



Bringing Your Faith
to the Workplace:

A Pocket Guide

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Introduction:

- 40 hours a week x 4.3 weeks in a month = 172 hours of work in a month. [*pause to ponder*]
- 172 hours a month x 12 months – 2 weeks of vacation = 1,984 hours in a year. [*pause to ponder*]
- 1,984 hours a year x 40 year career = Roughly 80,000 hours in a lifetime we will be at work! [*pause to ponder*]

Studies have said that we spend about 40% of our waking hours at work. And, this does not include how much time we spend *thinking* about work when we're not at work!

Do our work hours matter to God or just our “church” hours? If they do matter, what purpose does God have for us in these thousands of hours? How many of us have ever wrestled with these questions? If so, what answers do we come up with?

Os Hillman, an expert in the issue of faith in the workplace, says, “after traveling to 25 nations speaking

to Christians on the subject, and some 10 books later, I have learned one overwhelming fact: Christians do not have a theology of work.”¹ Tom Nelson, pastor and author of the book *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* says, “ Many who are Christians complain of a Sunday-Monday gap, where their Sunday worship hours bear little relevance to the issues in their Monday workplaces.”² Can you relate, at least in part, to these things? I bet most of you can.

Why this booklet on faith in the workplace? There are three main reasons for it:

1.) Practical: People spend a lot of time at work and thinking about work. Where does God and our Christian life fit into work? There must be a connection. There should not be a Sunday-Monday gap if I understand my Bible correctly. Also, many of us struggle with what that means practically; where do I start and how far do I go in bringing my faith to work with me. We want you to have a guide to refer to ***while you’re at work***.

(2.) Theological: The Bible speaks about this issue either directly or indirectly quite a bit. Work is a very important part of the overall theology of the Bible. We

¹ <http://www.marketplaceleaders.org/faith-and-work-movement/>

² Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*, Crossway Books, 2011. P. 15.

want to help you establish good, theological foundations to our understanding of the workplace.

(3.) Experiential: Think about the enormous amount of experiences and feelings we have each day, week, month and year at work. We all have some really rewarding days at work and we all have some really terrible days. Sometimes we see the great end for which we are working and sometimes it gets very cloudy and depressing. As Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes 3:9**, “What gain does the worker have from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given man to be busy with.” We hope to give you some fresh and optimistic perspective.

So let’s jump in and see if we can help shed some encouraging light on these things.

#1: Laying a Foundation

Left-Hand Bookend of the Bible (Genesis)

Tim Keller says, “One of the hopes for our unraveling society is the recovery of the idea that all human work is not just a job but a calling by God. Our work can be a calling if it is re-imagined as *a mission of service from God*”

to something beyond our own interests.”³ Have you ever thought of your work as a calling? Maybe you thought that was a term just used for pastors, missionaries or great doctors. Where does Keller get this idea from? He gets it right from the Bible. From the very beginning, God’s people have been “set apart” to labor for Him in His world. (1.) **Genesis 1:1** – “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God Himself worked and worked for a purpose. Not only that, He did His work well and He enjoyed it. God has not stopped working ever since. (2.) **Genesis 1:28** – “And God blessed them and said to them, “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over every living thing.” **Genesis 2:15** – “The LORD took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” In Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 we see what is called the **cultural mandate** given to mankind. As God’s image bearers (**Gen. 1:26**), *mankind was created to work with God, for God, in God’s world*. This mandate from God goes for us in 2016 suburban America as well.

One more thing - work was ordained by God *before* the fall. Work became tough, frustrating, monotonous,

³ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connection Your Work to God’s Work*, Riverhead Books, 2012, p. 2.

trouble-filled, unfair, etc. *after* the fall (**Gen. 3:17-19**). This is a good thing to remember! So, we can rightly conclude that God has ordained human working from the very beginning and that it is intended for good.

