



His Story, Our Stories:

Encountering God through Our Work

In Matthew 22:37, Jesus instructs his followers to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This invitation challenges anyone who desires to follow Christ to live for him in every area of life--in our moral choices and family relationships, but also in our daily work.

But what does it look like to bring our whole heart, soul, and mind to our work? How can our work express our love for God?

Recently, *Christianity Today* ran a series of articles authored by Chris Horst and Denver Institute for Faith & Work CEO Jeff Haanen exploring these very questions. In a series of interviews with a business leader, investment banker, factory owner, hotel housekeeper, entrepreneur, and educator, Horst and Haanen observe how this diverse group of professionals integrates faith into their work.

This study is intended to be used by small groups. Group leaders can send the article to participants before the week before the gathering and use the story as fodder for group discussion in person. Discussion guides are included to facilitate conversation about God’s intent for our work in the world.

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As you learn from these faithful followers of Christ, we pray you will be challenged and equipped to approach your daily work in new ways. May God empower you to love him with your whole heart, soul, and mind through your work!

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LIGHT for ELECTRICIANS

by Jeff Haanen

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“Come, let me show you around.”

As we rise from the conference table, Karla Nugent—cofounder of Weifield Group Contracting, a commercial electrical company in Denver—leads me into the pre-fabrication shop. Coils, wires, and electrical boxes are being assembled for installation. The only woman in the room of more than a dozen men, Nugent introduces me to employee Justin Hales.

“Electrical work is art,” Hales, an electrician’s apprentice, tells me. “Two years ago, they put me on the platform at Union Station. I would lay out the floors, locate everything, like a switch or outlet on the wall.”

“When you turn your pipes, make them uniform—that’s art.” He pauses. “It probably goes unnoticed to the average person, but we see it. We take pride in our work.”

Nugent co-founded Weifield in 2002 alongside three business partners. Since then, the company has grown to 250 employees and has emerged at the forefront of electrical construction. For example, Weifield was behind the Net Zero, a LEED-Plat-

inum research facility at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colorado. It’s one of the most energy-efficient buildings in the world, operating solely on power generated at the building site.

Denver’s business community took notice of Nugent because of her philanthropy. As leader of sales, marketing, and human resources, she’s created a culture of generosity at Weifield. The company donates to more than 30 nonprofits in the city, including organizations that support women, veterans, at-risk youth, and the urban poor. Employees join in the generosity as well, taking bike rides to raise money for MS and building houses for Habitat for Humanity on company time.

In 2014, Nugent won the Denver Business Journal’s Corporate Citizen of the Year Award as well as the award for Out-



standing Woman in Business for architects, engineers, and construction.

But light began to flood into Weifield when, several years ago, Nugent decided to bring the community’s needs into the company. After seeing growing income inequality in Denver, she created the Weifield Group apprenticeship program.

BECOMING AN APPRENTICE

Scott Ammon, a journeyman electrician at Weifield Group, joined the Army after high school. After serving in Desert Storm and four years in the Middle East, he worked for 11 years in the US Postal Service. “I’d actually been suffering from PTSD while I was there,” Ammon tells me. As a result, he “jumped into a pretty bad coke and meth addiction.” To get treatment, Ammon spent two years at the Stout Street Foundation, an alcohol and drug rehabilitation facility.

During rehab, Ammon heard about an opening for an electrical apprentice at Weifield. The four-year program trains employees in a pre-fabrication process (preparing electrical materials for on-site installation) while paying for their education to become state-certified journeymen electricians.

“I was really nervous when [Nugent] interviewed me because I was in treatment at the time,” Ammon says, figuring he’d be passed over because of his struggle with substance abuse. “But she looked me straight in the eyes and just nodded her head.”

When he got the offer, despite his rocky past, “That made me feel so good,” he says. “I said to myself, ‘From now on, they’ve got my full dedication.’”

In Colorado, 49 percent of all jobs are known as “middle-skill jobs”—one of 11 sectors requiring a GED but not a four-year college degree. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that in 20 years, 47 percent of all US jobs will still be middle-skilled, since building, plumbing, and wiring cities cannot be outsourced. But Colorado has struggled to find enough skilled tradesmen to keep up with the meteoric pace of Denver’s population growth.

So in addition to leading statewide

workforce initiatives like Build Colorado and Skills to Compete, Nugent began reaching out to their charity partners—Denver Rescue Mission, Peer One, Stout Street Foundation—to find more electricians.

When they started the apprenticeship, they had low expectations. “If we get a 25 percent stick [employee retention] rate, we’ll be happy,” Nugent recalls thinking upon launching the program. “Now we’re in our fifth year. I just ran the statistics the other day. We’re at an 85 percent stick rate. They’re ready to work. They’re excited.”

The three keys to success, says apprentice program manager Brad Boswell, are attendance, attitude, and the ability to learn mechanical skills. “If they can do those things, I can make them into an electrician.” Some apprentices who have become journeymen have—in four years—gone from homelessness or addiction to making upwards of \$50,000 per year.

After one of the many Weifield fundraisers for a community partner, a teary-eyed mother approached Nugent. “You gave my son a chance,” she said. “He was on his last leg. Nobody believed in him. But you did.”

A CONDUIT OF HOPE

“I pray that people see the good we’re trying to accomplish here through the workplace,” Nugent says.

Nugent’s Christian faith began in fourth grade, when she would hop on a Sunday school bus every week to attend church. Though nurtured by church and youth ministries, it was her mother, Rosemarie Craig, an executive at United Airlines and single mother, who gave Nugent a work ethic and vision for the good that business could do in the lives of others.

Today, she is a pillar of support to many employees who come from broken homes. “People start gravitating to you be-

cause they see you're stable and sound, but they don't realize that it's your faith." She's also become an ethics gauge at her company for everybody from executives facing tough decisions on high-profile projects to apprentices contemplating divorce.

Nugent believes being a woman in a male-majority industry allows her to have conversations that many men couldn't. "I have meetings with developers, executives, and other owners and usually guide it to some sort of eternal piece," she says. "Most guys would just talk projects and numbers. But I can pull off that conversation because I'm a woman. It's my challenge; it's kind of fun." Through these conversations, two of her business partners have become Christians.

"I could live in a little bubble, in my comfortable Christian community," Nugent says, "but here I [reach] a little bit of everybody, people I normally wouldn't share life with. I hear their stories and help them find a home."

"Our buildings are really cool, but at the end of the day, it's about the people. Jesus gave us community to serve each other."

RHYTHMS OF REST

Nugent's husband, Jack, owns an auto transportation company, is a NASCAR driver, and hunts on the weekends. As they raise their two children and excel in their professions, I expected to find a trace of exhaustion in her voice from the demands of work, life, and family.

Instead, Nugent shared with me a set of simple rhythms of rest, prayer, and dedication to her calling to be a wife, mother, and business leader.

As one of Denver's most networked women, she turns off her phone every Sunday. "It can wait until Monday," Nugent

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says. Her emails are brief, her social media presence is minimal, and she takes vacations with her family over the summers.

And when she considers a less busy life, she simply prays for direction. "Every time I pray about it, I say, 'God, maybe I'm not supposed to be here. Am I supposed to do something else?' But each time, God brings in a new relationship with somebody who's having a tough time. For now, God wants me here."

She is committed to both her husband and two kids as well as her "work family." "I'm on the front end of this ship, closing deals," she says. "And if we don't win deals, we can't provide for all the families here. And so I balance that with, 'I'd like to be home for dinner.'"

"As a woman in this industry, it's easy to be soft. I'm not the construction guy's guy. But I can be totally different because I'm a woman."

"She really cares about us," says Justin Hales.

And as Nugent quietly transforms the trades in Denver, the work of her hands is giving light to a new generation of electricians.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What stood out to you as you read this article?

How does Karla's work reflect the gospel? How does she sacrificially serve others?

In what ways do the people featured in this article find satisfaction in their work? Where do you find satisfaction in your daily work?

"Light for Electricians"¹

Discussion Guide

In this discussion, you will return to the opening pages of Scripture to explore God's purposes for work and what these principles mean for our lives. Keep in mind that work is not the same as a "job." It is not defined by our age, stage of life, or whether we receive a paycheck for our labor. Rather, work is about engaging the created world to nurture, create, develop, and renew its resources in God-honoring ways.

INTRODUCE Go around the room and have each person answer these questions:

What is your name?

Tell us about your daily work...(Note: Some work, like homemaking, may be unpaid.)

What are your most favorite and least favorite aspects of your work?

DISCUSS VIDEO and ARTICLE If possible, watch this short video showing Karla Nugent and the Weifield Group Electrical Contracting <https://vimeo.com/196310217> (4:35). Discuss the following questions together:

What stood out to you from the reading and video?

In what ways do you see Karla's faith expressed in her work?

The apprentices in Nugent's program not only learn a trade, they find a new purpose in their lives. Why does this happen? How does work contribute to a person's self-confidence and sense of purpose?

EXPLORE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS To understand the reasons why we labor, we must return to Genesis, where we discover two key concepts that introduce a framework for our work.

1. God is a worker (Read Genesis 1:1-4).

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness."

