when work disappoints, rather than point people toward abundant life."

A better balm for the stress and despair that accompanies work disappointment is found in the advice of Brother Lawrence (1611-1691)



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to discern within our mundane work the presence of God. This is theologically grounded in the Apostle Paul's teaching (Colossians 3:23) and is psychologically insightful – Beal calls it “a thoroughly Christian analogue of the counseling treatment called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.”

Beal concludes, “When we follow Brother Lawrence in being mindfully aware of God’s presence in our daily work, we do not ignore the pain of disappointment, frustration, sadness, anger, and stress caused by underemployment and unemployment. Rather, we realign our purpose in a manner that allows us to cope with this pain productively, by placing our labor into the metanarrative of God’s love and work of redemption.”

Study Questions

1. How did Brother Lawrence respond when his superiors assigned him “a very unwelcome task”? What insight does Matt Beal glean from this for our work disappointments?
2. Consider how George Herbert’s “Teach Me, My God and King, in All Things Thee to See” captures the heart of Brother Lawrence’s way of finding God’s presence in ordinary work.
3. According to Robert Dickie, while “the poverty gospel” and “the prosperity gospel” appear to be polar opposites, what mistaken assumption do they share? How does the stewardship model he commends improve on those “false gospels”?
4. Discuss how Philip Evergood’s *The Pink Dismissal Slip* depicts righteous anger at being unjustly laid off from work.

Departing Hymn: “Teach Me, My God and King, in All Things Thee to See”

Teach me, my God and King,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything,
to do it as for thee.

A man that looks on glass,
on it may stay his eye,
or, if he pleaseth, through it pass,
and then the heav’n espy.

All may of thee partake:
nothing can be so mean
which with this motive – “For thy sake” –
will not grow bright and clean.

This is the famous stone
that turneth all to gold;
for that which God doth touch and own
cannot for less be told.

George Herbert (1593-1633), alt.

Suggested Tunes: EMMAUS or ST. MICHAEL

† Jeanie Miley, “Worship Service,” *Work*, *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, 56 (Waco, TX: The Institute for Faith and Learning, Baylor University, 2015), 56.



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Focus Article:

📖 The Value of Caring Work
(*Work*, pp. 26-32)

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The Value of Caring Work

We undervalue work that cares for the weak, young, and old. And when we do value it, we prize it in the wrong way — as a display of our strength and virtues in caregiving. This reflects the individualism and consumerism of our culture, not the Christian Trinitarian perspective.

Prayer

Creator God, may we be responsible and faithful to do what has been entrusted to us to do.

May we work with joy and with love.

May the work that we do and the fruit of our labor contribute to the good of your creation and benefit your people.

Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 13:12-16

Reflection

Before the industrial revolution “women and men worked side by side, working for their sustenance, training up their children, and caring for their sick and their elders,” Christian Fletcher notes. But with the rise of industrial labor, this changed dramatically. Men went to work for wages to sustain the family, but women stayed home to provide “love’s labor” — care for the young, sick, and elderly. Soon, she notes, “money became the defining standard of worth [and] women’s unpaid labor of caregiving was not treated as ‘real’ work.”

The distortion in this situation is hard to describe in (what Fletcher calls) “the ethics of modern capitalism” that defines what’s right and good in terms of promises between those who are equal and autonomous. The highest good is freedom from restraint, and relationships should begin and end by free choices. In this view, caring for dependents is almost morally invisible because they are limited and their care may severely limit others.

The care of dependents becomes more visible in an “ethics of care,” which allows that “persons are often neither equal nor autonomous,” moral obligations can arise “from human need as well as human choices,” and true liberty “is not freedom from restraint but a freedom for the excellence of human flourishing.”

Christians can endorse this, but say even more, for “we start our ethical reasoning from a conception of the person as the image of God, a brother or sister to all other persons who are also children of our loving heavenly Father. Our actions are guided by the actions and teachings of Jesus who made our duty to care explicit at the Last Supper.” As he washes his disciples’ feet (John 13:12-16), “Jesus does not cease being Lord, though he undertakes lowly service; and he commands us to do the same.”

Fletcher continues, “We are called to use our gifts and talents, whatever they may be, to serve those around us. This means of course, that some specific kinds of caregiving, such as nursing a baby, are inherently gendered. But it would be a mistake to draw from that example the conclusion that men are not responsible for hands-on care of the young, the sick, or the elderly. All of us are called to be caregivers, men and women alike.”

Fletcher finds support for this counter-cultural view in God’s triune nature where “we see equality in difference, and difference within equality.” This suggests that since we are created in God’s image,



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“we are made for relationship [and] that difference, such as gender, does not mean inequality. When we say God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are not listing beings in order of importance.” She concludes, “From our Trinitarian understanding of equality in difference, we can see men and women as equals in the work of God’s kingdom, and equally called to care for others. We also see equality between the caregiver and the care recipient as human beings in relationship with each other.”

Study Questions

1. What evidence do you see that, as Christine Fletcher says, “Our society claims that those who are dependent lead lives of less worth”? How does this affect the value society places on the work of caring for dependents?
2. Consider the theological basis that Fletcher provides for a Christian ethic of caregiving. For a Christian, what makes caring work so valuable?
3. How is caring work valued in W. G. Tarrant’s hymn, “Our Master Was a Worker”?
4. Fletcher says Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-543) “can show us how the virtues of care—giving and receiving— are not gendered but human.” What concrete guidance does she glean from Benedict’s Rule for his monastic communities?
5. “Caregiving has its own spiritual dangers,” Fletcher notes. What dangers does she identify? Can you think of others?