Right-Hand Bookend of the Bible (Revelation)

Is work only something for earth? Isn't God going to make all things better in heaven? People say "all of this is thankfully going to end one day." The answer from the Bible to these questions, or assumptions, is YES and NO. We just looked at Genesis and God's fundamental layout for work in world history. Now, let's go to the other bookend of time: The New Heaven and the New Earth as described in **Revelation 21**. Previously, in **Revelation 7:9**, God tells us heaven is filled with people from every tribe, tongue and nation. **Revelation 21:2-3, 5, 10, 22-24** tells us that there will be a time when these people (his saints) will re-inhabit the earth to live alongside God forever. This will be a better place; work as we know it will end. To be sure, we will be praising God day and night and we'll be in the presence of the Lamb, King Jesus; but *that is not all we will be doing*. In ways we are not totally made aware of, God will bring things "full circle" and we will enter into living (and laboring)

alongside Him forever, on earth, again one day! But, it will be a “purified forever”, no longer troubled labor and living as we now know it (see further **John 14:1-3 and 2 Peter 3:10-12**)⁴. Tom Nelson says, “What you do here is not a waste. The skills and abilities you are developing now in your workplace will not be wasted; they will be utilized and further developed in *the future work* God has for you to do in the new heavens and new earth. Your time in our Father’s fallen world now is preparation [for the next].”⁵ Does that change our perspective or what?

Here’s a final, important stamp on the overall purposes of work from Genesis to Revelation: *It is all for God’s Glory*. One of the most fundamental principles in the Bible is stated succinctly in **1 Corinthians 10:31** – “whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all to the glory of God.” That’s quite a statement when you chew on it. “Whatever you do...” is not just intended for your church time, devotional time, etc. This means that what we do, say, think and feel *at work* can (and should)

⁴ There is some debate about the way to interpret the words “burn up” in 2 Peter 3. Some say it means the whole earth, all the work of history will be annihilated and God will start afresh. Others believe that burn is a term for refining or purifying of the earth along with eternal judgement on sin. This is God preparing the earth to start afresh for the New Earth/New Jerusalem time. This later view is the view I think is best.

⁵ Nelson, p.75.

be done “for God’s glory.” That can be both encouraging and convicting!

It’s encouraging because it means even the most mundane of tasks or meetings at work can be done with the mindset that “somehow, I want God to be glorified in this.” This brings our Christian life to life in the mundane of the everyday! But, it is also convicting because we all know we fall short of thinking, acting, speaking and feeling in a way that honors God at work. Praise God for the grace of forgiveness in Christ!

And what about this term “the glory of God”? What does that mean in a workplace context? Basically, it means that from our *private* thoughts and feelings to our *public* actions and speech, whether in big things or small things, we should *somehow want to make God look good*. We want to bring Him honor by honoring Him (**Matthew 22:37**). We want to show people what a valuable treasure He is to us (**Matthew 13:44**). We want to show them that He is King; not just of my life, but of everything on earth, including every place of employment (**Psalms 24:1**). We want to show people that there is something complete in our life that the world does not have (**2**

Corinthians 2:15). “What is the chief purpose of man? Answer: To glorify God and enjoy him forever.”⁶ That pretty well says it. And the 40+ hours a week you spend at work is a place to fulfill it.

I hope that you have already begun to see a new vision of your workplace. These passages from God’s Word have certainly helped me. Now let’s transition to the “here and now”, the parts of life in between each bookend of God’s Word. Let me start with things we should *not* do at work and then transition into things we *should* do.

#2: Things We Should *NOT* Do at Work

Making an Idol out of work:

In our culture, productivity and accomplishment are put on a pedestal. These things are, in and of themselves, not bad, in fact they are good and connected to the cultural mandate mentioned earlier. But, when we wrap our identities around them, see our self-worth in them and put our hope on them, they become dangerous idols. This is particularly true at any workplace. And yes, it can happen to Christians. *An idol is something or*

⁶ The Westminster Confession of Faith, Shorter Catechism, question #1.

someone we value as much as or more than God. John Calvin famously said that our hearts are idol factories. That may seem overstated to you, but one of the most prevalent themes in the Bible is idolatry. Whether it be the religious idolatry of the pagan nations that Israel fell into or idols within our own hearts (see **Matthew 6:21**, **Luke 18:18-29** and **Colossians 3:5**), idols are something that we mistakenly value, look to for ultimate hope, identity and meaning other than God. Here's the balance - goal setting, hard work, accomplishment and enjoyment in work are good....when *kept in proper perspective and portions with the Word of God.*

Here are some of the most common ways we idolize our jobs:

- Workaholism – “there’s always more to do.”
- Materialism – “I work to get more toys.”
- Push for power – “I work to get things done.”
- Overly seeking identity in your work – “work will make me happy and people will like me.”
- Favoritism – “I will get my way.”

