

Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work

by Timothy Keller

Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Jack Miller, "Cheer up: You're a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you're more loved than you ever dared hope."

We're to embody grace, truth, hope, and love in the organizations we create.

To make a real difference . . . [there would have to be] a reappropriation of the idea of vocation or calling, a return in a new way to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all and not merely as a means to one's own advancement.

The idea that all human work is not merely a job but a calling.

Thinking of work mainly as a means of self-fulfillment and self-realization slowly crushes a person and—as Robert Bellah and many others have pointed out—undermines society itself.

The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers, particularly Martin Luther and John Calvin, argued that all work, even so-called secular work, was as much a calling from God as the ministry of the monk or priest.

Work is one of the ways we make ourselves useful to others, rather than just living a life for ourselves. Work is not all there is to life. You will not have a meaningful life without work, but you cannot say that your work is the meaning of your life. The work-obsessed mind—as in our Western culture—tends to look at everything in terms of efficiency, value, and speed. But there must also be an ability to enjoy the most simple and ordinary aspects of life, even ones that are not strictly useful, but just delightful.

There is no better starting point for a meaningful work life than a firm grasp of this balanced work and rest theology. If the point of work is to serve and exalt ourselves, then our work inevitably becomes less about the work and more about us. Our aggressiveness will eventually become abuse, our drive will become burnout, and our self-sufficiency will become self-loathing. Work can convince you that you are working hard for your family and friends while you are being seduced through ambition to neglect them.

Where one's identity in prior generations might come from being the son of so-and-so or living in a particular part of town or being a member of a church or club, today young people are seeking to define themselves by the status of their work. We recognize that "making an image" of something is not necessarily a physical process but is certainly a spiritual and psychological one. It means imagining and trusting anything to deliver the control, security, significance, satisfaction, and beauty that only the real God can give. It means turning a good thing into an ultimate thing.

Notice that God says that either he will be our God or something else will. He leaves open no in-between possibility of having no gods at all that we rely on to "save" us.

Secular people may look for "favor, grace, and goodwill" in the acquisition of power, or the experience of pleasure, while religious people may trust in their moral virtue or acts of devotion or ministry. But all are fundamentally the same inner transaction. In each case the heart is given to a counterfeit god.

Christians seeking to work faithfully and well must discern the shape of the idols functioning in their professions and industries so as to both affirm the beneficial aspects and offset the excesses and distortions.

The term "worldview," from the German word *Weltanschauung*, means the comprehensive perspective from which we interpret all of reality.

In the wake of the phone-hacking scandal at News Corp.'s UK newspaper unit, his sister Elisabeth Murdoch could say to the same audience three years later that her brother "left something out," declaring "profit without purpose is a recipe for disaster." She went on to say, "Personally, I believe one of the biggest lessons of the past year has been the need for any organization to discuss, affirm and institutionalize a rigorous set of values based on an explicit statement of purpose."

Lloyd-Jones was on staff at Saint Bart's in London under the famous chief of staff Lord Horder in the late 1920s. As Lloyd-Jones did this task he was astonished that Horder's diagnostic notes in well over half the cases included comments such as "works far too hard," "drinks too much," "unhappy in home and marriage." At one point he spent the weekend with Lord Horder and took the opportunity to ask him about what he had seen in the case files.

Horder responded that he reckoned only about a third of the problems that are brought to a physician are strictly medical—the rest are due to or aggravated by anxiety and stress, poor life choices, and unrealistic goals and beliefs about themselves. too much emphasis on wholesale withdrawal from culture increases the likelihood of slipping into other more "respectable" idolatries.

Treating people as human beings with dignity rather than interchangeable resources means being transparent with information, offering extensive two-way communication, and seeking genuinely to persuade rather than merely to control people's responses. Christians are to work with "sincerity of heart," which is literally singleness of heart, a term that connotes both focus and integrity.

There are different sources and kinds of passion. Sometimes it generates frenetic activity more grounded in fear of failure than in pursuit of success. That kind of passion can produce a lot of energy, but from a Christian point of view it is a counterfeit. It is fueled by the work under the work. And it is unsustainable, like the extreme brightness of a dying light bulb.

In her book *Creed or Chaos*, Sayers addresses the traditional seven deadly sins, including acedia, which is often translated as "sloth." But as Sayers explains it, that is a misnomer, because laziness (the way we normally define sloth) is not the real nature of this condition. Acedia, she says, means a life driven by mere cost-benefit analysis of "what's in it for me." She writes, "Acedia is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing and only remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die. We have known it far too well for many years, the only thing perhaps we have not known about it is it is a mortal sin."

As C.S. Lewis observed, You will never make a good impression on other people until you stop thinking about what sort of impression you are making