

Leader's Guide for Joseph Sittler: Christian Living in the Real World

A Course Using the Videos: "Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation" "Spirituality Explored" "Love is not Enough"

Greetings!

This study guide is designed to help those facilitating meetings (e.g. adult forum sessions, ministerial conferences, etc.) in which the three videos of Seraphim interviews with the Rev. Dr. Joseph Sittler will be featured. While the videos can be watched and utilized separately, this guide provides a way of integrating the three conversations into one extended series over three sessions.

This packet contains both a leader's guide and then, as appendices, handouts for participants in the meetings.

To view the streaming videos, please visit <http://www.josephsittler.org/video/>

For questions or comments about this guide, or about obtaining hard copies of these videos, please contact Robert Saler at rsaler@lstc.edu.

What's in this Leader's Guide?

This guide has separate sections for each video, as well as a section of wrap-up reflections and questions at the end.

The sections are as follows:

- a). A summary of the main points in each video.
- b). Sample reactions from viewers. This course was designed in the “laboratory” that Joseph Sittler would have preferred: the parish. In numerous parishes throughout Illinois and Indiana,* viewers were asked to comment upon and raise questions about the points that Dr. Sittler makes in each of the videos. These reactions are offered as a way of “jump-starting” conversations about the videos in your own setting. *However, we do suggest asking your group for their reactions first.*
- c). Further questions for exploration.
- d). Suggestions about how each of the three videos relates to the other two in the series. While the videos need not be watched in order, this guide suggests a logical progression among the three, beginning with “**Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation,**” continuing with “**Spirituality Explored,**” and ending with “**Love is not Enough.**” Taken together and in that order, these three videos comprise a course focused on the topic of “Christian Living in the Real World.”

If you are curious about further resources from Joseph Sittler, please see www.josephsittler.org or contact the Joseph Sittler Archives at rsaler@lstc.edu

* Many thanks are due to the following congregations and assemblies for the excellent feedback that shaped the “Reactions” sections: Trinity Lutheran Church in Valparaiso, IN; Trinity Lutheran in Olney, IL; St. Paul Lutheran Church in Villa Park, IL; First Lutheran Church of the Trinity in Chicago, IL; The Northwest Indiana Ministerium of the ELCA; and Zion Lutheran Church in Tinley Park, IL.

General Introduction to the Series: “Christian Living in the Real World”

The Rev. Dr. Joseph Sittler (1904-1987) was deeply concerned with the question of what Christian theology, ethics, and spirituality have to do with the “real world” in which we live out our lives and vocations. As a theologian, he of course was interested in the *meaning* of Christian teachings; however, his focus was not simply on what these meanings might have to do with Sunday morning but also with how they impact, say, Tuesday afternoon at work, with our families, in our lives as citizens of God’s planet. He was known to supplement his essays on such weighty theological matters as the Trinity, eschatology, and the nature of Jesus with theological reflections upon the significance of Polish sausage and beer at his favorite neighborhood pub! For Sittler, no part of human life is without theological significance; everything points to the fact that, as he liked to say, “the human was made for transcendence.”

The following is a biography of Sittler adapted from the website www.josephsittler.org :

He was born in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, on September 26, 1904, the son of a Lutheran pastor (also named Joseph) and a remarkable woman, Minnie Vieth Sittler. He was a graduate of Wittenberg College and the Hamma Divinity School and began his career in the ordained ministry as pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Cleveland, Ohio. For most of his life, however, he was a Professor of Theology, first at the Chicago Lutheran Seminary in Maywood, Illinois, then at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. He ended his nearly 58-year career as theologian with fifteen years of association with the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC); that association included the title of Distinguished Professor in Residence.

The biographical statement in the bulletin for the Service of Thanksgiving for his life, at LSTC in January of 1988, well summarizes his varied and rich contributions to theology: “Significant areas of his impact can only be enumerated: a leading member of the Commission on Faith and Order, the highest theological council of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in which capacity he gave the keynote address (‘Called to Unity’) to the Third Assembly of the WCC in 1961 in New Delhi; an important contributor to the theological self-understanding of the Lutheran Church in America, especially its Confession of Faith (*The Doctrine of the Word in the Structure of Lutheran Theology*, 1948); a commentator upon literature, architecture, classical and jazz music, science, and ecology; a theologian concerned with ecology long before it became a popular

theme (*The Care of the Earth*, 1964, *Essays on Nature and Grace*, 1972); a profoundly feminist thinker; he gave theological foundation to the situational approach to Ethics (*The Structure of Christian Ethics*, 1958). In the late 1950's, he was featured in a Life magazine article as one of America's "Ten Most Influential Theologians."

