

"Work Matters will inspire and encourage you to reexamine not only your understanding of work but of yourself as well."

RAVI ZACHARIAS



CONNECTING SUNDAY WORSHIP TO MONDAY WORK

Tom Nelson

Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work

Copyright © 2011 by Tom Nelson

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Tobias' Outerwear for Books

Cover photo: iStock

Page design and typesetting: Dawn Premako

Notebook page: © iStockphoto.com/CGinspiration

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked MESSAGE are from *The Message*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-2667-1

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2668-8

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2669-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2670-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nelson, Tom, 1956-

Work matters : connecting Sunday worship to Monday work /
Tom Nelson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-2667-1 (tp)

1. Employees—Religious life. 2. Work—Religious aspects—
Christianity. I. Title.

BV4593.N45 2011

248.8'8—dc23

2011020712

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	11
Introduction: Connecting Sunday to Monday	13
1 Created to Work	19
2 Is Work a Four-Letter Word?	35
3 The Good News of Work	51
4 Work Now and Later	65
5 Extraordinary Ordinary Work	83
6 The Transforming Power of Work	101
7 Work and the Common Good	123
8 Gifted for Work	143
9 Facing Challenges in Our Work	163
10 The Church at Work	187
Notes	205
Selected Bibliography	211
General Index	215
Scripture Index	219

6

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF WORK

*In short, fidelity to the highest practices of vocation
before God is consecrated and itself transformational
in its effects.¹*

JAMES HUNTER

Though not the typical career path one might expect after receiving a PhD in philosophy from a prestigious university, Matthew Crawford found himself owner and operator of Shockoe Moto, an independent motorcycle repair shop in Richmond, Virginia. Working with his hands as a motorcycle mechanic, Matthew Crawford has become a strong advocate of manual work, the coherent manner of life it fosters, and its relationship to human flourishing.

In his book *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, Matthew Crawford speaks to the transformational effect our work and the workplaces we

inhabit have in shaping us. Crawford writes, “To begin with, we are accustomed to think of the business world as ruled by an amoral bottom-line mentality, but in fact it is impossible to make sense of the office without noticing that it has become a place of moral education, where souls are formed and a particular ideal of what it means to be a good person is urged upon us.”² When we think about work, our tendency is to reflect on how we, as free moral agents, shape our work, yet we must not overlook how the work we do profoundly forms us as individuals within a community. The work we do affects the contours of our thinking, develops our competencies, and contributes to our manner of feeling and well-being in the world. We shape our work and our work shapes us.

OUR WORK SHAPES US

Growing up in a rural farming community, it didn't take me long to grasp the powerful effect work had on the individuals I encountered. I remember as a young boy shaking hands with a neighboring farmer. I politely and respectfully placed my small, smooth hand into his massive hand. With his gentle squeeze, I felt a rush of extraordinary strength. Without saying a word, his rough skin and strong calluses spoke volumes to me about the work he did and the person he had become. Framing his warm and friendly smile was a tanned, windburned face that reflected many hours toiling beneath the summer sun, diligently caring for farm animals and tilling the rocky earth. As a young boy, I was enraptured listening to a close-knit group of farmers chatting at the local co-op store. The conversation I heard echoed a particular down-to-earth vocabulary tied to the unpredictable weather patterns where a timely rain meant the difference between crop success and crop failure. Farmers are people of the land indwelling a way of life that ebbs and flows with the seeming whims of nature and the ever-changing seasons. They are adventurous risk takers. When a seed is planted, there are

heartfelt hopes but no certainty of a future harvest. The work farmers do shapes their life competencies, their hearts, minds, and souls, as well as their broader perspectives about life itself and their particular place in the world. This is also true for each one of us regardless of the work we are called to do.

A professional dancer's body and mind will be formed in a way that is distinct from a surgeon or a schoolteacher. The dancer's workplace and the people she works with every day will speak into her life in transforming and enduring ways. Perhaps she will meet her spouse in the context of her work. Many of her closest human friendships will be birthed and sustained in her workplace. She will increasingly see and experience the world through a dancer's eyes. A teacher's work is spent exploring the world of ideas. His competencies are directed toward informing and shaping others' minds. As he influences his students, he, too, is influenced by the very ideas he conveys—often in a multitude of ways he himself cannot verbally articulate. On an assembly line a worker will develop a specialized vocabulary, particular relationships, and mental and physical skills that are vastly different than a company CEO who spends the majority of her time in a corner office or on an airplane going from city to city conducting strategic meetings in preparation for an impending merger.