The opening scenes of the Bible show God at work—speaking creation into being, bringing order to the world, and designing humans, insects, and animals. He is a thoughtful creator, intentionally shaping each element of the world as we know it and affirming that his created work is good. Indeed, God’s creative acts are referred to as “work” in Genesis 2:2.

What does this tell you about God? What does it tell you about the value of work?

Do you think of your own work as creative? In what ways is your work like God’s work?

2. God made us to be workers, too (Read Genesis 1:26-29).

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”

Reread this passage and circle the phrases that describe how humankind was created. Underline God’s instructions to men and women. What do you notice?

Imago dei is Latin for “image of God,” a theme which is repeated four times in this short passage. Men and women were created to be like God and to reflect his purposes and attributes as we go about our daily lives. If God is a worker, then one of the primary ways we emulate him is by working, too. And notice, “God’s work” isn’t limited to overtly religious work. We worship a creator who isn’t afraid to get his hands dirty as he engages creation.

Thinking practically, how might you reflect God’s purpose or character through your work?

[THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE WE SEE GOD AT WORK] “SHAPING, MOLDING, SPEAKING, COMMUNICATING, SHOWING OUTCOMES, DESTROYING, EMBELLISHING, MAKING THINGS BEAUTIFUL, FIXING AND MENDING, RESTORING, DESIGNING, KEEPING THINGS RUNNING, AND BRINGING THINGS TO CONCLUSION. THIS IS GOD AT WORK. GOD DOING BUSINESS.”
- R. PAUL STEVENS II

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3. God calls us to be "culture-makers."

*Revisit the words you underlined in Genesis 1:26-29.
How would you describe the instructions God gives
humankind in your own words?*

Scripture describes our task using words like "be fruitful," "fill and subdue," "have dominion," "cultivate" and "care," which convey a sense of authority, stewardship, creativity, and expansion. God created men and women to take the raw materials of the created world and to make something of it. As author Katelyn Beaty explains, this fruitfulness includes our reproductive potential, but goes well beyond it:

"God intends [humans] to build civilizations. Procreation is bedrock to society—you can't have a civilization without people to inhabit and guide it. But the buildings, food, laws, courts, gardens, clothes, calendars, dances, languages, and the million other artifacts and ideas that comprise culture are what God anticipates as he invites his image bearers to take up the creative task." - Katelyn Beaty ⁱⁱⁱ

Every human has the potential to make culture through their daily work—to develop the raw materials God gives us, to bring order, restore something that is broken, or to give and nurture life. How do you fulfill this calling through your daily work?

APPLY TO YOUR WORK Because God created us with an innate capacity for work, our humanity is affirmed and enlarged through meaningful labor—whether for pay, at home, or in or volunteer roles.

How could the principles we discussed today change the way you regard your daily work?

How could your words and work be a witness for Christ? How could you sacrificially serve others (colleagues, clients, the community) through your job?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Genesis 1 introduces us to a God who works and invites us to join him in the task of cultivating and caring for the world. Yet, only two chapters later, this plan goes awry as men and women disobey God's instructions and sin enters the world. The beauty and order God created is marred and work that was filled with joy and purpose becomes toil.

Our work exists in the context of a fallen world where we see sin's effects every day—in school systems that struggle to educate their students, corporations that adopt unethical business practices, or manufacturers that exploit the created world. In the midst of this brokenness, we find hope in Christ's work on the cross.

Christ's death frees individuals—and all creation—from the bonds of sin, beginning a restoration process that will continue until he comes again. Our call to steward creation remains the same, but we gain new hope and power through Jesus' redemptive work on the cross. Our daily work is vital to the full expression of the gospel in the world.

PRAYER

God, you are good creator, and we marvel at the things you made. Thank you for creating us in your image, that we may follow your example and understand your ways. Be with us this week in our work and empower us to create, renew, and restore. In Jesus' name. Amen.



THEOLOGY OF WORK

PROJECT

RECOMMENDED READING

“Being Made in God’s Image Equips Us for Relationships,” Theology of Work Project <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/genesis-1-11-and-work/god-creates-and-equips-people-to-work-genesis-126-225/relationships/>

“Bringing Light to Darkness,” Denver Institute for Faith & Work <http://denverinstitute.org/2017/02/01/bringing-light-to-the-darkness/>

Every Good Endeavor by Timothy Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf

From the American Enterprise Institute: The Dignity Deficit by Arthur C. Brooks <https://www.aei.org/publication/the-dignity-deficit-reclaiming-americans-sense-of-purpose/>

ⁱ Originally published in *Christianity Today*, March 21, 2016.

ⁱⁱ Stevens, R. Paul, *Work Matters* (Eerdmans, 2012).

ⁱⁱⁱ Beaty, Katelyn, *A Woman’s Place: A Christian Vision for Your Calling in the Office, the Home, and the World* (Simon and Schuster, 2016).

INVESTMENTS for THE KINGDOM

by Jeff Haanen

This article ran in the December 2016 issue of *Christianity Today*.

Not long ago, when reporters wrote about Robin John, the cofounder of Eventide Asset Management, a subtle snicker rumbled under the surface. One called him “The Believer”; others pointed out the odd language on his Boston-based mutual fund company’s website: business as an “engine of blessing” and “biblically responsible investing.”

Theology as the foundation for picking stocks? Is this guy for real? Today the murmurs seem to have faded, and for good reason. Since its launch in 2008, Eventide’s flagship mutual fund (a pool of money professionally invested in stocks, bonds, and other securities), the Gilead Fund, has given shareholders a 13.70 percent annualized return as of September 30, 2016, compared to 9.03 percent for the Standard & Poor’s 500. To put that into perspective, an investor who put \$10,000 into the fund at its launch would be worth \$26,050 today. The Gilead Fund has been covered as a top performer by *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*,

and *Bloomberg*, among other publications. Over the past three years, media attention has helped Eventide explode from \$50 million in assets under management to nearly \$2 billion.

But there’s more to Robin John than a focus on profit. Challenging Milton Friedman’s declaration that the only social responsibility of business is to increase profits, John says, “Profit is only the byproduct of a job well done.” John, an evangelical living in Dallas, is a leader in the growing field of biblically responsible investing, which applies Christian theology and social concern to investment analysis. Eventide, founded in 2008, has garnered attention because of both its results and its uniquely faith-filled investment philosophy, driven ultimately by Jesus’ command to love your neighbor as yourself.



His journey to investing, however, was fraught with vocational doubt, uncertainty, and a heart-wrenching journey to India, the land of his birth.

LONGING FOR A CALLING

John grew up in a village in southern India, influenced by the faith of his grandparents. “I remember looking out my window as a child and seeing a cemetery,” John told me. “The church needed land to bury the dead, and so my grandfather, poor as he was, donated it.” John learned the Bible originally in his native tongue of Malayalam and saw a sacrificial faith lived out at an early age.

When John was seven, his family moved to Medford, Massachusetts, following his uncle, an international pastor at Tremont Temple Baptist Church in Boston. “We moved into a community where I was one of the only non-Italian and non-Irish students in class,” John says. Due to an error on his Social Security card, his name became an abbreviated version of his middle name, Cheriakalath, while he was in school. It was nearly impossible for his Anglo peers to pronounce, just one factor that made growing up an Indian immigrant in American schools tough. So he studied hard and graduated in the top 1 percent of his high school class.

A few years later, John graduated with a degree in economics from Tufts University and took a job at a large bank. “I would pray for a calling to go into ministry,” John recalls. “But I didn’t hear from God. So, because I didn’t feel like I had a calling, I said, ‘I guess I’ll just make money and support those who do.’”

One of his first assignments took him from Boston back to Pune, India, near Bombay, to train new employees.

One day, staying in the guest house of an Indian firm, he asked the housekeepers where they slept. He discovered that in a four-bedroom house, they slept in a closet behind the kitchen on the concrete floor,

with no mat or rags for a pillow. Outraged, he notified his company of the housekeepers’ living conditions. But the two men begged him not to pursue the matter or they would lose their jobs and return to the slums.

When John returned to the United States, the air of his home office was heavy with tension. Outsourcing to India meant job cuts for American workers. Now co-workers in Boston came to John with their own plea: “If my job is going to India, you’ve got to let me know. I’ve got a family.”

“I started realizing that work is not just work,” John says. “People’s lives are being impacted.”

In the years that followed, he vocationally wandered from a bank to an accounting firm to part-time classes at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where he still longed for “a call to ministry.”

DIVINE CONVERSATIONS

While in Boston, John got in touch with a friend from high school, Finny Kuruvilla. At the time, Kuruvilla was simultaneously pursuing an MD from Harvard Medical School, a PhD in chemistry and chemical biology from Harvard University, and a master’s degree in electrical engineering and computer science from MIT. (“And just for fun, Finny taught biblical Greek and Hebrew at his church.”)

John asked Kuruvilla to pray with him, hoping for a sense of God’s call. They prayed once a week for six months. “If God wants me to go into full-time ministry, that’s what I’ll do,” John said, uncertain about working in ministry or business. Together they started a house church and were joined by a Nigerian widow, Congolese immigrants, and a few Harvard students eager

to serve their community.

Soon after, Tim Weinhold, an entrepreneur and Harvard alumnus, visited the house church. Getting acquainted after the service, Kuruvilla mentioned that he and some friends were thinking of starting a Christian mutual fund.

