



SOUL WORK

**FINDING GOD
IN YOUR
ENTREPRENEURIAL
PURSUITS**

LOWELL W. BUSENITZ

“You are holding a gem! This richly integrated book weaves together theology, business acumen, and spiritual insight that will help Christians understand and live out their faith in the workplace. Busenitz draws from a deep reservoir of entrepreneurial experience, a career as a business strategy scholar, and a vibrant Christian commitment to remind us that God is already present in our workplaces. When we begin with this recognition, our souls are shaped for God’s purposes, allowing us to participate with God in bringing innovation, compassion, justice, and love to the workplace.”

—**Denise Daniels, Hudson T. Harrison
Endowed Chair of Entrepreneurship
Business & Economics Department, Wheaton College**

“For years, I struggled with living out my faith in my work, trying to find clever ways to bring Christianity into my field and daily conversations. What I often didn’t realize is that God was already there. Lowell Busenitz has written a tremendously helpful book for the entrepreneurially minded that invites readers into a ‘with God’ relationship in all things—including the sacred pursuit of their daily work.”

—**Jeff Haanen, Founder, Denver Institute for Faith & Work**

“Lowell Busenitz has authored one of the most practical books I’ve encountered in the space of faith-based entrepreneurship. Leveraging a solid biblical framework, Lowell shows *how* we engage our faith in entrepreneurial pursuits and *how* God develops us spiritually through the experience. The soul work documented here explains why a creative God blesses us with innovation, where our spiritual gifts come to life in entrepreneurial work, how we love our neighbors through the work week, and when work becomes a platform for advancing compassionate justice. In addition, this book reframes the inevitable challenges, setbacks, and losses of work life in the context of spiritual maturity so that the ‘valley of death’ becomes a blessing a disguise. I encourage every Christian entrepreneur to read this book—not just for instruction in faith at work, but also for the inspiration that work makes us better Christ-followers.”

—**Chuck Proudfit, President, At Work on Purpose**

"*Soul Work* is a breath of fresh air! So many invigorating insights about God in the workplace that I've never heard before. His book changed my theology of work."

—**Michael Klassen, President, Illumify Media Global**

"*Soul Work* is a beautiful reminder that while God calls us to create and do work for him, ultimately, our work is a means to a much bigger end—experiencing God and being with him."

—**Jordan Raynor, national bestselling author of
*Called to Create and Master of One***

"Written by a scholar of entrepreneurship and innovation, *Soul Work* is a welcome gift to a maturing faith and work movement. *Soul Work* is theologically robust yet embodies on every page an accessible and refreshing down-to-earth practicality. The myriad of timeless insights along with reflective questions make this book a rich interactive experience for the reader who longs to better connect their Sunday faith with the joys and challenges of their Monday workplace. Anyone with an entrepreneurial interest or mindset will find a treasure trove of wisdom mined from years of experience and reflection by an author who brings his best game to this book. I highly recommend it."

—**Tom Nelson, President, Made to Flourish
Author of *Work Matters* and
*The Economics of Neighborly Love***

"*Soul Work* is a timely book that focuses on the growing movement and resurgent interest in the intersection of faith and work. In this book, Dr. Lowell Busenitz addresses the most important issues of how and why to integrate faith and work. He also provides new insights into this topic through his God-Already-at-Work model, where he highlights issues of co-creation, giftedness, and encountering challenges. *Soul Work* provides relevant Scriptures, thought-provoking questions, and a comprehensive model. This book is a must for anyone who is anywhere along the entrepreneurial journey!"

—**Brett Smith, Cintas Chair of Entrepreneurship
and Founding Director, Leading the Integration of
Faith & Entrepreneurship (L.I.F.E.)
Research Lab, Miami University, Ohio**

“Many struggle to see anything spiritual in work. The latter is little more than what we do to get by, to earn a living, and to survive, but hardly a reality that awakens us to God and his purpose in our lives. In his excellent book, *Soul Work*, Lowell Busenitz responds to this distorted viewpoint and unpacks for us the profoundly spiritual and Christ-exalting nature of our work, and how it serves to connect us with God. If ‘work’ has become for you a purely mundane necessity, entirely detached from your personal relationship with the Lord, read this book to be set straight and put on the right track.”