He was a preacher to the intellectual community without peer. In his prime, he was said to have been the single most sought after university and college preacher in America. He gave both the Beecher Lectures at Yale (*The Ecology of Faith*, 1961), and the Noble Lectures at Harvard, both devoted to preaching. Many of his preaching themes are included in his later books, *Grace Notes and Other Fragments* (1981), and *Gravity and Grace* (1986)."

But such a statement cannot begin to capture the transcendent humanity of Joseph Sittler. He delighted in Polish sausage and beer (and conversation!) at [Jimmy's](#), an "establishment" close to the University of Chicago and LSTC. He saw theological significance in the most ordinary activities of common folk in everyday life. He relished encounters with all sorts of people and never conveyed any hint of condescension. He had a marvelous sense of humor and could be astonishingly frank without ever offending. As his eyesight failed in later life, he drew on an amazing store of memorized poetry and literature, and he continued to carry on a vast correspondence with all sorts and conditions of people – he was never too busy to neglect noting some important event in the life of a friend or colleague. He and his wife Jeanne, herself a fine musician and composer, raised six children. Sittler died on December 28, 1987.

The three sessions of this study will trace a path through three video interviews between Sittler and his close friend, the Rev. Robert Herhold. These interviews highlight three themes which were essential to Sittler's views on Christian living:

- 1). **Prayer** – The Ultimate Conversation with a Grace-ful Partner
- 2). **Spirituality** – Christian Freedom to Tackle the Big Questions
- 3). **Justice** – Christ-centered Ethics in a World Crying for Justice

This guide assumes that the three videos will be used as part of a three-session series. Notes and suggestions for relating the three videos can be found at the end of each video summary. If you would rather use just one or two of the videos, please feel free to pick and choose which of the points in the following guide are most helpful to you.

Suggestions for Leading the Discussion Sessions

The following is a sample outline of how the leader might go about creating a comfortable environment for attendees to engage and understand Sittler's points, as well as to offer their own points of view on the material.

The assumption is that each session will last approximately one hour. If the session is longer, use the extra time for discussion (see steps 7 and 8).

Materials needed:

- The appropriate Sittler video (available from www.josephsittler.org)
- Equipment upon which to play the video
- A blackboard or dry erase board (optional)
- Pens or pencils with which participants may write down their reactions/questions.

Before the session:

- Look over the appropriate "Leader's Guide" to each video and watch the video yourself. Think about which themes from the videos/summaries (section "a" of the guide) might speak most helpfully to the needs of your setting. What parts of Dr. Sittler's comments strike a chord with what you and your faith community have been facing recently?
- Arrange the discussion room in a manner that makes group conversation comfortable.
- Set up the appropriate audio-video material with which to watch the video.
- Make sure that you have enough participant handouts and pens/pencils for each member of the group to have one.

Session Outline:

Step 1: Group introductions

- If attendees do not know each other, take a few minutes for each person to introduce herself or himself. This will help facilitate group openness and sharing.

Step 2: Christian Living in the Real World (~ 5 minutes)

- Discuss the question: what are the challenges for living out Christian faith in our daily lives? In our workplaces? In our families/relationships? You could choose to write these down, either on a piece of paper or on the blackboard/chalkboard.

Step 3: Distribute copies of participant handouts for the appropriate session (see appendix to this guide)**Step 4: Introduce Joseph Sittler (~3 minutes)**

- Take a few minutes and review Sittler's biography, using either the shorter biography found on the participant handout sheets or the longer biography found on pages 3-4 of your leader's guide.

Step 5: Introduce the video of the day, ask participants to watch for key themes (~1 minute)

- Call attention to the "Key Themes" section of the participant handouts and ask participants to be on the lookout for when they come up in the discussion. This will help orient participants to the video and facilitate discussion later.

Step 6: Watch the video (each video lasts for approximately 25 minutes)**Step 7: Ask for participant reactions to the video (~10 minutes)**

- Ask participants to write down a few questions or reactions to the video on the appropriate section of the handout (the "What else did you hear that stuck with you?" section and the "Reactions" section).
- Ask the group to share aloud their reflections or questions. It may be helpful to write down questions or reactions on the board.
- If it helps get conversation going, you may choose to supplement the group's reactions with the "sample reactions" found in section "b" of each session's leader's guide.
- Spend some time in the group discussing the questions and reflections.
Be flexible – allow the sessions to go where the group wants them to go!

