

Every Good Endeavor

Study Guide for Group Discussion

By

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Preface

Every Good Endeavor by Tim Keller and Katherine Alsdorf is an excellent study of the theology of work and its application in the workplace. Having read it, I knew it provided basic ideas that I wanted to share with the group of women I meet with every other Thursday morning before work, from 7-8:15 a.m. They are Christian women of varied ages, types of work, and levels within the workplace.

I wrote the EGE study guide specifically for this group, and it has inspired deep discussions about personal insights and applications. The members read the assigned chapter prior to each meeting and discussed the questions during our time together. Each chapter usually took more than one meeting to complete, as we had only 30-40 min. for the study, to leave time for prayer together.

I offer it for your use with the desire that others will be encouraged to learn from this important book in the context of a Christian community. Feel free to make changes if the questions do not seem appropriate for your group, or you would like to emphasize other ideas or expand to fill more discussion time.

My only request is that you report changes and ideas and successes back to me, so I may improve the study going forward.

For the Kingdom,

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The study contains fifteen lessons as follows:

Introduction

Part One: God's Plan for Work

- Chapter 1 The Design of Work
- Chapter 2 The Dignity of Work
- Chapter 3 Work as Cultivation
- Chapter 4 Work as Service

Part Two: Our Problems with Work

- Chapter 5 Work Becomes Fruitless
- Chapter 6 Work Becomes Pointless
- Chapter 7 Work Becomes Selfish
- Chapter 8 Work Reveals Our Idols

Part Three: The Gospel and Work

- Chapter 9 A New Story for Work
- Chapter 10 A New Conception of Work
- Chapter 11 A New Compass for Work

(Questions presented in two parts)

Chapter 12 New Power for Work

Epilogue: Leading People to Integrate Faith and Work

1. What is the difference between a “job” and a “calling” or “vocation?”
2. Have you received encouragement from your church to view your daily work as a calling?
3. There have been several “theological streams” in the faith/work movement. From the list on pages 5-6, which have you heard and which most resonate with you?
4. What does Keller mean when he says if we view each point as the MAIN WAY to think about our work, the points seem contradictory. But if we see each as A WAY, they can be complementary.
5. What did J.R.R. Tolkien’s story, “Leaf by Niggle,” mean to you? Do you believe his conclusion? What would you like to see about your own work?
6. Read the two paragraphs on Pg.14, beginning with “But really—everyone is Niggle.”

1. How is the biblical account of Creation radically different from other ancient accounts? From other theories today?

2. Does the fact that Genesis presents God as a worker (in the normal sense of our everyday work), make you feel differently about your daily work?

3. Describe God's work of "providence." Compare with Col.

4. How did Jay and Barbara Beldy help developmentally disabled adults? Why?

5. Read the comment by Dorothy Sayers on page 25. Respond.

6. Describe "leisure," as Keller addresses it. Is this different from your usual view?

7. What are the "limits" of work listed on pages 26-30? Do you abide by them?

1. My friend's father was a factory worker who referred to himself as a "wage slave." Was his view of work closer to the Greek or biblical view? (She deeply regrets that she didn't have *Every Good Endeavor* to share with him.)

2. How does work give evidence of our dignity as human beings?

3. How does work differentiate us from the animals? A coal miner said, "I wish they would treat me as well as they treat the mules." How is that a distortion of a godly view of work?

4. Does our society value some types of work over others? Do you see this in the way employees are treated where you work?

5. What does "subdue" and "have dominion" over the earth look like in your daily work?

6. Do you know anyone like "Mike, the doorman?"

7. Do you agree that the material world matters as much as the spiritual world? What arguments does Keller use to prove his point?

1. Read aloud the opening scripture from Genesis 1 & 2 (pp. 42-43).
2. Describe the “Cultural Mandate” (pp 43-44).
3. Does “fill the earth” mean more than procreation?
4. What does “rule” and “subdue” over creation mean to you?
5. How does your daily work (paid and unpaid) carry out the Cultural Mandate?
 - Forming
 - Filling
 - Ruling
 - Order out of chaos
6. Respond to Keller’s statement: “A biblical understanding of work energizes our desire to create value from the resources available to us.” (p. 49)

1. Robert Bellah wrote that work is a calling, “a contribution to the good of all and not merely...a means to one’s own advancement.” How does this fit with your idea of calling?

2. How does work as a calling affect job choices?

3. Where did the idea of “call” as only work in and for the church come from?

4. What was Martin Luther’s role in reinterpreting “calling,” based on Psalm 147: 13? How did he enlarge the idea of prayer for our “daily bread?”