An advertisement for an automobile company has described work's transforming power with these well-chosen words, "*The things we make, make us.*" In a multitude of ways, our work defines who we are, what we are becoming, and how we are contributing to the world. Miroslav Volf notes, "Human work is ultimately significant not only because it contributes to the future environment of human beings, but also because it leaves an indelible imprint on their personalities."⁵ To a large extent, what we do forms who we are.

When we meet someone for the very first time, the initial question we ask is, "What is your name?" Inquiring as to someone's name is not only an act of love and proper respect, but it also affirms the person's individuality and intrinsic worth. After

we have learned a person's name, the second question usually out of our mouth is, "What do you do?" When we ask this question, we are affirming that work is essential, an integral part of being human. We also are seeking to get some idea of what an individual's life is all about. We gain a greater familiarity and understanding about the unique contours of the person we are meeting by immediately learning something about that person's work. Intuitively we know that the work someone chooses not only reflects a certain human disposition, but it also tells us much about the person and the life experiences encountered by that person.

Our work is a gift. Like the good gifts of education, marriage, friendship, leisure, and family, our work influences in great measure the persons we are and the persons we are becoming. Daily we are being formed by the work we do, the people we rub shoulders with, and the skills we acquire. Work is one of the providential arrangements through which we are spiritually formed. The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther affirmed the central importance of vocation in spiritual formation when he asserted, "God's complete work is set in motion through vocation."⁴ Rather than being an obstacle or impediment to God's work in our lives, Martin Luther understood vocation to be the primary pathway God uses to transform our lives. Luther saw vocation as encompassing a broader theology of the everyday common life where God-honoring worship and spiritual maturation were most desired outcomes. Whether you recognize it, your work is shaping you.

OUR CULTURAL CONTEXT SHAPES US

While the specific work we do forms us, the broader cultural and social context in which our work takes place also shapes us. *WIRED* magazine, noted for its reporting on cutting-edge technology, published the results of a study done by UCLA professor Gary Small on how the Internet is literally rewiring our brains.

In his study, Small compared the brain activity of novice and experienced web surfers using a magnetic resonance imager. What he discovered was that the experienced web surfers had developed distinctive neural pathways because of their extensive Internet use. The novice surfers, who had agreed to surf the web for an hour a day, displayed almost immediate changes in their brains. What is truly stunning is that only five hours of Internet use had already rewired their brains. Small's research points out that the current explosion in digital technology is not only altering the way we communicate, it is quite literally altering our brains.

Nicholas Carr, who wrote the article for *WIRED*, wonders if this is a good thing. He writes:

What kind of brain is the Web giving us? That question will no doubt be the subject of a great deal of research in the years ahead. Already, though, there is much we know or can surmise—and the news is quite disturbing. Dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, and educators point to the same conclusion: When we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning. Even as the Internet grants us easy access to vast amounts of information, it is turning us into shallower thinkers, literally changing the structure of our brain.⁵

The workplaces we inhabit in our late modern world possess a very cozy relationship with technology. In many ways technology is a good gift, but what is largely lacking is the critical thinking needed to see the unintended consequences as they relate to human community and human flourishing. Like many other aspects of contemporary life, technology has a numbing effect on us. We must not minimize or overlook the effect on the body, mind, and soul that is taking place in what is now a highly wired and closely connected online global workplace. As workers immersed in a nanosecond information age, a discriminating utilization of technology will be important for each one of us if we

are to be rightly spiritually formed and flourish as God designed us. In addition to the vast technological changes, the cultural water we swim in brings with it a plurality of worldviews, faith commitments, and ethical frameworks, all of which make the marketplace more complex and challenging.

OUR PRESENT CULTURAL ETHOS

We live, work, and breathe in a particular cultural ethos. It is the cultural water we swim in every day. Sociologist James Hunter points out that we live in a time in human history marked by two strong and fast-flowing cultural currents: dissolution and difference. The radical skepticism that permeates our society, Hunter refers to as dissolution. We question deeply whether our words have any objective meaning and whether truth can be known. We also find ourselves immersed in a social context that is highly pluralistic. This is what Hunter describes as difference. The flattened globalized world we live and work in confronts us with a myriad of worldviews, cultures, ethnicities, and faith commitments that deeply challenge the Christian faith's claim to objective historical truth and exclusivity. The neighbor living next door or the coworker in the office cubicle adjacent to us is just as likely to be a Buddhist or a Mormon or even an atheist as they are a confessing Christian. Both the strong currents of dissolution and difference bring significant challenges to our faith in the marketplace, often playing an adverse role in our spiritual formation.⁶