—**Sam Storms, Lead Pastor of Preaching & Vision
Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City**

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LOWELL W. BUSENITZ

Soul Work: Finding God in Your Entrepreneurial Pursuits

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This book is dedicated to my parents,
John and Frieda Busenitz, in great appreciation
for pointing me toward the One who saves my
soul and for teaching me the value of work.

I also dedicate this to you, the entrepreneurial
worker who longs for more of God.
I pray these writings will help you forge a more
soul-enhancing pathway forward.
A journey that moves you closer to God
is the only journey worth pursuing.

God's blessing on you and your work.

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INTRODUCTION

“As a part of a group of six business leaders, we meet once a month for a four-hour block to push one another and to hold one another accountable,” said Lou, an entrepreneur and business owner. “We are owners and CEOs of entrepreneurial businesses, and we all hold similar spiritual values. We ask one another the tough questions like family priorities, whether to pursue a business expansion, handling tough employee challenges, moral issues, and spiritual values. Going on three years, we have become a tight-knit group.”

At a recent meeting, one of the entrepreneurs in the group asked, “What if we pool some of our resources and do something to address a social problem like human trafficking or the homeless? I would like to see us do something that *really matters*.”

I admire Lou’s fellow business owner for wanting to give from his success. But the comment unknowingly separated the gospel into distinct work and charity spheres. Fighting social inequality employs the radical hospitality of the gospel, and so does everyday labor. Jesus’ work as a teacher was important, and so was his carpentry work. It was not his financial contributions to the needy that saved souls—it was his fellowship with them.

Our work, then, can become a place to discover and connect directly with God. Instead of taking God to work, God is already there and embedded in our work. His presence awaits you there. With the eye-opening guidance of the Holy Spirit, work can become a rich place to know and experience God more intimately.

Consider a question from my friend Jake. “Am I wasting time building my career with little explicit eternal value? I have a full

plate with my work, and I rarely see how it connects with my spiritual interest.” Unfortunately, this is frequently how believers view work. If, like Jake, you’re pursuing a relationship with God, then you’re probably battling with how your work fits with your spiritual journey. You may even feel like work is a spiritual opponent.

Work was first God’s idea. After creating the heavens and the earth, Genesis 2:2 says, “And on the seventh day God finished his work.” Then God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and told them to “work it and take care of it” (Gen. 2:15). Because we are made in God’s image, this means we are designed to work. Working is a part of our DNA. Unfortunately, it’s often seen as disruptive to our spiritual journey. This book is about a different way where work is embraced as a place to discover a rich and engaging God.

My Story

I was born into a family of six boys and one girl in rural Kansas, where my parents were grain and livestock farmers. By kindergarten age, I was bringing wood into the house for tomorrow’s heat and helping in the garden with pulling weeds and harvesting potatoes before playtime.

My days started with my father calling up the stairs at 6:00 a.m., “Boys, time to get up.” If I was slow in waking up, my oldest brother would soon call to me “Lowell, your cow is calling” until I responded. Work was central to the enterprise, and we all had our part to do.

My parents’ faith was very important to them. As active participants in a Mennonite faith community, we regularly prayed for the needs of the day. Sunday was set aside as a day of rest, and we usually attended two church services. Our faith community shared a strong missional orientation, and from the fruits of our labor, full-time ministries were supported.

My early years of work provided many experiences, skill development opportunities, questions, challenges, and yes, even

glimpses of God. I recall getting on a horse to ride the cattle in from the wheat pasture on brisk December mornings while enjoying the open horizon and sunrises. I remember planting seeds in my own prepared garden, watching new sprouts poke up through the soil crust. I learned about soil erosion and caring for the land, watched fresh rain revitalize drought-stricken crops, and the art and science of caring for our livestock. When called on to shovel “itchy” grain or work in cold and windy conditions, I would often connect work to Adam and Eve’s sin and think about the resulting curse.

In my formative college years, I experienced meaningful relationships and engaged with leadership. By my last two years of college, I had finally learned how to become decent student. It was during these years when the longing for a deeper relationship with God really emerged. After graduation, I joined InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in campus ministry working with student leaders, conducting training workshops, and organizing conferences.

After six years with InterVarsity, I began working in the construction industry. After one year, I started my own business and learned about taking care of customers, dealing with competition, bidding on new projects, and developing my own skill set. Entrepreneurship stretched me in multiple ways.