Step 8: If the group has not generated questions of its own, or if you would like to change the course of the conversation, ask one or more of the "discussion questions" on the participant handout (also in section "c" of the leader's guide) (~10 minutes)

- You may choose to read all of the questions in order to see which one(s) spark participant reactions, or you may choose to pick just one or two questions.

Step 9: If this session is part of the three-session series, use section “d” of the leader’s guide to suggest how the themes of the day’s video relate to the other two (~3 minutes).

- This will help summarize the day’s discussion as well as prepare/remind participants of the connections between the three videos.
- You may read aloud the entirety of section “d,” or summarize it for the group.

Step 10: At the end of the third and final session, read the “Conclusion” on pgs. 16-17 of this guide as a way of wrapping up the entire series. Be sure to let people know that they can find more resources from Sittler at www.josephsittler.org

Session One Leader Guide: *Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation*

a). Summary

In this video, Dr. Sittler offers his perspective on the purpose and benefits of prayer. His concern is that, too often, Christians think of prayer as a kind of “vending machine” to get whatever we want from God; not only is this view of prayer not helpful, it is inadequate to the witness of the Bible. Sittler thus turns to four stories from the Bible (the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1; the story of the death of King David’s son in 2 Samuel; Paul’s comments about his affliction in 2 Corinthians 12; and the Gospels’ account of Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane) to show that, from the Bible’s perspective, the *good* of prayer is not dependent upon the *outcome* of prayer. Rather, it is in the act of praying itself that we open ourselves to conversation with God and thus receive the benefits of prayer. Sittler envisions prayer as “the ultimate conversation with the ultimate conversation partner,” one who, like no one else, knows the thoughts of our hearts and is one “to whom all desires are known and from whom no secrets are hid.” This conversation need not happen during times when we are *feeling* particularly pious, since, as Dr. Sittler comments, “prayer can emerge from dirt.” It is the fact of the conversation itself that makes prayer such a vital part of Christian life.

Some key points for discussion might include:

- i. Sittler being against a “parking-lot” or “vending-machine” God
- ii. Prayer not a “lubricant” for our own desires
- iii. The belief that we cannot be angry with God is a “wrong idea”
- iv. It is good that God does not give us all that we want.
- v. Prayer is the “ultimate conversation” with one “to whom all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hid” – how good it is that it is God who knows our secrets!

b). Sample Reactions (be sure to ask for participant reactions first!)

“Sittler has such a pastoral presence. You can tell that he really cares about the church.”

“The idea that the value of prayer is not tied to the outcome of prayer is something that a lot of Christians have never heard before.”

“His ideas might help free some people up for more fearless prayer.”

“Some of the greatest mishaps of my life have come from ‘answered’ prayers! He’s right that it is good that God does not always give us exactly what we want.”

“What are we praying for when we pray for the healing of someone with terminal cancer? A miracle? Peace of mind? Wholeness? Something else?”

“I bet that Sittler would be dismayed by the rise and flourishing of the ‘prosperity gospel,’ which says that if you are pious and pray enough then God will bless you with worldly riches.”

c). Questions for Reflection:

- 1). Dr. Sittler thinks that the woman in his story at the beginning of the video is wrong to pray for a parking space for her job. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 2). How do Dr. Sittler’s reflections here resonate with your experience of prayer? Where do you agree? Where might you disagree, or add more details?
- 3). Have you had an experience where you felt that the good of your prayers was independent of the outcome of your prayer?
- 4). What might it mean to pray for something that seems impossible (e.g. recovery from a terminal illness)? Does the church, in your experience, do a good job with this type of prayer? Why or why not?

d). Suggestions for how “Prayer: The Ultimate Conversation” relates to the other two videos.

The other two videos in this series (“Spirituality Explored” and “Love is not Enough”) have a great deal to do with what we might call “Christian living in the real world.” That is, they are about what it might mean for us as modern individuals who bring a whole host of worldviews (scientific, global, etc.) to bear upon the gospel message to incorporate God’s message of grace into our daily experiences at work, with our families, in our spending, and so on. As we venture on into those tough questions, we do well to remember that at the core of Christian living is the opportunity to have “the ultimate conversation with the ultimate conversation partner.” This sort of prayer is the cornerstone of Christian spirituality and ethics.

