



FAITH + NONPROFIT

FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Vocation and The Common Good

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FAITHFUL PRESENCE

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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.

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.

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).

² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 247.

We see and experience God's faithful 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.

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

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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.

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,

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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 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

The Wound

Faithful presence is rooted in the grand story of God and humanity, one that begins full of promise but descends into hardship before a joyful ending when God restores all things. We read this story across the pages of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation. But that story comes alive in everyday life amid all the joys and challenges we face in making the world a better place. In this week's video we watch as Phoebe and Greg wrestle with difficult circumstances. The way they respond to these challenges eventually sets the direction of their vocational lives.

Day 1

Assignment

Watch the video “The Wound”.

Reflection and Practice

1. Phoebe Cade Miles, the co-founder of Cade Museum for Creativity and Invention notices the Bible's grand story begins with creativity. Read Genesis 1 and write down what you notice about God's creativity.
2. Draw, color, or paint a scene that stands out to you in Genesis 1. Don't worry if you are not an artist—enjoy the creative process! Then share your picture with God. What do you sense God saying to you in response?

Day 2

Assignment

Watch the video a second time.

Reflection and Practice

1. Not only does God create, but “all humans were made . . . to create.” Phoebe states, “We are called into God’s story to be a partner” in the work God is doing. That’s what it means to be the “image of God” (Genesis 1:26-28). How did Phoebe’s father, James Robert Cade, creatively make a positive difference in people’s lives?
2. Think about your own life. Recall a time when you developed a creative solution to a problem that was negatively impacting you or others. It can be something small that no one else noticed or a major project you worked on. Audio or video record yourself describing your experience like you are a storyteller.

Day 3

Reflection and Practice

1. Greg Bradley, founder of Mirror Image Leadership Academy, states, “God calls people to this place, and it’s not just one person.” What places have you lived in or visited? Have you ever felt like God was calling you to a particular place for a purpose? Journal and pray about the topic of place, asking God for insight.
2. In addition to place, Greg notes that God often brings many people to the same place to work together. When have you seen several people come together in one place to make a difference? Journal about that story. How does it make you feel knowing you are not alone in working for the common good?
3. This week, look for an opportunity to work together with one or more people to resolve a problem in your household, school, workplace, or community. Then share that experience with your conversational partners.

Day 4

Assignment

Watch “The Wound” for a third time.

Reflection and Practice

1. Both Phoebe and Greg thought they would leave Gainesville, Florida and never return. What hardships did each of them face that made them want to leave?
2. What motivated each of them to return anyway? What role did their Christian faith play in their decision?
3. The first time Greg heard God telling him to return Gainesville, things did not work out. But he and his family persevered, trying again a second time eight years. Journal about a situation where you persevered through difficulty and it bore good fruit. How does your faith help you to persevere?

Day 5

Reflection and Practice

1. Greg started his non-profit organization because he knows his “assignment is to help people see themselves the way that God created them to be.” How does God see you? Journal and pray honestly about what you believe God thinks of you.
2. Read Psalm 139:1-18 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. What do you learn from these verses about how God feels toward you? Using these verses, write down specific words or phrases that describe the way God responds to you.

Day 6

Reflection and Practice

1. Phoebe says her father's creative work "all started with a question." What questions do you have about particular problems or situations in your community or the world? Write down as many questions as you can within ten minutes (don't overthink it, just let the thoughts flow).
2. From the list of questions, pick one that stands out to you the most. Journal possible resolutions to that question that results in a positive impact. Ask God for insight. Also ponder why this particular question and its resolution matter to you.

PART 2

The Healing

As we enter into God's grand story of human flourishing, we increasingly realize we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. As Phoebe observes, "We're born into a story and we continue that story." We are interconnected with God and other people, working together to make a difference in the world. We don't have to invent the story on our own. Significantly, this story involves God's redemptive work. God is bringing healing to us all, even creation itself (Romans 8). That good news gives us the courage and strength to partner with God in this important work.

Day 1

Assignment

Watch the video "The Healing".

Reflection and Practice

1. Phoebe says knowing she is part of a grand story that began long before her gives her the confidence she needs to take action. Read Isaiah 58 and 1 John 4:7-21. What would it look like for you to step into this grand story and become part of it?

Part 2: The Healing

Day 2

Reflection and Practice

1. The story we step into includes Christians who have gone before us who have contributed to God's vision for the common good of all people. We stand on their shoulders. For example, Phoebe's non-profit work builds upon the contributions of her own father. Contemplate those who have gone before you, whether a parent, mentor, or Christian leader in the past. Who do you admire for the way their work contributed to God's mission of healing, justice, and love? Whose good work might you want to build upon and expand?

Day 3

Assignment

Watch the video a second time.

Reflection and Practice

1. Phoebe and her husband had a goal of creating a museum that would "support inventors and entrepreneurs" whose ideas "would ultimately change the world." Yet that dream was difficult to implement. Have you ever had a dream for making a difference that seemed too hard and overwhelming to achieve? Spend some time journaling and talking with God about that dream.
2. When Phoebe became discouraged, one thing that helped her was meditating on the life of Jesus. What story of Jesus from the Gospels inspires you to press on in your dreams of making a positive difference? Read that story, then write a prayer to God about it.

