



FAITH + MEDICINE

FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Vocation and The Common Good

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What is Faithful Presence?

“The Christian story matters because it animates my whole view of work.”

– Dr. Farr Curlin

Welcome to *Faithful Presence: Vocation and the Common Good*, a *formative* program designed to shape *who* you are in the workplace. Your Christian faith matters in every aspect of life, including on the job. Whether you are a high school or college student dreaming of career possibilities or already employed, this guide will forever change the way you think about and engage work. At the end of this program, you will understand why faith matters for how we work and the powerful impact that *embodied* Christianity can have for the common good.

Faithful Presence is for young people (ages 15-22) and the parents, teachers, and ministry leaders who love them. Together you will learn and put into practice faithful presence. So, what is faithful presence? This concept is developed by James Davison Hunter in his book, *To Change the World*. Practicing faithful presence means being present with others in the way that God is faithfully present with us. That might seem like a simple task, but we often struggle to live it out. Consider how our busy and distracted lives make it difficult to be fully present with others.

We live in a culture of technology that encourages disembodiment and absence. Our phones, computers, and TV screens often result in significant time in virtual reality rather than physical reality. But one of the most important ways God demonstrated faithful presence was by taking on a human body. God physically showed up. In Jesus, God came near, becoming bodily present with us. As Hunter explains, the Incarnation (a word referring to God taking on human flesh), has four key characteristics. The Incarnation shows God *pursuing* us, *identifying with* us, *offering life to* us, and *sacrificially loving* us.¹ When we imitate God by doing the same for others, we become “incarnational witnesses.” We testify of God’s faithful presence through our own actions.

¹ For more on this, see the chapter, “Toward a Theology of Faithful Presence,” in James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

What is Faithful Presence?

What does this look like more specifically? Hunter says faithful presence “seeks new patterns of social organization that challenge, undermine and otherwise diminish oppression, injustice, enmity, and corruption and, in turn, encourage harmony, fruitfulness and abundance, wholeness, beauty, joy, security, and well-being.”² In today’s modern world, so many distractions, competing viewpoints, and tragedies can challenge our belief in God or cause us to lose sight of why we exist in the first place. But when we are faithfully present to one another, the truth of the gospel becomes clear. We see and experience God’s faithfulness presence through the ways we demonstrate the same presence for each other.

Practicing faithful presence is how God intends us to live every aspect of our lives, including in the workplace. In Genesis 1, we read that God created humanity to be God’s image so that we might govern and care for the earth and all of creation (vv. 24-26). God has given us a purpose that involves the daily tasks of life and work. Regardless of your particular job, faithful presence is all about *how* you go about your work.

The workplace is where you will spend much of your life. By practicing faithful presence in our jobs, we can change the world for the better. So, as you start this formative exploration on vocation and the common good, contemplate these questions: How am I pursuing others by loving them first before they give anything to me? How am I coming near and identifying with others, even those who are different from me? How am I offering life and beauty to others? How am I sacrificially loving others? These are the characteristics of faithful presence.

² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 247.

How to Use This Guide

Learning faithful presence requires both reflection and practice. For that reason, this guide goes beyond analyzing concepts to center real life application. Ideas are important, but knowing and discussing concepts is not the same thing as *living out* those beliefs. For example, we may want to love our neighbors, co-workers, or clients well, but the ability to do so requires self-awareness and practice.

During this program, you will watch short videos of Christians who actively embody faithful presence on the job. The stories will both inspire and teach by example. Their witness will ignite your imagination with all that is possible when we apply our faith in the workplace. Accompanying the videos are daily prompts for *reflection*, *discussion*, and *practice*. These three key components are essential for integrating and applying insights from the videos. With that in mind, here are tips for using this guide.

Choose Your People

Who will be your conversational partners? While the program can be completed individually, it's best used in pairs or small groups (preferably no more than five people a group). Parents and teens/young adults are encouraged to partner together, teachers and students can go through it in pairs or small groups, and ministry leaders and young people in faith communities can enjoy the program together. Choosing conversational partners that are motivated and ready to invest in the process will yield the best outcomes.

Choose Your Schedule

The guide walks each person through *daily* reflection. Plan to take about 30 minutes a day to silently reflect, pray, and journal in response to the prompts. Your responses to the prompts will be the basis for the conversations you have with your partner or small group.

Determine how frequently you and your conversational partner(s) will meet for discussion and for what duration. The recommended minimum frequency is once a week, but it could be as often as daily. Frequency might depend on whether you live in the same home, use Zoom or meet in-person, or have a schedule determined by classroom or youth group calendars.