Much of the freedom of prayer comes from the fact that, as Dr. Sittler says, our prayer does not depend upon us working ourselves up to a pious or holy-feeling state; rather, we can seek out conversation from the depths of our experience no matter where we are or how we are feeling at the time. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves; there is nothing about our lives that is not the proper subject matter of prayer. Freedom to pray is essential to the freedom of Christian living. It

allows us to ask the “big questions” and take the risks of Christian justice with the knowledge that all our strivings are supported by a fundamentally gracious presence that not only does not discourage us from asking the hard questions of life and faith, but in fact compels us to enter them without fear.



Session Two Leader Guide: *Spirituality Explored*

a). Summary

In this wide-ranging conversation, Dr. Sittler takes on the question, “What is spirituality?” Rather than limit the term to Christian usage, Sittler refers to spirituality as the sense, common to many religions as well as non-religious views, that the world is charged with a certain kind of deep meaning. Sittler thinks that the recent hunger for discussion/courses on “spirituality” at, for instance, Protestant seminaries reflects the fact that the contemporary minister is so “macerated” by various administrative responsibilities that he or she does not have the time or energy to focus on the key things to which ministers are ordained: word and sacrament.

A major interest of Sittler’s in this video is language: the ways in which the language that Christians use, say, in worship do or do not match up with contemporary experience. Sittler suggests that much of the language that Christians use in worship and preaching remains *local* (e.g. “God is our father,” “Israel is God’s people,” “the church is the body of Christ”) while contemporary experience is increasingly *global* and even *cosmic* in scale. As he says several times in the video, local language “is not wrong, but it is no longer adequate.” He thinks that the fact that our Christian language has, in some respects, become too “small” to describe reality is one of the reasons why the church has a hard time getting its claims across to contemporary people formed in the cosmic scientific worldview. The good news, however, is that within the Christian message itself are the tools for having the language of faith swing in a wider arc: the creeds, for instance, affirm that God and Christ are intimately involved in the creation and sustaining of all that is.

Sittler believes that these wider arcs of language and thinking are accessible to Christianity as long as we understand that “spirituality” is as much a matter of thinking as it is of experience. He is suspicious of those who would claim that we somehow have to turn off our brains in order to have “spiritual” experiences; rather, it is in the labor of thinking deeply about matters of faith and contemporary truths that we gain a greater appreciation for spiritual realities. There is no “cerebral bypass” that increases our capacity for spirituality! Greater study of the world leads to greater awe in the face of it, and this is a spiritually powerful reaction.

Some key points for discussion might include:

- i. The need for contemporary ministers to focus more on continued study of the Bible, theology, and sacraments rather

than allowing themselves to be “cut into a million pieces” by administrative duties.”

- ii. The ways in which our Christian language in worship, prayer, teaching, etc. might need to “expand” to encompass the scope of contemporary science.
- iii. The manner in which some aspects of contemporary life (e.g. commercials, television, etc.) have the tendency to dull our wonderment at the natural world.
- iv. What kinds of worldviews does this generation bring to the gospel as it is proclaimed in church? What resources do Christians have for tailoring their language to an appropriate “size” to match contemporary experience?

b). Sample Reactions (be sure to ask for participant reactions first!)

“What might the Apostles’ Creed sound like in more modern language?”

“I’m glad that he doesn’t define spirituality in terms of ‘mountaintop’ experiences, because I’ve never had one myself. I’ve never thought about the idea that study in a bookstore could be just as spiritual as meditating in a desert somewhere.”

“Sittler seems very comfortable with ambiguity. Is faith more about having answers or more about being able to live knowing that you’ll never have absolute certainty? How can we live with ambiguity in a graceful way? I’m a marriage counselor, and I’ve often told the people with whom I’m working that being able to live with ambiguity is one of the main keys to mental health.”

“Are Christians always appearing afraid or reactionary in the media? Are Christians today called to bear witness to a spirit of openness towards life’s ambiguities in a way that demonstrates our fundamental confidence in the sufficiency of God’s grace to the world?”

c). Questions for Reflection:

- 1). Lutherans affirm that, according to the priesthood of all believers, we are **all** “ministers” in one form or another. Do you feel “macerated” in your vocational life? How so? What might it take to change this?
- 2). What are the scientific issues that are changing the way we view the world? What about political/social/cultural issues? What impact do these have on Christian faith?

