

2024

Fall Affinity Group Curriculum: Work Segments

LEADERSHIP
IN A CULTURE OF GRACE



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WEEK 1 (week of Sept. 15) “Who ME?!”

Resources:

- Bible Verse- Gal. 2:19b-21
 - *“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*
- Sept. 15th Scripture- Gen. 32:22-33:4
- Reading Material- Excerpt from “The Preaching Life” by Barbara Brown Taylor
 - The reading is at the end of the Week 1 overview information in this curriculum file.
 - You can save files electronically or print them if needed.

Overview of the reading material:

Barbara Brown Taylor’s excerpt was chosen for week 1 to establish a common definition of the word “vocation.” Her whole piece lays out her definition. At Westwood, we have defined “vocation” in these terms.

- *In our baptism, each of us has been both CLAIMED and CALLED to be God’s hands and feet in the world and all the realms of our lives. We use the word vocation to speak of this calling. Therefore, we confess that we have a “vocation” as a family member, as a friend, in our work lives (which is the focus of these groups), as a citizen of the country and world, etc.*

In addition to the basic definition of “vocation,” there are two other points to highlight in this reading.

1. The idea of “vocation” is not an idea that is first of all about “doing more” or “being more” in any part of our life (in this case, our professional lives). It’s about an adjustment of how we understand our identity. In all parts of our lives, we are (as Taylor states on page 3) “God’s people in and for the world.”
2. We also encourage you to highlight the last paragraph on page 5. The idea of vocation is one that challenges our imagination because it is “largely a matter of learning to see in a different way (for instance, our work life).

(cont.)

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Week 1 - Suggested Agenda

Opening Prayer and Co-facilitator introductions (5 minutes):

- If you feel comfortable, have one of you come up with your prayer on the spot. If you are not comfortable, here's one you can pray. *"Holy God, we thank you for this day and for the gift of each person you have gathered here. Bless our conversation and be present with us, as you have promised, during this time. Amen."*
- Both of you as Co-facilitators should introduce yourself, share a bit about how you ended up at Westwood, and share a personal word of welcome.
- Have everyone do a brief introduction. "My name is...". "I've been around Westwood this long." "I currently work at..." (or other questions you find more appropriate).

Have people pair up with a person they don't know (20 minutes):

- Round 1- Have each person spend 5 minutes introducing themselves to the other person and share about their work-life journey. What specifically is their job, and what are their responsibilities? What did they go to school for? Where else did they work? How did they end up in the employment they have now?
- Round 2: Have each person take 5 minutes to share the joys and challenges of their work life.

Large Group exercise (10 minutes):

Invite the group to compile a list of the joys and challenges of their work lives. Do you see common themes that emerge from them? Please either send a photo of this list or have someone type it up and email it to me (j.vanhunnik@westwood.church). These will only be shared with the pastors.

Scripture readings/questions (10 minutes):

- Read Gal. 2:19b-21.
 - This is a faith claim that we make at Westwood. Discuss with the group. Does this make any sense, given your experience of life?
- Read Gen. 32:22-33:4.
 - In the Sunday sermon, we focused on the theme of "Humble Courage." Think about your work life. Share with another person what courage looks like for you in your place of work.

(cont.)

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Barbara Brown Taylor reading discussion questions (20 minutes):

- Discuss the paragraph that starts at the bottom of page 2 and its definition of vocation. Have you thought of your work life (just one of our vocations) in this way? What about your experience of life and church has encouraged this confession? What about your experience of life and church has discouraged this confession?
- Read and discuss the two paragraphs on page 3 that start with “But affirming the ministry...” and end with “understand herself to be God’s person in and for the world.”
 - Do you agree with Taylor that many people initially hear this confession as the push to “do/be more”? If you have always believed this, what made that happen? If you don’t/haven’t, what have been the barriers to this confession?
- Read the last paragraph of the piece. Taylor essentially argues that the core issue for us is one of sight. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Would anything change in how you view your work because of this confession?

Homework assignment

Invite people to begin wondering about their specific place of work. How does/could this vision of work as being a calling to serve the neighbor and the world God loves to manifest itself for you and your place of employment in large/small ways? (we’ll come back to this question in upcoming weeks).

Close with the Prayer of Good Courage:

○ God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with Good Courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

If you can’t be in worship on Sundays, please watch the livestream online or listen to our relatively new Westwood podcast of the sermons. You can listen to the ‘Real Good Courage’ podcast on [Spotify](#) or [Apple Podcast](#).

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From *The Preaching Life* by Barbara Brown Taylor

A priest in the Episcopal Church, Barbara Brown Taylor, believes that the vocation of clergy is really not all that different from that of the non-ordained. She contends that we all are “claimed by God at baptism for the accomplishment of God’s will on earth.” Have you ever thought of yourself as a “priest” before (as Barbara Brown Taylor invites)?