Departing Hymn: “Our Master Was a Worker” (vv. 1, 3)

Our Master was a worker,
with daily work to do,
and one who would be like him
must be a worker, too.
Then welcome honest labor,
and honest labor’s fare,
for where there is a worker,
the Master’s friend is there.

Our Master was a helper,
the woes of life he knew,
and one who would be like him
must be a helper, too.
The burden will grow lighter,
if each will take a share,
and where there is a helper,
the Master’s friend is there.

W. G. Tarrant (1853-1928), alt.

Suggested Tunes: NYLAND or WHITFIELD



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 Of Magic and Machines:
When Saving Labor Isn't
Worth It
(*Work*, pp. 33-41)

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Of Magic and Machines: When Saving Labor Isn't Worth It

At the heart of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is the conflict between two visions of the true purpose and methods of work: one vision worships efficiency and dominates the world, while the other patiently draws out the inherent goodness within creation.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Psalm 90:1-2, 16-17

Meditation†

If human delight finds its model and goal in God's delighting in creation, so too human work finds its inspiration and fulfillment in God's own work of healing, restoring, strengthening, and maintaining the life of creation. Our work, if it is to be good, must line up sympathetically and harmoniously with God's.... Good work attempts, through various creative means and with the help of others, to honor and give thanks for the gifts we use and (too often wastefully) consume.

Norman Wirzba

Reflection

The psalmist humbly positions the achievements of human labor within the sphere of God's creative work (Psalm 90:1-2, 16-17). The relationship is not mechanical or magical, but prayerfully relational: "O prosper the work of our hands." Consonant with this perspective, J. R. R. Tolkien labels us – and the creatures in his imagined worlds – "sub-creators."

Running through Tolkien's fantasy novels is a conflict between two visions of what this means. For example, in *The Lord of the Rings* "the evil and powerful villains Sauron and Saruman seek to dominate the world and more efficiently recreate it in their own image," Jonathan Sands Wise notes, while "opposing them stands the humble wizard Gandalf, who uses persuasion and encouragement to bring out the potential inherent in the world and in others and so makes it what it ought to be."

"Evil arises when we try to create (to make things on our own) or control the things we have sub-created," Sands Wise explains. "To use more traditional theological language, the central source of evil in all creatures is disordered pride, or a desire to be like God, which led to the fall of Adam and Eve."

Such "pride appears in *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, which revolve around created objects whose creators try to control and possess what they have created, refusing to share their goodness to the benefit of others or even of themselves," Sands Wise writes. Thus, "Fëanor's creation of the beautiful jewels called the Silmarils is good, [but] his refusal to sacrifice the light of the jewels to give light for all the world (after Morgoth has destroyed the trees of light) leads to the downfall of much of the Elven race. Likewise, the Arkenstone in *The Hobbit* and the rings of power in *The Lord of the Rings* are good (with the possible exception of the one ring, which exists solely to dominate), but too often their possessors try to dominate



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others rather than seeking the 'shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves,' as sub-creation should do."

The prideful characters in these narratives are lured to *magic* and *machines*. Tolkien explains, "The Enemy, or those who have become like him, go in for 'machinery' – with destructive and evil effects – because 'magicians,' who have become chiefly concerned to use *magia* for their own power would do so (do do so). The basic motive for *magia*... is immediacy: speed, reduction of labour, and reduction also to a minimum (or vanishing point) of the gap between the idea or desire and the result or effect...."

While Tolkien's suspicion of speed and technology was shaped during "the first great, mechanized wars in history," Sands Wise fears the pattern continues today. "There is a direct line between our over-reliance on technology of all sorts, from smart phones to cars, and our inability to see or care about the sorts of human and environmental destruction that we sponsor by purchasing these commodities. When we can get anything we want at the press of a button, how can we have the time or care required to try to change an entire system of exploitation?"

Sands Wise concludes, "Here we see two visions of good work directly in contrast: good work as that which achieves the chosen end in the most efficient way possible, or good work as that which works with the nature of the material at hand to achieve an end that is good in itself. Magic and machines both depend on efficiency, on finding the shortest and most powerful path between will and accomplishment, but this is not the way of good work. Good work must be humble, driven by a truthful vision and love for the soil or wood, student or neighborhood, upon which it works; and the good worker does not work to serve herself, but instead serves the good of her work. In short, good work makes something good *for us*, and also makes someone good *of us*."

Study Questions

1. We tend to think *magic* and science-based *machines* are poles apart. What links between them does J. R. R. Tolkien see?
2. What does Tolkien mean by "sub-creation"? When is this proper and when is it sinfully prideful?
3. Distinguish the two visions of work that are in competition in Tolkien's fantasy novels. Which major characters act from each vision? What are some examples of people acting from each vision today?
4. Is there a proper role for work-saving technology in our homes and workplaces? For what spiritual dangers of using "machines" that we should remain alert?
5. How does Jeanie Miley's hymn "I Offer All I Am to You" reflect the psalmist's perspective on human labor?

Departing Hymn: "I Offer All I Am to You"

† Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 95.