- 3). What causes the “dullness” or loss of awe in daily life? What can the church do to foster this sense of awe?
- 4). Is Sittler right that study and learning can be pathways to spiritual experience? Why or why not?
- 5). How might Sittler react to one who claims to be “spiritual, but not religious?”

d). Suggestions for how “Spirituality Explored” relates to the other two videos.

With prayer as the grace-filled foundation of Christian living (as discussed in the first session), we are free to engage in the task of taking on the need for expanding our vocabulary, incorporating new insights, and entering into the most vexing modern questions of human existence without feeling that we have somehow lost our moorings in God’s grace. Christian spirituality is the search for a concept of God that is “big enough,” “expanded in scope” enough to speak to contemporary experience.

A close friend of Sittler’s, Melvin George, was once asked why he thought that Sittler was able to maintain such a pastoral presence and sense of calm during debates about very weighty topics (e.g. aging, death, the environmental crisis, etc.). Dr. George responded, “Joe always gave the impression that one could wrestle with the toughest questions without fear; since, no matter what answer one might come up with, God’s grace was still there as the foundation of human life.” This sort of spirituality – the freedom to be immersed in tough questions – will become especially relevant when we turn to the issues of justice and Christian ethics in the next session.

Session Three Leader Guide: *Love is Not Enough*

a). Summary

This interview begins with Robert Herhold asking Sittler what he means by the phrase “love is not enough.” Sittler responds by asking us to consider two issues of great magnitude: the billions of people on planet Earth living in hunger, and the threat of annihilation from nuclear weapons. Sittler posits that, while it is possible to have an emotional reaction to a relatively small problem that is immediately in front of us, it is harder for us to have any kind of great reaction to problems that seem so large as to be out of scale with our daily experience (notice the same theme that was present in the last video: the “size” or “scale” of our language!). He suggests that there seems to be an inverse relationship between the size of a problem and that problem’s ability to evoke a visceral reaction in us.

Sittler goes on to wonder, then, how Jesus can *command* his disciples to love one another when love as we know it is a feeling that we cannot command ourselves to have. He suggests that the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is not an emotional reaction, but rather recognition of the fundamental demand for justice occurring all over the world. Thus, if “love” is confined to a kind of sentimental feeling, then “love is not enough” to address the world’s demand for healing and justice; in fact, “love” in this sense can be what Sittler calls a kind of pious “analgesic” that obscures our own complicity in the world’s injustices. However, if love is defined in terms of justice or, as Sittler calls it, “love operating at a distance,” then that is the kind of love to which Christians are called.

Sittler argues that, while our money and goods act as a kind of “blubberous insulation” between ourselves and the world’s pain, Christians are called to enact “love operating at a distance” and work towards justice. We cannot be self-satisfied when we deign to include others in the circle of full humanity; we must recognize the *existing* humanity in all whom God has made. This begins with a fundamental recognition that all humanity is God’s humanity, and we do not have the right to decide whether or not other humans are entitled to the sort of basic standard of living that most of us in the United States possess – they are so entitled, and to work for this kind of equity is the substance of Christian ethics. This means giving up the kinds of worldly security that comes with wanting “just a little bit more than I presently have,” and embracing what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls “the cost of discipleship” in the world today.

Some key points for discussion might include:

- i. Sittler’s point concerning the difficulty of evoking a visceral reaction to problems so large that they render us seemingly helpless (e.g. nuclear warfare, world hunger, etc.).

- ii. Sittler's sense that, if "love" is defined as a sentimental emotion, then it makes no sense for Jesus to have commanded it; however, if love means justice ("love operating at a distance"), then Jesus not only can but indeed does both command and model such a love.
- iii. The ways in which thinking about justice in these terms can inform our sense of what discipleship means in modern life (for instance, how does it influence our consumer habits? Our sense of mission in the world? Our feelings about national security? And so on...)

b). Sample Reactions (be sure to ask for participant reactions first!)

"I was hungrier for specifics. Why was he so resistant to suggesting, for instance, specific numbers of how much we should give to world mission? I suppose that there are a few reasons. He probably doesn't want to become outdated; also, maybe he doesn't want to lose the question by rushing too quickly to one-size-fits-all answers. In fact, maybe a diversity of answers is not only tolerable but appropriate."

