

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR
THE WORKPLACE



BILL HEATLEY

FOREWORD BY DALLAS WILLARD

Featuring the Message "How God Is in Business"
by Dallas Willard

NAVPRESS 

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In gratitude I dedicate this book to the hard-working men and women whose dedication and devotion to their jobs ensure the great bounty of our nation. May you find within these pages the light of God's love in His creation of work and the blessing that it richly extends to all His children. May this knowledge lighten your burden, provide rest for your soul, and fill your heart with joy in the shadow of His wings.

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My family and friends, who have steadfastly supported my efforts.

My children, who remind me of what's really important.

FOREWORD

We human beings are situated in a world structured by small and large systems of hidden powers. On the physical side, the discovery of the wheel and the lever, and the harnessing of heat (fire, steam, internal combustion engines), electricity, and the atom are all illustrations of the unfolding destiny of humanity upon the earth. That destiny is, in biblical language, to “have dominion” (Genesis 1:26, KJV). That is, we are to be responsible for the earth and life upon it. Human inventions or discoveries are all related, in straightforward ways, to work. Work is the production of value by the actions of our thoughts and bodily efforts upon available resources.

What’s more, work is a good thing, and it is a natural disposition of human beings from early childhood on. Work is simply human creativity. It is a special type of causation through which goodness and blessing can be promoted in our surroundings.

Except in the rare desert island kinds of cases, the values produced by work and the particular activities involved in work are social or communal in nature. They are strictly inconceivable, except in a communal setting, from the family on up. They depend upon others for their

existence, and they are for the benefit of others as well as of the individual worker. This too is a good thing and part of God's arrangement for the virtue and prospering of human beings. Without a division of labor and suitable human relationships in community, human life can barely rise above the level of animals. So the great question is this: What is the resource that will enable human beings, developing the powers of nature, to live in a community where there is dignity, love, and provision for everyone?

We know very well some of the human answers to this vital question, and we have the bitter experience of their failures. The modern answers all focus upon the matter of ownership. That is, upon the question of who shall have the right to say what will be done with the resources. One says that the state or government should own the means (including money and human labor) by which goods are produced. That is socialism. (But the state turns out in practice just to be certain people, who may be neither wise nor competent nor good.) Communism says that no one should own those means of production. (But then it turns out that certain people do, for all practical purposes—regardless of the official arrangement.) Unrestrained capitalism says that enterprising individuals should own them, catch as catch can in fair competition. (But then *fair* gets defined by those who have the goods.)

None of these answers, we should now know, provides a moral solution to the human problems posed by work. In simple terms, this is because none of them deals with the fine texture of human motivation, with what men and women care about and live for. They are a form of the proverbial brain surgery with a meat cleaver. The popular theories of human action now taught in our best schools of management do little better.

Bill Heatley's book addresses this fundamental problem of finding appropriate community-in-work for human beings. That community is the resource without which all other resources languish or become dangerous. He addresses that problem at the level where work is done in a world not really structured around doing what is good and right,

but around doing it *my* way and for *my* benefit. That is the level of the job. (Spelled, incidentally, just like the name of the all-time leader in suffering, Job. What a coincidence!) The solution Bill brings forward is that of Jesus Christ and His followers. It is the recognition of and intelligent reliance upon the community (kingdom, family) of God. That community is already there at your job, waiting to turn it back into rich and rewarding and meaningful work, creativity, shared production of goods to be shared. You don't make God's community, of course—you receive it, by counting on it and acting with it.

The accessibility of life in the community of God to every person was the message of Jesus, in His words and in His deeds. Everything else fits into that: forgiveness of sins, redemption from sin, transformation of character into “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17), transformation of society, and the development of history into everlasting life. In His efforts to help those around Him understand the message and reality of the community of God, Jesus on one occasion remarked that the community of God is not recognized by eyesight. It isn't something localizable in the world, like a human social group, a government (buildings), or an army. Rather, He said, it is already there, “in your midst” (Luke 17:21, NASB). That is to say, it is already where you are, wherever that may be, right now.

Now that was not a new thing in the time of Jesus, though it was for Him alone to manifest and to be its full meaning. In Deuteronomy, we read that God's Word and doing what He wants and supports “is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe [do] it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea. . . . But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe [do] it” (30:11-14, NASB). The twenty-third psalm is a poetic celebration of this life in “the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Paul, taught by Christ Himself, reclaims and enlarges this vision of our life in God (see Romans 10:8). He tells his Philippian friends:

“Our citizenship” (πολίτευμα)—our socioeconomic order, if you wish, or our commonwealth—“is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). That means it is right around us (“in our midst”), not something far away and at some later time. We are now, as disciples of Jesus, members of a divine community that, when we seek it, we find with us in our job and throughout life, and thereby we turn all that we do into work for and under God. Thus, Paul advises: “Whatever you do, do your work heartily” —literally, “from the soul” —“as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Colossians 3:23-24, NASB). We are not to try to look good (do “eyeservice”), as men-pleasers, but on our job we simply do “the will of God from the heart” (Ephesians 6:6, NASB).