5. Does the sacred/secular split still exist in your church? How have you experienced it?

6. How can we demonstrate the value of **all** jobs in our workplace? (Hint: do you know the name of the person who cleans your office?)

7. Explain how the doctrine of salvation by grace, not works, affects these views of work:
 - If religious works are crucial to salvation, then they are superior to other work.
 - Can our work today be our “salvation”—proving our worth—or can it be service?
 - “Common grace” can be evident and celebrated.

8. How does competence relate to the idea of work as honoring God by loving neighbors?

1. Did you gain any new insights about sin from the first two sections: Paradise Lost and Things Fall Apart?

2. Have you experienced any of the “thorns and thistles” he describes (Gen. 3:18) in your work? Have **you** ever been a “thorn?”

3. In the “Accepting Fruitfulness” section, Keller says, “It is important for us to understand and hold in tension what the Bible says about creation and about the fall—about God’s plan for work, and also about the problems of work in a broken world.” What does that mean to you?

4. Has the frustration of your work not being as fruitful as you desire made you tend toward idealism or cynicism (“I’m going to change things and make a difference” or “Nothing really changes; Don’t let yourself care too much”)? Why or why not?

5. Returning to the introduction, how does “Leaf by Niggle” depict the future? Does the idea of work being perfected in the new heavens and the new earth give you hope today?

6. The hope of God’s story of redemption is voiced in the closing lines from a carol. Why don’t we SING the words.....(or all the words of “Joy to the World” if you know them!).

1. Explain how the description of genre and “under the sun” helped you understand the book of Ecclesiastes?

2. What are the three ways (“life projects”) the Philosopher attempted to find meaning in his life? Are these true of you or the people you work with?

1.

2.

3.

3. Why does he say even success is pointless in the end?

4. What was wrong with Antonio Salieri’s prayer: “Lord make me a great composer! Let me celebrate your glory through music—and be celebrated myself! Make me famous through the world....make me immortal!”

5. How can work be alienating through injustice and depersonalization? Have you experienced this?

6. Work can isolate—wealth, but no friends/family to enjoy it with. Have you seen this happen? What can you do about it?

7. How can choice in careers contribute to dissatisfaction? What are three considerations in career choice?

1.

2.

3.

1. How does the Tower of Babel illustrate the tendency to use our work to establish our identity?

2. Keller says there are two ways the people were getting identity from their work: “assigning spiritual value to their work that they would be better off getting from God,” and not being scattered gave a sense of power and security from the size of their group. Are these still present in today’s society?

3. Have you experienced the need to “make a name” for yourself in the workplace? How did that impact your ability to be serving others? Have you seen this in coworkers or bosses?

4. Read the C.S. Lewis quote from *Mere Christianity* (page 112). How have you seen this **competitive** pride in your workplace? Does it detract from serving others with our work?

5. Did the way Keller told the story of Esther change your perspective? What changed?

6. In what ways are you “in the Palace.”

7. Have you thought about how to leverage your position (“financial and cultural capital”) to benefit others?

8. How does God’s **grace** help when you face the perils of being in the Palace? What are the perils?

The antidote to selfishness is freedom in Christ to serve others.

1. How does the opening story about David illustrate the kind of idols Keller means? What are David's idols?

2. Define "idol" based on Exod. 20:3-5. (p. 127)

3. Making an image is not limited to a physical "god". What can it mean today? (p.128)

4. Read Luther's comments on page 129. How can our idols show that we do not trust God?

5. What kind of power can our idols have over us? (p. 130)

6. Have you thought about our cultural/corporate idols? How would you define them for Seattle? For your business?

7. What are differences between the shared values/idols of traditional, modern and post-modern cultures? Name aspects of each:

 Traditional:

 Modern:

 Post-Modern:

8. Was the example of the two advertising executives helpful? Why or why not. (p. 147-8)

9. What are four ways the Gospel offers hope for overcoming idols? (p. 149-50)

1. What is a “worldview?”

2. What are the three questions a worldview addresses? (p. 159)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

3. How does the Christian Gospel differ from other worldviews?

4. What are the four aspects of the Christian worldview? (p. 161)

5. Read the paragraph on p. 162 beginning with “The gospel is the true story.....”.

6. Considering “The Gospel and Business” (p. 164-168), what are some ways a Biblical worldview makes a difference?

7. Keller/Alsdorf suggest we “think of the gospel as a set of glasses through which you ‘look’ at everything else in the world’.” Does this concept make sense to you? How have you applied in thinking about your work?

