

WORK LIFE: AN INTRODUCTION

The *Work Life* curriculum is founded on the belief that God has designed all people in His image with unique gifts and abilities, and given them the task of adding value to His world through work. God's people are called to recognize that all legitimate work is ultimately work done under the Lordship of Christ. If even the *thief* is called to work with their hands in order to have something to *give*, (Ephesians 4:28) then surely God has called all of His people to do good work—not out of some ethic of independence—but as God's chosen means by which people participate in and contribute to the life of the community. Work is good; it was a part of creation in the garden of Eden and will be a part of abundant life in the new heavens and the new earth. However, in North America today, both low-income and higher-income communities have broken views of work.

Many low-income individuals have increasingly turned away from work as a meaningful or even helpful part of their lives. Myriad factors contribute to the reality that low-income individuals are not working—particularly in areas dominated by multi-generational poverty. Having a marred view of who they are, many have lost the vision for stewarding the resources and potential that God has given to them. *Work Life* is designed to inspire this population to hear God's Word calling them toward re-creation—His call to them to add value to His world through work. In discovering their potential as unique stewards of God's world, unemployed or underemployed people *can* make significant, meaningful change in their lives by transforming their beliefs and choices around work.

Unemployed persons are not the only demographic whose views on work are distorted. Many successful, middle class North Americans—including those who have written and may use this curriculum—may demonstrate a marked *over-confidence* in our economic system. Few of us hear the Bible's testimony of our struggling neighbors when they cry out that *the poor's land produces a crop, but injustice sweeps it away* (Proverbs 13:23). We are often blind to the ways in which structural injustice, racism, inequitable educational systems, and problematic economic systems mean that often the poor make all the right choices and still end up in very difficult situations. Many of our low-income neighbors desire employment, but struggle to find work that sustains them.

Work Life has tried to capture this tension, reflecting the importance of individual choice as well as the injustices and inequities of the market place. If you're looking for a curriculum that simply tells low-income individuals "do better and you'll get better," *Work Life* is not for you, and some of the segments will not make any sense. Ignoring the realities of injustice in the work place, in our view, means blaming the victim, shaming the poor, and increasingly marring the identity of our neighbors made in God's image.

We encourage you to use *Work Life* to facilitate genuine discussion around workplace issues that you may see very differently from the way members of other economic groups see them. As you co-learn with participants, may we all recognize that our world, including its marketplaces and economic systems, is deeply broken; however, our God is doing powerful work to transform both systems and individuals into His new creation.

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE? WHO SHOULD FACILITATE?

Work Life is designed to be used by local churches or organizations who seek to empower unemployed or underemployed individuals with the character and skills needed to retain employment. The course curriculum is designed for groups ranging from 5-20 participants. The target group for the *Work Life* curriculum are adult men and women who are caught in multi-generational poverty contexts. Participants in this demographic have intellectual potential and have been created in the image of God, given unique gifts and abilities, and have a lot of value to contribute—to other participants, their

neighborhoods, and employers in the marketplace; however, they may have a criminal background, face workplace discrimination, lack a High School Diploma, or may be light drug users. Other qualities include:

- Unique experiences and perspectives which are vital to our understanding God's Word and God's world;
- Unemployed or underemployed who are not currently and historically have struggled to succeed in careers;
- Willingness to discuss spiritual issues and how they affect life, though not necessarily committed to the Christian faith. Some are practicing; others cultural Christians
- Willingness to make changes beyond the surface; and
- May or may not have a high school diploma or equivalent, but can read and write; without serious mental handicap.

The best *Work Life* facilitators have a deep understanding of the Biblical story, as well as a basic understanding of emotional health and healing, and have succeeded in a job in the US for at least 2 years. They offer participants hope by increasing their confidence, drawing out unique ways they can add value to God's work, and helping them to build character and skills necessary for a healthy work life. A robust *Work Life* facilitator must also acknowledge the reality of structural injustice and the real prejudice low-income individuals face in their workplace and community.

Facilitators are not lone rangers—they are part of a ministry team that is committed to ongoing support of participants in their careers. *Work Life* sites have the capacity to:

- Foster mentoring relationships with participants;
- Network with potential employers for job placement;
- Recruit participants and host regular meetings;
- Become co-learners with participants through dialogue and mutual respect; and
- Assist participants in finding a job and provide ongoing support.

WHEN AND WHERE SHOULD *WORK LIFE* CLASSES TAKE PLACE?

Work Life sites have the capacity (learning space, relationships, mentors, time) to go deeper with participants in a jobs readiness training program. Sites are located in the US/Canada, and have adequate capacity to run the training program and walk alongside participants across time.

Work Life contains 19 sessions. Each session is designed to run for 2 hours. Sites are encouraged to hold courses 3 times per week for 6-7 consecutive weeks, or 2 times per week for 9-10 consecutive weeks.

An active ministry team should expect to invest 20 hours per week on the program. This includes: recruitment of participants and allies, ally orientation, general administration and logistics, facilitating course sessions, assisting participants with coursework (outside of class), networking with employers, and assisting participants with job placement. Sites will likely spend as much time during active training weeks as in the post-course weeks assisting participants with job placement.

The *Work Life* learning space should be large enough to accommodate up to 20 people with access to tables for writing, wall space for posting group activities, and physical space for small group discussion and activities.

WORK LIFE: COURSE MAP

Laying Work Life Foundations

- **Session 1: Examining God's Good Design Gone Bad**
- **Session 2: Celebrating how Jesus Restores All Things**
- **Session 3: Building on Past Experience**
- **Session 4: Knowing your Own Story**
- **Session 5: Overcoming your Roadblocks**
- **Session 6: Sharing your Life Story**

Adding Value at Work

- **Session 7: Building Character and Skills**
- **Session 8: Discovering how the Work World Works**
- **Session 9: Exploring our Gifts**
- **Session 10: Adapting to Professional Culture**
- **Session 11: Identifying What Employers Want**

Integrating Work Life Communication

- **Session 12: Speaking and Listening**
- **Session 13: Resolving Conflict**
- **Session 14: Maintaining Healthy Relationships**
- **Session 15: Practicing Communication Skills**

Getting Hired and Promoted

- **Session 16: Putting Best Practices to Work on the Job**
- **Session 17: Creating a 60-Second Commercial**
- **Session 18: Leaving Impressions at an Interview**
- **Session 19: Persevering on the Long Journey**