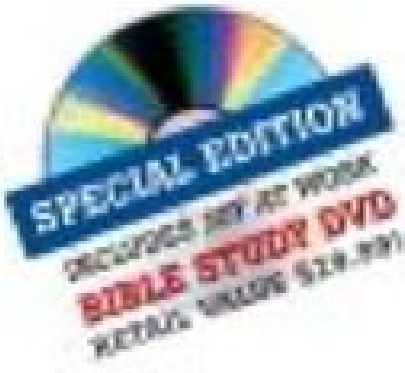
JOY AT WORK

Bible Study Companion



RAYMOND BAKKE
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BRAD SMITH



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INTRODUCTION



One of the fastest-growing industries in the world today is the increasingly sophisticated domain of computer games. Have you ever thought about what makes for a good computer game? Recently we had the opportunity to put that question to the creator of one of the most popular simulation games on the market. The man was about 40 years old but had the wardrobe and excitement of a 22-year-old.

> GENESIS 2 SAYS THAT GOD PLACED OUR HUMAN PARENTS IN THE GARDEN TO KEEP IT AND TILL IT.

"The key to a good video game is not just the graphics," he explained. "The setup has to follow good game design. Ideally, players must face a decision every eight seconds, and certainly no more than every 30 seconds. When they make a decision, players have to feel as though they have a high possibility of failing with that decision. Yet the game metrics have to be set up so that there is actually the highest probability that they will succeed."

> GOD INTENDS HUMAN WORK TO BE ABOUT JOY.

That game designer didn't realize it, but he might as well have been describing the situation that presented itself to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2 says that God placed our human parents in the Garden to keep it and till it. Imagine: You're the first two human beings who have ever existed, placed in a brand-new job in a brand-new world. You're faced with lots of unknowns, confronted with a continuous series of decisions, and uncertain whether your choices will turn out right. Yet God has set up the Garden in your favor, so that you are likely to succeed more often than fail. That would make the work a lot of fun! No wonder a modern-day game inventor accidentally designed a game meant for fun almost exactly how God originally designed our work.

That, in a word, is the overarching theme of this study—that God intends human

work to be about joy.

Does that describe your work? If you're like most people, probably not. Oh, to be sure, many people find work to be fun at times—maybe even exhilarating. Yet even at its best, work hardly rises to the level of, well, *joy*. Happiness, maybe. Or a momentary thrill. But where's the *joy* in adding a percentage point or two of market share to your company's sales of toothpaste or beauty products? Or in boosting by a few basis points the return on an investment portfolio? Or in dedicating a year's worth of effort so that your sales team trounces a competitor's sales team and wins a contract? Successes like those make work fun at times. But are they really sources of *joy?*

And then there are all the aspects of the work world that are anything *but* joyful. The client you lost. The expensive ad campaign that accomplished nothing. The ill-conceived product that cost your company millions in litigation. The workers you had to lay off. In light of disappointments like these, many find work to be far from joyful. For a homemaker, it is the work of cleaning, cooking, changing diapers, carpooling—then doing it all over again day after day. Indeed, many workers today would describe their work as some combination of boring, laborious, tedious, dangerous, and stressful.

Did God really mean for work to be joyful? You'd never know it by going to church on Sunday. There, the minister talks about serving God, impacting the world for good, helping the needy, living with purpose. Many ministers attempt to connect these activities to the marketplace, but the illustrations often lack the rich specifics of personal experience. As a result, the concerns of the "secular" world would hardly seem to matter much to God. So, even if we actually enjoy our work and sometimes have a lot of fun doing it, it's easy to feel a kind of guilt, because it would seem that our fun is coming from the pursuit of the wrong goals.

If you're feeling any of these sorts of things, this study is for you. We're going to see that God really does intend us human beings to find joy in our work.

Moreover, God Himself intends to find joy in our work. That truth will be considered through three themes that will surface again and again throughout this study:

Theme #1: Stewardship. The Bible teaches that human beings were created by God to be *stewards* of His creation. We are to take personal and corporate responsibility for what happens in and to this world, and the people in it, through the vehicles of business, government, and the nonprofit sector, as well as the church. This study will show that such stewardship is the clear call of Scripture. It is an ancient and magnificent call that God's people down through the ages have answered in various ways. Now it is time that we step up and answer the call, for our time.

Theme #2: Human dignity. The Bible teaches that God created humans as *decision-making* creatures. No matter where we work—whether in business, government, the nonprofit sector, the church, or the home—we are called to act like creatures who have been created in God's image and who treat other humans likewise, as fellow "image-bearers."

Theme #3: Joy. In Christ, we have the privilege and responsibility of restoring work to its original purpose, and of restoring one another to be decision makers in our work. The result of doing that is *joy*—a deep, abiding, inner peacethat no circumstances can take away, because we are doing God's will and aware of God's presence.

Joy

Joy means a deep, abiding, inner peace that no circumstances can take away, because we are doing God's will and aware of God's presence. In the New Testament, the word translated as "joy" is the Greek word *chara*, from the verb *chairo*, "to rejoice or be glad."

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus used the term to describe a master's reaction to two of his servants who invested funds well and realized a profit: "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; *enter into the joy of your master*" (v. 21, 23, italics added).

HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

This Is a Bible Study

We're going to explore what the Bible says about the purpose and role of human beings on Earth, particularly as it pertains to our work. No matter where you spend those 50 or 60 (or more) hours a week at what we call work—whether in a business, a government entity, the military, a nonprofit organization, an educational setting, a church, a home, or anywhere else—you may be surprised to learn how much the Bible has to say about God's interest in your daily endeavors. You'll see that finding joy in one's work is God's intention for every person. And if you are a pastor, this study can help you see the vital role your church can play in helping workplace leaders understand their calling.

The Study Considers a Large and Current Illustration

This guide is a companion study to the book *Joy at Work*, by Dennis W. Bakke. *Joy at Work* tells the story of AES Corporation, one of the world's leading power companies, and one of the most prominent modern-day examples of a company that has intentionally tried to live out the principles of business as stewardship and mission.

CEO DENNIS BAKKE PROMOTED "FUN" AS A KEY CORPORATE VALUE.

Dennis and his co-founder, Roger Sant, established the company with the idea that its primary purpose was not just to maximize shareholder value, but to produce safe, clean, reliable energy, especially for developing countries. At one point, AES owned $40 billion in assets and was the third largest producer of

energy in the world, behind France and Russia.

AES provides a valuable case study of a business that has tried to be a steward of God's creation. It is not a simple example, nor has it escaped the daunting realities of the rough-and-tumble business world. As CEO, Dennis championed an admittedly unorthodox view of the purpose of business. From the beginning, the company made what is often called "social responsibility" its first priority, even above profit. In fact, AES's original stock offering came with a Securities and Exchange Commission-mandated warning attached:

> AES believes that earning a fair profit is an important result of providing a quality product to its customers. However, if the Company perceives a conflict between these values and profits, the Company will try to adhere to its values—even though doing so might result in diminished profits or forgone opportunities. Moreover, the Company seeks to adhere to these values not as a means to achieve economic success, but because adherence is a worthwhile goal in and of itself. The Company intends to continue these policies after this offering.

In pursuing these ends, Dennis practiced a highly decentralized approach to corporate leadership (100 employees at headquarters, 40,000 across the world). And he promoted "fun" as a key corporate value. Along the way, AES encountered the same financial turmoil that imperiled other energy companies in the aftermath of the Enron scandal, although AES was legally and ethically beyond reproach.

The Wall Street Journal and other business publications have written numerous articles about AES, with strong opinions both for and against the company's philosophy. The business schools at Harvard and Stanford have produced multiple case studies on AES. And an award-winning documentary film titled *The Power Trip* was made about AES's efforts to bring reliable electricity to the city of Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia (south of Russia).

Without a doubt, AES's business model has proved controversial to some, and it raises lots of questions. Nonetheless, it is a courageous real-life example of an

attempt to reclaim the biblical purpose of work in a world that has little understanding of that purpose and at many points fervently resists it.

The Study Considers Other Examples

AES is a large, publicly traded corporation. But the biblical principles by which Dennis and his team tried to operate the company apply to a venture of any size or kind, and to workers at any level. On the companion DVD to this study, you'll find numerous interviews of people in a variety of workplace settings grappling with the issues raised by *Joy at Work*. In addition, the studies in this guide were heavily influenced by a group of leaders representing many different disciplines. That's because, ideally, we want this material to be discussed by small groups of leaders that include people from diverse backgrounds, responsibilities, and perspectives.

The Study Is Advanced

As a genre, Bible studies come in many forms and styles. Many are written at a fairly elementary level in terms of their theology and biblical depth, as well as their practical application. By contrast, this study is a bit more demanding in the following ways:

This study grapples with in-depth concepts. It is going to stretch your thinking a bit. We're going to ask you to consider some challenging ideas and to grapple with hard questions. Not that we're going to throw complicated theological terms, Greek verbs, or long quotations from the Church Fathers at you. Indeed, the material intentionally avoids theological jargon as much as possible. But we're asking you to do some serious theological reflection about work—which means wrestling with issues from the workplace using a variety of biblical insights. The objective is not so much to find The Answer (for many issues there is no single, simple, one-size-fits-all answer) as to change the way you think about everyday matters, so that you begin to see your work and your role at work through God's eyes.

THIS IS NOT AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL ON HOW TO RUN A

CHRISTIAN BUSINESS, BUT RATHER AN EXPLORATION OF WHAT THE BIBLE HAS TO SAY ABOUT WORK.

This study assumes you have basic familiarity with group discussion. It is for groups that know how to get a Bible study started quickly and can get right to work. For that reason, we haven't included any step-by-step guides for the study leader. If you're that leader, we assume you and your group have been meeting for at least one or two weeks for introductions and will be ready to dive right into some pretty hefty discussion beginning with Session 1.

This study asks more questions than it provides answers. This is not an instruction manual on how to run a Christian business, but rather an exploration of what the Bible has to say about work. What we learn from that exploration we then take to the real world of work and ask: *How does that biblical teaching apply here?* As we've said, AES provides a useful case study. Other examples will also be given. And, of course, we want you to bring the issues and challenges of your own workplace to the discussion.

What you'll quickly discover is that no organization, including AES, applies biblical teaching perfectly. Nor is there one "best" way to apply it. Even the best models sometimes reveal contradictory practices, and their flaws are easily pointed out. Nevertheless, the biblical principles are real. So despite their shortcomings, we study people and organizations that are making heroic efforts to apply biblical teaching as well as they can. Doing so helps us avoid studying the Bible in the abstract, as just an ideal, without reference to the difficulty of applying it in the real world. Instead, by looking at theology when it is applied to the mess of a sinful, fallen world, our study of God moves beyond our heads to our hearts—and from there to our actions, our habits, and our dreams.

This study considers more than your personal spirituality. Many Bible studies on work are aimed at personal transformation. They are excellent at guiding you as an individual in examining your personal habits, morals, ethics, and decisions that pertain to your particular work. This study, however, looks at more than just your personal faith. It asks you to think about your larger role in your organization, and in turn your organization's role in an economy and a society,

and in turn how all of that fits into God's purposes for the world. As a result, we're going to be applying Scripture to matters beyond your personal needs and issues. Those are important, to be sure. But you'll miss out on the real joy of work if your faith gets involved only with individual concerns. As a steward of God's creation, your responsibilities—and opportunities—involve the whole of creation!

For this reason, this study is especially important for leaders. We believe that leaders are required and should be found at every level of an enterprise. Every worker is capable of making decisions, regardless of his or her position, status, or role in a company. So, this study is aimed at those who live with a leader's mind-set, who are willing to accept responsibility for their actions and influence others to do the same.

The Study Is a Weekly Process

This study is designed to take place in a series of eight or 10 weekly sessions (although other formats are possible, such as a weekend retreat or a weeklong series of concentrated study). To gain the most from each session, as well as to honor one's commitment to the other members of the group, each participant is asked to prepare for the sessions as follows:

1. Pray that God will use the study in a powerful way in your life, as well as in the lives of your fellow participants.
2. Read the material in this study guide pertaining to the session (approx. 20 minutes).
3. Read and reflect on the selections indicated from the Bible (approx. 15 minutes).
4. Read the section from *Joy at Work* pertaining to the session (approx. 30 minutes). Because this Bible study is not precisely tied to specific *Joy at Work* chapters, some groups may opt to read the book ahead of the study, others loosely alongside it.
5. Respond to what you've read using the reflection questions at the end of each session (approx. 15-30 minutes).
6. Watch the introduction of the session on the companion DVD before the group meeting or at the beginning of the meeting (approx. 15 minutes).

The introduction sets up the theme of the session.

WE BELIEVE THAT LEADERS ARE REQUIRED AND SHOULD BE FOUND AT EVERY LEVEL OF AN ENTERPRISE.

WHY DO WE AS HUMANS IMAGINE A BETTER STATE THAN WHAT WE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCE?

When your group gets together, your group leader may wish to make a few remarks (emphasis on *few*; what matters most is that participants get to interact as much as possible). Or, the group can immediately dive into the discussion questions. You can structure the time in whatever way works best for your group, but the point is to get everyone involved in a lively discussion.

The group questions are designed to take anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes to discuss. In order to facilitate as much participation as possible, we suggest breaking into groups of three. Allow the small groups to interact for 20 to 30 minutes, then reconvene the larger group and have each subgroup report highlights from its conversation.

Discussion is key! This study is *not* to be a lecture. In fact, the topics raised are far larger than can be adequately covered in 40 minutes of discussion. So it is vital that as much time as possible is allotted to group interaction. We also hope that the conversations will spill over into many additional conversations—over breakfast, lunch, and dinner; on the golf course; through e-mail.

This guide provides 10 sessions for a 10-week study but can be completed in eight weeks by skipping over sessions 8 and 9 if necessary.

If You Are Unfamiliar With the Bible

Not everyone who participates in this study will be familiar with the Bible. For that matter, this study need not be limited to Christians. When Dennis wrote *Joy at Work*, he intentionally avoided presenting AES as an overtly Christian story (although the postscript spells out the biblical roots of his business model). His

point was not to hide his Christian commitment. Rather, he realized that some people who might benefit from his ideas would not read the book if they saw Bible verses and other Christian language sprinkled throughout. Dennis wholeheartedly believes that people of all faiths can adopt his ideas as their own. Some who do may want to explore the Christian roots of those ideas more fully.

By way of orienting you to those core ideas, consider that every life philosophy or religious belief system deals with the question, *Why do we as humans imagine a better state than what we currently experience?* For Christians, the explanation is that God created us for a different purpose than we now pursue and in a better place than we now inhabit. We chose not to pursue God's purpose, and so we suffered the consequences for choosing our own way rather than God's way.

Life under those consequences is referred to as the Fall. The core of the Christian message is that God has provided a way to reclaim us and our world from the Fall. Through the death of Jesus Christ, who was God in human form, we are able to return to God's original intentions for us. We do that only partially while we are here on Earth, but we will do it fully after we die and go to live with God forever.

As humans, we are responsible for accepting the gift of God's rescue and then pursuing a life that is consistent with the change God creates in us when we accept that gift.

This study reflects that overview by coming back to a recurring outline, as follows:

1. What did God originally intend for us?
2. What happened after we chose our own way?
3. What should we do now that God has us back on the path to what He intended?

If you are unfamiliar with the Bible and you really want to gain a better understanding of its teaching on work, you'll find it easier if you recruit some participants who have a background in the Bible and Christianity. Some people

have put a lot of time into learning the Bible, and they can be a valuable resource to your group.

The Bottom Line: Life-Change and Joy

Why should a group meet for eight or 10 weeks to wrestle with the issues raised in this study? Because doing so will lead to seeing work differently, and ultimately to doing work differently. As we've said, God intends work to be about joy. We want this study to be a means of leading you toward joy in your work. By gathering together each week, we hope you will create a community of peers who are committed to the same vision of pursuing work in ways that steward God's creation and merit His commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

> WE WANT THIS STUDY TO BE A MEANS OF LEADING YOU TOWARD JOY IN YOUR WORK.

Some Thoughts for the Leader

The companion DVD provides a brief introduction for each of the sessions. However, if you are the leader of your group, you may wish to add comments of your own as you get the group started each week. Our suggestion is that you share examples from your own experience to focus everyone's thinking on the topic. Stay away from lengthy discourses or controversial opinions, as these will tend to de-motivate the group. As you prepare to lead the group, you should be aware that this study is organized around a flow of thought that keeps repeating itself, as follows:

1. *Work before the Fall.* We humans were made in the image of God to be stewards (representative caretakers) of God's creation. We were created to make decisions with daily feedback from God. We were created to govern and work on behalf of God. God's intention is that when we do what He created us to do, we will experience true joy.

   While rarely talked about, business and government can be seen (or at least envisioned) as having legitimate roles in the world before the Fall. In our original state, we would have organized our gifts and abilities into

teams working together, and we would have traded our work and its products with one another. That is the essence of the original purpose of work—organized gifts focused on stewarding God's creation.

2. *Work after the Fall.* The original design for the world was badly marred by the Fall. As humans, we are still created in God's image, but our relationship with our Creator has been broken, and we've lost our understanding of how to use our gifts and abilities as God intended.
3. *Work under Christ's lordship.* In Christ, human beings are "recreated," so that Christians are restored to pursue much of the original purpose that was given Adam and Eve. We are endowed with new power, insight, and a relationship with God by virtue of His Holy Spirit, which lives in us. Thus, we are new Adams and Eves, with new responsibilities:

    - a responsibility to understand what it means to be a steward of God's creation;
    - a responsibility to understand (but not be overwhelmed by) the painful reality of our fallen world; and
    - a responsibility to be examples of re-created stewards in every sector and circumstance of our lives—including the way we work, the way we carry out our businesses, economics, governments, and social services, and the way we lead people.

As the leader, you need to give people permission to dream about what their work could be like if it was pursued according to God's original intentions. This is not a theoretical exercise. If participants don't envision a better world, they'll be neutralized by excuses for why they cannot be courageous, God-empowered stewards to create a better world. Sometimes dreaming can be scary, because a noble vision can call for some painful choices and prophetic responsibilities.

In this connection, you as a leader may have to help participants be honest about expressing some of the harder realities of life as we know it—for example, the way things don't always work out as hoped, or the way people are mistreated, or the ever-changing rules of Wall Street and global economies.

Some groups dream better. Some groups vent better. As the leader, you'll need to help your participants advance on both fronts.

The Theme of Stewardship

There are many ways to look at the intersection between faith and work. If we were to classify the various approaches that "faith at work" studies take, we could describe them according to five emphases:

- *Personal ethics.* How do I practice my personal spirituality in the work world?
- *Personal calling*. How do I pursue my life purpose? Should it be primarily through my work, through workplace evangelism, or in a "second half" devoted to increased community service or ministry commitments, or both?
- *Community practices*. How do I extend Christ's love to coworkers, customers, vendors, and other people I encounter at work and still get my work done effectively and make a profit?
- *Community culture*. How do I contribute to a healthy culture at my workplace, one that honors Christian values?
- *Work as stewardship and mission.* How do I use my workplace as a means of stewarding God's creation?

  STEWARDSHIP IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST YOUR LIFE, OR YOUR WORK, OR YOUR SPIRITUALITY, OR YOUR CONCERNS.

Joy at Work is an example of the fifth emphasis on work as a form of stewardship and mission. This Bible study looks at the biblical and theological framework that underlies that emphasis.

It's worth pointing out that work as stewardship was a view that many of the Puritans held, and through them it forms many of the roots of democratic capitalism. Unfortunately, that view has largely been lost for a century or two. But now it is increasingly being reclaimed and is becoming a lens through which the other four emphases—personal ethics, personal calling, community practices, and community culture—are finding new perspective.

You will explore some of those new perspectives through the discussion questions at the end of each session. For example, we will ask you about your spiritual walk at work; about with whom you are speaking about Christ; about

how you are pursuing your personal calling and purpose; and about the values you are honoring and building into your workplace. However, as we ask these questions, we encourage you to always consider them through the larger lens of "we" and "ours" rather than just "I" and "mine." Stewardship is about more than just your life, your work, your spirituality, or your concerns. As a steward of God, you are ultimately connected to your whole team, and your whole organization, and the whole economy, and the whole world.

Bible Study Theme and Outline

Joy in work comes from restoring work to its original purpose as a means of stewarding God's creation. Stewardship includes:

1. understanding the original purpose of work
2. understanding how the Fall marred that purpose
3. taking responsibility to help both ourselves and others discover and employ their gifts
4. taking responsibility to create a healthy environment for work
5. taking responsibility to acquire and give away power
6. seeing success and failure from God's perspective
7. taking responsibility for community needs
8. taking responsibility for values and beauty in work
9. taking responsibility in all areas of life
10. pursuing joy as both a present and future reward

Theologically speaking, this study deals with a "public theology," the study of what God calls us to be and do in the public sphere, no matter what our role or station in life—business executive, nonprofit leader, government official, minister, parent. Whatever we do for work and wherever we work, our work has public implications that the Bible challenges us to consider.

GOD ALLOWS PEOPLE FREEDOM TO MAKE DECISIONS SO THAT THEY CAN EXPERIENCE JOY.

The Theme of Responsibility

Another recurring theme in this study is that God has created each one of us uniquely, with the ability to think rationally. That gives us freedom, or free will, to make important decisions, to take responsibility for our actions, and to benefit from the rewards or suffer the consequences of our choices. We might formulate that idea as follows:

DECISION MAKING + RESPONSIBILITY + FEEDBACK = JOY

The Theme of Humility

A key theological truth about God has to do with power. God is all-powerful; He can do anything that is possible to do. Yet God humbles Himself by giving human beings the authority (power) to oversee His creation. In doing so, He demonstrates remarkable humility, giving us an example of how we should deal with power and rights. God allows people freedom to make decisions so that they can experience joy. And in Philippians 2:5-11, we learn that God loves us so much that He humbled himself by giving up His power and rights as God to become a human being—and a lowly one at that. As such, He further subjected Himself not only to death but to the agonizing and unjust death of a criminal. What amazing humility!

God calls us as His stewards to adopt the same humility with the people we encounter and have power over—employees, vendors, customers, volunteers, coworkers, family members, etc. Humility requires not always exercising the power we have and sometimes even giving the power we have to others—for them to keep and never return to us! To do so requires trust. But it results in joy for all who are in the path of our humble acts.

How to Get Started

Each group will structure its format a bit differently. But here are some things you'll want to think about as you organize your activities:

1. Distribute copies of *Joy at Work* to all the participants and decide on how

you plan to read it—in sections as you work your way through the Bible study or in its entirety before you begin the study. Each session in this study guide also includes an executive summary of the assigned *Joy at Work* chapters for review before attending the small-group discussion.

2. Decide how many times your group will meet. The study is designed to be completed in 10 weeks; however if you have only 8 weeks available, consider sessions 8 and 9 in this study guide to be optional.
3. Decide how you plan to use the companion DVD. It has an introduction for each session, and we encourage you to watch them. If you are meeting in a crowded restaurant rather than a home or boardroom with a DVD player, participants can watch the introductions on their own in preparing for each session.
4. There is a 90-minute film about AES called *The Power Trip* that can be purchased at www.powertripthemovie.com (a less-expensive home edition is due out soon). It is a powerful companion to this study. One suggestion is to let the group meet for three or four weeks to establish a good group dynamic and shared understanding of the issues. Then schedule an optional meeting outside of the normal Bible study time—perhaps over a lunch or at someone's house after dinner—to show the film and discuss it.
5. Before the first session, the group leader should create a roster of participants: name; contact information; current or most recent occupation, with a sentence or two that describes what the employer does; and title, with a brief description of that role. Some will find that approach different from that of other Bible studies, which ask participants *not* to talk about their work or position, or the nature of what they do, so as to avoid bragging or comparing, and to ensure that everyone feels on an even playing field as they come to Scripture. In this study, we want participants to do just the opposite: not to brag but to honestly present their role in the workplace as God has provided.
6. Unless group participants are already very familiar with one another, spend some time before the beginning of the first session having members introduce themselves—perhaps explaining what they do for work, how they got interested in this topic, maybe a brief story that tells something about their life, a word about their family, and what they hope to gain from the study (see the suggested questions below).
7. When it's time to address the discussion questions, consider breaking

into groups of three. Allow the groups to interact for half of the allotted discussion time, then reconvene the larger group and have each subgroup report highlights from its conversation.

Invite Your Pastor to This Study

The topic of corporate social responsibility has received increasing press in recent years. A number of books have provided examples of companies that focus on environmental or social needs as part of their business (for example, *Cause for Success: Ten Companies That Put Profit Second and Came In First)*. There are efforts to change how M.B.A. students are taught (see *www.beyondgreypinstripes.org)*. And think tanks are beginning to research this topic in earnest (see *www.acton.org*).

Yet, while it might be assumed that church and religious leaders would be at the forefront of this burgeoning workplace movement, for the most part they are not. Later, we will study what the Bible says about the interdependence of business, the church, government, and the family. For now, consider that since the Puritan era ministry-related occupations have become full-time jobs, and Bible teachers and theologians have had fewer personal reasons to reflect on the purpose of work and business from Genesis 2.

It's true that many pastors today are building stronger bridges between the events that take place in the church building on Sundays and the events of the church people the other six days of the week. Still, a close examination will show that, in most cases, churches are still focusing on how workplace activities can support or extend the work of the church—evangelizing the lost, providing a place where personal piety can lead to spiritual growth, funding church activities—rather than focusing on how the church can help people be God's representatives in their workplaces.

If your pastor visits your workplace, uses workplace illustrations in his sermons, and teaches on work and business as stewardship and mission, you are blessed. You are in a church that understands something about both the church gathered and the church scattered.

If your pastor does not do those things, you may be surprised how open he might be to an invitation to participate in your Bible study. After all, he probably did not receive much teaching on workplace issues in seminary, and he may desire to learn more about how he can do a better job of discipling workplace Christians.

In the end, this is a Bible study about joy at *work*, whether that work takes place in a business setting or a church setting (or a family, government, or nonprofit setting). Pastors experience just as much challenge and frustration in their work as any other worker. So, your study should welcome them to the club!

Some Questions to Help You Get Started

Here are some suggestions for helping the group members get to know one another at the beginning of the first couple of sessions. Take just a few minutes to answer them before moving into the discussion questions. The leader of the group may want to jot down participants' answers in order to better facilitate the group's interaction later.

Note that some of these questions push participants to be a bit vulnerable. We caution leaders to avoid pressuring group members into sharing more than they feel comfortable sharing. Perhaps the best way to prompt an open exchange is for the leader to take the initiative in talking about him or herself.

1. Where do you currently work? Describe your enterprise—what it does or

produces, how large it is, its internal culture. What is your title or role? What do you actually do in your work?
2. Talk about the nonwork areas of your life—your family, church, community interests, etc. In what nonwork areas do you have particular education, expertise, or experience? What do you do for leisure?
3. Do you take joy in your work? Is it fun?
4. What are your definitions of "joy" and "fun," especially as they pertain to work?
5. Do you feel "called" to your particular line of work?
6. What are your expectations for this study? How do you hope it will benefit you? Are there some specific things the group could take note of, and pray for you on, over the course of this study?

Questions to Expect Along the Way

(1) Why does this study spend so much time dealing with the Garden of Eden?

If you've ever tried to assemble a jigsaw puzzle, you know it helps to have the complete picture on the cover of the box to use as a guide. In a similar way, the first two chapters of Genesis give us a picture of how God intended the world to look "in the beginning." (That picture is quite similar to how the world will look in the end as well, when God will create a new city; see Revelation 21.)

If Christians have the "*first fruits* of the Spirit" (Romans 8:23) and are *new* creations and ambassadors for that which is *new* (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), then we need to have a clear picture of what "new" looks like as compared with what we experience in a fallen world. The Garden is an excellent place to learn about Adam and Eve's original role and, by extension, about our roles as new Adams and Eves.

One reason many of us shirk our public calling is because we cannot envision what it looks like. By allowing you to spend some time mentally and imaginatively in the Garden of Eden, this study can help you find a new vision for your role on this side of the Garden, and with it a new joy in and a new understanding of your responsibility.

(2) What if I disagree with Dennis's approach and feel skeptical about AES?

Welcome to the club! Dennis knows he has detractors, and he's at peace with that. We welcome divergent opinions—as long as they are expressed, of course, with courtesy and intellectual honesty. The point of the groups is not to debate *Joy at Work* but to study the Bible's teaching on work and apply that teaching to the real world. AES offers one case of a company that tried to do that.

In examining that case, various readers will inevitably find things to disagree with:

- *Some lawyers* have expressed concerns about the potential liabilities that directors and officers might face if their companies followed the AES model wholeheartedly. Interestingly, those concerns are part of a much larger debate that has legal opinions on both sides.[1]
- *Some stockbrokers* have expressed concerns about the viability of a company marketing itself to Wall Street by explicitly stating that even though profits are important, the company's values are more important than maximizing shareholder value. At the same time, few would argue that the stock market and how it is marketed could not stand reform.
- *Somemanagers* have criticized AES for being "too loosely managed" and not subjecting its people to enough "accountability." However, Dennis argues in his book that top leadership made the greatest mistakes at AES, not those at lower levels. Furthermore, AES's decentralized leadership system and advice process have become a model for many successful start-ups, high-tech ventures, and other "fast companies" across the world.
- *Somepastors* have expressed concerns about *Joy at Work's* apparent neglect of a theology of systemic evil, and what they perceive as a naiveté about human depravity and the need for corresponding checks and balances. At the same time, many pastors have decided to use the AES "advice process" with their own staffs.
- *Some investors* have expressed concerns about the dramatic drop in AES's stock value at one point. However, most financial analysts view AES as no different than most other companies in the energy sector, which

collectively struggled through a downturn in the market. Moreover, AES was one of the few energy companies to emerge from the downturn intact, rebounding to $20 billion in assets (compared with the $40 billion it once held).

- *Some people* have claimed that Dennis's approach is negated by the fact that he was forced by his board to resign. However, in his book Dennis explains why he chose to resign and that he was given the prerogative of handpicking his replacement. In addition, the values of AES as expressed in *Joy at Work* remain in place.

The point is that neither the shortcomings nor the successes of a particular case in any way disprove or prove the timeless principles of Scripture. What a case like AES does is provide a rich source of real-life discussion and examination of those principles. We hope that your group will give participants freedom to express admiration for Dennis and AES when they feel it, as well as vent concern when they feel that. But quite apart from one's opinion of Dennis and AES, the key questions group members need to wrestle with are: *What does this say about the biblical principles we are studying?* and *How will I bring joy to my own sphere of responsibility?*

(3) I'm not like Dennis Bakke. I haven't founded my own company; I'm not a CEO. My organization doesn't even pretend to hold to Christian values. I work in the government, a nonprofit, a church, or as a homemaker. How is this study relevant to me?

The Bible's teaching on work is relevant to all of us who work, regardless of the type of work we do, where we do it, what our position or status is, and how successful (or unsuccessful) we happen to be. Our role may involve less "drama" than Dennis's did in supplying electrical power to developing countries, while planting 52 million trees in Guatemala and preserving hundreds of thousands of acres of rain forest in the Amazon region to offset carbon-dioxide emissions elsewhere. That's OK. God uses all kinds of people to accomplish His purposes. Some carry out His work at the world-class level; others labor in relative obscurity. It's not the prominence that matters. It's the faithfulness to be God's steward over whatever responsibilities He has given.

> IT CHALLENGES YOU TO ADOPT A NEW MIND-SET—TO SEE YOURSELF AS HAVING RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE GOD FOR

YOUR EFFORTS AT WORK.

That said, there is obviously a great deal of difference in the nature, scale, and scope of what you can do if you are the CEO of a business as opposed to a mid-level manager, or if you lead a privately owned company as opposed to a publicly traded corporation. If you feel that you have little control over how your enterprise operates, you may be tempted to think that the principles in this study don't really apply to your situation. But they do! No matter where you are positioned, and no matter what the prevailing culture at your workplace, your participation in this study could be the beginning of a journey toward:

- Transforming the way work is accomplished in your immediate sphere of influence, where you do have a stewardship responsibility.
- Initiating a longer-term effort to slowly but surely transform the culture of your overall workplace and perhaps even your industry.
- Beginning the process of transitioning to another job or career where you feel your talents are better used as a steward of God's creation.

The point is that this study is by nature countercultural, and therefore transformational. It challenges you to adopt a new mind-set—to see yourself as having responsibility before God for your efforts at work. That perspective can pose some significant internal conflicts, because it is not the dominant wisdom of our day. Fortunately, you are not alone. There is a growing movement of Christians in the work world who are recognizing their responsibility as God's stewards and taking that responsibility seriously.

SESSION 1



God's Original Purpose for Business

Bible Readings for This Study
Genesis 1 and 2
Romans 8:18-23
2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Preface (pp.13-18)
Chapter 7: Purpose Matters (pp.149-168)

DVD Session One: Created to Work
Explore the Genesis account of creation,
in which God paints the picture of a joyful workplace
as embodied in the Garden. This session introduces you
to our two callings in life: stewarding resources
to meet the world's needs and the Great Commission.

Introduction: We Like to Work, But We Don't Always Like Our Jobs

For most of us, work consumes much of our time. Assuming you work an average of 50 hours a week between the ages of 22 and 65, you will have worked a total of 111,800 hours. That's about 30 percent of all the waking hours in your life to date and 45 percent of all the waking hours during your career.

That does not include time spent commuting, overtime worked, extra time spent on business trips, and hours devoted to planning, thinking, and worrying about work-related matters in your off hours.

For all that time and energy invested, and all the sacrifices you make, do you find your work to be filled with joy and meaning? Or are joy and meaning reserved for the activities of your "spare time"?

According to a Gallup poll, 6 in 10 American workers would continue to work even if they won $10 million, though only 35 percent would stay at the same job (Gallup News Service Poll by David W. Moore, Aug. 29, 1997). Clearly, most of us like to work. Yet how many of us really enjoy our job?

> BUT MAYBE IT'S TIME FOR CHRISTIANS TO ASK WHETHER PROFIT MAXIMIZATION IS THE TRUE RATIONALE FOR DOING BUSINESS.
>
> WE CAN DISCOVER GOD'S ORIGINAL PURPOSE BY LOOKING AT THE WORLD JUST AFTER ITS CREATION.

Finding Your Voice Is Not the Answer in a Soundproofed Room

A common piece of advice heard today is that to find fulfillment at work, we have to find our personal "voice"—that is, to figure out our unique mission in life and our God-given gifts. Without question, that kind of self-discovery is vitally important. But Christians are called by God to go beyond that personal quest for meaning and significance. We are called not just to find our own "voice" or those of our friends but to actually change the "acoustics" of the room.

Have you ever considered the possibility that business today is fundamentally pursuing the wrong purpose? In 1970, economist Milton Friedman wrote an essay titled "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase its Profits." Most people probably believe that's true—that the purpose of business is, and

always has been, to maximize profits.

But maybe it's time for Christians to ask whether profit maximization is the true rationale for doing business. If it's not, what difference would that make in:

- the reason one goes to work?
- finding fulfillment at work?
- how one leads employees?
- how one influences the internal culture of one's workplace?
- what one thinks about the many hours spent at work?

The real question we need to be asking is: What was God's original purpose for business? How was it different from today's goal of maximizing profit?

We can discover God's original purpose by looking at the world just after its creation, while still in its pristine state in the Garden of Eden. That was before the Fall, a time when the human race was still following God's purposes for life and work.

The Original Blueprints: Do We Still Have It Right?

The first two chapters of Genesis show God's original plan for the world we humans inhabit. Notice that God placed Adam and Eve in a garden. Later, in Genesis 3, the first couple's decision to reject God's plan resulted in their being thrust out of the Garden into a ghetto of shattered dreams, lost connection with God, and endless conflict and futility. The rest of the Bible tells about the ongoing, painful consequences of that terrible choice, which still enslave us today. Yet Scripture also reveals God's amazing character in pursuing us, even in the midst of our ongoing rebellion against Him. The last two chapters of the Bible, in Revelation, describe what it will look like when God restores us and the earth to His original plan. That setting will be a new city.

There is something important to note in this movement from the Garden to the ghetto to the new city. Romans 8:18-23 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 describe

Christians—those who are true believers in and followers of Christ—as "first fruits of the Spirit," "new creations," and "sons of God." By contrast, 1 Peter 2:11 describes Christians as "aliens in this world." What these descriptions mean is that Christians are "in-between" people—people with renewed hearts, the way the human heart was in the Garden and will be in the new city—yet living in the ghetto between the Garden and the new city. As renewed people, we have been given the motivation and power to re-create the Garden (in part) and start building the new city (in part), even as we are surrounded by those who have lost sight of where humanity came from and where it is going. As renewed people, we have a different purpose than to just hang on and do the best we can to manage a fallen, futile world. We have a responsibility and have been given a degree of power to overcome that futility—only partially right now, but someday completely, when the full plan of God is revealed.

> AS RENEWED PEOPLE, WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE MOTIVATION AND POWER TO RE-CREATE THE GARDEN.

It's interesting that even people who are not Christians can usually describe a better workplace than the one they currently experience. Where did they get that vision? We believe it is a latent memory of God's original plan. So, shouldn't those who have the "first fruits of the Spirit" be able to describe a better workplace more vividly and more comprehensively than anyone else? The Bible describes an original plan for work in ways that indicate that God meant for all people to take real joy in their work. It would be idealistic to imagine that we can return the work world to its original state in the Garden. But if we as "in-between people" are going to rebuild what we can and improve the situation for ourselves and others, we need to spend some time looking at the original blueprints for what God intended.