Now, you may be saying, “Easier said than done. My work just demands a lot out of me”. Understood. Your job may demand a lot out of you, but that does not mean

your heart has to make an idol out of it! See the difference. Paul saw this idolatry in his own heart and warned us as Christians to *find our identity in Christ*, not our resumes (**Philippians 3:4-8**).

Being idle at work:

The other side of the coin is being idle at work. This is just as much a threat to our hearts and our witness at work as idolatry. We waste company time, we are habitually late to work and clock out too early. We put in the minimum amount of effort because we don't think our pay deserves any more than that. Do you find it easy to complain or cut corners and have found that you can generally get away with it? Idleness is a habit we can easily fall into. If your job offers you too much time for idleness, think of some ways you could turn that around. Maybe seek to help fellow employees or let your boss know you have some extra time to get onto another project or task for example.

God's goal in the gospel is not to change your personality but your character. He is likely not going to turn you into an opposite type of person in the workplace. But, if you tend to be an idolizer of work, Jesus does want you to

repent of overdoing (making an idol of work). If you tend to be overly idle at work, Jesus does want you to repent of your underdoing (being idle at work).

So, there's the "what not to do at work." Now for the some things you can and should do at work as a Christian.

#3: Some Key Ways to Bring Your Faith to the Workplace

Lists can be dangerous. They too often act as some quick checklist and can put you and God in a box. Before we look at 6 things to bring to work with you, remember: As Christians, we bring a unique purpose and end to our work – serving others (not just self), we are joining in on God's work of redeeming culture and we give the glory to God, not to self-centered advancement or accomplishment.

Now, you can see that each suggestion below has a Bible verse(s) listed. Please go to your Bible – read and think on each of these. The Word of God is our only inerrant guide. Also, as you read each of the 6 suggestions, maybe ask yourself these helpful questions: Which of

these suggestions am I doing well in at my workplace?
What are some areas I could use some improvement?
Set some small, reasonable goals and ask God for help.

Character and Attitude (Galatians 5:16-23 and Colossians 3:23-24):

I will have to say that this is the most important thing you can bring to your workplace as a Christian! I will say it again, character and attitude are the most important things you can bring to work as a Christian. Being a person of *integrity* in everything you do and say at work is huge. Being *thankful* for your job and having the *Colossians 3:24 attitude* are equally powerful and important to God. Not only will character and attitude be of benefit to you and your weekly work experience, but it will surely be a light of the Gospel to those around you. There are times when you will be pressured to compromise your character and/or your attitude. We've all been there before. But, in the end, having the right attitude and being committed to integrity will be rewarded by God, give peace to our consciences and even be rewarded by the work world itself at some time and in some way. May these two simple words

(character and attitude) be the screensaver on your mind each day.

Service (Philippians 2:3-7 and Matthew 5:16):

Ever seen an overflowing trash can in the break room if you work in an office setting? Could you offer to empty it? Here is just one example of serving in the workplace. Can you think of some other ways you could serve others in your workplace? Maybe there are opportunities to shine our light by serving co-workers, bosses or clients *outside of work* too – helping a co-worker with a home project for example. This is all in the context of one of the cardinal precepts of living for King Jesus in this world: *Self-sacrificing love of others*. Sure, at work you have a lot on your own plate – you don't have much extra time to think of other's needs. However, there are times when work is slow and you could think about stepping up to help others in a variety of ways. This is the "going the extra mile" principle. Also, as you do your work in front of you, you can do it in ways that are thoughtful of others. Here's an example: Your boss has worked very hard on a particular project for a customer. You are doing a lot of grunt work for him. Do what you can to make your boss be successful in this project. This will

honor King Jesus as you are serving your boss. Hopefully this will bring you a sense of joy as well.