Now this book tells us exactly how to do this. Intelligent, well-informed, and biblical to the core, it is intensely focused upon the real-life context of the job: on what really goes on there, and how, for our part, we can turn it into divine work. In this respect the author is telling us how to live a life that is spiritual throughout, full of meaning, strength, and joy. He thus stands in the solid tradition of Christian teaching throughout the ages. He does so with the freshness of personal experience and the forcefulness of careful thought.

Phillips Brooks was a great American pastor and teacher of a century ago. He was for a long time the pastor of one of the greatest churches in the United States, and sometimes the Anglican bishop of Massachusetts; but he was also a man of national prominence and influence. In his sermon, “Best Methods of Promoting Spiritual Life,” he acknowledges the role of special religious practices, activities, and experiences. But he goes on to emphasize that to limit spirituality to these is to omit most of our life from spiritual living. To promote spiritual life, he says, is not to be more religious where one is already religious:

It is to be religious where he is irreligious now; to let the spiritual force which is in him play upon new activities. How shall

he open, for instance, his business life to this deep power? By casting out of his business all that is essentially wicked in it, by insisting to himself on its ideal, of charity or usefulness, on the loftiest conception of every relationship into which it brings him with his fellow man, and by making it not a matter of his own whim or choice, but a duty to be done faithfully because God has called him to it. . . . God chose for him his work, and meant for him to find his spiritual education there.¹

Brooks closed his sermon with these words: “The Christian finds the hand of Christ in everything, and by the faithful use of everything for Christ’s sake, he takes firm hold of that hand of Christ and is drawn nearer and nearer to Himself. That is, I think, the best method of promoting spiritual life.”

This steady stream of Christian spirituality through vocation flows down through the ages, and it alone is sufficient to the soul and to the world of humanity today. We have only to step into it, to set ourselves to learn it, and we will see its radiant power at work on the job where we are. If one will simply do what Bill Heatley says, he or she will find the promise, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20), to be the sure basis of abundance of life, whatever the job.

Dallas Willard

PROLOGUE

WORK — WHAT WAS GOD THINKING?

What is it to be a good person in business? . . . How to be a good person, that's where the light has gone out in our culture.

DALLAS WILLARD

I finished high school and ran right into work: BAM! One minute I was without a care in the world, and the next I was standing in the middle of a local amusement park sweeping up trash and being asked when the next show would begin. Beyond babysitting and mowing lawns, that was my first “real” job, and I’ve been working ever since. I found myself bouncing from job to job, seeking a few cents more an hour or simply moving on when the tedium and the people were too much to handle.

I worked hard and believed I would get ahead, and for the most part I was right. But there’s a heavy price to success. A sacrifice must be made at the altar of getting ahead. My family paid the price for my hard work and success. After losing everything—my house, my cars, my marriage—and filing for bankruptcy, I finally woke up and realized that I didn’t know the first thing about work. Indeed, I knew little about life. What I knew for sure was that work, as I understood it,

couldn't be what God had in mind for me or for anyone else.

The more I looked for answers, the more confused I became. As my walk with Jesus deepened, it became more and more obvious that something was terribly wrong with my understanding about work. And I wasn't alone—I saw the problem everywhere. At work and in the daily newspaper, I saw a constant stream of Christians making questionable and unethical decisions and justifying or excusing every one. From Enron to the local banker and even in Christian organizations, everyone seemed lost and confused about work and what God intended. Greed, inhumanity, and survival of the fittest seemed to rule.

The power and destructive qualities of greed go underestimated. Look at Warner-Lambert's diabetes drug Rezulin and the sixty-plus deaths caused by the company's decision to intentionally hide adverse reactions to the drug and aggressively promote it to Hispanics because as a people group they trust their doctors and are more afraid of needles.¹

Consider the self-induced travails of Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Anderson, Tyco International, Adelphia Communications, Rite Aid, Global Crossing, ImClone, KPMG, HomeStore, Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, Merrill Lynch, Charles Schwab, Catholic Healthcare West, and Kaiser Permanente.² Exceptions? Exaggerations? Maybe. But not one of us is immune to the taint of questionable work. All of us are affected by the frequently self-centered beliefs that undergird the way we conduct business.