> THE PROBLEM IS NOT THE DESIRE FOR SIGNIFICANCE BUT THE FACT THAT ON THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN, WE WILL ALWAYSDESIRE MORE SIGNIFICANCE THAN WE CAN ACHIEVE.

Only after the Reformation did faith and wealth cease to be considered a theological issue because "the accumulation of wealth —'capital' it was now called—became the main goal of entire societies that also considered themselves Christian. … Significantly,

> as we move into later centuries, the doctrine of creation remains one of the pillars on which most of the authors (from early Christian centuries) build their arguments on the proper use of wealth. Thus it is clear that the doctrine of creation and its development should not be studied apart from its connection with issues of the proper management of created things, in other words, with issues of faith and wealth."
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> Justo L. Gonzales, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas On the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 232

We Were Created to Do Significant Things

All of us as humans desire to be significant, to make a difference, to live a life that makes a worthwhile contribution. No one is immune from this desire. There is no reason to be ashamed of feeling it; the longing for significance is part of what it means to be a human in God's image.

The problem is not the desire for significance but the fact that on this side of heaven, we will always desire more significance than we can achieve. Living as we do outside of the Garden, we can never attain the full sense of meaning and fulfillment that God intended us to have. In the Garden, where God originally put us, we would have felt at the end of every day:

- absolute significance in what we had accomplished in our work;
- fully in sync with our divine "Boss" as we walked with God every evening to talk about what we had accomplished;
- complete connection with our spouses, enjoying a relationship unimpeded by clothing, shame, or communication gaps; and
- holistic harmony with our environment as the animals obeyed our commands and the plants submitted to our wishes.

We were created to be Garden creatures. That was our *natural* habitat—a place

where working the ground was easy, food was plentiful, animals assisted us in our tasks without hesitation, and we could share the deepest of our feelings and craziest of our ideas with our spouse and our God without the slightest fear of ridicule or criticism. The Garden was a place of joy because it was a place of work—not just leisure and play.

As you read Genesis 1 and 2, do you think Adam and Eve:

- had to work and were tired at the end of each day?
- had needs they had to overcome and problems they had to solve?
- had a big responsibility, including the element of risk that they might make a wrong decision?
- got daily feedback from God during their walk in the "cool of the day," including occasions when God gently corrected a decision they made?

Do you think evil existed in the world, even if Adam and Eve did not know about it?

> "But it is appropriate here to point out that man was created not for leisure but for work, even in the state of innocence."
>
> *Martin Luther, Lecture on Genesis 2:15*

We Look Like God

Genesis 1:26 says that we were made in God's image. That means that we "look like" God. We have finite characteristics similar to God's infinite characteristics:

- We are **community creatures,** just as God exists forever in triune relationship—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- We **desire to create**, just as God rejoiced in the act of creation.
- We **desire to give**, just as God enjoyed giving life to us.

Yet because we are finite “models” of an infinite God, and creatures spawned from the purpose of a Creator, our identity, significance, and happiness are always ultimately connected to that Creator. We were never intended to be stand-alone creatures, independent of the One who made us.

> WE WERE NEVER INTENDED TO BE STAND-ALONE CREATURES, INDEPENDENT OF THE ONE WHO MADE US.
>
> “LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE, IN OUR LIKENESS, AND LET THEM RULE OVER THE FISH OF THE SEA AND THE BIRDS OF THE AIR, OVER THE LIVESTOCK, OVER ALL THE EARTH, AND OVER ALL THE CREATURES THAT MOVE ALONG THE GROUND.”

We Are Created as God’s Representatives

Being made in God’s image also means that we represent God. The Hebrew word translated as *image* in Genesis 1 describes the way kings in the ancient world used to create huge statues of themselves in conquered lands. The massive stone image said, in effect, “This is my land now.” The same kings appointed governors to be their “image,” in days when communications could not travel by airplanes or telephones or Internet connections. The decisions, facial expressions, and words of the governor became the decisions, facial expressions, and words of the distant king to the people in the conquered territory.

In a similar way, human beings were created to be the image of God on Earth. We are what God looks like to the animals, insects, plants, minerals, oceans, landmasses, and everything else on earth. In essence, when an animal thinks of God, it thinks of the human faces it has seen. What an awesome responsibility to be the image of God! Yet it is a responsibility that humans were made to bear, and we actually enjoy that role immensely, because we were created exactly for that role.

Genesis 1:26-30 describes that creation:

> Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
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> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”
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> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

This passage is sometimes referred to as the “dominion mandate.” We humans are commanded by God to have *dominion*—to rule over—the earth in the same way that a governor was commanded to rule over the territory of a distant king. However, humans were ruling on behalf of the Creator. This was not exploitation but caretaking. We were gardeners, not miners; animal trainers, not hunters (Adam and Eve did not wear leather until Genesis 3:21, and people possibly didn’t eat meat until Genesis 9:2).

We Are Created to Be in “Business”

Genesis 2:15 states, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” The human form was designed for work: It has opposable thumbs, muscles that strengthen when stressed, a nervous system with many layers of communication capacity, minds that enjoy designing and solving problems. If form indeed follows function, then the function of human beings is to work—especially in work that requires groups, teams, and organizations.

Imagine if Adam and Eve had stayed away from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Humans would have lived forever and most likely expanded the

Garden to the whole earth. Children would have been born with various natural gifts. Some would have been excellent animal trainers. Others would have had keen insight into how plants grow. Some would have been designers of new tools, mechanisms, and systems—plows, pots, wheels, wagons, irrigation systems, harvesters, saddles, boats, hang gliders. Others would have served as communication runners or cart drivers. Some would have created beautiful crafts for others to enjoy, while still others would have composed songs, stories, poems, and dances.

In that pristine world, it may well be that people would have been named to reflect their God-given gifts. What they did best and enjoyed doing most would have been apparent to all. They would have organized themselves in ways that allowed them to do those things all day long. They would have formed teams to plant, cultivate, and harvest. Given that the earth produced exactly what they desired, the wheat farmers would have had surpluses of wheat that they could use to barter with other teams—for rice from the rice farmers, songs from the song-makers, feather bedding from the goose-keepers, and so forth.

> THIS BRINGS US TO THE ORIGINAL UNDERSTANDING OF BUSINESS AS THE ORGANIZATION OF HUMAN ABILITIES AND THE TRADING OF THE PRODUCT OF HUMAN WORK FOR THE PURPOSE OF OVERSEEING CREATION.

All of this activity would look like *business*—the organization of human effort to accomplish what no single human can do alone and the trading of the product of organized teams for products created by other teams. This brings us to the original understanding of *business* as the organization of human abilities and the trading of the product of human work for the purpose of overseeing creation.

> BOTH GOOD FAMILIES AND GOOD BUSINESSES WERE GIVEN TO REPRESENT GOD WELL ON EARTH.

Understood in this way, the original intent of business as an institution, alongside the institution of the family, was to work in tandem with the family as a means of carrying out the dominion mandate. Both good families and good businesses were given to represent God well on Earth. And humans need both good families and good businesses to be good stewards of the creation that God has put them in charge of.

Of course, the institution of business—along with the family—was corrupted when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. As a result, work is cursed, human motives are corrupted, and death is God's gracious way of keeping us from experiencing this horribly disfigured world forever.

Did God Establish Three—or Four—Institutions for Humanity?

In the 1500s, Martin Luther declared that there were three God-ordained vocational stations or *institutions*: the family, the government, and the church. For Luther, business and the economy were lumped together with family, perhaps because in his day and culture, most businesses were family-owned. (See Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972], pp. 36-42.)

Does Scripture give us a basis for these three institutions? Yes. Genesis 2:24 is often cited as the authorization of the family as God's ordained institution for procreation and passing on values and faith from generation to generation. Romans 13:1-7 is given as the authorization of government for overseeing justice and order. And Matthew 16:18 is seen as the establishment of the church as an institution for reconciliation between God and humans, for making disciples, and for serving as the present place of God's rule on earth.

However, there is a legitimate argument that in addition to these three, there has been a fourth institution established by God. Perhaps it is not as explicitly authorized by a single text as the other three, but it is just as important. That fourth institution is business. Genesis 1 and 2 clearly establish work, and by extension they establish business as a means for human beings to organize their dominion over the earth. If that is so, then God established two institutions before the Fall—the

family and business. And after the Fall, two more were given—church and government—to deal with the effects of the Fall.

Interestingly, in the New Jerusalem there is apparently no more need for the church (Revelation 21:22), human government (22:3), or the family (Mark 12:25). Yet business may be something we will practice for all eternity (Jeremiah 31:5).

A Century Ago, Business Was More Connected to Social Good

The idea that work in general and business in particular have a divinely ordained purpose is not new. It has existed for centuries and can be traced to at least the time when America became an English colony. When the Puritans came to the New World, only a few centuries had passed since the merchant and artisan classes had emerged from the vassal states of medieval Europe. Yet those original colonists clearly understood that the purpose of work was to steward God's creation and pursue the dominion mandate.

> THE IDEA THAT WORK IN GENERAL AND BUSINESS IN PARTICULAR HAVE A DIVINELY ORDAINED PURPOSE IS NOT NEW.

The Puritans viewed their society as a covenant between themselves and God. In that society, some would be rich and some would be poor, according to God's providence. But all had a role to play in the economy, and all were to be treated with dignity. Even as the colonists were sailing across the Atlantic on their way to New England, their leader, John Winthrop (1588-1649), admonished them to beware of putting their own private interests ahead of the public good:

> Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck [of self-interest] and to provide for our posterity is to follow the counsel of Micah: to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection; we must be willing to rid ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities; we must uphold a

> familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together: always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. (*A Model of Christian Charity*)

The Puritans' understanding of faith was very practical. They believed that God had put them into the world to do the work of the world without succumbing to the temptation of worldliness. This Puritan "business ethic" was articulated masterfully by John Cotton, a theologian and vicar of St. Botolph's church in Boston. He taught that in addition to one's personal and spiritual life, every person has a civil life and a natural life, and that all of life must be lived with reference to God:

> Civil life is that whereby we live as members of this or that city or town or commonwealth, in this or that particular vocation and calling.
>
> Natural life I call that by which we do live this bodily life. I mean, by which we live a life of sense, by which we eat and drink, and by which we go through all conditions, from our birth to our grave, by which we live and move and have our being. And now both these a justified person lives by faith. (*Christian Calling*)

Statements like that show that the Puritans did not make the unfortunate distinction so often made today between the "sacred" (church, prayer, hymns) and the secular (work, money, entertainment). All of life was to be lived out under a solemn covenant with God. For that reason, Cotton urged his fellow citizens to use their occupations as a means of serving others, because in his mind to serve God was to serve others, and to serve others was to serve God:

> If thou wouldst live a lively life and have thy soul and body to prosper in thy calling, labor then to get into a good calling and therein live to the good of others. Take up no calling but that thou hast understanding in, and never take it unless thou mayest have it by lawful and just means. And when thou hast it, serve God in thy calling, and do it with cheerfulness and faithfulness and a heavenly mind. And in difficulties and dangers, cast thy cares and fears upon God, and see if he will not bear them for thee; and frame thy heart to this heavenly moderation in all successes to sanctify God's name. And if the hour and power of darkness

> come, that thou best to resign up thy calling, let it be enough that conscience may witness to thee that thou hast not sought thyself or this world, but hast wrought the Lord's works. Thou mayest then have comfort in it, both before God and men.

What a profoundly different way of approaching work than characterizes our society today!

The Puritans' view of work, which laid a foundation for the modern system of democratic capitalism, reflected an effort to reclaim the original purpose of business and to re-establish the original Garden order. Sadly, their lofty vision was marred by their view of non-Europeans as less than human, leading to their treatment of Native Americans and Africans as resources for, not partners in, the new Garden. Yet to this day, many American business laws, structures, and values still reflect the Puritan "theology of business," even though the original context and idealism have been lost.

> The Puritans sensed with peculiar keenness the close relationship between religious experience and common, everyday duties. This fact is the more significant for history because they lived in an era of economic expansion and change, and of political revolution. They knew that they had something to do about this earth, and they brought the power of religious conviction into the momentous struggles of the age.
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> *John T. McNeill, Modern Christian Movements (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 34*

Brad Smith's great-grandfather serves to illustrate how the spirit of the Puritans lived on in American society. In the early 1900s, he owned a general store on the city square of a small town in east Texas. Records show he lived modestly,

worked hard, collected money from those who could pay, and extended credit to many who could not. In those days, little businesses like his served as the principal source of capital and business ownership in many small towns of America. As such, he felt it was his responsibility to use his resources to benefit his community and its citizens. One way he did that was to help with educational costs for some of the community's poor and to help in a small way to lead the town away from its traditional racial prejudices.

When Brad's great-grandfather died, two young African-American men who had received college degrees thanks to his generosity drove nonstop to Texas from the East Coast. Dressed in formal attire, they went straight to the house where the body lay. Following the tradition of their people, they sat bolt upright all night long during the wake, one at the head of the coffin and one at the foot, as a sign of respect for and gratitude to the man who had provided them with an education using the profits from his store. The funeral was an unusual event for that era, attended by blacks and whites together.

If Brad's ancestor had been driven only by self-interest, he probably would have lost his customers over time to new businesses that were more community-service-minded. But he, along with others in the community, saw the purpose of a business as more than just making a profit. It was to help the community have access to the resources it needed. On the way to doing that, the enterprise also pursued social good by providing credit to the poor and engaging in charitable acts. And yes, it took care to earn enough profit to stay in business.

Is this not an echo of John Winthrop's vision of the Puritan society?

> The end is to improve our lives to do more service to the Lord, the comfort and increase of the body of Christ whereof we are members, that ourselves and our posterity may be the better preserved from the common corruptions of this evil world, to serve the Lord and work out our salvation under the power and purity of His holy ordinances. (*A Model of Christian Charity*)

The Motive of Profit Maximization Is Relatively New

The descendants of the Puritans benefited greatly from their work ethic but gradually lost sight of the basis for it. As markets and the delivery of goods became more efficient, the sources of capital, ownership, and management became increasingly separated from the communities where business transactions took place. Companies expanded into distant "branches," and those with power became removed from the people their power affected.

As a result, the purpose of business was slowly redefined. Shareholder value and "making a profit" became the dominant concerns. Return on investment (ROI) became the primary measure of success. Charity and social responsibility became things that individuals did "after hours," on their "own time." Managers who engaged in "too much" charity (beyond establishing goodwill to attract and retain customers, of course) were seen as robbing shareholders of profit that they could use for their own purposes—like funding charities in their "own" communities.

By the 1960s and 1970s, Wall Street had become very efficient at rewarding companies with the best ROI. Managers were heavily incentivized to pursue quick, short-term profit strategies in favor of longer-term and/or socially responsible ones. Shareholders increasingly became supportive of corporate raiders who increased stock prices without regard to the impact on the long-term viability of businesses and communities.

Attempts have been made to offset the problems created by the "shareholder only" view of business. For example, on page 156 of *Joy at Work*, Dennis Bakke presents a chart that describes a "balanced stakeholder" philosophy of business. That view argues that business leaders should do their best to strike a compromise between profits and the needs of employees, suppliers, customers, managers, and local communities. Those who promote that strategy often say that "profit is not the ultimate purpose of business, but a good business will make a good profit." There is some merit in that perspective. But as Dennis argues in *Joy at Work*, the balanced-stakeholder approach is too idealistic and

means that the “perfect” CEO would inevitably disappoint *all* the stakeholders equally.

Dennis Bakke on profits:

“We make profit too much of a goal. It is at best a means to achieve something useful. Profits to shareholders are no different than taxes to governments, salaries to employees, or interest to banks. Profits are the just reward for helping the organization achieve its goals.”

Dennis offers an alternative way of doing business in *Joy at Work*. A business must have a mission and values that *all* the stakeholders agree to from the outset, a core purpose that aligns everyone’s individual interests but also supersedes those interests. The shared purpose acts as a “north star” to guide the company. Thus the job of the CEO is to point all stakeholders to that “north star” of common purpose before any decisions are made that affect everyone’s interests. And all decisions must yield to the ultimate question, *What best serves our higher purpose?*

> A BUSINESS MUST HAVE A MISSION AND VALUES THAT ALL THE STAKEHOLDERS AGREE TO FROM THE OUTSET, A CORE PURPOSE THAT ALIGNS EVERYONE’S INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS BUT ALSO SUPERSEDES THOSE INTERESTS.
>
> THE CORE VALUES WERE NOT JUST MEANS TO AN END BUT LEGITIMATE OUTCOMES IN THEIR OWN RIGHT.

AES’s “north star” was to provide safe, clean, reliable electricity, especially in developing countries where this would make a significant difference in the national economy and human condition. In addition, the company had four core values—integrity, fairness, fun, and social responsibility—that became the means to accomplish its mission. Over time, each of these values became a mission of its own. The core values were not just means to an end but legitimate outcomes in their own right that were worth pursuing, even if it could not be proved that they made the most efficient contribution to providing safe, clean, reliable electricity or to stakeholder interests such as profit or higher wages.

In the conclusion to his bestselling book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes that "enduring great companies don't exist merely to deliver returns to shareholders. Indeed, in a truly great company, profits and cash flow become like blood and water to a healthy body. They are absolutely essential for life, but they are not the very *point* of life" (p. 194).

This Bible study will repeatedly explore the complexity and difficulty of trying to pursue a "higher purpose" of work and business amid factors such as:

- competing stakeholder interests
- laws prioritizing shareholder interests and return on investment
- capital markets that are spooked by idealism
- competitors that would take advantage of the slightest inattention to cutting costs
- limited authority to make sweeping changes
- employees within our organizations who are not at all thinking in these terms

Reaction

It may be a new idea for you that God has a purpose for business in a similar way that He has a purpose for the church and the family. But as we've seen, there is no sacred-secular dichotomy separating the church and business, since everything we do matters to God. The implication is that work can be worship if practiced with the mind-set that God is the Creator and we are His stewards (or managers) over the creation through our work. That means that "faith at work" involves more than having good quiet time with God in the morning or having evangelistic conversations at lunch. Worship can be something we do every minute of every workday as we acknowledge God's guidance and purpose in our lives, even as we fill out a sales report, make a board presentation, keystroke a memo, or solve a client problem.

Reaction questions

- With what do you agree or disagree in the view stated above, that business is an institution given to us by God in the Garden as a means of stewarding the creation?
- How do you see your work as a mission in itself, rather than as just a "mission field" for evangelizing coworkers and making money to support the church?
- There is a rapidly growing secular movement today that advocates the social responsibility of business to focus on its environmental and social impact. How might that affect your attempts to see the purpose of your work as coming from God's original design and not merely from human good intentions?

> WORSHIP CAN BE SOMETHING WE DO EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY WORKDAY AS WE ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S GUIDANCE AND PURPOSE IN OUR LIVES.

- Imagine if the Fall had never occurred and the Garden of Eden had continued on and even expanded to the whole earth. What would your work look like today? For example, consider that:
    - Technology companies would still be needed, since travel, communication, and knowledge technologies allow finite human stewards to increase their effectiveness. (Note that technologies extend human capacity and enable us to mimic in finite ways what God does in infinite ways through His omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence.)
    - Currency would still be needed to allow the trading of value across geographical distances. Thus, hedge funds and investment banks would be needed to increase efficiencies and minimize risk for those in trading relationships.
    - Lawyers would still be needed to help people communicate their expectations clearly and to help work through hurt feelings when misunderstandings came about.
    - Counselors would still be needed to help people explore their deepest feelings so as to unleash them for expression in their relationships and to create poetry, art, and music.
    - In the absence of human evil, there would very likely be no need for the military, police, prison guards, or social workers. But there probably would be firefighters and perhaps garbage

collectors.

THE WORDS “SERVING” AND “STEWARDSHIP” MORE APPROPRIATELY DESCRIBE THE WORK OF CORPORATIONS THAN “SELLING” AND “MANAGEMENT.”

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Preface

Dennis Bakke’s passion is to make work exciting, rewarding, stimulating, and enjoyable. While most business books focus on top executives, *Joy at Work* is aimed primarily at the working life of the other 90 to 95 percent of people in large organizations. According to Bakke, co-founder and CEO emeritus of the AES Corporation, a worldwide energy company with 40,000 employees and $8.6 billion in revenue by 2002, a better measure of an organization’s success than the bottom line is the quality of work life.

In Bakke’s view, successful business people should be guided by principles and purposes “meant to be ends in and of themselves, not techniques to create value for shareholders or to reach financial goals.” He is disturbed that society’s preoccupation with economics often leads people to calculate their worth as individuals based on their salaries or wealth and to judge their leaders more on financial results than on values.

Bakke views winning—especially winning financially—as, at best, a second-order goal. Yet, most business books do not go beyond this objective and thus fail to define the ultimate purpose of an enterprise. Bakke challenges us to broaden our definition of organizational performance and success beyond dollar value. The “timeless values and principles” he advocated during his tenure at AES, he says, stand on their own merits, whatever a company’s share price. Bakke and AES partner Roger Sant redefined the basic operating structure for organizations and created an unconventional global success story. At AES, said senior executive Tom Tribone, “We try it out in practice and then see if it works in theory.”

Chapter 7: Purpose Matters

Corporations exist at the pleasure or sufferance of society, since the state grants them their special status and associated rights and responsibilities. Consequently, they must achieve broader and more meaningful purposes than just making money. Bakke expects to see any modern, progressive, socially responsible organization striving to achieve three goals:

- to serve society with specified services or products;
- to operate in an economically sustainable manner; and
- to achieve these results while rigorously adhering to a defined set of ethical principles and shared values.

As individuals tend to act in ways that are consistent with their personal goals and missions, so do organizations. Yet, corporate boards generally consider noneconomic goals "soft," and capitalists tend to assume that a company's primary purpose is to make profits for shareholders. These attitudes open the door to executives who misuse their enterprises to make themselves rich, powerful, or profligate, or all three. To Bakke, this is wrong.

In early purchase negotiations with Allegheny Power, for example, Allegheny wanted to pay considerably less than AES was asking. Bakke and Sant resisted until they realized that their goal wasn't to make the maximum amount of money for AES but to finance the deal, cover expenses, and profit enough to generate a reasonable return on the investment. The figure Allegheny offered did that. While AES lawyers were aghast that the partners had agreed to a lower figure, the economics of the lower price worked for AES, and the customer was better served, too.

To Bakke, the words "serving" and "stewardship" more appropriately describe the work of corporations than "selling" and "management." Employees are not owners of resources but guardians or stewards of them. Companies that recognize that fact, and give a high priority to serving society, energize their employees. Most corporate CEOs know their company's success and its total value result from the contributions made by all stakeholders, not just shareholders.

Recognizing this, Bakke changed the salutation in his annual report letter from "Dear Fellow Shareholders" to "Dear Friends" and included separate sections to keep the various AES stakeholders abreast of how business was conducted. He

stresses that employees make corporate decisions based on what they believe their leaders value, how the company determines compensation, what information it presents to shareholders and banks, and how its leaders live their private lives. Corporate values are worthy only if they are widely shared, lived, and considered at least equal to economic criteria in all major decisions.

Thus, every business decision, from compensation to strategic planning, should be evaluated on whether the economic and noneconomic criteria serve all of a company's purposes. Board members and other company leaders should back this wholeheartedly and stress its value with investors, banks, communities, and other stakeholders. It is perfectly appropriate to aim high. Goals should not be set according to how easy or hard they are to measure. They should be set because they're right.

> GOALS SHOULD NOT BE SET ACCORDING TO HOW EASY OR HARD THEY ARE TO MEASURE. THEY SHOULD BE SET BECAUSE THEY'RE RIGHT.

Group Discussion Questions

- (1) How would your work be different in a world without sin?
- (2) How do you see the two commissions working together—both to steward God's creation and to make disciples of the nations?

(3) As you read Genesis 1 and 2, did anything strike you as you looked for what those chapters say about work, and especially business?

(4) What is your current occupation? If the Fall had never occurred, would your work be needed in a worldwide Garden of Eden? How would your work be different from what it is today?

(5) How might you rewrite the purpose of your company using the language of "stewarding God's creation"? (Recall AES's mission statement: *to provide safe, clean, reliable electricity, especially in developing countries where this would make a significant difference in the national economy and human condition.)*

(6) What are three things you can do differently today to be more of a steward of God's creation through your work,

- in how you communicate with employees and peers?
- in how you affect the culture of your workplace?

- in how you measure results beyond profit maximization?
- in how you talk to God and know God's presence during your work?

Next Session—Work: After the Fall

Bible readings: Genesis 3, Genesis 11:1-8, Romans 8:15-39
Joy at Work, Chapter 1: My Introduction to Work (pp. 19-40)

SESSION 2



Work: After the Fall

Bible Readings for This Study
Genesis 3 (esp. v. 1-7 and 16-19)
Genesis 11:1-8
Romans 8:15-39

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Chapter 1:
My Introduction to Work (pp.19-40)

DVD Session Two: The Tommy Brooks Story
Join Tommy Brooks as he shares his powerful story of the way in which AES's values-based philosophy dramatically changed his life. His story is a testament to the transforming power of values.

Leaders Who See Something Different

Many people who have worked for several years have experienced a different kind of organizational leader. They are rare, but you remember them for the rest of your career. They might be CEOs, foremen, sales managers, or executive assistants. Their presence brings a calmness and confidence to everyone. They see through panic, politics, and paralysis to create a way to get everyone re-engaged. They heal relationships, facilitate solutions, and have a dogged vision

that never seems to be lost.

This kind of leader is not the same as the showboat whose personality and sense of drama create a wake. This is not the intimidator who causes things to happen through fear. This is not the genius who is always inventing a new way or the perfectionist who works long hours to set higher standards. It is not the dreamer whose vision would pop if it settled back down to earth and faced reality.

This is the person with unusual balance. Some call it “horse sense”—meaning that the person sees the obvious that everyone else has missed. Often this type of leader is called a “spiritual leader” because he or she leads on a plane that is higher than that of the rest of us, yet walks unwavering into the deepest of problems.

Shouldn’t the people with the “first fruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23) make up an unusually high percentage of these leaders?

It’s a fair question in light of the truth that God has designated humans to steward His creation. And it’s an especially relevant question for those of us who have been redeemed from sin’s dominion and are now followers of Christ.

We of all people should appreciate God’s original purpose for work. We should also appreciate the challenge of working in a fallen world. And we should appreciate the power God has given us to transform the way we work. So then, by rights, Christians throughout the culture ought to be this type of leader. We ought to be a people with a “sixth sense,” who know how to:

- motivate people like no one else
- create oases of health in our spheres of influence, places of joy and productivity that others would want to mimic
- negotiate “win-win” deals with clients and competitors, using uncanny skill
- show up with the most powerful and lasting innovations, while avoiding

fads and useless distractions
- face adversity and setbacks with courage, stamina, and faith in God's presence
- maintain a contagious attitude of hope and peace in a tumultuous and daunting world

If we are not redeeming our workplaces through behaviors like these, then maybe it's because we don't fully realize God's original plan for our work or the horrible damage that daily work suffered as a result of the Fall. That's the topic of this session.

The Genesis Story Continued …

The Fall (Genesis 3:1-7)

In Genesis 1-2, Adam and Eve were created to work in a garden. God instructed them to expand the Garden to the whole earth and to serve as His representatives, overseeing all living things. The first couple was specifically equipped to carry out that task. They were *workers*, with minds designed to create, make decisions, and communicate, and bodies designed to till, plant, harvest, and build. They had helpers under their command as well—animals of all kinds, each with its unique abilities, to extend Adam and Eve's capabilities. They also received timely feedback from their "Boss," who spent time walking and talking with them each day.

In short, everything was perfect in the Garden. "Perfect" in the sense that everything—people, animals, plants, land, and weather—was in harmony. As a result, there was neither too much work nor too little, and the work always provided just the right amount of food, just the right sense of purpose and significance, and just the right relationships among all created beings.

> GOD INSTRUCTED THEM TO EXPAND THE GARDEN TO THE WHOLE EARTH AND TO SERVE AS HIS REPRESENTATIVES.

Yet note that while everything was perfect, the world in the Garden was not *infinitely* perfect. Only God is infinitely perfect: everywhere present, all-

knowing, all-powerful, always making the right choice. Adam and Eve were *finitely* perfect. They had freedom to create, build, and decide. Which means they had *needs*—not from brokenness, sin, or unhealthiness but from being finite.

For example, they could not live without eating, which created a need for food. They could not read each other's minds, which created a need for communication. They could be in only one place at a time, which created a need for travel, and hence for transportation. They had limited strengths and abilities for tasks like lifting up, pressing down, boring into, breaking open, and cutting apart, which created a need for tools (or technologies) to extend their efforts.

The Creator had foreseen those needs, and so He provided every resource to meet the humans' needs—*as they worked*. In doing the work, they doubtless encountered problems. But again, God had provided every resource to solve the humans' problems—*as they worked*. Inevitably, one of those problems had to be the challenge of risk. But God had provided every resource to enable the humans to make good decisions in the face of risk. It seems doubtful that they always made right choices and never made wrong choices (otherwise, how could they learn?). But in a "perfect" garden, their "wrong" choices would not have been catastrophic but rather opportunities to gain experience and wisdom, especially since they had unrestricted access to the observations and advice of an infinite God who came to discuss their work with them at the end of each day.

However, there was one wrong choice that *did* prove catastrophic. Genesis 3:4-5 says that the serpent planted seeds of doubt in the humans' minds about God's character. Many people assume that Adam and Eve's sin was in disobeying God's instructions—like eating a pomegranate when they had been told to eat only pears. But their sin was more than that. It was the sin of rebellion. By choosing to eat the forbidden fruit, they both were saying, in effect, "We don't trust that God has *our* best interests in mind. So we will take matters into our *own* hands. We can do better than just *representing* God on earth. We can *be* God on earth. We don't need (or want) a Boss anymore. We want to be on our own. We want to do it *our* way."

The Curse (Genesis 3:17-19)

Genesis 3:17-19 describes the consequences of Adam and Eve's bad choice. God declared,

> Cursed is the ground because of you;
> through painful toil you will eat of it
> all the days of your life.
> It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
> and you will eat the plants of the field.
> By the sweat of your brow
> you will eat your food
> until you return to the ground,
> since from it you were taken;
> for dust you are
> and to dust you will return.

These words describe a disharmony that Adam and Eve had introduced into their "perfect" world. When both the ground and the groundskeepers had been under the same rule, they had worked together in harmony. Now the ground would not cooperate as well with the groundskeepers, nor would the groundskeepers understand the ground as well. To be sure, God's purpose for His human creatures would remain the same. Their God-given motivation to improve, grow, and build the creation would never go away. But their ability to accomplish that purpose would be significantly compromised, and their ability to fulfill it perfectly would be lost altogether.

God sent the rebellious couple out of the Garden of Eden into a fallen world. The consequences of that loss were substantial for all humanity, to this day. At the core, our identity as humans is now frustrated. Our work is now futile. Our relationships with God, our own selves, others, and our environment are now disrupted and even destructive. Created to experience significance and connectedness, we now face frustration and disunity at every turn. Created to live in a garden, we now are forced to live in a ghetto. In a word, this world that we now inhabit is not our natural habitat.

Having said that, let's be clear on what was *not* cursed. The ground was cursed and had thorns and thistles (weeds, difficulties, impediments) added to it. But the groundskeepers themselves were not cursed, at least not directly. They would eventually die as a result of eating the fruit, but they were still responsible for stewarding the ground.

Work was not a product of the curse (since work had been taking place long before the curse and was a source of great purpose and joy). The curse was that work would be made more difficult and oftentimes end in futility. Thus work remains our destiny and fulfillment; futility in work is our curse.

How about our relationships? Human relationships were not a product of the curse. Yet like work, they, too, would be marked by difficulties. Made for deeply satisfying relationships, we would instead experience conflict, power struggles, alienation, loneliness, and sadness in even our most intimate relationships. Thus, relationships remain at the core of our identity; disappointing relationships are our curse.

Is there any bright spot in this dismal picture? Yes. God gave humanity a gift—though we usually don't perceive it as one. By removing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, God ensured that they and their descendants would not have to stay in that miserable state forever. Outside the Garden they could never eat of the Tree of Life, which would have kept them from dying. And so death became a way to keep human beings from having to experience eternal frustration on earth. Death was a painful yet gracious gift to humanity. Eventually God would provide an even greater gift—His Son—who would enable us to overcome the effects of both the Fall and Death. But that would come later.

THEY WOULD EVENTUALLY DIE AS A RESULT OF EATING THE FRUIT, BUT THEY WERE STILL RESPONSIBLE FOR STEWARDING THE GROUND.

WHY IS IT THAT WE CAN IMAGINE A STATE SO MUCH BETTER THAN THE ONE IN WHICH WE ACTUALLY LIVE?

The Futility (Genesis 11:1-8)

Humans left the Garden to go out on their own, still possessing all the gifts required to represent God on earth. Now, however, their sin-tainted motivation would drive them to represent themselves instead. They would be masters of the world, yet masters out of harmony with the world. Genesis 11:1-8 provides an early illustration of how they did that.

By the time history arrives in Genesis 11, people had discovered the innovation of brick making. That technology opened up a whole new era of city building. Yet instead of using bricks to glorify God—the God who had given humankind the minds and the means to make cities—they used their innovation to rebel against God, "to make a name for themselves and avoid being scattered throughout the earth." God may have been pleased to see them come up with a new technology. But He was not pleased to see their motive, which was "to make a name for *ourselves* and avoid being scattered so we can do what we want, *where* we want to do it."

God's purposes can never ultimately be frustrated by human rebellion. In an amazing turn of the tables, God responded to the human ingenuity turned against Him by giving people another gift—this time, different languages. The gift caused confusion and ultimately the failure of the project. But it accomplished God's purpose of populating the world (see Genesis 1:28).

Babel would have been a magnificent—but miserable—place to live. Think about it: all human beings clumped together in one city, with all of their God-given gifts, but also with all of their sinful, selfish motives. No space to get apart, no safe place to hide. The citizens of Babel would have destroyed one another. And so God scattered them by a confusion of languages, spreading them across the world, thereby minimizing the disastrous impact of too many egos in one confined space, all attempting to be God.

The story of the tower of Babel has been the story of human striving ever since.

So How Does This Relate to Us Today?

The Move to Improve: A Universal Desire

Every religion, life philosophy, art, and social science attempts to answer the question, *Why is it that we can imagine a state so much better than the one in which we actually live?* There seems to be a universal tendency among humans, even in primitive cultures, to hold out a "vision" that is better than the present, a universal drive to improve things, to create something, to achieve something, to make something more than what exists.

That drive seems to point directly at the truth taught in Genesis, that we humans were made in God's image. Of course we would feel as we do if we were created to be God's representatives, designed and instructed to take the perfect raw materials of a newly created earth and "improve" upon them, using God-given gifts of creativity, communication, and work. It is our destiny as humans to have dominion over the earth, and so we find ourselves in a constant state of envisioning and implementing improvements.

The Genesis narrative accounts for human striving. It's interesting that many ancient civilizations had variations of the Garden story. And even today, many people who have never heard of Eden feel as if they have a distant memory of a better state. They have a strong sense that they were designed for something better than what they currently experience. And so one doesn't have to subscribe to a worldview involving creation to see the world as a place where progress and development should occur. Indeed, evolution is at heart a belief that the world's creatures are constantly striving to surmount the challenge of survival.

> Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
> Man never Is, but always To be blest:
> The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home,
> Rests and expatiates in a life to come.

Alexander Pope, An Essay on Man, Epistle I, 1733

Marketers and salespeople understand that people are always looking for "new and improved" products and services. Cars must have improved performance, comfort, and fuel economy. Software must have updated versions with improved features—even if users hardly use the features they had. Educators and trainers motivate workers by touting knowledge and skill "improvements." Movies have to have the latest special effects. Sports teams must meet ever higher expectations of their fans each season. All of these point to the "drive to strive" that God has placed in the human heart.

AND EVEN TODAY, MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD OF EDEN FEEL AS IF THEY HAVE A DISTANT MEMORY OF A BETTER STATE.

THE HUMAN DRIVE TO IMPROVE, CREATE, ACHIEVE, OR RETAIN ORIGINALLY WAS INTENDED TO CREATE GREAT JOY.

Isn't "Improvement" Just a Western Idea?

What's the difference between a cultural obsession with improving, creating, and achieving, and a universal desire across many cultures to do the same? We ask that question because, admittedly, the culture of the United States seems to be obsessed with bigger, better, and faster. Is that obsession just an extraordinary rarity, or is it a heightened expression of a drive shared by most cultures?

Often, cultures that are relatively young or in widespread transition tend to think that the future will *always* be better than the past. By contrast, established or declining cultures often tend to view the past as better than the present. They have rich stories and legends that recall a time when life was supposedly better and members of that culture were supposedly happier. Traditions become the way that the greatness of the past is woven into the fabric of the present. Likewise,

primitive cultures often imagine a better world through their art, folklore, myths, and songs.

To be sure, some cultures view history as a linear journey through improvement or decline, while others see it as a repetitive cycle of improvements and declines. In either case, worldviews are haunted by the idea that there will be, or there was at one time, a better existence than is present today.

This seems to be a universal human perspective. Call it "improvement" or some other quality: creativity, effectiveness, achievement, significance, or balance. Whatever word best describes it, human imagination everywhere exceeds human experience.