As I found that the construction industry was not going to hold my attention for the rest of my working years, I decided to pursue graduate studies in strategic management and entrepreneurship. This journey pushed me substantially beyond anything I could have ever imagined.

Upon completion of my PhD from Texas A&M University, I became a professor of strategic management at the University of Houston. After six years, I moved to the University of Oklahoma where I cofounded the entrepreneurship program in the Price College of Business. My research continued to gain traction, and I had the great privilege of walking alongside hundreds of learners in entrepreneurship and their development of business concepts.

In the years following my student ministry days, I often wrestled with the worth of my work spiritually. But in God’s grace, he some-

times brought me enough understanding to see his “imprints” in the work of my hands and mind. These “God-touches” left me pondering spirituality in fresh ways. Eventually, the workplace became a place of opportunity to discover and connect with God—in fact, I discovered that God was already present in my workplace.

As a teenager, I had already started reasoning that if faith is real, then it should be equally relevant across all of life, not just church life. My relationship with God should be just as relevant in my work life as in leading a Bible study or doing “ministry.” By God’s grace, I discovered him to be abundantly present in the workplace. Furthermore, this revelation enabled me to thrive by discovering the interconnect-edness and complementariness of my work and my spiritual life.

Is This Book for You?

At a recent conference on faith and work, Stuart shared some of the positive influences he was able to have as an entrepreneur and a city council member. Then Pastor Tracy, the leader of the panel, asked him, “How is your work impacting your relationship with God?” After a significant pause, Stuart said, “I’m going to need to get back with you on this.”

Like Stuart, most of us have given little or no thought to such a question. Along my pathway, I came to realize that God is the creator and sustainer of our world and lives and that he is already everywhere present. The touches of our hands and minds are potential connections for us to God. He wants us to link in with him.

Are you desirous of some serious soul work but there seems to be a chasm between your work and spiritual life? Maybe you’re struggling to make sense of your work at a spiritual level. Maybe you’re on a journey toward God, but a personal relationship with him still seems elusive. If you desire to understand God better, then work can be a channel for discovering him. The everywhere-present God is more than ready to connect with you! Given that you picked up this book, you most likely have a desire for some soul growth, or you’re not satisfied with the proximity of your spiritual journey. Welcome!

In full disclosure, my pathway to God is through Jesus Christ. He is alive within me, and he is my lover, my advocate, my guide, my brother, my strength, my redeemer in ever-increasing ways. My relationship with God through Jesus is at the core of my life. He is my eternal hope. But I am still young in my journey and have so much to learn.

If you've been embarking on a different pathway to God, I still invite you into this book. This doesn't change the fact that God is present in our places of work. We all have much to learn with coming to know God. Regardless of your current position and leanings, I invite you to join us into this journey of soul work. You'll find God waiting to connect with you at your work.

This book offers a new way of thinking about your work, a new paradigm for how you can meet God at work. Work is like a rich resource pool of opportunities for letting God come and touch you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, discovering God in your workplace is possible beyond anything you have ever imagined! I pray you can increasingly connect with the God who longs to connect with you.

What's Ahead in this Book?

Part I of this book (chapters 1–3), “Discovering God Already at Work,” establishes the biblical premise for the new paradigm from which I'm building. Chapter 1 notes the most common ways work is viewed by Christians today. I characterize this as the “faith-to-work” model where we take spiritual values into the workplace. These often include practices like prayer, good ethics, meditations, the Holy Spirit's counsel in decision making, and loving one another, among others. However, such practices, while good, often struggle to encourage much spiritual growth. This chapter will identify the spiritual voids most of us feel in our workplaces.

Chapter 2 presents the “God-Already-at-Work” model as the new paradigm from which the entire book builds. Work is a great context for pointing us to God and constructively enabling soul work in connecting us to God. This chapter provides the foundation

for understanding this practical approach for discovering God already in your work.

Drawing on both the Old and New Testaments, chapter 3 lays the biblical foundation for our work. It moves us beyond a common understanding of work because of the fall. The Scriptures point us to consider God's creation and his presence in our work, in how he values our work, and how he connects with us through our work.