Vocation

Not too long ago, I spoke with a recent college graduate about his desire to be ordained. He was an articulate Christian that had been active in campus ministry and deeply influenced by the Episcopal chaplain at his school. He was bright, committed and knowledgeable about the faith, but as he talked I grew perplexed. He did not want to serve a church, did not think he would like being held accountable by a denominational body, and was not attracted to a ministry of the sacraments, although he did believe he would like to preach once a month or so.

“Then why do you want to be ordained?” I asked him. He thought a while and finally said, “For the identity, I guess. So I could sit down next to someone on a bus who looked troubled and ask them how they were without them thinking I was trying to hustle them. So I could walk up to someone on the streets and do the same thing. So I could be up front about what I believe, in public as well as private. So I would have the credentials to be the kind of Christian I want to be.” His honesty was both disarming and disheartening. God help the church if clergy are the only Christians with “credentials,” and God help all those troubled people on the bus if they have to

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wait for an ordained person to come along before anyone speaks to them.

When God calls, people respond in variety of ways. Some pursue ordination and others put pillows over their heads, but the vast majority seeks to answer God by changing how they live their more or less ordinary lives. It can be a frustrating experience, because deciding what is called for means nothing less than deciding what it means to be a Christian in a post-Christian world. Is it a matter of changing who you are -- becoming a kinder, more spiritual person? Or is it a matter of changing what you do -- looking for a new job, becoming more involved in church, or witnessing to the neighbors? What does God want from us, and how can we comply?

In many ways, those who pursue ordination take the easy way out. They choose a prescribed role that seems to meet all the requirements, and take up full-time residence in the church. They forgo the hard work of straddling two different worlds, while those they serve have no such luxury. Those in the pulpit know where they belong, but the people in the pews hold dual citizenship. When they come together as the church, that is where they belong -- in God's country, which is governed by love. But when they leave that place, they cross the border into another country governed by other, less forgiving laws -- and they live there too.

One man I know describes his dilemma this way. "On Sunday morning," he says, "I walk into a world that is the way God meant it to be. People are considerate of one another. Strangers are welcomed. We pray for justice and peace. Our sins are forgiven. We all face in one direction, and we worship the same God. When it's over, I get in my car to drive home feeling so full of love it's unbelievable, but by the time I've gone twenty minutes down the road it has already begun to wear off. By Monday

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morning it's all gone, and I've got another whole week to wait until Sunday rolls
around again."

It is not a new problem he describes. From the beginning, being a Christian meant being a sojourner in a strange land. The reversal in our own day is that for many people it is the church, and not the rest of the world, that is strange. As the moat between the two has widened, the old bridges have become obsolete, leaving commuters to paddle across by themselves the best they can.

What many Christians are missing in their lives is a sense of vocation. The word itself means a call or summons, so that having a vocation means more than having a job. It means answering a specific call: it means participating in the work of God, something that few lay people believe they do. Immersed in the corporate worlds of business and finance and in the domestic worlds of household and family, it is hard for them to see how their lives have anything to do with the life of God. From time to time, they visit their priests, confessing how they ache for more meaningful work. Lay

people are doing their jobs, but are they doing the jobs they were born to do? Somewhere along the way, we have misplaced the ancient vision of the church as a priestly people – set apart for ministry in baptism, confirmed and strengthened in worship, made manifest in service to the world. That vision is foreign to many church members, who have learned from colloquial usage that "minister" means the ordained person in a congregation, while "lay person" means someone who does not engage in full-time ministry. Professionally speaking, that is fair enough – ordained people make their livings in ministry, and lay people do not – but speaking ecclesiastically, it is a disaster. Language like that turns clergy into purveyors of

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religion and lay people into consumers, who shop around for the church that offers them the best product.

But affirming the ministry of every baptized Christian is not an idea that appeals to many lay people these days. It sounds like more work, and most of them have all the work they can do. It sounds like more responsibility, while most of them are staggering under loads that are already too heavy. I will never forget the women that listened to my speech on the ministry of laity as God's best hope for the world and said, "I'm sorry, but I don't want to be that important."

Like many of those that sit beside her at church, she hears the invitation to ministry as an invitation to *do* more – to lead the every member canvass, or cook supper for the homeless, or teach vacation church school. Or she hears the invitation to ministry as an invitation to *be* more – to be more generous, more loving, and more religious. No one has ever introduced her to the idea that her ministry might involve being just who she already is and doing just what she already does, with one difference: namely, that she understand herself to be God's person in and for the world.

However simple it sounds, I suppose that invitation will always frighten people, if only because they have heard such hair-raising tales about what happens to God's representatives. Whether they are reading the bible or the newspaper, the bottom line is the same: God's people draw fire. Meanwhile, however, their fear causes them to surrender their power, and what they are willing to lay down, someone else is always willing to pick up. Traditionally, it is the clergy that have filled that role, keeping the church neat by gathering up all the power the laity has dropped there. Part of it is their genuine if misguided desire to be helpful, but the rest of it is megalomania – their

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perverse notion that they are the only ones that can be trusted with the ministry of the church.