We also need to realize that the very plausibility structures, those institutions and cultural supports that provide a consistency and coherence to a faith-informed life, have largely been eroded away. It is as if we are culturally adrift, not sure of where we have been and even more unsure of where we are heading. As followers of Jesus who are called to be a faithful presence in our workplaces, we need to be attentive to the fast-moving currents of our times and become intentional about the spiritual formation

of our lives. In some cases this will require swimming upstream. It is not a question of whether we are being formed spiritually, but rather, are we being spiritually formed in the inexhaustible riches of the gospel as we live and work in the already-but-not-fully-yet kingdom reign of Christ. If we are to incarnate lives of grace and truth in our workplaces, we must make the important lifestyle commitments to resist the mindless conformity to the spirit of our age and instead have our minds renewed in and through the timeless truths of God's Word.

CONFORMITY OR TRANSFORMATION?

After articulating the glorious truths of the gospel to followers of Jesus in Rome, the apostle Paul calls those who have experienced transforming grace to a new way of thinking and a new way of grace-filled living. Paul writes, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:1-2). Paul wants us to grasp the vital importance of our physicality—for we are embodied creatures. Our physical bodies offered in submission to God and daily aligned with his will are to be instruments of God-honoring worship. This is not just about a posture of worship we assume when we arrive at church on Sunday but one we also assume when we enter our workplace on Monday.

If we reflect back at creation design as it is expressed in Genesis 1, we observe that for six out of seven days our physical bodies were designed to work. During these six days of the week our bodies are to be worshiping God as much as they are on the seventh day of Sabbath rest. All seven days of the week are to be days of God-honoring, Christ-exalting worship. When we embrace the gospel and experience the new birth of regeneration,

our physical bodies become indwelling places for the Holy Spirit and are temples of God (1 Cor. 6:19–20). As a result, when we go to work every day, we bring a temple of God with us.

While Paul emphasizes the importance of our physical bodies being in submission to God, he also speaks to the high importance of our minds in spiritual formation. In Romans 12, Paul calls us to avoid mindless conformity to the world. Broadly speaking, Paul is referring to the spirit for our age that in many cases is in opposition to the gospel and Christ’s kingdom reign. If we are going to effectively navigate the fast-moving currents of our cultural context and thrive as followers of Jesus in our workplaces, we will need to make the ongoing renewing of our minds a top priority in our lives. There are simply no spiritual-growth shortcuts.

RENEWING OUR MINDS

If we are going to avoid a mindless and perilous conformity to the spirit of our age, we must be actively engaged in the renewal of our minds. Only then will we have the discernment and attentiveness to discover God’s will and honor him in our lives and our work. As yoked apprentices of Jesus, we not only take the indwelling presence of God’s Spirit with us to work, but we also take the truths of Scripture with us as well. Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul reminds these first-century followers of Jesus that they have been given the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). When we embrace the gospel, we are given a new capacity for spiritual discernment and understanding. In our new-creation life we have a new way of thinking and seeing the world, and it is something we are called to intentionally cultivate through a disciplined life of reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on the rich and transforming truths of Scripture. Paul emphasizes this very point. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). Immediately following

this verse, Paul broadly applies our new way of thinking and our new lifestyle of thanksgiving to “whatever [we] do, in word or deed” (Col. 3:17). Though the immediate context is geared to life in the new covenant community of faith, Paul quickly expands the application of his main point to our work when, just a few verses later, he specifically addresses the topic of the Christian and work (Col. 3:22–4:1). At the heart of Christian maturation and spiritual formation is a mind that is being continually renewed in, through, and by the rich truths of Scripture.

