

2orMore Bible Starters

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Jesus transforms all of life, including your work

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ABOUT BIBLE STARTERS

2orMore prayer groups are unique in the way they specifically pray for the workplaces of those who attend, as a place where the pressures and wins of work shape workers as disciples of Jesus, and where extended time spent with colleagues from diverse backgrounds positions it as key area for mission for each worker.

The Bible provides a fantastic springboard for praying in a 2orMore as it renews focus on our lives, and workplaces, from God's perspective. Engage Work Faith recognises the busy pace at which the work week rolls on is excited to introduce 'Bible Starters' as a means to equip prayer groups with a succinct Bible lesson and thought-provoking questions to move God's kingdom plans back to the center of thinking for each one praying.

Engage Work Faith

welcome

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04 THE GOSPEL IS ATTRACTIVE

Discussion Starter: What are the stumbling blocks to the gospel for your not yet Christian friends?



1 Kings 10:1-13

"When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she came to test Solomon with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.

She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was not told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness."

And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

(Hiram's ships brought gold from Ophir; and from there they brought great cargoes of almug wood and precious stones. The king used the almug wood to make supports for the temple of the Lord and for the royal palace, and to make harps and lyres for the musicians. So much almug wood has never been imported or seen since that day.) King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country."

We see in this interaction that the news of Solomon under God created curiosity. We can expect the same of the gospel, it will not always be met with hostility and rejection, but sometimes with challenging questions. The queen of Sheba visited Solomon to test him. He patiently and methodically answers all her questions and she marvels at his wisdom, wealth, leadership and relationship with God. The queen's visit is a direct answer to Solomon's prayer in 8:41-43.



Discussion: How can you grow your own confidence in the gospel standing up to public scrutiny as it did with the queen of Sheba?

Which people groups/cultures/personalities in your team/professions do you find difficult to imagine becoming Christians?

What person in your life would you consider 'far away' from God?

How can you encourage curiosity in your colleagues?



Leaders Notes:

02 WHERE WE BELONG

Discussion Starter: What does it mean to be part of a country?



We all have certain benefits from being part of Australia. Those who are citizens have health care, protection while overseas, a place to belong, an opportunity to choose our leaders and vote, etc. When we watch the Olympics or celebrate ANZAC Day, our connection with our country feels strong. No matter where we come from, our identity and loyalty is often shaped by our country.

Hebrews 11 talks about some of the faithful in the Old Testament. When we get to the part below of Hebrews 11, we have just read of Abel, Enoch, Noah and then of Abraham...who left his country with a promise from God. A promise that affected his entire household. A promise that was reinstated to the following generations through Isaac and Jacob.

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

Hebrews 11:13-16

As Christians, our citizenship of Australia (or any country) is trumped by our citizenship in heaven. Thinking about what we said earlier, how does this shape our identity and loyalty?



Discussion: In what situations might a Christian feel like a foreigner in this world?

How might a longing in this life be merely an echo of a greater longing for heaven?

How does this help today at work?



Leaders Notes:

It might be difficult to come up with answers if the group has never thought about having a heavenly citizenship and seeing themselves as foreigners in Australia. If there are group members from another country, it might be helpful to ask them for insight of how it is different living as a foreigner or draw on experience visiting other countries and try to imagine what it would be like to live there as a foreigner – needing to integrate into an unknown culture, learning a different language, feeling like you don't belong.

03 SUFFERING PART 1

Discussion Starter: When you think of the idea of suffering yourself, what comes to mind?

Western culture often encourages us to run away from all suffering. While this is not always ungodly, when we read Romans, perhaps we can take a different view of suffering.

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Romans 5:3-5



Discussion: What does perseverance look like and what helps us persevere in tough times?

How have you seen your character (or someone else) grow through suffering?

How might your suffering become a segue to sharing Jesus with your work colleagues?

Leaders Notes:

Suffering is by no means pleasant, and it is important to acknowledge the pain and hardship that we endure in life. However, it is helpful to see that suffering is productive...particularly in our godliness. Our world may say that suffering is to be avoided at all costs, but Romans is telling us that suffering is useful.

04 SUFFERING PART 2

Discussion Starter: When suffering, where do you find hope?



If you google ‘Where do you find hope?’ a list of different options is at the top of the search. The first five are interesting...

- Believe you can achieve your goals
- Reflect on past success
- Practice prayer or meditation
- Use uncertainty as a tool
- Focus on the positive

Do these things bring hope? As you have already seen last time the Bible has an interesting insight, perhaps not what we expect.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

Romans 5:3-5

Suffering produces hope!

Discussion: What is the hope we find in suffering

What impact does this hope have on our work today?