Almost five hundred years ago, a German monk named Martin Luther wrestled the same problem. In his day, clergy ruled the church like princes, selling salvation and getting fat off alms. They got away with it because they claimed a special relationship with God. They asserted the superiority of their own vocations and elected themselves to highest offices of the church, until all that was left for the laity was to attend mass as they may attend the theater, watching mutely as the clergy consumed communion all by themselves, and paying their dues on the way out.

In his address to the German nobles, Luther attacked this farce. He made careful distinction between a Christian's vocation and a Christian's office, suggesting that our offices are what we do for a living – teacher, shopkeeper, homemaker, priest – and that none of them is any dearer to the heart of God than another. In our offices we exercise the diversity of our gifts, playing our parts in the ongoing life of the world. Our offices are the “texts” of our lives, to use a dramatic term, but the “subtext” is the common vocation to which we are all called at baptism. Whatever our individual offices in the world, our mutual vocation is to serve God through them...

My office, then, is in the church. That is where I do what I do, and what I do makes me different from those among whom I serve. But my *vocation* is to be God's person in the world, which makes me the same as those I serve. What we

have in common is our baptism, that turning point in each of our lives when we were received into the household of God and charged to confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share in his eternal priesthood. That last

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phrase is crucial. Our baptisms are our ordinations, the moments at which we are set apart as God's people to share Christ's ministry, whether or not we ever wear clerical collars around our necks. The instant we rise dripping from the waters of baptism and the sign of the cross is made upon our foreheads, we are marked as Christ's own forever.

I have often wondered whether the church would be even smaller than it is if that cross were made not with water but with permanent ink—a nice deep purple, perhaps—so that all who bore Christ's mark bore it openly, visibly, for the rest of their lives. In many ways, I think, that is the chief difference between the ministry of the baptized and the ministry of the ordained. The ordained consent to be visible in a way that the baptized do not. They agree to let people look at them as they struggle with their own baptismal vows: to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to resist evil, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people. Those are not the vows of the ordained, but the baptized, even though we do not even seem to know how to honor them in the course of ordinary life on earth.

Perhaps we should revive Luther's vision of the priesthood of all believers, who are ordained by God at baptism to share Christ's ministry in the world—a body of people united by that one common vocation, which they pursue across the gamut of their offices in the world. It is a vision that requires a rich and disciplined imagination, because it is largely a matter of learning to see in a different way. To believe in one's own priesthood is to see the extraordinary dimensions of an ordinary life, to see the hand of God at work in the world and to see one's own hands as necessary to that

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work. Whether those hands are diapering an infant, assembling an automobile or balancing a corporate account, they are God's hands, claimed by God at baptism for the accomplishment of God's will on earth. There are plenty who will decline the honor, finding it either too fearsome or too intrusive to be taken seriously, but those willing to accept the challenge will want to know more about what a priest does, exactly.

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).

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2024 Fall Affinity Group Curriculum: Work Segments

WEEK 2 (week of Sept. 22) “Humble Courage”

Resources:

- Bible Verse- Romans 14:7-9
 - *We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*
- Reading excerpt from “The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation” by Gary Badcock
 - The reading material is at the end of the Week 2 overview information in this curriculum file.
 - You can save files electronically or print them if needed.

Overview of the reading material:

Gary Badcock's excerpt was chosen for a couple of reasons. **First**, he confronts one of the main misconceptions about our Christian vocation: a misconception argued with different languages in religious and secular circles. The religious version sounds like this. The point of life is to find your one true calling (often in your work). If you can listen well enough/search well enough (or whatever well enough), you'll find that calling, and your life will be blessed/filled with meaning, etc. The secular version sounds like this. The truly happy/successful people will realize their passion and then get themselves in the exact spot to live that passion, for instance, in their work. On the one hand, it's a wonderful thing when that can be the case for an individual. If a person has that opportunity, by all means, go for it.

But I hope you can see the downside of this being the primary understanding of our call to be God's hands and feet in the world. What if this isn't completely true in a person's job? Does that mean that person is a failure/not a faithful person? Does this mean that if you are in a job that has real questions/challenges/places of ambiguity that it isn't really seen as a vocation? Do we really believe that there is only one job in which one can live out a vocation?

Obviously, we say “no” to these last set of questions. As Badcock argues in the 2nd to last paragraph, “Christian vocation is not reducible to the acquisition of a career goal or to its realization in time. It is, rather, something relating to the great issues of the spiritual life. *It has to do with what one lives ‘for’ rather than what one does.*”

(cont.)

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The **second** reason is that Badcock lays out a helpful exercise to help us begin to think about all the ways that various jobs allow us to live a life of service to our neighbors and the world that God loves. His article invites us to an exercise of listing the ways our profession allows us to serve the neighbor/world. We'll use this exercise to invite the groups to further wonder about the ways each of our possible paths could have served the well-being of our neighbors. Finally, we'll use this as a way to speak about how each specific affinity group sees its current role as one that serves the community.