TAKING GOD’S WORD WITH US TO WORK

All too often we get up in the morning and take a few moments to have a short devotional when we read God’s Word and then rush off to work. Maybe we even listen to a Christian radio station on our way to work or review a sermon we heard on Sunday. Yet our tendency is to compartmentalize our minds, leaving God’s Word behind when we enter our workplaces. As we do our work, thoughts of cultivating God’s presence, of communing with him in prayer and meditating on the truths of his Word, seldom if ever enter our minds. While we may reflect on God’s Word as we hear it taught on Sunday morning, it is as if we have a kind of spiritual amnesia that accompanies us when we go to work. This kind of compartmentalization is a great impediment to our spiritual growth and must be addressed by the thoughtful follower of Jesus. If we fail to meditate on Scripture and nurture our intimacy with God at work, where we spend the vast majority of our time, then our spiritual growth, Christian maturity, and spiritual formation will be greatly hindered. Would it not make sense that God not only wants to join us in our work but to increasingly conform us into greater Christlikeness while we work? What we choose for our minds to dwell on while we are working matters a great deal.

In Psalm 1, we are given a picture of human flourishing that is tied to the ongoing discipline of meditating on the truths of

God's revealed Word. Comparing the blessed life of the righteous person to a fruitful tree, the psalmist notes that "his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). The truths of the Holy Scriptures richly dwelled within the psalmist both when he worked and when he rested. The psalmist emphasizes that the God-honoring person meditates on the law of the Lord both day and night. It continually accompanies his thoughts wherever he is and whatever he is doing.

If you will embrace the spiritual discipline of the careful study and consistent memorization of God's Word and hide it in your heart, then meditating on God's Word in your workplace as you work will be transformational in your life. Bill Hull speaks with helpful clarity on the primacy of God's Word in spiritual formation: "There is no other path to Christian spiritual transformation than through meaningful interaction with the Word of God. Many Christians have tried to change without its penetrating analysis, but they have failed. . . . True thoughts find their rightful home in the Scriptures, and they find their way into the disciple's mind through reading and prayerful reflection"⁷ One of God's primary places where he desires your mind to be renewed is your workplace—for your thoughts, words, and behavior to be changed while you work. Your workplace is to be a place of spiritual formation.

MEDITATION AND MULTITASKING

Multitasking is a big thing these days. We talk on our cell phones as we make dinner. We eat our lunches as we drive to our next appointment. We keep track of the stock market as we respond to e-mails. Our brains have the amazing capacity to do several things at once. Sometimes our multitasking can be a distraction and even dangerous, but it also can be a helpful skill. Because of our multitasking ability, we can concentrate on our work and at the same time allow the words of Christ to richly dwell within us. While we do good work, we can foster a close and intimate communion with

our heavenly Father. Even while doing the most mundane tasks, we can enjoy fellowship with God and practice his presence.

As a pastor I have repeatedly observed that those who not only do good work but flourish spiritually in the workplace have cultivated and continue to practice the spiritual discipline of meditating on God's Word while they work. But this requires us to shift away from what is often our compartmentalized thinking about worship and work. No one is more gifted in multitasking than a stay-at-home mom. A mom running a household with small children juggles several balls in the air at the same time. I was always amazed watching my wife, Liz, as she kept track of so many things at one time and still maintained her sanity while doing it. Yet if you were to ask her today about her demanding work, Liz would say that it was in the crucible of the multitude of demands she experienced every day as a stay-at-home mom that a more robust theology of vocation was forged. Her vocational calling to manage a household and raise two small children paved the way for a more seamless life of work and worship.

A stay-at-home mom in our congregation began to grasp the transforming truth of taking God's Word with her to her workplace. I was delighted to receive an e-mail from her that described her growing seamlessness of work and worship. She wrote,

A stay-at-home mom doesn't get a lot of accolades or affirmation. No paycheck. No glowing review from their boss. I have been working through these thoughts and feelings and several weeks ago decided I wasn't going to spend any more time feeling like a victim. . . . I have had a new outlook on life over these past few weeks, and I feel so much better. . . . I have never thought of being a mother as an act of worship. I can look at it in a whole new way now. . . . I can now see the contributions I make to my household as what I was uniquely created to do for this season of life.

We must not compartmentalize our work and our worship, but rather we must learn to see our work as an act of worship. Though

God is omnipresent, make it your thoughtful intention to bring God with you to work and mediate on the truths of his Word while you work.

God deeply desires that each one of us grows to maturity in Christ, being continually formed into greater Christlikeness. The work you are doing now and the workplace you indwell are presently God's providential arrangement for you to glorify him and grow spiritually. God desires to use your work context to contribute to his good world and to accomplish your spiritual formation. Your work is not an obstacle to your spiritual growth, but rather a conduit for it. God, in his unfathomable grace, has invested much in your spiritual growth. He has given you the Holy Spirit, who is with you and who empowers you while you work.