Leaders Notes:

This is not meant to be a “pie in the sky, suffering doesn’t matter” reflection. When you look through the life of Jesus, he was very interested in the suffering of people. He regularly had compassion on those suffering, he even relieved their suffering, though not always. Even more important, Jesus himself suffered and completely undeservedly. He suffered complete separation from the Father, which is more than we will suffer if we follow Him. The hope we have is based on God’s love and what it means that we have the Holy Spirit. Unpack what that means with the group and think through how this truth impacts our daily work.

05 THE WORDS WE SPEAK

Discussion Starter: What's playing on your mind at present?



Often what we are regularly thinking about will eventually come out of our mouths. If we are having a challenge at work that is taking up brain space, it is likely to find its way into our conversation at some point. When we are excited about something, we will tell people, particularly those we trust.

"The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

"May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."

Psalm 19:1-4

The heavens declare God's glory just by doing their job.

Discussion: How can we please God with the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart through our job?

How can you live this out today at work?

How can you declare God's glory to colleagues without appearing weird to them?



Leaders Notes:

As we all know, it can be easy to get through our day and not even remember God is with us, or that He is the one we are working for. Work gets busy. The purpose of this Bible starter is to get us thinking about how much God is involved in the day and as we remember that, speaking of Him will spill out in conversations.

06 DISCOURAGEMENT

Discussion Starter: How do you react when God seems to be inactive or absent in a difficult situation at work?



Asaph wrote some very angry words in Psalm 73. He even mentioned how pointless it was to be righteous because the wicked are the ones who prosper. He reaches the end of his rant with this startling revelation:

"Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever."

Psalm 73:25-26

Discussion: List the areas of work/life that are currently hard for you.

How can you find God's strength to encourage your heart?

Leaders Notes:

Some member's fears may be around losing a job, being unliked, not performing well at work, uncertainty about being bold as a Christian, dealing with people, etc. It could be worth working as a group to come up with God's promises that can help. Some promises can be found Hebrews 13:5-6, Lamentations 3:22-23, Matthew 28:20b – your group can hopefully come up with some more.

07 FEAR

Discussion Starter: What are some fears that you may justifiably associate with work?



David had been seized by the Philistines at Gath when he wrote Psalm 56.

"When I'm afraid,
I put my trust in you.
I trust in God. I praise his word.
I trust in God. I am not afraid.
What can mere people do to me?"

Psalm 56:3-4

David would have been afraid for his life, and in that instance was able to trust God. He knew that even if he died, he was safe.

Discussion: What are promises of God that we can trust when we are afraid (the fears identfied at the beginning)?

Leaders Notes:

08 WHO IS GOD?

Discussion Starter: How would you describe God to someone who doesn't know him?



God describes himself to Moses when God gives the covenant to the people of Israel, and this description is reference over 20 more times throughout the rest of the Bible.

"And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

Exodus 34:6-7

Discussion: What does God say about himself?

How does this description of God help people understand him better? What about us, today at work?

Leaders Notes:

Some members may find the second half of these verses difficult because of the strong language around justice. Also, we may find it difficult to share the justice part of God to others, in fear that people will be too confronted. However, if God is not just, then what Jesus did is insignificant. The full gospel itself depends on the idea of justice. The gift from God is that He is just…He just sorted out paying the punishment through Jesus.

09 OUR SPEECH

Discussion Starter: What 'filters' do you use to decide what you talk about? Particularly at work.?



In the middle of many examples of Godly living, Paul drops this little gem to the Ephesians:

'Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.'

Ephesians 4:29

This is a very high standard to try and meet, one we cannot meet without God's help. To only speak what is helpful for the benefit and needs of others, means that we need to be interested in getting to know our colleagues so we may have an idea of their needs.

Discussion: What do you think would help you remember this when in conversation with colleagues?

Is there any situation/person at work where this is more difficult?

Leaders Notes:

Having only words that are beneficial for the hearer is not something we can achieve on our own and possibly not in this lifetime. However, it is a very good reminder for us as we are God's people in our different contexts. It is a good reminder to ask for God's help and then notice over the next week how your 'filters' change.

10 SUBTLE SINS

Discussion Starter: What are some 'subtle' sins that may be part of working life?



Often when we think about sin it is around family, church, friends but it can be easy to overlook our work life. Sometimes we may not even think about work behaviours in light of sin...eg. Complaining, selfish motives, out of control temper, stepping on others for personal gain, etc.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Ephesians 4:29

As Christians, because we have already admitted we are sinful, we can be open about our sin to work colleagues. Not only that, while recognizing our sin can cause us grief, we know that God is true to his promises and is faithful to forgive.

Discussion: Is there any sin you need to confess to God? Or share with your 2orMore for accountability (no pressure)? Thank God for his faithfulness and forgiveness.

Something to consider – is there someone at work to whom you may need to apologise for a hurtful or deceptive word or action?

Leaders Notes:

While this study may make it seem easy just to confess our sins, it is important to treat each member with grace and humility as they speak. Listen attentively. You may not need to say much. This could be the first time members have thought about sin in the context of work.