The human drive to improve, create, achieve, or retain originally was intended to create great joy. So we can imagine that before the Fall, Adam and Eve went to bed each evening tired from their work, but it was a "good tired." They felt the satisfaction that something was improved, new animals had been named, last year's shelter was reinforced for the coming year, and a Creator had been excited to walk with them in the cool of the day and hear them recount their accomplishments.

Even now, after the Fall, we are still designed to "make a difference" in the world. When we do, we are most in sync with the core of what it means to be made in God's image and to represent God on this earth.

Blocked Improvement = Frustration

Our endless striving as humans would be great if we still lived in an ever-expanding garden. But now that we are outside of the Garden, improvement, creativity, and achievement are blocked. And so the drive to create, improve, and achieve, which was once a source of great joy, has now become a source of great

frustration. Just ask the most frustrated, unmotivated worker you know why he or she is so discouraged. The answer most likely has to do not so much with the person's present situation as with the feeling that he or she cannot improve the situation. People feel motivated when they feel hopeful that they can make a difference, but the heart goes out of them when they conclude they will never overcome the challenges facing them.

Yet no matter how frustrating the circumstances of their lives, and especially their work, people attempt to satisfy their desire to create, improve, or achieve somewhere, somehow. They tend to think through their options along a continuum, as follows:

- How can my work make the world a better place? And if that's not possible . . .
- How can I improve the conditions of my work for me and my coworkers? And if that's not possible . . .
- How can I improve my work? And if that's not possible . . .
- How can I make enough money to improve my life? And if that's not possible . . .
- How can I create a nest egg for an improved life after retirement? And if that's not possible . . .
- How can I work to make sure my children have a better life than I've had?

> PEOPLE FEEL MOTIVATED WHEN THEY FEEL HOPEFUL THAT THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

The percentage of human beings who are even in a position to ask those higher-level questions is rather small. So one purpose of this study is to increase that percentage—by increasing the number of people who recognize and ask those questions, and by increasing the number of decision makers who can create solutions that allow more people to ask (and answer) them.

> GOD WASSO PRESENT AND PEOPLE'S GIFTS WERE SO APPARENT THAT EVIDENTLY NO ONE ARGUED OVER WHO SHOULD MAKE WHICH DECISION.

Joy at Work: It's About Decision Authority

Enjoyment of work seems to be tied to decision-making authority and responsibility. Our reading of Genesis argues that humans originally were created to be God's representatives on the earth, with authority to decide the names and fate of the animals, plants, and minerals. In that case it makes sense that there would still be a universal human desire to make decisions. In the Garden of Eden, God was so present and people's gifts were so apparent that evidently no one argued over who should make which decision. There were plenty of decisions to go around, and the order of the day was to please God, not to reclaim a lost identity and attempt to express a battered ego.

Today, however, the desire for responsibility remains, but the decision-making roles are hotly contested. A common strategy for sorting out those roles is to increase salaries, titles, and perks to keep employees motivated. Yet any manager who has tried such a strategy knows all too well that the effects of such increases is short-lived. All they do is ratchet up expectations. And so the increases have to be constant, or else morale falls.

Joy at Work: It's About Relational Confidence and Feedback

In the Garden, God declared that Adam by himself was "not good" (Genesis 2:18). So He created Eve. From that day forward, the stewards of the Garden worked as a team. Their work and their relationship were both fulfilling. And so we can guess that when they corrected each other's work, or gave advice, or stated an opinion, there was no shame or second-guessing, no suspicion about "what did he or she *really* mean?" And there was no hiding to cover up mistakes. When one was made, there was no blaming of each other. It was just a mistake. Mistakes happen. Just another opportunity to laugh at ourselves, have a useful conversation, and apply our minds to coming up with a creative solution, perhaps by inventing a new technology.

It is hard for us to imagine a world where people are naked and without shame. Likewise, it is hard for us to imagine a work environment where mistakes are a reason to *celebrate* the opportunity to try another approach. It's hard to imagine a world where one feels so safe in God's care that ambiguity about the future is

an adventure, rather than a worry. And it's hard to imagine a world where there is no need to balance work and family, tasks and relationships, because those commitments are seamlessly integrated. Or is it so hard to imagine? Apparently not, because work surveys inevitably reveal that people will trade a higher salary for a more encouraging, supportive work environment. Workers shun workplaces characterized by fear of failure, pressure to perform, and stress to take on ever more tasks.

Joy at Work: It's About a Higher Purpose (Romans 8:15-39)

The Genesis account indicates not only that we were created to improve our world, work in close community, and make decisions, but that we were also made to do these things for a purpose higher than ourselves: to steward God's creation and to worship and glorify God in our stewardship role. That means that every person in your workplace was made in the image of God and somewhere deep inside has a desire to pursue significant work. They have that longing, even if they don't understand its source. Every person in your world is a "Garden creature" who has been displaced to the ghetto—even if they have lived in the ghetto so long that they no longer have any idea what a real garden looks like.

> EVERY PERSON IN YOUR WORKPLACE WASMADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD AND SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE HAS A DESIRE TO PURSUE SIGNIFICANT WORK.

Total Depravity

In discussing human fallenness, we have to consider a theological idea called *total depravity*. This concept originated with John Calvin (1509-1564). It meant that sin has so altered human nature that human beings no longer have any ability to choose God on their own. When people turn to God in faith, it is because God is reaching out to them and empowering them to choose Him and be reconciled to Him. God initiates; human beings only respond using the power He provides them to respond.

Unfortunately, the term “total depravity” is often misunderstood to mean that we no longer have any vestige of God’s image remaining in us. We are “totally depraved” in the sense that there is no good thing left in us—nothing that God would desire or find valuable.

But that is not true, nor can it be true. If it were true that there is *nothing* of value remaining in human beings, then we would not be human beings, for the same reason that a car that is *totally* depraved is not a car but a pile of rust.

Perhaps it would be better to say we are like a junk car abandoned in a field. Such a car has no power to move—none whatsoever. But it still retains its original shape and is recognizable for what it is—a car. In a similar way, we humans still have our “shape” or “wiring” as stewards of God’s creation. But we lack the power to use that wiring for the purpose for which it was intended (see Romans 1:18-21).

However, those of us who are Christ-followers not only have the dignity of being made in God’s image but have been “re-created” in Christ into new Adams and new Eves:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
>
> *2 Corinthians 5:17*

> … and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
>
> *Ephesians 4:24*

…the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Colossians 3:10

It is essential that Christians understand both the dignity of God's image in every person and our unique roles as new Adams and new Eves. That insight is vital to our calling to be people who experience and create joy in work.

CHRISTIANS OF ALL PEOPLE ARE IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO EXPERIENCE JOY AT WORK FOR OURSELVES AND TO CREATE A PLACE OF JOY FOR FELLOW WORKERS.

Romans 8:15-39 describes Christians as sons and daughters of God and fellow heirs with Christ. That role puts us in a unique position to:

- rebuild authentic representations of the Garden in the present, giving people a taste of the real Garden to come in the future;
- tell people what a real Garden will look like when God rebuilds it in the future as a new heaven and earth;
- express honest frustration at knowing what could be and feeling blocked by the current state of the world in attaining it; and
- express real joy in our hope of a restored Garden in the future.

In summary, Christians of all people are in a unique position to experience joy at work for ourselves and to create a place of joy for fellow workers.

Reaction

Has it ever amazed you to watch executives who are paid extremely well fight vigorously over a parking spot, a corner office, or box-seat tickets to a sporting event? How many times have you seen an administrative assistant express deep frustration over not having clear feedback on how well he or she has performed? Why do some of the most promising young leaders irritate everyone by always having to say something in a meeting, or by having to be involved in every

project, or by always having to know more than anyone else? How many times have you had the better numbers yet still lost the sale to someone else who "connected" better?

In every workplace meeting, communication, and task, there is a layer of communication beyond the actual words being said. At one level, people are attending to the words, the charts on the PowerPoint, or the facts in the memo. But at a deeper level, they are also listening for something in one's voice, actions, or manner that tells them, "You are significant," "I enjoy being with you," "You did a great job," "Your opinions matter," "You matter to me."

Leaders who are aware of this deeper level of communication are like people who see in the land of the blind. They observe things no one else recognizes. They hear things no one else hears. When they deal with conversations, decisions, relationships, and problems, they have a map to guide them that no one else has.

This deeper level of awareness is sometimes referred to as "emotional intelligence" (e.g., see Reuven Bar-On, 2000; Daniel Goleman, 1995, 1998; Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Yet at its root, emotional intelligence is nothing other than the ability to hear the cry of Garden creatures who are asking for what they were designed to experience in the Garden but are deeply missing in the ghetto. As Christians who understand that original design, as well as the horrible effects of the Fall, we should be people who have eyes and ears for those deeper meanings.

> WE WHO HAVE THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT SHOULD BE DIFFERENT PEOPLE WITH A DIFFERENT SENSE OF WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

So as you go about your work today, consider an attempt to listen to that deeper conversation. When does a colleague's question about his sales idea have an underlying tone that says, "Tell me that I am significant"? When does a boss's anger about a quota communicate, "The CEO is telling me I am insignificant, so I need your quota filled so I can prove to him otherwise"? When is a client's

demand telling you, “We can certainly afford a higher price, but I must score a lower price to prove my worth to my fellow buyers”?

We who have the first fruits of the Spirit should be different people with a different sense of what really matters. And we should be making a difference in a world where people feel futility and frustration in their work and relationships.

Reaction questions

- Where do you agree and disagree with this session’s interpretation of the Genesis story?
- Where do you feel the greatest pain of being a “Garden creature” living in a “ghetto”? Is it at work? At home? In relationships? In connection with God?
- How do you respond to your role as a new Adam or Eve, with a responsibility to steward of your portion of God’s creation?

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Chapter 1: My Introduction to Work

Bakke grew up as one of four children in the isolated Nooksack Valley at the foot of Mount Baker in Washington state. There, by doing farm chores and raising his own herd of cattle, he learned stewardship, responsibility, time management, and the satisfaction of knowing at the end of each day how well he had performed. He enjoyed strong support from his parents, who believed in what their children could achieve and gave them the freedom to work and make decisions.

After going to college on a football scholarship and eventually earning his M.B.A. at Harvard Business School, Bakke worked six years for the federal government in Washington, D.C. He had grown up enjoying work—and even took great pride in washing the family dishes—but now he saw how central staff operations tend to exert a “destructive tyranny” over organizations.

He knew that purpose makes work meaningful and believed that fun and work weren't at all incompatible. So, when he and business strategist Roger Sant brainstormed forming a private-sector company to generate electricity, the two already had a different kind of organization in mind. "Let's make it fun," Sant said. The two launched AES in January 1982, with a $60,000 personal bank loan and $1 million from investors, including family members.

Since society grants corporations certain rights and privileges, Bakke believes that corporations are obligated, in turn, to operate in a way that benefits society, mitigating potential negative consequences. How a corporation operates should be shaped by principles derived from mainstream values, as practiced by billions of people worldwide.

As one of the new company's first steps, therefore, AES held a two-day retreat where 20 employees hammered out its "shared values"—integrity, social responsibility, fairness, and fun. All AES personnel were encouraged to develop a collegial, values-driven atmosphere at work and to live these values off the job, too. AES leaders stressed these values from the start to let people know where the company stood and to give prospective employees the choice of whether they wanted to be a part of AES or not.

"Fun" was the most difficult value to define. To Bakke, fun was not the Friday afternoon beer blast or the annual holiday party. Rather, fun meant a joy-filled, rewarding, creative work environment, free of autocratic supervisors and staff offices, where each and every employee could fully utilize his or her talents for success.

Bakke believes that values are the organizational infrastructure that guide management and give a company its distinctive character. An organization's values cannot change with the ups and downs of the stock price, or be regarded as some management tool or system that runs parallel to the operation. Yet CEOs rarely talk about values in investor meetings and rarely consider them in judging the performance of managers or employees, or in making business investment decisions.

When, in 1991, AES management, employees, and investors decided to take the company public, they submitted a draft public-offering document to the Securities and Exchange Commission for review. SEC staffers advised moving the paragraph on "Adherence to AES's Values" out of the "Business of the Company" section and into the "Special Risk Factors" section.

Bakke was amused that SEC officials thought AES's values posed a business hazard and that the U.S. government thought it was *very risky* to try to operate a business with integrity, fairness, social responsibility, and a sense of fun.

Group Discussion Questions

(1) What struck you as a new thought in your reading of Genesis 3 and 11, and a second reading of Romans 8?
(2) What other sources of joy at work seem as important to you as:

- improvement, creativity, and achievement?
- responsibility and authority?
- relationships?
- a higher purpose?

(3) How would your role at work be affected if your job were understood according to the responsibilities of a "fellow heir with Christ," as described in Romans 8?
(4) What two things will you do differently today to live out your role as a "Garden creature" in your workplace?
(5) What did you take away from the Tommy Brooks story?
(6) How do you live out the concept of integrity?
(7) Where have you seen examples of servant leadership in your workplace?

Next Session—Trust: Stewarding People's Gifts

Bible readings: Genesis 2:4-25, 4:19-22, Exodus 31:1-6, 35:30 - 36:7, Psalms 139:13-16, Ephesians 2:10, Romans 12:3-8
Joy at Work, Chapter 2: A Miserable Workplace
Chapter 3: From Misery to Joy (pp. 41-83)

SESSION 3

Trust: Stewarding People's Gifts

Bible Readings for This Study
Genesis 2:4-25 (note every use of the word "man"), 4:19-22
Exodus 31:1-6, 35:30-36:7
Psalms 139:13-16
Ephesians 2:10
Romans 12:3-8

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Chapter 2: A Miserable Workplace
Chapter 3: From Misery to Joy (pp. 41-83)

DVD Session Three: The Gifted Worker
This session explores the concept that we are all uniquely designed by God and fitted for a particular task. It is in applying your gifts to your specific task that you experience pure joy at work.

Review

In the last two lessons, we learned:

1. We humans are made in God's image.
2. We were made to work, and to work in community.
3. We were given responsibility to make decisions as God's representatives

on earth.

4. We made the decision to try our own way, rather than God's. The result was the fall of humanity and a curse pronounced on the creation.
5. Despite the Fall, we are still designed for work and therefore are motivated to work, but in a fallen world our work is now frustrated and futile.
6. As the "first fruits of the Spirit," Christians have a role in reclaiming work as a source of joy, not frustration.

In this session, we will discuss one key step to reclaiming work as a source of joy: recognizing God's gifts in ourselves and others, and trusting others to make decisions as they were originally designed by God to do.

> WHAT DOES STEWARDING THE CREATION MEAN FOR THE PEOPLE WHO WORK IN AN ENTERPRISE?

Introduction: People Were Designed by God for a Purpose

Business owners and corporate executives are fond of saying that "people are our greatest asset." Some leaders mean that sincerely. But for many the saying is just an empty platitude. Indeed, the statement betrays a common view of people in business, that human beings are an "asset"—another resource to be exploited and a necessary cost to get the job done. Even many who have a high view of people, such as the servant-leadership movement, argue that leaders should treat people with dignity and integrity because such "golden rule" altruism induces employees to give their best in return.

Why should we treat people with respect? Because it sounds good? Because it increases work motivation and thereby increases profit? Or because it is right, *even if* it does none of the above?

> ADAM AND EVE COULD BE SAID TO BE THE WORLD'S FIRST ENTREPRENEURS.

Inour study, we've been looking at the implications of seeing work as a means of stewarding the creation. What does that mean for the people who work in an enterprise? What does it mean to see coworkers not as "assets" but as fellow

stewards, no matter their level in the organization? How does it change a leader's thinking to realize that he or she is responsible not only for the outcome of an organization's work but also for helping the people doing the work to rise to the position of stewardship that God created them to fulfill?

People in the Garden (Genesis 2:4-25)

In an earlier session we saw that we humans were created to be God's representatives on the earth. In fact, He appointed us to be the caretakers of the earth (Genesis 1:28). Genesis 2 teaches the same truth from a different perspective. God created Adam, and later Eve, placed them in a garden called Eden, and gave them a job: "to cultivate it and keep it."

This was the first job anyone ever held. It was by no means intended to be the only job humans would ever hold. After all, the mandate was to "fill the earth, and subdue it." Adam and Eve were subduing just a small plot of the earth. Bigger things would follow. But the Garden was a start. Indeed, Adam and Eve could be said to be the world's first entrepreneurs.

Three important truths about humans can be found in Genesis 2. The first is that *Adamand Eve were personally <u>designed</u> by God*. Notice the word "formed" in verse 7. The Hebrew word is *yatsar*, which means "formed" or "fashioned." The idea is of a potter who is turning a piece of clay on a wheel. As the clay turns, the potter uses his hands to squeeze and mold and form the clay into whatever shape he wants. So, in Genesis 2, we have a picture of God with his hands in the mud/clay, forming Adam and shaping him into whatever He desires. God was *designing* a human being.

> THE TRUTH THAT GOD UNIQUELY DESIGNS EACH HUMAN BEING HAS ENORMOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE.

But there is another aspect to the word *yatsar* that we should pay attention to. Potters design pottery with an eye toward not only beauty but utility and functionality as well. They craft features into the work that fit it for a particular task. One piece comes out of the kiln with the ability to hold water or wine.

Another is more suited to burn oil as a lamp. Another is made flat and wide to serve as platter. The usefulness of a piece of pottery is predetermined by the potter, who designs the pottery for a specific task.

Adam was designed by God for a specific task. So is every other human being. God handcrafts each one of us and designs into us unique attributes that fit us to specific tasks. That design is our *giftedness*: It is God's gift to us as individuals. It is an endowment from God that enables us to add value to the world. And it is the thing we most love to do. Not "like" to do but *love* to do, are *born* to do, and *instinctively* do because the motivation to do it springs from the very core of our personhood, which is from God.

People in the Womb (Psalms 139:13-16, Ephesians 2:10)

The truth that God uniquely designs each human being has enormous implications for the workplace. So let's consider two other Scriptures that teach the same truth. The first is Psalms 139:13-16. That passage is similar to Genesis 2:7 in that it depicts God fashioning a human being. Unlike Adam, who had no mother, the person being formed in Psalm 139 is being handcrafted by God in his mother's womb. The Psalmist portrays God as a weaver who is stitching together an intricate tapestry.

Note verse 16 in particular. It says that all our days were "ordained" before there was one of them. The word "ordained" is the same Hebrew word *yatsar* used in Genesis 2. Again, *yatsar* means "formed" or "fashioned." So here we have another passage in which the Bible tells us that our lives ("days") have been designed by God from the womb. That doesn't mean we are just living out a script and that every detail of our life is predetermined. Rather it means that our *design* is predetermined. God has gifted us with a particular shape or form that fits us for a particular purpose.

> GOD HAD INTENTIONS FOR US BEFORE HE EVER CREATED US AND PLACED US IN THE WORLD.

The same idea is given in the New Testament in Ephesians 2:10. The verse says

that we are God's "workmanship." The Greek word means "made thing" or "crafted thing." Once again, the idea is of a piece of artisanship or pottery being made. And once again, the pottery has a functional purpose, because the verse goes on to say that the workmanship was created in Christ Jesus for "good works." Those are not just "generic" good works, like feeding the homeless or helping elderly ladies across the street. Those are good works and ought to be done. But clearly, given the context, the "good works" in Ephesians 2:10 look back to the design of the "workmanship," which has been handcrafted by Christ to do specific work that is "good"—in other words, work that God wants done (by definition, work that God wants done is "good work").

Notice, too, that all of this work was prepared for us "beforehand." When is "beforehand"? Before we were saved? Before we were born? Before the worlds were created? The answer is, all three. God had intentions for us before He ever created us and placed us in the world. To that end, He designed us in our mother's womb with a particular "bent" that fits us for particular tasks.

Using the Gifts (Genesis 2:4-25)

The first truth about humans in Genesis 2—that Adam and Eve were designed by God—leads directly to a second truth: *Adam and Eve used their gifts in the Garden*. This is self-evident from the account, in that Genesis 2 shows God's plan being carried out in a sinless world. But it also can be seen explicitly in verses 19-20. God brought the animals to Adam for naming. Isn't it interesting that God Himself did not name the animals? He left that to Adam. Naming is an act of "subduing" and having "dominion" over the creatures. Clearly, Adam had been endowed by God with the capacity, or *giftedness*, for naming the animals. Verses 19-20 show him using that giftedness.

This leads to a third truth about humans from Genesis 2: *Adam and Eve saw their gifts as purposeful for God.* In other words, their lives had meaning because they were doing the thing God had designed and intended them to do. They understood why they were placed in the Garden. They were not confused as to their purpose, or what they were supposed to be doing, or why it mattered.

Indeed, they had daily communion with God, who came to visit them in some sort of physical way each day (Genesis 3:8 says that God came "walking" to find Adam and Eve, and that's not just a figure of speech; they "heard" the sound). We can imagine that God talked with them about the things they had accomplished each day, and what those accomplishments signified, and how the creation was intended to work. They had the perfect job for them, and the perfect Supervisor to go with it!

> THE POINT IS THAT EVEN AFTER THE FALL, GOD STILL FORMS EACH ONE OF US WITH A PARTICULAR GIFTEDNESS THAT FITS US FOR A PARTICULAR TASK.

Gifted Humans in a Fallen World (Genesis 4:19-22)

Today, of course, we live on the other side of the Fall from Adam and Eve. How did the Fall affect the three truths taught by Genesis 2? At first glance, it would appear that the first truth was not affected at all: People are still designed by God. For example, in Genesis 4:19-22, we learn about three men who were descendants of Cain, who was a murderer and is considered by many theologians to be the father of a long line of God-haters. Yet despite those suspect roots, Cain's three descendants each had a giftedness that decisively influenced their occupations and contribution to the world.

Many other examples could be cited of "post-Fall" people who were prepared by God in their mother's womb for particular roles and functions: Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25:23), Samson (Judges 13:5), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-16), a man blind from birth (John 9:1-3), and Paul (Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:15-16), to name a few. The point is that even after the Fall, God still forms each one of us with a particular giftedness that fits us for a particular task.

People Don't Know Their Gifts

The tragedy of the Fall is that most people don't know what their giftedness is. Most people have only a vague awareness of what their real contribution can be.

Perhaps they know that they are good with numbers, or that they like to solve problems, or that they are "people persons." But those are extremely broad and rudimentary assessments of one's capacity. It's as if people have blinders on that prevent them from appreciating how God has designed them—exactly what we would expect if the world is fallen and humans are cut off from their Creator.

People Are Not in Jobs That Use Their Gifts

A second tragedy of the Fall is that most people are not in jobs that make good use of their gifts. For example, research suggests that anywhere between 60 and 80 percent of Americans are in jobs that do not make much use of what they are fundamentally designed to do. There are many reasons that situation exists. But it means that millions of people are working at tasks that make little use of their giftedness—exactly what we would expect if the world is fallen and humans are no longer pursuing the intentions of their Creator.

> BECAUSE OUR GIFTEDNESS COMES FROM GOD, IT IS INHERENTLY GOOD.

People Don't See the Higher Purpose of Their Gifts

A third tragedy of the Fall is that most workers today don't see their gifts as purposeful for God. Even people who have some awareness of their giftedness usually see their abilities in terms of self-serving ends. Perhaps they make a lot of money, but they see those financial rewards as merely the just benefit of happening to be so bright or talented or savvy. God certainly gets no glory. As for the wider workforce, how many people do you know who view work itself as a curse? Or, at best, as "just a job"? How many live for the weekend, when they can finally express themselves in activities that match their God-given design better than anything they do at work? It's a gift of God that they can have that outlet. But again, the satisfaction is usually self-oriented.

People Use Gifts Meant for the Good of the Community for Selfish Purposes

Because our giftedness comes from God, it is inherently good. However, it is

morally neutral. It can be used for good or for evil. When people combine their giftedness, as in a business, a great deal of productive and beneficial activity can take place. That's the genius of the modern corporation. However, it's also possible for a community of gifted people to pursue ends that oppose God. We saw that in our last session, when we looked at Babel (Genesis 11:1- 8). We see it in modern times in societies that organize themselves around genocide. We also see it in businesses that intentionally deceive investors, defraud customers, pillage the environment, and abuse their workers. Those kinds of activities are not committed out of anyone's weakness, but out of God-given core strengths turned to dark ends.

Redeemed Humans in a Fallen World

If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creature, with a renewed relationship to God (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). That means that followers of Christ are in a position to reclaim their role as stewards of God's creation. Workplace leaders in particular are in a position to use their enterprises as a primary venue for carrying out that role. This means that Christian leaders have a new set of responsibilities. In the next session we'll discuss the responsibilities for creating a corporate culture that:

- establishes what is expected—not just desired—in an organization
- helps people overcome lack of experience and knowledge
- helps people hold themselves accountable for their actions
- shares decision-making authority and responsibility at all levels
- takes into account the reality of sin in our fallen world

> GIFTEDNESS IS ALL ABOUT HOW THE PERSON GETS THE JOB DONE.

In this session, however, we will look at the implications of people's giftedness and our responsibility to:

1. help them identify their gifts and abilities
2. place them in jobs and tasks where their gifts are best used
3. equip people to function optimally and trust them to make decisions in their sphere of responsibility

Responsibility for Helping People Discover Their Gifts and Fitting Them to Appropriate Tasks (Exodus 31:1-6; 35:30-36:7)

In light of what we saw above about the nature of giftedness and where it comes from, stewardship means that leaders and managers should pay particular attention to the giftedness of the people who work in their enterprises. This is the issue of *job fit*, and all the evidence suggests that very little attention is paid to job fit in the work world today.

One reason is that organizations are primarily concerned with getting a job done, not with the person doing the job. In effect, they hire people and tell them, "We don't care how you get the job done, just get it done." But giftedness is all about *how* the person gets the job done. Therefore, to ignore the person's giftedness is to be a poor steward of the means God has provided for getting the work done.

When people's giftedness does not match the tasks they are assigned to do, they do not put their heart into the work. They will do the work—but only if they are externally motivated (e.g., by money, incentives, a supervisor looming over them, threats of dire consequences for nonperformance, etc.). They may actually do the work well—which makes the employer happy. But the work does nothing for the worker, except pay the bills. But far worse, it stewards the giftedness of the worker poorly. It squanders God's design of that individual on tasks that he or she was never really created by God to do. Who will God hold responsible for that? The worker, for sure. But what about the decision maker who placed that individual in a poorly fitting job? Remember, "You too have a Master in heaven" (Colossians 4:1).

> IT'S A LOT EASIER TO PUT YOUR HEART AND SOUL INTO WORK IF THE WORK FITS YOU.

Exodus provides a great illustration of people being given tasks that fit their God-given design. The context of building the tabernacle was not a business setting, but it was a *work* setting. People were assigned work on the basis of the giftedness God had bestowed on them. The result was a beautiful, functional, and practical worship center that lasted for many, many years (the tabernacle and its furnishings remained in use until Solomon built a permanent temple at

Jerusalem). And, while the text doesn't say it, it's easy to read between the lines and see that the workers were highly motivated to do their tasks. Moreover, everyone else seems to have been delighted to have had gifted workers working on the tasks—which is perhaps why they brought more materials than were needed (Exodus 35:5-7).

God explicitly told Moses to assign workers to tasks based on their giftedness. That model of job fit worked well for the construction of the tabernacle. There is every reason to believe it would work well for workplaces today—especially those led by followers of Christ who have responsibility for stewarding the giftedness that God has supplied their companies (or will supply through intelligent hiring).

By the way, Colossians 3:23 says that slaves (and by extension, all Christian workers) should "do your work heartily." That is, put your heart in it; be motivated by it. It's a lot easier to put your heart and soul into work if the work fits you. If it doesn't, then it's only by strength of character that one will be able to hang in there and do the task. People in a poor job fit gain no energy from the job. And while they may do the task well enough to satisfy the employer, the whole experience will feel like a grind. Is that the situation a Christian leader or manager wants to put his or her people in? Is that good stewarding of the giftedness God has supplied the company?

The Continuum of Gift Discovery: From Freedom to Facilitation

Companies and organizations help people identify their gifts through a variety of means. Some do it well; many do it poorly.

AES, with 40,000 employees, did not have a human-resources department. The reason? Dennis had seen the way many HR departments in corporate America view their task as controlling job fit rather than helping people discover their gifts and find the natural

place for those gifts to be used. For example, they use standardized job descriptions, which serve the interests of a centralized decision-making authority but tend to force compliance to a standard rather than exploration of frontline needs and gifts. Dennis observed that large corporate human-resources departments were far too distant from the daily workplace of employees to help people discover their gifts or redefine jobs, even if they were so inclined.

AES chose a different model. The solution was to minimize central control and instead create a corporate culture of freedom. AES decided to allow workers to find their best gifts and then try to fit those gifts within their own teams. Next week's reading in *Joy at Work* (Chapter 4) will provide more detail about how that was accomplished, using something called the "Honeycomb" principle.

Other companies do gift-assessment much differently. They have found that their people need assistance to discover their gifts and fit them to frontline tasks. So leaders in those enterprises advocate a more proactive approach, in which the organization facilitates gift discovery through formal assessment and other processes, as well as foster a corporate culture that encourages gift discovery.

The point is that whether your organization takes a fairly hands-off approach and lets people figure out their gifts however they will, or whether you facilitate a more process-oriented approach, the responsibility to steward people's gifts implies that you avoid joy-destroying, command-and-control processes that force square pegs into round holes.

Responsibility to Trust (Romans 12:3-8)

Helping people discover their gifts and find places to work that align with their

gifts makes such good sense that we should immediately ask, *If this is so true and obvious, why is it practiced so rarely?*

Romans 12 gives us a clue. Verses 3-6 indicate that many of us are prone to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. We think our gifts are broader, bigger, and stronger than they actually are. Furthermore, when we think that way, we are liable to diminish other people's gifts. And so we trust ourselves to make the "right" decisions more than we trust anyone else. In effect, to use Paul's analogy of a body, we think of ourselves not just as a body part but as the whole body, or at least a whole body section.

> WHEN WE INFLATE OUR ACTUAL CAPABILITIES, WE ARE SAYING, IN EFFECT, "I DON'T NEED TO TRUST GOD."

We saw in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve's sin was in thinking that they could do better than just represent God on earth; they could *be* God on earth. Thinking too highly of ourselves by overrating our gifts is just another form of committing that same sin. When we inflate our actual capabilities, we are saying, in effect, "I don't need to trust God. I've got all the ability I need, right here inside me. I can do this task (e.g., run a company, make a sale, predict the future of the market, size up a potential hire) quite well on my own, thank you very much. I don't need God. And frankly, I don't need anyone else. If I include others, they'll probably just mess up my wonderful plan. I think I'll just do this on my own."

The first time, the last time, and every time anyone has thought that way, things haven't turned out so well.

Romans 12 also challenges the common excuse, "But I have to stay in control. I'm the one who is ultimately responsible!" Perhaps, but that raises the question: Should you be? Should you have ultimate responsibility, by virtue of your giftedness? Verses 6-8 imply, "If you are gifted to a task, do it." The unspoken corollary is, "If you aren't gifted to a task, then get out of the way and let someone who is take responsibility for it." It does not say, "If you have the title, role, or job description, then you should be doing it, regardless of your gift."

The body functions when there is awareness of our need for God and for one another. The body functions where there is trust of one another to use the gifts that God has provided.

Romans 12 is addressed to the church, but the principles apply more broadly. All human beings are made in God's image. All have been designed by God and have gifts that fit them to particular tasks. All are also made to make decisions and be held accountable for the results of their decisions. We all were gifted with the ability to make decisions. That is implied in what it means to be made in the "Image of God." No leader has the right to take that gift away from us.

So even if a person is apart from Christ and disconnected from the Creator he or she is supposed to represent, the design and desire to steward remain deeply ingrained in that person's core identity. It is our responsibility as those who are reconnected to the Source and have the in-dwelling Holy Spirit to both demonstrate and provide the route for others to learn what they were created for.

> WE ALL WERE GIFTED WITH THE ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS.

But Wait! God Trusted Adam and Eve, and Look What Happened. Why Should I Trust My Employees?

Pope John Paul II, in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, states: "God created man as rational and free, thereby placing Himself under man's judgment. The history of salvation is also the history of man's continual judgment of God. Not only of man's questions and doubts but of his actual judgment of God. In part, the Old Testament Book of Job is the paradigm of this judgment. There is also the intervention of the evil spirit, who, with even greater shrewdness than man, would judge not only man but God's actions in human history. This too is confirmed in the Book of Job."

Pope John Paul is essentially saying that God "trusts" humans with the very decision of their own eternal destiny, the most important decision they will make in eternity. In this way, God humbles himself to have His created representatives judge their own Source and Creator.

Even theologians who would not agree with this view emphasize that God trusts people with His creation—the earth, the animals, our children, our gifts, the call to be members of God's kingdom in a fallen world. Either way, God's trust of fallen humans is amazing.

Business leader Howard Butt Jr., author of *Who Can You Trust?*, was asked, "If the world is deeply flawed by sin, why should we trust others?" He replied, "Because they are created in the image of God. We trust God in others, and He alone is completely trustworthy. Trusting God in others is essential for healthy human relationships. In some mysterious way, God is at work in everyone despite our fallen condition. Knowing this allows us to be predisposed to trust. Unless we do so, we can never enjoy the love of God that He ministers to us through others."

If we do not trust another person to act and decide, we are denying that person was created in the image of God. Decentralizing decisions is not a "management style" issue; it is a spiritual issue. It is an imperative for a Christian leader in business, government, nonprofit groups, family, and church.

THE STEWARDSHIP OF PEOPLE IS REALLY THE STEWARDSHIP OF GIFTEDNESS, WHICH MEANS HELPING PEOPLE DISCOVER AND LIVE WHERE THEY CAN DO THEIR BEST WORK.

Conclusion

So, what do these truths about giftedness mean for what we do in our work today? Well, following from the truths about humans that we saw in Genesis 2, they mean first of all that Christians can help people know and celebrate their gifts. Remember, most people don't even know that they have God-given gifts. So to help them discover their design is a major step toward helping them discover God.

> IT'S IMPORTANT TO REALIZE THAT PEOPLE LONG TO DO SOMETHING MEANINGFUL WITH THEIR LIVES.

A second thing Christians can do is to facilitate placing people in jobs that make good use of their gifts. If most people are not in very good "job fits," then leaders who are aware that God has designed people should be the most careful to ensure that workers under their authority are hired and placed according to their God-given design. The stewardship of people is really the stewardship of giftedness, which means helping people discover and live where they can do their *best* work.

Finally, Christian leaders are in a position to help people see their gifts as purposeful for stewarding the creation and create environments of trust that allow that to happen. This has a lot to do with the communication of a company's core values. But it's important to realize that people *long* to do something meaningful with their lives. They want their lives to count. They want their efforts to matter. Employers have a wonderful opportunity to create work that matters—to take job tasks and enterprises that are seemingly mundane or insignificant and infuse them with a sense of mission and purpose. That's what Dennis Bakke did with an energy business. The same could be done with any other organization.

Reaction

All of us have been designed by God and endowed with abilities that enable us to serve His purposes.

Reaction questions

- To what extent do you feel you are aware of your own giftedness?
- Write down a list of your strengths, motivations, and skills, as best you know them.
- How well do you feel that your current work makes good use of your giftedness? How would you describe your job fit?
- If you are in a relatively good job fit, how are you using your work to fulfill God's purposes for you? If you are in a poor job fit, how does that impede you from fulfilling God's purposes for you?
- How have you taken responsibility for the job fit of those whom you employ or who report to you?

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Chapter 2: A Miserable Workplace

Today's management structures and attitudes toward workers are rooted in the Industrial Revolution. As capitalists created factories and hired laborers, they defined two classes of people: management and labor. Workers moved from independence and generally high self-esteem in the agrarian model to dependence and low self-regard in the factory model. In contemporary business, managers can get education, take responsibility, oversee budgets, and make decisions. But workers are considered lazy and irresponsible, capable only of work for hourly wages, in need of constant training and supervision, and not to be trusted to make sound decisions.

In today's economic formula (labor + material + capital = production), people (labor) are treated as a quantity like financial and fuel resources, to buy and sell, depreciate, and, when used up, dump. Business leaders are far more concerned with the tasks these interchangeable, expendable "human resources" can perform than with who they are as humans.

Current approaches to leadership are often hierarchical and paternalistic, with decision making, compensation, and control all centralized. But decentralizing makes more sense, since lower-ranking people are most often closer to the problems and better positioned to come up with solutions, especially if they seek advice from a broad range of colleagues. Yet making such changes ignites resistance. Executives are loath to delegate much of their power and control to others in the organization and to share their knowledge and expertise with all who work in the organization.

Laws and attitudes must also change. Laws support centralized, top-down structures. Boards, shareholders, and investors tend to believe "important" decisions should be made by people at the top, because they are held responsible for company performance. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, for example, requires CEOs and CFOs to certify financial results, even though most have little connection to creating and assembling the numbers they certify.

In the AES experience, staff technicians were more engaged and reacted more quickly to problems when no bosses were looking over their shoulders. Delegating responsibility for managing plants and field offices to those who

work in the field wouldn’t reduce corporate liability or change a company’s chances of being sued, but it would make a huge difference to the people away from headquarters. They would feel they played an important role in their company and know that the company trusted their judgment.

Everyone in an organization has the uniquely human abilities to make decisions, take risks, learn, fail, grow, make progress, experience loss, and make progress again. In our paternalistic corporate systems, however, most people work for job security. As decision-making is centralized and job descriptions box employees in, forcing them to answer to multiple staff supervisors, they fail to develop to their full potential, find meaning in their work, and create a joyful workplace.