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 Integrating Faith and Work
(*Work*, pp. 67-74)

Suggested Articles:

- 📖 On Not "Dying on Third"
(*Work*, pp. 80-83)
- 📖 Work, Wealth, and Business as the Ground of Christian Discipline
(*Work*, pp. 89-93)

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Integrating Faith and Work

Christians sometimes separate work and faith into secular and spiritual spheres. But recent studies show that if faith-work integration is emphasized in congregations, members experience work more positively and contribute more to their workplace.

Praying with Scripture (Psalm 19:14 and 90:17)

Loving God, we come to you as your people, created by you.

We acknowledge that you have made us in your image.

*May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable to you,*

O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

May we continually seek your guidance
in the work we do in partnership with you.

*Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
And prosper for us the work of our hands –
O prosper the work of our hands! Amen.*

Reflection

In the biblical creation story, "God worked and he determined that humankind would work as part of their fellowship with him," Mitch Neubert and Kevin Dougherty note. "The Fall broke this perfect fellowship and corrupted work, but it did not fatally sever the relationship between worship and work." Christians today, however, do not consistently integrate faith and work.

In one survey, "less than half (47%) of employed adults who attend religious services monthly or more indicated that they often or always see connections between faith and work." In another, "61% of those regularly attending a religious service agreed that their work honors God." So, Neubert and Dougherty wondered what factors influence some believers to integrate their faith and work. They discovered:

- ▶ *A sense of spiritual calling relates to higher job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment.* "We defined spiritual calling as a summons from God to approach work with a sense of purpose and a pursuit of excellence in work practices," they explain. It is associated with increased job performance and decreased absenteeism and turnover.
- ▶ *Specific theological beliefs are shaping workplace behaviors.* One study shows that believing that God is the ultimate moral authority is negatively associated with risk-taking at work. Does this mean the belief hinders entrepreneurial behavior, or that it encourages prudence and stewardship of resources?

To answer that question, Neubert and Dougherty narrowed the focus by distinguishing the belief that one's work should honor God from the belief that God financially blesses the faithful. They found that "honoring God beliefs were positively associated with helping, entrepreneurial behavior, affective commitment to the organization, and the tendency to look for and recognize opportunities to innovate. Prosperity gospel beliefs had no association with entrepreneurial behavior and affective commitment, while they had a negative association with helping, the tendency to look for and recognize opportunities to innovate, and a measure of work performance. In short, prosperity beliefs do not seem to deliver on their promise in work, quite to the contrary of some proponents' promises."



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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- ▶ *Entrepreneurs differ in their religiosity from other workers.* They “pray more frequently, are more likely to attend a place of worship that encourages business activity, and are more likely to see God as engaged and personal,” perhaps because they are putting their money and livelihood at risk. In interviews some say they start businesses to “express values central to their faith,” such as “to accommodate work and family conflicts or...to create organizational cultures that treated others with respect or focused on helping others.” Women entrepreneurs, due to their faith, “prioritize family commitments, particularly raising children,” and start businesses to gain flexibility in meeting these demands. Another study found that working for faith-integrated entrepreneurs was attractive to employees with high faith-work integration, but unattractive to those with low integration.
- ▶ *Some congregations promote faith-work integration more than others, and their members (especially frequent attenders) have “greater job satisfaction, entrepreneurial behavior within the organization, and commitment to the organization.”*

Study Questions

1. Which of the faith-work correlations that Mitch Neubert and Kevin Dougherty discovered seem most significant to you? Do any of the correlations surprise you?
2. David Miller has identified *ethics, experience, enrichment, and expression* as the most common manifestations of faith-work integration. Have you seen each of these in your workplace?
3. How does your congregation encourage faith-work integration? What more would you like to see it do?
4. Consider how Bob and Janice Newell’s “second career” manifests their longtime commitment to faith-work integration. Does a similar project appeal to you?

Departing Hymn: “O Grant Us, God, a Little Space”

O grant us, God, a little space
from daily tasks set free.
We meet within this holy place
and find security.
Around us rolls the ceaseless tide
of business, toil, and care,
and scarcely can we turn aside
for one brief hour of prayer.
Yet this is not the only place
your presence may be found;
on daily work you shed your grace,
and blessings all around.
Work shall be prayer, if all be wrought
as you would have it done;
and prayer, by you inspired and taught,
shall then with work be one.

John Ellerton (1870)

Suggested Tunes: FOREST GREEN or MINERVA

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Consumer Culture and the Deformation of Work

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2, 3, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To identify the value of human work in the biblical creation story.
2. To consider how a consumerist culture reshapes human desire and thereby distorts our attitude toward work.
3. To discuss how your congregation can help members resist consumerism and retrain their hearts to seek the most valuable goods of work.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Work (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "I Offer All I Am to You" is located on p. 50 of *Work*.

Begin with a Story

Darby Ray writes, "One of my favorite ways to begin a class, workshop, or discussion about work is to ask this question: Would you work if you didn't have to? That is, if you had enough money, good healthcare and retirement options, and adequate opportunities to be with other people, would you still want to work? Despite posing this question in a wide range of settings and to diverse audiences, I almost always get the same response: a resounding 'Yes.' Those who are dissatisfied with their current work situation sometimes take a moment or two to reflect, but before long they tend to make their way to a clear affirmative answer.

"What is it about work, or about this particular moment in the history of work, that makes it an apparently indispensable dimension of what it means to be human? In other words, what work is work doing for us these days?"