Week 2 - Suggested Agenda

Welcome/Opening prayer (5 minutes):

Begin by welcoming everyone and introducing any new members. Then, begin with a prayer. If comfortable, have a co-facilitator pray. If not, use this one. *O God, we thank you for the journey of this day and our time together. We also thank you for your presence in our journeys of our lives. Bless this time of remembering and wondering what it means to follow you. Amen.*

Scripture readings Romans (10 minutes):

- Have someone read Romans 14:7-9 and ask the following questions.
 - Have you heard this scripture before? If so, where? *This is a common text for funerals, so some may say that. If so, make the point that this is appropriate, at least in part. It's ½ the reason it was written (Lord of both the dead and the living).*
 - What does the ½ that speaks about "Lord of the living" mean for you? Have you ever been invited to consider what it would mean in your real life? *Examining the claim that "Christ is Lord" in our real work lives is the main point of these five weeks.*
- Read Gen. 45:1-12
 - In our Sunday sermon, we focused on "truthful curiosity" connected to our understanding of leadership. The temptation for Joseph was to be closed off because of his hurt and anger over what his family had done to him. Instead, he stayed honest and curious, resulting in forgiveness and his family's thriving.
 - Reflect on the idea of "truthful curiosity" in your work. Is being curious a benefit to your role? Can it lead, directly or indirectly, to others thriving? Share an example if one comes to mind.

(cont.)

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Reading Question (5-10 minutes):

If helpful, introduce why the Badcock reading was chosen for this week. Then start with this question.

- Read the paragraph on page 4 that begins, “At the beginning of the book...”
 - Have you either heard or believed that “God had a plan for your life” (in this case, your professional life)? In what context did you hear it, or what brought about this belief for you?
 - Share your reaction to the statement that “such a vision of the Christian vocation is extremely unhelpful.” Is he correct?

Pair up into groups of two (10 minutes/ 5 minutes each):

Get with another person and share the journey that led you to your current professional life. What professions were present in your family when you were raised or in the people around you? What was your educational journey? What other professions did you consider? What other jobs did you hold before the one you currently have?

Large group: (5 minutes):

Have each person share one other profession they considered when they were younger and why.

Back in the groups of 2 (15 minutes):

For the first 1/2, have each person do the exercise Badcock does with your current profession and the other profession you considered when you were younger. List the ways you could have served your neighbor/community/world through the other profession. Then, list how you do that in your current profession. In the second 1/2, have each person share the lists with the others.

Large Group (5 minutes):

Have the group construct a list of all the ways that their current professions allow each person to serve their neighbors/community/world. **Please send this list to Jason, along with any comments about this exercise.**

Final Question from the reading (5 minutes):

Have someone read the last paragraph of Badcock’s article to the group. He argues that this view of our professional journey makes it “possible for us to live more adventurously, more freely, breathing in an atmosphere of love rather than law, looking for *our own* way to share the good news of the gospel in daily life, whether in career choices or in business or in the ordinary transactions of the daily round.” Do you agree?

Why or why not?

(cont.)

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Close with the Prayer of Good Courage:

○ God you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with Good Courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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From *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation*

by Gary D. Badcock

Gary D. Badcock, an academic, recounts all of the paths that his life very well could have taken, and he believes that all would have been equally worthy vocations. He rejects the belief that God calls us to one particular life vocation that we might “miss” if we’re not paying close enough attention. God works through us no matter what we choose. Does this view of vocation feel liberating to you, or does it make you feel even more “on the hook?”

Vocation and Mission

For the Christian, however, the decisive consideration is that a life project must be capable of being integrated into the overall mission of Christ. Christ’s mission is a mission of love, of self-giving service, and of obedience to God. My argument has been that the question “What ought I to do?” really leads to another: “What kind of person ought I to be?” There is no clear answer to the first – insofar, at least, as it is a question concerned solely with career choice. However, much clearer answers can be given to the second question. I ought to be a person for whom love, service, and obedience to God are the major priorities. The Christian ethic is flexible insofar as it allows a multitude of possibilities by which one can fulfill such goals, but there is nevertheless an irreducible core concern within it, which can never be relinquished. Let me illustrate this by outlining three possible paths that I might have taken in life. The first option requires some references to my own family background. For centuries my ancestors have made a living from the sea. I also might have done so. I come

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from a region in which the fishing industry is a major source of wealth, and in which there were opportunities for a young man such as I was when I left school. Had I become a fisherman, my life would certainly have been very different from what it is today: I would, for example, most probably have remained a member of the local community within which I was born and grew up and thus maintained the link between my family and that place, a link that has lasted (until now) for some three centuries. The friends of youth would have remained the friends of adult life, and I would have been at hand for my aging parents. The commandment to honor one's father and mother would have been fulfilled in this way. I would also have been able to maintain contact with people and with a place that I love. No doubt there would have been opportunities to become involved locally in community and church work. I would have taken up a useful role in relation to the rest of society providing food for others. Had I married and raised a family, I could have shown love in that context; the monotony of early mornings and days at sea would have been offset by the knowledge that a family was cared for. My Christian faith would no doubt have remained simpler than it is now, for I would probably have read little theology, but this would not have been a great burden or hindrance to my fulfillment, which would have come in other ways. I am, in fact, attracted to such a life still, punctuated as it is by the rhythm of the seasons and based as it is on strong ties with the sea and the land.