We need to design organizations that encourage people to look beyond job security. Most executives have no idea how to create such an environment because they may never have experienced a joyful workplace themselves. But the love of work and accomplishment, the passion to serve, and the readiness to honor individual traits, gifts, and failings still exist in the human spirit. These qualities transcend industrialism and must be welcomed where we spend most of our waking hours—the workplace.

Chapter 3: From Misery to Joy

Early on, two crises tested Bakke and Sant's decentralized, values-driven philosophy. The first showed them that encouraging freedom to act and make decisions was as hard a sell to employees as it was to executives and boards of directors.

In mid-June 1992, nine technicians at AES's new plant in Shady Point, Oklahoma, conspired to falsify water-test results reported to the Environmental Protection Agency and the state of Oklahoma. By this point, the AES shared-values and principles campaign was well under way. As AES brought the new plant on line and discovered operating violations, it had adjusted procedures and added new equipment to correct them. AES also conducted two confidential and anonymous values surveys during the conspiracy period, and no employee had mentioned anything amiss. So, when the guilty Shady Point workers said they had falsified samples because they feared losing their jobs if they reported a violation, Bakke and Sant were baffled. They thought that by now, employees understood the shared values and management's commitment to trusting everyone and treating them as adults. They put that in writing in an AES open letter: "No one at AES has ever lost his or her job for telling the truth, nor will they ever, as long as we have anything to say about it."

The second crisis made clear that AES had further to go in living up to its shared values. Between the Shady Point news and a Florida interest group's challenge to a new AES power plant, the company's stock price sank 60 percent. Bakke saw that the stock price was more important than the breach in AES values to most AES leaders and board members. Those who had applauded the Bakke-Sant management philosophy when the stock price was high now believed AES was foundering because of the very same decentralization, lack of organizational layers, and unorthodox operating style. They urged Bakke to concentrate on making the profits that investors wanted to see and to tone down his values rhetoric, which they said made AES look hypocritical and arrogant. Bakke realized that he had done a poor job of teaching the intrinsic worth of the shared-values concept. The management of Shady Point reverted to a "proven" approach, and staffing there was increased more than 30 percent.

Neither the business literature nor Bakke's observations at AES suggest that

operating AES in a more conventional manner would have protected it from mistakes. But weakening the shared values and principles, and the company-wide trust they fostered, would take the joy out of working there. Bakke realized that if he pursued his radical approach to creating a joyful workplace, he ran the risk of being ousted by the board. His challenge was to achieve economic sustainability while asserting his positive assumptions about people, all within established organizational structures—a tall order.

To Bakke, work is "opus," a voluntary, meaningful, and creative act. In his experience, pay has almost no effect on the quality of one's work experience. It is a reward for work accomplished and cannot predict future happiness. Rather, people want to feel useful and creative, to know their work is significant, worthwhile, and trusted. They want to be held accountable. They are fallible and unique. They can make important decisions and want to use their skills and talents for positive contributions. They want to be part of a team contributing to a larger purpose. Failure and mistakes are as essential to learning as is success, in making games and work fun. Bakke strived to create such a learning environment at AES.

Group Discussion Questions

(1) What is your reaction to the truth that God has handcrafted you from the womb?

(2) Are you doing what you are designed for?

(3) How have you gained any awareness of your giftedness? How has that knowledge affected your choices about work?

(4) Imagine you are in conversation with one of your coworkers, who is not yet a follower of Christ. You've been telling him or her about the idea that God has designed each one of us. So the coworker says, "That's interesting. How has God designed you?" What would you say?

(5) Why is trusting other workers so difficult? How do you know if there is a high or low level of trust in your place of work?

(6) How might the truth that God has fit individuals for particular tasks affect the way you make hiring and placement decisions in your workplace?

(7) Why is helping others discover their giftedness such a vital aspect of

good leadership?

Next Session—Values: Stewarding Corporate Culture

Bible readings: Matthew 25:14-30, Romans 12:3-8,
Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-4:1
Joy at Work, Chapter 4: “Honeycomb”: Dynamics of a Joyous Workplace
Chapter 5: Scorekeeping, Accountability, and Rewards (pp. 85-129)

SESSION 4

Values: Stewarding Corporate Culture

Bible Readings for This Session
Matthew 25:14-30
Romans 12:3-8
Ephesians 6:5-9
Colossians 3:22-4:1

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Chapter 4: "Honeycomb": Dynamics of a Joyous Workplace
Chapter 5: Scorekeeping, Accountability, and Rewards (pp. 85-129)

DVD Session Four: Decision Making
You'll examine qualities that create a healthy corporate culture, paying close attention to the decision-making process. Dennis Bakke takes you through the *Joy at Work* decision-making approach, in which bosses give decision-making responsibility to others.

Review

In the last session, we considered the truth that God has designed every human being with a unique giftedness. This is the engine that drives work. Giftedness is the energy that enables bridges to be built, planes to be flown, software to be written, homes to be designed, inventions to be dreamed, teams to be led, risks to

be assessed, deals to be struck, and all else in the world of work to be accomplished.

> GIFTEDNESS IS THE ENERGY THAT ENABLES BRIDGES TO BE BUILT, PLANES TO BE FLOWN, SOFTWARE TO BE WRITTEN, HOMES TO BE DESIGNED.

In light of that reality, we said that the first steps in reclaiming work as a source of joy are to recognize God's gifts in ourselves and others, and to trust others to make decisions in accordance with the way God designed them. This week we'll explore our role in creating an environment of trust and values that allows joy to return to the workplace.

> SOME ORGANIZATIONS ARE NEITHER HIGH-CONTROL NOR HIGH-TRUST—THEY JUST LACK INTENTIONAL DESIGN.

Introduction

We've all had the experience of asking a customer representative if we can get a problem solved or a change made. The response? "We can't do that." What we're asking does not seem unreasonable to us, so we persist. At that point, we're likely to hear, "Well, I'll have to ask my boss." We wait. Eventually someone else shows up, saying, "I'm the manager. May I help you?" Once again we make our request. This time, the manager has to call another manager, until finally someone with the authority to solve our problem is found and a decision is made. With persistence, we finally get our problem solved. But inevitably we walk away wondering, "That was such a minor request. What if I had asked for something really big? What if I had not persisted? Why did it take so long to fix? Why couldn't the original person fix it?

On the other hand, perhaps you've had the case where you make a request, and the first person cheerfully says, "Sure, I can fix that right now. How else can I help?" What accounts for that quick, pleasant response? Sometimes it's just the luck of running into an extremely competent employee. But more often than not you'll find that superior service grows out of an environment of trust that pervades the whole organization. The employee has clear direction on many

things but, more important, knows that he or she will be supported, not criticized, when making a common-sense decision on customer service, even if it is not in the policy manual.

The issue of good vs. bad customer service is not merely high-control environments versus high-trust environments. Some poorly run organizations are neither high-control nor high-trust—they just lack intentional design. They might be described as “environments of anarchy.”

Brad Smith’s first job out of college was in such an organization. He was dropped smack in the middle of a government outfit that had recklessly-paced work schedules and zany projects with more commas and zeros in their budgets than Brad had ever seen before. No wonder collaborators outside the organization assumed a look of abject panic when they realized that a 22-year-old kid was in charge of their deal. Yet Brad was given the responsibility anyway—not because he was trusted but because he was working in a sector that had money to throw at problems. Sometimes that worked to a person’s disadvantage: Brad watched colleague after colleague eventually make that one mistake that was a bit too public, or a bit too embarrassing to the wrong person, and that colleague disappeared overnight into a private-sector job. In short, working there was walking a low-trust, low-control tightrope.

In both high-control and anarchic environments, leaders have shirked their responsibility to build an organization that recognizes that people have gifts, skills, experiences, and knowledge, along with the desire to use those resources with responsibility, authority, and accountability. Lacking healthy, intentional design, those organizations will sooner or later stagnate under the control or blow up amid the anarchy. A few people safely parachute out. But many others get hurt.

> AS A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST, DENNIS BAKKE FELT CALLED TO TREAT OTHER HUMAN BEINGS AS IMAGE-BEARERS.

How to Create High-Control or Anarchic Cultures

1. Be too centralized. Make sure only a few people at the top make all of the decisions. That way, the organization loses the best thinking and work of the majority of its people.
2. Provide little support. Tell people to make the decisions, but don't give any trust, resources, or education to do so. That way, people will be more likely to fail, as well as to fear failure.
3. Provide few "boundaries." Push decision making down into the ranks, but don't make the corporate mission or values clear, and don't provide any advice or education. That way, people will make up their own rules.
4. Don't offer encouragement. Motivate people by fear, and don't treat them with respect. That way, people will act out of fear, self-interest, and risk-avoidance.

An Embarrassing and Foolhardy Journey

At the end of this session, we'll look at some key principles for creating a high-trust culture. But first, why should Christians even bother to take responsibility for changing corporate culture, especially if it means swimming upstream in an organization or an industry marked by either high control or anarchy? The result may be good. But the process itself often looks foolish, and there is no guarantee of the outcome. Indeed, who's to say that the change agent will even have a job by the time it's over?

Dennis Bakke serves as a case in point. His rationale for running AES as he did was that, as a follower of Christ, he felt called to treat other human beings as image-bearers. That may strike some as foolishness—the supreme business disadvantage, the ultimate do-gooder naiveté. Doing that would mean giving up power, or at least restraining oneself from using power. It would mean holding on to responsibility but giving away authority to others to make decisions. It

would mean sitting in board meetings and saying, “I don’t know (what leader wants to admit that?), but I’ll check with my employees who do know.” It would mean turning the other cheek. It would mean carrying the enemy’s cloak an extra mile. It would mean a frightening journey into humility—perhaps like Christ’s humility, described in Philippians 2. Sure, there might ultimately be a reward, but it would be a long time in coming.

> ANY WORKER AT ANY LEVEL CAN TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHANGING THE CULTURE.

Why should Christians undertake such a journey? And if we do, how should we assume the role of new Adams and new Eves? How can we return joy to workplaces that are clearly fallen and hurtling in the wrong direction?

What If I’m Not the CEO and I Don’t Work At a Place Like AES?

Joy at Work is based on the premise that God has placed humanity over His creation, to steward it as His representatives (Genesis 1:27-28). That mandate continues even after the Fall. Those who are in Christ are particularly called to steward the creation, including the people whose giftedness makes business possible. Therefore, Christians are called to be stewards of creation and of people (fellow image-bearers) no matter at what level they serve in an organization or industry.

Obviously, it is almost impossible to change the culture of an entire enterprise unless one is among the top leaders of the venture. Nonetheless, any worker at any level can take responsibility for changing the culture of his or her particular sphere of influence—with his or her office, employees, customers, vendors, etc. The fact is, most organizations have a variety of internal cultures, and much depends on how individual leaders at various levels intentionally take responsibility to influence what lies within their authority.

And just because one is the founding CEO doesn't mean there's no risk to creating a high-trust culture, as Dennis shows in *Joy at Work*.

Yet the reason one takes that risk is because Christians are called to be image-bearers of God—a little picture of what God intended, so that people can learn about Him. There are no short-term guarantees that effort will be successful. But there's a definite guarantee that it is the right journey and will be greatly rewarded in the end.

Christian Workplace Leaders Bear Responsibility (Matthew 25:14-30, Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1)

Stewardship is all about responsibility. God designed us to be stewards, which accounts for why we actually desire responsibility and enjoy a bit of weight on our shoulders. Responsibility is what we were made to hold and use, so we experience great joy when we get to hold it and use it, and when we get to make a decision and the outcome turns out well. We are made in God's image and the height of fun for image-bearers is being responsible for what our Creator has asked us to steward.

> WE ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE AND THE HEIGHT OF FUN FOR IMAGE-BEARERS IS BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT OUR CREATOR HAS ASKED US TO STEWARD.

If God Made Us to Bear Responsibility, Why Do Some People Avoid It?

We've all run into people at work who run as quickly and as far as they can from taking responsibility. "Don't put me in charge," they protest. "I don't want to have to be in the hot seat." Even when their job description clearly puts responsibility on their plate, they try to pass it off to others. There's almost a fear in their aversion to responsibility. How does that square with the idea that God has made

people to take on, and even enjoy, responsibility?

Sometimes we humans are most afraid of what we desire the most. There's a degree of pain in not getting what we want. So, we try to control that pain by avoiding what we desire and setting constant expectations that we will never have it. We even try to push down the desire itself. This human tendency is well known among professional counselors. We even see hints of it with the third servant in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:24-30). That suggests that the avoidance of responsibility is not just an issue of brokenness or a dysfunctional background but actually of evil and sin as well.

For sure, it can be hard to coax someone who has given up hope to dream again. Yet trust can rekindle that hope. If someone who pushes off responsibility can watch others around him or her wear it and not get fired, criticized, or have their responsibility snatched away, it's amazing how quickly he or she may step up and accept a fair share of responsibility. They may have been denying their desire for responsibility, but they have probably been thinking about it constantly. They just need a safe place to claim it once again.

On the other hand, Dennis Bakke has observed, "The people who say, 'These people shy away from decisions and responsibility' are most often the bosses, not the workers."

STEWARDSHIP MEANS CONTINUOUSLY ASKING, "HOW WOULD GOD WANT ME TO TREAT THIS THING THAT HE HAS PLACED WITHIN MY CONTROL?"

God has given each one of us a degree of authority over various aspects of the creation. For example, we each have been given abilities, time, relationships, resources, money, knowledge, and many other things. Some of us have also been given power, networks, an ability to influence, an ability to communicate, an ability to lead or manage, or a position over people. Whatever God has placed

within our control, we have a responsibility to *steward* that thing for Him. That is, to treat the thing as belonging to God and to handle it as His representative. Stewardship means continuously asking, “How would God want me to treat this thing that He has placed within my control?”

What does that mean for the *people* who work in our enterprise? It means we have responsibility for how we treat them and what we do with them. We don’t have New Testament texts that address CEOs, vice presidents, and sales managers, because the economy of that world functioned much differently from ours. So we have to extrapolate from teaching devoted to the first-century economy. The passages devoted to masters in Ephesians and Colossians provide quite a bit of insight.

Much of the first-century economy was based on slavery. The closest thing to a corporate leader was a master, meaning an owner who had authority over his slaves. Notice in the two passages that masters are exhorted on the basis of their *responsibility* to God: “both their Master *and yours* are in heaven”; “*you too* have a Master in heaven.” Paul was teaching that a master was to be thedivine Master’s representative. What would that mean for how a master treated his slaves? That he would treat them the way God would treat them (and the master) —with justice and fairness. That includes sharing the joy of decision making with them, just as God shares decision making with us.

What would that shared decision-making process look like? The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) suggests an answer. The story is about a human master who both experiences and gives great joy to his first two servants when they exercise prudent responsibility. Some translations call the servants “stewards,” which is probably closer to the original; they were not menial slaves but managerial servants with fiduciary, “bottom-line” responsibility. The master calls them “good and faithful servants,” and invites them to “enter into the master’s joy.”

The third servant, by contrast, experiences great anxiety when confronted with

making a decision. As a result, he doesn't take any risk but instead buries his talents. Notice the master's words about this man's unwillingness to take responsibility: "You wicked, lazy servant!"

> THE MASTER'S CONCERN IS NOT WITH RESULTS BUT WITH FAITHFULNESS.

The master's concern is not with results but with *faithfulness*. So imagine if the first two servants had made excellent investments and watched them carefully, yet lost money because the economy took a sudden, unexpected downturn. We can conjecture that in that case the master would still have praised them, using the exact same words, because they had been faithful in exercising the responsibility given them. Part of faithfulness is taking risks. God gave Adam and Eve huge responsibilities with finite knowledge. Every decision was a risk that their finite abilities did not come to the same decision as God would with His infinite abilities. Yet risk was the heart of what it meant for Adam and Eve to be faithful as stewards of creation. The same is true of the three servants and for us today.

If that kind of relationship existed between first-century slaves and masters and their God, how much more should that relationship exist between modern-day knowledge workers and leaders and God? Clearly, we as leaders have responsibility before God for how we steward the people we lead.

Responsibility for Sharing Responsibility

Businesses are fond of calling their workers "human resources." This term may have been intended as a positive advance over calling them "employees" or "workers" or "hands" (Henry Ford griped that he meant to hire only a hand, but he always got a whole person along with it). At any rate, "human resources" implies that people are just another "resource" for the business to use (and discard) as it wills. If so, that is an unacceptable perspective for Christians in business. Humans are created in the image of God and have inherent dignity and value. Moreover, they have been designed by God in ways that are intended to add value to the enterprise. All of this means that humans are unlike any other "resource" that a business might use.

One primary difference is that each human has a degree of God-given authority for stewarding the creation. As was pointed out earlier, each of us were given abilities, time, relationships, resources, and so forth. When people bring those assets to the workplace, they still have authority over them. Which means that the business needs to respect that authority by allowing people to exercise responsibility over their gifts, time, relationships, and resources.

> THE POINT IS THAT HUMAN BEINGS INSTINCTIVELY WANT TO MAKE DECISIONS AND BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE.

That is a radical idea for many in business today. But it is a model for business that has a lot of support from Scripture. For example, one reason that Jesus's Parable of the Talents was so easily accepted and understood by His followers is that the model of pushing responsibility down the chain was normal for that day.

We tend to think of the ancient world as hierarchical and controlled by central command. But historical evidence suggests otherwise. None of the great empires of the biblical world could have existed without significant decentralized authority (see Luke 7:2-10). The same was true of the British Empire when it controlled lands as far away as India. Indeed, one of the main reasons England lost the American colonies was its refusal to grant local autonomy.

The point is that human beings instinctively want to make decisions and be held accountable for that which they perceive to be under their control. The New Testament recognizes that reality when it exhorts even slaves on the basis of their responsibility to and accountability before the Lord: "as to Christ," "as slaves of Christ," "he will receive back from the Lord" (Ephesians 5:6-8); "fearing the Lord," "as for the Lord," "from the Lord you will receive the reward," "it is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Colossians 3:22-24). If slaves doing the menial work of the Roman Empire had responsibility for their work, how much more should that be true of knowledge workers today, who have significant control over their work and its context?

Four Kinds of Authority

Leaders cannot give away their authority and responsibility, yet this study is calling them to give away decisions. How can one maintain responsibility and authority if he or she gives decision making to others? Part of the answer comes from understanding the four kinds of authority in any team or organization:

1. **Point authority**: One person has clear authority to make a decision.
2. **Input authority**: Each person on the team has the right to express an opinion and to hear back what the "point person" did with his or her input. In a healthy team, everyone has input into a decision, and everyone takes responsibility for the decision that the point person makes.
3. **Veto authority**: It is held by top-level leaders—the CEO, top executives, the board. Veto authority should be exercised very carefully and only when absolutely necessary. When it is used, it should be seen not as a failure of the team but of the veto authorities, for failing to adequately prepare the team to make a decision.
4. **Information authority**: This is the right of people often outside the team to be informed of a decision once it is made.

In a team-structured organizing, team members take responsibility for a decision and for giving advice or input into the decision.

The top leader retains the final authority (*veto*), responsibility and accountability, but by giving the decision-making away, others share authority, responsibility and accountability at a different level (*point, input and information*).

The AES Advice Process described below is one of the most highly developed and powerful applications of these principles of authority.

Responsibility for Mitigating the Curse (Romans 12:3-8; Colossians 3:22-4:1)

Now we come to perhaps the most difficult task Christian workers have—exercising leadership in trying to build corporate cultures that reclaim a glimpse of the Garden of Eden, even in a ghetto where humanity is in rebellion against God.

In the Garden, human beings were designed to use their gifts and to make decisions. But they did not know evil. By contrast, life in a fallen world means that:

- *People are sinful*. We are driven by our own will. God's will is no longer a central compass that everyone agrees to and aligns with. Each of us is an island looking out for ourselves. In the Garden, we were a team looking out for God's desires, but now we are disconnected from both God and one another.
- *People are broken*. We have physical, mental, emotional, and psychological problems. We come from dysfunctional families and carry the baggage of poor parenting into the boardroom, the office, the planning meeting, and the sales call. We live in fear, striving to survive, scheming to use others to alleviate our own pain. This is true for bosses and workers alike.
- *People are limited.* We are finite and yet don't always acknowledge it. Even people in the Garden were limited; no one had all the gifts. Yet in the Garden, limitation was not something that brought shame but an opportunity to depend on others. That dependence was something to celebrate because one could enjoy watching others "do their thing," which in turn enabled a person to do his "thing" better. Yet today, instead of saying plainly, "Look, I'm no good at closing sales; who can help me?" we work as hard as we can to hide our limitations. In fact, we are leading organizations composed of people who are hiding their limitations.

  It's a time bomb, because sooner or later a mistake will be made—one that could have been avoided if the limitation had been recognized and permitted, and others with the necessary gifts had been brought in to

help.

- *There is evil in our world.* "Evil" is a strong word, but it is a reality in our world. Eve was approached by a being that not only was in rebellion against God but had malice toward Adam, Eve, and all the rest of God's creatures. Satan was so intent upon exercising his will that he was willing to destroy everything and everyone in his path for as long as necessary to get what he wanted. Human beings don't have the power of Satan, but we are nonetheless intent on exerting our will. When we see historical examples of great evil, such as Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, Adolf Hitler, or the Khmer Rouge, we realize that humans are tragically capable of inflicting great evil upon others.
- *There is systemic evil in our world.* Systemic evil occurs when the systems of politics, power, culture, economics, and social norms conspire to harm people. It may be impossible to blame one person or group of people for the wrongdoing. And it may also be impossible to identify a simple solution to the situation. Nevertheless, anyone can see that the system is unjust, dangerous, and destructive to all in its wake.

Mountains of Policies Are Not the Antidote for the Fall

Some leaders attempt to overcome evil in our world through comprehensive, centralized policies. Yet often this is a way to play "god," forgetting that policymakers are as sinful as everyone else. Good, balanced policies can make a substantial difference for good. But in many cases, trying to overcome evil by enacting policy merely gives work teams the idea that responsibility for character, ethics, and morality rests with top leadership. In fact, it's become commonplace for many workers today to feel that holding peers accountable is not their responsibility. But the logic of that proposition is self-defeating: Which would be more effective in "policing" wrongdoing—a tiny group of senior leaders at a headquarters or thousands of rank-and-file workers on the front lines?

In many corporations, policies tend to be written for the handful of

people with severe character issues. AES took the opposite approach. It designed policies for the overwhelming majority of its workers who were trustworthy. For example, the vacation policy stated, “Take one when you need one.” How could that possibly work? The “Honeycomb” principle (see p. 85) made it difficult for anyone to abuse that policy without suffering significant consequences from peers.

AES viewed policies as a means of helping to define values, not controlling evil. The model worked well, even though many of AES’s operations were in countries that had completely different cultures and ethics than the United States does. The company felt it was important to ensure that policies didn’t rob people of decision-making opportunities nor allowed the few exceptions to rob the joy of work from the majority.

The key question AES asked when framing policy was: *Is this policy more like the old assumptions in which we don’t trust people or the new assumptions in which we do trust them?*

How do we overcome these seemingly insurmountable risks? Here are three possibilities:

1. **Remain naive about the problem.** For some, the way to handle the fallenness of the world is to pretend it doesn’t exist. “I trust in the goodness of people,” someone will say. But that attitude betrays a laziness or unwillingness to address head-on the real issues of sin, limits, and evil in our world. Denial does not make the problem go away. Instead, leaders who fail to face the stark, hard realities of the fallen world we work in tend to create organizations where cultures of anarchy reign.
2. **Create a centralized control.** This is the path taken by the large majority of managers in the workforce today. These bosses know their own motives and actions and arrogantly assume they are more trustworthy than workers. They generally trust (or at least can monitor)

those who work close at hand. But they don't know as much about workers in other divisions, regions, or countries, especially at lower levels. So they introduce many forms of centralized authority to enforce their will from a distance.

Control comes in various forms:

- **Large headquarters staff.** The home operation may include vice presidents for finance, human resources, legal affairs, public relations, marketing, government relations, etc. Each has his or her own large staff whose job is not to make the company's product but ensure that those who do make the product are abiding by centralized rules and quotas.
- **Policies and rules.** Many companies have enormous employee handbooks—so large that they are often not read. Ironically, all that ponderous information does little to deter the misbehaviors it was written to control, yet it provides a basis for legal defense in case someone is fired for breaking a rule.
- **A culture of fear.** The theory is that if people are afraid of their boss, they will refrain from stealing, cheating, shortchanging their timecards, or otherwise defrauding the employer. Yet research shows time and again that while fear may deter employees from fraud in the short term, the long-term effect is the exact opposite. Given what we know about image-bearers, that shouldn't surprise us.

(3) **Intentionally build a healthy culture.** A third alternative is to build a high-trust culture that gives workers a glimpse of God's original plan for the Garden. Doing so would restore a sense of joy to work and point people back to God.

What Is Corporate Culture?

"Culture" describes the environment of values, language, behaviors, beliefs (both conscious and unconscious), customs, rituals, and understandings that a community shares. In a workplace setting, corporate culture is the environment of an enterprise—"the way we do things around here." Culture is about what is expected. It is not just words in a corporate brochure or on a plaque on a wall, but the actual way the organization goes about doing its work.

> [CORPORATE CULTURE] IS ABOUT THE VALUES THAT ARE INTENTIONALLY PURSUED, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE PAINFUL TO UPHOLD.

Corporate culture is remarkably powerful and amazingly resilient. It is about the values that are intentionally pursued, even when they are painful to uphold. It includes purposeful operating principles, concrete ways of working that reward behaviors consistent with the culture and punish behaviors that are not. Indeed, corporate culture sets the boundaries of behavior. It is not something controlled by a central headquarters, but by the "normal expectations" of how work is to be done by both top executives and front-line workers.

Occasionally, corporate culture is proactively and carefully formed by the top leaders of an enterprise, and then brought to life throughout the organization by leaders at every level who believe in and commit to the values that have been formulated. More often, culture is formed by a hodgepodge of unintentional developments over time that result in vaguely stated but strongly felt values.

What are the building blocks of intentionally led corporate culture? They include:

- **Statements** about the *values* of the organization—what it stands for regarding its workers, customers, shareholders, vendors, and other stakeholders.
- **Operating principles** that translate the values into policies and procedures that move the organization toward living out its values.
- **Evaluation and correction** that assess people, policies, strategies, and programs by how well they contribute to the culture, along with corrective action.
- **Leaders** who teach and live the values consistently. Leaders who admit mistakes and ask and grant forgiveness.

AES's Corporate Culture: Values, Principles, Evaluation, Correction

One of the strengths of AES was that it had a very carefully crafted **statement of**

values that were constantly talked about and evaluated. Much of Dennis's job as CEO was to travel around the world explaining those values to employees, vendors, customers, regulators, and investors. The company had well-crafted paragraphs and rich stories to explain what it meant to work within (and outside of) those values.

AES's core values were integrity, fairness, fun, and social responsibility. Not only are those true biblical values that all organizations could stand to have, but they also made great sense for AES. However, stating and publicizing those value statements alone were not enough to create or change culture. AES also had **operating principles** that gave teeth to the nice words of its value statement. Those principles were simple yet powerful ways of operating, and they were practiced relentlessly.

One of those principles was "Honeycomb." Work was divided into teams, including work that normally would be placed in a specialized function at central headquarters, such as finance, legal, and marketing. Another mechanism, and perhaps the most powerful for AES, was the "advice process" described in this week's *Joy at Work* reading. The advice process was followed so consistently that while employees were never fired for a wrong decision, they were immediately fired if they had made a decision without using the advice process.

Operating Principles Are Not Disconnected Gimmicks

What does it take to create an organization that frees people to use their gifts in significant ways? The gimmicks that promise to achieve that result are known all too well: a finely tuned organizational chart; an air-tight policy manual; a large training budget; a dynamic CEO with a great personality; an annual rah-rah motivational seminar prescribing "management by slapping on the back"; employee trophies; elaborate field trips. Some of those approaches have merit and can accomplish a few limited gains, but generally speaking they are not enough to transform an entire corporate culture.

Transforming an entire organization's culture requires an intentional effort, over time. It starts by formulating and then clearly stating some key core values, then aligning a few prioritized operating principles with those values. As the work gets underway, the organization must engage in relentless evaluation, leading to redirection of effort.

Finally, AES had consistent **evaluation and correction**. The most visible mechanism for that was the annual values survey discussed in Chapter 5 of *Joy at Work*. Much of that feedback loop was accomplished on the front line: Workers corrected their own work problems without having to go all the way to the top of the organization and back.

> PRINCIPLES WERE SIMPLE YET POWERFUL WAYS OF OPERATING, AND THEY WERE PRACTICED RELENTLESSLY.
>
> IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE CONSTANT REDEFINITION, STORYTELLING, REVISED OPERATING PRINCIPLES, AND VIGILANT EVALUATION AND CORRECTION TO KEEP THE CULTURE HEALTHY.

To recap, corporate culture is proactively formed when leadership develops and consistently applies (1) stated values that are aligned with (2) operating mechanisms that are checked and adjusted by (3) evaluation and correction. When this process happens consistently, workers begin to "police" one another naturally, without needing a large headquarters staff to oversee behavior using a central set of rules and policies. This model, which produced a "flat," nonhierarchical structure, saved AES a great deal of money. It also caused the values to be owned, believed, and implemented at all levels of the organization.

Good Business *and* Good Theology

AES's corporate culture was trying to treat its workers at all levels like people made in the image of God—people who desired and were able to bear responsibility and be held accountable. That allowed the company to have fewer policies and procedures than most other global companies of 40,000 employees.

It also made the employees feel more empowered, responsible, and able to use their gifts, skills, knowledge, and experience in responsible ways.

What is not stated but is evident in *Joy at Work* is that the leaders of AES *embodied* (or incarnated) the values that were guiding the enterprise. The lesson is that corporate culture must be lived out by those at the top if it to be taken seriously by those on the front line.

What is also evident is that a healthy corporate culture is both hard to build and hard to maintain. Even if an organization intentionally tries to work in ways that are consistent with the values of the Garden, countless forces in a fallen world are working against it. Thus it is necessary to have constant redefinition, storytelling, revised operating principles, and vigilant evaluation and correction to keep the culture healthy. That becomes even more difficult when the company includes people of different generations, races and ethnic groups, nationalities, and other backgrounds that may vary widely in their cultural norms of right and wrong.

It must also be pointed out that culture-building is much easier when the economy and business environment are flourishing. If conditions turn harsh, whatever minuscule cracks an enterprise has will suddenly become painfully obvious. Many who once were committed to creating a healthy, fun place to work start focusing on survival at all costs. That suggests that a culture has to be "overbuilt" in the good times in order to prepare it for the bad times. The task is never-ending, but it is one that Christians, as image-bearers who have been re-created with the "first fruits of the Spirit," are called to do and have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to do well.

Justice and Grace

How, then, do Christian workplace leaders deal with fallen, frail people? Again, Ephesians and Colossians guide us. The first principle is that we have a Master in heaven who treats us with grace, despite our own sin, brokenness, and

limitations. Notice that the relationships among and between Christians outlined in Ephesians 5:1-6:9 and Colossians 3:1-4:1 are preceded by discussions of God's grace toward us in Ephesians 1-4 and Colossians 1-2. That suggests we accept the fact that people are not perfect, and avoid setting people up for failure by expecting them to be perfect. When they do fail (as they inevitably will), the mandate for grace suggests that their failures be used to grow them, not shame them.

GRACE IS BOTH TENDERHEARTED AND TOUGH-MINDED.

That leads to a second principle: Grace is both tenderhearted and tough-minded. Notice again the admonitions to "give up threatening" (Ephesians 6:9) but also to be just and fair (Colossians 4:1). That means accountability. Colossians 3:25 specifically cautions slaves that there are consequences to choices and actions. Responsibility means just that: When things go wrong, the person responsible bears the consequences. By the way, in our economy, responsibility is usually shared, meaning that more than one person—including leaders—should share in the consequences.

Reaction

The choice between high-control management and high-trust leadership rests on our view of people. The route to joy for both the leader and others starts with the leader giving up the demand to make most of the important decisions. The leader won't do that without trust.

Reaction questions

- On pp. 44 and 72 of *Joy at Work*, you will find two lists showing radically different ways of viewing people. Compare those lists. Which aspects of those lists either accurately or inaccurately reflect what we've been discussing about people?

  > [THE ADVICE PROCESS] LEAVES THE FINAL DECISIONS TO INDIVIDUALS, BUT IT FORCES THEM TO WEIGH THE NEEDS AND WISHES OF THE COMMUNITY.

- Read Romans 12:3-8. Then read the following excerpt from *Joy at Work*

about the “advice process”:

> It is a very simple, although often controversial, concept. It takes the “suggestion box” management approach of the 1970s and ’80s and turns it upside down. Instead of the boss getting advice and suggestions from people below, the decision maker—who is almost always not an official leader—seeks advice from leaders and peers.
>
> Usually, the decision maker is the person whose area is most affected, or the one who initiated an idea, discovered a problem, or saw an opportunity. If it is unclear who the decision maker should be, the leader selects an individual to gather advice and make the final decision. Before any decision can be made on any company matter, the decision maker must seek advice. The bigger the issue or problem, the wider the net that is thrown to gather pertinent information from people inside and outside the company. In my opinion, all issues of importance need advice from the decision maker’s own team. However, members of other teams in the plant or offices should also be consulted. Some decisions are so important that advice is gathered from other plants, divisions, and offices, including the home office. The board of directors should be consulted on the most important issues. …
>
> The advice process is my answer to the age-old organizational dilemma of how to embrace the rights and needs of the individual, while simultaneously ensuring the successful functioning of the team, community, or company. I observed that Japanese companies tended to emphasize the group and consensus, while American culture pushed rugged individualism. I believe the advice process strikes a better balance. It leaves the final decisions to individuals, but it forces them to weigh the needs and wishes of the community. Parenthetically, the Internet was made to order for our advice process. The kind of wide consultations that I advocate would not be possible in large,

dispersed organizations were it not for e-mail.

Five important things happen when the advice process is used by an individual before making a decision or taking action:

First, it draws the people whose advice is sought into the question at hand. They learn about the issues and become knowledgeable critics or cheerleaders. The sharing of information reinforces the feeling of community. Each person whose advice is sought feels honored and needed.

Second,asking for advice is an act of humility, which is one of the most important characteristics of a fun workplace. The act alone says, “I need you.” The decision maker and the adviser are pushed into a closer relationship. In my experience, this makes it nearly impossible for the decision maker to simply ignore advice.

Third, making decisions is on-the-job education. Advice comes from people who have an understanding of the situation and care about the outcome. No other form of education or training can match this real-time experience.

Fourth, chances of reaching the best decision are greater than under conventional top-down approaches. The decision maker has the advantage of being closer to the issue and will probably be more conversant with the pros and cons than people in more senior positions. What’s more, the decision maker usually has to live with consequences of the decision. Even if the decision maker comes to an issue without a thorough understanding of its implications for the larger organization, that weakness can be overcome by obtaining advice from senior people. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: “Advice is like snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon, and the deeper it sinks into the mind.”

> Fifth, the process is just plain fun for the decision maker because it mirrors the joy found in playing team sports. The amount of fun in an organization is largely a function of the number of individuals allowed to make decisions. The advice process stimulates initiative and creativity, which are enhanced by wisdom from knowledgeable people elsewhere in the organization.
>
> (*Joy at Work*, pp. 97-99)

ASKING FOR ADVICE IS AN ACT OF HUMILITY, WHICH IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF A FUN WORKPLACE.

The advice process as described here does not include the essential components described in Romans 12 of seeking God's wisdom, praying for discernment, or checking and balancing our motivations in order to act as living sacrifices who worship God. Given that, in what ways do you think the advice process can serve as a mechanism for promoting some of the key values expressed in Romans 12:3-8? What would make it more useful in that regard?

- Stewarding people means trusting them with responsibility to make decisions for which they will be held accountable. What is your reaction about increasing the degree of people's responsibility in your organization?
- What is your reaction to the idea that God holds you as a workplace leader partially responsible for the culture of your company, no matter what level you work at? Where do you think you might be pushing too far, even if you were pursuing a culture of stewardship?
- Daniel influenced the culture of a nation as a servant to the king, not as the king. Of course, his efforts created significant personal risk. How does one know when it is right to:
    - Not rock the boat because your efforts will make no difference?
    - Quietly build an alternative culture inside your office, as an example?
    - Speak out prophetically, with the outcome uncertain? Speak up and intentionally create conflict?

    - Change jobs?
- Which “fallenness factors”—people’s sinfulness, brokenness, limitations, or issues of personal or systemic evil—have you seen affect things where you work?

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Chapter 4: “Honeycomb”: Dynamics of a Joyous Workplace

“What made AES unique was that we acted on our ideas,” Bakke writes. Some became policy, others were scrapped after one try, but gradually AES became a different kind of organization.

For example, Bakke and Sant improved management and increased workplace joy by cutting the layers of supervision between the CEO and entry-level people. They disbanded “service” departments and central staff groups, integrating the specialists into local plant and office work teams, and into task forces that operated company-wide. In some cases, the company retained three layers from top to bottom and, in rare cases, four. Everyone, from entry-level worker to CEO, became an “AES business person,” with equal rights and opportunities, responsible for performing his or her functions in the context of balancing the interests of all stakeholders. Decentralized and integrated, the environment supported trust, freedom, and individual action. AES named it “Honeycomb.”