“I know what a mutual fund is,” said a skeptical Weinhold, who would eventually become director of faith and business for Eventide. “And I know what a Christian is. Explain to me what a Christian mutual fund is.”

After prayer and discussion, John and Kuruvilla cofounded Eventide Asset Management with the vision of “Investing that makes the world rejoice.”

As the Great Recession began, the sun was setting on John’s longing for a call to ministry. In response to John’s question of whether to go into business or ministry, God slowly revealed his clear answer: “Both.”

FROM PLUNDER TO BLESSING

“I’m confused,” I confess on stage, as I interview John before an eager crowd at The Commons at Champa, a shared workspace in Denver. “What’s the difference between socially responsible investing, values-based investing, and biblically responsible investing?”

In the audience is a young couple, eagerly listening for advice on how to begin their meager retirement savings; a pastor turned investment adviser, fearing he’s failed now that he’s no longer a minister; and a bleary-eyed investment banker, tie-loosened and over-tired, wondering if he’s made a vocational mistake.

Conventional fund managers look for financial strengths in making investment decisions, John says. The problem

“WE LOOK FOR COMPANIES WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY ABILITY TO INNOVATE AND CREATE VALUE FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS – CUSTOMERS, EMPLOYEES, SUPPLIERS, HOST COMMUNITIES, THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, AND SOCIETY.”

is that profitability is a lagging indicator. It tells investors more about the past than the future. Moreover, it doesn’t show how a business made that money, whether through quality products or oppressive business practices.

Conversely, moral or ethical fund managers screen out the “vice-stocks” – pornography, tobacco, weapons, or abortion – and then look for financial strengths. “This is the typical approach of what we might label biblically responsible investing 1.0. It’s a good start,” John says, “but it doesn’t go far enough, because business can harm not just through bad products but through bad practices.” For example, payday loan companies can trap the poor in a cycle of debt, and auto title loans can charge effective rates as high as 500 percent.

The biblical word for these business practices is plunder, says John, who cites biblical passages that emphasize God’s concern for the poor: “‘Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise,’ says the Lord. ‘I will protect them from those who malign them’” (Psalm 12:5).

But instead of merely avoiding companies that plunder or extract value from

community, John says, “we look for companies with an extraordinary ability to innovate and create value for all stakeholders – customers, employees, suppliers, host communities, the natural environment, and society.” Each of these six stakeholders, Eventide believes, is a primary neighbor that businesses are called to serve. John dubs this positive vision “biblically responsible investing 2.0.”

BUSINESS 360

The Eventide philosophy, or Eventide Business 360, is rooted in the biblical understanding that God’s intent for business, investing, and all vocations is to serve and, in turn, bless humankind. Weinhold, Eventide’s director of faith and business, points to verses like Deuteronomy 8:18 – “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today” – to show that business is uniquely able to create wealth and provide for material needs.

Business does this, according to Weinhold, by creating products that solve the material challenges of human existence and by making a profit, thereby enlarging human wealth to make those products affordable and accessible.

When deciding what business to invest in, Eventide considers factors often outside of typical investment analysis such as employee satisfaction, a genuine innovation in the field of investing. They use websites with company reviews shared by employees, as well as other sources, to evaluate both how well a business is “loving” its employees and also its long-term prospects for profitability.

“In the days before the Great Recession,” John says, “we saw the subprime mortgage industry was exploiting its customers. We didn’t invest there.” Avoiding dishonest practices, John says, is one of discipline that can help the firm sidestep the kinds of activities that may be profitable – at least for a time – but do long-term harm.

Like the vast majority of mutual fund investors, most of Eventide’s 133,000 clients are average people saving for retirement. The minimum investment in the Gilead Fund is only \$1,000 (or, with an automatic investment plan, \$100). “We wanted anybody to be able to invest with us,” says John.

Eventide has performed well for their shareholders, but investing is risky business and can suffer downturns. Even in down markets, though, John reminds his team of their true purpose. Gilead, the name he and Kuruvilla gave their first fund, means “mountain of witness” or “hill of testimony.”

John remembers praying for a calling in 2008, descending into his unfinished basement to “ask God to use me for his glory.” In 2015, Eventide gave away more than \$3.5 million to charity, directed almost \$2 billion toward businesses they believe improve people’s lives, and influenced business leaders and financial advisors across the United States in how they think about the purpose of their work.

John found his calling in an unlikely place. An investor and entrepreneur, John has embraced a higher view of business, often quoted by Weinhold: “Business is God’s intended partner in his great work as Provider for all of humankind.”

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What struck you as you read this article? Could you relate to any of the experiences it describes?

Early in his career Robin John expected to receive a call to ministry, but over time his understanding of calling changed. How did his perspective shift?

How would you describe what it means to “be called”? Do you feel called to your job or profession?

"Investments for The Kingdom"¹

Discussion Guide

In this session you'll discuss a concept that confuses many Christians—the idea of calling. In the faith community, people often allude to a sense of God guiding their lives. ("I feel called to music ministry" or "I don't feel called to work in the nursery.") But what does it really mean to be called? How can we identify our calling— and how can misconceptions about calling keep us from engaging our work?

INTRODUCE Go around the room and have each person answer these questions. (If you have new members, have them share their name and daily work):

What do you think it means to be called?

Do you feel called to your current work?

DISCUSS If possible, watch this short video describing Eventide's philosophy of investing and discuss the following questions: <https://vimeo.com/223488058> (5:23).

Early in his career, what did Robin John expect his calling would be?

How did his understanding of calling change over time?

What principles about discerning our callings can you draw from this article?

EXPLORE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

1. Highest Calling: Before God ever calls us to something, he calls us to himself. (Read Matthew 22:37-38 and John 15:4-11.)

"Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment." -Matthew 22:37-38

"⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

-John 15:4-11

In these verses, Jesus calls his disciples into relationship with him. Explore the metaphor of the vine and branches as a group. In practical ways, what does it look like to live out this call?

No matter what a person does for work, everyone's first and most important call is to a relationship with Christ. This call goes deeper than a call to a particular type of work.

"We are not called to do something or go somewhere; we are called to Someone. We are not called first to special work but to God. The key to answering the call is to be devoted to no one and to nothing above God himself." - Os Guinnessⁱⁱ

We may, or may not, receive clear direction from God regarding our work. How does the principle above give us confidence, even if we never hear from God about our careers?

2. Common Calling: We are called to serve.

(Ephesians 4:1, Mark 10:45, Matthew 22:39.)

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." -Ephesians 4:1

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." -Mark 10:45

Our second calling is simply to live the Christian life: to obey God, faithfully respond to Scripture, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39). We call this a "common calling" because this calling is shared amongst all believers in Christ.

The Protestant reformer John Calvin observed, "All the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbors' benefit."

What do the statements above tell us about why we are called?

3. Specific Calling: We are occasionally given specific tasks to do by God, which may or may not include a particular job or line of work. (Ephesians 2:10.)

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." -Ephesians 2:10

"GOD CALLS ALL OF HUMANITY TO RETURN TO HIS PRESENCE AND BE COMPLETELY PRESENT TO HIM. AS WE RESPOND TO THAT CALL, HE SENDS US INTO THE WORLD TO IMITATE HIM BY BEING PRESENT AND AVAILABLE TO OTHERS IN THE SAME WAY. AS SUCH, GOD'S FAITHFUL PRESENCE TO EACH OF US BECOMES OUR MODEL FOR AN INCARNATIONAL PUBLIC FAITH."
-NEW CITY COMMONS ⁱⁱⁱ

Scripture suggests that God has prepared certain tasks for us to do. This, however, presupposes that the first two callings - the call to love God and love our neighbors - are first obeyed. For instance, in Robin John's story, he first prayed and asked for a call. He sought God's face through prayer (highest calling). He then asked what Scripture generally says about the purpose of business, and, hence, investing (common calling). Finally, he felt called to start a mutual fund that reflected God's priorities (specific calling).

Most often, when we're confused about our calling, the situation becomes much easier when we remember to first return to the highest calling. Calling is fundamentally about listening to the voice of God - not necessarily about our ideal job.

In what ways do you think we've overemphasized "feeling called" to a particular kind of work?

APPLY TO YOUR WORK

How has this discussion affected your understanding of calling?

What opportunities does your work present to show God's love or respond to the world's needs?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

One of the joys of discerning our calling is Christ's invitation to explore life with him. Every day is an opportunity to experience him more deeply, to see the world and its needs more clearly, and to use our God-given gifts in new ways. As a group, read Eugene Peterson's translation of Ephesians 6:1, 4-5 from The Message:

"Live creatively...Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life."

PRAYER Have each person share a prayer request in response to these verses and spend time praying for each other as you seek to live in response to God's call.

Thank you Lord for calling us each to belong to your son, our savior Jesus Christ. And thank you for giving us important work to do, for our families and for your redemptive work in the world. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear your divine guidance. In Jesus' name. Amen.

RECOMMENDED READING

“An Overview on Calling and Vocation,” Theology of Work Project. <https://www.theologyof-work.org/key-topics/vocation-overview-article/>

“Work, Profession, Job, Vocation, Occupation, Career or Calling? Getting Clear on Language About Work,” Denver Institute for Faith & Work
<http://denverinstitute.org/2017/03/22/affirmation-and-inspiration-2/>

The Call by Os Guinness

ⁱ This article ran in the December 2016 edition of *Christianity Today*.