How would you answer her questions? In this study she contrasts a biblical perspective on the answers with the consumerist perspective that dominates Western culture.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to bless members with work through which they can express their love for God and neighbor.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Genesis 2:1-15 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

To orient us toward the Christian theological perspective on work, this study introduces the roles of labor in the biblical creation story and the positive meanings that work can confer on our lives. Those positive meanings

are grounded in the roles of work as stewardship before and partnership with God the Creator. Within a consumerist culture as the role of work shifts toward making money to purchase more and better goods and services, those positive meanings of work are threatened or deformed.

The books reviewed in Greg Clark's "To Labor Not in Vain" are excellent resources to continue your group's study of the biblical and recent Christian theological perspectives on work.

Study Questions

1. In the biblical creation story, "God is first and foremost a worker. God shapes the world with intelligence and care, patiently attending to both high-level concept and nitty-gritty detail, and taking great satisfaction in both the process and the outcome of the work," Darby Ray explains. Then God creates human beings in God's own image (Genesis 1:26-27). Humans are to be stewards before God of the creation, and to work and rest with God in the Garden. This implies "that humanity's work is intended to mirror God's work, which is to say it is intended to be fundamentally life-giving: a means of establishing our place in a complex and chaotic world; an opportunity to act on the world – shaping, building, growing, and delighting in it; and an avenue for connecting generously and responsibly to the diverse others with whom we share the world."
2. Ray focuses on these positive meanings: providing resources for our survival, giving structure to our lives, fostering individual and social identities, and developing our self-respect. Work can provide these meanings whether it is full-time or part-time, paid or volunteer. (In our economy, of course, making money is often an essential means to providing the resources for survival.) Encourage members to discuss how their work experiences have had some or all of these meanings. Which meaning(s) might keep them working even if they did not need to work in order to make money?
3. Consumerism shifts the purpose of work to making money in order to purchase more and more goods and services, including many that are not needed for adequate and good living. Thus, "the value of work is reduced to a paycheck or, more accurately, to the buying power that the paycheck represents," Darby Ray explains. If time permits, form four small groups to summarize and expand on her discussion of how this shift threatens or deforms each of the positive meanings of work. Or, encourage the whole group to consider the threat to one or two positive meanings of work that they judge to be most important to them.
4. Ray mentions these steps: identifying and opposing abusive work practices encouraged by short-term profit taking, such as "wages that are too low to support life's necessities, corporations that focus on short-term gains at the expense of long-term well-being, work that trades human dignity for higher profits"; learning to judge when we have enough, and teaching our children to judge when they have enough things; "learning a craft, taking the time to develop skill and even mastery, and having the patience and foresight to teach the next generation"; and measuring our work "not primarily for the buying power our work produces but for the 'higher' goods work can confer on human life – things like livelihood, purpose and structure, self-definition, social connection, and civic responsibility."
Consider how your congregation encourages these steps. Do members recommend other stratagems to resist consumerism, such as 'fasting' from advertising and shopping, sharing essential goods between families, learning about and publicly honoring different types of work among congregation members, and so on.
5. Greg Clark briefly discusses Witherington's definition in "To Labor Not in Vain." Clark notes that "a Christian definition of work should enable us to determine what work Christians can, must, and must not do." Witherington uses words like "the new creation" to give eschatology a central place in defining good work. In the eschaton there will be no war, but there will be work. So, Witherington suggests Christians may not work to further and expand war, and they should reconsider the dream of working in order to achieve retirement.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Working for Dignity

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 3 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand how human dignity involves acknowledging, embracing, and pursuing the *telos*, or goal, of true human fulfillment.
2. To consider ways in which a job can contribute to or diminish workers' human dignity.
3. To discuss how your congregation can encourage members to seek and value dignifying work.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Work (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "Forth in Your Name, O Lord, We Go," locate the familiar tune CANONBURY in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with a Story

"When my students discuss the goals of their college education, they often say they are preparing for a 'good job,'" Joel Schwartz reports. "For many of them, the goodness of the job depends almost entirely on a high salary, generous benefits, and how much of it involves 'intellectual' rather than manual labor. But do such things as compensation and type of work really make a job 'good,' or is there more to consider?"

How would you define a good job? Perhaps you can think of cases where the better job does not pay as much as another one. So how do you make this judgment? "Another way of evaluating the goodness of work is to ask how well it preserves the dignity of the worker," Schwartz continues. "This shifts the focus to the person doing the job and to how performing the work fulfills the worker as a person."

In this study we'll explore the implications of evaluating jobs on how they either dignify or diminish workers.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to bless members with work that promotes their flourishing as human beings.

Scripture Reading

Ask two group members to read Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 15:58 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

The previous study, "Consumer Culture and the Deformation of Work," explained how human beings are created in the image of God to be workers who foster order and beauty in the creation and care for its creatures. Doing good (rather than vain) work *expresses* our dignity as creatures made in the image of God. It also *fosters* this dignity by helping us to understand, embrace, and live into our humanness; it does this by teaching us to

work well – that is, for the glory of God and in service to God’s creation. This study explains how some jobs fail to dignify workers, either due to features of the work or due to workers’ misapprehending the dignifying (or demeaning) nature of their work. Since the topic is necessarily at a somewhat high and abstract level, be sure to provide clear examples to focus the group’s discussion.