WORK IN THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence joins us in our work—guiding us, empowering us, interceding for us, and producing in us character qualities of Christlikeness such as love, humility, submission, servanthood, and sacrifice. In writing to the churches of Galatia, Paul paints a riveting contrast between the character qualities of those who walk in the flesh and those who walk in the Spirit. Paul describes those who walk in the Spirit as manifesting in their everyday lives the beautiful and fragrant fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23 NIV). So often we think that the more multifaceted the ministry of the Holy Spirit we are drawn to, the more spectacular the manifestation of miracles. Yet we must recognize the greatest evidence of walking in the Spirit is the fruitfulness of our own lives and the transformation of our own personal character into greater Christlikeness.

As we fill our minds with the truth of God's Word moment by moment, and as we yield our wills to the Holy Spirit, we experience the fruit of the Spirit being produced by his grace in and

through us. It is in the fertile soil of the workplace that the fruit of the Spirit can grow and flourish in a robust way, and a large part of how we are to be salt and light in our world is manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in our places of work.

Paul makes this important point: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Our attitude toward our work, the excellence of our work, and our relationship with our coworkers would dramatically change if we walked in the Spirit at work. If I were to survey those with whom you work, whether that is in a classroom, an office, on an assembly line, or at home, what would they say about you as a person? What would they say about your work? What would they say about your attitude and actions at work? To not walk in the Spirit in the workplace where God has called you is to live a life of spiritual impotence and carnality. But if we walk in the Spirit in our workplace, we can have confidence of his supernatural empowerment as well as our own spiritual formation in Christlikeness. By walking in the Spirit, we cooperate with God in the redemptive work he is doing in the world and contribute to the common good. Walking in the Spirit empowers us to live lives of vocational faithfulness and to experience seamless lives of work and worship.

OBSTACLES OR OPPORTUNITIES?

For many years I worked in a fast-food restaurant. I spent long hours waiting on difficult and demanding customers, dealing with conflict, managing employees, evaluating financial statements, and cleaning clogged toilets. Being young in my faith, I had not yet fully understood the importance of my work in contributing to my own spiritual growth. All too often I viewed my work as an obstacle to my spiritual growth. During those times when my work was a real pain, I thought to myself, *You know, if it wasn't for my work and the difficult people I work with, I could be a better Christian.* I now realize how wrong my thinking was. The

people I worked with and the work I did were the providential pathway God had for me to nurture my spiritual growth and not be an impediment to it.

Many times our work seems less than ideal. Who of us cannot relate to country singer Johnny Paycheck's heartfelt words of exasperation, "Take this job and shove it"?⁸ But is throwing in the towel on work the answer? We can be treated unfairly at work. We can face workplace prejudice, abuse of power, harassment, and injustice. Merely because of our Christian faith commitment we can be sidestepped for promotions or even lose our jobs. Clearly some of our greatest disappointments, struggles, and suffering in life occur in the context of our work.

Dave is a friend who works in the highly competitive field of sports broadcasting. He is very good at his work and has crafted his vocational skill to a high level. His career has seen both highs and lows. Dave described a low point in his career. He was in the final interview for a job he really wanted. The job would have meant much wider network exposure, a big step in his career, and more generous provision for his family. While he was having dinner with the leaders of the company he was hoping to work for, he was asked what philanthropy he wanted to endorse as part of his broadcasting role in the community. When Dave mentioned his commitment and support for a nationwide nonprofit Christian sports ministry, the interview came to a screeching halt. His interviewers thanked Dave for coming and immediately asked for the dinner check. My friend had a long flight home knowing that the job he had wanted so badly and thought he had secured was now gone.

Difficulties, disappointments, discouragements, and suffering are a part of every work experience, but they need not be seen as obstacles to God's purposes in our lives. For the follower of Jesus, suffering, in whatever its form, is one of God's means for his formative work in our lives. Detours, difficulties, and delays are often some of the most transformative times in our journey

of faith. Under the sovereign hand of God, suffering is not senseless; it is purposeful.

In Romans 5, Paul's articulation and understanding of the gospel puts our suffering in proper perspective. God's preferred path of transformation is not a path of ease, but it is one of enduring hope. Paul declares, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5). We must embed deeply in our hearts and minds that our work, though often difficult and filled with tribulations, is one of God's main means for our spiritual growth and transformation. Work is where perseverance, proven character, and hope are deeply forged in our lives.