One way to think about this is to contrast a good person with a successful person. We think a good person is very different from a successful one. Review the responses I got from two high school English classes to two requests: "name someone successful" and "name someone good." For the first, they named a well-known billionaire, and for the second, an admired teacher. Then I asked them why the answers were different, why they defined success differently from goodness. As a clarifying point, since this was a Christian school, I asked them, "Was Jesus successful?"

The challenge for those students, and for all of us, is understanding that until we reconcile success with goodness, the world will tear us apart. The world will constantly pull us toward its definition of success and put us in tension with God’s desire for goodness. *We will ruin our lives and hurt the people around us if we believe that goodness comes after we are successful.* That is serving two masters, God and money, and our lives will be confused and broken. Every day, work will ask us for more of our life, more of our time, and will lure us with a false version of success. We must find a place to stand firm in our knowledge of what is good and right in God’s eyes.

FROM CURSE TO BLESSING

Jesus told His listeners, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). And later, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

For me, the false dichotomy between success and goodness began to reconcile when I really came to grips with the transforming reality of Jesus’ kingdom undergirding my life and work. I will tell you how that realization occurred in the following chapter, but first I need to say that I came to understand, in a new way that I could enter into the astonishing reality of God’s kingdom wherever I am, including at work. Jesus *is* with me to the end of the age, and that means I can look to Him to teach me, help me, and guide me in *all* that I do.

Hope is foundational for life, and today I have great hope about my work life. I am excited by the knowledge that the ember of God’s love in His gift of work to humanity can be fanned into a flame of creative passion—as I express it daily in my work with others. With Him, in Him, and through Him our labors together become God’s field, God’s building, and an abundant blessing to those in need.

This book is about what I've learned about work in the kingdom of God. It concerns ideas that are crucial for making what we do for a living a place of discipleship. Along the way, I will share with you the insights I've learned, challenges I've faced, and practices that have helped strengthen me in my walk with Jesus. I'll also tell the stories of some Christians and companies that are laboring to make the good news of Jesus Christ manifest in this world of work.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR WORK

Some of the practices that have strengthened my kingdom perspective are called spiritual disciplines. I have found these to be crucial for my walk with God in and out of work, and I recommend them to you. Jesus considered spiritual disciplines integral to His life and ministry,³ and as we read the Gospels we see Jesus taking opportunity to exercise these disciplines and ensure that His disciples were given the same opportunity and instruction. Spiritual disciplines aren't commandments, but Jesus holds them out to us as a master craftsman would to an apprentice. As Richard Foster put it in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, "God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who must wash dishes and mow lawns."⁴

Douglas Rumford said, "In themselves spiritual disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to a place where something can be done."⁵ That posture of dependence on God is uncomfortable for most people today. The word *discipline* also has a somewhat negative connotation in our quick-fix society, so it might be helpful to think about them in terms of "spiritual training," "holy habits," "spiritual fitness," or something similar.

I AM NOT ALONE

I can see now that God had a plan for me to learn the nature and purpose of work as He intends it. He had a plan for me to realize the great blessing and benefit of work to me and everyone around me. He provided me with someone to help me on my journey of discovering the joy of work in His kingdom. He brought someone into my life to guide me, mentor me, and be my spiritual friend: Dallas Willard. Dallas has helped me see what God intended when He created work, and he shows me by his living example how to do my job. Dallas, who asks that I refer to him simply as “a fellow pilgrim,” has opened up the history and writings of holy men who have come before us in discovering the great wonder and beauty of work. Much of what I know about work and many of the writings of those that have come before I owe to his guidance. Dallas’s wisdom and experience with God’s living Word has brought the Bible to a fuller and richer level in my heart. His love of God and the gentleness that it brings to everyone and everything around him, is an example for me and others.

John Ortberg, someone else who has been influenced by Dallas, says,

The circle of people who have been influenced by his life is a very wide one, and to spend much time with him at all is to recognize that this is a person who has entered a long ways into a life most of us only loiter at the edges of. More than his writings and thought, helpful as those are, it is his simplicity and humility and ability to attend to the moment and to whomever he is with that bring hope that such a life as Jesus promises really is possible.⁶

With an abundance of God’s grace, Dallas has helped steady my steps and unveiled God’s truth about work. My confusion has continued to clear, and seeing what God intended for my job has transformed

it into one of the great joys and blessings in my life. Deep wisdom about work is something that everyone in the workplace should have. That's why I wrote this book. My prayer is that it will help you answer the question, "Work—what was God thinking?" and grant you the wisdom and peace the answer has brought me. It's a wisdom that inspired A. P. Giannini, the founder of Bank of America, to say, "Serving the needs of others is the only legitimate business in the world today."

