



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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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."



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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

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.