Study Questions

1. Workers are “objectified” when they are primarily valued as a means of production, rather than as persons. This implies that how the work affects them as persons with dignity is relatively unimportant; their productivity is most important, and in this regard they are replaceable. Objectification is bad because it does not value and develop workers for what they are in themselves, and may teach them not to value or de-develop themselves this way.
Employers may objectify workers by underpaying them, overworking them, not giving their safety and development due consideration in the workplace, laying them off too aggressively, firing them without cause, neglecting to honor their service to the company, pressuring them to mistreat coworkers or clients, and so on. But workers can also objectify themselves by treating themselves as commodities: they may be willing to do anything for a higher salary, to sacrifice friendships and family for a promotion and title, and so on.
2. “Examples of this situation range all the way from the ‘happy’ slave to those abused office workers, demeaned sex workers, and endangered laborers who have convinced themselves they are happy,” Joel Schwartz suggests. Members may think of more ordinary examples: salespersons who must employ deceptive practices on their clients, workers who must harm the environment and endanger others, workers who must cut corners and provide shoddy or dangerous products and services, and so on.
Ignorance might be an excuse, for instance, if society highly values the job (because it pays well or brings fame, or the true dangers or worthlessness of its product or services are not widely known or generally accepted) and this confuses the workers. But workers should examine their own work with due diligence, and be prepared to resist society’s pressures and see through its misperceptions of their work.
3. One answer is this: if one could grow in dignity but not know about it, one’s pleasure would be incomplete. Another answer is based on the nature of a person as “a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization” (*Laborem Exercens*, § 6). Development in human dignity, or human fulfillment, is not something that other people can do *to* or *for* a person, because the person must participate in the process; this requires, at least, that the person recognize and welcome her growth as a steward and coworker with God.
4. Making jobs more dignifying for workers requires action at the levels of society, employers, and employees. First, “society should properly value the goods that various forms of work bring about for the society and for the workers,” and express this appreciation through “an attitude of respect, better working conditions, and greater compensation for those workers.” Second, “Employers should remember that work is for the worker, not the worker for work, and then treat themselves (for they are workers, too) and their employees by this standard.” Finally, “Workers can help themselves by fully appreciating the goods for society, their employers, and themselves that they are accomplishing through work. Most importantly, they can attend to how their work is helping to bring about the fulfillment of their humanity.” In your congregation are employers and employees who can effect change in their workplaces, and the congregation’s witness can influence societal attitudes and policies as well.
5. Van Gogh does not reveal the peasants’ faces (as his inspiration, Jean-Francois Millet, did). There are signs of difficult manual labor in *The Red Vineyard*: the workers bend low to the vines and work to the end of daylight. However, they work in harmony with one another and with the beautiful vineyard, fields, and stream bathed in warm light of the setting sun.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

When Work Disappoints

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the spiritual toll of underemployment (and unemployment).
2. To critique the adoption in business motivational circles and congregations of the “dream big” (or “prosperity gospel”) response to underemployment.
3. To commend—here, as a better way of addressing the spiritual toll of underemployment—Brother Lawrence’s practice of seeing the presence of God in ordinary work.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Work (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Teach Me, My God and King, in All Things Thee to See” locate one of the tunes EMMAUS or ST. MICHAEL in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with an Observation

Robert Dickie notes, “Understanding how God sees work in relation to Christian vocation and ministry is especially important today because young people who want meaningful work are facing a very rough road in a new economy” emerging after the Great Recession that wracked the world in 2008. “This new economy increasingly offers young people only part-time work.”

With underemployment on the rise, its spiritual toll is becoming more apparent. Work psychologist Doug Maynard reports, “Research shows that underemployment, whether it is involuntary part-time employment, underpayment, or intermittent employment, has negative psychological and behavioral effects, including low self-esteem, stress, substance abuse, health problems, and depression. In fact, being underemployed may be as traumatic and damaging as being out of work entirely.” [Douglas C. Maynard, “Underemployment,” in Vincent N. Parillo, ed., *Encyclopedia of Social Problems* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 967-969, here citing 969.]

Where can we find guidance on how to respond to these debilitating spiritual effects of underemployment? In this study Matt Beal points away from some contemporary motivational commonplaces and toward the insights of the seventeenth-century monk Brother Lawrence.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide and be present to members in their daily work.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Colossians 3:23-24 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Underemployment – when workers’ must take jobs in which their skills and education are underutilized, or take part-time jobs when they are seeking full-time employment – is increasingly common. Its spiritual toll in disappointment is greatly increased when work is tied to personal identity, dignity, and fulfillment. This study focuses on a Christian pastoral response to this disappointment, which should supplement, not replace, congregational efforts to improve opportunities in the economy and to help members find adequate work.