Bakke and Sant also moved the organization to become transparent, so that information could flow in all directions and be shared by people working at all levels, from CEO to line worker. This became the basis for the “advice process.” Before making a decision, and to ensure the best possible balance of interests among all affected groups, everyone on a team or task force was required to ask for as much advice as possible inside and, if necessary, outside the company. Operating unit work teams took responsibility for everything in their areas: budgeting, workload, safety, schedules, maintenance, compensation, capital expenditures, purchasing, quality control, hiring and firing, education, risk and environmental management, economic performance, long-term strategy, charitable giving, and community relations.

> THE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTED TRUST, FREEDOM, AND INDIVIDUAL ACTION.

Bakke and Sant found the system to be self-regulating: People given the responsibility for decisions want to succeed. The chances of reaching the best decision are greater in an advisory team framework than in a top-down structure; decisions are made more nimbly, and lines of accountability are clearer. Every team member gets an on-the-job education in what it takes to run the business, as

well as an appreciation of their colleagues' work. After AES went public, employees overwhelmingly chose to continue getting full access to information, even though they would be considered "insiders" and restricted from freely trading AES stock.

There is great resistance to this form of management, however, as it requires leaders to delegate most of their decision-making power and to trust the judgment of lower-ranking members of the organization. While leaders are trained to make decisions, Bakke believes that every decision made at headquarters takes away responsibility from people elsewhere in the organization and reduces their ability to feel they are making an effective contribution.

In the AES experience, the typical restructured organization can accomplish twice as much with half the number of people. Bakke favors 300 to 600 as the "right" number of people to staff any one facility, divided into roughly 15 to 20 teams of 15 to 20 people each. Above 500 or 600 at a facility, people have difficulty identifying with the organization, its values, and mission. The team size limit is pragmatic: Most of us have difficulty maintaining strong relationships with more than 20 people.

Chapter 5: Scorekeeping, Accountability, and Rewards

Workplace freedom must be balanced by accountability and feedback on performance. This starts at the top. Sant suggested basing executive compensation half on how the individual advanced the organization's values and principles and half on his or her technical performance.

Evaluating technical, earnings, and growth performance was relatively easy to do with standard tools. Business development was more difficult to track; decisions made today may not show results for years. Judging values performance was more subjective. So, AES started using a company-wide annual values survey. By 1988, the survey was generating tens of thousands of comments and took months to review, summarize, and distribute. The results presented such an accurate, current picture of AES that every business unit was required to read and discuss them.

The comments were overwhelmingly positive, regardless of the AES business person's nationality, religious affiliation, political system, income, or education level. From the United States: "You have to be blind not to realize what the corporation has done to change the way people view their workplace." From Pakistan: "The AES values at work are basic human values and are similar to what we tell our families at home." From South Africa: "These were our values before you came to our country." Most negative comments came from those who had been part of the company fewer than three years. The surveys always reminded AES management that they ran a highly unusual company.

Worker performance reviews were also unconventional. At AES, the subordinate did an extensive self-review, with the leader assuming a coaching role. Worker compensation was also the subject of experimentation. Bakke realized that arbitrary pay structures maintain two classes of people, management and labor, in their places. Regardless of where AES did business in the world or under what political system, the same gulf existed between the two groups, often aggravated by the elitism of management and the militancy of unions. Bakke found this system morally unsupportable and inconsistent with AES shared values. So, he took a novel approach: Put everyone on salary.

Such a step had never been attempted on this scale before. U.S. labor laws

prohibit forcing such a change, to protect hourly workers from management exploitation. It took Bakke three years of lobbying to persuade AES plant leaders that they could experiment and create a voluntary program. People could choose to take salary (calculated based upon hourly pay and average annual overtime), then opt back into the hourly pay and overtime system at any time, no questions asked. As part of the package, everyone salaried was eligible for bonuses and stock options, based on individual, plant, and corporate performance. Each plant also kept a record of hours worked, for government accounting and for individuals who decided to opt back into the hourly system. When AES started the compensation policy change in 1993, only 10 percent of people worldwide were paid a salary. By the time Bakke left in 2002, more than 90 percent of 40,000 people in 31 countries were paid salaries, just like the company's leaders.

This giant step helped break down barriers between management and labor, bringing them together as AES business people. Most became more productive, took more responsibility, initiative, and pride in their work, and spent less time than before at their plants and offices. This gave them more time with their families and communities, and, most important, it built their self-respect.

Group Discussion Questions

(1) What concerns you the most about giving people greater responsibility in your organization?

(2) What is your organization's "formal" corporate culture—the statement of values printed in a brochure or employee handbook? What is the actual corporate culture—how you see the company act, use its resources, and treat people on a daily basis? How do you personally affect your organization's culture, for better or worse?

(3) What operating principles, like AES's "advice process," does your organization have in place to build a healthy culture without centralized control?

(4) When someone in your organization fails, what is your protocol for dealing with that failure? How might the concept of "stewarding" the person(s) responsible for that failure affect that approach?

(5) How do you relinquish decision-making power in your workplace?

- (6) Can you think of an instance when someone gave you the responsibility to make an important decision? Can you think of an instance when you empowered someone else to make a decision that you otherwise would have made? Contrast the difference in your feelings between receiving responsibility and giving it away. How can joy be found in both?

Next Session—Influence: Stewarding Power

Bible readings: Zechariah 4:6-9; Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:5
Joy at Work, Chapter 6: Leading to Workplace Joy (pp.131-148)
Chapter 8: Potholes in the Road (pp. 169-203)

SESSION 5



Influence: Stewarding Power

Bible Readings for This Session
Zechariah 4:6-9
Romans 1:16-17
1 Corinthians 2:4-5
Philippians 2:5-11
1 Thessalonians 1:5

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Chapter 6: Leading to Workplace Joy (pp.131-148)
Chapter 8: Potholes in the Road (pp. 169-203)

DVD Session Five: The Servant Leader
Inspired by the perfect servant leader, Jesus Christ, this session explores the concepts of humility and restraining power as spiritual acts. See how one church brought these principles to life—and found pure joy.

Power is the ability to exert your will to create a result you desire.

The leader is a steward of power—acquiring it, giving it away, using it for God's purposes, building relationships, and getting results with it. But not hoarding and using it for selfish ends.

> “Power corrupts. Absolute power is kind of neat.”
>
> *John Lehman,*
> *Secretary of the Navy, 1981-1987*

> “If absolute power corrupts absolutely, does absolute powerlessness make you pure?”
>
> *Harry Shearer*

> “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”
>
> *Abraham Lincoln*

Introduction

Electrical Power

AES produces and distributes electrical power. Electricity cannot be seen, but it can be intricately measured. For electrical power to do the most good, it must be efficiently distributed over a wide area. Much of *Joy at Work* is about the efficient distribution of electrical power, but it is also about the effective use of a different kind of power—the human power to choose actions and receive feedback on the results of those choices. Joy is most achieved when that power is not bottled up in autocratic structures, but widely distributed throughout an organization.

> WE ARE GIVEN POWER IN OUR VERY ESSENCE TO OVERSEE, TO NAME, TO CO-CREATE, TO CHOOSE, AND TO LEAD.

Human Power

Much of the Bible is about power, too—about a single Source of all power, who,

amazingly, has dispensed it among many flawed, deceived, and even evil creatures. Being made to serve as God's representatives taking care of creation means that we are given power in our very essence to oversee, to name, to co-create, to choose, and to lead. Power is at the core of what it means to be human, made in the image of God. Like electricity, this kind of power is not a substance that can be seen; nevertheless, its presence can be known, its impact measured, and its amount increased or decreased.

> POWER IS AT THE CORE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN, MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

Every human being has a degree of power. Even an infant knows how to use charm and noise, vulnerability and irritation to persuade others to take care of him or her. Power is used in every relationship to both give and take. Being made in the image of God means that humans are endowed with power, a currency to use or abuse:

- Some people desire power so much that they become obsessed with acquiring it, hoarding it, displaying it, and trying to increase it. To quote Lord Acton's famous statement in 1887, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."
- Some people desire power so much that they are actually afraid to admit they have it, in order to avoid the pain of losing it. They fail to acknowledge the power they have, intentionally seek to avoid having it, deny when they do have it, and avoid responsibility for the power they have. They are victims, both in reality and in their own minds.

Power is not a topic that is easy to talk about directly. For example, we are often suspicious of politicians who talk openly about power. We are confused by nonprofit or church environments, which seem to have obscure ways of measuring and discussing power. In the business world, power tends to be more easily measured, monetized, bluffed, stored in contracts, and dispensed in products—all without having to call it power. Titles convey power. Power is used in commerce as part of almost every economic exchange. Even the lifeblood of commerce—money—is both a measurement of power and an instrument to exert it.

In the end, salaries, equity shares, stock values, and profits are not really about

having money. There is little one can do with small metal disks and little papers printed with green ink, or with numbers on a bank statement, or with a stock certificate. However, there is much one can do when those disks and pieces of paper are converted into the currency that existed long before the first coin was minted—the currency of power. Then, it can be used to:

- help others grow, learn, be safe, and be happy
- control others by securing their love, activity, and loyalty
- overcome fear and worry about the future
- create comfort for oneself and those one loves
- fight back the brooding sense of insignificance that humans tend to face
- change what is wrong in the world and make a significant difference

So then, if power is such a part of being human, of doing business, and of being good stewards of the creation, why are we so often reluctant to talk about power, unless we're discussing engines or sports? Why are we are so reluctant to face the subject directly? **How can we steward something so important to God's call in our life if we deny we have it, avoid asking others to help us steward it, and hoard it in its less overt forms as money, fame, possessions, and positions on organizational charts?**

> HOW CAN WE STEWARD SOMETHING SO IMPORTANT TO GOD'S CALL IN OUR LIFE IF WE DENY WE HAVE IT?
>
> GOD IS THE ULTIMATE POWER SOURCE, BECAUSE HE CREATED EVERYTHING, KNOWS EVERYTHING, IS EVERYWHERE PRESENT.

Power Failure

One reason that power is such a difficult topic is that it is so often abused. For many of us, the abuse of power has brought about great pain in our lives. Parents, siblings, bosses, spouses, friends, and governments have hurt us badly by using power poorly. Some of us have even caused self-inflicted wounds through our own foolishness with power. And on a grand scale, injustices throughout the world, famines, environmental catastrophes, genocides, wars, and similar mayhem have frequently been caused by leaders abusing power. Indeed, it doesn't take much insight to see that our world suffers from a massive "power

failure."

If we experienced a power failure in our neighborhood, we would assume that something had gone wrong either at the power plant that generates our electricity or with the power lines that bring that electricity to our homes. So, where should we look for the source of the spiritual "power failure" in our world today?

Traditionally, Christians have identified sin as the culprit that has brought down the "power grid" between God and us. Christians have understood the Bible to teach that God is the ultimate Power Source, because He created everything, knows everything, is everywhere present, and has the ultimate and unmitigated power to do whatever He desires. When Adam and Eve chose to sever their "connection" to God by going their own way, they cut off all of humanity from its intended Power Source. As a result, we all suffer today from a spiritual "power failure" and wait expectantly for the day that Jesus will return and "rewire" the world to its original Source. In the meantime, followers of Christ have been "rewired" in Christ and already experience access to that Source. As a result, we are able to partially overcome the power failure, and we are called to shine as visible signs of hope to others who need that hope to believe.

Such is the traditional view. But in recent times people have started questioning that understanding. How could a good God allow such a massive "wiring problem" in the first place, especially when it has caused such great pain? And wouldn't a good God fix such a problem immediately, instead of letting it go on and on and continue to cause trouble? Perhaps God isn't good. Or perhaps He is powerless to fix the problem. If so, then maybe we humans need to chip in and help Him, since He obviously hasn't been able to fix it by Himself.

The view that God needs our help is very common in our society today. And it has been a disaster for the idea of stewardship and leads to a very different course of action:

		God Is Good but *Not*

	God Is Good and All-Powerful	All-Powerful
Creation	God created the world, not out of need of the love that existed within the Trinity.	God created the world but out because He needed people to help Him.
Choice	God had the power to oversee the earth by Himself. But He chose to give humans the ability to choose, knowing that our wrong initial choice would open a way for us to make a second, right choice, one that would settle the issue of whose will would prevail for eternity.	God did not have enough power to stop our bad choice, so He is now in a battle with Satan. We humans can help God win by becoming more aware of good and making better choices.
The Fall	God allows us to experience the painful consequences of our bad choice not out to realize that we power cannot experience joy apart from Him. We will then make the second choice with that new awareness.	God pushed us out of the Garden for fear that we would gain too much and use it against Him.
Stewardship	We are responsible to take care of God's creation, knowing that someday, after humans have experienced enough pain to realize that they must be connected to God, all will be restored to its original plan.	We are responsible to help God rebuild creation by using our own power in unison with His. The outcome is not certain. The balance weighs in our hands.

Can you imagine what would happen if the power lines in your neighborhood started imagining themselves to be power plants as well? Rather than passing power through themselves, they would start hoarding it, saying, "If I created this power, then I can do what I want with it." Instead of transmitting power as

stewards, they would begin claiming rights to it and using it to control power lines farther away from the plant—all under the deception that they are "helping" the inadequate power plant.

Understand the Source of All Power

The first and most important principle of being a good steward of power is that we fully recognize that we don't actually manufacture the power we have. It is given to us by one Source. We didn't earn it. We don't own it. But we have been given responsibility for it. Power passes through us, just as if we were electrical wires. Thus it is our job to receive it well and pass it on well. But if we start to think of ourselves as the power plant rather than the power conductors, we assume a role that was never intended for us. That will cause us to abuse power rather than to steward it. And when we abuse power, we start abusing money, fame, relationships, authority, and ourselves.

> POWER PASSES THROUGH US, JUST AS IF WE WERE ELECTRICAL WIRES. THUS IT IS OUR JOB TO RECEIVE IT WELL AND PASS IT ON WELL.

God's Enemies Don't Seem to Question God's Power

One significant clue that God is truly the originator of all power is that His enemies never seem to question His power. When Satan tempted Eve, he didn't challenge God's power. He didn't say, "Surely God is inadequate to take care of you?" Instead, he questioned God's goodness: " 'You will not surely die [God is lying to you],' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil [God is holding out His best from you; He doesn't love you enough, and He is not good enough for you to trust Him to take care of you]' " (Genesis 3:4-5).

Satan said essentially the same in the Book of Job. To paraphrase his declaration to God: "Job obeys You because You use Your power to

build a hedge around him. Withdraw Your power and let me at him. He'll end up cursing You, because Your power—not Your goodness—has bought his loyalty" (Job 1:9-11). Even after Job experienced calamity after calamity, neither Satan nor Job nor Job's friends ever questioned God's power. They questioned His justice and His goodness, but not His power.

During the temptation of Christ (Matthew 4:1-11), Satan apparently found it hard to believe that the Son of God would actually function apart from His awesome divine power. In fact, Satan tempted Jesus to reclaim His power—to alleviate His suffering, to make a grand, powerful entrance into the temple courts, and finally to take a shortcut to claiming his rightful kingship over earth. But Satan never attempted to intimidate the Lord with a show of power.

In the end, Jesus *chose* to suffer. He accepted suffering not because He was overpowered but because He was good, loving, just, and true. If there were any doubt of that, the earthquakes and torn curtain in the temple proved otherwise (Matthew 27:50-53). Obviously, anyone who has the power to unleash an earthquake at His death has the power to prevent His death, if He chooses to do so.

For the angels and demons, which see God more clearly than we humans do, God's power has never been in question. Jesus displayed God's goodness by giving up His divine power for a season on behalf of His rebellious human creatures. That's the message of Philippians 2: God forever proved His goodness when Jesus set aside His power and rights as God in order to suffer an atoning death for us. As a result, Satan no longer has a valid claim that God doesn't have our best interests in mind when He asks us to obey Him.

So if even God's enemies, who have seen Him face to face, don't question that God has all power, why would we humans assume that our actions are needed to "help" God, as if He were inadequate?

HOW ONE USES POWER DISPLAYS ONE'S CHARACTER, WHETHER GOOD OR EVIL.

JESUS DISPLAYED GOD'S GOODNESS BY GIVING UP HIS DIVINE POWER.

God Has Sovereignly Delegated Power to Both Good And Evil Stewards

Some assume that, because power exists that is opposed to God's will, there must be another source of power that God does not control. Yet the Bible teaches that God has created a hierarchy of authority and power—millions of angels, rulers, governments, economies, organizations, leaders, and so forth. In heaven, He gave free choice to the angels, and some chose to rebel. On earth, He has given free choice to humans, and we have chosen to rebel as well. Yet even after rebelling, Satan is still permitted by God to steward power, and deeply deceived and broken human beings are still permitted to steward power, too.

Christ-Followers Are Now New Creatures, Given Power to Steward For Good

How one uses power displays one's character, whether good or evil. God has given Christians great power, called "the Gospel." The Gospel is the good news that God's character really is good; that God's Son died to redeem sinful humans; that God is active and present by His Holy Spirit, creating supernatural results within and among us that we could never account for on our own:

> "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty.
>
> *Zechariah 4:6-9*

> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen

> you, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.
>
> *1 Thessalonians 1:5*

> I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."
>
> *Romans 1:16-17*

> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.
>
> *1 Corinthians 2:4-5*

Those who accept the Gospel can now, for the first time, intentionally use their power as stewards of God's creation. They are "rewired" into the "power plant"—though they experience that imperfectly now but will experience it perfectly later. But right now they can act with the motive of a steward. They can have a new awareness that they are a "power line" to the world, receiving power from one Source and passing it on to wherever that Source has determined.

Stewards of power:

- are aware of the power they have. They measure it, are not afraid of it, store it well, and carefully watch how it affects those in their care.
- know that all the power they have is given to them.

- know that they could be called to give away much of their power in a moment's notice—and they would find joy in that.
- listen to God's voice to know when to acquire power and when to give it away.
- use power not out of fear but out of love, joy, and hope.
- give away power when God tells them to, even if it doesn't make rational sense.
- know they are stewarding something they cannot control. And the more they release it, the more powerful it becomes.

POWER IS MORE SUBTLE THAN MONEY BUT HAS SIMILAR POTENTIAL FOR BOTH GOOD AND EVIL.

The Tendency to Abuse Power

While all of our power ultimately comes from God, He uses a variety of means to distribute it to us: skill, hard work, and our personality, expertise, character, and wise discernment, to name a few. Power is more subtle than money but has similar potential for both good and evil. That's why we need to be honest about the issue of power in our lives. Otherwise, it's liable to become a hidden source of addiction for us. In fact, one reason power is so often avoided as a topic of discussion is that we have all experienced its abuse.

People whose primary objective is to become powerful often succeed at doing so—and fail spiritually in the process. That's why Christians are taught not to love power, just as they are taught not to love money, because the *love of* power or money can become a source of great evil (note that Scripture never calls power and money evil in themselves).

The temptation to love power can befall any one of us—especially those who have a good work ethic. That's because people who do a good job often end up with greater power than they had. More power is a reward for doing well. But more power often brings more responsibility, and that can be hard to manage. Some people faced with this situation push back in a show of humility, as if pretending they don't really have any power. But humility does not mean

denying you have power. Rather, it means recognizing the full extent of the power you have and discerning the right times and ways to refrain from using it or to even give it away.

> [HUMILITY] MEANS RECOGNIZING THE FULL EXTENT OF THE POWER YOU HAVE AND DISCERNING THE RIGHT TIMES AND WAYS TO GIVE IT AWAY.

No wonder those who have privilege—racially, economically, or politically—don't talk openly about their power very much. If they do, they are either worried about someone taking away their power, or else they are simply bragging. By contrast, those who lack power—minority groups, the poor, those without political clout—tend to talk about power frequently because the lack of it is such an obstacle to their goals.

So what's wrong with the powerful avoiding conversations about power? One problem is that it keeps them from admitting the true extent of the power they have gained. As a result, they can easily abuse their power and lord it over others in society without even realizing how opposed their actions are to God's desires. Even the people they care about most—their spouse, children, employees, customers—can feel controlled, diminished, or run over, even though the person with power has no intention of making them feel that way.

On the other side of the equation, it can be hard for the powerless to speak up. They may fear losing the favor and privileges they get from riding the coattails of the powerful. They may also fear outright retribution for offending or creating problems for the powerful.

And so a responsibility falls on the powerful to discern appropriate ways and times to give power away. They must respond humbly when they discern they are being led by God to give power away, even when it doesn't make rational sense or actually even hurts deeply.

The most powerful human who ever lived was Jesus Christ. He created the

whole world and could control the wind, the seas, the demons, and even earthquakes. He had the full power of God. Yet He submitted to His Father and gave up that power to become a human being. Jesus's temptation in Matthew 4 demonstrates that as a human, He didn't seek power beyond what God gave Him. At the same time, He didn't shy away from it.

Jesus said, "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:18). Jesus had power even over His death. Yet, note that He submitted to that death—the grisly and unjust death of a criminal on a cross. Jesus's humility was not lack of power but the choice to refrain from using it and even the temporary giving up of power.

It is interesting to examine how Jesus refers to power in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-5, 7). He refers to:

- *The poor in spirit*—people who give up the false power of self-reliance to tap into the real power of God-dependence
- *Those who mourn*—people who don't use their power to cover up their needs but present their needs raw and real before God and others
- *The meek*—people who are not gutless, spineless, or lacking in power but whose power is under control
- *The merciful*—people who give up the power they could use to enforce personal rights, to punish others, to exact revenge, to avoid emotional connections, or to cause suffering

STEWARDSHIP OF POWER IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

AES and Power Stewardship

Joy at Work argues that the power to make decisions should be decentralized in an organization. That's not because decentralization makes more money or makes better decisions, although it may do that. It's because stewardship of power is the right thing to do, and decentralizing power throughout the organization is a primary way of stewarding power.

In the last session we saw that corporate culture is changed not only by words but also by leaders who embody core values in the way they lead, a few simple operating mechanisms aligned with those values, and relentless evaluation and correction. One of the ways AES followed through on its value of distributing power throughout the company was by intentionally not having centralized departments of specialization, such as human resources, finance, marketing, and legal departments. Dennis believed that structures like those tended to collect experts in one place, who would hoard the power they had by virtue of their expertise. He also felt that many frontline workers actually had a better grasp of the true situations confronting the company, and therefore greater expertise, than some of the "experts" would have at a centralized headquarters.

> FAIRNESS MEANT THAT PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE TREATED EXACTLY THE SAME, BUT IN A WAYTHAT FIT THEIR GIFTEDNESS AND ROLE.
>
> FAIRNESS WASNOT A SYNONYM FOR EQUALITY BUT FOR JUSTICE.

AES observed that people who hoarded specialized information tended to cause other employees to think they could not ask hard questions of the expert—questions that might lead to better decisions. So for AES, if specialized information was important, then everyone needed to know it. Thus the job of the specialists became not to hold on to expertise but to teach it to others. For example, a nonfinance person was sometimes tapped to make the biggest financial presentation of the year in each region, because that would help that individual learn the information and put the report in terms that everyone could understand. The goal was to create a great education company, as well as a power company. As a result, employees spent 80 percent of their time working in their primary areas of responsibility and the other 20 percent learning other areas.

A second mechanism for distributing power was an open-book policy (see *Joy at Work,* pp. 101-102). AES observed that people tended to hoard information as a way to hang on to power. The answer to that was to eliminate secrets. Everything was made transparent. That reduced the temptation to steal opportunity from

people lower in the organization.

A third mechanism comes from the value of “fairness.” Dennis recognized that not everyone is created with the same gifts and abilities. So fairness meant that people should *not* be treated exactly the same, but in a way that fittheir giftedness and role (see *Joy at Work*, pp. 28-30). At AES, fairness was not a synonym for equality but for justice: “To each person what he deserves; to each one what is appropriate.”

The result was the elimination of standardized job descriptions. The company allowed for God-given uniqueness to distribute power, which meant that even frontline employees sometimes had as much power to customize their jobs as executives did.

The Results of Good Power Stewardship

Attempting to steward power is the right thing to do, but there is no way to control the outcome. (Of course, the same could be said of hoarding power: There is no way to control the outcome, even though it “feels” more controllable.) Dennis Bakke is no longer the CEO of a $40 billion company. Yet even after Dennis left his role as CEO, many of the employees at AES have kept operating according to the values he established. And the company itself continues. While it has sold some of its assets, AES still owns or co-owns power plants that provide safe, clean, reliable electricity in developing countries where before there was sporadic and environmentally damaging power.

The lesson is that the good steward of power may be moved to a different assignment, but the results of his stewardship for others remain. And there’s also a lesson about power: The purpose of the power is not to benefit the steward but to accomplish the will of the Power Source. Thus, the steward of power measures his or her success not by a personal portfolio of money, fame, position, span of control, or prestige, but by how well God’s purposes were accomplished.

STEWARDSHIP DEMANDS THAT THE WEALTHY EXERCISE

POWER TO BUILD COMMUNITIES, NOT TO DESTROY THEM OR HAMPER THEIR DEVELOPMENT.

Implications for Parenting

Parents have power over their children, but what they do with that power varies:

- There are times when parents exert power—for example, when young children need to be comforted by knowing that their parents are in control.
- There are times when parents release power—for example, when their children reach adolescence and naturally seek personal power to test their own wings.
- There are times when parents have waning power—for example, when children leave home to start their own lives.
- There are times when children have power over their parents—for example, when elderly parents are ill or dying, and arrangements have to be made.

Good stewardship of parental power means knowing when to "move electricity" through the parental wire at full power, when to reduce it, when to shut it off, and when to let others take over the role that the parent formally had.

Implications for Community Development

People who are wealthy have power over those who are less wealthy. Stewardship demands that the wealthy exercise power to build communities, not to destroy them or hamper their development:

- Sometimes the wealthy need to exert power—for example, to bring resources to economically depressed neighborhoods. (AES was an example of that: The company exerted political connections to bring power to developing countries that lacked reliable energy.)
- Sometimes the wealthy need to reduce or refrain from exercising their power—for example, to allow the people who actually live in poor, developing communities to create their own solutions.
- Sometimes the wealthy need to allow the poor to exert power over them—

for example, to allow new leaders from an emerging community to determine their own priorities and direct what resources are needed, and where.

GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF WEALTH MEANS BEING AWARE OF THE POWER OF MONEY AND ALL THAT MONEY COMMANDS.

Good stewardship of wealth means being aware of the power of money and all that money commands. It means realizing that you have connections that the poor do not have; that you're able to drive home to a nice, safe neighborhood after you've done your volunteer work, but those who live in a developing community stay there; that you always have the option of withdrawing from the project if you don't like the way it's going, but those for whom the project exists cannot.

Implications for Business

Owners, managers, and bosses have power over those under them on the organizational chart (unless, like Dennis Bakke, they refuse to have an organizational chart). Leaders can leverage that power to influence their corporate culture. Indeed, it would be poor stewardship for a leader to abdicate his or her role of influence by not being aware of how much power he or she has over the internal culture of the enterprise.

The process of decentralizing decision making also must be initiated at the top. A leader may fear giving up control; or that mistakes will occur, incurring the wrath of those even higher in the organizational chart; or that giving up power will make it appear that the leader is not "in charge." But those fears will inevitably result in poor stewardship of power, leading to pain for those who are being supervised. And the bad outcomes that are most feared can easily be avoided by "mapping" decisions in order to keep track of how power is being stewarded: Who should decide what? What authority should each person have? When should the leader be prepared to veto an employee's decision? Who should be held responsible when a poor decision is made? What decisions should the leader reserve for him or herself, and why?

Employees have significant power, and they should be made aware of it. For

example, they exert power when they:

- choose to align with their bosses or act independently
- choose to be easily led or resistant
- stay focused on team goals or work on their own agenda
- follow the policy manual or create new solutions where needed, even if risky

Employees who are good stewards will be aware of both their power and the limits to their power. They will learn to use their limited "bullets" sparingly and with focus. And, like their supervisors, they will know both how to acquire power and how to give it away when called upon by God to do so—even if it works against their personal career advancement.

Power is a crucial issue for stewardship in all areas of life because it goes to the essence of how God made humans in His image. He has given us extensions of His infinite power to steward His creation as finite creatures.

> POWER IS A CRUCIAL ISSUE FOR STEWARDSHIP IN ALL AREAS OF LIFE BECAUSE IT GOES TO THE ESSENCE OF HOW GOD MADE HUMANS IN HIS IMAGE.

Ultimate Power in This Age Comes From Giving It Up

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
> Who, being in very nature a God,
> did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
> but made himself nothing,
> taking the very nature of a servant,
> being made in human likeness.
> And being found in appearance as a man,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to death—
> even death on a cross!
> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Reaction

Reaction questions

- When and with whom do you talk openly about power? Who helps you understand it, measure it, develop strategies to acquire it, and holds you accountable to give it up?
- Assess your personal power in the major sectors of your life—family, work, church, friends, community. Describe some of the power you have. Does it come from your expertise, relationships, experience, history, possessions, position, personality, physical strength? Do you think you are more aware of your power in these areas, or are others typically more aware of it than you are?
- Where are you a good steward of power—aware of what you have, how you are using it, and what God is calling you to do? Where would you say you are a poor steward of power?

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Chapter 6: Leading to Workplace Joy

Business guru W. Edwards Deming said a leader's job is to drive fear out of the organization so that employees will feel comfortable making decisions on their own. Most leaders do not show the humility to make that process a priority. But to Bakke, a willingness to serve and help others do better is crucial in a leader. Leaders must interpret an organization's shared values and principles. They are advisers to everyone in an organization, and they demonstrate integrity as the organization's collective conscience, pushing it to reach its goals and live up to its ideals.

People possess the motivation, discipline, and inner strength to act in a way that is true to themselves. The role of leaders is to create a joyful, rewarding environment that allows these qualities to flourish, giving an organization its best opportunity to succeed.

Leaders must realize that character is transparent to those around us. People "catch" character, virtue, and values by observing and practicing "right" behaviors and actions, and making them habits. When a leader acts as if he or she is the center of the organization, everyone else feels extraneous. It takes courage for a leader to delegate and free his or her people to act, exercising their natural gifts and fulfilling their potential. Leaders who create dynamic, rewarding, enjoyable workplaces love people, love spending time with them, and love affirming that they are worthy and important.

Federal and state governments require company officers to sign monthly plant compliance documents. AES senior manager Dave McMillen noted that the company's technicians had the best information about their plants: They understood the rules and AES environmental values and commitments better than anyone. So, AES made the technicians officers of the company, enabling them to sign the documents.

A World Bank manager once asked Bakke for advice. She wanted to erase layers of home-office veto power, so she could give decision-making authority to her in-country people. "Be prepared to lose your job, because this is radical stuff," he replied.

Where leaders and board members can exercise tight control is on issues that

affect the strategy and shared values of an organization. With the exception of those required by law to be made by top executives, all other decisions, including those with major financial implications, should be delegated to team members who are closest to the matter under consideration. Leaders must serve as advisers—advisers able to distinguish an organization's unchanging principles from its constantly changing strategy. Bakke and AES board members became active advisers on every important issue facing the organization, which tended to offset their loss of enjoyment in surrendering decision-making control. Bakke believes the result was that AES directors were far more influential, committed, and engaged than those of more conventional companies.

Leaders must also put a high priority on accountability. When the Shady Point problem occurred in 1992, Bakke took a 30 percent reduction in his own pay that year as the most senior person responsible for adherence to AES values. Other corporate officers and leaders in the plant also took pay reductions ranging from 10 to 20 percent. Taking responsibility must become a habit in order for each worker to trust in the organization and partake in the joy and accomplishment that the workplace offers.

Chapter 8: Potholes in the Road

Study at Harvard Business School helped Bakke learn why people dread work. Bakke and Sant sought to change that, taking their lead from business theorist Peter Drucker. Among his ideas: Stress self-discipline and individual responsibility in the workplace; make the same person responsible for both planning and execution; and use supervisors to assist subordinates.

At the AES Beaver Valley plant near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Bakke first recognized a way to defuse union-management tension. When the leader of its Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union asked him, “What do you think of unions?” he responded, “I don’t think much about unions. My job is to eliminate management. If I succeed in doing that, I don’t know what unions are for.”

Leveling management helped create good relationships with AES unions. Some examples:

- To negotiate a contract with union leaders at new AES hydroelectric facilities in Brazil, AES sent its own group of union leaders, not managers or attorneys. The resulting generous deal did not break the AES bank, and it left the Brazilian workers feeling a sense of accomplishment. They had negotiated successfully and felt ownership in their workplace.
- When AES bought three California power plants from another company, union members chose to continue working under AES rather than to transfer or terminate. The union’s research team had observed AES Shady Point and found people there to be self-motivated, dedicated to company values, working in effective teams, and leading by example.
- At Beaver Valley, AES put union and nonunion families together at all celebrations and social events for the first time in the plant’s history, and the company opened survey participation and plant information to everyone—managers and union members alike.
- After AES put everyone on salary and removed the management layers against which unions defined themselves, people at several plants found they no longer needed union protection and voted, without AES prompting, to decertify.

The “victim mentality,” however, still runs deep. Changing that attitude requires constant effort to win people’s trust and get them to trust themselves. Bakke found that individual performance is more a function of work environment than hiring process. No hiring prerequisites will guarantee delivering a decisive, responsible employee. Generally, employees themselves know best when they’re ready for more responsibility: They’ll ask to take on a bigger role.

Pushing decision making down to the lowest possible level creates risks that big mistakes will be made, but Bakke believes that freedom in the workplace is worth it. Decentralized organizations make no more mistakes than traditional centralized ones, and they perform just as well or better over the long term, because they tend to be much more rewarding workplaces.

Job security, a chief concern at many businesses, is an illusory goal. In our dynamic world, every job and every person are in a constant state of flux. Bakke finds it obstructive, demoralizing, and costly to let people stay in jobs when they’re not needed, especially when their creativity and energy can be better used elsewhere in society. Toward that end, he advocates generous severance arrangements to compensate people leaving organizations. The right-size workforce is the number of people needed to make the workplace fun.

Group Discussion Questions

(1) Is power an uncomfortable subject for you to talk about so openly? Why or why not?

(2) Identify three new thoughts you have had about power as a result of this session, either from the Bible verses, reading *Joy at Work*, reading these study notes, or reflecting on the questions above. What aspects of this study did you most agree or disagree with?

(3) Which is the hardest area for you to steward power? Where do you see yourself as a good steward of power, and where do you see need for improvement? Why?

(4) Describe what humility that does not grasp after power would look like in your workplace. Provide specific examples.

(5) What must happen for us to restrain our use of power in our workplace?

Next Session—Failure and Success: Stewarding Circumstances

Bible readings: Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17; Ecclesiastes 1-12; Romans 8:18-25
Joy at Work, Chapter 9: Another Crisis at AES (pp. 205-226)

SESSION 6

Failure and Success: Stewarding Circumstances

Bible Readings for This Session
Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17
Ecclesiastes 1-12
Romans 8:18-25

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Chapter 9: Another Crisis at AES (pp. 205-226)

DVD Session Six: Freedom to Fail
As sinners, we know we are going to fail. Failure is just another consequence of the Fall. This session investigates the nature of failure—and the hope of greater success and joy that follows when we allow ourselves the freedom to fail.

Introduction

"Keeping score" in business seems to be a very simple calculation: If at the end of the day (i.e., the accounting period) you've made more money than you spent, you've got a profit, and therefore you've succeeded. If not, you've lost money and therefore failed (or at least not succeeded).

In 2000, AES's stock price hit an all-time high of $70. By February 2002, the price had fallen to less than $5. In Chapter 9 of *Joy at Work*, Dennis Bakke cites four major internal mistakes that led to AES's economic problems: (1)

overriding the company's traditional ceiling on investments in any one market; (2) funding equity commitments to AES subsidiaries with debt on the books of the AES parent company, which made the parent particularly susceptible to the liquidity scare that occurred after the Enron scandal; (3) acquiring or constructing so-called merchant plants (notably Drax, in England), which created capacity without customers under contract to use it; and (4) an overemphasis on new business development, particularly of "do-good" projects in developing countries (e.g., Tbilisi, Georgia).

In addition to these internal factors, significant external factors affected the stock price of AES during that time, including the collapse of Enron due to scandal, which drastically affected the financing of all businesses in the energy sector; the California energy crisis; currency problems in Latin America, particularly the economic collapse of Argentina; and the adverse economic conditions that followed 9/11.

Dennis writes, "Every company in our industry, even those without significant businesses in England or South America, had experienced a stock price decline that was equal to or greater than ours" (*Joy at Work*, p. 214). He estimates that the internal factors contributed to about $5 of the stock price decline, while external factors contributed to the rest. Many market analysts agree with that assessment, though some disagree. Those interested in learning more can find a brief discussion of the issue at www.dennisbakke.com.

Regardless of the cause, there's no denying that AES was hit hard by events beyond its control, and the company's stock price declined catastrophically in less than two years. So was AES a success or a failure in 2002? The stock price would seem to indicate failure. But Dennis disagrees. While clearly admitting that a plunging share price indicated serious problems, he nonetheless argues that in light of AES's larger mission, vision, and core values, the company was by no means a failure, even if it was troubled financially. He writes:

> At age 10, I learned that when the river flooded at a 100-year level, it didn't matter how well our house was constructed. It didn't matter whether I did my homework or whether our family values were strong or

> whether my father was home or working in Alaska. It didn't matter whether I was smart or whether my little brother was a good athlete. If the house was anywhere near the river, it was going to be damaged by the rushing water. AES and every other energy company were hit by a series of events that were as powerful—and as unavoidable—as the flood that swallowed my boyhood home.
>
> What should this teach us? Humility is the most important lesson.
>
> *Joy at Work*, p. 215

Whatever your reaction to Dennis's perspective, his statement forces us to think carefully and perhaps differently about the question, *What is failure?* It also introduces the role of risk in the success/failure equation, and the question of *Who is responsible?*—especially when things happen that are outside anyone's control.