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The recommended minimum duration for pair discussion is 45-60 minutes if once a week (if daily, then 20-30 minutes might suffice). Recommended minimum duration for small group discussion with five members or less is 90 minutes a week (if daily, then 45-60 minutes might suffice). These are minimum times, and pairs or groups can choose longer times if desired.

Choose Your Place

Where you spend time in reflection and discussion will impact the quality of the program. Be sure to pick a place that is consistent, quiet, and distraction-free (that includes turning off and setting aside phones). You may need to consider two places—one for daily personal reflection and one for scheduled conversation time. Or you can designate a quiet zone and silently complete the personal reflections in the same space where you hold your discussion time. That approach works well if you see each other daily and could be a way to reinforce commitment to completing daily reflections.

Agree to Conversational Guidelines

Before you begin, discuss the guidelines below and make sure each person understands and consents to these boundaries. Discussions can easily go haywire without basic guidelines for conversation. Keep these in mind when you meet with your conversational partner(s).

- *Keep the main thing the main thing.* Conversation should focus directly on responses to the videos and the reflection prompts in the guide. Avoid getting sidetracked.
- *Ensure each person has equal time to share during discussion sessions.* Allow each person to share before you move into cross-talk conversation. For small groups, a “talking stick” can be helpful. This can be any variety of hand-held objects. Only the person holding the “talking stick” has the floor, and the object is passed from one person to the next in the circle. This helps to prevent interruptions and derailments. As needed, feel free to add a method of time-keeping as well.
- *Practice active listening.* Faithful presence involves being attentive to other people. Fortunately, good listening is a skill everyone can learn and improve upon. When someone is talking, give them your full attention, including facing the person and maintaining eye contact. Allow yourself to be curious about what the other

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person is saying. Listen for any emotions the person is expressing, seeking to understand their perspective. Avoid judging or imposing your own opinions on the other person's experience.

- *Practice self-disclosure.* Learning to share ourselves with others is an essential relational skill. That's true for both parent and child or teacher and student. Consider this a joint discovery process with parents/teachers participating in self-disclosure alongside teens/young adults. Many adults are still learning about faithful presence themselves and those further along can model healthy self-disclosure.
- *Avoid advice-giving.* Keep comments centered on "I" statements, reflecting your own feelings and experience, rather than giving advice to others or analyzing their responses to the prompts.
- *Maintain confidentiality.* What is shared by your conversational partner is confidential. Do not disclose what another person has shared without explicit permission. The only exception would be if a person is a physical danger to themselves or others (e.g. suicidal ideation). In that case, ask a professional for guidance.

Know Your Power

This program is only as formative as you allow it to be. You have the power to decide how much time and energy you invest, whether or not to take the process seriously, and how you will treat your conversation partners. Sometimes we think of power in association with arrogance or exploitation. But personal agency is a vital part of our existence. We can use power for good. In fact, this program is all about our faith informing and motivating our agency for the common good.

PART 1

Medicine and a God that Sees Us

Practicing faithful presence grows out of a deep understanding of how God treats us. When you internalize the truth that God sees and cares about you, then you know what it looks like to embody faithful presence with others. In this week's video "Medicine and a God that Sees Us," Christian physicians share how their faith in a loving God transforms the way they practice medicine.

Day 1

Assignment

Watch the video "Medicine and a God that Sees Us".

Reflection and Practice

1. The doctors in the video seek to imitate God by practicing faithful presence. They are the hands and feet of Christ in their workplace. What do you learn about God's character through watching the way they care for patients? Journal specific attributes that you notice, starting your sentences, "God is . . ." or "God is like . . ."
2. Take a few minutes to replay in your mind a time when someone cared compassionately for you in a time of illness or need. What does it feel like to receive compassion? Close your eyes and imagine God present and caring for you in that moment.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to grasp how much God delights in you.

Day 2

Assignment

Watch the video a second time.

Reflection and Practice

1. Faithful presence involves compassion for all people, not only friends or people we enjoy being around. What enables the doctors in the video to care for difficult patients?

Part 1: Medicine and a God that Sees Us

2. Dr. Ben Frush tells the story of meeting a “notoriously difficult patient.” What emotions did Dr. Frush feel when he first met with the client? How did Dr. Frush choose to respond, and what helped him to practice faithful presence in that moment?
3. Dr. Farr Curlin states, “When I go to work, I frequently call to mind the fact I’m going to encounter people who are coming to me in God’s image and, in a mysterious way, even as Christ himself.” As you go about your day today, intentionally look at each person you encounter as God’s image, as though you are meeting Christ himself. Then journal about it at the end of the day.