Would any of this been incompatible with sharing in the mission of Christ? I do not think so. Some of it would have been much more compatible with it than the path I finally took in life; for one surely owes a debt to one's own society and people, to those, for example, who provided an education, and to the Christian community that

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nurtured one's faith. The people whose lives might have been affected by my own were very much as real in that world as they are in my situation today. And for me, an especially important consideration is that my own father would not have died while I worked far away.

Another alternative was available. I might well have gone into business. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the business had been successful and that I had gone on to build up a modest company, which after twenty years, employed twenty people and looked set to make me modestly wealthy. Would this have been compatible with the mission of Christ? The answer, I believe, is yes—especially in my home context. In resource-based economies, there is often insufficient secondary industry. The result is that there is much unemployment and sometimes surprising poverty. In such a context, the creation of wealth in business would have been more than self-service or worship at the altar of greed, even were such sins a factor in the whole story. For the creation of wealth can be the creation of new possibilities for an entire community, with prospects of work for young people and a prosperity that enables social as well as economic well-being. For a few people, at least, the cycle of welfare dependency might have been broken. Economic prospects can generate hope as well as wealth, sustaining communities and helping people to live a full life. And along the way, opportunities for service, for living in love within a family, or for participating constructively in the life of a Christian congregation would also have been present.

In any event, of course, I became a scholar. Contrary to my own expectation, which is that I would enter the Christian ministry and work with my own people in a pastoral way, I was drawn more and more deeply into academic issues and into an academic

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culture far from my original goals. It has been a surprising journey for me, going against my own plans at a number of crucial junctures. However, I find that the needs for my neighbors are much the same here as elsewhere, and the so-called “ivory tower” of higher education has as much genuine reality in it as does any other sphere of life. As well as the usual grind that is the warp and woof of most occupations, ample opportunities for serving others and even for preaching and pastoral care arise. In the meantime, I have a wife and family, and within the home I am sustained and I help to sustain other human lives in dignity and in love.

Which of the three paths “ought” I to have taken? There is no clear answer to such a question, for there is no clear moral imperative governing the situation. In each case, the opportunity to participate in one way or another in the mission of Christ was open to me. I would go further, in fact, and say that it was *equally* open to me under any of the scenarios presented, for there is nothing especially saintly about my present work as a theologian, nothing intrinsic to it to lift it beyond the possibility of selfcenteredness or faithlessness. The calling to be faithful and loving is one that extends to any and all walks of life and that cannot be identified with any one of them. And it is this calling to faithfulness and love with which Christian vocation is really concerned, the calling to follow the one who obeyed the Father to the end, who laid down his life for his friends – the one who, as such, was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father.

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The Way of Life³

Jesus speaks of the human goal in two ways. The first is in terms of the great commandments. The human goal and the divine imperative here coalesce: “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31 par.). From the standpoint of the spiritual life, the human goal is succinctly summed up in these key statements. The second, and literally crucial way in which Jesus speaks of the goal of life, is in terms of discipleship: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34 par.). According to this teaching, we find life by relinquishing it, by sacrificing our small goods to the overriding good of the gospel of the kingdom and for the sake of the name of Christ. There is no other “way,” in this sense, to our goal. Nevertheless, within this one “way” is a multiplicity of individual paths that we tread. But we navigate by means of the same signs, following the same rules, living one life of love and discipleship.

At the beginning of this book, I wrote of my own childish belief that God had a plan for each life; a plan that a given individual might miss if he or she was not attentive to God’s call and obedient to his voice. As a youth, I took such a view. It was as if I were waiting for a bus, or a “streetcar named vocation;” if I became bored and decided to wander away from the street, it would pass me by. But is it really possible to miss the will of God in this way? I have found such a vision of the Christian vocation to be extremely unhelpful, and because I am convinced that there are many people (especially young people) who are similarly mistaken, I have sought to develop a different understanding of the Christian vocation. Christian vocation is not reducible

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to the acquisition of a career goal or to its realization in time. It is, rather, something relating to the great issues of the spiritual life. It has to do with what one lives “for” rather than with what one does.