Failure and Risk in the Garden (Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17)

In order to think in a Christian way about the meaning of failure, we have to go back to the Garden of Eden before the Fall. So we return to the Genesis 2 passage that we've read repeatedly in this study.

By now it should be quite familiar to you. Indeed, you may be tempted to gloss over it as a text that you already know well. But most of the insights that students of the Bible gain come as the result of *repeated* exposure to Bible texts, such that they begin to observe things that previously went unnoticed.

This time, as you read the verses indicated in Genesis 2, ask yourself these two questions: *Was failure possible before the Fall? Was there risk in the world before the Fall?* Your answers should have some basis in the biblical text.

One potential failure/risk that the text clearly presents is the possibility that

humans would eat of the forbidden fruit. Indeed, God warned them that the consequences of doing so would be disastrous, “for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.” So at least there was that potential. Were there possibilities for other failures, albeit of a lesser kind, with lesser ramifications?

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were sinless, yet they had limitations. For example, they had only finite knowledge. So, was there a risk that they might make wrong decisions about how to plant or water a crop? About training or using an animal? About designing or engineering a structure? About mixing vegetables in a salad that would make it taste bad? About lifting a heavy object the wrong way and pulling a muscle?

If you think there was the possibility of risk and failure in the Garden *before* the Fall, how might that affect your perspective on failure today?

> IF YOU THINK THERE WASTHE POSSIBILITY OF RISK AND FAILURE IN THE GARDEN BEFORE THE FALL, HOW MIGHT THAT AFFECT YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON FAILURE TODAY?
>
> NO HUMAN THIS SIDE OF THE FALL ESCAPES THE UNDERTOW OF A WORLD THAT IS CUT OFF IN SOME WAYFROM ITS CREATOR.
>
> EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US FEELS THE EFFECTS OF FUTILITY.

Failure and Risk After the Fall (Ecclesiastes 1-12, Romans 8:18-25)

It’s hard for us today to imagine what life was like in the Garden of Eden because all of our experience has to do with a *fallen* world. Moreover, our own capacities to think and imagine have been marred by sin. For that reason, we need to carefully read the Bible, where God has revealed a great deal about our true condition.

One book that particularly addresses the issue of failure is Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is one of the most enigmatic books of the Bible and may be unfamiliar to you. Indeed, as you read through it, you will occasionally find yourself saying, “What in the world does this mean?” And you may be puzzled as to why such a dark, difficult, and sometimes depressing book was ever included in the canon of Scripture.

Here are some clues for beginning to understand Ecclesiastes (with an emphasis on “beginning”). The book is about “life under the sun,” meaning life here on earth. It is about life after the Fall, with all the effects of the curse (Genesis 3:17-19). The writer discusses area after area of human experience in this fallen world (“Here is what I have seen”), and at the end of each discussion pronounces a conclusion. His overall conclusion is this: Life is characterized by “futility.”

The Hebrew word for “futility” is *hebel*. The word means “transient, transitory, empty, vaporous, fleeting.” It does *not* mean “absurd or meaningless.” Some English translations render *hebel* as “vanity.” Perhaps a better translation is “futility,” which conveys the idea that nothing in this fallen world is stable or solid enough that you absolutely can stake your fortune and your future on it. If you do, it will prove empty and fleeting, just when you need it most.

Ecclesiastes presents a rather sobering assessment of the human condition: *Everything* in this world is marked in some way by *hebel*. Nothing escapes it. No human this side of the Fall escapes the undertow of a world that is cut off in some way from its Creator. Every single one of us feels the effects of futility, which shows up in every aspect of our experience.

There is, however, a bit of good news in this otherwise bleak outlook. Here and there God gives us what Ecclesiastes calls “gifts” or “rewards” that bring a bit of joy into our lives (note the phrase “there is nothing better”). Most of these gifts are simple and basic: food, family, work, friends, laughter. They are gifts from God, and it is a gift to even be able to enjoy them. And we *should* enjoy them. But we should never rely on them as the basis for our lives, because they, too,

are fleeting and temporary.

Many Christians down through the centuries have dismissed Ecclesiastes in an effort to avoid its dark premise. Some have seen it as the conclusions of a skeptic. Others see it as a secularist's perspective on life—i.e., it's what happens if you leave God out of the equation. And some point out that Ecclesiastes may have been written by Solomon (see 1:1). As you may know, Solomon ended up forsaking God in favor of the idols of his 1,000 wives and concubines (1 Kings 11:3). And so Ecclesiastes is believed by some to reflect the bitter outcome that resulted. They see it as the story of a man who ended up disillusioned because he turned his back on God.

Each of those interpretations manages to avoid Ecclesiastes's unpleasant statement that life here on earth is *hebel*, futility. But read the Romans 8 passage carefully. Note that Romans 8 is in the New Testament, *after* Christ's death and Resurrection and the grace of the Gospel. Yet it repeats the same truth of Ecclesiastes: "the creation was subjected to futility"; "the whole creation groans." The Greek word *mataiotes*, translated as "futility," is a synonym of the Hebrew word *hebel*.

So even though we Christians live after the cross, we still live on this side of heaven. And on this side of heaven, Romans 8 says we *will* experience futility. We will still feel the effects of the curse. We will still experience the *hebel* that Ecclesiastes describes so eloquently.

We will certainly experience it in our work. Even if we love our work, it still has a measure of toil attached to it. "For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is *hebel"* (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23).

Likewise, even when we have financial success, the money is not quite enough,

is it? We're happy with the success, certainly. And the money makes life easier—in some ways. And yet, "I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was *hebel* and striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun" (2:11).

> EVEN THOUGH WE CHRISTIANS LIVE AFTER THE CROSS, WE STILL LIVE ON THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN.

Ecclesiastes doesn't say to not engage in work. If anything, work is a gift from God's hand (3:12-13; 5:18-19). But the book is clear that work and its rewards are not enough to base a life on. Work, along with the rest of life, is ultimately marked by *hebel*.

> HUMILITY ALSO CREATES IN US A MIND-SET THAT WE MUST STEWARD WHAT WE HAVE FOR OUR MASTER.

And perhaps AES illustrates that truth about as well as any company could. It was led by a sincere visionary whose motivation was to steward the creation as he understood that task from Scripture. It had a board of bright, dedicated people who concurred with their CEO's vision. It had a workforce of extremely loyal people who worked hard and made a lot of great decisions that for a while led to financial success. It carried out its business with levels of transparency and integrity that eluded most other companies in its sector.

In short, AES tried to do business "right," as its founders understood "right." Did the company succeed? Or did it fail? The question challenges us to reconsider our understanding of success and failure.

How Do We Define Success?

In the last session, we looked at power and saw that stewarding power in a Christ-like way demands humility. Humility meant not denying that we have power and influence, but recognizing that God has given power to us and that we must use it for the purposes for which He gave it to us.

A similar principle applies to our definitions of success and failure. As we

consider the outcome of our work, we need a measure of humility in making our evaluation. Humility causes us to recognize that it is God who has given us whatever skills, abilities, resources, coworkers, opportunities, markets, and other benefits that allowed us to "earn" what we have. Humility also creates in us a mind-set that we must steward what we have for our Master. And humility reminds us that ultimately we are not in control of what happens to what we have been given to steward.

This is a very different view of success and failure than most of the ones that prevail in our culture. How does it compare with your view? As you consider that question, ask yourself: Have I bought into a definition of success and failure that:

- is based on the way Wall Street defines success?
- comes from my parents, spouse, peers, or someone other than God?
- is trying to override the futility that Ecclesiastes and Romans 8 describe (and also say is impossible to avoid this side of heaven)?
- fools me into thinking I am successful just because I have money and power?
- is driving me to constantly change jobs and careers in an elusive search for "greener pastures"?

Most people don't give much time to pondering what "success" really is. Many are too busy trying to outrun that futility that Ecclesiastes talks about, perhaps by working really hard so they can make lots of money, or by pursuing an impossible goal. Others who already have possessions and power delude themselves into thinking that they've won, that *hebel* cannot touch them, that they're "bulletproof" because of what they have.

Still others know the experience of *hebel* all too well—and they're angry about it. Sometimes they blame others, such as their spouse, their parents, or one of their children, for "messing up" their life. Sometimes they beat themselves up with shame, as if life would be just right if only they were smarter, prettier, more clever, more adventurous, or better in some other way. Sometimes they get caught up in addictions to numb their feelings of emptiness.

Chapter 9 of *Joy at Work* shows clearly that Dennis Bakke and AES did not escape the undertow of *hebel*. Dennis writes:

> The stock decline was devastating to many people. Six members of my extended family lost their entire retirement fund savings, which had been invested entirely in AES stock. Two family members were forced to sell their homes and rent apartments. Thousands of individual AES investors suffered painful economic losses. AES employees, especially those who had been with the company for 10 years or more, had their net worth reduced to a small fraction of what it had been before the price drop. I feel worse than I can say about the economic consequences to the people who trusted me and AES enough to invest their money in the company. The responsibility I feel for the economic plight of so many will stay with me as long as I live.
>
> *Joy at Work* (p. 217)

> LIFE MAY BE DISAPPOINTING, FRUSTRATING, MADDENING, ARDUOUS, TREACHEROUS, DEPRESSING, AND AT TIMES EVEN EMPTY, BUT IT IS NOT MEANINGLESS.

Is that not a parallel to what we read in Ecclesiastes? Some dismiss the writer of Ecclesiastes by calling him skeptical, secular, or sinful. Interestingly, some respond to Chapter 9 of *Joy at Work* with similar incredulousness. They describe Dennis's explanation of AES's stock-market crash as "delusional" or "avoiding of responsibility." Is it? Or is it a modern-day statement admitting that *hebel* touches even the things we care about the most, and even the things we work hardest on in an effort to reverse the effects of the curse?

> LIFE ALWAYSHAS A PURPOSE—EVEN IN A FALLEN WORLD.

Hebel means futility, but it does not mean absurdity. Life may be disappointing, frustrating, maddening, arduous, treacherous, depressing, and at times even empty, but it is not meaningless. Life always has a purpose—even in a fallen world—because God exists and He places each person on the planet for a reason. And because He gives us the hope of the Gospel and the hope of Christ restoring this world to its intended glory (Romans 8:18-25).

And so even though Dennis experienced *hebel* in his work at AES, he did not allow that to keep him from working hard after his "failure." His hope remained

quite alive, which allowed him to pursue new dreams (without being consumed by them) and to pursue joy even in the midst of *hebel*. For that reason, *Joy at Work* describes a flawed but powerful model of someone trying to lead an organization according to biblical principles in the real world—that is, a fallen world.

Could the rest of us serve as similar models? Many of us say we want to apply biblical truth in our lives. It's easy enough to see what that looked like for Dennis. What would it look like for us? How might Ecclesiastes and Romans 8 affect our understanding and pursuit of success? Will we be courageous to face the full reality of *hebel* with hope and joy and purpose, rather than despair and denial?

Redeemed Humans Stewarding Risk

If it's impossible to fully escape the effects of the Fall on this side of heaven, how should followers of Christ go about their work? We considered this question earlier, in Session 2. Recall that Romans 8 gives us substantial insight into answering it when it describes us as "the children of God," people who have a restored relationship with God (on the basis of Christ's work) and are now awaiting the hope of a restored creation. We are in a unique position to not only experience a large measure of joy for ourselves, but to create places of joy for others in and through our work and our organizations.

You may take a very different view of success than Dennis Bakke. But you can still ask the question, *How does my work reflect, or at least hint at, the truth that God has not abandoned this world but will eventually restore it to its intended glory, with all the good that that means for people? Or is my work just another example of a fallen human condition that exploits people, trashes the creation, and squanders the potential for good?*

Mean Time

Rabbi Robert Gordis, in a commentary on the Hebrew text of the book *Koheleth*, described the golden age of Hebrew poetry. He said this occurred when the exiles returned from Babylon and had to reflect on their experiences. They lived in the ruins and shadows of the great past, and they knew the Messiah would come sometime, probably much later in the future. It was the "mean time which was a meantime" between "the great acts of God in the past and the great acts of God in the future." Moreover, these books of poetry have a present reality that assumes pain and trouble and broken temples and walls are the norm. We spend much of our lives and money to avoid this truth—that we live in the "mean time" between Christ's death and Resurrection and the time of his return to set all things right again. Yet, that is the truth of our time, and in this "meantime," failure to reach what we truly desire will be the norm.

Reaction

Reaction questions

• How does the message of Ecclesiastes strike you—that we live in a fallen world and that nothing we do can fully escape the effects of the Fall?

• How do you react to Dennis's response to the AES stock-market decline (Chapter 9 in *Joy at Work*)?

• What are some examples of *hebel* in your own work or your own experience? What would you say was the real "futility" in that situation?

• How do you typically respond when forced to deal with futility?

• What did you learn from this session that affected your definition and pursuit of personal success?

• How might your understanding that you have the "first fruits of the Spirit" (Romans 8:23) help you deal with the reality of *hebel*?

• How would your work and life look different if it were possible to overcome futility? How might these look in heaven?

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Chapter 9: Another Crisis at AES

When the AES stock price tumbled in 1992 and again in 2001, top management and board members blamed Bakke, and Bakke blamed himself for failing to persuade them that the decentralized, shared-values approach was the right way to run the organization. It had succeeded in discharging AES's obligations to all stakeholders and to the society that supported the corporation.

But thousands of shareholders inside and outside the company blamed Bakke when the AES stock price plummeted from $70 a share in 2000 to a post-Enron low of $5 a share in February 2002. They lost confidence in his leadership and refused to follow him when things got tough. The executive team hired lawyers, consultants, and advisers to protect AES, called for a major reorganization of the company, and moved to centralize decision making.

While the recession, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, spectacular financial defaults, and coast-to-coast bad economic news drove down share prices of most companies, regardless of their economic performance, Bakke traces the AES debacle to four structural mistakes:

1. At one point, AES had limited investments in any one market to 10 percent of cash flow. But it later abandoned this ceiling to participate in a wider range of business opportunities.
2. Following a financing philosophy that "debt is cheaper than equity," AES funded new businesses with debt kept on the parent company's books, rather than selling more AES shares to investors to raise needed investment capital.
3. Like its competitors, AES speculatively built or purchased power plants, without long-term contracts from customers to buy their energy output. The resulting excess capacity drove down open-market electricity prices.
4. AES so emphasized business development that it lost focus on economic sustainability.

Most of AES's competitors in the energy market operated with top-down management structures, and they too suffered the same kinds of losses and stock price declines as AES.

A decentralized, values-driven structure, however, helped AES avoid other serious problems. For example, unlike centralized decision-making companies, AES plant teams didn't purchase turbines in bulk to achieve per-unit cost

savings, so AES didn't get stuck with huge turbine surpluses when the energy market collapsed. AES did not breach any legal or ethical rules in its financial accounting or in buying and selling electricity. And no executives or board members sold major blocks of AES stock before its price decline. It would have been next to impossible for senior people to engage in this sort of malfeasance because important decisions were discussed at every level of the company.

Rather than focus on the ethical transgressions of Enron's top executives, which led to their frauds and crimes, subsequent congressional hearings focused on the financial losses of Enron shareholders and employees. The federal corporate-governance laws and orders generated from this exercise were political in nature, not pragmatic. None will improve the quality of information provided to the public, nor reduce fraud.

Bakke resigned as CEO of AES in 2002. Retirement from the company gave him time to reflect and write *Joy at Work*. Since this did not quell Bakke's passion to create the most fun workplace, he founded Imagine Schools with his wife, Eileen, a lifelong educator. In June 2004, Imagine Schools acquired Chancellor Beacon Academies to form one of the largest charter-school companies in the United States. The company operates about 70 K-12 schools on 40 campuses in nine states and the District of Columbia, serving nearly 20,000 students. Bakke realizes that success as defined in *Joy at Work* cannot be guaranteed, but he will strive to live out the ethical principles embodied in integrity, justice, and a fun workplace.

Group Discussion Questions

1. If God included risk and failure as part of His perfect Garden design (inherent in perfect yet finite creatures with free will), then how would you envision the conversation between God, Adam and Eve after they had made a wrong decision (short of the Fall)?
2. How do you typically respond when you find yourself feeling rather "futile" at work or home?
3. After reading this session, how would you define personal and corporate success differently, adding any new understandings of *hebel* and humility that you gained?
4. Identify a specific decision you face today where you risk failure, or

where someone you oversee may fail. How will you handle it differently, today, as a result of your understanding of *hebel?*

5. How are risk, failure, and forgiveness connected to your experiencing joy at your workplace?

Next Session—Service: Stewarding Community Resources

Bible readings: Exodus 23:10-12; Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, 25:10-28; Deuteronomy 24:14, 15; Proverbs 14:31, 19:17; Matthew 25:14-26, 26:11

Joy at Work, Epilogue (pp. 227-243)

Reflections on Risk and Failure

"America was discovered accidentally by a great seaman who was looking for something else."

The Oxford History of the American People

"Never confuse a single defeat with a final defeat."

F. Scott Fitzgerald

"I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; time and chance overtake them all."

Ecclesiastes 9:11

“Luck favors the prepared.”

Peter Drucker

Abraham Lincoln’s Road to the White House

Failed in business,1831
Defeated for Legislature, 1832
Second business failure, 1833
Nervous breakdown, 1836
Defeated for Speaker, 1838
Defeated for Elector, 1840
Defeated for Congress, 1843
Defeated for Congress, 1848
Defeated for Senate, 1855
Defeated for Vice President, 1856
Defeated for Senate, 1858
Elected President, 1860

SESSION 7

Service: Stewarding Community Resources

Bible Readings for This Session
Exodus 23:10-12
Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, 25:10-28
Deuteronomy 24:14,15
Proverbs 14:31, 19:17
Matthew 25:14-26, 26:11

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Epilogue (pp. 227-243)

DVD Session Seven: Outside the Walls
This session takes a look at the balance among work, family, and community. Until now, we've assessed the responsibility of stewarding resources within an organization. Here we will broaden that scope as it extends into the community.

Introduction

Few people would deny that almost every community has needs:

- poverty, homelessness, hunger, slums, ghettos
- lack of education, jobs, or economic opportunity
- crime, gang violence, poor prison conditions, the challenges facing ex-convicts trying to re-enter society
- alcoholism, substance abuse, prostitution

- child abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence
- health care, challenges facing the disabled, care for the elderly
- family problems—divorce, abandonment, poor parenting
- lack of transportation, poor air quality, slow police or fire response
- unjust laws, unfair people, inefficient bureaucracies
- lack of moral training, poor modeling

CHRISTIANS ESPECIALLY HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN USING THEIR ENTERPRISES AS VEHICLES FOR STEWARDING THEIR COMMUNITIES.

On a global scale, the world struggles with:

- famine caused by weather and political and economic injustice
- wars caused by extremism, nationalism, imperialism, and ideological clashes
- unjust economic systems that leave people without hope or access
- the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and the lack of medical facilities, supplies, and personnel
- prostitution, slave trading, drug trafficking, mass migrations, genocide
- weapons of mass destruction
- global warming, environmental decline

Clearly, our world does not lack for problems to be addressed, whether locally, nationally, or internationally. The question is: Who is responsible to address them? Is that the job of governments? Or charities? Or churches? Or individuals?

What about businesses? Dennis Bakke believes that the business sector has a primary calling to help meet the needs of the world. Christians especially have a role to play in using their enterprises as vehicles for stewarding their communities, both through the goods and services they supply and the goodwill they impart. To that end, Dennis co-founded AES. The company tried to be very intentional in providing electricity as a means of social responsibility.

> If business has a social responsibility, how is that responsibility carried out by the actual work of the business and the products and services it delivers? And how is that responsibility carried out by the

charitable activities of the business, such as charity events, philanthropic donations, and service projects that focus employee time and resources on social needs?

Five Views of Corporate Involvement in Service and Charitable Activities

Businesses display a wide variety of responses to the issue of community impact. The approaches can be evaluated according to two questions: What is the relationship between profit and social responsibility? And what is the relationship between the social good provided by the product of the business and the good provided by charitable efforts outside of the core business? This leads to five general kinds of responses along a continuum, as follows:

1. **"The best solution is for business to make the maximum profit."**

   The more profit there is, the better for the economy, and social ills will be overcome by healthy economies, more jobs, and better products. The more profit there is, the more individual shareholders will have money to contribute to charitable causes. The purpose of business is not to address social needs directly but to create an economy where "all boats rise with the tide." Increased personal wealth allows for highly decentralized, personal, and effective solutions to social problems. Therefore, corporations should not engage directly in service projects or charitable efforts.

   This view has been the dominant view of Wall Street and many business schools for the past 40 years, as reflected in an essay by Milton Friedman in 1970, "The Social Responsibility ofBusiness Is to Increase Its Profits." Today, most people mistakenly assume that the purpose of business has *always* been to maximize profits.

2. **"The best solution is for business to make the best profit possible while minimizing negative impact upon society."**

   When possible, businesses should avoid activities that create obvious

environmental decline or economic injustice. If that is not possible, they should try to invest in solutions that cancel out the negative impact of their activity. (AES did that by saving rain forests in an effort to offset carbon-dioxide emissions from its coal plants.) American businesses should treat overseas workers fairly to conform to general local standards, and to abide by fairness regulations, such as the minimum-wage laws. Balancing profit with social responsibility creates the maximum forces to improve society while minimizing the company's negative impact. Therefore, corporations should engage in service projects or charitable efforts only if they are directly related to offsetting some negative social impact of their profit-making ventures.

3. **"The best solution is for businesses to make the best profit possible by choosing socially responsible activities as they build market share and customer loyalty."**

   A business should choose the most socially responsible direction *if* it contributes to increasing market share of "value-based" customers. Each decision must offset increased costs by boosting market share of value-based customers or by enhancing the ability to charge higher prices for value-based products. For example: pursuing the hybrid automotive niche; choosing to locate a plant in a country with a good human-rights records; enacting policies to hire and train increasing percentages of disadvantaged workers. When faced with options that have roughly the same impact on profits, the company should always choose the more socially responsible direction. Therefore, corporations should choose service projects and charitable efforts only if they directly result in improved customer loyalty.

4. **"The best solution is for business to make profits with an equal priority on social responsibility."**

   The company has to weigh social responsibility and profits equally. Decisions should be made with equal weight given to the balance sheet and the impact on the community and the world. If an activity would be profitable but has a negative social impact, it should not be undertaken. If a project would create social improvement but has unusually high profitability risk, it should not be undertaken. Therefore, corporate service projects and charitable efforts should be directed widely toward

wherever the greatest needs exist, even if they don't enhance customer loyalty, so long as they don't diminish profits.

5. **"The best solution is for business to pursue social responsibility with enough profits to create sustainability."**

   A company should always choose the socially responsible direction but do so in a way that keeps profits high enough to sustain the business. The company should engage in social change by increasing wages, leading environmental initiatives, and investing in the education of future workers, so long as doing so does not put the long-term sustainability of the company at risk. Social responsibility inherently means risking greater profitability in some situations, so the company should allow profit-making projects to subsidize nonprofitable, socially responsible projects. Therefore, corporate service projects and charitable efforts can be pursued but are largely unnecessary since the whole business is oriented to social good.

Which of the views above best reflects your own perspective on the role of business in the community? Which one reflects the perspective of your business, if you work in a for-profit venture? In reality, most companies have a mix of two or three of these views. The larger the company and the more stakeholders it has, the more opinions there will be about how the company should view itself.

Some who hold to option #1 worry that any concern other than maximizing profit will lead to the ruin of the business, as attention will be diverted from the core mission. That is a legitimate concern. On the other hand, business in the United States actually started out closer to option #5, with the Puritan view that business exists to steward the resources of society. It has only been in the past 100 years or so that "profit maximization" has become the main purpose for many businesses.

The Devolution of the Corporation?

While corporations have greatly evolved in terms of their sophistication, efficiency, and influence, some argue that they have

declined in their usefulness to address social ills. For example, Joel Bakan presents a strident argument, in his book *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power,* that corporate law over the past century and a half has created a situation in which corporations have less and less incentive (or accountability) to do social good.

One hopes you are committed as a Christian to the ministries of compassion and community development sponsored by your church, and perhaps as well to some of the many nonprofit ministries and organizations that exist to do good. But as you think about your work, and about the organization in which you work, what is your role in and responsibility *there* to making a difference in the community at large?

INDIVIDUALISTIC PERSPECTIVE LEADS TO A VERY SELF-ABSORBED APPROACH TO LIFE.

Individual or Public Christianity?

In answering that question, we need to address a cultural bias that has redefined Christianity for Western Christians in ways that are very different from Christianity's roots. The west, and particularly the United States, emphasizes individual identity over community affinity. As a result, Westerners tend to read the Bible in terms of individual concerns and responsibilities, as opposed to corporate or communal concerns and responsibilities. Even the New Testament epistles, which were written mostly to *churches*—that is, communities of people—are applied as if they were written to each one of us as an individual.

At its worst, that individualistic perspective leads to a very self-absorbed approach to life. For example, how a person does his or her work is seen as "personal"—it's "no one else's business." What a person does with his or her money is "personal." How one allocates one's time is "personal." One's faith and prayer life are "personal."

It's hard to change that thinking when the Bible's teaching is understood only through the lens of "how this applies to me (individually)." Passages that clearly were written for "us and our God" are interpreted by a theology of "me and my God." That yields very different implications for how Scripture should be applied than were seen by first-century Christians.

In the workplace, it means that we tend to concern ourselves primarily with personal piety and our own individual ethics: Maintain personal character, treat coworkers with courtesy, try to be honest, and act in a morally upright way. Profits should be given to individuals to do with as they please—to provide for their families, of course, and, one hopes, to donate to good Christian causes.

There's nothing wrong with those values and much to commend them. However, the problem is that we tend to allow our responsibilities to remain only at the personal level, which means they rarely rise to a sense of *public* responsibility. And so we neglect to consider issues of corporate culture, the social impact of our work, and the role our enterprise plays in society.

It's fine to agree that "I am responsible for my behavior." But an unintended consequence of that perspective can be a "live and let live" philosophy that goes on to say, "I am *not* responsible for the behavior of the organizations that I participate in." "I am *not* responsible for the group I'm a part of if I don't lead it." "I have *no* responsibility for other people's behavior." "I am *not* responsible for problems I didn't create." If we hold those attitudes, we display an anemic Christianity that does little to address systemic problems in the workplace and society.

Western Christians often defend their individualistic outlook by pointing to socialist and communist systems that trample on individual freedoms. Without question, those systems fail to recognize that:

- Humans are made in God's image and have responsibility to make free choices.
- Any system that takes away freedom shuts down the power of human

dignity made in God's image, and the eventual result is almost always economic disaster.

- When people are not free to be what God intended, the potential for economic and social good is diminished.
- Autocratic leaders and systems destroy individual initiative and rewards, which are vital to the way God made humans to steward the creation.

Having acknowledged that, is it possible that the West has overemphasized individual freedom to a point that is harmful to the common good? In any case, there is a place for Christianity that recognizes both individual *and* community responsibilities.

> UNFORTUNATELY, MANY CHURCHES TODAY HELP PROMOTE THE EMPHASIS OF PRIVATE PIETY OVER PUBLIC FAITH.

Churches: Involved or Detached?

Unfortunately, many churches today help promote the emphasis of private piety over public faith. And in too many cases they have abdicated their leadership role in the work world in a way that would have appeared strange to Christians of previous centuries. For example, in the 18th and 19th centuries, it was not uncommon in the United States for the texts of Sunday's sermons to be printed in Monday's newspapers. Pastors regularly spoke out on issues of public and societal concern. That's because churches believed they had a responsibility not just to their members but to everyone in their communities—even to people who did not attend church or hold to church dogma. Regardless of their spiritual condition, they were still people with needs that the church should be concerned about.

> IT TAKES SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP TO PRODUCE SOCIAL SYSTEMS THAT ARE FAIR AND JUST.

It takes spiritual leadership to produce social systems that are fair and just. The church has a legitimate role in providing that leadership. Likewise, those who hold power in business and government need accountability. The church has a role in providing that. And so, again, in earlier times, churches in the West accepted public roles as caregivers, activists, and community builders, not just through their programs or pastoral leadership but through the resources and

influence of their members. As a result, it was not unusual for pastors to ask business leaders hard questions about how their businesses were treating their employees, how they were stewarding profits to meet the needs of society, and how they were using their power to create just social systems.

Too little of that interaction takes place today. Instead, a bold line has been drawn to divide the “sacred” activities and spaces from the “secular.” The New Testament does not make such a hard distinction. Nor did the Puritans. That dichotomy is a relatively new development in Western Christianity.

New Discussion Needed

By this point, some readers may be thinking that by challenging the overemphasis that Western Christians tend to place on personal faith, we are suggesting a retreat from personal faith and individual responsibility to walk holy and humbly before God. We are not. If anything, we are appealing to modern-day Christians the way Paul appealed to the Thessalonians. Having praised them for their personal walk with Christ, he urged them to “excel still more” in that walk (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Likewise, we urge Christians today to “excel still more” in their personal relationship with Christ.

But like Paul, we will not limit the Gospel to merely personal, individual concerns. Note that after addressing the personal side of the Thessalonians’ faith, Paul turned to discuss the public. Again, he praised those Christians for their “love of the brethren” (a public, social, communal expression of their faith). But then he urged them to “excel still more” (4:9-10). That is all that we are asking —for Christians in the West to take seriously their role as public representatives of Christ and to “excel still more” by working out the implications of their faith for how they engage with and respond to the world beyond their own immediate concerns.

To that end, we offer readers some hard questions to wrestle with, to examine by the Scriptures, to pray about, and ultimately to respond to—to “excel still more”:

- What is the responsibility of Christian leaders in the workplace to create enterprises that steward God's creation?
- What is the responsibility of Christians working within today's organizations—corporations, small businesses, government entities, nonprofits—to work toward transforming those organizations into ventures that steward God's creation?
- What is the responsibility of churches to teach their members how to see their workplaces as both a personal *and* corporate extension of the work of the church?
- What is the role of the business sector in particular to address societal ills, and how should Christians influence that role through laws, education, and personal example?
- How should the individual Christian take a stand—perhaps a radical one—to steward organizational resources toward meeting community needs when he or she is opposed by a very different mind-set—the culture of the enterprise, the expectations of investors, a limiting job description, or a system of regulations and the realities of competition that assume success is only about maximizing profit?

Principles About Work and Social Responsibility

In an effort to assist and prod your thinking, we offer the following digest of biblical passages and principles that should be considered in answering the questions above. There is certainly more we could say. But perhaps this will get you started on a long-term, in-depth examination of what God has to say about the public implications of our faith, especially for our work.

The Old Testament specifically tied workplace policies to public good and social responsibility:

1. **The Sabbath.** One day each week was set aside for rest and worship (Exodus 20:8-11). That meant forgoing one-seventh of what one could have had by making people work on a seventh day. Nowadays, many workers have two days off. Yet somehow they still do not return to the work rested, nor have many of them worshiped. Have we lost the meaning of the Sabbath?

2. **The sabbatical year (Exodus 23:10-12).** The Israelites were to let their fields lie fallow for one year every seven years, to let the poor have at them, as well as the animals. Some executives and professionals today take sabbaticals or partial sabbaticals—mostly for their own benefit. Note that the Israelites never did practice the sabbatical year. God remembered that when He determined the length of the Babylonian captivity to be 70 years, to recapture the years that had been taken from the land (2 Chronicles 36:20-21). This judgment indicates how seriously God viewed the sabbatical year.
3. **Gleanings (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22).** Farmers, the primary employers in Israelite society, were to leave the corners of their fields unharvested and not completely strip their olive trees and grape vines, so that the poor could harvest (or glean) them. Today, food banks remainder the leftovers from grocery stores and institutional kitchens. But there is no widespread practice among businesses to leave anything on the table, least of all for the poor.
4. **The year of jubilee (Leviticus 25:10-17).** Every 50 years, ownership of lands reverted to their original owners, regardless of when the property was obtained, what had been earned from it, or how it had been developed. The lands in Israel had been apportioned by Joshua to the various tribes, clans, and families, so that each family had a means of providing for itself as well as adding to the economy. Lands were lost when they became payment for debt. The year of jubilee ensured that no family would suffer permanent loss, which would disenfranchise it from Hebrew society. Interestingly, there is no evidence in Scripture that the jubilee was ever practiced. Nor is there any counterpart to jubilee in the United States' economy today, although bankruptcy laws do provide some relief from insurmountable debt.

In addition to the explicit teaching of these passages, a number of general principles pertaining to a "public theology" can be seen:

(5) **God is interested in the long-term welfare of His creation.** The Old Testament commands sometimes seemed to disadvantage landowners, but they made a great deal of sense economically in the long run. For example, while a donkey or oxen might be made to work for 14, 21, or even 28 days without a rest, sooner or later the lack of rest would take its toll. Likewise, while land might be able to produce for 14 or 21 years

without lying fallow, sooner or later the nutrients would be depleted. God appears to have set up the creation in natural cycles designed to replenish and renew the earth rather than wear it out. That is the point of Ecclesiastes 1:3- 11: The world operates in continuous cycles (affected, of course, by the curse). So if God cares about sustaining the earth and its resources, shouldn't we?

(6) **God ultimately owns all of the resources.** The Old Testament reminded landowners that they were merely stewards of land that belonged to God. For example: "The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants" (Leviticus 25:23). Even the strength to work the land was given by God: "But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). It is perhaps easier to imagine that God owns the resources when you are a farmer working on land, and so much lies outside of your control. Today, knowledge workers find it much harder to acknowledge that God owns everything, including the main resource most of us now work with—information.

(7) **God especially cares for the powerless.** God is not opposed to wealth, as the Deuteronomy passage above makes plain: He empowers people and societies to gain wealth. But He is definitely opposed to the abuse of power that the wealthy so easily fall into. Even a casual reading of the Bible demonstrates a significant solidarity that God has with the poor, the powerless, and the disadvantaged. The sabbatical year and the year of jubilee clearly were intended to assist the poor in meeting their needs. "Do not take advantage of each other," the Lord warned, "but fear your God" (Leviticus 15:17). In other words, how we treat the poor—both individually and communally—is tied directly to whether or not we fear God (see 1 John 4:16-18 and James 5:1-6).

(8) **God still provides even when His rules don't "make sense."** Some of the Bible's instructions and principles make little sense, economically speaking. They seem too idealistic and too naive about the "realities" of the world. It obviously occurred to Israelite farmers that they wouldn't have anything to eat in the seventh year if they practiced a sabbatical year. But notice God's promise to them: "You may ask, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?' I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years" (Leviticus 25:20). That's not a bad return on investment—

three years' profit for working one year and taking a second year off. But God was committed to supplying their needs for all three of the years that would be affected by the sabbatical year. Where might Christians today see God show His abundance like that, if we trusted Him by practicing public faith that sometimes makes no sense—for example, in regard to extending credit, or in regard to rezoning land in developing communities, or in regard to working with ex-convicts trying to make a new start in society?

The Challenge of Applying Biblical Teaching Today

For people who live and work in free-market, capitalist systems, reading Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy can feel strange and terribly restrictive. We can imagine the Israelites living under such a system, but few of us would want to live by those laws ourselves. Yet we have to remember that those laws were the way God established the economy and rules of commerce for His people. They lived in a theocracy, and God was their King. So even if the letter of those laws cuts against our free-market mind-set, we can at least look at the underlying spirit of the laws and consider how they promoted the "core values" of God's economy—justice, kindness (or loyalty), and humility in walking with God (Micah 6:8; see also Matthew 22:37-40).

Still, how can we apply the Bible's "public theology" to our situation today? We certainly don't live in a theocracy established by God. And it would be foolish to try to force theocratic laws onto a secularly governed system. However, if we study those laws carefully, we will find clues to how God views work and the role of enterprises in stewarding community resources.

As we make that inquiry, we have to remember that the Old Testament laws were addressed to an agricultural economy (although be aware that Israel had numerous cities and a rich urban life as a result). Today, by contrast, a very small percentage of Americans work in farming. And even they, along with the rest of us, contend with a global economy that is extremely complex and layered with industries in manufacturing, distribution, financial services, information

management, technology, and more.

Clearly, what people do for work has changed dramatically in the past 3,000 years. What hasn't changed, however, is the nature of human beings. Nor has our calling changed: Humans are still appointed to be the stewards of God's creation. So just as the Israelites had to work out the practical implications of stewardship for their public life, so we today—especially those of us who belong to Christ—have to work out the practical implications of stewardship for our public life.

As we do so, consider some parallels for "translating" those ancient precepts into modern-day principles:

- **Rest in cycles of seven.** Oxen needed a weekly rest, but it would actually do harm to a cement kiln or steel mill to shut it down once a week and allow it to "cool." The same could be said of many assembly-line machines. They are not living creatures and don't need weekly rest. But human beings who work on machines do need a rest. And they can be organized to work in shifts, so that each worker gets a weekly rest without an entire business having to shut down. What would the principle of rest mean for your enterprise?
- **Corners of the field.** As a result of several economic downturns in the past 25 years, companies have become extremely efficient at ferreting out underperforming and nonperforming areas of their business. If possible, they want to leave nothing on the table for a competitor to take advantage of, let alone the poor. In fact, the "corners of the field" in many businesses have become important sources of additional profit—for example, manufacturing seconds that can be sold at a discount, bad loans that can be sold to specialized companies at a discount, "points" that reward banks and credit unions for making "riskier" loans to lower-income families. Almost every enterprise has some place where they have a choice to either extract the last percentage of profit potential from a lingering activity, *or* they can leave that economic benefit for the less powerful, as a gift of social good.
- **Jubilee.** As noted, the purpose of the jubilee was to ensure that no family lost its place permanently in the Promised Land. In an agricultural economy, value exists in the land itself, not in the capital improvements

on the land. A family that had land had a permanent source of income that passed from generation to generation. Land was the primary raw material for success. The Jubilee gave each generation a fresh start. What is the equivalent of family land today? For some it is education—the formal or informal know-how of an occupation. For others it is financing or access to a network for business opportunity. Jubilee today doesn't have to come in 50-year increments. It can be delivered any time by anyone who provides education and opportunities to those who lack the raw materials of successful economic sustainability.