Study Questions

1. “[Brother Lawrence] gave himself no uneasiness about it... [Rather] he said to God, It was His business he was about... So likewise in his business in the kitchen (to which he had naturally a great aversion), having accustomed himself to do everything there for the love of God, and with prayer, upon all occasions, for His grace to do his work well, he had found everything easy during the fifteen years that he had been employed there” (*The Practice of the Presence of God*, 13-14).
Beal notes that Brother Lawrence advised a simplicity of heart, or mindfulness, to focus on “‘doing our common business... (as far as we are capable) purely for the love of God.’ Rather than depending upon a convergence of passion, mission, vocation, and profession for his sense of purpose, he rooted the motivation for his work in love, claiming that despite the apparent lack in one or more such categories ‘he was pleased, when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God.’”
2. The hymn text, shown here as it appears in contemporary hymnals, is drawn from George Herbert’s poem *The Elixir*. [The motive “For thy sake” – called “this tincture” in Herbert’s poem – is the elixir, or medicine, that cures the disappointments of common labor.] The poet prays that his way of seeing the world would be educated by God, so that he can see God through everything. The second verse employs the analogy of looking through a telescope to the heavens rather than at the reflection of one’s own eye in the glass of the telescope eyepiece. Even the lowliest work becomes a gleaming, golden treasure (a gift to the worker, or to others?), when done out of love for God.
3. Robert Dickie contrasts “the poverty gospel” (which says possessions are evil, godly people should work only to meet their basic needs, and giving is only from a sense of duty) to “the prosperity gospel” (which says we have a right to great possessions, and should give in order to get more for ourselves). He says these “false gospels” have the same flaw: they measure work by “what we earn and what we own rather than for whom we work and why we work.” The stewardship model gets the focus right: with possessions comes responsibility for their use; in our work we should serve God’s kingdom; and we should give prayerfully and responsibly out of love for God. Ask members to consider how the stewardship model is consonant with Brother Lawrence’s experiencing the presence of God in ordinary work.
4. A specific injustice is behind *The Pink Dismissal Slip*: the artist, Philip Evergood, was severely beaten for protesting the mass firing of 1923 artists and writers by the WPA in 1936. In the painting, the main figure (an artist) holds a pink slip for “John Doe,” indicating the injustice is happening to others, and could happen to anyone. Heidi Hornik notes the image is “dominated by a vibrant, almost violent, red color” on the doors, carpet, and railing that seems to externalize the figure’s rage.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

The Value of Caring Work

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To discuss how our society devalues those who are dependent and, therefore, undervalues the work of those who care for them.
2. To understand how both the doctrine of the Trinity and the specific teachings and actions of Jesus undergird the value of caregiving work by men and women.
3. To glean specific guidance for caregiving from the Rule of Benedict.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Work (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Our Master Was a Worker” locate one of the familiar tunes NYLAND or WHITFIELD in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with a Story

Christine Fletcher writes, “In December 2014, I was flat on my back after a cardiac ablation, forbidden to move until the bleeding from the incision stopped. After six hours, I had seen every nurse on the cardiac floor and most from the cardiac ICU. None of them could stop the bleeding. They substituted a ten-pound sandbag for a nurse’s hands applying pressure and left me to sleep as I could. Instead of being in charge of my life and able to move at will, I was helpless and dependent. I found myself in the hidden world of dependency, a place I didn’t want to be. I am one of the active ones, I am in control of my life, or so I think. Suddenly I was part of the world of those who are not capable of being active and self-sufficient. I needed the care of others for my basic needs.”

Though she very much welcomed the nurses’ life-preserving care when she needed it, she notes that “society now segregates the dependent and devalues their lives and the work of those who care for them,” and wonders, “How did we get to this situation?”

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read John 13:12-16 from a modern translation.

Reflection

The previous study, “Working for Dignity,” shows the serious consequences of society undervaluing certain jobs: workers may internalize these negative perceptions, which can prevent them from being dignified by their work, cause them to leave those jobs, and thereby harm themselves and others whom they would be helping if they stayed. In this study, society’s undervaluing of caring work is a case in point. Christine Fletcher questions our ability to notice and articulate this problem from the perspective of “the ethics of capitalism.” While “the ethics of care” does much better, Fletcher commends the rich Christian resources in the doctrine of the Trinity, the teachings and example of Jesus, and the communities formed by Benedict of Nursia.

Study Questions

1. Christine Fletcher mentions “we have legalized abortion and face increasing pressure to legalize assisted suicide.” Members might note other evidence like inadequate health care for the mentally ill, limited healthcare options for people in poverty, pressure to use prenatal testing for “baby selection,” and so on. Fletcher notes how many people, in order to be free to enter the work-for-pay economy, choose to “out-source” caregiving of the young, old, and sick in their families. Consider the salaries and status of workers who care for children, the poor, the sick (who are poor), and the aging.
2. Fletcher emphasizes two theological bases for caregiving: Jesus’ example and teachings (she cites his washing the disciples’ feet and notes Benedict’s references to Matthew 25:36, 40), and the doctrine of the Trinity. She writes, “The Trinity, the central doctrine of our faith, tells us not only that we are made for relationship, but also that difference, such as gender, does not mean inequality. . . . [I]n the Trinity we see equality in difference, and difference within equality. Applying that to our lives, we no longer see Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but equal children of God (Galatians 3:28).” Each theological foundation suggests men as well as women should be involved in the work of caregiving. In both cases, caring work is valuable because it participates in the life of God.
3. W. G. Tarrant’s “Our Master Was a Worker” calls on us to emulate Jesus in caring for those who endure “the woes of life.” In this manner, then, caregiving participates in the life of God. The original text has a pronounced masculine focus: it says “the Master’s man” rather than “the Master’s friend,” and the concluding verse calls on “brothers, brave and manly” to be like Jesus, “the Man of men.” How should we understand that focus – as limiting the Master’s “helping” in the third verse to stereotypically masculine activities, or as breaking through that cultural mold by calling on manly men to join with Jesus in helping the weak?
4. Fletcher observes, “The Rule [of Benedict], written originally for men in the patriarchal Roman society, asks them to give up their privileged position and voluntarily cultivate the virtues of the oppressed. These virtues – humility, patience, and love – are cultivated in the work of care within the monastic community.” There are detailed instructions about everyone sharing in kitchen duties and about compassionate care of dependents – for example, the sick and elderly monks, and children who are sent to the monastery for schooling or to be raised. Fletcher concludes, “Benedict’s reversal of his society’s gender norms stands as a way to expand our notions of care. Our tradition is not wrong in stating that women are called to the vocation of virginity or motherhood; but it is incomplete without reminding us that equally all men are called to the vocation of virginity or fatherhood. Motherhood and fatherhood can be lived both physically and spiritually.”
5. Fletcher notes two spiritual dangers related to caregiving. First, “We can become blind to how giving care to someone and being needed by that person feeds our own ego.” C. S. Lewis’s character “Mrs. Fidget” is an example of how we can selfishly enslave others to our caregiving. Instead, Lewis says, we should aim “to put the recipient in a state where he no longer needs our gift.” Another danger is for caregivers to become “brusque and dismissive” of those who require their long-term care in order to “protect themselves from the pain and suffering of disability and aging.” Fletcher says, “This is pride and not the love we are meant to have toward one another; the only way to purify our love is to be humble.”