Day 3

Reflection and Practice

Dr. Patrick Smith says faithful presence involves being “attentive.” Practice attentiveness today. You can do this by listening well to what your co-worker, fellow student, or client is saying. Ask follow up questions to show you are listening and that you care. At the end of the day, journal what it was like to practice attentiveness. What were the challenges? What were the gifts?

Day 4

Reflection and Practice

Dr. Calvin Gross says sickness provides an unusual opportunity—an opportunity for close relationship and care. Try a new practice of looking for opportunity amid difficulties. Is there something bothering you? What might be the opportunity for noticing and doing good in that situation?

Optional Activity

Watch the supplemental video “What Is Beautiful in Medicine?” As you go about your day, ask yourself, “What beautiful thing is God doing?” Then pay extra attention to what is going on around you. Where do you see beauty unfolding in your day-to-day tasks?

Day 5

Assignment

Watch “Medicine and the God that Sees Us” for a third time.

Reflection and Practice

1. One of the primary challenges the doctors face in practicing faithful presence is the demanding pace of their job. Dr. Emy Yang and the other doctors discuss how efficiency and bureaucracy can threaten to overshadow relationships. How do they resist becoming mechanical and detached in their jobs? Be specific.
2. Spend time in prayer, asking God to reveal ways that you prioritize efficiency over relationships. Ask God for specific ways you can become more relationship-centered. Journal what you sense the Spirit telling you, then put that into practice this week.
3. How might you incorporate rest and rejuvenation into your daily and weekly schedule?

Day 6

Reflection and Practice

1. Hope is essential for practicing faithful presence and implementing justice, but Dr. Patrick Smith says, “Hope should not be conflated or confused with optimism.” What do you think he means by that? Do you tend to conflate hope with optimism?
2. Dr. Smith describes hope as a “deep moral vision” that is “informed by something beyond ourselves,” leading us to see where change is needed. Hope or a vision inspires us toward “individual and collective efforts to realize [bring about] the way things ought to be.” In your own community (whether on the job or at school), where do you see a need for more justice and faithful presence? Spend time daydreaming about what it might look like if things were the way they ought to be in your community. Journal your reflections and consider what concrete action God might be inviting you to.

PART 2

We Are Better Together

The needs of our communities and the world can seem overwhelming until we realize that we do not have to shoulder these burdens alone. We are better together because we look after one another, and we are better together because we can work as teams in practicing faithful presence for the common good. In the video, “We Are Better Together,” follow the staff at Lawndale Christian Health Center to see how they practice faithful presence on the job with a marginalized population. Watch as the staff lean into their faith in God for support and how they shoulder together the needs of their clients.

Day 1

Assignment

Watch the video “We Are Better Together”.

Reflection and Practice

1. Christianity matters for our work because it teaches us to care about others beyond ourselves. Dr. Alexander Porte says, “The work I’m doing, to me, does not make any sense without faith. To take a job where you are paid less, doing harder work, it all comes from how I see Christ’s sense of justice, and that Old Testament justice is always paired with how you treat the poor.” How does your Christian faith motivate you to care about others in the work you do?
2. Spend about ten minutes day dreaming about partnering with God in the work of justice. What might this look like in your own life now and in the future. Journal what comes up for you.

Day 2

Reflection and Practice

1. The Lawndale staff discuss the challenges of caring for other people’s burdens. Recall a time when you cared for someone whose needs were not easy to address. How did it make you feel? In what ways did God help you care for another when it was hard?

Part 2: We Are Better Together

2. Dr. Louisa Olushoga talks about her decision to provide care to those living in shelters who have significant psychiatric needs. What were the risks involved with taking the job? What emotions did she feel? What motivates her to do this work anyway?

Day 3

Assignment

Watch the video a second time.

Reflection and Practice

1. The Lawndale staff discuss the importance of teamwork in caring for others. As you watch the video, write down instances where you spot teamwork. What does that look like for the staff? What about teamwork with departments outside of Lawndale? Write a paragraph summarizing why teamwork is important.
2. What does teamwork look like in your own employment or as a student? Ask God to give you insight into how teamwork can help you better care for others. Then look for ways to put that into action this week.