Such an understanding, once developed, can liberate us from the tyranny of such notions as the one that some have vocations whereas others do not, from the idea that having a vocation is incompatible with being unemployed or retired, from despair over not being able to “hear” God’s voice when looking into the future at turning points in life. The human vocation is to do the will of God and so to live life “abundantly” (John 10:10). But the will of God does not extend down to the details of career choice. And once this is realized, I believe, then it becomes possible for us to live more adventurously, more freely, breathing in an atmosphere of love rather than law, looking for *our own* way to share the good news of the gospel in daily life, whether in career choices or in business or in the ordinary transactions of the daily round. Here, new possibilities open for the creating of Christian lifestyle and modes of spirituality that reflect the generosity of God in Christ. For this, at heart, is the Christian’s vocation.

2 Gary D. Badcock, *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Cambridge, U.K: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 136–139.

3 Ibid., 141–142.

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2024 Fall Affinity Group Curriculum: Work Segments

WEEK 3 (week of Sept. 29) “Right Where You Are!”

Resources:

- Bible Verses-Gen. 45:1-12
- Reading material- Introduction and Chapter 1 from the book “Why We Work” by Barry Schwartz.

Overview of the reading material:

We shift in weeks 3, 4, and 5 to look at portions of Barry Schwartz’s book on why we work. In his book, Schwartz critiques Adam Smith’s view that the only real reason we work is because of financial incentives. While certainly acknowledging the need to “make a living,” he will make the argument for the importance and possibility that work is as much or more about meaning, challenge, the opportunity to be creative, and meaningful human interactions. We’ve picked this book to invite us to wonder whether or not his critiques/suggestions have connections to our understanding of vocation in our work lives. Our activity this week will again invite us to wonder about how our faith and our work are (or are not) integrated.

In our reading for this week (introduction and chapter 1), Schwartz lays out his critique of the overemphasis on incentives as the only reason we work and the effects it’s had on how jobs have been designed. The goal this week is to invite the group to wonder about his critiques. Are they true in general? Are they true in the specific work environments you are in? What has been the effect? In the coming weeks, he’ll move from his critique to arguing for what he believes is a more meaningful understanding of work and how it’s possible to make this the case in most work environments. Again, our hope is to keep engaging with his material while simultaneously wondering how our faith confessions can integrate into our real work-life experiences.

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Week 3 – Suggested Agenda

Welcome/Opening Prayer (5 minutes):

Begin with a few words of welcome and prayer. If comfortable, have someone from the group open with prayer. If not, here's a suggestion. *O God, thanks for this group, the gift of new relationships, and the presence of each person here. Bless our time. Deepen our relationships and our sense of your presence in our journey of life and work. Amen.*

Relationship building time (10 minutes):

Before we get into the material, have folks pair up with someone they don't know well (and haven't yet been paired up with). Have them share some part of their story with each other, such as where they were raised, how they ended up at Westwood, and specifics about their work. If having them speak about the joys and challenges of their work is helpful, focus on that. Pick another question deep enough to carry these 10 minutes if that one has been done enough. The point here is just relationship building. *Feel free to cut this if you feel the exercise below is sufficient and you're concerned about time. Depends on your read of the group.*

Scripture Reading- Gen. 45:1-12 (5-10 minutes):

Have someone read the text to the group. Then, discuss this question.

The assumption going in is that this will be a story of Joseph, now in a position of power, getting revenge on his family. Instead, it's a story of Joseph revealing himself by his words and his tears and, interestingly, demonstrating his desire to reconnect through his curiosity. He wonders specifically about his father and calls for him to be brought to Egypt. All of this is in the context of Joseph still telling the truth about how he had been harmed. Given the pain that families can inflict on each other, this is a remarkable show of leadership by Joseph. The result is a new start for the family.

- As this story was read, did you have any stories from your own family that came to mind? Have you experienced reconciliation with someone who demonstrated both truth-telling and curiosity about others and how to continue relationships in your own family?
- How about in your work lives? The temptation can be to assume that everything is set in how work is done and how each person will show up. Has curiosity about your gifts and capacity ever led to a new direction for you? How about your co-workers? Share any other ways that "truthful curiosity" has played out in a positive way at work.

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Hemingway exercise (20 minutes):

This exercise I've done in the past has been helpful but can also be a new one for folks. Start by sharing the story. Ernest Hemingway once made a bet with some friends that he could write a 6-word novel. After the bet was made here's what he produced. *For sale, Baby Shoes, Never Worn. A story of love and loss.*

After that example, tell the group that we will use this story as a launching point for an exercise about our faith and our work.

1. Have the group get into pairs have them individually write a 6-word statement about how they see their professional life. Who do they strive to be in their work? Give them 5 minutes of silence and then have them share with each other person.
2. Then, ask them to do the same thing with their faith. Have them write six words that describe their faith confession—same thing with another person.
3. Then ask them to tell the other person what these to 6 word “confessions” have to do with each other. Have some time as a large group to discuss this. Ask how this exercise was for them. If folks are willing to share their work confessions, have them do this. Same with the faith confessions. Last, share any reflections on the integration of the two (or lack of).