Part II of the book (chapters 4–8), “Opportunities for Experiencing God at Work,” establishes five spiritual work disciplines for finding God in our entrepreneurial and business endeavors. Chapter 4 delves into the innovation and co-creating processes common to entrepreneurial pursuits. Because we are made in God's image, we have the privilege of innovating and extending what God has created to develop for the good of life on this earth. Furthermore, for those who have eyes to see, engaging in innovation can enable us to discover the deeper thumbprints of God in what he created.

Chapter 5 unwraps the relevance of our spiritual giftedness for our work. Far too often, our spiritual gifts are limited to the church context. Just as our spiritual life doesn't need to stop when we enter the workplace, neither does our giftedness. Becoming a light of our God in the workplace usually finds its roots in our individual giftedness. Engaging our work from a position of our giftedness opens our eyes to see God and pursue promising opportunities.

Chapter 6 focuses on seeing God in and through our “neighbors.” The gain of this chapter is in seeing God in the many and varied individuals with whom we engage. The practice of loving our neighbors at work becomes a channel for seeing God's imprint in creating all humankind in his image. In so doing, we deepen our solidarity with God. We also get to see the good that God has put in each of us as we pursue goodness for others.

Chapter 7 addresses the pursuit of justice. Injustices in the workplace are commonplace. However, with injustices also come opportunities to address the wrongs and the hurting to help contribute to the common good. Doing so can connect us to the God of justice who cares far more than we do. God's purity and ultimate

justice gives us an anchoring hope. The benefit of this chapter is in its offering of constructive channels for helping with the practice of justice and in so doing unite with the heart of God more closely.

Chapter 8 probes the pain issues we encounter in our businesses. Dealing with challenges such as lying, competitors, failed dreams, false accusations, stolen ideas, flaws in our legal system, and coworker conflicts are painful realities. When going through our “Valley of Death,” we invariably have the opportunity to engage in some serious soul work.

In Part III, “The Fruit of Being with God at Work,” which includes chapters 9 and 10, we will discuss how worship is the climax of uniting with God in and through our work. In the context of chapters 4–8, we now consider the implications of recognizing the nature and character of our God more explicitly. When we see glimpses of God already at work, we want to respond in worship. The Hebrew word *avodah* or the root of it appears many times in the Old Testament. Sometimes it means “work” or “service,” sometimes it means “worship,” and sometimes it means both. *Avodah* is “work” and “worship” overlapping in meaning and sometimes becoming indistinguishable!

Chapter 10 puts the capstone on work as a central opportunity for spiritual formation. Spiritual disciplines are like resources facilitating the building of our souls to connect us with our God who is already at work. They are pathways to the real presence of God among us. While our workplaces are notoriously challenging, we can prepare the way for some serious soul work within. Our work can become a thriving space for knowing God.

As you progress through this book, each chapter starts with a prayer. I will continue to bring these prayers before the Lord on your behalf. Maybe you would also like to take a few moments before reading each chapter to make these prayers your own. The Spirit of the Lord be with you!

PART I

DISCOVERING GOD
ALREADY AT WORK

STRIVING TO CONNECT GOD AND WORK

Gracious and loving Heavenly Father, in love you spoke me into being before the foundation of the world. Your love has surrounded me and patiently nudged me forward into greater intimacy with you. Thank you for how you have used work to deepen my journey with you. Holy Spirit, come now and guide these words to fill our minds with you so we can know you more intimately. Amen.

The Great Divide

“Why are those who seem most interested in spiritual issues the ones who often go on to full-time ministry?” This is a question I asked of my teacher one Sunday morning when I was seventeen. “It seems those with more spiritual interests are less likely to pursue vocational alternatives,” I continued. Behind my inquiry was a wrestling with the reality of God’s presence. I thought to myself, “If I really want to grow in knowing God, will I be disadvantaged by pursuing a vocational direction not in full-time ministry?”

I had already tasted the Lord’s presence, but it was becoming apparent that I was only at the tip of the iceberg. I longed for more. Did my career track matter in this regard? Should my level of spiritual interest drive my career path? Although my budding biblical perspective was pointing me toward a God who was equally relevant across all vocations, was what I thought really true?

From early in my life, I learned work could be good. Of course, it was also necessary for making a living. From the proceeds of work, we are able to eat, go to school, support family, and serve others. It was largely unspoken, but self-respect and good things also come from work.