ⁱⁱ Os Guinness, *The Call*.

ⁱⁱⁱ New City Commons, *Faith 360*, “Faith and Work”.

SHOWING HOSPITALITY to STRANGERS AND SPRING BREAKERS

by Chris Horst

This article ran in the May 4, 2016 issue of *Christianity Today*.

“I wake up pumped that I get to go to work. It’s a perfect fit for me.”

You might assume that Dave Collins spends his days in a high-powered, prestigious profession, but the Colorado native’s job is simply to keep a hotel lobby clean and answer room calls. Collins, 57, is a housekeeper at the Denver Marriott, a 600-room business hotel next to the Colorado Convention Center.

His joy in serving Marriott guests starts with his own journey. Two years ago, Collins reached a low in his battle with alcohol abuse. He lost his job, then his home, before checking into the Denver Rescue Mission, a large faith-based nonprofit.

“I shouldn’t even be alive for all I did,” Collins recently told me. “God had a plan for me, though. As Jerry Garcia said, ‘What a long, strange trip it’s been.’ Everything I’ve gone through has been to make me who I am and put me here to serve others.”

As someone who has known life without a place to live, he understands others wanting a place to call home, even if for one night.

JOYOUS HOSPITALITY

Collins, the son of a military father, has lived most of his life in Colorado, growing up near the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. He worked warehouse jobs for close to 25 years before his renewal of faith and transition to Marriott.

Kindness exudes from Collins’s face as we meet over lunch at the hotel lobby café. Housekeepers, front desk staff, and wait staff stop by to say hello. Collins, who celebrated one year on the job last month, is like a celebrity among his co-workers.



“When does a job feel meaningful? Whenever it allows us to generate delight or reduce suffering in others,” writes contemporary philosopher Alain de Botton.

Generating delight and reducing suffering is at the center of Collins’s work. Hospitality is an industry, but for Collins it’s also a posture. Sharing the same Latin root word as hospital and shelter, hospitality

defined simply is caring for people. Collins cites God's admonitions to Israel to provide for sojourners and we read countless examples of God instructing his people to make provisions for sojourners. For those on the path from one place to another.

Collins serves guests in the ways he has experienced Christ serving him on the cross and in the ways fellow Christians have demonstrated hospitality. The community at Denver Rescue Mission helped him rekindle his faith and gave him shelter when he had none. Their aptly named Work Therapy program introduced Collins to housekeeping.

Also significant in Collins's life has been Fellowship Denver, an Acts 29 church founded in 2006. He credits the church's small group for much of his progress. They helped him purchase clothing for his Marriott interview. Each week, he joins the group to study the Bible, pray, and enjoy good food.

"Dave has such gratitude for God's grace and the miracle God's worked in his life," said small group leader Patrick Creedon.

REDEEMING A DIRTY JOB

Cleaning hotel rooms can be dirty business. Spring breakers and partiers show fleeting concern for the housekeepers responsible to clean up after them. From Colorado's rowdy April 20th ("4/20") celebrators to friends looking for the quintessential "hotel party," staff see it all. Collins has encountered rooms packed with extra sleepers, intoxicated guests, and everything in between.

Recently a guest contracted debilitating food poisoning, and the sickness created a mess throughout the room. Collins chose to see the unpleasant situation as an

opportunity.

"I changed her sheets for her and asked if there was anything I could do," he said. "Our restaurant sent up crackers and water, and we tried to make her as comfortable as possible."

Low pay is another challenge for many in the hotel industry. Marriott recently rolled out a global tipping initiative to encourage guests to tip their housekeepers. But even with tips, salaries for the 444,200 housekeepers nationwide average \$22,740, below the national poverty line for a family of four. According to Collins, though, his salary and benefits exceed his expectations and are sufficient for his needs. It is the culture, he says, not the compensation, that makes his job meaningful.

CULTURE OF SERVICE

A service-centered culture anchors the world's best hotel chains. Marriott and its Ritz-Carlton luxury hotel chain are considered by analysts to be the industry standard bearer for customer service, regularly topping charts from both employees and guests. The secret to these hoteliers ensuring housekeeping work is meaningful, not menial, lies in the way they frame housekeeping. For these companies, purpose starts with elevating the dignity of service. Ritz-Carlton refers to all their staff members as "ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen."

In his important management research, Daniel Pink outlines the three ingredients of motivating employees: purpose, autonomy, and mastery. For social workers, counselors, and pastors, deriving meaning from work isn't so hard. For men and women stocking toiletries and scrubbing toilets, finding meaning can be more elusive. Marriott and Ritz-Carlton have attempted to solve this by stressing that meaning can be found in all types of work.

In the broader “faith and work” movement, the overriding focus is on professional and white-collar jobs. Overlooked are the millions of people not working in cubicles or office towers. For many Christians, particularly, the work of our hands – in construction, housekeeping, machining, and cooking – is often cast as less eternally or socially significant than work done from laptops and lecterns.

In an age of unprecedented choice for the educated and privileged labor force, meaning is defined almost exclusively by what workers do, not by how they do it or who they do it for. Collins, though, sees his work as an extension of his love for Christ. For Collins and his fellow housekeepers, service is the purpose.

“I feel like I’m a doorway to show our guests how much they are appreciated,” says Collins.

In these companies, autonomy is emphasized. Managers empower housekeepers to be decision-makers. They entrust housekeepers to figure out how to best serve guests. Housekeepers respond to requests and predict needs based on what they believe will best fulfill the hotel’s mission.

MASTERING THE CRAFT

Housekeepers also develop mastery of their craft. Many of Collins’s colleagues are expanding their expertise and breadth of abilities, resulting in little turnover among the 40 members of the housekeeping staff in the past year. The staff who left have taken jobs at other Marriott locations.

“I’ve never had a job where I’ve been treated like this, where I’ve been treated this well, where I wasn’t treated like a piece of meat,” says Collins.

“WHEN DOES A JOB
FEEL MEANINGFUL?
WHENEVER IT
ALLOWS US TO
GENERATE DELIGHT
OR REDUCE
SUFFERING IN OTHERS,”
- ALAIN DE BOTTON

Marriott boasts industry-leading employee retention rates. It’s a company few people want to leave. And an engaged workforce is good for business. High levels of employee engagement and a commitment to customer service drive profitability and sustain the good hospitality jobs at companies like Marriott.

After a year of Collins faithfully practicing hospitality, Marriott awarded him for his service. At a swanky banquet hall, he was given the “Employee of the Year” award for his joyful service.

“We’re so lucky to have David here,” said his supervisor, Jonathan Adrian. “We need many more people just like him.”

Steve Swihart, chaplain at Denver Rescue Mission, agrees. “The people he works with have affirmed that the work he is doing is meaningful. He takes absolute delight in serving. He views his work as a ministry, as a way of serving God.”

“I have a lot to do,” reflected Collins. “I need to continue to show God’s love to others. There are a lot of people who haven’t yet seen it.”

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Describe Dave Collins' attitude and approach to his work?

What helps Dave find dignity and purpose in the less dignified aspects of his job?

Even the best jobs have tasks that may feel repetitive or menial. In what ways does your daily work feel like "toil"? Following Dave's example, how could you show gratitude or joy in these tasks?

"Showing Hospitality to Strangers and Spring Breakers"¹

Discussion Guide

This discussion examines the less glamorous aspects of work and offers a framework for experiencing joy in the midst of work's toil. As you discuss the article, consider the tensions you face at work and how these tensions can be both a way to experience God. Also look for ways Dave Collins makes his work a form of witness and service.

INTRODUCE Go around the room and have each person answer these questions. (If you have new members, have them share their name and daily work):

What parts of your work feel tedious or menial?

What parts of your job bring you joy?

DISCUSS Briefly summarize the article, and as a group, answer the following questions:

What helps Dave Collins find purpose and joy in what can be an unglamorous job?

How does Dave's attitude affect his coworkers and the hotel at large?

How does the Marriott Corporation create a culture of generous hospitality at its hotels?

EXPLORE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

1. In work, we encounter sin's effect on the world. (Read Genesis 3:17–19.)

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

How do these verses describe the effect sin has on the world? What do they tell us about work?

In what ways does Dave Collins encounter sin's effects in his daily work?

Where do you see the consequences of sin expressed in your work or industry?

(Note: while sin is expressed through individual attitudes or behavior, it also shapes workplace culture and industry practices.)

2. In spite of the sin we encounter, we can experience joy in our work. (Read Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 .)

Repetitive or menial work can be boring, or as the writer of Ecclesiastes calls it “toil.” But the writer also says it is God’s gift to take pleasure in our toil – just as we’d find joy in eating and drinking.

How could toil be a gift? What might it look like to receive the more mundane aspects of your job as a gift.

Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth-century French monk, spent his days working in the monastery’s kitchen, a place where he found great communion with God. For Brother Lawrence, his daily work, no matter how mundane, was the medium of God’s love. The issue was not the worldly status of the task, but the motivation behind it:

“I KNOW THAT
THERE IS NOTHING
BETTER FOR THEM
THAN TO BE
HAPPY AND ENJOY
THEMSELVES AS
LONG AS THEY LIVE;
MOREOVER, IT IS
GOD’S GIFT THAT
ALL SHOULD EAT
AND DRINK AND
TAKE PLEASURE IN
ALL THEIR TOIL.”
ECCLESIASTES
3:12-13

“Nor is it needful that we should have great things to do,” he observed. “We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.”

What strategies have you found that help you connect with God while you work? In what ways do you struggle to experience God at work?

3. God empowers us to fight sin’s effects through our work. (Read Mark 16:14-15.)

“Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’”

In these verses, Christ instructs his followers to “proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” It’s a command to share the “good news” that Christ’s death frees individuals—and the entire created world—from the consequences of sin.

When God saves us from our sins, he brings us into relationship with him and begins restoring our lives to the way he intends them to be. He also calls us to join him in the process of restoring all of creation using the resources he gives us (roles, relationships, talents, time, treasure, influence, etc.)

Our work is a critical way in which God is caring for human beings and renewing his world. Through work, we express his love for the world and serve it.

How do you see a spirit of service and witness reflected in Dave Collins' work?

APPLY TO YOUR WORK

How could your work reflect God's love or continue his work renewing the world?

What keeps you from experiencing joy at work? How can Christ's example provide motivation?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Hebrews 12:2 points us to Christ, whose death on the cross exemplifies both the joy and toil of work: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Allow Christ's love and sacrifice to serve as a model for your work today.

PRAYER

Jesus, your love motivates us to love the world through our work. Open our eyes to the needs around us and empower us to serve others sacrificially. Help us sense your presence in our work and experience joy in the midst of toil. In Jesus' name, Amen.



RECOMMENDED READING

THEOLOGY OF WORK PROJECT

"Doing Our Work as for the Lord," Theology of Work Project, <https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/colossians-philemon/colossians-and-work/doing-our-work-as-for-the-lord-colossians-317-23>

"Are You Wasting Your Life in a Retail Job?" Denver Institute for Faith and Work <http://denverinstitute.org/2016/08/17/are-you-wasting-your-life-in-a-retail-job/>

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence

ⁱ "Showing Hospitality to Strangers and Spring Breakers" by Chris Horst was originally published in *Christianity Today*, May 4, 2016.

ⁱⁱ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Whitaker House, 1944.

PRODUCTIVITY and GRACE: MANAGEMENT and LABOR AT A DENVER MANUFACTURER

by Chris Horst

This article appeared on the *Christianity Today* website in September 2012.



There's a simple reason why manual laborers are called "blue collar." The color blue, it turns out, hides dirt better than the white seen in office buildings. But "blue collar" defines more than work apparel, of course. It defines industry, even a way of life. And its stereotypes are often unflattering.

But a metal products manufacturer in Colorado is working to undermine those stereotypes, right on the shop floor.

Sandwiched between rail lines and a tire depot, the Blender Products factory hides in a quiet Denver neighborhood. The nondescript warehouse looks from the outside as nondescript as most warehouses do. But the way Steve Hill and Jim Howey lead inside the building is unusual in an indus-

try known for top-down management hierarchies.

"The metal fabrication business is extremely cutthroat," says Hill. "Workers are given a singular task, and maximum output is demanded. They're simply a factor of production. As a general rule, they have no access to management. There is very little crossover between guys on the floor and guys in the offices."

ABANDONING US-VERSUS-THEM

Hill and Howey aim to subvert the us-versus-them mentality. Many days they walk the shop floor, engaging their workers as peers. Employees on the floor are treated as importantly as the managers, undermining the adversarial culture simmering in many manufacturing businesses.

"The company has tried to abide by a simple philosophy concerning our employees," Steve said. "Pay them well, provide great benefits, and invest in lives...The guys in our shop...know that I'm a human too. I have many of the same struggles they do. Showing humanness to people is key to disarming those stereotypes."

Extraordinary moments of God's grace abound. One longstanding Blender employee endured a season of family crisis. In that moment, he turned to those closest to him for support, prayer, and care. For him, those people were his colleagues. He openly shared his pain and his managers prayed for him and helped him find his footing. Baptized soon thereafter, the employee's tragedy has been redeemed, forever changing the trajectory of his life.

"At our company, we are committed to three things: provision, attention,

“OPERATING A
BUSINESS UNTO
THE LORD IS ABOUT
PRODUCING A
QUALITY PRODUCT
OR SERVICE, TREATING
PEOPLE WELL, AND
STEWARDING THE
PROCESS,”

and inclusion,” says Hill. “Even if it’s just a few minutes, it’s important for our guys to know we care about more than just their work lives.”

The Blender Products values aren’t just tucked away inside the employee manual, however. They’re exemplified in the culture of the company. With an average staff tenure exceeding 12 years, it’s clear this is a special place. Six of the nineteen employees have worked there for over 20 years.

The very work that Blender employees accomplish benefits a broader community. On the shop floor, talented metal artisans convert stacks of sheet metal – what looks like an oversized stack of paper – into massive fans that improve the efficiency of machinery by mixing airstreams. Their proprietary mixing designs decrease pollution, reduce machinery fire risks, and improve ventilation wherever they’re installed. Fastened in hospitals, schools, office buildings, and factories, they silently make buildings and machines work better and safer. There are many potential customers whom Hill and Howey hope to serve with their products. They say that whatever growth God provides means more opportunities for

them to serve, which aligns with their commitment to stewarding what God has entrusted to them.

The manufacturing floor itself breaks norms. Anything but chaotic, the warehouse exudes peace and order. The Blender Products team assigns a high value to cleanliness. Machining expansive swaths of sheet metal is dirty business, but each corner of the facility appears purposeful and organized.

WITNESS IN
WORD AND DEED

Hill and Howey are unabashed in their Christian identity. They cite Colossians 3:17 – “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” – as a foundational verse for Blender Products. But while faith infuses their work, they also have misgivings about the assumptions many Christians assume about business leaders.

Steve and Jim lament how Christian business leaders are often short-sold. When these leaders are reduced to the number of tracts they dispense or the ichthus they display, they argue, it undermines their primary contributions to our world: valuable products, meaningful work, and life-giving camaraderie.

“Operating a business unto the Lord is about producing a quality product or service, treating people well, and stewarding the process,” Howey says. “That’s it... Being a Christian in business isn’t about tricking your employees into hearing the gospel. It’s not about being a donor to nonprofits. It’s not about making as much money now so we can retire and serve on ministry boards.”

Their greatest challenge is balancing their equal commitments to productivity and grace.

“We want to cultivate a healthy work environment,” says Howey. “But we want people to get their work done. The pendulum of grace can swing too far. This isn’t a love fest. It’s a business.”

The demands of a fast-paced manufacturing business play into this tension. When making simple decisions like how to use timecards and when to permit flexible work hours, Hill and Howey wrestle with how to be both highly productive and highly loving, to balance employee care and manufacturing excellence.

“It’s seemingly impossible to have a highly productive work environment and not treat employees as simply factors of production,” Hill says. “But we believe that all things are possible with God.”

Blender Products isn’t just a warehouse filled with steel and rivets. It’s a manufacturing family. In an industry lacking exemplars, they forge a countercultural environment teeming with dignity, ingenuity, and grace.



PAUSE AND REFLECT

In their management of Blender Products, how do Steve Hill and Jim Howey show they follow Jesus?

Have you ever shared your faith in your workplace? How did it go? What holds you back from talking about Christ more often?

The word “evangelist” means someone who brings good news, but the reputation of evangelists in today’s workplaces is not always positive. What reaction do you have to the word “evangelism”? What experiences or people cause this reaction?

"Productivity and Grace: Management and Labor at A Denver Manufacturer"¹

Discussion Guide

Sharing our faith is a core component of the Christian life and one aspect of God's redemptive work in the world. Yet, the idea of sharing Christ at work may give even the most faithful professional pause. In this discussion you will explore your own experiences with workplace evangelism and consider a wide range of ways to communicate your faith at work.

INTRODUCE Go around the room and have each person answer these questions. (If you have new members, have them share their name and daily work.):

Have you ever talked about Jesus at work, or has someone else at work talked to you about their faith?

What did you like or dislike about the experience?

DISCUSS Briefly summarize the article, and as a group, answer the following questions:

*What challenges do Steve Hill and Jim Howey face as Christian business leaders?
List the different ways Steve and Jim share the "good news" with their employees.*

EXPLORE **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Read John 4:1-26 (Samaritan Woman) or Mark 10:17-23 (Rich young ruler). If you have a large group, divide it in half and assign one passage to each group. Use the questions below to examine the passage:

How open is this person to spiritual things?

What are their current spiritual beliefs?

What do they consider to be reliable sources of truth?

What does this person love most in life? What's their top value or goal?

What issue or belief stands in the way of them following Christ?

What would be "good news" to this person?

4 Principles to Be a Vibrant Witness at Work:

1. Do good work!

Authors Greg Gilbert and Sebastian Traeger explain: “When you get a chance to speak the gospel to one of your coworkers, make sure you’ve already been backing it up by being a good worker yourself. Build a reputation as a person who works with purpose, creativity, kindness, and encouragement. Then, when you get to share the gospel, people will see how you reflect the character of your King.” ⁱⁱ

How could you do your work in a distinctly Christian way? (Hint: It’s not about putting a Bible verse at the end of a budget report but applying Christ-like attributes to the work itself.)