Note: When I've done this in the past, this has not always been an easy exercise. We, as the church, rarely have ever invited people to actually use their own language to define their faith, let alone actually try to ask what it may have to do with their work (a real critique of the church, in my opinion). The point isn't that this is easy or that everyone should be profound in what they write. The truth is that some may come right out and say (as I've heard before) that no one has ever asked them to do this, not sure faith has anything to do with work or that it's hard. Assure everyone that they are not being graded and that these aren't being printed or shared with the larger congregation (at least not without specific permission 😊). I will be interested in your feedback on this exercise.

Reading questions (15-20 minutes):

- Start with a question about people's general reaction to the reading. Is he correct in his assessment of the reality of work and of Adam Smith's influence? *“What Smith was telling us is that the only reason people do any kind of work is for the payoffs it produces. And as long as it produces adequate payoffs, what the work itself consists of doesn't matter.”*
- On page 2, Schwartz lays out the statistics from a 2013 Gallup poll on worker engagement. Do these statistics reflect reality for you and the people you work with? Why or why not? Has the pandemic changed how you might answer this question?

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- Read the paragraph at the bottom of page 6 that starts out “The lesson here...” Do you agree that false ideas can be made true by a structure? Reflect on the structure in your place of work. What philosophies underlie them?
- Last, ask the faith question. How does our faith confession of vocation relate/contrast with both what Adam Smith argues and what Barry Schwartz argues?

Closing Prayer:

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with Good Courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

If you can't be in worship on Sundays, please watch the livestream online or listen to our relatively new Westwood podcast of the sermons. You can listen to the 'Real Good Courage' podcast on [Spotify](#) or [Apple Podcast](#).

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2024 Fall Affinity Group Curriculum: Work Segments

WEEK 4 (week of Oct. 6) “You Matter!”

Resources:

- Bible Verses-Exodus1:15-22 and Romans 12:1-2
- Reading material- Chapter 2 from the book “Why We Work” by Barry Schwartz.

Overview of the reading material:

In the Introduction and Chapter 1 of “Why We Work” Schwartz critiques some of the misunderstandings he sees around why people work. In Chapter 2 he moves to make this claim. “Often it doesn’t take a lot to turn almost any job into an opportunity for meaning and engagement.” Given the 2013 Gallup poll results he quotes in the Introduction, this seems to be a strong claim. In light of the claims of this chapter, we hope each group engages 2 questions.

1. Is Schwartz correct in his claim? If so, how does this relate to each person’s experience?
2. Does Schwartz’s claim and our understanding of vocation (we are called to be God’s hands and feet in all the realms of our life including in our work lives seeking the well-being of our neighbor and world) have any connecting points? Can our faith confession complement and enhance our work lives in the ways that Schwartz is arguing?

Scripture overview:

In our scripture verse, the Apostle Paul urges his audience to not conform to the ways of the world but instead be transformed by the experience of our faith in Jesus Christ to see the world differently. We invite you to wonder if this can be true in the real lives of our work. Schwartz has argued that too many jobs are structured and viewed as being driven only by profit incentives. The way forward is to look at and structure work lives differently with an understanding of the importance of meaning and engagement. While Paul’s argument of being transformed is not just about our work lives, is this a transformation that should be included for us as a part of our faith?

Note- I encourage you as facilitators to not allow the group to get too caught up in the word “perfection” that is used in verse 2. In the early parts of Romans Paul spends whole chapters talking about sin and even makes this statement: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Paul certainly is not making the statement in verse 2 out of the assumption that any of us have the capacity for being perfect people of faith in our job or

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anywhere else. To spend time debating this word and talking about how none of us can do this (which is absolutely true) is to miss the point. We will continue to start out our worship services with confession and forgiveness for good reason. But can the arguments about “not conforming” and being “transformed” be true in our real work lives as well?

Week 4 – Suggested Agenda:

Welcome/Opening Prayer (5 Minutes):

Begin with a few words of welcome and prayer. If comfortable have someone from the group open with prayer. If not here's a suggestion. *O God, we have journeyed through the gift of another day with all its joys and challenges. We thank you that you have been with us throughout. Bless this time of relationship building and reflection as brothers and sisters of faith. Amen.*

Relationship building time (10 minutes):

Same as last week. If this continues to be beneficial have folks have a 1 on 1 conversation with a person they don't know well sharing stories of how they got to where they are now in their professional life (or another question you like better). If that is no longer a good use of your time then skip it.

Scripture Reading (5-10 minutes):

Have someone in the group read Exodus 1:15-22 and Romans 12:1-2. Invite the group to focus on Paul's urging to “not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed” and how Shiprah and Puah live that out. Schwartz is arguing for a different understanding of what drives work. Does our faith confession contribute to this at all? While certainly not just about our work, can arguments about “not conforming” and being “transformed” be true for us as people of faith in our understanding of our work lives as well?