CHAPTER ONE

CHANGING OUR MINDS ABOUT WORK

“It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” This is a radical change in the understanding of what work is, what a job is, what business is, and it can only be understood in the context of the kingdom of God. I’m not going to try to exhort you to get God into business, I’m just going to explain to you two main ways that He is in business, and we have to come to terms with it, because He is there.

DALLAS WILLARD

In 1974, Studs Terkel wrote,

Work, by its very nature, [is] about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fist-fights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us.¹

This was my experience with work for many years, and I know so many people who live with work as a “daily humiliation.”

In my deepest despair about work, God threw me a lifeline. Frustrated and struggling, I was convinced work was all about money, power, and domination. Whatever God might have originally intended, human greed had taken over. Work was a curse. Work was a place of toil, anguish, and mind-numbing labor for someone else’s benefit. The best you could hope for was to survive the day, eke out a living, and look ahead to something better in the future. So I was shocked when I asked a fellow pilgrim for his thoughts and he answered, “Work, and on a broader scale, business, is a fundamental structure of love in the kingdom of God.” He went on to tell me that God’s purpose for work is to “bring people together in loving community for mutual benefit and support.”

I was stunned. Absolutely stunned. In one sweep of God’s mighty hand, all my ideas about work had been shattered and miraculously rebuilt into something beautiful and beyond my imagining. At that moment, I felt like I had just stepped on a live wire. The powerful cleansing truth of what this fellow pilgrim said left me forever changed. The effect wasn’t limited to my ideas about work but penetrated deeply into how I thought and felt about God. That God created work as a place of love—a place where I could be nurtured and supported, a place where I could contribute and flourish—continues to amaze and delight me.

Sure, my old thoughts still lingered on. My old habits born of the “daily humiliations” and my own greed and confusion continued to affect me. But from that point on, nothing about work or my life has ever been the same. Years of struggle and fruitless attempts to reconcile my work with my discipleship to Jesus Christ were somehow deeply resolved.

The years since that conversation have been remarkable, and what I’ve learned is that work *is* a fundamental structure of love in the kingdom of God. God *meant* for us to come together in loving community

so we could benefit from and support each other. Work stands beside all the other loving structures He created for us—marriage, friendship, family, and nature. God intends work to be the firm support beneath, around, and within a community, so that *all* the people in that community—regardless of their age, sex, color, belief, or ability—can use their unique gifts and skills to provide for one another’s needs. No one is excluded, everyone is welcome, and everyone is needed to contribute and be blessed in return. God wants us to reign in the marvelous kingdom that He gives us (our life), to be fruitful, loving, and caring with the “garden” He has given us so that others are blessed.

When we bring our job into the kingdom of God, by aligning it with His divine purpose for work and inviting Him in, our efforts unite with His in miraculous and supernatural ways. Our job is nourished, sustained, and empowered by the mighty arm of God. I want Him in my life so I begin each day with God and show my gratitude to Him each week in my tithes and offerings. I call these practices “first fruits.”

FIRST FRUITS

My idols were time and money—I could never get enough of either one. I would do almost anything to get more of them so I could spend them as I wished, and that desire pushed God out of my life. Somewhere along the way, I realized who God was and who I was—and I stopped. First fruits—the giving of the first part of my day and the first check that I write after payday—have replaced my selfish pursuits. This principle comes from the Old Testament practice of offering your first fruits of the harvest to God. Time and money are the things that I “harvest.” So I tithe my income, and I offer the first fruits of each day. I get up thirty minutes earlier than I used to and give that time to God. Every day starts with God—in prayer and study of and meditation on His Word. It is the single most important thing I do, and it starts the day better than anything I know.

Rather than taking time away from my too-busy schedule, this practice magnifies my time and provides me with more time to do the things I should be doing. On several occasions, I've had to choose between an early-morning meeting and my time with God. Every time I chose God, He's cleared the way by lightening the traffic flow, or perhaps canceling or rescheduling the meeting. The money is also something I don't miss, and I am far richer for having given it to Him.

I've spoken with several Christian CEOs who set aside the first part of their day to be with God, and they all confirm how richly they are blessed throughout the day as a result. I've also found many companies that have early morning Bible studies and a growing number of commuters who use their early morning commute to listen to the Bible or inspirational books or Christian radio. These practices prepare you for the day by bringing God in before you start. (Throughout this book I will be giving examples of spiritual disciplines tailored expressly for the workplace. Each is described with a brief explanation of how you can practice it.)