My earliest encounter with entrepreneurial work came when I was eight years old in 1960. Taking clues from my mom's large garden, I carved out my own plot of land. After a spring and summer of tilling the soil and caring for my plants, the highlight of the year came when I loaded up my harvested pumpkins to offer them to a local grocer. I still vividly remember my exchange with the store manager and the moment he handed me a check for \$2.60 (which today is about \$10!) in exchange for the seven pumpkins. My first entrepreneurial endeavor had earned a nice return.

I felt a sense of accomplishment and dignity from this gardening effort, and I realized that work could indeed be good. But was there any spiritual significance to it? Except for when it rained on parched soil, I rarely gave more than a passing thought to how my everyday work could be relevant for my journey in growing toward God.

God graciously guided me through my challenges and misperceptions. By his grace, I've seen the reality of his presence meaningfully penetrating my work. I now see God as present in *all my life*. Furthermore, work has become an incredibly valuable channel for coming into a closer union with him.

Do you struggle with finding God in your work? Are you frustrated when work seems to get in the way of your relationship with God? Consider an alternative of journeying with me in this book as it charts a course for us both through opportunity to engage with the living God through your work.

The "God touches" I've experienced in my work resulted in significant steps forward, and I now realize that he has been more powerfully present in my work than I once could have ever imagined. If we believe that God is already present in our workplaces, then we will realize how our work can become transformative and draw us into a more beautiful intimacy with him.

Vocations in the Scriptures

As God reveals himself to me (and to all of humankind), I'm particularly impacted by my reflections of the workplace in the Scriptures. To illustrate God's clear interest in our vocations, let's consider the following vocations mentioned in the Scriptures with modern-day counterparts:

- *Carpenters and woodworkers*: God gave Bezalel the Spirit of God and the skill in woodwork and craftsmanship to build the furnishings of the Tabernacle (Exod 31:2–4), and many were involved in building David's house (2 Sam. 5:11). Jesus learned the construction trade from Joseph (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3).
- *International businesspeople*: Solomon was a business entrepreneur involved in international trade and merchant ships (1 Kings 10:22–29; 2 Chron. 9:13–14). He also had profitable partnerships with kings and queens (1 Kings 10:1–13). Ultimately, though, his great wisdom and the resulting work and wealth gave way to arrogance and diversion and away from his union with God.
- *Merchants*: There were entrepreneurs in the marketplace; some did well and were spoken of appreciatively (2 Chron. 9:13–14; Song 3:6), while others were called out for dishonest gain (Hos. 12:7; Rev. 12:15). Lydia, the “dealer in purple cloth” from Thyatira, was likely an accomplished and influential entrepreneur. She was also Paul's first convert in Philippi (Acts 16:14–15, 40).
- *Doctors and nurses*: There were physicians who embalmed Joseph's father, Jacob (Gen. 50:2). There were midwives in the birthing of babies (Exod. 1:15–21). Nurses were often honored positions (2 Sam. 4:4; 2 Kings 11:2; Gen. 24:59; 35:8). There were doctors who tried to cure people (Mark 5:25–26). Luke, the writer of his Gospel and Acts, was a physician (Col 4:14).

- *Teachers*: There were those who taught the next generations (Exod. 18:20; Col. 3:16), and teaching was also identified as a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:6–7).
- *Night watchmen/security personnel*: There were guards and those who protected the cities from violence (2 Sam. 18:24–27; Isa. 21:11–12; Ps. 127:1).
- *Urban (re)developers*: Nehemiah was very entrepreneurial in the gathering of resources and managing the rebuilding of the wall (see the book of Nehemiah).
- *Administrators and government leaders*: Although enslaved under enemy nations, Joseph, Mordecai, and Daniel used their appointments as government leaders to serve the Lord and the people of Israel, which led to pivotal turns in history (Gen. 41:37ff.; Est. 6–10; Dan. 5; the “city clerk” in Acts 19:35). Joseph was deeply touched by his work and later recognized God’s great “good.”

From these examples, it’s apparent that God’s purposes for us don’t hinge on whether we’re in full-time ministry. In God’s economy, one career is not more sacred than another. The relevance and vitality of knowing God and the potential of his presence is available in all careers. What is rarely addressed is how work can become a channel for enabling spiritual flourishing.