- **Systemwide laws.** The Old Testament laws were mandated across an entire economic system. The idea was that every Israelite family would operate its farm or business according to the same constraints: one day off each week, one year off every seven, return of lands every 50 years, and so forth. Today, we have laws and regulations to govern industries and economies. But with very few exceptions, those laws were by no means enacted to help enterprises work as God's stewards. So what happens if a business today decides to operate with the added constraints of applying biblical values? Certainly its competitors will not be doing that. Is it the right thing to do nonetheless?
- **Private ownership.** While God ultimately owned all of the land, the lands of ancient Israel were in the hands of private individuals and families. Today, many corporations are publicly traded and have thousands of shareholders all over the world. Many of those investors make decisions based solely on return on investment; they have little concern (and want little) with the actual product or social impact of the companies they invest in. All of this creates a significant challenge to the CEO who wants to make a decision that would diminish profit in order to pursue social good. Even though business laws do not actually require directors and officers to *maximize* profits (primary fiduciary responsibility is not the same as profit maximization), many investors assume that to be the case nonetheless, and they make investment decisions based on a company's commitment to maximizing short-term profits. If a company mentions goals about social responsibility in its financial prospectus (as AES did), that can cause adverse marketing and financial reactions. And if a company adds social programs to its corporate agenda after capital has been raised, that can expose management to potential lawsuits by investors. So what sort of leadership and courage would it take for senior

management to persuade investors (along with other stakeholders) that a particular activity, policy, or course of action is the socially responsible thing to do, even if it means short-term losses on the balance sheet?

Your Turn

There have never been easy answers for how God's people should live and work in a fallen world. Every generation of believers has faced new challenges that demand a re-examination of Scripture, fresh thinking, wise judgment, and a renewed commitment to trust God and then *act*. Such is the challenge for Christ-followers in the workplace today. God has given us no simple prescriptions for how we should create social good, whether we work in a for-profit business, a government agency, a church, a nonprofit, or at home.

However, while God has given us no formulas, He has revealed to us in Scripture what He values and what He will hold us accountable for. By the light of that revelation, it is now our responsibility to pursue what God values in the public sector, through the purposes and activities of the organizations where we work. How can we do that?

First, we should make sure we are clear on some basic principles for the way God views our work in the public sector, namely:

1. God is interested in the long-term welfare of His creation.
2. God ultimately owns all of the resource.
3. God especially cares for the powerless.
4. God still provides even when His rules don't "make sense."

> IT IS NOW OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO PURSUE WHAT GOD VALUES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

Second, study real-life examples of modern-day companies that have tried to pursue their work with a biblical perspective. There are many examples to consider, and they all do it a bit differently. AES serves as one model. Here are several others:

- **S. Truett Cathy and Chick-fil-A.** From the beginning, Truett Cathy made a statement by enforcing a company policy that closed all of his restaurants on Sundays. “Our decision to close on Sunday was our way of honoring God and directing our attention to things more important than our business,” Cathy says. “If it took seven days to make a living with a restaurant, then we needed to be in some other line of work.” That’s a commitment to a core value—a willingness to be punished in the marketplace, or even leave the marketplace, rather than violate a fundamental conviction.

  As Cathy told NBC News, “I see no conflict between biblical principles and good business practice. Corporate America needs faith in something more than the bottom line” (interview with *NBC Nightly News*, July 14, 2002).

- **Norm Miller and Interstate Batteries.** Interstate Batteries is the No. 1 supplier of replacement batteries in the United States. Norm is now chairman of the company and not as involved in day-to-day operations. But when he was CEO, he determined that Interstate would be a witness for Christ in the way it conducted its business. To that end, the company gave away millions of dollars a year to hundreds of Christian ministries and nonprofit organizations doing Christian work. Evangelistic projects were particularly favored. For years, Norm supplied his dealers (numbering in the hundreds of thousands) with a free booklet describing his personal journey of faith.

  The company also made a commitment to support the marriages and families of its salesmen, who were on the road 21 weeks of the year, by investing in a program of videotapes and study guides that addressed the challenges that travel poses for a family.

  Norm writes, “Interstate Batteries, a privately held corporation, has given me the privilege of developing ministry outreaches within a business context. Our ministry environment affords us the opportunity to present biblical truths and tools to a variety of people within and outside our company.”

- **Pura Vida Coffee Company (www.puravidacoffee.com).** Its mission statement reads, “The mission of Pura Vida is to create good by using capitalism to empower producers, motivate consumers, inspire business

leaders, and ultimately serve the poor. We believe in a different approach to business. One driven by good rather than greed. One that sees capitalism as an agent for compassion and faith as an engine for action. Pura Vida is 100 percent charitably owned, and all of our resources go to help at-risk children and families in coffee-growing countries build more hopeful futures. The work of Pura Vida is rooted in personal faith and a desire to empower the poor in coffee-growing regions of the world."

- **ServiceMaster Corporation.** ServiceMaster provides home servicing, maintenance, and repair to 10.5 million homes and businesses in the United States each year through its service brands such as TruGreen, ChemLawn, Terminix, Merry Maids, Rescue Rooter, and others. ServiceMaster was formed in 1947 by Marion Wade, a former minor league baseball player. Its corporate culture grew out of Wade's strong personal faith and commitment to honor God in all that he did.

  According to the company history, Wade viewed each individual employee and customer as being made in God's image, and therefore worthy of dignity and respect. This perspective led to the framing of the company's core objectives: "To honor God in all we do; to help people develop; to pursue excellence; and to grow profitably."

- **Mike Joseph and Dacor.** Dacor manufactures and distributes professional kitchen appliances for custom homes throughout the United States. When Mike took over Dacor from his father, he determined to run the company according to a handful of core Christian values. But he felt strongly that the only way those values would actually be practiced was if every employee was reminded of them daily.

  To that end, he had wallet-size cards printed for every worker, customer, and vendor to have, listing the core values. He also had a large sign with the same information placed prominently on the wall of the company's manufacturing shop, so that workers could hold their supervisors accountable to the values. Similar signs were posted throughout the company's headquarters.

Other examples can be found in books such as:

- *Cause for Success: 10 Companies That Put Profits Second and Came in First*, by Christine Arena, 2004.
- *On Kingdom Business: Transforming Mission Through Entrepreneurial*

Strategies, by Tetsunao Yamamori and Kenneth A. Eldred, 2003.

- *Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Missions,* by Steven Rundle and Tom Steffen, 2003.
- *Sweet Success: 12 Proven Habits of Winning Leaders,* by Bill Byrd, 2004.
- *Believers in Business,* Laura Nash, 1994.

Aword of caution: Just because an entity styles itself as a "Christian business" does not make it better, more successful, or more ethical than its competitors. Indeed, some would argue that it is unwise to portray one's company as a "Christian business," even if the intent is to operate according to biblical principles. The thinking is that using the word "Christian" implies a particular market niche. Others more cynically point to a few examples of businesses that use the guise of "Christian business" as a cover to hide shoddy work and unethical business practices. And that does raise a problem: Even if a company has the best of intentions and the purest of motives, when it emphasizes its "Christian" underpinnings and then fails in some egregious way, does that not reflect on the reputation of Christ? The point is that Christians should be aware of the expectations they are creating by describing their entity as "Christian." As Jesus warned, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21). And again, He asks, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Third, evaluate your role in your own organization, and consider how you can be an agent of transformation—not just a private Christian, but a public Christian who stewards your responsibilities in ways that are consistent with your gifts and the opportunities God has provided you.

Whatever else we can say, Scripture makes it quite clear that God's intention for work is something more than maximizing profit. God places a corporate responsibility on businesses and other workplace entities for at least some aspects of the social good of the community. Each individual Christian has a role to play in helping his or her organization learn and fulfill that responsibility, even if doing so proves risky and unpopular, and is often misunderstood.

Reaction

Reaction questions

- Was there anything in the Old Testament passages that surprised you?
- Do you think these largely agricultural-based biblical passages apply directly to the topic of corporate responsibility today? Are companies with publicly traded stock (versus privately owned corporations) exempt from these principles? Why or why not?
- Looking over the five views of corporate involvement in social and charitable activity listed above, what is your personal view of the role of business in addressing social needs?
- What is your gut reaction to the call to take on "public" responsibility beyond the responsibility for your personal faith and character?

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Epilogue

Bakke takes pleasure in affirming success stories about the AES way of doing business. The epilogue celebrates AES people who stayed with the company out of love for its shared values and freedom to make decisions.

He writes about Aparecido "Cas" Castellace, an operator at a new AES plant in Brazil, who refused to take a generous severance package. With AES, he said, "I have never loved working as much as I do today. I am good at what I do. I have significant responsibilities, and I have the freedom to make decisions. My health is good, and this is what I want to do. I have decided to stay."

In New York State, two AES plant operators attended an Independent System Operator conference on statewide electricity scheduling. At first, they felt intimidated by people from Enron and other companies who were well versed in electricity trading and dispatch. But it soon became clear that they were the only two people at the conference who knew anything about actually running power plants. By the end of the event, they were at the center of almost every discussion. They returned to work confident in their knowledge about effectively operating the facility and marketing electricity.

At another AES facility, the *Wall Street Journal* covered plant operator Jeff Hatch and maintenance technician Joe Oddo negotiating by phone the best 30-

day rate for $10 million worth of Treasury bills. Both were members of an AES team managing a $33 million plant investment fund. Giving investment responsibility to coal handlers, Bakke said, resulted in their matching, and once bettering, the returns of corporate counterparts. The participants enjoyed this and learned so much about the total aspect of the business that they are changed people.

If academic research and anecdotal evidence about the AES-style management approach are so positive and convincing, why aren't more companies doing it? Bakke sees these obstacles:

- Board members and senior executives still control information, make decisions, marginalize lower-level employees, and certify all government-required documents.
- Managers and bosses distrust subordinates and keep the decision making for themselves.
- Leaders' motives center on financial success, or objectives unrelated to creating a fun workplace, so the organization's purpose is shallow or selfish, and employees see no worthwhile higher purpose in what they do.
- Management and labor are adversaries, and employees are treated like children.
- Mistakes in a decentralized structure often are attributed to the system rather than to human error or outside forces, prompting management's return to a top-down style.

Bakke suggests that we quit searching for the secret to always winning, to profits and stock prices that rise quarter over quarter. Let's accept that losing is part of life and that we can make mistakes and fall on our faces. Out of these experiences come new learning, growth, hope, and life. He advocates for an unselfish and benevolent concern that allows people to give up power and control, to treat each person with respect and dignity, to serve others, and to inspire people to work with greater purpose. To Bakke, this is love—perfectly consistent with even the most aggressive economic goals, and the final and crucial ingredient in a joy-filled workplace.

Group Discussion Questions

(1) How do you think the Old Testament passages about gleaning and the year of jubilee might apply specifically to your enterprise today?
(2) Looking over the five views of corporate involvement in social and charitable activity listed above, which one(s) did you most agree with and why? Which one(s) did you most disagree with and why?
(3) How do you see your primary call in your organization? To help change the culture, core business, or core product of your organization, so as to make it more socially responsible? To be more involved in the social and charitable activities of your company? Both? How could you specifically do more of that?
(4) Have you experienced the feeling Raymond Bakke described, that your work is "in the economy" section of God's will?
(5) How are your work and your community service connected?

Next Session—Truth and Beauty: Stewarding Values

Bible readings: Exodus 21:1-11; Leviticus 25:1-7, 8-17;
Deuteronomy 15:1-18; Psalms 8:3-8; Psalms 15; Psalms 24:1-6;
Psalms 104; Psalms 136:1-9; Micah 6:6-8;
Matthew 22:37-39; Romans 13:8-14

SESSION 8

Truth and Beauty: Stewarding Values

Bible Readings for This Session
Exodus 21:1-11
Leviticus 25:1-7, 8-17
Deuteronomy 15:1-18
Psalms 8:3-8
Psalms 15
Psalms 24:1-6
Psalms 104
Psalms 136:1-9
Micah 6:6-8
Matthew 22:37-39
Romans 13:8-14

DVD Session Eight: The Innotec Story
Step inside the walls of the Innotec Group, a manufacturer from Zeeland, Mich., that designs, engineers, and builds industrial parts. It is the story of an organization whose people understand God's purpose for their lives. This understanding creates a culture of trust where people are given decision-making power, ultimately allowing them to find joy in their work.

Introduction

Why is it that the same person's obituary and résumé are so different?

There's an old joke about a retired business executive who had a beach house in the Caribbean. While on vacation there he befriended a local fisherman. The fisherman's daily routine was to catch a few fish in the morning, sell them by lunchtime, then spend the rest of the day relaxing at his small beach hut with family and friends.

The businessman was appalled by the fisherman's lack of ambition. How could he ever get anywhere in life by working half a day and then taking the other half off? So the businessman drew up a plan. He showed the fisherman how fishing longer each day would generate more revenue, so as to buy more boats. Then he could hire employees to run those boats 24 hours a day. That would enable him to save enough money to purchase his own cannery. That way he could process fish all day and all night. If he then created a multinational marketing campaign and distribution network, he could ensure that his fish would be in constant demand all over the world. In short, if the fisherman would only follow the businessman's advice, he would be able to retire in 40 years as a wealthy man.

The fisherman listened carefully to this grand vision. It certainly sounded far-reaching. But after pondering it a few moments, he quietly asked, "So when I retire, what would I do?"

The executive was taken aback by the question, as the answer seemed obvious. "Why, you could do what I did—buy a small beach house, fish a little each morning, then have the rest of the day free to relax with your family and friends."

Doing What You Value

Even a casual look at the workplace reveals an interesting fact: Many of the most successful business leaders pursue personal expression of values that are not allowed or rewarded in their business. For example:

- A world-renowned consultant on management efficiency gets paid large

sums by companies to pinpoint the factors impeding their success. But for 40 years the consultant has devoted his own time, money, and personal energy to collecting Japanese art.

- The CEO of a large automotive company that competes fiercely to win market share in selling the latest, fanciest SUVs drives to work each day in a 50-year-old car.
- A Chinese political leader is overwhelmed by a schedule crammed with appointments, meetings, phone calls, official dinners, reports to read, decisions to be made, tasks to delegate, and the countless other duties of keeping his country running. But for the past 30 years, he has spent three hours every Friday afternoon practicing the art of writing ancient Chinese characters.
- A high-tech executive leads a venture on the cutting edge of innovative technology. But he wears only antique, pre-quartz watches.
- A group of fast-rising young executives and their spouses goes on an annual retreat at an expensive resort. The focus is not on business skills but on helping the couples add "quality" to their lives by creating margin for reading great books together, learning a new language, or taking up a mutually satisfying sport.

Examples like these illustrate what people instinctively know—that the relentless pursuit of money, power, and position by itself will leave them empty and longing for something more. There is something else they desire, besides the trappings of success. That's the call of *values*—something that matters, something that makes a difference in one's life, something that one feels a conviction about and will fight to preserve.

> THAT'S THE CALL OF VALUES—SOMETHING THAT MATTERS, SOMETHING THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN ONE'S LIFE, SOMETHING THAT ONE FEELS A CONVICTION ABOUT AND WILL FIGHT TO PRESERVE.

Unfortunately, many who feel the need for a set of bedrock values don't have a way to identify them. So they succumb to the siren song of "work hard, make a lot of money, that's what it's all about." And that fits perfectly with the core value that drives many businesses today—maximizing profit. Indeed, many enterprises would view the competing values and concerns of its workers as "distractions" from the efficient pursuit of a better return on investment. That's why:

- Some companies don't treat values as a core, strategic concern. "Values" are basically seen as necessary window dressing to create good public relations. Thus, the matter of "values" gets delegated to the human-resources department, which plans a "values retreat" so that top management can tell the board and shareholders, "See, we care about values here." (Note that activities like values retreats will be tolerated so long as they can show financial benefit, like improved retention rates for employees, so as to justify their expense. As always, the eyes of the decision makers focus on the *real* core value—the bottom line.)
- Some workers make peace with the idea that work is not a place to indulge what they personally value. When they go to work, they leave their personal interests at home and devote themselves to the employer so as to make enough money to pursue whatever they value *outside* of work, or sometimes not even until retirement.
- Some workers try to create little oases of personal ownership in their work that in some small way express their personal values. For example, they decorate their cubicle to fit their personality. They find out how to take advantage of certain perks their employer offers, such as travel or tickets to sporting events. They dress a bit differently, displaying the quirks that allow their personal identity to stand out.
- A handful of workers become intentional about defining their personal values clearly. Armed with those convictions, they make decisions at work that keep them consistent with what they really care about. For example, they may choose *not* to follow certain accepted business practices that may be legal but to them are unethical or immoral. They may pass up a transfer or promotion if it runs counter to their values (e.g., the value of family). They may speak up in a meeting when the organization is operating in a way that conflicts with what it has said it values.

BOTH ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS AND PERSONAL SUCCESS ARE AS MUCH ABOUT CONSISTENT VALUES AS THEY ARE ABOUT CONSISTENT PROFITS.

Successful Companies

Of course, not all organizations run roughshod over the values and concerns of their people. Nor do all organizations operate with a myopic focus on the bottom line. Some recognize that both organizational success and personal success are as much about consistent values as they are about consistent profits.

Jim Collins, who studied enduring companies in his bestselling book *Built to Last*, cites Thomas Watson, the former CEO of IBM, on the key role that values (or "beliefs," as Watson called them) play in organizational success:

> I believe the real difference between success and failure in a corporation can very often be traced to the question of how well the organization brings out the great energies and talents of its people. What does it do to help these people find common cause with each other? . . . And how can it sustain this common cause and sense of direction through the many changes which take place from one generation to another? . . . [I think the answer lies] in the power of what we call *beliefs* [or values] and the appeal these beliefs have for its people. . . . I firmly believe that any organization, in order to survive and achieve success, must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all of its policies and actions. Next, I believe that the most important single factor in corporate success is faithful adherence to those beliefs. . . . Beliefs must always come before policies, practices, and goals. The latter must always be altered if they are seen to violate fundamental beliefs.
>
> *Thomas Watson, A Business and Its Beliefs, pp. 5-6, 72-73*

As we saw in Session 4, organizations that are intentional about developing a strong, healthy corporate culture have:

- **Clearly stated values** that have emerged from within the organization and

are owned by workers at every level. The values are not haphazard or disconnected from the organization's mission, nor are they handed down from the top. They are like a flag that everyone in the venture salutes, because everyone believes in them.

- **Operating principles** that translate the values into policies and procedures that move the organization toward living out its values.
- **Evaluation and correction**: processes to assess people, policies, strategies, and programs by how well they contribute to the culture, along with corrective action. Behavior that contributes to the values is rewarded; behavior that does not is punished.

A SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATION IS ONE THAT BOTH LIVES OUT CERTAIN CAREFULLY SELECTED VALUES AND SUSTAINS ITSELF WITH PROFITS.

By this measure, a successful organization is one that *both* lives out certain carefully selected values *and* sustains itself with profits.

Is it true that a for-profit company doesn't *have* to pay attention to its values? It can stay in business as long as it meets its profit goals, even if it fails to honor any values. But what does that accomplish? How is that success? As Jesus said, "What will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). If that warning applies to an individual, how much more to an entire enterprise (which is just a collection of individuals) that gains materially but starves people's souls by offering them nothing to live for or stand for? Who wants to work in an enterprise like that?

On the other hand, nonprofits sometimes can be so focused on values that they neglect results. They can often continue to exist as long as they convince enough donors that they are doing something about the values that the donors support. Never mind that they may be run inefficiently and may be doing very little. But again, what does that accomplish? How is that success? It's just the nonprofit version of "gaining the world" but of losing souls by offering nothing of substance that makes a real difference in the world. Who wants to work in a venture like that?

VALUES ARE LIKE THE AIR WE BREATHE—VITAL TO OUR

FUNCTIONING BUT LARGELY UNNOTICED AND OFTEN UNDEFINED.

Values Come From Our Understanding of Truth and Beauty

Values are like the air we breathe—vital to our functioning but largely unnoticed and often undefined. Values are the "rules" of our work, the moral and ethical commitments an organization makes and by which it "plays the game" of business, school or government.

Each stakeholder in an organization brings his or her own set of values to the enterprise. For example, customers define their values in terms of their needs and wants, and how they demonstrate those needs and wants factors into how a business sells them products. Employees bring many values, including a value on employment and providing for their own needs and their families' needs. Shareholders bring a value on getting a good return on their investment. The larger community may bring a value on stability in its job market and tax base. Vendors may bring a value on securing a reliable customer or creating new marketing opportunities. These and countless other stakeholders bring a mix of values that pull and tug at the organization, making the job of sorting out what the venture really stands for a challenging one, to say the least.

To a large extent, governments codify the formal rules by which an economy is supposed to operate, by enacting laws and regulations that govern commerce. That is in accordance with a God-ordained role for government (see Romans 13:1-7). But there is much fine-tuning and customizing to be done by the organization itself in sorting out what it believes and what it stands for.

If those values are not sorted out and clearly stated, the organization will become a seething caldron of competing and ill-defined values. In other words, it can expect on-going conflict with and among its stakeholders. Ironically, that chaos is likely to result in a shallow focus on the bottom line—supposedly the only "shared value" among most of the stakeholders. The organization ends up as a

sustainable, one-dimensional venture, but not a genuinely successful one.

Successful organizations go beyond just passively arbitrating competing values. They intentionally define what they think is true and beautiful, even if it goes beyond governmental requirements or seems to contradict the "common wisdom" of their industry.

An organization's values reflect what it believes and what it really cares about. As Jim Collins points out in *Built to Last*, a value is a conviction and a way of doing business to which a company holds so strongly that it is willing to be punished in the marketplace if necessary in order to honor that conviction. We saw an example of that in the last session with S. Truett Cathy and Chick-fil-A, and the company's long-standing policy of not doing business on Sundays. Chick-fil-A is the second-largest chain of chicken restaurants in the world, so it is hard to say that Cathy's conviction has "punished" his company. Nonetheless, he loses one-seventh of the business he could be doing. But he doesn't care. Keeping the Sabbath is a *value* to him, a way of doing business.

> THE IDEA OF LOVING-KINDNESS MEANS THAT GOD HAS PERMANENTLY COMMITTED HIMSELF TO THE WELFARE OF HUMAN BEINGS.

The Values of the Garden (Psalms 24:1-6, Psalms 104, Psalms 136:1-9)

What were some of the values by which the economy of Eden operated? Admittedly, we don't know much about the world before the Fall. But here and there in Scripture we catch glimpses of what mattered to God, and presumably what mattered to Adam and Eve before they disobeyed God. Consider three core values for which we have ample biblical evidence.

The first is *a devotion to people and their good*. Read Psalms 136:1-9. The psalm repeats a chorus over and over: "For [God's] loving-kindness is

everlasting." The word "loving-kindness" is the Hebrew word *chesed*. There is no direct English translation for *chesed*. Various translations render it as "mercy," "kindness," "goodness," "faithfulness," "devotion," "steadfast love," "covenantlove." The New American Standard translates it as "loving-kindness." The idea of loving-kindness means that God has permanently committed Himself to the welfare of human beings. It's a pledge He can never go back on. As Psalm 136 says, He is devoted to following through on that pledge always and forever. His loving-kindness is *everlasting*.

The psalm gives several pre-Fall examples of how God has expressed His loving-kindness even in the way He has created the universe: He "made the heavens with skill," "spread out the earth above the waters," "made the great lights," etc. In fact, comparing Psalm 136 with Genesis 1 shows that God's commitment to the good of people pre-dates the appearance of people on the earth. God has *always* been for us, even before He created us. It's a core value by which the Garden operated—that people matter to God and that He is committed, devoted, *pledged* to their good.

> GOD STILL CARES ABOUT THE SAME THINGS AFTER THE FALL THAT HE CARED ABOUT BEFORE THE FALL: PEOPLE, THE CREATION, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.

A second value is *a concern for the earth and its creatures.* Read Psalm 104. It describes an intimate relationship between the Creator and the creation. Every natural phenomenon and every living thing is referenced back to God. He is portrayed as a *causal* God, the One who sustains the world. And His stewardship is positive and beneficial. He feeds the animals, He causes plants to grow, He sets the stars and planets in motion, and He breathes life into human beings. He is the God who not only made the world as "very good" (Genesis 1:31) but actively keeps it "very good." Stewarding the earth and its creatures is a core value to Him.

Yet stewardship is productivity before preservation. The earth is to be utilized to grow things and create things for mankind. God expects us to change the raw materials into something more useful, but to do so in a way that does not destroy access to those resources for future generations. The resources are God's, and

God gave them to us for our needs—even knowing that we would make mistakes with those resources. The priority of stewardship is productivity accomplished in a way that conserves the earth for the future.

A third value, which follows from the previous two, is *a commitment to truth and integrity*. If God is devoted to the good of people, and if He creates a fundamentally good world that He stewards in order to keep it good, then it makes sense that God places a high value on behavior that preserves and promotes goodness. Psalm 24 teaches that. First, it cites God as the Creator. Then it describes the values by which He expects His world to function (the "hill of the Lord" refers to a place in Jerusalem that eventually became the temple mount; by extension, it means the presence of the Lord).

What God Values After the Fall (Exodus 21:1-11; Leviticus 25:1-7, 8-17; Deuteronomy 15:1-18; Psalms 8:3-8; Psalms 15; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 22:37-39)

The Fall changed humanity's relationship with God, but it didn't change God. It didn't change His intrinsic goodness. And therefore it didn't change His core values. God still cares about the same things after the Fall that He cared about before the Fall: people, the creation, and righteousness.

On this side of the Fall, and especially in our culture, most of the world lives in a sacred-secular dichotomy. That is, certain parts of life are seen as "sacred" (God, church, prayer, the Ten Commandments), and everything else is considered "secular." For most people, work—especially work in the business world—fits into that "secular" category. It's something they assume God doesn't care about, and certainly a realm that oughtn't be concerned with God.

As a result of that compartmentalization, countless people assume that one of God's main concerns is our religious devotion. But read Micah 6:6-8. It indicates that God doesn't see dutiful church attendance or regular tithing as the ultimate goal. God most values doing right by people through justice and kindness marked by an attitude of humility toward God. It's not that church attendance

and worship services are unimportant; both are vitally important. But true worship, according to this passage, is an active, intentional promotion of the things that matter to God. And one thing that still matters to God is people and how we treat them in our economic and social dealings with them.

Scripture gives us several practical illustrations of what it means to “do justice” and “love kindness.” For example, Exodus 21:1-11 spells out the laws for buying and selling slaves in ancient Israel. Slavery is abhorrent to us today given the brutal way it was practiced in recent centuries, but in Israel’s day, slavery was a socially accepted practice for settling debts. It’s interesting that God did not do away with slavery but instead gave His people laws for ensuring that slaves would be treated fairly and kindly. For example, the families of slaves were to be kept intact. The enslavement was never to be permanent, except by the will of the slave. And female slaves were to be provided for (there was no welfare system as we know it in Israel).

Another example of justice and kindness in regard to people is found in Deuteronomy 15:1-18, which deals with the poor and their debts. Notice the spirit of generosity that was to characterize the Israelites’ treatment of the powerless.

> GOD MOST VALUES DOING RIGHT BY PEOPLE THROUGH JUSTICE AND KINDNESS MARKED BY AN ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY TOWARD GOD.

A third example of justice exercised toward people on a grand scale was the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-12), which we looked at in Session 7. The idea behind the jubilee was to allow Israelite families to hold on to the portions of the land allotted to them in the time of Joshua, according to God’s designation. Land wasa family’s economic lifeblood and the means of God’s provision. The jubilee was intended to prevent families from losing their land permanently, which would doom them to poverty.

> GOD VALUES INTEGRITY IN OUR DEALINGS WITH PEOPLE, JUST AS MUCH NOW AS BEFORE THE FALL.

What about God’s concern for the earth and its creatures? Psalms 8:3-8 clearly

indicates that human beings have been delegated authority in this regard. Obviously, that authority is based on the core value of stewardship over the creation, as we have seen throughout this study.

Again, an illustration of that stewardship can be found in the Israelites' experience. In Leviticus 25:1-7, just prior to the discussion of the jubilee, God designated the sabbatical year, in which the land was to lie fallow. In part, the sabbatical year was to be a practical demonstration of trust on the part of the people. They were to rely on God to provide for their needs for the seventh year. But the sabbatical also allowed the land to recuperate and replenish.

Finally, God values integrity in our dealings with people, just as much now as before the Fall. Psalm 15 is one passage that spells out some of the specifics associated with that value. Note the practical, transactional nature of the precepts given.

All of these Old Testament passages can be summed up in Jesus's statement of the two great commandments—to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:37-39). This is a remarkable teaching, because it links directly back to God's loving-kindness, which Psalm 136 says is everlasting. Not even sin, rebellion, or open defiance of God can change His core value of love for people.

Technology Companies as Ministry

Psalm 104 describes God's careful management of His creation, but Psalm 8 explains that God has ordained human beings to be His agents of managing the earth. That's a challenge, because we obviously don't have the infinite faculties that God has. He is omniscient (knows all things), while we have limited knowledge and understanding. He is eternal, while we are fixed in time. He is omnipresent (present everywhere), while we are limited to three-dimensional space. He is omnipotent (all-powerful), while we have

limited strength.

God clearly foresaw these limitations and to that end endowed humans with creativity, by which we have devised the means of overcoming those limitations and extending our abilities. The wheel, the hammer, the ladder, the lever, the screw, the kiln, the automobile, the suspension bridge, the airplane, the integrated circuit, the Internet —all of these *technologies*, devised by humans, have enabled us to know more, do more, and transcend time and distance. Not infinitely, but substantially.

These increased powers can and should be used to steward the earth more and more as God intended. Of course, they can also be used for less noble purposes—to serve our own comfort and convenience, to harm people, to destroy the world. What determines whether technology is used as a help or a hindrance to our God-given purpose for being here has nothing to do with the effectiveness of the technology, but everything to do with the *values* of the people and organizations that use it.

Questions

- How does our technologically oriented society affect our appreciation of Psalms 8 and 104 and their teaching?
- Do you think technology helps or hinders us from stewarding the creation according to God's values?

EVEN THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S CREATION DOES NOT ALWAYSHAVE TO DO WITH THE AESTHETICS INVOLVED, BUT WITH THE CONSISTENCY AND TRUTHFULNESS OF WHAT IS CREATED.

Beauty Points to Truth

Skim through Exodus 25, 26, and 28. What stands out is the amount of aesthetic detail that God prescribes for the tabernacle, which will be used to worship Him. Likewise, look at Revelation 21. Again, the amount of detail describing the aesthetics of the new city that God is preparing is astounding.

Whether in the service of building a tabernacle or building a new city, the visual art employed reveals a great deal about God's character. Scripture includes these artistic details not because God prefers a certain style or favors certain colors, but rather to show us that God is beautiful in His character and His form. Without the truth of God's character, the gold and acacia wood and precious stones and the other finery would certainly be shiny but nonetheless shallow in their beauty.

> BEAUTY IN A PERSON'S LIFE AND IN THE ORGANIZATION WHERE HE OR SHE WORKS COMES FROM CONSISTENCY IN WHAT IS TRUE AND WHAT IS REPRESENTED.

This connection between truth and beauty is seen throughout Scripture. For example, Proverbs 11:22 states (probably with intentional humor), "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." In the New Testament, 1 Peter 3:3-5 addresses the same issue, speaking of an internal beauty of character and godliness for a woman, as opposed to a "false" beauty of external adornment. Isaiah 52:7 (which is also cited in Romans 10:15) talks about the beauty of those who deliver the good news of Christ's advent and salvation. The beauty in these passages is not just in the aesthetics, but in the value of the good news.

Even the beauty of God's creation does not always have to do with the aesthetics involved, but with the consistency and truthfulness of what is created. Few would describe porcupines or warthogs or crocodiles as beautiful creatures. But in their natural setting, they actually do have a certain beauty of fit, purpose, and strength. In their natural setting, they reveal accurately what they truly are, and the consistency is beautiful.

So both from the Bible and creation, we can see that beauty is not just a

visual aesthetic. It is a consistency between what is true and what is represented.

This principle carries over into our work. Beauty in a person's life and in the organization where he or she works comes from consistency in what is true and what is represented. The values express what is true; the beauty expresses style.

Obviously, beauty can be borrowed or mimicked without being true to anything that is real. For instance, a business may invest in elaborately appointed offices, conveying the impression that the firm is utterly successful, when in reality it is doing poorly. Likewise, many cheaper automobile models mimic styles of more-expensive brands, yet they don't seem as "beautiful," because the sporty or luxurious body lines don't seem consistent with the undersized engine and the plastic interior.

What often makes a luxury brand of clothing different than a knockoff brand is not the style but the consistent selection of quality materials and workmanship. The same is true of power tools, furniture, sports equipment, and home products. Some look beautiful from a distance but not as appealing up close. What looked like solid metal turns out to be foil-painted plastic. What looked like solid wood turns out to be synthetic laminate. Beauty that is borrowed may seem aesthetically pleasing, but it lacks a deeper beauty of consistency.

What often determines the beauty of a product is more the purpose of the product and the values of the company that produced it than some objective standard of style. Even an "economy" product can have its own beauty if it is what it purports to be—a product that does the job using cheaper, more cost-effective materials and that avoids unnecessary frills that don't contribute to its utilitarian purpose.

So how does this apply to corporate values? Again, what matters is a consistency between what is true and what is represented.

Apple Computer and IBM both serve as illustrations of this principle. Apple has historically placed a value on innovation and being an industry leader with cutting-edge products. This value is well represented by the company's design of its hardware. Unusually shaped and brightly colored, the styles would seem ill-advised in the marketplace, yet when stamped with the Apple logo (and what it represents) they are recognized as aesthetically bold and stylistically beautiful.

By contrast, in the years when IBM was making personal computers, its units were simple gray or black boxes that had clean lines and few frills. Those styles could be interpreted as boring or cheap, but when stamped with the IBM logo (representing stability, reliability, and affordability) they were seen as "beautiful" by IBM's customers, reflecting the values of the IBM brand.

What Is Beauty?

Pilate asked Jesus the age-old question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38), as if truth were mysterious and unknowable. In a similar way, beauty is often perceived as mysterious and unknowable. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," the saying goes, suggesting that there can be no universal agreement on what defines beauty. And supposedly different cultures define beauty in different ways.

Yet today, what often is described as "beautiful" in fashion, faces, forms, and styles, even across cultures, has more to do with large marketing campaigns and connections to the arbiters of style and fashion than to personal perceptions and preferences.

So is beauty relative? If so, then power and marketing can force definitions of beauty on others. But what if beauty is actually connected to eternal truths and values? In that case, those in the best position to define what is beautiful would be those who can see those truths most clearly.

That raises the question: What happens to beauty when Christians become passive and/or manipulated observers of the world's economy, whose definitions of beauty are driven by values that leave God out of the equation? What if Christians reclaimed their role as the world's true connoisseurs and celebrators of beauty as God intended?

Jumbled Wire as Art

In the film about AES's work in Tbilisi, Georgia, titled *The Power Trip*, there is a striking scene of jumbled electrical wires created by hundreds of squatters illegally tapping into an electrical transformer. That image is at one and the same time a picture of danger, a beautiful display of human ingenuity, and a metaphor for the many societal problems that AES was attempting to solve in the former Soviet republic. That scene is part of the art of the film—not necessarily an aesthetically pleasing image, but beautiful nonetheless in how it truthfully represents the larger underlying struggle and hope for safe, clean, reliable electricity.

Corean Bakke, wife of Ray Bakke, writes: "In the workplace, order and cleanliness and functionality can be the embodiment of beauty. I think of my cast-iron mortar. I used it regularly in my home as a centerpiece on my dining room table. It has clean, simple lines. To me it is a thing of beauty. Functional beauty. In contrast, I think of lifeless 'decorator' prints on the walls of some hotels usually hung over the bed. I am tempted to turn their faces to the wall. They are fake art. I wonder why someone thought they were necessary."

Is Beauty an Option, a Branding Device, or a Non-Negotiable?

When beauty is mistakenly defined as purely aesthetics, it becomes an option

that can be indulged in when good times allow but done away with as a luxury when money is scarce. That's why companies experiencing positive financials will build new headquarters, upgrade the furniture and interiors, and perhaps even commission artwork to place in the executive suites. But when times are bad, everything is made as austere and utilitarian as possible.

The equation here evaluates aesthetics as an opposite of function. Various stakeholders argue for or against spending money on aesthetics based on their estimation of whether it is "needed" or not. In this way, beauty often becomes more of a source of conflict than a representation of authentic, commonly held organizational values. Similarly, aesthetics can become a way for a leader to express his or her ego, demonstrate some superiority, or manipulate buyers into seeing more in a brand than what is really there.