PRACTICE • The obsessive pursuit of time and money is the primary issue for Christians in the workplace today. Finding ways to let go and give those things back to God is essential in our walk with Him. Begin with five or ten minutes each morning in prayer and reading the Bible. Steadily increase until the first thirty minutes of your day is spent with God. The day that you get paid, write a check to God for the amount you have agreed to give. Steadily increase to 10 percent.

Starting our day with God makes it easier to bring Him with us into our work. With Him on our mind and in our heart as we begin our job, we increasingly become aware that He is with us and more easily bring Him into what we are doing. We are renewed and refreshed by interacting with God in our daily routine. Our work is transformed

from something the world has ruined into an activity and a place of love and Immanuel (God with us) potential. It is transformed from “daily humiliations” into an abundant garden overflowing with “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (see the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23).

THE CREATION OF WORK

In Genesis 2:15, we read, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” From the beginning, work and care² have been bonded together under God. The loving nature of work can be seen in its unblemished beginning. In their tending of the garden, Adam and Eve would find purpose and fulfillment. Their work and care would result in a thriving, beautiful garden that would satisfy their needs. God would be present in the garden with them, His loving hand upon them and their lives. Caring is central—God never intended work to be estranged from caring or to occur outside His kingdom. Work shouldn’t be separated from caring any more than loving God should be separated from loving our neighbor. For work to be the blessing God intended, we must give it back to Him—to work in love “as to the Lord” (Colossians 3:23, KJV) and to care for those with whom we work.

For the most part, our society excludes caring and God from work. This helps explain why work can be so numbing, draining, and dehumanizing—and how it got to be “about violence” and “daily humiliations.” Without caring or God, work becomes a place of violence, greed, and destruction. Without *caring* as the underlying attitude, the garden God has provided to each one of us will continue to wither and die. Examples of this in today’s world are pollution as a result of unrivaled technical advance, untreated but curable diseases (for example, malaria), moral corruption of well-educated leaders, and death from starvation while food is hoarded in lands of plenty.

Work becomes a thing to be squeezed, something to be used up and

discarded as we move on to greener pastures. When our work involves service, without *caring* as a fundamental part of how the work is performed, it is people (employees, customers, and society) who are used up and discarded. If work involves creating useful products, then it is resources (air, water, minerals, food, land, animals) that are used up and discarded along with the people. No lasting good is achieved—the value is squeezed out and the empty husk thrown away. We don't have to look very far to see the wake of destruction that uncaring businesses have left behind: lives ruined, communities decimated and impoverished, natural resources and wilderness polluted.

Think about your job. Do you feel like you're working in a beautiful garden where your needs are met in a loving community? When you consider your work, do the words *love, care, joy, garden, lasting good, mutual benefit, and support* come to mind? For many, work elicits other terms, many that shouldn't be printed. But that's where God comes in.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

As information technology director of a large insurance company, I managed a department of twelve people who were responsible for the computer systems that supported the company's human resource and payroll departments along with several other areas. My staff worked with HR and payroll to make sure that employees were compensated accurately (rate, vacation time, deductions, taxes) and on time. For multiple reasons, this job required people to regularly work twelve- to sixteen-hour days, often until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m., whenever payroll was run. It was a hard and thankless job.

Two things struck me about my staff: their total dedication to the job and their hatred of it. They all wanted out. My staff didn't see any value in what they were doing, and the future didn't look any brighter. As far as they were concerned, quitting seemed to be their only hope. It was a challenging situation. The human resource department thought very

little of them (so much for the *human* part of their title). The employees that benefited from their dedication and hard work didn't know or care that they existed—they just wanted their paycheck. My department was understaffed, underpaid, and had been given little or no training. All of these conditions contributed to their disdain for the work, and previous management had done nothing to address any of these issues.

I decided to stand in the gap and give God space to work in my job. I decided to take intentional steps in trying to create and grow a godly environment of loving community and mutual benefit and support. In the first staff meeting I held with my team, I went over a few simple things: I thanked them for making sure that everyone in the company was paid on time without fail, and I told them that the work they did had value. I explained the benefit they brought to each and every employee. I told them that I believed in them: I believed that they were there to do a good job and that I could trust them to do their best. I asked them about areas of greatest difficulty and suggestions for making improvements. Over the next few months, I worked hard to address their needs and concerns.

