

Guide for Theological Reflection about Work

GFM National Staff Conference 2016

“It is estimated that the average North American Christian spends 88,000 hours of her lifetime in the workplace--more if one is a farmer or a professional. . . . At the same time, these same believers spend less than 4,000 hours in the church building, engaged in church-related activities that focus almost entirely on the 4,000 hours rather than the 88,000.”

--R. Paul Stevens, “The Marketplace: Mission Field or Mission?”

We spend the bulk of our adult lives engaged in some kind of work, yet most of us rarely reflect on the spiritual significance of our work. What might it mean for us to become more attentive to the ways God is present in our work, to the ways that our work can be sacred activity?

Think about one experience or way that you engage in work—that’s not ministry. Choose one theological “lens” listed below, and reflect and/or journal about this experience of work in response to scripture and a few of these questions. Come to GFM National Staff Conference prepared to share from these reflections.

Creation. Genesis 1 and 2

- How do you see or experience your work bringing order out of chaos?
- Where do you see the Spirit hovering over your work?
- How do you see or experience the material world as good? or human persons as "very good"?
- Where/how do you experience delight or joy in your work?
- How does your work give you opportunities to be creative?
- How are you finding patterns of work and rest (sabbath) in your work?

The Fall. Genesis 3:1-11:9

- How do you see or experience the effects of the Fall in your work? How do you see or experience alienation, brokenness, sin, or evil in your work?
- The Fall caused alienation and destruction in our relationships with God, one another, ourselves, and the earth. How do you see or experience struggle and alienation in these different sorts of relationships in your work?
- How do you see our alienation from ourselves in your work? How do you or people around you experience nakedness and shame?
- How do you see brokenness in our relationship with creation in your field?
- How do you see brokenness in interpersonal human relationships in your work?
- How do you see systemic or societal brokenness in your work?
- How are you or others in your field tempted to want to be like God?
- How do you see human alienation from God in your work? How are you or others around you lost, afraid, or hiding from God?
- Are there ways you see or experience evil in your work? What is this like for you?
- How do you experience the consequences of the Fall in your work? such as domination and subordination in human relationships, painful and arduous work, struggling with (or against) creation/land, etc.

Redemption. Colossians 1-2. Revelation 21-22. Kingdom of God parables in Mt/Luke. Luke 4

- In what sense is Christ the antidote (or solution, healing, redemption) for the issues of sin (or the fall) that you've seen in your work?
- How is God using your work to bring redemption of brokenness, alienation, sin in human lives and the world? How is your work an opportunity to partner with God in making all things new (or fostering the kingdom of God)?
- How do you see God working through your work to bring redemption to:
 - broken relationships? (how does your work further reconciliation?)
 - our broken relationship with creation? (how does your work further care of creation?)
 - our alienated relationships with God? (how does your work foster faith and love for God?)
 - our alienation from ourselves? (how does your work help bring about inner healing and peace?)
 - broken systems and unjust societies? (how does your work foster justice and shalom in world?)
- In what sense does your work only fully make sense when seen through the lens of the Gospel? What is missing when your work is seen or approached without awareness of Jesus?
- When Jesus says, "Well done, good and faithful chemist/economist/pathobiologist, etc", what might that mean?
- What is eternal about your work?
- What does Jesus love about your work?
- Do you ever worship in the midst of your work? Can you worship in the midst of it? why or why not?