When we face the formidable winds of workplace trials, rather than running from them or becoming embittered by them, we would be wise to lean into them with trust and confidence, knowing that God has allowed them in our lives for a reason. Often this reason is not fully known by us. Through the eyes of faith we find contagious joy and enduring hope. If we grasp the truth of God's Word about our work, we can remain hopefully buoyant even in difficult job circumstances.

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrases the apostle James's inspired words in a way that I find very helpful: "Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides." (Does that sound like your workplace?) He continues, "You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way" (James 1:2-3). As I look back at my life and my vocational work, I see the truthfulness of these words. I now realize that some of the times of my greatest personal and leadership growth have been in the most difficult days. When my work has been

the most demanding and when my inadequacy has been most inescapable, my spiritual growth has been most evident. As I have had to increasingly trust God for wisdom and strength in my work, my spiritual formation has trickled down into the depths of my heart, mind, and soul.

When we look at our work, we often look through the lens of our own personal fulfillment. Yet the New Testament writers look at it through the lens of our own spiritual formation, an outworking of our salvation and our sanctification. It is a good and desirable thing to have work that fulfills us. There is nothing inherently wrong about pursuing a great job, but we must remember that it is not necessary for God's will to be accomplished in our lives. What is necessary is that we are formed into greater Christlikeness in our work. If you are facing some really tough times in your work right now, don't let the termites of discouragement eat away at your soul. Realize that God wants to use the difficulties you are facing to forge greater Christlikeness and spiritual maturity in your life. Your work is not an obstacle to your spiritual growth; it is a God-sized opportunity for you to grow.

WORKPLACE INFLUENCE

Not only is your workplace an opportunity for personal growth, it is where you can have a significant influence. Throughout Scripture we observe individuals like Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Esther whose workplaces, though less than ideal, were used by God in very significant ways in moving redemptive history forward, protecting God's covenant people, and contributing to the common good. No work platform is too small or obscure for you not to make a difference.

Over the years I have observed the significant influence Dallas Willard has had on his students as professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California. Both the excellence of his academic work and the Christlikeness of his life have left a

lasting impact on his colleagues and students. In an essay entitled “How God Is in Business,” Dallas pens these autobiographical words regarding the importance of the workplace and how it has been used by God to form him spiritually.

The place of discipleship is wherever I am now. It’s whatever I am now, and whatever I am doing now. . . . When I go to work at USC and I walk into class, that’s my place of discipleship. That’s the place where I am learning from Jesus how to do everything in the kingdom of God . . . that’s why it’s important for me to understand that Jesus is, in fact, the smartest man in my field. He is the smartest man in your field. It doesn’t matter what you’re doing. If you are running a bank or a mercantile company or a manufacturing plant or a government office or whatever it is. He is the smartest man on the job.⁹

Where has God placed you? Is your workplace your place of discipleship? Are you learning from brilliant Jesus not only how to live, but also how to do your work? If you will begin to see your workplace as your primary place of discipleship, it will be truly life changing. You will do good work. You will grow spiritually, and you will have a significant influence in the world. Your spiritual formation into Christlikeness is best seen not in what you do on Sunday, but how you work on Monday. As followers of Jesus, it’s time we take Christ with us to work.

HOSPITALITY AT ITS FINEST

For the upscale traveler who desires to spend the night in Kansas City, the hotel of choice is often the Westin Crown Center Hotel. Built by the Hall family as part of the larger Crown Center complex, the Westin Hotel is known throughout the nation as setting a high standard for service and hospitality. The Westin staff are devoted to giving extraordinary attention to the needs of their guests. When the name Westin comes up in conversation, the thought of hospitality comes to mind.

My wife, Liz, and I were invited to the Westin Hotel for a going-away party for its general manager, John Evans. As members of our congregation, John and his wife, Deborah, have embraced a seamless life of work and worship, bringing their Christian faith to work every day. Over the years I have known this couple, I have observed the fruit of the Spirit increasingly evident in their lives in the gracious Christian hospitality they model. I like to think that our church is a hospitable place, and would love to think that our community alone was able to provide them with this growth and depth of insight into the true nature of hospitality, but I know that it has been their work in the hospitality industry combined with their deep faith nurtured on Sunday in our faith community that has truly shaped them.