I requested additional staff and funding for training, and I received both. I worked on building mutual respect and understanding between my department and the HR and payroll departments. It took time to build trust, but we did. The individuals in my department went from being cliquish and antagonistic to working well together as a team and sharing more of themselves and caring more for each other. The department went for sixteen months with zero turnover (an unheard-of statistic in that company since the average was 30 percent turnover in twelve months). There are so many more examples of what God was doing on a day-to-day basis that it would fill another book. I've learned what happens when you let God in at work, and nothing compares to the wonder and power of seeing His hand working with you and through you. I can say with confidence, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). Surely, one place the Lord

our God will go is with us into our workplace—if only we will invite Him to walk beside us.

WORKING WITH GOD

I often wonder what it was like in the original garden before humans lost confidence in God. Think about it—an unblemished landscape, fruitful labor, abundant harvest, harmony between God and all of His creation, reigned over by Adam and Eve working hand in hand with God. Everything around them was created, upheld, and sustained by the spoken word of God. I wonder: Was the power of God manifest in their tending of the garden? Does Matthew 21:21 give us a hint of what it must have been like? “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt . . . you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done.” Moving mountains, tilling the ground, naming the animals—what do you think they did together? What would *you* do in their situation? I’ve often imagined how I would arrange the garden, where I would put the mountains, how I would make the streams run so they would catch the sunlight, and how I would have an orchard of all my favorite fruit trees. In my own backyard, I’m going to plant three fruit trees; I’ve got to dig up old stumps and ivy, prepare the soil, buy the trees, drive them home, and plant them. But in that first garden, Adam probably could’ve said, “Let’s put an avocado on the left and an orange tree on the right,” and it was done. Ah, those were the days.

We are created in God’s image, and part of that image includes the desire and ability to create. Adam and Eve’s work in the garden was one outlet for their creativity. Our work is to be an outlet for our creative goodness as well. I believe God wants us to envision and live a life of goodness and beauty where we care for creation side by side with God. He calls us to a life where our work creates a garden of grace, peace, provision, and love for all those who enter in. Just as God helped Adam and Eve with the heavy lifting in the garden, He will help us to renew and transform the garden that He has given to us. No matter

how barren or desolate our garden might seem, with God, what can't be accomplished?

Remember Israel during the time of the Exile, when Jerusalem had been reduced to burned rubble and Nehemiah and Ezra returned to rebuild the wall and the Temple? It's a great story of God's people coming together to restore what sin had destroyed. Maybe a clear vision of life in the garden can inspire us to reclaim and begin rebuilding what was damaged in the Fall.

PRACTICE MAKING SPACE FOR GOD

In order for us to work with God, we first have to make a space for Him and then invite Him in. Our experience of God's presence in our workplace has to do with how much we let Him in, how much space we make for Him in our job. Jesus knew this was a matter of heart, and He used the image of a good tree bearing good fruit to symbolize a heart that is open to God and bearing the fruit of a good life (see Matthew 7:18). How can we perform our job so that God has a space to work with us, through us, and around us? How can we increasingly participate in the amazing community of redeemed souls that God dwells in for eternity? You make a space for God when you do something you can't do without Him. You take a risk (with the potential of failure on human terms) and then rest in the power and provision of God (the kingdom of the heavens) because you trust (have faith in) Jesus and enjoy growing in knowledge (experiencing God).

The apostle Paul points us toward the answers when he writes, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). We do our job in a way that lets God in. We cooperate with others in a spirit of humility, service, and mutual support. We give God's Spirit the freedom to enhance and enrich our work.

We make a space for God by loving those around us through intentional acts of support, celebration, and appreciation. We pray for the success of others' good works. We intentionally celebrate the value and contributions of those around us and openly express our appreciation for them. We do a good job regardless of who's watching and praising us. Combined, these practices form a discipline that opens a space around us for God's love, creates a space for God to be made manifest, and helps unseat pride from our heart. It is a discipline that embodies the verse, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). This practice helps us see people from God's perspective—those unique and beautiful aspects of who they are regardless of their position and authority. It helps us view their work in the context of God's kingdom as they provide a vital benefit to others. This discipline helps us be mindful of how these men and women contribute to God's loving plan to provide for His people, and how I can help them accomplish it.

A dramatic experience of this discipline came when I had just started a new job. I was working with someone from another department to prepare for a very important meeting. She was diligent, thorough, upbeat, and her attention to detail set the stage for a smooth meeting. However, the department that I worked for had a lot of history with her department, and it was like the Hatfields and McCoys—simmering tension and periodic hostilities. So I did three simple things: I prayed for her, I thanked her management in another meeting, and I sent an e-mail to her boss expressing my appreciation for her hard work (I made a space for God to fill). The effect was immediate and beyond any reasonable explanation by my efforts. Eighteen months of growing tensions eased, and a period of greater cooperation ensued. Was there perfect harmony? No. Was there still friction and minor feuding? Yes. But the thorny issues became far less important than the enjoyment of working together. We learned how to work toward a common goal and found mutual support along the way (I planted, she watered, God made it grow). I found a way to do my task and make a space for God to fill,

and in the process my faith and knowledge of God increased. And just as Solomon prayed when the presence of the Lord filled the temple, I could pray,

O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. . . . With your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today. (1 Kings 8:23-24)

PRACTICE • Pray for the success of those around you. In a public setting, sincerely compliment someone who deserves it. Go out of your way to help someone even if it isn't your job.

