

Faith Goes to Work: Spirituality in the Workplace

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Sometimes there is a disconnect between church on Sunday and what we do for a living on Monday. Many of us are unsure of how to take our faith to work. It's not something we talk about with our friends as a rule. And I, for one, have childhood memories of this topic that bring up fearful scenarios. We were encouraged to give our "witness" whenever we could and we were instructed to carry our Bibles on the top of our books. When I tried it, I was petrified that someone would ask me about it. No one did. It was not my personal style, no matter how strong my faith, so I gave up.

So how do we take our faith or our spirituality to work? If we go beyond the witnessing scenario, some people think immediately of ethics or morality as spiritual principles that we bring to the work environment. These are important principles and integrity is a north star for many in the work world. Honesty and integrity can be major challenges, especially if our work place adheres to a different standard.

Let's probe this issue a bit deeper. *How do you personally feel about the impact of your faith or spirituality in your day-to-day environment?* What are some personal and honest questions it raises for you?

*One woman is troubled about the fact that her company is in the entertainment business and she has a hard time reconciling all the work she does for a "product" she has little commitment to.

*A young man is working in a coffee shop until he decides what to do next with his life. He feels like he may be wasting his time. He likes his job but some days he wonders what difference it makes to provide weary workers with early morning caffeine.

*A woman in medicine feels immense pressure to see too many patients in one day. She feels like she has no time to know them and that she is just a prescription machine.

*A stay-at home dad feels like his kids are so filled with activity that the culture puts on them (and to be honest, he as well), that he is just a "driving" machine. He sometimes wonders if all this activity will make them better people or more prepared for life.

How do we deal with situations that are not strictly ethical in nature, but which may erode our souls in the workplace, cause us to be less effective, or even burn us out? What do we do about situations that, as a person of faith, go against the grain of what we think we are called to be? How do we bring our souls to work?

Why do you work?

Before we get to all of that, let's look at a key question that may get to the heart of the issue? *Why do you work?* The most obvious answers are the ones that come to

mind first; security, money, recognition. But underneath that, why do you work, really? And how might your faith be a motivator in your day-to-day work? In a book I co-authored on career renewal I included a small self-scoring test to see why people work. Included on the list were the three reasons listed above. But the total list of reasons included:

Recognition and approval	Variety
Socioeconomic status	Teamwork
Interpersonal relations	Mastery, skill, achievement
Independence	Service and social welfare
Leadership and personal power	Creativity and challenge
Adventure	Self-expression
Moral value	Security
Money	

Over the twenty years I used this profile, the vast majority of people did not list the big three; security, money, recognition as the most important or even the second most important reason they worked. They chose things like personal relationships, self-expression, moral value, or service as their main values. What they wanted was *meaning*.

So if we desire deeper meaning in our work or a sense that we've made a difference, what better way, as people of faith, than to somehow incorporate our spiritual lives into our work lives—in very practical, creative and meaningful ways. That would look different for each of us, but what if we asked God to show us how our work could be more meaningful by integrating our faith at work?

For inspiration, let's look at a few Biblical examples of people who had regular jobs (well all except Esther who was a queen) and who faced incredible crisis or incredible opportunities and drew upon their faith to live out their calling.

-Joseph was a government bureaucrat who wisely used his skill to ward off starvation of the people during a massive drought. He had to struggle with the false accusation of a treacherous woman in order to rise to his position of authority.

-Lydia was a seller of purple cloth in the marketplaces of early Christendom. Even though women were considered powerless, she hosted Paul on his visits to her town of Philippi and was one of the early church leaders.

-Esther was the Queen who risked her life to save her people, the Jews, from total destruction. She was terrified to present herself to the king without his invitation, but she listened to the wise counsel of Mordecai, her uncle, who believed that she was born to be queen for just such a time as this.

-Jesus was a carpenter, but you all know about that.

-Nehemiah, upon returning from exile in Babylon requested permission to supervise the restoration of the walls and gates of Jerusalem. Under ridicule and duress from his distracters he became one of the Bible's most revered construction general contractors.

-Deborah was a judge over Israel who sustained her general, Barak, in a crucial time of battle. Her strong presence and belief in God made the deciding difference.

-Paul was a tent maker who used his trade to support himself as he traveled around the Mediterranean, teaching and preaching to his newly formed churches

Ponder the relevance of these stories for your own work life. Next week—part 2 of this series on faith and work.

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My book on this career topic is called *The Inventurers*. I am grateful to Robert Banks, retired professor at Fuller seminary specializing in the Laity, who so thoughtfully inspired me with stories of Biblical people who lived out their faith at work. Rob edited a book called *Faith Goes to Work* by Albion Press. And I am grateful to Bethel Seminary for a workshop I took on faith and work in the fall of 2013.

Reflections on this essay:

Why do you work?

What are your major disconnections from work?

How do these stories inform your work?

What does God have to say about why you work or what you are called to do?