Day 4

Reflection and Practice

Dr. Detmer uses the phrase “Incarnational work.” Write down the definition he gives, word for word, stopping the video as needed. What might incarnational work look like for you right now, whether you are employed or a student? Spend some time talking with God about your life as an incarnational witness.

Day 5

Reflection and Practice

1. Dr. Olushoga writes, “It drops me down to my knees every single time because I don’t actually feel particularly equipped to do that kind of work.” Have you ever felt inadequate in your efforts to make a difference? How did prayer help Dr. Olushoga in those times? How might prayer help you in the workplace?
2. Read and pray Psalm 46.

Day 6

Assignment

Watch the video “We Are Better Together” a third time.

Reflection and Practice

1. Dr. Olushoga talks about being honest with God about what we are feeling. She says, “I serve a God who can contain my anger, my frustration, and I don’t have to pretend that, you know, I’m happy with the things that are happening ... His love is big enough to contain that.” What are your conversations with God like? Have you felt comfortable being honest about your emotions? Why or why not?
2. Take a few minutes to reflect on the past 24 hours. What emotions have come up for you during that time? List as many different emotions as you can recall. Spend some time talking with God about what you have been feeling, then sit quietly to listen for what the Spirit might say to you.

PART 3**Offering Myself Wholeheartedly**

Practicing faithful presence in our work is about viewing our lives as part of the bigger picture of God's good plan for shalom to be the culture of the world we live in. *Shalom* is a Hebrew word in the Old Testament that means holistic well-being. In the video, "Offering Myself Wholeheartedly," we meet the remarkable Dr. Daisy Dowell. She is a role model who shows us by example what it means to practice faithful presence on the job. Dr. Dowell shares her story of humble beginnings and persevering through hardship to give herself wholeheartedly to sharing God's faithful presence with others.

Day 1**Assignment**

Watch the video "Offering Myself Wholeheartedly".

Reflection and Practice

1. What emotions come up as you listen to Dr. Daisy Dowell share her life story and where she is now?
2. In what ways does Dr. Dowell inspire you? How might she be a role model for you as you approach your own work or vocational dreams?

Day 2**Reflection and Practice**

1. How does Dr. Dowell's Christlike treatment of others reveal how God sees and cares for you? Journal as many attributes of God that you see reflected in Dr. Dowell's life. Meditate on that list of attributes, contemplating the truth of what God is like.
2. Dr. Dowell states, "The hand of God has been upon me for as long as I can remember, and He has been so good, so kind, so gracious . . . I'm just so grateful. I owe him all." Journal about how God has been present in your own life. How might that inspire you to give yourself wholeheartedly to God in your work?

Part 3: Offering Myself Wholeheartedly

3. What do you feel grateful for today? Spend time thanking God for those things. Begin a daily practice of gratitude as a way to stay inspired to embody Christ in your work.

Day 3

Assignment

Watch the video a second time.

Reflection and Practice

1. Dr. Dowell overcame many obstacles and hardships in her life to achieve her vocational goals. Write down each specific obstacle she faced. How did God help her through those hard times?
2. What obstacles have you faced, especially in pursuit of your dreams? How might her example give you perseverance in your work or vocational aspirations?

Day 4

Reflection and Practice

1. Dr. Dowell says, “There’s so much wonder and beauty in what I do.” What are some of the beautiful things she notices?
2. What beauty do you see as you go about your daily work and tasks? Be specific, journaling what you notice. Begin a practice of noticing beauty in the ordinary, even in challenging circumstances.
3. In what ways are you embodying faithful presence and bringing God’s beauty into the world within your local context? Are there specific ways you would like to bring beauty to others?

Part 3: Offering Myself Wholeheartedly

Day 5

Assignment

Watch the video “Offering Myself Wholeheartedly” a third time.

Reflection and Practice

1. What prayer does Dr. Dowell pray over the babies she encounters in her work? Write down her prayer, word for word, stopping the video as needed. Then say this prayer over yourself.
2. How might you be an answer to this prayer by bringing “real hope” to the people in your local community, including the people you see every day? Ask God to give you discernment to know how you can embody faithful presence to others in your work.

Day 6

Reflection and Practice

1. What life experiences influenced Dr. Dowell’s decision to go into medicine? What has influenced your vocational aspirations?
2. Spend some time daydreaming about what you would do if you could do any job you desired. Then draw a picture of yourself doing that (you don’t have to be an artist! Draw stick figures if you have to). How would you practice faithful presence in that job? In what ways would that work contribute to the common good?