During the evening we spent celebrating their good work at the Westin, one of the hotel employees by the name of Connie came up to me. She had worked at this hotel for thirty-one years, which in itself was pretty amazing, but what she said spoke volumes. Connie blurted out, “John is the best GM we have ever had.” City leaders also spoke glowingly of John and Deborah Evans. They highlighted the integrity displayed at work, their community involvement and devoted service. Neighbors spoke of John and Deborah with great fondness and genuine warmth. Throughout the evening, a beautiful picture of ordinary lives working in ordinary places in extraordinary ways was painted before my eyes. I found myself marveling at the influence of lives well lived and the transforming power of our work in forming us and in shaping our world. We shape our work and our work shapes us.

A Prayer for the Workplace

Heavenly Father, in your divine and gracious providence you have presently placed me in my workplace. It is my heart's desire that I glorify you in and through my work today. May I do my work well,

and may my mind be renewed as I meditate on the truths of your Word. Draw me near to you. Lord Jesus, let my workplace be a place of discipleship where I am learning from you as I work. As I walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, may the character qualities of Christlikeness increasingly be evident in my life. Lord, use my life and my work to further your redemptive purposes in the world and to enhance the common good. Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- How would you describe the culture in which you work?
- How has your workplace culture shaped you as a worker?
- What disappointments have you faced in your workplace? What might God be teaching you through them?
- How might you be conscious to bring God to work with you?

KEVIN > CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Our faith community has centered on navigating life and faith in a seamless way. Likewise, my work community at Garmin has centered on providing the world with great navigation technology using GPS. The intersection of these two worlds has provided challenging yet incredible experiences for me. Both organizations have recently celebrated two decades since inception. In many ways, the organization at Garmin has allowed an opportunity to put into practice each day what we often speak of on Sunday. The roots of our company began with a vision to create high-quality, lasting work in order to serve the customer and each other, to create and innovate, and to do so with integrity in all our business dealings. Work is not just about great products but about people, relationships, and how we interact together. We do have a great team of committed people at Garmin.

My position within this company has provided an ability to influence and practice the concepts of faith and work, which has been a real joy. At Garmin we often speak of performing meaningful and productive work each day— part of our language is not being pleased or satisfied with the status quo but striving to improve. Leading a workforce that remains motivated and excited to come to work each day is anything but easy, but it is very rewarding when others catch the vision of how work “ought” to be. Knowing that many in our organization feel they contribute significantly to the success of the organization in all aspects of business is an incredible feeling, and one that is too often missing in companies. Celebrating successes after reaching key milestones is another focus that adds to the richness of our experiences and relationships at work.

Perhaps the greatest sense of satisfaction comes from knowing I am right where God has designed me to be. To know that God has gifted each of us with skills and abilities and called us to serve him best with that calling is unbelievable. Looking back over the last twenty-five years as a professional, I can see

how many life experiences, both positive and negative, have prepared me for my current position of leadership as CFO of Garmin. Many of those who work on our teams respect the unique culture that has been nurtured over the last twenty years and are proud of the fact that we are different—different in the value we place on each associate, in the respect and service we grant to our customers and suppliers, and in the vision we have to align individual skills with business needs. The work we do is important, and how we perform our various callings through work is even more important.

WORK. For some this word represents drudgery and the mundane. For others work is an idol to be served. If you find yourself anywhere on the spectrum from workaholic to weekend warrior, it's time to bridge the gap between Sunday worship and Monday work.

Striking a balance between theological depth and practical counsel, Tom Nelson outlines God's purposes for work in a way that helps us to make the most of our vocation and to join God in his work in the world. Discover a new perspective on work that will transform your workday and make the majority of your waking hours matter, not only now, but for eternity.



"Thoughtful, practical, entertaining, and true to Scripture. The lights are going to suddenly come on in many readers' minds."

JOHN YATES, Rector, The Falls Church, Falls Church, Virginia

"Theologically serious and pastorally aware, no one has tried to do what Nelson has done, and has done so well."

STEVE GARBER, Director, The Washington Institute for Faith,
Vocation, and Culture

"Nelson does a marvelous job of walking his readers through a robust theology of work, and he does so in a very provocative way. *Work Matters* will compel you to approach work differently."

MOE GIRKINS, author, *Mother Leads Best* and *50 Women Who are Transforming Leadership*

TOM NELSON (DMin, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) has served as senior pastor of Christ Community Church in Leawood, Kansas, for more than twenty years. He is also a conference speaker and author of books including *Five Smooth Stones: Discovering the Path to Wholeness of Soul* and *Ekklesia: Rediscovering God's Design for the Church*.

CHRISTIAN LIVING