Linking God and Work

In my early adult years, I understood human flourishing to come through praying, meditating on the Scriptures, collective worship, loving one another, communicating the message of God to others in my workplace, practicing strong ethics, and so on. To this day, my soul continues to find nourishment as I engage in these practices.

Then, when I was in my early thirties, some subtle shifts started taking place in my life. As an entrepreneur in the construction in-

dustry, I became intrigued with the different kinds of wood and the importance of the right wood for various applications. For example, I discovered that while yellow pine is strong for structural purposes, it also quickly rots if subjected to moisture, but cedar and redwood can handle years of exposure to the outdoor elements. For interior applications, I found out that the variations between open and closed grain woods impact the way they absorb stain and that the style of the grain also helps to set the desired tone for a room. The density and hardness of different woods also have implications for milling and use.

Contemplating God's creation of all these different trees from which we get our wood can be amazing. And the more I worked with specific wood, the more the various properties and nuances became evident. However, my fascination with different types of wood hardly touched my spiritual journey. Little did I realize that what I was working with all day long could be a means of connecting me to God, yet my growing amazement with different wood became a foretaste of more to come as I began to wonder if the work of my hands could become a way of opening some windows to God and thereby enriching my spiritual journey.

Clearly, practicing the spiritual disciplines of my morning quiet times, prayer, collective worship, and service to others continue to be instrumental in my growth. But the breeze of the Holy Spirit was now starting to blow into my work life. At some point, I started noticing that the most impactful advancements in my relationship with the Lord came through my work as an entrepreneur and then as an entrepreneurship professor.

I've also had the privilege of watching numerous entrepreneurs make significant spiritual strides forward in the context of high work demands. It's always a delight to see their giftedness come alive in their innovative thinking, building organizations, utilizing their unique skill sets, becoming teachers, and so forth.

I now see that work can be an amazing context for advancing our spiritual journeys—though unfortunately, most of these

opportunities tend to be overlooked. This book therefore seeks to help you open your own window to knowing God more intimately in and through your work. Since God is everywhere present, this means that he is *present everywhere*—much more present than most of us realize.

Challenges with Faith at Work

Let's now talk about some realities. There have long been significant challenges to meeting God in the workplace. When our spiritual life is seen as separate from our daily work, this is commonly characterized as the sacred/secular divide or dualism.¹ Until we're individually able to dissolve this dichotomy, our spiritual advancement through work will be seriously impeded.

For centuries, Christians tended to think of their daily work only as something they did just to put food on the table—the only ones who “worked for God” were the clergy. Then along came the Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany and Reformers such as Martin Luther (1483–1546)² and John Calvin (1509–1564) gave spiritual worth to even the smallest of duties. Calvin reminded us that just as the Spirit of God was the one who gave Bezalel the ability to craft the furnishings of the Tabernacle, God is the one who gives us the ability and skills to perform our work.³ Luther and Calvin both taught that we have vocational callings to serve God and to be “the salt in the earth” (Matt. 5:13), and their teaching served to open the door for us to see the dignity and spiritual significance of ordinary work.

Regardless, some people still feel that pursuing a ministry career is of the highest significance. After all, what could possibly be more important than explicitly being involved with people's spiritual lives? For those not in full-time ministry, they feel that their work is just what they do to make a living, but they can justify doing what they do if they can contribute financial or material support to those with a “higher calling.” Figuratively speaking, pastors and missionaries are viewed as those sitting in the first-class section while everybody else is back in coach.

The good news is that over the past thirty years, some people who felt this impact of the “Sunday-Monday gap” came together to form what is now known as the faith and work movement, which started from their frustration with the limited relevance of the Christian message to everyday work. These leaders sought to take principles from the Bible and apply them into our *work lives*. In *God at Work*, David Miller notes that common issues include identity, meaning, purpose, calling, discipleship, ethics, responsibility, witness, evangelization, and transformation in and of the business world.⁴

Most of the subsequent materials and teachings on faith and work can be characterized by the following question: How can your faith impact your work? This approach takes faith issues and applies them to our work lives (hereafter referred to as Faith-to-Work model). For example, “pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17) includes when we are at work and “do not worry about tomorrow” (Matt. 6:34) because God wants us to let him take care of the concerns we tend to shoulder.