Being Intentional (Matthew 5:13-16 and 2 Corinthians 5:20):

Like character, bring intentionality to work with you. Be aware of being a Christian in the workplace! This goes two ways: One, is that you act *proactively* as a Christian. Here's an example: You know that a meeting is coming up today where you could manipulate information to get your way. Be intentional that you will not do this. Pray before you enter that meeting for yourself. Another example: Have a plan to talk with Jim about that personal problem in his life he keeps bringing up. He's searching for help, for hope. Two, you act *defensively* as a Christian. You know that people are watching you as a Christian. We all know this one, don't we! Here's an example: Avoid the opportunity to join in on workplace gossip. Be encouraged – you can do this in a way that does not make you look like you're that “holier than thou” person. Of course we fail at times, but even in the failure, respond to it in a way that is becoming of a Christian - confess and ask forgiveness. So, come to

work, not just to get your work done and clock out, but to be a Christian living out your faith.

Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-3 and 8):

Some things you're asked to do at work are beyond your skill set. You're intimidated to confront someone about unethical behavior. You know your co-workers marriage is hanging on by a thread. You can't stand your boss on Mondays. Your industry is an important part of the local economy and it's fallen on hard times. You struggle with laziness at work. Bring it all to the Lord in prayer! In the Bible, Paul tells us we should pray continually. This does not mean we do nothing else in our day, our course. But, it does mean that we can always be shooting up little messages of need, request and praise to God at work. This can be done privately on your way to work, at work and on your way home from work. Also, God may open doors for you to pray with people at work personally. Or, if you are a manager or owner, you do have the authority to pray (with discernment) at staff meetings or other events like the annual Christmas party. Prayer shows our dependence on God and it forms our will to be in line with His. I think that in heaven, if we are granted the

privilege, we will be amazed to see just how much prayer matters in this world.

Your Personal Salvation Testimony and Stories (Acts 9:1-18, Romans 1:16-17):

God has done things in you and through you that are just undeniable, right? People are looking for help, for hope, for purpose. Your story can be a powerful tool at your workplace. Your story includes how you came to faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Non-believers need to hear how the historical Jesus and the pre-modern Bible really are true. There is a way of salvation and it's in one person, Jesus. The Bible, though old, has shown itself over and over again to be trustworthy and reliable. Your story modernizes and personalizes the old Gospel story. St. Augustine, in the 5th century, said, "We were created for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." This restlessness of heart may describe someone(s) in your workplace. Your story also includes all the other things God has sovereignly brought into your life (**Romans 8:28**). There are parts to your story that will fit perfectly into the needs of others at your work, both fellow Christians and non-Christians. These parts can be used as means of encouragement,

correction, warning, hope and purpose. Maybe you've had motivation difficulties at work and can shed some light on a co-workers troubles in it. Maybe you're having trouble with talking with your kids but recently have found some things from the Bible to be helpful and you could share those with a coworker or your boss. We are the gospel "enfleshed" in unique ways. So, tell your stories; connect with people through them. But, do it in a way that is humble and with grace.

When Asked (1 Peter 3:15-16):

There are times when we do not need to initiate an offensive for King Jesus in the war at work. There are times when people will come to us. Like those "teachable moments" with our kids, take advantage of these moments when people have questions for us about Jesus, the Bible, how to have a happier marriage, anything. Admittedly, this can put us on the spot and most of us don't do as well as we'd like on the spot. But, God can do great through your imperfect "on the spot" performance. God will use your imperfect answers somehow and someday. In our imperfection, it's also a good idea to respond to questions with, "I don't know, let me get back with you on that." This should motivate

you to seek better answers to give in the future. You are not expected to be a theology professor at work, but God did give you a brain that can retain and explain God's message to others. For example, there are probably a few people that have the most questions for you about spiritual things. Or, there are a few people that like to play Devil's advocate the most. What are their common comments and questions? Try to formulate some answers for them. You can give them these answers face to face or via e-mail if that's better for you. Be careful not to be taking too much company time though; this would not honor God. Also remember that *how you interact* with others can be just as powerful as the actual answers you give. Be gracious and humble. Here is a recommended "pocket guide" to some of the most famous questions people have for Christianity to aide you: *Reason to Believe: A Response to Common Objections about Christianity*, by R.C. Sproul, Zondervan Books, 1982. 160 pages.