2. Recognize that everyone is on a spiritual journey.

Remember, only God can change a person’s heart. Your role is to walk alongside people—at whatever point they are on their journey—trusting God to use you to spark curiosity, answer questions, and offer truth.

In the Scripture passage you read earlier, how did Christ meet the woman at the well or the rich young ruler where they were at on their spiritual journey? How did he point them toward the truth?

Think of a colleague or neighbor...how would you describe where they are at on their spiritual journey?

3. Be prayerful. Be Ready.

Start by building a genuine relationship to learn about a person’s life as you pray for opportunities to talk about spiritual things.

1 Peter 3:15 encourages us: “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

Practically speaking, what does it look like to be ready to offer a reason for the hope you have?

“WHEN YOU GET A CHANCE TO SPEAK THE GOSPEL TO ONE OF YOUR COWORKERS, MAKE SURE YOU’VE ALREADY BEEN BACKING IT UP BY BEING A GOOD WORKER YOURSELF. BUILD A REPUTATION AS A PERSON WHO WORKS WITH PURPOSE, CREATIVITY, KINDNESS, AND ENCOURAGEMENT. THEN, WHEN YOU GET TO SHARE THE GOSPEL, PEOPLE WILL SEE HOW YOU REFLECT THE CHARACTER OF YOUR KING.” ⁱⁱ

4. Think like a farmer.

A farmer who spends the summer watching Netflix can't expect the fields to be ripe for harvest in September. Rather, good farmers spend the summer in their fields—preparing the soil, planting seeds, plucking weeds, and watering the crops to produce a harvest. They know that effective farming requires cultivation—slow, attentive work that nurtures a plant's growth.

In the same way, engaging your colleagues in spiritual conversations is a form of cultivation. You don't just show up one day expecting someone to ask how they can know Christ. Not likely! Thinking like a farmer means you join God in the gradual work he's doing in a person's life—planting seeds of the gospel, clearing objections (or rocks) that stand in the way of them understanding Christ, and watering the soil to encourage a person's growth.

Don't be afraid to introduce spiritual themes to your conversations, but allow time and space for people to grow.

APPLY TO YOUR WORK

As a group, brainstorm a list of practical ways you could encourage spiritual conversations with your colleagues or neighbors.

Imagine you weren't using words to communicate the gospel, but had to rely on your actions at work to reflect the gospel. How would you approach your job in a distinctly Christian way?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

It can be intimidating to think of sharing your faith at work, but Christ's example empowers us to point people to God in winsome, respectful ways. Only God can change a person's heart; however, he asks his followers to serve as faithful guides along the way. As the old saying goes, "You may be the only Jesus some people see." Ask God to give you wisdom and courage as you live the gospel at work.

PRAYER

Jesus, your death and resurrection bring life, freedom, and hope. Strengthen us to live for you in our work. Give us insight to see your colleagues' needs and the courage to speak the truth. For your glory. Amen.



RECOMMENDED READING

“Let Your Life Speak: A Practical Resource for Sharing Your Faith at Work,” Denver Institute for Faith & Work <http://denverinstitute.org/2016/11/14/let-your-life-speak>

“The Woman at the Well,” Theology of Work Project. <https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/john/the-woman-at-the-well-john-4>

Speaking of Jesus: The Art of Not-Evangelism by Carl Medearis / “Jesus Stories” video by Carl Medearis <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chcaJDqPbw4>

Just Walk Across the Room by Bill Hybels.

ⁱ “Productivity and Grace: Management and Labor at a Denver Manufacturer” by Christ Horst was featured on *Christianity Today*’s website in September 2012.

ⁱⁱ Gilbert, Greg and Sebastian Traeger. “How to Share Your Faith at Work,” The Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-share-your-faith-at-work>

A WELL-DESIGNED JOURNAL CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

by Chris Horst

This article ran in the October 2016 issue of *Christianity Today*.

“She looked me in the eyes, pointed at me, and said, ‘These notebooks need to be waiting for me in my office tomorrow morning.’”

Mica May, founder and CEO of May Designs, took in what she just heard. The stern instructions came to her from Tory Johnson, a regular contributor on ABC’s *Good Morning America*. She needed samples of May’s notebooks for a feature she was hosting on gift ideas.

At the time, May was a staff-of-one, a scrappy entrepreneur working from her home. Thrilled about this opportunity for increased publicity, she shipped off a few of her classic notebook designs.

But then the show aired.

When millions of viewers saw the May Designs notebooks on that Tuesday morning four years ago, her business exploded. In less than ten hours, more than 33,000 new customers ordered May Designs notebooks.

“I thought I was going to die,” May reflected about that crazy day. “I had no

idea how I was going to do it. But I knew the customers were counting on me. I had their money and their trust, and I knew I could not let them down.”

May started recruiting staff, kept rolling out new products, and continued to answer phone calls. Over the next few years, May Designs showed up on *The Today Show* and in *Elle*, *People*, *Glamour*, and “Oprah’s Favorite Things” in *O Magazine*.

Today, her growing company employs 11 people at their sleek headquarters in downtown Austin, Texas. Last year, May Designs grossed \$4 million and today is on the brink of expanding their product line from notebooks and stationary into fashion and homewares.

“I feel called by God to be an entrepreneur,” May said.



WAGING WAR (ON UGLY STUFF)

For May, the idea of creating just another lifestyle brand is uninspiring. For her company, the vision is nothing less than bringing joy to their customers, staff, and community.

“I want to delight our customers with incredible products they really believe in,” May said, “down to even the envelopes, emails, and packaging.”

May started her company because she was frustrated with the dearth of beauty in the notebook aisle. Her frustration extends beyond bland journals, though. She’s tired of the “throwaway shopping culture” in which consumers buy cheap stuff devoid of any enduring meaning or beauty.

“One of the most powerful sources of cultural fragmentation has grown out of the great successes of the Industrial Revolution,” wrote artist Mako Fujimura in his book *Culture Care: Reconnecting Beauty to Common Life*. “Modern people began to equate progress with efficiency. Despite valiant and ongoing resistance from many quarters – including industry – success for a large part of our culture is now judged by efficient production and mass consumption.”

Even the word consumer is provocative. Consumers are not investors in the items they own. No, for modern Americans, we just consume what we buy. Buy, (ab)use, trash, repeat. It’s amid this voracious shopping landscape that entrepreneurs like May aim to not just sell trendy products, but to challenge the way men and women think about what they buy and own.

“Mica is a type of entrepreneur that is underappreciated in our Silicon Valley world,” reflected Dave Blanchard, co-founder of Praxis. May Designs is a fellow in the Praxis business accelerator. “Instead of starting with millions in venture capital and plans to take over the world, she started simply with a product she loved that the market around her asked her to make more of.”

May and her team create enduring products that are well-made, priced for the masses, and fun to look at and use. And

May infuses her values into her products, offering gratitude journals and meal journals to help drive her customers to imbue meaning in their daily routines.

“I created May Designs because I believe everyday moments should be more lovely,” May said. “Our culture says, ‘Have more, be more, do more.’ It’s a crazy consumption world. That’s what we’re battling as a company.”

May’s view of beauty comes not from a desire to grow a bigger business, but from her convictions about her Creator.

“Isn’t God the ultimate creator?” May asked. “He wants to delight us. The sunsets, water, movement; I believe all of it has come from God. And God has equipped us to be artists. We’re co-creators with him.”

PAPER IN A DIGITAL AGE

In some ways, a company creating paper notepads is a bit of a modern conundrum. As the world increasingly gravitates digitally, May Designs stands athwart popular culture by encouraging their customers to work offline.

“I’m on my screens all day long,” May said. “But I process, learn, and remember more deeply when I write things down. It’s not as efficient, but in the digital world, we’ve lost something as we’ve moved away from pen and paper.”

While some technologists believe everything everywhere will move digital, there are reasons to believe pen-and-paper isn’t going away quickly.

In the book industry, for example, the number of brick-and-mortar bookstores has increased 21 percent in the United States over the last five years. While e-books are certainly not a fad, printed book sales have remained very resilient.

Similarly, in schools, many teachers and professors are now banning lap-

tops from their classrooms, requiring students take notes by hand. These educators cite a number of recent studies illustrating how students writing their notes by hand learned more deeply and tested better than their digital note-taking peers.

“Like so many others in today’s overly wired society, [students] are perpetually distracted, never fully present,” wrote Stuart Green, a law professor at Rutgers University who recently outlawed laptops in his classroom.

As the world’s interactions increasingly move digital, a wave of educators and entrepreneurs challenge us to not miss the power of working offline. Christians understand the importance of the tactile. In the bread and wine of communion, the mud used in healing, the oil for anointing, and the waters of baptism, Jesus created extraordinary moments with ordinary elements. It’s this same conviction undergirding the work of May Designs.

ENTREPRENEUR FROM BIRTH

The entrepreneurial itch started early for May. When she was six, she filled notebooks with drawings of dresses and other fashion concepts. At seven, she had launched her own handcrafted perfume business. By middle school, she was running an afterschool childcare center for kids in her apartment complex.