WATCHING AND WAITING

This discipline is a natural part of all other disciplines and is extremely beneficial when partnered with prayer and making a space for God. “Watching and waiting” means patiently and expectantly looking for what God is doing—for how His character and power are manifest. We tend to seek a specific and immediate outcome from our efforts. We work toward a goal and get frustrated at ourselves and others when it doesn't happen *immediately!* Watching and waiting teaches us to let God be God. His time is not our time. Watching and waiting teaches us to put God in charge of outcomes and keeps our focus on doing what's right and doing our best.

If prayer is being caught up in what you and God are doing together, then watching and waiting is the other half of that friendship. It can be a discipline on its own, and through it you will improve your vision of “him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27). Watching and

waiting will focus your mind on God and push against your natural tendency toward hurry and distraction. Jesus told His disciples to “watch and pray” (Matthew 26:41). Had they followed His instruction, they would not have succumbed to the weakness of their flesh and fallen asleep. Paul tells us to “walk circumspectly” (Ephesians 5:15, KJV)—to look around and pay attention. In Micah 7:7 we read, “But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.”

Examples of where to practice this discipline are meetings where you are seeking a specific decision from executives, team projects, and employee reviews (yours and other people’s). Every task we do has an outcome that rightly belongs to God. My yearly review is a great example of practicing this discipline. In years past, I would make sure that my boss was keenly aware of how great I was doing. I would even go so far as to delay bad news around review time. That did three things: (1) It focused my attention away from my job, (2) elevated dishonesty instead of truth, and (3) led me to trust myself and not God. I was managing outcomes (my career, my boss’s opinion of me, and my salary). Now it is far more important to me that God be honored than it is to be falsely advanced.

When you first practice this discipline, things can be a little confusing. Where do you draw the line? How do you know when to turn it over to God, and what is enough? Wisdom and discernment will come, I’ve found, if we rely on God’s Word, advice from trusted spiritual advisors, and this hard and fast rule: *No future good justifies a present evil*. As the proverb says, “When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever” (10:25).

PRACTICE • Pray for a specific person at work consistently for two weeks and watch for God’s presence. Make a space for God in your daily tasks and watch and pray. Patiently keep your eyes, ears, and heart open to what God does.

WORK IN GOD'S CONTEXT

Work can seem very far removed from God and the caring He intended, but at its heart, work remains one of the principal means that God created to provide for His people. When we leave home and head for work, it should be with the encouragement that the next portion of our day is going to be spent helping to meet the needs of people in the community our business serves.

Work as a structure of love consists of three elements: provision, goodness, and security.

Provision is the “supplies” or resources that will meet needs—food, clothing, housing, justice, medical care, art, or information—and these supplies come from the abundance that God has provided in and around us. The apostle Paul speaks to this concept:

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.
(2 Corinthians 9:10-11)

Goodness is having a heart to love others and wanting to provide for them what is good and best. It is not by chance that the word *goods* uses the same root as *goodness* and that both trace their core meaning back to God.

Security is protecting and promoting what is good and eliminating or suppressing what is evil. Securing the lives of the people in a community by ensuring that the sources of provision and goodness are maintained allows a just and merciful society to flourish and bless. Isaiah 32:2 embraces all three elements of the work structure:

Each man will be like a shelter from the wind
and a refuge from the storm,

like streams of water in the desert
and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

With this understanding about work as a fundamental structure of love, we can engage verses like 1 Corinthians 15:58 in a new way. We can see a new life in God's kingdom that includes our job: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Seeing God within the fundamental structure of work through His abundant providence, loving goodness, and everlasting security helps us walk with Him and invite His full participation in our vocation.

Getting ready for my workday is markedly different for me since I came to understand work as God intended. I used to plot, plan, and worry about how I was going to deal with all my problems and adversaries. How was I going to get ahead today? I was tense and ready to rumble before I got out of my car. Now I bring the wisdom of Peter's words with me to work:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:8-11)

I submit my body and my job to God and ask Him for help. I seek to know and be in His will and find His provision, goodness, and security throughout my day.