"How political should Christians be in working for justice?"

"Maybe we should be more attentive to how secular measures by non-Christians can sometimes seem more in line with what Jesus would want than the actions of "Christian" politicians or churchgoers."

"Sittler uses family as an example of love that comes easy to us, but I would want to tell him that sometimes I have a harder time loving my family than a person in Africa whom I've never met!"

"I think that Jesus would want us to move past the rhetoric of a lot of today's politics and activism. So much is polarizing – 'this is good, that is evil,' and so on."

c). Questions for Reflection:

1). In this video, Sittler has several reflections on "distance." Justice is "love operating at a distance," while distance is also the thing that we can buy from others (e.g. a house in the country away from others, box seats at a baseball game, etc.). What was your reaction to these thoughts?

2). What's the link between individual responsibility and national responsibility when it comes to problems like world hunger? What is the role of Christian convictions in global politics, activism, peace movements, etc.?

3). What was your reaction to Sittler's notion that sometimes "love" can be a kind of cop-out in relation to the demands of justice?

d). Suggestions for how "Love is Not Enough" relates to the other two videos.

We emphasized in the second session how Sittler thought that Christian freedom means freedom to tackle the big questions without fear, since we are confident that a grace-ful God stands with us.

Concrete questions about ethics and justice, particularly when they extend to politics and global affairs, are risky and complex. Therefore, our struggling with the demand – coming from both the world and our Lord Jesus Christ – that we Christians engage in "love operating at a distance" towards all in need requires courage to face the ambiguities and uncertainties that always accompany ethical action. There are no easy answers, and there are likely no perfect solutions. However, with prayer at the center and the courage to risk taking on life's complexities with a freedom born of the gospel, we can seek to live out the command to work for justice wherever our life vocations might take us.



Conclusion: Three Foundations for Christian Living in the Real World

PRAYER – the foundation that assures grace and frees us for Christian living.

SPIRITUALITY – the fearless wrestling with life’s ambiguities that is both mandated and supported by the need to speak the gospel in language “big enough” for our modern ears.

JUSTICE – the living out of the Lord’s command to love, not just affectively but “at a distance” through justice. Obedience to this command is yet another sign of our confidence in God’s grace.

As several people have observed after watching these videos, Joseph Sittler doesn’t always leave us with concrete or specific answers to the nitty-gritty questions in life– “What job should I work? How much money should I give? How do I balance work, family, and prayer?” Instead, what he does is to get us to think about our lives in fresh theological ways – “How do my choices reflect my sense of God’s presence in the world? What small part of global justice might I be a part of in my vocation? Which parts of my thinking and speaking about God need to change, and what can stay the same?” You could say that, for Sittler, keeping the questions alive is just as important as coming to any kind of provisional answers. This is the nature of faith.

Sittler, as we have emphasized several times in this series, was quite comfortable with ambiguity. An honest recognition that we do not always have the truth clearly is a thousand times closer to the truth than a false sense of certainty. For him, the key to living peacefully with the uncertainties of life is the certainty of God’s grace towards all that God has made – the earth, humanity, and history.

For more Sittler-related resources and information, please visit www.josephsittler.org

Appendix: Handouts for Participants

The following are three two-page handouts that the leader may choose to distribute to participants in the meetings. These contain condensed versions of the biography, a partial list of key themes, and questions.

These handouts are designed to be used as part of the three-session course. Each video's handout does not reference the other videos; the leader may use the suggestions in section "d" of each session's leader guide to help participants relate the videos to one another.



Joseph Sittler
Prayer, the Ultimate Conversation

Biography: Joseph Sittler (1904-1987) was a famous Lutheran theologian who taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. His numerous books and articles explored the topics of biblical interpretation, Lutheran theology, ecology and environmental concerns, art, film, and aging, to name just a few.

Key Themes:

Problems with a “parking-lot God.”

“Her countenance was lifted, even though she didn’t get what she wanted.”

“Prayer is not some lubricant to get whatever our hearts desire.”

“Prayer can emerge from dirt.”

“How wonderful it is that we can pray to the One ‘to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.’”

“Prayer is the ultimate conversation with the ultimate conversation partner.”

What else did you hear that stuck with you?