1. Martin Luther stated that God is both Creator and Provider: “Work is a major instrument of God’s providence; it is how he sustains the human world.” (p. 185-186)
Does this affect the way you view your work?
2. Explain the concept of “Common Grace.” (p.189)
3. Read aloud the verses that expand on the idea of “general revelation” (p. 190-191)
4. What is meant by “first-order beliefs” and “second-order beliefs?” (p. 193)
What does this mean to you, to the workplace encounters you may have?
5. How does the belief in Common Grace free us? (p.194-195)
6. How does your “thin view of sin” or “thick view of sin” relate to how you view the culture? (p. 197)
7. What is “dualism” and what are two ways it may affect our view of work? (p. 200)
8. Sum up the chapter by reading aloud the last paragraph on p. 201.

Every Good Endeavor Discussion questions for Chapter 11- A (pp 202-215)

1. How does Howard's story illustrate the limitations of ethics? (Why did he inflate his salary when applying for a job and how did he justify it?) (p. 204, 207-8)

2. Have you experienced unethical behavior in your workplace?

3. Why can personal dishonesty have an impact on a company and the wider society? (Four ways, p. 207-8)

4. What is Transparency International? (p.205)

5. How does corruption effect economic development of a country?

6. What is the biblical basis for ethics? Read aloud the final paragraph in this section (p. 208) How does your workplace behavior line up with this directive, in view of the rest of the paragraph?

7. What did Christianity add to the classic virtues of justice, courage, temperance and prudence? (p. 209)

8. Where do the Christian virtues originate?
9. Are you working to help people "give and receive more love"
10. What is unique about the way Christianity portrays human beings? (p. 212)

11. What difference did this make in history?

12. How does this affect the way you view coworkers, boss, customers? (p. 213-14)

Every Good Endeavor Discussion Questions for Chapter 11-B (p. 215-232)

The following four question sets cover the four divisions in our reading assignment.

1. How do the following five ways help us to be guided by wisdom:

Know God, Know Yourself, Learn from Experience, The Word/Proverbs, The Holy Spirit

2. Read Eph 6: 5-9 on p. 218-19 regarding "A New Audience"

- Did you learn anything new about the situation of slaves and masters when this passage was written? (p222-23)
- Can this advice to slaves and masters apply to our work today?
- What is common to both, and what is more specific to employees or employers?

3. In the "New Compass" section, what are the four characteristics listed for Christians in the workplace?

Which one(s) are easiest for you to identify in others? In yourself?

Read the final paragraph on p. 227.

4. Keller says our concerns about "Ethics in our Vocation" should go beyond our personal ethical behavior to the corporate and the economic systems, to see what is unjust and not serving human flourishing. How is capitalism affected by these factors:

The increasing size and global reach of corporations

Less risk in loaning money

Short term profit vs long-term vision

Commodification (see definition on p. 230)

How have these factors affected your work/workplace?

1. How does the example of the pregnant doctor illustrate “work under the work?” (See definition at the end of paragraph, p. 233)

2. What difference does Jesus make? What does it mean that the apostles “had a new freedom both *from* their work and *in* their work”?

3. Have you felt that freedom in your work? Explain.

4. How does “true passion” for our work differ from passion driven by our own needs, comfort and interests?

5. Discuss the idea of sloth/*acedia* (p. 236) being the sin that leads to other six deadly sins of gluttony, covetousness, envy, wrath, and lust.

6. Read the three paragraphs about Romans 12 on pp. 239-40. What is the basis for “offering your body as a living sacrifice?” Give a personal example of how this can be lived out in the workplace.

7. How do the two passages describing the Sabbath differ? What does that mean in your life?

8. Keller says “It’s liberating to accept that God is fully aware of where you are at any moment and that by serving the work you’ve been given you are serving him? How have you experienced this?

1. The epilogue will be a review of what we have studied for the past months. Let's start by reading together the quote from Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper:

"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"

2. Look at the chart on p. 254. Can you identify with any of the beliefs on the left of the chart?

3. Now look at the right "Change to" side of the chart. Are there any ideas here that you have learned and accepted during our study of Every Good Endeavor? Are there any that you are not certain of or reject?

4. Look at the statistics at the top of p. 258. How would you have responded if you were in the group of several hundred participants at Redeemer who were asked about their work/faith?

- Have shared faith in some way at work?
- Prayed about your work?
- Struggle to balance/integrate your own desires with God's desire for your life?
- Recognize that your work itself contributes to society?

5. Would you be interested in joining a Vocation Group if one were offered?

6. Are you aware of the Cascade Fellows program, modeled on Redeemer's Gotham Fellows?

