

An Altar in the World
Chapter Nine
The Practice of Carrying Water

This study guide is formatted for a small group gathering. If you choose to use it as a small group leader or as an individual, feel free to adapt it in whatever way seems meaningful to you. Enjoy!

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Lesson prep:

Work out a way to help the custodian during the gathering activity (something helpful that can be completed in 15-30 minutes) or think of some class activity that requires exertion or perseverance.

Print out song for closing and homework assignments.

Quotes and ideas worth repeating:

No task is too menial to serve as a path.

Anything that sustains life has holy dimensions too.

Related Scripture:

John 21:1-14 Miraculous catch of fish

List all the different kinds of work found (and implied) in this scripture.
(getting boat ready, making fire, fishing, cooking)

Introductions:

Report back about your Sabbath enabling activities.

What does Sabbath teach us about knowing when enough is enough? (manna)

Gathering Activity:

Help the custodian with a task at church. (wash a window; clean a kitchen or bathroom, mop, etc)

Reflection/discussion:

Tell of a time when the lights/power went out for you.

When the power went out in the snowstorm, Barbara Brown Taylor says *necessity brought us together. It was our common language, one that did not require words.* Have you had an experience of necessity bringing you into community with someone? (maybe an accident, illness or loss of income)

When the power is out, does the “power of God” have more meaning to us?
What about the “light of Christ?”

Surviving the power outage in the cold showed Barbara Brown Taylor how to live as most people in the world live, preoccupied with survival. Does being able to choose our work set us apart from those who have no choice?

Does our culture regard physical labor as the lowest kind of work?

Have you ever felt satisfied after some physical labor-working outside in a garden, cutting wood, etc?

What work do you do that sustains life?
Do you see this work as holy?

Does our church offer us any opportunities to get dirty doing hard work?

Closing:

Sing "Take My Life and Let It Be" by Frances R. Havergal

Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love,
at the impulse of thy love.

Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee;
Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King,
always, only, for my King.

Take my will and make it thine, It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is thine own, it shall be thy royal throne,
it shall be thy royal throne.

Homework:

This week when you face a task that seems like drudgery, try to see a link to how it sustains life and think of it as a spiritual practice. Choose the labor instead of resenting it.

If you pay someone who engages in physical labor on your behalf, find a way to show your appreciation for their efforts this week.

