



JOSEF PIEPER'S

LEISURE, THE BASIS OF CULTURE

A Study Guide for Groups
and Individuals

AMY FISCHER



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amy@aroundthethicket.com

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Understand. Engage. Grow.

This study guide is designed to help you achieve three goals. First, to **understand** the arguments of Josef Pieper's essay *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. Second, to **engage** with the themes of the essay by relating them to your personal context. Third, to **grow** as a person by working through a stretching book and deep principles. With these goals in mind, each chapter is divided into four sections: *comprehend*, *consider*, *consolidate*, *contemplate*.

Comprehend

For each chapter, begin by reading the introduction provided in the study guide. This section gives a very broad outline what you will soon read. It may feel like a spoiler to read what the author will be writing about; however, having a feel for the structure of the chapter will help you organize your thoughts and make it easier to recall them later.

After the introduction, follow the prompts in the rest of the *Comprehend* section. This will include directions to read the chapter, note any confusing or curiosity-striking phrases you would like to look up, and then develop an outline of the chapter. You can look things up as you go or return to this list after reading the chapter.

Strive to draft your chapter outline after one reading, without looking back at the text. This can take the form of a traditional, roman-numeral outline, a written narration, or another structure that challenges you to

produce a complete summary of the chapter. Your goal is to develop a comprehensive overview or paraphrase of the chapter.

Doing this activity from memory will have two benefits: it is an efficient way to remember the content of the chapter in the long-term, and it will expose where you do not fully understand the content.

If you find it difficult to recall much from the chapter after one reading, then you might consider reading one section at a time and then making notes for that section.

After doing this from memory, you may wish to read the chapter a second time, possibly on another day. This will let you fill in the gaps of your understanding and add in what you missed in your first outline.

Consider

The *Consider* questions that follow are designed to help you think through the content more deeply. Often the questions will challenge you to put the content into a present-day context, or will give you the opportunity to answer questions Pieper himself asks in the text.

Consolidate

After outlining and discussing the content of the chapter, the *Consolidate* section provides space to briefly summarize the chapter and note down a key takeaway or a favorite quote. For the chapter summary, it may be helpful to imagine you are writing to a friend. If you can teach it, you understand it.

This differs from the *Comprehend* section in a few ways. Your summary of the chapter should be much shorter and convey the principle theme and argument of the chapter, where the *Comprehend* section will be longer and include more detail.

It may be helpful to think of our long-term memory as a warehouse full of shelves, with a file box for each memory. The goal of the *Comprehend* section create well-organized notes about the chapter that we can file, where the purpose of the *Consolidate* section is to write a useful label on the box so that we can find it when we need it.

Contemplate

Each chapter ends with several prompts for contemplation. These topics are related to the content and will encourage you to think about the content in your own, personal context and even apply it. You may wish to write out your thoughts in another journal or notebook, talk about them with a friend, or simply enjoy time thinking about your responses quietly.

Recommendations for Group Discussion

Whether you are discussing the book in its entirety in one meeting, or meeting separately for each chapter, this workbook can be used to guide conversation. While ideally all participants would complete this workbook, you as a leader will gain plenty from using it to prepare for your meeting, even if your group members do not complete the workbook.

Either way, you can use the format of the study guide to organize your discussion.

- **Comprehend:** Ask one or two members to summarize the chapter.
- **Consider:** Pose one or more questions from the Consider section, depending on the time you have available. The questions are designed to be open ended and foster dialogue between members. To extend conversation, you can also ask members whether they agree with the author's reasoning and argument, and why or why not.
- **Consolidate:** Wrap up the conversation by offering members the opportunity to share a key takeaway or favorite quote, along with why it stood out to them.
- **Contemplate:** Encourage members to discuss any personal application they have made from their reading. You may decide to close your session with a few minutes of quiet reflection and worship.

CHAPTER 1

Pieper begins *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* by anticipating an objection to discussing leisure: now, rebuilding after World War II, simply is not the right time. The first chapter addresses this objection. Firstly, he argues, if the culture will be rebuilt on the Western tradition,

It is essential to begin by reckoning with the fact that one of the foundations of Western culture is leisure (p. 20).

Second, we have lost an understanding of the ancient concept of leisure and have been so influenced by capitalist ideology that it is difficult for us to regain that understanding.

Pieper then goes on to argue that the ancient understanding of leisure remains important to us in modern times, because it demonstrates to what extent our conception of the nature and purpose of man has changed because of

the notion of work in its modern form, spreading, as it does, to include the whole of human activity and even of human life (p. 22).

Comprehend

Read Chapter One, paying attention to the structure of the chapter. Use this space to make a note of any words or references which you feel prevent you from grasping the meaning of the text. You may wish to write down any definitions or illuminating information you can find about the items on your list, either as you are reading, or after you finish the chapter.

Briefly summarize the objection that Pieper introduces at the beginning of Chapter One.

Outline Pieper's comparisons between the ancient and medieval tradition of leisure and the modern world of total work. You may wish to divide the page into two columns with notes on leisure in one column, and total work in the other.

Outline Pieper's argument for why the world of antiquity should matter in modern culture. Include the conclusions he draws about the necessity of examining "the notion of work in its modern form" (p. 22).

After outlining what you remember from your first reading, reread the chapter and update your outline with missing information.

Consider

We are no longer in the post-World War II era, and much has changed since Pieper first published this essay. Is it still a time to talk about leisure? Do Pieper's arguments still hold today?

What evidence do you see in our culture of prejudice “that comes from overvaluing the sphere of work” (p. 20)?

Based on your reading in this chapter, develop a rudimentary definition of *leisure*. Keep in mind Pieper's discussions on *skole*, the liberal and servile arts, and the contrast of leisure with the world of "total work".

Consolidate

Write a short summary of Chapter One. Answer as if a friend asked you what the chapter is about.

Make a note of a key takeaway, application point or a favorite quote.

Contemplate

- Take time to consider whether it is now a time for you to talk about leisure *personally*. What cultural and personal beliefs influence your answer?
- Reflect on how you spent your time over the last week: work, leisure, something else? Ponder the motivations driving your actions.
- In a quiet moment, pray that God would help you come to a right understanding of the nature and purpose of mankind.
- Contemplate your key takeaway or favorite quote from the chapter.

Thank you for previewing the *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* Study Guide. To purchase, please visit <http://aroundthethicket.com/leisure>.

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