11 PRAYERS AND PLAYERS

Discussion Starter: What are some of the real threats to your walk with Jesus? Physical or relational? External or within?



'The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.'

Prayer is a tangible expression of utter dependence on God that takes us beyond our own skills, expertise or energy. Moses stands on a hill and echoing the exodus itself, he holds up his staff of God as directed as the battle rages below. As long as the staff is held up, God's people continue to win over God's enemies.

Clearly some of God's people must be on the battlefield waging war and others, like Moses, hold them up before God. Pray-ers can become weary of the task and need the help of others who help hold up those prayers of dependence to God.



Discussion: If Evangelism is a battle for people's souls, what does this story tach about the importance of prayer?

How does this story reshape your picture of prayer, dependence and provision?

What parts of the New Testament echo this teaching? Ephesians6:10-20?

What does it mean to hold each other's arms up?



Leaders Notes:

While we may not be in bodily danger in Australia, some of the tangible threats may be around losing a job or not being able to progress at work, broken relationships, etc.

12 JESUS IS LORD OF THE PUBLIC SPACE

Discussion Starter: Over what issues/points have you ever felt you might have a target on your back?



The story of Daniel might be a familiar one. To recap the story so far, Daniel is one of 3 high officials in the kingdom that Darius rules. Daniel was favoured because of his work, and the other officials and satraps plot against him by getting Darius to sign an edict preventing any petition to any god for 30 days other than Darius, or they will be thrown into a den of lions. Then we read this:

"When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously."

Daniel 6:10

You may remember that Daniel was thrown to the lions.

John Haldane*, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews University observes that a tolerant society used to be exemplified by being able to hold different viewpoints and disagreeing. That ideal first shifted to a new position – you must approve of my viewpoint. A second shift has taken place - you must celebrate my view. Someone who won't celebrate and fully embrace your view is deemed intolerant. No scope for reservation or disagreement.

Daniel did as he had done the day before. He did what he always did – Pray. Worship of God is not a thing you can silo off into the private personal sphere. It invades the public space, the place of rule and authority. God invites us to make him Lord of every domain in our lives including our work.

Daniel teaches us that this can be costly, stressful and unjust. It may threaten our livelihood and our very lives at points. But we will do it if our lives our built on the conviction that worship of God and not another has prior claim on us – it boils down to demonstrating this is the one in whom we trust.



Discussion: When do I feel afraid to continue outwardly following Jesus at work?

What would give me confidence regardless of the outcomes?



Leaders Notes:

Interesting points about the story:

- Daniel's habit: 3 times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to God- this behaviour he continues without missing a beat after the edict.
- Daniel's work life was exceptional: he was distinguished above and beyond others- so much so that the King of Babylon planned to set him over the whole kingdom; he currently administered one third.
- This causes jealousy and created a toxic work culture: the thought police were out to get him.
- They tried to find grounds for dismissal and poor conduct, but Daniel is neither corrupt nor open to it. He is exemplary as a public servant – trustworthy and he wasn't negligent in his duties.
- They then moved on to his relationship with God: By appealing to the King's ego they create a ridiculous law that operates for 30 days that bans prayer to anyone else than the king.
- Daniel continues his harmless activities (prayer) without hesitation.
- ·The king spends a sleepless night, arriving at Daniel's supposed tomb to find him untouched, rescued and rejoices – bringing justice to Daniel's perpetrators and sending an edict around the whole kingdom in all languages praising the God of Daniel.

Ask if people in the group have experienced the need to celebrate others as mentioned in the reference from John Haldane quote above and discuss how you can respond in a way that glorifies God.

* https://youtu.be/SIF1wNJwL8k

13 GOD SATISFIES WHAT THE SOUL HUNGERS FOR

Discussion Starter: When you think of the idea of 'transformation'what does it look like for you?



Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
2 Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.
3 Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.
4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a ruler and commander of the peoples.
5 Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendour.”
6 Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.
7 Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts.
Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.
8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.
9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55

Last year the Staff and Board of Engage wrestled over and clarified the vision of the mission. In the end we said we exist because faith in Jesus transforms all of life, including your work. God is into the complete transformation of people. In v.10-11 he uses the effect of what is known (nature and the seasons) to build our confidence/trust in the impact on less familiar terrain. In this case it is His Word going out. Verse 10 can be used for training in 1-1 bible reading but needs to be linked to v11. An observable experience which gives us a handhold to the promise.

What is that handhold - as the rain transforms the earth, so God's Word transforms a soul. God has his eye on people as yet seemingly unaffected by His impact. God will speak and accomplish what he desires. He will transform lives, budding, germinating, growing beyond what we imagine – nourishing generations to come.



Discussion: Do you believe in this transformative power/speech/word?

At present in whom do you need to nourish and foster the optimism that God and His Word are what they are ultimately hungering for?

Pray for your own confidence in the transforming power of God's Word.



Leaders Notes:

Appendix 1

Appendix 2



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