Over the last four years, May Designs has grown well beyond her home office. Today, May takes joy in creating opportunities for the 11 members of her team to use their gifts and abilities in her company.

“I feel like a mother hen,” May said. “These are my people, and I feel really protective of our environment, our finances, and our culture. It’s a huge responsibility.” She loves the generosity her business suc-

“ISN'T GOD THE ULTIMATE CREATOR?... HE WANTS TO DELIGHT US. THE SUNSETS, WATER, MOVEMENT; I BELIEVE ALL OF IT HAS COME FROM GOD. AND GOD HAS EQUIPPED US TO BE ARTISTS. WE'RE CO-CREATORS WITH HIM.”

cess has enabled. Already, her company has given over \$80,000 to schools and organizations committed to early childhood intervention for children with special needs like Rise School of Austin, where May’s son Jackson is a student.

Stepping into her calling as an entrepreneur and a Christian has not been without its challenges, though.

“It’s challenging,” May said. “When I became a Christian, I felt an internal struggle, because I felt like I should be an overseas missionary, but I didn’t feel at peace about it.”

May felt an often-unspoken pressure from the Christian culture around her to pursue a different type of work – to join a nonprofit or go serve overseas. But over time, she began to understand the unique way she was wired was not an accident. She began to feel burdened to serve her neighbors through doing what God designed her to do – create beautiful things and delight her staff, customers, and community.

“This is my calling,” May said. “I can’t believe I’ve been giving the opportunity to steward this business and the opportunity to create joy in people’s lives.”

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What does Mica May hope to add to people's lives through her work?

How does she relate her calling to God's work?

What does Mica May's work tell us about what it means to make "culture" (and who can make it)?

"A Well-Designed Journal Can Change Your Life"¹ Discussion Guide

INTRODUCE Go around the room and have each person answer this question.
(If you have new members, have them share their name and daily work):

How would you define "culture"?

DISCUSS Briefly summarize the article, and as a group, answer the following questions:

What does Mica May believe she is called to do?

In what ways does she create culture through her work? (Think beyond the artistic designs on her journals. How does the environment she creates at her business or the standards she sets for her products reflect culture?)

The internet has made it possible for almost anyone to become a "tastemaker" these days. All it takes is a high-speed internet connection, iPhone, and genius for self-promotion to gain a reputation as someone who shapes culture. But what if making culture meant something more? What if making culture wasn't limited to artists or Instagram stars, but was the task—and privilege—of every believer?

EXPLORE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

1. Good design matters to God. (Read Genesis 2:8-9.)

"And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

God established different kinds of trees in the garden he made for Adam. Some of them were good for food, while others were nice to look at.

People clearly need to eat, but what human need did God address by creating things that are "pleasant to the sight"?

...

GOD
CALLS US
TO “MAKE
SOMETHING
OF THE
WORLD.”

Brainstorm other examples from Scripture that show how God values beauty or design.

How does Mica May create products that are both useful and “pleasant to the sight”?

2. God calls us to make culture, but culture is more than just art.

God created a world that is both useful and beautiful. When Genesis 1 says we are made in his image (*imago dei*) it means we share God’s creative potential. In fact, as author Andy Crouch explains, God calls us to “make something of the world.”

Take a moment to read the following verses from Jeremiah 29. In this passage, God gives instructions to the Israelites, who had recently been taken captive by the Babylonians and were living in exile, far from their home in Jerusalem.

As you read, consider the instructions God gave the Israelites. Of all the things he could tell them to do (build a temple, cling to their religious traditions, avoid becoming corrupted by Babylonian culture) what does he tell them to do?

“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.’” (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

How do activities like building homes, settling into a community, planting gardens, and establishing families contribute to a healthy culture?

What are the benefits to both the Israelites and the Babylonians of these activities?

How would it benefit your community if you did similar things?

“In a way, the Creator’s greatest gift to his creation is the gift of structure—not a structure which locks the world, let alone the Creator himself, into eternal mechanical repetition, but a structure which provides freedom. And those who are made in his image will also be both creators and rulers. They will have a unique capacity to create—perhaps not to call something out of nothing in quite the way that God does in Genesis 1:1, but to reshape what exists into something genuinely new. And they will have a responsibility to care for what God has made—‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it’ (Gen 2:15). They will sort out the cultivated from the wild.” - Andy Crouch

Think about the culture of your work. You may not be creating fine art, but we create culture on a small scale through the way we treat each other within an organization, the products we create, or the way we relate to clients or community. For example:

A teacher may not be able to control the home environment that shapes her students' lives, but she can maintain a peaceful, structured classroom that helps her students learn.

A software engineer can strive to write "elegant" code that makes programs run efficiently.

A corporate manager shapes the culture of his team through the way he runs meetings or handles conflict between team members.

How do you create culture through your daily work?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Scripture opens with God's command to care for and develop the world's potential and ends with Christ's triumphal proclamation, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Our lives and work exist between these realities in the tension and promise of a broken, yet beautiful world.

Culture making is gospel work because it brings Christ's redemption of all creation to bear on the circumstances we encounter every day. As a group, spend a moment in silence reflecting on your work—or the environment in which you do your work:

What's broken (or not the way God intends it to be)? What do you find hopeful?

What practical steps can you take to influence the culture of your work to "make all things new"?

PRAYER

God, we celebrate the beauty of your creation. Deepen our understanding of our roles as culture makers. Empower us to bring the restoring work of the gospel to areas of our work and communities that are not the way you intend them to be. May your glory and the beauty of Christ shine through our work. Amen.



RECOMMENDED READING

Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life by Makoto Fujimura

Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling by Andy Crouch

“Visual and Creative Arts as Ministry: A Doorway to Transformation,” Theology of Work Project <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/blog/visual-and-creative-arts-ministry-doorway-transformation>

ⁱ “A Well-Designed Journal Can Change Your Life” by Chris Horst was originally published in the October 2016 issue of *Christianity Today*.

ⁱⁱ Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. IVP Books, 2013.

A GROWING CHARTER SCHOOL PLANTED IN ROCKY SOIL

by Jeff Haanen

This article appeared on the *Christianity Today* website in August 2013.

Ten years ago, a subtle desperation filled the aging halls of Denver Public Schools. In 2003, only 55 percent of Denver high school students graduated on time; that number dropped to 46 percent in 2008. As low-income populations rose, achievement tumbled. Denver, along with cities like Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Oakland, became a “dropout epicenter.”

Despite noble efforts from teachers, issues like drug abuse, gang activity, and pregnancy fostered a “what’s the point?” attitude among students. Even many of those who did graduate wouldn’t go to college or be prepared to compete in a global workforce that was rapidly outperforming American students, especially in science and math. America’s high school students were falling behind, and Denver was near the back of the line.

But ten years ago, when most saw hopelessness, Bill Kurtz saw opportunity. A former investment banker with JP Morgan Chase, Kurtz later served as principal of a school in Newark, New Jersey, that gave

full scholarships to all students. In 2003, he decided to leave the East Coast and start a new charter school in Denver. Inspired simply by the opportunity to serve and a growing vision of the gospel he absorbed while attending Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, in 2001 he became the founding principal of the Denver School of Science and Technology (DSST). In 2004, the new STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) high school opened its doors in Park Hill, a neighborhood in northeast Denver.

The modern architecture, sparkling science labs, and newly hired staff of DSST all glimmered with hope. But the challenges of Denver Public Schools (DPS) remained daunting. The student population in Stapleton, an urban neighborhood, was



75 percent minority and 45 percent from low-income households, and DSST was completely nonselective in its admissions, accepting students from any academic, ethnic, or socioeconomic background. Could the students succeed with a rigorous STEM curriculum that included six years of high-school science and math?

But over the next decade, DSST would produce stunning results. Average ACT scores rose to 24.6 (the DPS average is 17.6). Every single senior in DSST’s histo-

ry has been admitted to a four-year college, and DSST graduates have the fifth lowest college remediation rate in Colorado. It's consistently recognized as one of the nation's top charter schools. In 2010, Oprah Winfrey publicly praised DSST by donating \$1 million on live TV. As DSST expanded from one school to seven from 2008 to 2013, educational leaders around the country began asking, "How did they do that?"

VALUES, COMMUNITY, AND THE HUMAN STORY

As I sat down for lunch with Kurtz at Udi's Bread Cafe in Stapleton, he wasn't quite what I expected of a charter school executive. Soft-spoken, deferential, and clearly reflective, he exuded a humility about DSST's accomplishments, insisting "we're not perfect" and "we have plenty of issues." Between bites of his apple walnut sandwich, I drilled down to the central question. "How have your schools been so successful?"

"We hire great people," Kurtz said, noting the challenge of hiring 120 new staff this year alone. "I also think it's significant that we have a clear goal for each of our kids, which is to send them to a four-year college." But in addition to goals and hiring practices, Kurtz consistently attributed their success to "the culture we create," a culture sculpted by DSST's core values.

Respect, responsibility, doing your best, integrity, courage, curiosity—the DSST values were originally crafted by Kurtz's leadership team, but now are the tacit background behind all DSST activities. "We create a values-driven culture...We expect our kids and ourselves to live our values, and those values are going to trump self-interest at times." Instead of rigid rules, which Kurtz notes usually aren't even enforced by most schools, or a free-floating relativism that lets students dictate their own

morality, Kurtz believes in shaping student character through a set of fixed moral ideals embedded in community. "By creating a community that lives a set of values deeply," Kurtz said—"that is the best character development you can have."