MUTUAL BENEFIT AND SUPPORT

Work is about people. Not indirectly, but directly and in all aspects. It is performed with people, done by people and for people. There is no work, as we understand it, without people. So the purpose of work rightly begins by bringing people together, and in that way work is an extension of the loving family structure. It also means that work is for everyone, and everyone who can contribute and provide value, should. No one should be excluded. I spotted an excellent example of this in an article featuring Habitat International, Inc.:

Explaining why his company was so successful, CEO David Morris said: “I hire the people no one else wants to hire.” Schizophrenics drive forklifts next to those with Down syndrome, autism, and cerebral palsy. Recovering alcoholics, deaf employees, and homeless people cut floor runners alongside co-workers who have suffered strokes, severe head injuries, or loss of an arm. All are cross-trained on every task in the plant. “We have practically no absenteeism and very little turnover. We’ve also seen higher production, increased profits, better morale, greater respect from the community, and better customer relationships.”³

Once people have been brought together, loving community is the best way of working. We understand and appreciate love covering over a multitude of sins. I know I’m not perfect, and in my efforts I sometimes offend and cause hurt. Love becomes the means of bridging the gaps and healing the wounds that I cause. The tensions that our unique differences and limitations might cause are transformed into dynamic and diverse strengths through love.

In his book *The Fabric of This World*, Lee Hardy states, “We all have needs which we alone cannot meet. By necessity we live in communities of interdependent individuals. And we are to make use of what

talents we do have to serve others as they, in turn, serve us.” He also shares a summary of John Calvin’s teaching on the book of Galatians, saying: “He [God] intended us to live in a community of mutual love and service.”⁴

It’s a simple concept that is sorely missing from our world. Part of being a Christian is finding ways to illuminate what is good. Point it out, talk about it, promote it wherever we find it. Doing our job to the very best of our unique abilities supports others and opens our work to receive the benefit of our labors.

Imagine a workplace with people who embrace this philosophy of work as God intended. People will learn to understand, appreciate, and cherish the unique qualities and contributions of others. In turn they will be understood, appreciated, and cherished for their own unique contributions. Differences and conflict will be resolved in love, without intentionally hurting someone, engaging in politics, or ignoring the problem. The vocabulary and attitudes about work will change. Words like *love*, *trust*, *care*, *understanding*, and *joy* will begin to appear in normal conversation about work.

Think about Paul’s description of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 as a business analogy for loving community. It’s an excellent illustration of how our talents and natural giftedness can benefit a community by placing each of us in dependence upon one another. The body cannot properly function without all its needed parts. Work is advanced when each of us contributes our special giftedness and appreciates the contribution of others.

THE DISCIPLINE OF RELATIONSHIP

When you work with people, it’s important to invite God into those relationships. It’s wise to bring Him in and to ask Him to wrap His arms around all of you. Relationship discipline calls us to remember our relationship with Jesus, who He is, what He has done for us, and

what He calls us to. Jesus presents this God-based relationship in His analogy of a vine:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:1-8)

Jesus asks us to extend to others what we have been freely given—Himself. You hold the key to letting Jesus into the midst of your relationships. Remember to open the door for Jesus in all of your relationships: enemy, friend, coworker, neighbor, stranger. Relationship calls us to serve and support others as in Ephesians 4:28-29:

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Stealing breaks relationship; it is the antithesis of loving community and mutual benefit and support. Stealing can be something as benign as delegating our work to others or letting someone else carry a heavier workload. Our actions should contribute to the needs of others, and our words must build others up and benefit those who listen.

Relationship is being a servant to others. Jesus tells us in Mark 10:43-45: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” If God came as a servant, who are we to put ourselves above others? How can I apply this teaching to my job? How should I be a “servant” and “slave of all”? By embracing what God intended, His will, about work. Loving community relies upon loving relationships, and loving relationships must first remember Jesus, who He is, what He has done for us, and what He calls us to. Second, we must follow Him by loving others—build others up, be a servant, and don’t steal. In this way, we ensure that even at work His will is being done on earth as it is in heaven.

PRACTICE • Evaluate your job and make sure you are bearing the full weight of your responsibilities. Take time to give an accounting to God for your actions. Don’t steal. Remember Jesus and find ways to bring Him into all your relationships. Generously build others up. Be a servant to others—find and promote what is good at work, stand firm, be a refuge to others in a storm. Do all that you can to create, promote, and enhance a loving community at work. Ensure that all your dealings with others achieve mutual benefit and support, first for them and then for you. And above all else, seek God at all times and in all things. See others as God sees them, not as you wish them to be.