Gains follow from this approach. One recent and particularly refreshing look at this Faith-to-Work approach is *Working in the Presence of God* by Denise Daniels and Shannon Vandewarker.⁵ These authors offer practical ways for bringing Scripture, commuter liturgy, affirmation, gratitude, confession, and so on, into the “holy ground” of the workplace. We are called to pursue such practices—not just on Sunday, but in all of life.

The Faith-to-Work movement can be characterized as an outside-in approach. We take what is learned from our faith gatherings and carry it forward into Monday to Friday. This model rightfully assumes that truths rooted in the Scriptures have implications for our work week. Figure 1 below illustrates this outside-in approach of seeking to bring learned principles and truths into our work lives. Unfortunately, such truths often don’t penetrate far enough into our work lives. This is illustrated by the length of the arrows into the workplace circle in the figure.

In sum, although this Faith-to-Work model offers people some gains, it also places limitations on their union with God. This



Figure 1.1. The Faith → Work Model

approach focuses on the individual worker bringing the right actions and practices into the workplace; but far too often, such practices don't translate into inner transformation and closeness with God, and they can tend to limit our spiritual formation growth. We therefore need to consider the Scriptures more carefully and probe the transformative potential of meeting God in the workplace.

Seeking “Better” Work

The past several decades have brought substantial turbulence into our workplaces. Events such as 9/11 and financial crises brought economic and workforce challenges. Then, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought a worker shortage and the “Great Resignation” when four million Americans quit their jobs in July 2021, leaving open 10.9 million jobs by the end of that month.⁶ These crises often serve as a wake-up call that work is more than just a paycheck and increasing wealth. Business schools have responded to widespread calls to provide research and teaching for the next generation of

students with more focus on sustainability, ethics, and social purposes. As a result, many schools have revised their curriculum to integrate moral and ethical values.

Another response has been to think innovatively and address social issues with entrepreneurial ventures.⁷ Entrepreneurship can empower purposeful work and provide a pathway for pursuing a given cause by utilizing creativity, innovation, and artistic expression.

Pursuing better work and maintaining work/life balance are good things, and the longing to change the world is God given. But such desires are not sustainable without an inner life rooted in God. The end, however, isn't about becoming more ethical and balanced in our work and life. Life is more than just being passionate and "doing good." The inner strength to engage in such work comes from being able to drink of the living water, as Jesus said, "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst" (John 4:14). The deepest longing of our heart is to be with God and enjoy him now and forever—and I believe that our work context can actually help us move closer to this great desire.

The Potential of Soul Work

In *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, Eugene Peterson notes that the word *soul* is a comprehensive term for designating the core of who we are, a one-of-a-kind creature made in the "image of God."⁸ In Peterson's paraphrase of Genesis 2:7, where God forms man from the ground and then breathe into him, he writes, "The Man came alive—a living soul!" (MSG). "Soul" here speaks to the totality of our God-breathed individuality, our spiritual life, and our relationships with people and the earth.⁹

Since our work is a major part of who we are, to be able to integrate our work with our God-breathed individuality, spirituality, and relationships is to engage with soul work. With such integration comes enormous dignity. To disconnect work from our individuality and spirituality is to reduce it to something mechanical or a function of production. When we separate spirituality from our work,

we fracture our lives into something less than what God intended in his breathing life into us. Furthermore, it shortchanges one of the central ways in which God often seeks to touch the core of our lives.

Soul Work therefore probes the realities of having a God-breathed living soul to help us transform our souls in a practical way through our work. Work has the possibility of connecting us to the highest purposes for which we were created; it can become a central facilitator in nourishing our souls, taking us to new heights with God, and thus opening the possibility of gaining immeasurable richness in our lives in God.

What Is Your Core Mindset?

How is your spiritual journey impacted by your work? Which of the following questions most resonate with your challenges?

- Does your workplace seem like a spiritual desert?
- Do you long for after-hours time so you can pursue what you think really matters?
- Do you often feel guilty for not praying, meditating, or even thinking about the Lord when you're at work?
- Are you stuck in a business that provides reasonable earnings, but you don't like what you're doing?
- Do you enjoy your work and being able to help the world become a better place but feel guilty for being so energized by this?

Questions for Reflection

1. What is your core mindset when it comes to faith and work?
2. Do you sense God's presence in your work? If so, how?
3. Do you believe that God is building a bigger story with you through your work?