Community is forged daily at DSST. Four days a week at 8am, DSST staff and students gather for "morning meeting" to recognize student achievement, acknowledge the school's values, praise service to others, own up to mistakes, and pledge to put forth their best effort each day. "We affirm you," Kurtz says in a promotional video, "but we'll hold you accountable to be extraordinary." Also, students are graded on upholding the school's values (for instance, one could receive a 1-5 on honesty), and students and teachers alike publicly sign the core values commitment at the beginning of each year. In fact, community is so important, Kurtz has capped enrollment at 500. "Everybody's success is important to everybody else. The bigger it gets, the more impersonal it gets." With such tight bonds, he said, struggling students are less likely to fall through the cracks.

Fertilizing the soil of these communal values is what Kurtz calls the human story. "Everybody wants to be affirmed for their unique gifts and talents, and everybody wants to make a significant contribution to the human story," Kurtz said. In a pluralistic setting of diverse beliefs, "There's a larger story that is part of the work we do, and people want to connect to that. People want to make a contribution that moves our world forward."

A member of Denver Presbyterian Church, Kurtz sees his work as a chance to build God's kingdom. "[Education] is a great opportunity for me to live out my faith. Obviously, public education is a secular space, and this is an opportunity for me to live out my vocation, serving the needs of

others and building strong communities.”

MENDING OUR CIVIC FABRIC

DSST’s reputation has sprouted in Denver like a conifer growing in rocky soil. A recent report published by nonprofit A+ Denver criticized a decade of failed school reforms in Denver and Aurora. Even though graduation rates rose by 20 percentage points since 2006, first year college remediation also rose while ACT scores stagnated—with one exception. Education News Colorado called DSST “the crown jewel of Denver’s high school reform efforts.” In Kurtz’s view, DSST has brought renewed hope to public education in Colorado: “We’ve had an impact on what people think is possible in public education [in Denver], regardless of somebody’s ethnic, economic, or academic background.”

Judging from the opinion of journalists and reformers alike, DSST has ignited a spark of hope in public education beyond Colorado. On April 10, Kurtz testified before the U.S. House of Representatives on “Raising the Bar: Reviewing STEM Education in America.” Shortly after, President Obama announced \$3.1 billion to further STEM education in America, alluding to schools like DSST as models. Annually DSST hosts visitors from across the country who want to emulate its approach.

Yet for Kurtz, hope is mixed with dire warning. In the past 10 years, the number of high-poverty schools in America has increased 60 percent, from 1 in 8 to 1 in 5. Charles Murray, author of *Coming Apart: The State of White America from 1960-2010*, sees a class division emerging between wealthy and poor, educated and uneducated. And a 2012 report by three Stanford researchers shows that America’s public schools are rapidly re-segregating,

“THERE’S A LARGER STORY THAT IS PART OF THE WORK WE DO.... PEOPLE WANT TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION THAT MOVES OUR WORLD FORWARD.”

particularly in the South.

“The civic fabric of our country is being torn apart,” said Kurtz. “We’re going to be a majority-minority country in 2040, and our schools are becoming more segregated...If [students] go to schools that are not educating them, that do not provide the values important to a civic society, and they are only with kids that look just like them – we’re in serious trouble.”

But this is a challenge Kurtz is rising to. This summer, DSST opened its seventh school, with an eighth and ninth slated for 2015. On June 20, the DPS school board approved two new charter applications for two more middle schools and two more high schools. By 2022, Kurtz plans to have seven campuses and 14 schools with a total of 6,500 students. That means nearly 1 in 5 of all secondary students in Denver would walk the halls of a DSST school. “We could just sit back and do one or two schools,” Kurtz said, seemingly unaware that leading two schools would be a herculean feat for most. “But we’re called to do big things, and I think we can do big things. It will be challenging, but it’s worth the difference we can make.”

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Bill Kurtz has a unique ability to combine high level thinking (reforming education through DSST) and daily details (integrating the schools' values into its approach to classroom management, expectations of students, etc.) How do you see his vision/values communicated at a high level? How do you see them communicated in the school's daily operations?

What is Bill Kurtz's ultimate hope for Denver's school system? How does his work contribute to the city's transformation long-term?

Consider your own community...what issues or institutions (school system, public works, government, etc.) do you feel burdened by?

"A Growing Charter School Planted in Rocky Soil"¹

Discussion Guide

This story challenges us to broaden the way we think about our daily work—from thinking of our work in personal, team, or organization terms to considering how our work engages institutions in our community. The word “institution” can have negative connotations, suggesting something that is unwieldy, ineffective, or slow to change. Yet, community life revolves around institutions through powerful systems, like healthcare, education, or government, that define life in big cities and small towns.

INTRODUCE Take a moment to introduce any new members to the group and ask them to share a bit about their daily work.

DISCUSS Briefly summarize the article, and as a group, answer the following questions:

What stood out to you as you read this article?

How does Bill Kurtz integrate his faith with his work in a secular environment?

What does he hope will be the long-term effect of his work?

EXPLORE **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS** As you discuss Bill Kurtz’s story, consider the ways you encounter institutions in your daily lives. Our power to shape institutions may vary, but each of us can consider our unique role in serving our community well.

1. God’s Kingdom is not a distant, future goal. It’s alive and active through our daily lives and work. (Read Matthew 6:9-13, The Lord’s Prayer.)

“⁹This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’”

In your own words, describe God’s Kingdom?

What do you think Jesus is asking for when he prays, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?”

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following quote from Jim Wallis, founder of the Sojourners movement.

“Our conversion, then, cannot be an end in itself; it is the first step of entry into the kingdom. Conversion marks the birth of the movement out of a merely private existence into a public consciousness. Conversion is the beginning of active solidarity with the purposes of the kingdom of God in the world. No longer preoccupied with our private lives, we are engaged in a vocation for the world. Our prayer becomes, ‘Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’ If we restrict our salvation to only inner concerns, we have yet to enter into its fullness. Turning from ourselves to Jesus identifies us with him in the world. Conversion, then is to public responsibility—but public responsibility as defined by the kingdom, not by the state. Our own salvation, which began with a personal decision about Jesus Christ, becomes intimately linked with the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The connection between conversion and the kingdom cannot be emphasized enough.”
- Jim Wallis ⁱⁱ

“OUR
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THEN, CANNOT
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ITSELF; IT IS THE
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KINGDOM...”
-JIM WALLIS

How does Wallis describe the responsibilities of Christ’s followers?

What might those responsibilities mean for your own life?

2. God calls us to a faith that is both private and public.

(Read Matthew 5:13-16.)

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Which phrases in the verses you just read reflect faith that is personal/private?

Which phrases refer to faith that is public?

What results from this public faith?

3. God cares about the systems and structures that make up our communities. He wants all of creation to flourish and become whole.

As the Lord’s Prayer reminds us, we should long for God’s Kingdom to be as real here on earth as it is in heaven. But what does that mean? Scripture describes it as shalom or welfare, a comprehensive state of well-being or wholeness. As the Lord told Jeremiah, “Seek the

shalom of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its shalom, you will find your shalom” (Jeremiah 29:7).

In what ways does your community struggle to experience shalom?

Jeremiah 29 goes on to list practical ways the Israelites could work for the welfare of the community they lived in (Babylon): build homes, plant gardens, let your children marry and have children of their own. Simply put, settle in! Work for the good of your community, even if the culture feels foreign to you.

What would it cost you to live this way?

How might your success be tied to the success of the systems and structures that make up your community?

APPLY TO YOUR WORK

For your final activity, take 5 minutes as a group before ending this study to answer the question:

“In one month from today, how do you envision your work being different as a result of this small group experience?”

Write your answer on a notecard, and write your name and address on the other side. Your group leader will mail you your response in a month to remind you of what you said.”

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Throughout this series, we’ve considered the many ways the gospel is expressed through our daily work. From Karla Nugent, whose electrical apprenticeship program offers workers who struggle to be employed a second chance, to Robin John, who manages billions dollar investments according to biblical principles, each story invites us to consider the role our daily work plays in God’s mission in the world.

The gospel is the “good news” that through Christ’s death and resurrection, God is making all things new—from the most intimate details of our personal lives to the powerful institutions that run communities. What a privilege to be given a role in this process!

As this series draws to a close, we pray you will see the gospel’s renewing work in every area of your life and influence.

PRAYER

Thank you Lord for the promise that you are making all things new. Give us the power to change the world around us with your help. May our work glorify you. In Jesus' name, Amen.



THEOLOGY OF WORK PROJECT

RECOMMENDED READING

Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good by Amy Sherman

“Work Makes the World,” Denver Institute for Faith & Work. <http://denverinstitute.org/2017/04/25/work-makes-the-world/>

“Blessing The Wider Society through Work,” Theology of Work Project. <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/jeremiah-lamentations/work-related-themes-in-the-book-of-jeremiah/blessing-the-wider-society-through-work-jeremiah-29/>

ⁱThis article appeared on the *Christianity Today* website in August 2013.