Part 2: The Healing

Day 4

Reflection and Practice

1. Greg says “without the experiences, the pain, and the set-backs” he would not be where he is today as the founder of a non-profit. What wisdom have you gleaned from hardship, failures, or set-backs? How might those experiences better prepare you for the work God has for you?
2. Phoebe observes that she ministers from her scars and not her wounds. What does she mean by that? Why is serving others from a place of healing a better approach?

Day 5

Assignment

Watch the video a second time.

Reflection and Practice

1. Scripture reading, on-going prayer, and perseverance through set-backs all played a role in Greg’s and Phoebe’s discernment of what God was calling them to do. Greg also states “I’ve never had a time in my life that I felt more at peace about what I’m doing.” Even when it required hard work to start the non-profit, he felt peace. Have you ever felt God’s peace even when something was difficult? Journal about that experience.
2. Having a dream or vision for the common good is one thing. Acting on it is another. Greg talks about how he had to go from the idea of his non-profit to stepping out in courage to act on that vision. Ask God to show you someone in need today, then take a risk to act on meeting that need.

Day 6

Assignment

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

Reflection and Practice

1. Another way Greg discerned God’s direction was through the way the non-profit vision persisted in his heart and mind over a long period of time, even after he initially abandoned the work. This persistence was reinforced by his wife who experienced the same prompting, leading them to try again. What specific desire for the common good has surfaced repeatedly in your own heart over time?
2. Phoebe came to better understand God’s call on her life by walking through her community and praying, “God, show me how you see that person or institution, and give me the same heart you have.” God opened her eyes to see what she had not seen before. This week, write down Phoebe’s prayer and begin walking through you own community, workplace, or school, saying the same prayer. What do you sense God showing you? Journal about your experience of praying this prayer

PART 3

The Purpose

Theologian Frederick Buechner once said, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Greg puts it another way: “Somewhere between your dreams and the things that give you righteous indignation is probably your purpose.” In other words, your purpose is discovered by what stirs your heart—for example, righteous indignation over suffering or injustice plus your dreams to make a positive difference in that situation. This is what God’s Kingdom is all about. This is the grand story where all things are healed and love governs everything. And you play an important role in this story.

Day 1

Assignment

Watch the video “The Purpose”.

Reflection and Practice

1. Contemplate Greg’s statement, “Somewhere between your dreams and the things that give you righteous indignation is probably your purpose.” What problems or situations in your community do you find yourself most upset about? Write down as many as come to you. Then pick the top two that have repeatedly weighed on your heart the most over a period of time, such as the past several months or years. Why do you think these two are particularly important to you?
2. Greg says our ability to imagine possibilities is important for making positive changes— “we can take creativity, we can take invention, and there’s no boundaries put around that.” In other words, the sky is the limit when it comes to creative solutions! Spend some time daydreaming possible solutions to one of the two problems you named above. Visualize yourself (like a movie in your mind) taking action to make the situation better. What specific actions do you picture yourself taking?

Part 3: The Purpose

Day 2

Assignment

Watch the video “The Purpose”.

Reflection and Practice

1. What is Greg’s purpose? How has faith played a role in his career choice? Be specific. What about Phoebe? What is her purpose, and how has faith played a role her job?
2. Many of us mistakenly believe the only way to really live out our faith is to become a pastor, missionary, or ministry leader. But Phoebe points out, “The whole world—everything in it—is the Lord’s and every career can be in service of the wider story of building the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.” What assumptions have you had about the relationship between faith and a career?

Day 3

Reflection and Practice

1. You are uniquely capable of contributing to the common good by the way God has created you. As Greg states, “We need the gift that’s in you.” What gifts and abilities do you have? Make a list of as many you can think of.
2. Ask a trusted friend and mentor to tell you what gifts and abilities they notice in you. Perhaps you and your conversational partner(s) might choose to write these down on a piece of paper to give to each other as a reminder.

Part 3: The Purpose

Day 4

Assignment

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

Reflection and Practice

1. Greg’s work involves helping youth discover “you’re created in the image and likeness of God.” Why does this self-awareness matter for the vocational futures of these youth? Why is this realization crucial for your future as well?
2. The youth in Greg’s program memorize and recite an affirmation. Stop and rewind the video to listen to it three times. Then come up with your own creative daily affirmation that you can begin memorizing. Read or recite it to your conversational partner(s).

Day 5

Reflection and Practice

1. Just as you are made in the image of God, so is everyone you meet, even people who might annoy you. God loves all of humanity, and so practicing faithful presence means acting with love toward those who are different from you. Who do you know in your school, workplace, or community that is different than you? Maybe they have a different skin color or different religious or political belief or lifestyle than you. Write down a prayer in your journal, asking God to bless this person with good things. Then find a way to show kindness to that person today or the next time you see them.

Day 6

Reflection and Practice

1. Greg and Phoebe grew up in the same town, but they have very different backgrounds and life experiences. Yet, they are working together. In fact, their differences enhance the work they do together. Write down the ways Greg and Phoebe are collaborating. Be specific. What are specific positive outcomes from their working together?
2. Greg and Phoebe remind us that we don't have to shoulder the problems in the world all by ourselves. We can carry the burdens together in creative and surprising ways. What would it look like for different groups in your community to work together on solutions that benefit everyone? Brainstorm and write down as many creative scenarios you can think of, even if it seems impossible or unrealistic to achieve. Remember, God can do more than we ask or imagine! (Eph 3:20).