Members may think of other spiritual dangers, such as burnout in caregiving, the varieties of behaviors called “codependency,” resentment and anger toward the person in need, coming to believe that we are the only ones who can really help, and so on. Many of these dangers suggest that we need help (from God and others) in order to be helpers.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Of Magic and Machines: When Saving Labor Isn't Worth It

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To identify the competition between two visions of work that is a central theme in J. R. R. Tolkien's fantasy novels.
2. To understand Tolkien's concept of "sub-creation."
3. To consider how the lures of magic and machines are similar in their worship of efficiency.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Work (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "I Offer All I Am to You" is located on p. 50 of *Work*.

Begin with a Story

"Knowing as we do today the immense popularity and commercial success of *The Lord of the Rings* and its spinoffs, it is hard for us to imagine the great difficulty Tolkien faced in getting his masterpiece published," Jonathan Sands Wise writes. *The Hobbit* had sold very well, but now Tolkien was pressing to publish his long sequel trilogy together with *The Silmarillion*. His publisher balked. In a letter to a rival editor, Tolkien explains how all of his work revolves around "Fall, Mortality, and the Machine." Sands Wise explains, "Mortality causes us to fear that our work will remain incomplete, while the Fall causes us to cling to our work as if it is our own and solely under our control. After the Fall and due to our attendant mortality comes the deceptive lure of magic and machines:

[T]he sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. ... Both [the Fall and Mortality] (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective,— and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of developments of the inherent powers or talents — or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognized."

Following Tolkien's lead, Sands Wise explores how we are tempted to pursue efficiency at any cost, and why saving labor isn't always worthwhile.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide members to care for the creation in their daily work.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 90:1-2, 16-17 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This study explores the meaning of good work through the fantasy novels of J. R. R. Tolkien. Group members who are familiar with Tolkien's writings or the spinoff movies will enjoy reviewing the example characters and events mentioned in Jonathan Sands Wise's article, and will be able to supply many more. Other group members will see this study as an invitation to explore Tolkien's fiction and its deeply Christian worldview. Together they should focus on Tolkien's understanding of good work and his warning about the temptation to idolize efficiency.

Study Questions

1. We distinguish the lures of magic and machines as inhabiting prescientific and modern worldviews respectively. Tolkien sees them as similarly prideful temptations to idolize efficiency, and allows them to relate in his fantasy world. Tolkien clarifies this connection in the letter quoted above in "Begin with a Story."
2. Jonathan Sands Wise explains that the various products of our work—our ideas, objects, organizations, and so on—"are not creations proper, but sub-creations: only God can create, making what is genuinely new out of nothing, but we in proper imitation can bring into being sub-creations out of the primary world that exists around us, because we are created in the image of God." As sub-creators, we should honor and develop the good inherent in creation, and not control our products as though we are totally responsible for them, can do anything we please with them, and so on.
3. One vision is consonant with our status as sub-creators: instanced in characters like Gandalf and the noble hobbits, it "uses persuasion and encouragement to bring out the potential inherent in the world and in others and so makes them what they ought to be." The other vision is infected with overweening pride: instanced in villains like Sauron and Saruman and the fallen/former hobbit Gollum, it seeks "to dominate the world and more efficiently recreate it in [our] own image." Members may discuss specific instances of these two visions of work motivating characters and shaping events in Tolkien's writings.

In our experience we can recognize work of the first sort because it is not selfishly motivated or blindly executed, but is sensitive to the true needs of others; it is not wasteful of resources or exploitive of others, but is sustainable and supportive of the community; and, as Tolkien emphasizes, it does not sacrifice the other goods of work on the altar of efficiency.

4. Saving labor is often a good thing, and employing technology to do this is appropriate when no other, greater goods must be sacrificed. However, there is often a tradeoff of goods when we use technology, and the goods we sacrifice may be hidden from our immediate view. We should consider the costs of the technology: the collateral damage to the environment of using it, the changes in relationships (with other people, creatures, and God) it may cause, the other things we must forgo in order to purchase and maintain the technology, the effects it will have on our craftsmanship, the sorts of desires it will engender, and on and on. Tolkien is worried that we will be so fascinated with saving labor that we neglect to consider the overall cost to ourselves, other people, and the environment.

This overweening concern for efficiency can be traced to a distorted desire to rework the world in our image at the snap of our fingers. That is, we want our machines to work magic.