Reading questions (30 minutes):

1. Review the distinction that Schwartz makes between jobs, careers, and callings on page 4-5. Which category do you find yourself in now and why?
2. In 2 places Schwartz makes a similar argument. On the bottom of page 6 he writes this. **“Luke and Carlotta were not actively encouraged to craft their work into callings. Meaningful and engaged work emerged because they wanted to craft their jobs into callings, and- and this is the key- because it was not forbidden.”** On the bottom of page 9 he says this. **“The lesson from the**

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custodians, the carpet makers, and the hairdressers is that virtually any job has the potential to offer people satisfaction.” It is often heard that the primary determiners of meaning/engagement in a job (after the question of whether or not you are making a living) is the culture of the work place, the relationship with one’s supervisor, or the people with whom one interacts (customers or fellow employees). Schwartz, while seeming to acknowledge their influence, is arguing that the individual in many circumstances can be an even stronger influence in seeing a job as having meaning. Do you agree or disagree? What personal experiences influence your answer?

3. On page 5 Schwartz makes this claim. **“What, then, determines how people think about their work? To some degree, it depends on characteristics of the person. That is, differences in the way people approach their work are explained by the attitudes they bring to their work- who *they* are, not what the work is.”** One of the driving questions in this small group has been whether or not our baptismal identity as a child of God called to work for the well-being of our neighbor can be the “who *they* are” that can open us to see meaning in our work wherever we find ourselves. Spend a few minutes first discussing the Schwartz quote. Is this true? Second, can/does our faith identity do this?

Closing prayer:

Close with the Prayer of Good Courage.

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with Good Courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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WEEK 5 (week of Oct. 13)

“Shared Leadership”

Resources:

- Bible Verses- John 10:10b
 - *“I came that they might have life and have it abundantly”.*
- Reading material-Chapter 3 from the book “Why We Work” by Barry Schwartz.
- **Three questions to send back to Pastor Jason**
- *Note that this session will veer away from the scripture texts that will be used in our worship. Feel free to bring in other pieces from our worship if you’ve made those connections.*

Overview of the reading material:

In Chapter 3, Schwartz breaks open many of the challenges that occur when the assumptions of material gain are utilized to drive work. He utilizes several examples of how work has changed for the worse because of this assumption. In one place he even says this. “But this is not what Ms Moffett thought she was signing up for when she switched careers.” We’ll invite your group to look at the following questions.

- Do you see these incentives at work in your sector of the economy? What has been the result?
- One of his subthemes is that work has changed or is in transition (This book was written prior to the pandemic after which change is especially true). Does your group believe this is true in their sector of the economy and specifically, how has the pandemic affected this? Does your job feel like something different than what you signed up for?

Scripture Overview:

John’s Gospel makes the claim that Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly. Schwartz claims that one of the challenges in work is that the driving assumption is that workers see financial/material incentives as what leads to an abundant life (therefore incentives are designed around this). What constitutes the abundant life for us as people of faith? Are these understandings complimentary to each other?

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Week 5 - Suggested Agenda:

It's a priority for us to receive honest feedback on the three questions. This will help us to determine future directions. Please make sure that you have adequate time in your group to engage these questions even if you need to cut off another productive part of the conversation (not usually what we would advise, but these questions are important to us).

Welcome/Opening Prayer (5 minutes):

Please invite someone in the group to open with prayer.

Scripture reading (10 minutes):

Start by having someone read the scripture text.

- What do you think Jesus means by “abundant life”? What are the characteristics of the abundant life?
- Schwartz suggests that too many work places see material/financial incentives as what drives people (in other words, abundant life is defined primarily as financial gain). How does the definition of “abundant life” that Jesus speaks of compare/contrast with what Schwartz suggests matters most in work?

Reading Questions (15-20 minutes):

- In Chapter 3 Schwartz documents some of the transitions that have gone on in the education, healthcare, and legal fields as a result of the financial incentives. Spend some time talking about your sector of the economy. Share your experience of the significant changes that have occurred especially since the pandemic (connected to the financial incentives assumptions or other)? How have they affected each of you? What have been the effects of these changes on you? **Please make a list of your answers and include this in the feedback to Pastor Jason.**
- Schwartz says the following in his reading. “Adding financial incentives to situations in which people are motivated to work hard and well without them seems to undermine rather than enhance the motives people already have.” Given your experience of your work life, do you think this is true? Why or why not? Share any examples that you may have.

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Final Reflection Questions (20-30 minutes):

Please send these responses to Pastor Jason. You can either do this by having one document or asking each person to fill these out on their own and send them to me.

1. What should the pastors/church know about the experience of working in your sector of the economy?
2. What would a church look like that did a good job supporting people working in your sector of the economy?
3. How would Westwood's ministries to the larger community be enhanced if we did a good job listening to people who bring expertise from your sector of the economy?

Closing prayer:

Close with the Prayer of Good Courage.

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with Good Courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.