Conclusion

Some of you are real excited right now and some of you just got more intimidated. For sure, these things take

time to develop. One author on the subject said that it took him many years to really integrate his faith fully into his particular workplace. Be patient and forgiving of yourself but don't stop trying. Let me get back to simple motivation at this point. Maybe the clearest motivation we can say for bringing your Christian faith to your workplace is that ***you are serving King Jesus***. We've already mentioned **Colossians 3:23-24** several times. You have a great Boss - King Jesus. You get to work for the most successful, innovative, and employee-loyal CEO you could ever meet – King Jesus. His “company’s” vision and work is global, supremely important and has eternal profits. He will never fire you and his “company” will never close its doors. Understandably, this is not always easy to remember or to live out in a world of messed up workplaces (**Romans 5:12, 8:23**). This is a true statement. But, if you keep in mind that you work for King Jesus, we think it will change the way you think about your work. How? Because when glorifying Jesus is our primary motivation, our work – regardless of what that work is in its particulars- becomes an act of *worship*.

Some of you may still be wondering how does God do His work through me doing mine? Good question! Place

yourself and your job field in the appropriate category below and be encouraged.

The Intrinsic Value of Work: How we participate in God's work

- 1. Redemptive work** (God's saving and reconciling actions) Humans participate in this work through evangelists, pastors, counselors, authors, song writers, etc.
- 2. Creative work** (Gods' fashioning of the physical and human world) Humans participate in this work through the arts, construction, architects, urban planners, etc.
- 3. Providential work** (God's sustaining of humans and the created world) Humans participate in this work through public utility workers, farmers, ship builders, researchers, plumbers, bankers, etc.
- 4. Justice work** (God's maintenance of justice) Humans participate in this work through judges, lawyers, paralegals, policy makers, law enforcement, etc.
- 5. Compassionate work** (God's involvement in comforting, healing and guiding) Humans participate

in this work through doctors, nurses, paramedics, counselors, pharmacists, etc.

6. Revelatory work (God's work to enlighten people with truth) Humans participate in this work through preachers, theologians, writers, teachers, scientists, etc.⁷

If you are *still* struggling to see the big picture, check out this evidence from Christian sociologist Rodney Stark, "How did a tiny and obscure, Jewish messianic movement from the edge of the powerful Roman empire dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization? It was, in part, due to the early church's normal day to day living in vocational marketplace networks."⁸ In other words, the Gospel spread through Christians bringing their faith to their marketplaces and workplaces! Is God not still working in this way today?

Being a "pocket guide" to bringing your faith to the workplace, this booklet has not touched on a number of important issues like evangelizing a co-worker. We have also not gone into much detail on navigating those particularly thorny issues where you could get yourself

⁷ Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, IVP Press, 2011, p.102-103.

⁸ Nelson, p. 192.

into trouble. The good news is that, if this booklet has peeked your interest to dig deeper into these things, the books and websites below will be of help to you.

I'm thinking of you and pray this prayer for you: *May God grant you increasing measures of courage and joy in living out your faith at the workplace.*

Suggested Books:

The Gospel at Work – How Working for King Jesus Gives Purpose and Meaning in our Jobs, Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert, Zondervan Books, 2014. 151 pages.

Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work, Tom Nelson, Crossway Books, 2011. 201 pages.

Every Good Endeavor – Connecting Your Work to God's Work, Tim Keller, Riverhead Books, 2012. 263 pages.

Suggested Websites:

www.madetoflourish.org – Excellent articles, interviews, testimonies and short videos on faith and work.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTVIvdBluLE – search “Tim Keller – Why Work Matters”. An excellent 20 minute video from Dr. Tim Keller about faith in the workplace.

<http://www.marketplaceleaders.org> – The website of Os Hillman, a highly respected authority on faith in the workplace internationally.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-ways-god-s-at-work-in-you-at-work> - An excellent article about how God is sanctifying you through your work.