5. Jeanie Miley's hymn "I Offer All I Am to You" is a prayer to God, gratefully offering ourselves and our work as gifts to the "Creator God," who is the Giver. Thus, our lives and labor acknowledge and imitate God's creative act. Verses 3-5 seek God's guidance to coordinate our work with God's work, God's assistance in doing the work we should do, and God's blessing/crowning of that work with good fruit.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Integrating Faith and Work

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Praying with Scripture	Praying with Scripture
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To outline recent empirical research on how faith-work integration impacts believers' work and workplaces.
2. To consider how faith-work integration is manifest in our own workplaces.
3. To discuss how your congregation can encourage faith-work integration.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13. Distribute copies of *Work (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "O Grant Us, God, a Little Space" locate one of the familiar tunes FOREST GREEN or MINERVA in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with a Story

"I always wanted my work to be worship and am deeply honored to be a part of God's work on earth. This attitude comes from my father, a small businessman," Bob Newell writes. During his career, Bob Newell served as a pastor, professor, and college administrator. He and his wife, Janice, thought long and hard about what they would do in retirement.

He admits that as a pastor, "I discovered many committed followers of Jesus whose work cessation brought on a kind of spiritual malaise. They had narrowly framed their contribution to God's kingdom around their occupation, which left them feeling little spiritual value when their work ended."

So, as he and Janice approached retirement, they "asked God for a new challenge. Our gracious God provided what some have called an 'encore career.' It was an eleven-year, thrilling, new expression of our callings, far removed from the wealthy, upper-income congregation where I was then pastoring." They learned two new languages and moved to Athens, Greece, to minister among working class and outcast Albanian immigrants.

Over the years, Bob and Janice Newell had developed a pattern of integrating their faith and work. This changed them, and led them to a counter-cultural response to retirement.

Praying with Scripture

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read responsively the prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the italicized lines from Scripture.

Reflection

This study focuses on some recent empirical studies by Mitch Neubert, Kevin Dougherty, and their colleagues on how, why, and to what effect Christian workers are using their faith to shape workplace behaviors. This is an occasion to step back and see the big picture of faith-work integration in America. But it is also an invitation for group members to consider their own attempts at integration of faith and work. Bob Newell's essay, "On Not Dying on Third," may spur discussion of how to continue the integration into retirement. The resources in Roger Ward's "Work, Wealth, and Business as the Ground of Christian Discipline" will guide members to specific ways of integrating faith and work in the American context.

Study Questions

1. Here's a brief outline of the correlations Mitch Neubert and Kevin Dougherty discovered:
 - ▶ a sense of spiritual calling is positively related to higher job satisfaction and affective organizational commitment, which are associated increased job performance and decreased absenteeism and turnover;
 - ▶ belief that God is the ultimate moral authority is negatively related to risk-taking at work; but belief that one should honor God through work is positively related to entrepreneurial and helping behaviors, while belief that God financially blesses the faithful is not related to entrepreneurial behavior, but negatively related to helping;
 - ▶ entrepreneurs have different faith-related behaviors than other workers, and they often start businesses in order to express their faith commitments;
 - ▶ congregations supporting faith-work integration influence members' job satisfaction, entrepreneurial behavior, and commitment to the organization.

Neubert and Dougherty were puzzled by the negative correlation between belief in God and risk-taking, and this spurred their further research. Which correlations surprise group members? Which is most significant to them, and why?

2. David Miller's framework is "drawn from researching faith and work movements past and present," Neubert and Dougherty explain. "*Ethics* refers to faith motivating ethical behavior and excellence within the workplace. *Experience* refers to faith offering meaning to work as a place to live out one's calling and a context for utilizing one's unique gifts and talents in serving others. *Enrichment* refers to faith assisting in work by providing strength, guidance, and the capability to cope with difficulties or suffering. *Expression* refers to faith being shared in word and deed as an example or witness to others." Encourage members to discuss their own or colleagues' ways of integrating faith and work.
3. Neubert and Dougherty report that in their survey of full-time workers who attend church regularly, "63% agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation promoted the ethical manifestation of 'considering what is morally right when facing a tough decision at work.' Following next in frequency was a question associated with enrichment, with 57% who agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation promoted 'drawing on my faith to help me deal with difficult work relationships.' Expression, as measured by a question about their congregation promoting 'letting my coworkers know I am a person of faith,' yielded 42% of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed. Finally, 38% agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation promoted 'viewing my work as a partnership with God,' which represents the experience of a fully integrated calling at work." How does your congregation promote each manifestation of faith-work integration through worship, study groups, mission opportunities, or special programs? Are all major categories of work included, or are some slighted?
4. Bob Newell writes, "As a boy of fourteen, I began to sense God's call to ministry, in both the universal and professional senses of that word. As I matured into the wider implications of that marvelous impression,...I prayed for good life-planning and the Holy Spirit's dynamic leadership to keep God's call alive and growing." He notes that retirement is a relatively recent concept, and that many people continue to be active and in good health after age 65, the traditional age for retirement from work. "The growing complexity of our work world and the cultural fixation on the 'good life' of retirement complicate matters," he admits, but he and his wife, Janice, "have found fulfillment in remaining active and working longer." Invite members to discuss the jobs (volunteer or paid, in the work economy or their family economy) that would appeal them as new opportunities for faith-work integration after their retirement from their first career.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.