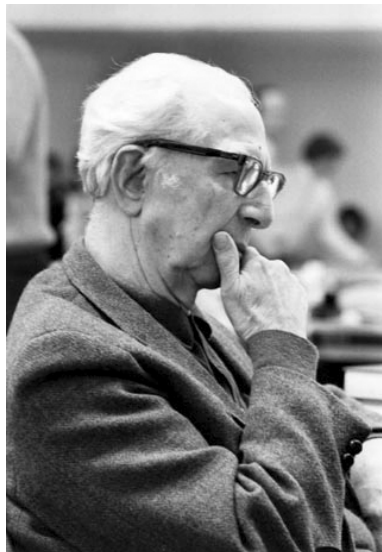
Reactions: What were some of your reactions to the video?

Questions

1). Dr. Sittler thinks that the woman in his story at the beginning of the video is wrong to pray for a parking space for her job. Do you agree? Why or why not?

- 2). How do Dr. Sittler's reflections here resonate with your experience of prayer? Where do you agree? Where might you disagree, or add more details?
- 3). Have you had an experience where you felt that the good of your prayers was independent of the outcome of your prayer?
- 4). What might it mean to pray for something that seems impossible (e.g. recovery from a terminal illness)? Does the church, in your experience, do a good job with this type of prayer? Why or why not?

What other questions did you have?



Joseph Sittler
Spirituality Explored

Biography: Joseph Sittler (1904-1987) was a famous Lutheran theologian who taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. His numerous books and articles explored the topics of biblical interpretation, Lutheran theology, ecology and environmental concerns, art, film, and aging, to name just a few.

Key Themes:

A hunger for spirituality among Protestants

The danger of a “macerated ministry”

A lot of our language about God is local, even though our scientific worldview has become cosmic in scope. Such language “is not wrong, but it is no longer adequate.”

Spirituality is as much about thinking as it is about “experience.”

A sense of wonder is crucial. So much of our wonder at the world has been “dulled.”

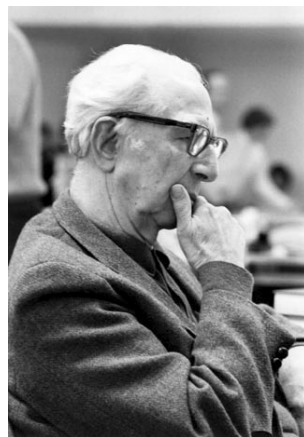
What else did you hear that stuck with you?

Reactions: What were some of your reactions to the video?

Questions

- 1). Lutherans affirm that, according to the priesthood of all believers, we are **all** “ministers” in one form or another. Do you feel “macerated” in your vocational life? How so? What might it take to change this?
- 2). What are the scientific issues that are changing the way we view the world? What about political/social/cultural issues? What impact do these have on Christian faith?
- 3). What causes the “dullness” or loss of awe in daily life? What can the church do to foster this sense of awe?
- 4). Is Sittler right that study and learning can be pathways to spiritual experience? Why or why not?
- 5). How might Sittler react to one who claims to be “spiritual, but not religious?”

What other questions did you have?



Joseph Sittler
Love is Not Enough

Biography: Joseph Sittler (1904-1987) was a famous Lutheran theologian who taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. His numerous books and articles explored the topics of biblical interpretation, Lutheran theology, ecology and environmental concerns, art, film, and aging, to name just a few.

Key Themes:

An “inverse relationship” between the size of a problem (like world hunger) and the ability of that problem to evoke an emotional reaction from us

If love as an emotion cannot be commanded, why does Jesus command his disciples to love one another?

Love, as a “feeling,” is not enough.

The notion of “love” can sometimes be overly sentimental and can hide the demand from our Lord that we treat each other with *justice*.

We often use our possessions and our riches to distance ourselves from one another.

Justice is “love operating at a distance.”

What else did you hear that stuck with you?

Reactions: What were some of your reactions to the video?

Questions

- 1). In this video, Sittler has several reflections on “distance.” Justice is “love operating at a distance,” while distance is also the thing that we can buy from others (e.g. a house in the country away from others, box seats at a baseball game, etc.). What was your reaction to these thoughts?
- 2). What’s the link between individual responsibility and national responsibility when it comes to problems like world hunger? What is the role of Christian convictions in global politics, activism, peace movements, etc.?
- 3). What was your reaction to Sittler’s notion that sometimes “love” can be a kind of cop-out in relation to the demands of justice?

What other questions did you have?