Thus the issue of aesthetics becomes a question of power: Who can spend the money to bathe the organization in style? Likewise, it can become a question of money: Can the extra investment in beauty be connected to increased sales?

But what happens when beauty is defined as an authentic representation of true values? In that case, beauty becomes a non-negotiable. It becomes part of the way an organization does its work. If organizational success is as much about values as it is about profit, then while the profits are represented on balance sheets, values are represented in the beauty of the organization.

Theology of Place

Dennis Bakke's older brother Ray Bakke is a theologian and a coauthor of this Bible study guide. Ray has spent four decades studying the Bible's teaching on urban issues. One of the discoveries that Ray has made is the Bible's significant emphasis on what might be called a "theology of place."

The idea is that God calls people to specific geographic locations. For example, even when the Israelites were sent into exile in Babylonia, they were called to bless the geography of that land: “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper’” (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

A theology of place means that we live fully in the location where God has placed us—even if it seems temporary, and even if it is not our favorite location. As God’s people, we are to seek for the peace and prosperity of that place. We are to contribute to its health, its values, its vitality, and its beauty.

This teaching has significant implications for every kind of organization and for every follower of Christ within an organization. It means that churches have a job to do in the community right around them. It means that Christians have responsibility for the neighborhoods and communities where they live. It means that businesses have a theology to live out in the locations where they have offices, divisions, manufacturing plants, stores, or distribution warehouses.

Many of us are not located where we dream of living. Yet God does not allow us to just “write off” our surroundings because we don’t like them or feel we are there only temporarily. Wherever we are, we are called to be agents of peace and prosperity as long as God has us there.

The Example of AES

While *Joy at Work* says a great deal about AES's corporate values of integrity, social responsibility, fun, and fairness, little is said about beauty and aesthetics. Yet beauty is a key ingredient in the company's story. The beauty of an energy company the size of AES is not in its power plants, catchy advertisements, or landmark offices. The beauty is best seen in these ways:

- the consistency of the company in following its mission and core values
- the way the company connected its values of integrity, social responsibility, fun, and fairness to biblical values of loving-kindness, truth, justice, and the stewardship of the earth and its resources
- the compassion with which the company took risks to provide safe, reliable electricity to developing countries

What's interesting is that when AES stakeholders were allowed to make their own decisions, their choices often involved adding more aesthetic beauty to their workspaces and lives.

The documentary film *The Power Trip* (made about AES's work in Tbilisi, Georgia) contains several scenes that contrast the old offices with the new offices. As the values of the company changed, the physical expression of the new values could be seen in the new offices. Likewise, a number of individuals in the film act courageously to bring reliable energy to a country struggling to emerge from a painful past. Their efforts to overcome a politically charged and somewhat corrupt system have a moral beauty that can only be called heroic.

Organizational Values Today

How does a business today translate biblical values such as loving-kindness, truth, integrity, justice, compassion, love, and stewardship of the earth into values, operating principles, and beauty in its daily work?

First, a company must have as clear a picture of what success looks like in

accomplishing its values as it does in accomplishing its “hard targets”—profit, sales quotas, market share, and the like. To do that, values must be clearly defined and connected to the mission of the organization. They must be translated into concrete operating principles and “owned” throughout the organization. Ideally, they should be values that flow from the timeless values that God has revealed in Scripture—values that are consistent with God’s purposes for the earth, and for people and their organizations to steward the resources of the earth.

A key test is whether those who work in the enterprise view it as a mission worth devoting themselves to heart and soul, or whether it’s mainly just a place to earn a living, while they pursue their values and purpose elsewhere. When an organization becomes a vital part of each worker’s life—a place to live out personal values in partnership with others—then it has become a workplace where joy can be found.

Second, beauty must be redefined as an authentic representation of the underlying truth of the organization’s values. Hard questions need to be asked in this regard, such as:

- What do the aesthetics of the organization currently say about what we value?
- If we don’t like the “look” (or beauty) of our organization, does that mean we need to do a better job of defining our underlying values? Or that our values are poorly understood? Or that our values are weak and don’t really work in the reality of the organization?
- When we make choices about spending money (or not) on issues of beauty, what drives those decisions? Are we honoring an underlying truth or covering up a lack of truth? Or are we trying to represent a truth that isn’t really present?
- Rather than spend lavishly on some outsider’s conception of beauty, hoping that somehow he or she will “get it right” for us, what is the most consistent and focused way that we as a company can represent our corporate values?
- Is beauty a distraction or a natural extension of our work? Does the pursuit of beauty for its own sake capture my heart more than the pursuit of the

core truths and values that the beauty is supposed to represent? Are all of the art forms connected to our organization naturally connected to our stated values?

Third, there must be as much effort placed in evaluating, measuring, and reporting values as there is in evaluating, measuring, and reporting profits. "Reporting" may take the form of stories, testimonials, and displays in addition to quantifiable measures. The point is that if beauty is evaluated and the findings are used to correct and redirect the organization's efforts, beauty can serve as a key indicator to help create an organization that is truly successful in both profit and values.

Redeemed Humans in a Fallen World (Romans 13:8-14)

Romans 13 underscores all that we have looked at. It says that those who follow Christ are to pursue all of their dealings in a spirit of love. That is not a sentiment but a value. Note the economic language and context of the passage. The first seven verses of Romans 13 talk about the relationship of Christians to government. Verses 8-14 broaden the discussion to the relationship of Christians to society at large. We essentially have a debt to pay to the world—a debt of love. And why not? Whereas the wage of sin is death, God has shown us pure love by granting us the free gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23; see also 8:12-17, which describes our position in Christ in economic, transactional terms that obligate our loyalties and affections to Christ).

Part of how we pay that debt is to take responsibility to build organizations that are as successful in terms of truth and beauty as they are in terms of money.

Reaction

Reaction questions

- Does the value of love, which flows out of God's loving-kindness, seem too "soft" and sentimental to have much practical effect on the rough-and-tumble world of work and business? Why or why not?

- Use the Psalm 24 and Psalm 15 passages to take a personal inventory of your ethics and moral choices. How do you fare? Is there one particular area in which you feel the conviction to make changes, or at least to take a long, hard look?
- How did you respond to the way this session defined beauty—not as a personal choice of style, but as an authentic representation of an underlying truth? How does that ring true in how you experience beauty in people, material possessions, and life experiences?
- If this Bible study is the first time you've seriously thought about the aesthetics of your organization, does that suggest that you've not defined your core values well enough? Or that you have not understood how values must be translated into concrete operating principles for them to be more than just words on paper? Or that you have mistakenly placed beauty in opposition to function?
- How does it strike you to read in Romans 13 that you *owe* the world a debt of love? How might that affect your outlook on your position, status, power, and influence?

Group Discussion Questions

(1) Talk about your own organization and/or industry, and describe some of its stated values. Also, describe some of its unstated values, as seen in the actions of your organization. Where do they reflect God's values of loving-kindness, truth, integrity, justice, compassion, love, beauty, and stewardship of the earth? Where do they contradict those values?

(2) Jim Collins says that you know what a company values by the punishment it is willing to accept in the marketplace in order to stand by its conviction. Can you give an example of a time when your organization paid a price for standing up for a core value? What was the motivation for holding on to that conviction?

(3) According to the definition of beauty given in this session, would you say that you are a person of beauty? Do you work in an organization of beauty? Why or why not?

(4) How is it that the people at Innotec found joy at work? What is required?

(5) Trust is a fundamental value at Innotec. Share an example from your

workplace in which you trusted someone to make an important decision.

Next Session—Church, Family, and State: Holistic Stewarding 1

Bible readings: Genesis 9:1-3, 14:11-24; Numbers 1:47-53;
Hebrews 7, 10:15-18; Matthew 16:13-18; 28:18-20;
Acts 3:1-10; Joel 2:28; Romans 14:5;
Philippians 1:3-6; 2:1-3; 3:10; Ephesians 5:22-6:10
Joy at Work, Postscript: Enter Into the Master's Joy (pp. 245-275)

CHAPTER 9



Church, Family, and State: Holistic Stewarding

Bible Readings for This Session
Genesis 9:1-3
Genesis 14:11-24
Numbers 1:47-53
Hebrews 7
Hebrews 10:15-18
Matthew 16:13-18; 28:18-20
Acts 3:1-10
Joel 2:28
Romans 14:5
Philippians 1:3-6; 2:1-3; 3:10
Ephesians 5:22-6:10

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Postscript: Enter Into the Master's Joy (pp. 245-275)

DVD Session Nine: The Marketplace-Friendly Church
The Marketplace-Friendly Church explores the reality behind Colossians 3:17: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." This session calls us to broaden our understanding of ministry, as God calls us into the marketplace, politics, law, economics, and so on.

Introduction

In the previous sessions, our discussion of stewardship has primarily focused on paid work, whether in a business, a church, a nonprofit organization, the government, or the military. Yet stewardship is a life theme, not just an employment theme. We are called to steward the creation in every area of life. So, how do we take the various themes discussed in this study—stewardship, work, joy, giftedness, trust, humility, power, success, failure, values, beauty, social responsibility—and integrate them holistically into a balanced, healthy life?

As a special case, how do we do this with our church? Many people struggle with how their work life integrates with their church life. At the end of this session, we will look specifically at the relationship between church and business.

Five Sectors of Stewardship

In almost all societies of the world, there have always been four sectors of work that contribute to the functioning of society: the family, religion, government, and commerce.

In the past century, a fifth sector has also come into existence, the nonprofit or nongovernmental organization (NGO). The five sectors have distinct purposes but also overlap to some extent. Some of these purposes are clearly defined in Scripture. Others have historically or culturally defined purposes:

(1) The Family

- to have children
- to meet the human need for intimate relationship that comes from being made in the image of the Triune God
- to be a community that displays the love, authority, and relationships of the Trinity
- to care for the very young and the very old, and to pass on values and faith

from generation to generation

(2) Religion (The Church)

- to provide a focal point for the worship of God
- to oversee the pure practice of the sacraments
- to be the source of teaching from God's Word
- to be a community that displays the love, authority, and relationships of the Trinity
- to intentionally make disciples
- to be a sending agency for cross-cultural mission
- to be a community that encourages dependency upon God and interdependence with one another
- to be the visible establishment of God's rule on earth
- to support the family in its role

(3) Government

- to oversee justice by creating legal systems, laws, courts, and policies; by punishing criminals; and by rewarding those who do good
- to oversee economic and social order by implementing social and economic policies
- to ensure that infrastructure is built and maintained; to ensure that effective welfare systems exist (they don't have to be owned by government—and may be better operated by private organizations)
- to create and maintain currency for trade
- to defend national borders and pursue national interests abroad
- to provide stability for commerce to thrive
- to protect the church and the family and enable them to perform their roles

(4) Commerce

- to provide goods and services that are useful to people in return for payment that sustains the ongoing provision of goods and services
- to create efficient markets for trading of goods and services
- to create support systems of finance, technology, distribution, and consulting to improve the quality, availability, safety, and cost of goods and services
- to provide various stakeholders a fair return on their investment—whether it be capital, time, expertise, participation, or other resources—so they

can have the resources to support their families and churches
- to build taxable value that provides resources for government to do its role

(5) Nonprofit or Nongovernmental Organizations

- to provide charitable goods and services that are useful to people, but not in ways that build capital to sustain ongoing efforts
- to meet societal needs that are otherwise unmet by other sectors
- to create new mechanisms for charitable donations to meet societal needs

Note that Scripture does not indicate a hierarchy of importance among these sectors. *Each one is necessary to accomplish the overall responsibility of stewarding God's creation.* Each one has the potential to honor or dishonor that stewardship. Each one has its brilliant potential for good, as well as its challenges, problems, and version of *hebel* (recall Session 6).

For-Profit vs. Not-For-Profit

Dennis Bakke believes that for-profit and nonprofit enterprises have the same purpose—they just carry out that purpose in different ways. That purpose is to serve the needs of society. A business serves society by providing goods and services, with the requirement to make a profit so that it can sustain itself and build the capital that was put forward to create the venture in the first place. A nonprofit also serves society by providing goods and services, but without the requirement to make a profit. Instead, it "capitalizes" its efforts through the investments of donors, who expect good works to be done rather than monetary return on their investment. In many ways, the nonprofit sector serves where government and the business sector leave gaps. If business better saw its role as stewarding God's creation and government was more effective at recognizing and applying public or private solutions in those gaps, fewer nonprofit organizations would be needed.

Dennis writes, "One of my core beliefs, then and now, is that every entity incorporated by the state should serve the needs of society in an

ethical and economically healthy manner. The same goal is appropriate for both profit-making and not-for-profit business organizations" *(Joy at Work,* p. 247).

Some people spend their lives working primarily in one of the five sectors. Others transition between them during different seasons of their lives:

- A woman works in a corporation for several years, quits to become a stay-at-home mom, then returns to the work world in a second career after her kids leave home.
- A pastor becomes an educator.
- A businessman "cashes out" at age 50 and pursues nonprofit work during the "second half" of his life.

God often calls people to change sectors. This is good when the call results from discerning and surrendering to God's will. Yet every sector experiences its own brand of futility from the Fall. No sector has an antidote to the message of Ecclesiastes.

Halftime

Many people who work in business occupations struggle with the issue of significance. They often wonder whether their lives would be more "meaningful" if they changed careers and went to work in a church or ministry, or in a nonprofit organization. Sometimes these questions arise at ages 40 to 50, in the "halftime" of their life. Meanwhile, at about the same age, many who work in churches, parachurch ministries, and nonprofit organizations look longingly at jobs in the business world.

Dennis makes a "drive off the road" comment on page 266 of the postscript about how some people misunderstand this "Success to Significance" movement. This movement has been sometimes used to justify a "grass is greener in another sector" approach to seeking significance in a sector, rather than from surrendering to God's will. Even Bob Buford, the author of the book *Halftime: From Success to*

Significance, has fought against this mentality by sometimes describing halftime as "success to significance to surrender."

There are many instances where God legitimately calls people to change sectors, and they find a whole new significance. However, the results of feeling more "significance" is not from the sector per se, but from following God's call and experiencing the joy of working in that new sector as a faithful steward.

Family and Joy

It may be unpopular for people to associate their role in a family as "work," yet family is as much of a work sector as the other four. Decisions from the menial to the far-reaching are part of the work of this sector. Stewardship of people and resources is essential. As we've seen throughout this study, humans were created in God's image to work and make decisions. The family sector provides an excellent venue in which to do all of that and more.

Additionally, family powerfully shows us another aspect of being made in God's image. God created us out of His love, not because He *needs* us. It is His character to give and to give sacrificially. The family sector shows us that being made in God's image means we actually have, as part of our nature, an impulse to give and to give sacrificially. We find joy when we live out that aspect of being made in God's image.

Given that reality, it follows that if we want to create joy in our families, we need to employ many of the same principles by which we build joy at other workplaces—humility, trust, values, gifts, *and* giving to the point of sacrifice.

For many people, if you ask them in which of the five sectors they experience the greatest joy, family will be the first that comes to mind. Indeed, family can provide a unique environment of safety and purpose, decision making and trust, humility and service, beauty and values. Families usually operate on a smaller scale than a corporation or a church, and parents have more control in setting the culture, values, and trust of the situation.

When family is a place of joy, it makes it easier for people to experience joy at their business. Many also describe better family lives when they are experiencing joy at their business as they carry that energy and fulfillment back home. Yet, when family is not a place of joy, some people seek their joy in their work, even to the point of addiction as a means to "deaden" the pain of disappointment at home. Joy at work is not something that can be compartmentalized in just one sector. It must be "joy at work" in all aspects of our work—at home, at church, and in our business.

What Is the Specific Role of the Church?

How the church fits into the other four sectors has been an area of confusion—especially in the interaction of the church and business.

A Brief History of the Role of the Church

Melchizedek

An early story in Scripture demonstrates how these sectors related to one another and gave early definition to what we now call the church. Until Genesis 14, the Bible gives no indication that there was any formal religious institution established by God nor any priestly caste. Until that time, God spoke directly to and through selected stewards, all of whom appear to have been family patriarchs and leaders of commerce. There was no one sector in which God

spoke more than the others.

However, something important happens in Genesis 14. Abram (from the commerce sector) rescued five kings (the government sector). He then gave 10 percent of the spoils to a man named Melchizedek. Verse 18 calls Melchizedek a "priest of God, Most High," and this is the first mention of a priest in the Bible. Melchizedek is also described as the King of Salem. Salem was the city that eventually became Jerusalem (Jeru-salem). Later in Scripture, Hebrews 5:6 describes Jesus as a priest in the same order as Melchizedek. Thus the introduction of Melchizedek is the institution of both a new sector (religion), as well as a new way by which God would communicate with His stewards. After Melchizedek, God began delivering His word to humans primarily through priests and prophets.

Levites

In Numbers 1, the tribe of Levi is appointed by God to be a special sector—a priestly tribe. That tribe's sole task was to oversee the religious duties of the Israelites. To that end, the Levites were given no land of their own (and hence no means by which to engage in commerce). Instead, they were to be supported by the other 11 landed ("commercial") tribes. In placing Levi over the religious sector, the Lord was not indicating that they were a better tribe than the other 11 or that their role was better. Their role was certainly unique. But note the interdependency that God designed into the nation: The other tribes were dependent on the Levites to do their priestly work, and the Levites were dependent on the rest of the people to engage in commerce and support them materially.

Prophets

In addition to priests, God also appointed prophets. The introduction of prophets in Scripture parallels the introduction of priests. Just as family patriarchs and leaders of commerce served as priests in the early years of biblical history, so they functioned as prophets, proclaiming God's words and will to others. God used the term "prophet" to describe Abraham (Genesis 20:7). Prophets were

unusually anointed with the Spirit of God and tended to work outside the centers of power. They often performed miracles to validate their credentials as God's appointed spokesmen, and they frequently brought a message of rebuke and correction to the other sectors—commerce, government, and religion—when those had gone away from following God. The Old Testament includes 16 books named for prophets, containing the spokesmen's messages, revelations from God, and accounts of their lives.

Apostles

After Jesus's return to heaven, God began speaking to His people, now the church, most directly through the apostles ("sent ones, messengers"). Some see the apostles as a New Testament form of the Old Testament prophets. Some of the apostles came from the commercial sector (Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen), some came from government (Matthew had been a tax collector), and some came from the religious sector (Paul was trained as a Pharisee; he also worked as a tent maker during his years of ministry). Yet none acted in the established roles of the priestly sector. They spent their time primarily as church leaders, church planters, teachers, and writers of the New Testament.

Why was there no longer a special priestly sector? Because when Christ established the church, He wrote God's law on the hearts of believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:15-18). And so, as 1 Peter 2:5-9 teaches, *every* believer is a "priest," meaning that he or she has a direct, personal relationship with God and no longer needs a sacrificial system run by a special class of Levites to commune with Him. Later, when the church became an established institution in the Roman Empire, a sector of priests came to exist within the church. They assumed roles of mediating between Christ and the church, but the legitimacy of that role has been debated.

Parachurches

What we commonly refer to as the nonprofit organization is of relatively recent origin, having been spawned by section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. tax code. However,

a portion of religious nonprofit organizations can trace their history back to the apostles. This portion is sometimes called the “pararchurch.”

These are auxiliary organizations, working alongside churches, that are dedicated to specific tasks that are of concern to churches but are not the churches’ primary responsibilities of leading worship, overseeing the sacraments, and teaching the Word. These parachurch ministries (*para* means “alongside”) exist to extend the work of the church without distracting the church from its core mission.

In the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic orders emerged that organized groups of monasteries around a common purpose or focus, guided by a “rule” approved by the pope. Some of those orders remain to this day, including the Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, and Carmelites. These parachurch orders focused on work, poverty, evangelism, education, and prayer. In many cases, they served alongside local churches, accomplishing goals in their areas of concentration that the local churches could not do on their own.

History shows that specific parachurch ministries, like the prophets of the Old Testament, often were raised up for a time and were used by God to address some need for reform among local churches, then diminished in importance.

Modality and Sodality: Congregation and Concentration

Missiologist Ralph Winter has noted that throughout history God has promoted his Kingdom through two basic structures: the church as “modality” and “sodality.”

“Modality” refers to the permanent church structure, the local church. Multigenerational and geographically limited, a congregation puts down roots and makes a long-term commitment to its community. As theologian Darrell Guder observes, “The parish must always be

looked upon as the central and continuing form of the church." The basic form of the church is the local congregation.

The second structure, "sodality," focuses on a specialized aspect of God's purposes on earth. This concentration may target a particular group of people, age group, spiritual discipline, religious community, or mission activity. Parachurch ministries are more suited to functioning in this more targeted way.

WHILE THE CHURCH EXISTS IN INDIVIDUAL, LOCAL CONGREGATIONS, IT ALSO EXISTS IN EVERY OTHER SECTOR —THE MARKETPLACE, THE GOVERNMENT, THE NONPROFIT SECTOR, THE HOME.

The Local Church Today

Some see the church today as the continuation of the redeemed people of God who trace their roots back to Abraham in the Old Testament. Others see the church as a new institution with a new purpose—to make disciples, or followers, of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). In either case, the church is built on the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God (Matthew 16:16-18). This core conviction led to a growing, vital community in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47), which quickly expanded to other communities in other parts of the Roman Empire. One of the distinctions of these communities was that they equipped their members for works of service, so that the whole body of Christ would grow into maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13).

The church has a unique purpose among the five sectors in overseeing the sacraments, making disciples, and communicating the message of reconciliation between God and fallen humanity through Jesus Christ. These functions are carried out by individual congregations/communities of Christians in localized, individual "churches." However the word "church" also describes the entirety of all Christians everywhere and, indeed, all who have ever lived (the "church

universal”).

This means that while the church exists in individual, local congregations, it also exists in every other sector—the marketplace, the government, the nonprofit sector, the home—as individual Christians go about their daily work. This reality has led to a useful distinction between “the church gathered” and “the church scattered.” In the United States, “the church gathered” is recognized as a separate sector, with its own tax designations and laws. In some countries, there is no recognized sector called “the church.” Instead, the church exists invisibly through Christians in every sector, who meet—often in secret—for fellowship, teaching, worship, and the sacraments.

Church Reformatted

One of the things that may be surprising in the next 100 years is how much the organized church will change and take on new forms as the world undergoes massive shifts from rural to urban communities, from state-led military powers to corporate-led commercial powers, and from local to globalized economies and affinities. Even now, many churches in some parts of Asia and Africa are increasingly tied to factories and individual businesses as a way to build on the natural workplace community when traditional forms are not relevant or even persecuted. Some long-held assumptions are being questioned:

- Worship has long been viewed by many Christians as an *activity* that involves praying, singing, and teaching inside a church building on Sunday mornings. But new generations of Christians are redefining worship as an *attitude* and an *act* of recognizing God as Creator and of submitting to Him in all aspects of life. With this new awareness, “worship” is no longer reserved to the organized church but finds a place in all five of the sectors.
- Some church-starters find they can better influence closed communities if they start as a community-development ministry or business before forming “Sunday programs.”

Many churches operate their ministries of compassion through a separate nonprofit or business.

- Companies have been formed that are uniquely suited for effective community ministry at a scale and effectiveness that a church alone could never accomplish.

Challenges to Business Leaders Called to Church Leadership

Business leaders who attempt to enter the church as a governing board member, a staff member, or a pastoral leader frequently contend with issues like these:

- Church work feels "sacred," while the business leaders' own experience and background feel "secular." They may find it hard to enter church work with a healthy confidence that God can use them there.
- Clergy have their own language and cultural rules that tend to place outsiders at a disadvantage.
- Business leaders may fear that their motives will contaminate the "purer" motives of the church. Yet, as they serve, they discover the church has the same sins as the business world. This can lead to disillusionment and apathy.
- Business leaders find that a poorly administered church does not get the spiritual results it wants, no matter how spiritual the pastoral leadership is. It takes good character and good leadership—and, always, dependence on God for the results. Management writer Peter Drucker has said, "The purpose of management is not to make the church more business-like, but to make the church more church-like." A well-functioning body employs the gifts of all of its leaders.
- A church is a *cause* (with a mission and purpose), a *community* (with a sense of relational connectedness), and a *corporation* (with legal status and an infrastructure to maintain). People's gifts are often more strong in one of these areas than in the others. When the church is out of balance with community-gifted pastors, the corporation-gifted business leaders' gifts can be misunderstood, feared, and disrespected.
- Business leaders sometimes feel out of their element when

strategy must be subordinated to discernment. A healthy church holds strategy loosely to wait for God's confirmation and leading through means that cannot be controlled—prayerful discussion, heart urgings, Scriptural insights, and supernatural events. Those are not realities that business leaders are used to dealing with, although many find it the greatest excitement of working in church leadership.

- Most churches have a very different organizational structure from that of businesses. Churches are inherently structured to be *inefficient*:
    - They have a plurality of leaders.
    - They must serve anyone who comes.
    - Their emphasis on love requires a more relational pace.
    - Some of the most important aspects of their work—dealing with brokenness, invoking heart change, fostering dependence on God, and helping participants love one another—are difficult, if not impossible, to measure.

The Church and the Business Sector—The Story of the Bakke Family

Dennis has three siblings. His older brother, Ray (one of the authors of this study guide), is a theology and church-history professor, former inner-city pastor, and well-known speaker on urban ministry. His older sister, Marilyn, is a designer and decorator with a unique eye for beauty and a serious commitment to prayer. His younger brother, Lowell, was until recently a pastor with a long-term commitment to his congregation. Even now, as Lowell pursues graduate studies, he has focused his research on the needs of pastors of small churches in long-term pastorates.

The word "Bakke" is Norwegian for "small hill." Some have said in the Bakke

family that Ray's theology flowed downhill through Dennis's business and collected in Lowell's church. Marilyn prayed for all three.

We thought that the best way to end this session was to let Lowell, who has studied Dennis's theology perhaps as no other single person has, describe the results in his church in his own words. If you have not yet invited a pastor into your discussion, this might be a good section for one to read and discuss with you in your study group this week.

Pastor Lowell Bakke Speaks

It is true that Dennis's first audience is the business world. After all, that is his passion, calling, and place of expertise. As many business leaders have read *Joy at Work*, they have been able to identify with the world he so openly and honestly discusses. But when they read the postscript, which is largely about the church, some readers will find it exciting to look at the relationship of the church and business through the view from the *pew* rather than from the perspective of the *pulpit*. In fact, you might be feeling that "it's about time someone told my church how it really is or should be in the real world." You read Dennis's words as a *gauntlet he is throwing down* for the church to respond to.

> In *Joy at Work,* I suggest how faith fits into businesses and other secular organizations. What about the local church? If church leaders believe what I have written, what changes should they consider in prayer, missions, sermons, pastoral visits, church programs, and the empowerment of church members? (*Joy at Work*, p. 267)

Dennis has been challenging churches with these questions for years. And since he has said that this is his one and only book, one might think it would be somewhat unethical of him not to have put into print what he genuinely believes. Yet this is also what Dennis has consistently lived out in terms of the Lord he loves and the church that Dennis has identified with and consistently served since he was a child.

My vantage point is that of the youngest child in the family behind two world-

famous brothers. As I watch my brothers, the story might be called “The Tale of Two Callings.”

Twelve days before my father died in 1990, Dad gave me this assignment:

> Lowell, your brothers are not listening to one another. Promise me you will tell your brother Ray that he needs to listen to Dennis about business and make sure that Dennis listens to Ray about missions.

My dad was not a theologian, nor was he a highly opinionated man who insisted that others see and do things his way. But he knew his sons’ callings. He knew Ray was called by God to the church and the world through missions, and he knew that Dennis was called by God to serve the world through business. He also knew that the two of them were far more opinionated and confident about how they felt our family foundation should proceed than maybe they should be.

Safe Families Allow Risky Work

Ray Bakke describes a conversation he had after he gave a speech about moving to at-risk neighborhoods and leading urban change. The questioner asked Ray to describe his family background. Ray explained that he and Dennis and their family had grown up in a tight-knit rural community, buried deep in a logging valley in north Washington state. The Bakkes had a very close extended family, as well as numerous friends spanning several generations.

Upon hearing that, the questioner said this about Ray: “You are asking the people in this room to do something most of them will never be able to do. Your family and community provided your identity. As a child in a small community, you were always a Bakke—no matter how much you succeeded or failed. This carries into your adult life. No matter how much you fail in your work today, you will always know who you are. When you risk, you risk only your work, not your identity. Yet most people are using their work to find their identity. They don’t have the deep-seated identity that you have from your

childhood. When you ask them to risk their jobs, you are asking them to gamble with the only source of identity many of them have. I don't think most of them will be able to do what you've challenged them to do."

ONE WORKED NEAR THE WHITE HOUSE IN JESUS'S NAME, WHILE THE OTHER OFTEN FELT LIKE MARCHING IN PROTEST ON THE SAME HOUSE IN JESUS'S NAME.

While reading *Joy at Work*, one cannot help but feel the passion Dennis has for his calling, which he has exhibited since he started a wood-kindling business when he was 5 years old. I should know, because before he learned all of these wonderful values about giving away decision making, I was often his entire labor force. Profits were far more important to him then. Upon reflection, I believe he needed a human-resources division at that time. But in time, Dennis grew up to be what one newspaper article declared the "Evangelist of Business."

Even before that, my brother Ray had been developing his passion for the cities of the world, and at about the same time *Christianity Today* called him "The Apostle to the City." They both began to speak in my life. One lived around the *penthouse* of power, while the other proclaimed near the *outhouse*. Oneworked near the White House in Jesus's name, while the other often felt like marching in protest on the same house in Jesus's name. Periodically, they both would come to my little church and lob urban apostolic and business evangelistic bombs across the platforms in my sanctuary, then ride off into the sunset, leaving me to try to figure out how to "put into practice what I [they] knew to be true" (L. Bakke translation of Philippians 4:9).

I often felt like crying out, "What about me and my calling?" I was called to pastor a few people God in His grace would bring my way, and turn around one life at a time to follow God in their families, workplaces, and the rest of their lives. I also realized that the only way I could fulfill my father's deathbed assignment to get Ray to genuinely listen to Dennis, and Dennis to humbly listen to Ray, was if I could intentionally listen to both of them myself. Somehow I

needed to become a steward of their knowledge and wisdom and attempt to put that knowledge and wisdom together into one small, aging congregation.

As a result, over 13 years there were no impressive programs or marketable how-to manuals developed in this process, nor were people knocking on the door of our church to write our story. There were only a series of simple questions that were asked by an amazing group of 55- to 80-year-old “permission-givers” in our congregation. These questions allowed a Swedish Baptist church to try to put Humpty Dumpty (my two brothers) together again, and in some way to merge their passions into one church body.

Below are a few Bible passages that stimulated questions we have wrestled with over a decade. We discovered that by taking these questions seriously, we were able to engage a variety of sectors within our city and unleash passionate people that God had given to us to trust and empower in the small city of Puyallup, Washington.

1. **Matthew 16:13-18**

   Who do people say that I am?

   I went to an overlook in my town and read this passage. I was new in town, so I could honestly say that I did not know the answer to that question. We began to ask that question as often as we could wherever we went.

   Finally, we were given an answer by a third-grade teacher who had been asking this question for 16 years of a list of names like George Washington, Moses, Abraham Lincoln, and Jesus. She reported that by far the No. 1 answer to the question was that “Jesus Christ” was a swearword. We understood, maybe for the first time in years, that Puyallup was our mission field.

   When I studied the town Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asked the same question, it dawned on me that the disciples’ answers to the questions

were all wrong. They were giving answers about who the people in Jerusalem thought Jesus was, not the people in this Roman northern outpost, far from the main line. Most people in this town would not have known the Old Testament stories. It became very clear to us that the Jesus we speak of as the Christ in our building was not who the people in our community were thinking of when they heard the name Jesus.

Who owns the gates?

Jesus and the disciples were looking over the hillside, down into the city, and they could see a wall and gates around it. We started asking the question, “Who owns the gates?” Jesus looked out on that city and saw the resemblance of hell in Caesarea Philippi, in the form of a wall with gates. We also tried to discover what the purpose of the gates was. If God owned them, then they would no doubt have one purpose, but if Satan owned them, then they would certainly have another. We came to the conclusion that the gates were Satan’s, and their purpose was to keep the church out of the town that he controlled.

What was the purpose of the church?

If Satan owned the gates, was it the purpose of the church to rescue people by getting them out of the town and into the church? We discovered instead that the purpose was to get the people already in the church out of the fellowship and into the community.

2. **Nehemiah 1-4 and Ezra 1-4**

Does God love places as much as he loves people?

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah raise the question, “Can a good church with a good pastor exist in a city that is in public disgrace?” It was through the insights of my brother Ray that we began to understand that the city we lived in was more than just people. There were structures and systems like government, business, schools, hospitals, and a police department that held the city together. As a church we had not really cared about or engaged this part of our world. We did not understand what later we came to know as the various sectors of our city as they are

developed in the Bible, but we began to look at John 3:16 with different eyes. We began to see our world in terms of:

- our biological world, the world of our families;
- our vocational world, the world of our work;
- our geographical world, the world of our neighborhoods;
- our recreational world, the world of our play; and
- our educational world, the world of our schools.

We also recognized that we were a small, financially limited church with very little to offer to our newly defined world. Because of our condition we decided that we did not have the time, energy, or skill to provide programs for any part of our community. (In fact, we cut many of the programs we had tried to run in our church building.) We made a decision not to attempt to run any of the programs or to put our name on any ministry in the community. Our passion was to have said of Puyallup what Ezekiel 48:35 reports: “And the name of the city from that time on will be the Lord is there.” We believed this could be accomplished more effectively through the power of relationships than through the development of church-controlled programs.

3. **Acts 3:1-10**

Where is the worship center?

The church in Acts 2 became a lean, mean, mobile machine meeting in homes, which was a radical and innovative idea in those days. However, the observation was made that those same believers kept coming to the temple in Jerusalem daily—to this place that was once the center of worship but was not a place of compromised faith. In fact, we discovered that many of the miracles of Acts were happening not on the way to church in the homes but on the way to this community worship center.

We began to ask ourselves the question, “Is there a worship center in Puyallup?” by asking the questions: “Why do people live here? Where do they consistently go? What are they proud of? What is uniting us as a city?” After a month or so of investigation, we became convinced that the worship center in our town was the high-school football stadium. People lived in the city for the schools, and this little district was turning

out both college and pro athletes whom the community was very proud of.

We asked ourselves, “If schools are the worship center, should not we be totally engaged in them until we are kicked out of them, as the early church experienced in Jerusalem?” We made the decision that we would use our natural relationships as parents and friends of the schools to bring the love and presence of Christ to the community worship center.

“Silver and gold have we none, but such as we have …”

What did an old church have to give to a big school district with close to 18,000 students at that time? The average age of our congregation was over 60 years old, and we had only one baby in our nursery.

“Lo and behold,” as the Old Testament book of Ruth would put it, we discovered we had students in the schools, teachers who taught there, and administrators who were leaders in the school system. They were softly being told by the general Christian population that the schools were going to hell in a handbasket, so most of the teachers felt isolated, alone, and unappreciated in their calling by their church family. Three things came to change our ministry culture:

(1) Teachers and administrators were publicly commissioned, for their callings and passions, to be our missionaries to the 20 or so elementary schools, five junior highs, and three high schools, which included one of the newest Native American high schools in America.

(2) Retired teachers were redeployed to help *serve* the schools, so that the principals and teachers could fulfill their calling, even if we did not agree with everything that was going on in the schools. We decided that the way to be a great church was to become a serving church. Service was not limited to the schools. We purposed to come alongside as many

individuals in our church and in the community as we could to help them accomplish what God was asking them to do in our community. Eventually, one-third of our mission giving went to support ongoing ministries in our community. We brought on a staff person as director of ministry development. A good portion of his job was to help people develop their personal ministries, including helping some establish 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. We handled their finances through our church until they could establish their own boards and systems that would free them to bless our community. All staff people eventually were asked to give 25 percent of their time to help organizations outside of our church accomplish their callings. Service became both our message and model.

(3) Dennis and Eileen Bakke came to meet with us, and they talked to our people about how Joseph and Daniel served unjust and ungodly rulers, thus helping those leaders achieve success in their own callings. In essence, they became stewards of what some would call "ungodly resources and power." We began praying for men and women in the workplace, and we opened our facility to any person or group from the schools that needed a place to meet or practice. We purposed to chaplain our local elementary, junior high, and high school with our pastoral team and lay leaders who had a passion for those schools. High school and junior high choirs began to sing in our services, and eventually our nursery became the nursery for unwed high-school girls who were young mothers. Our retired teachers began volunteering to serve breakfast at our local grade school. Eventually, the Buddhist principal of the high school asked if we would begin helping kids with homework, which led to a tutoring program.

4. **Joel 2:28 When the Spirit was poured out, did He give us a new way of approaching the cities of the world?**

    He was to be poured out on all ethnic groups.
    He was to be poured out on both sexes.
    He was to be poured out on all generations.

    If that was so, could we assume that our ministry should reflect:

    An end to ethnic hate crimes?
    An end to gender domination?

A closing of the generation gap?

We began to pray that we could give ethnic-diversification leadership to our city. We ended up being a key force for reconciliation when our city made national news for racial strife in the schools in 1999. We eventually sold our church building to a new African-American congregation in 1999, and the pastors of both congregations decided to attend appointments together throughout the city that year to bring a model of peace to a volatile environment.

Could we expect that the next generation would be totally capable of being used in our church and in its outreaches as fully viable ambassadors of Christ? Could our kids become our missionaries, totally trusted and empowered? Could they be set aside for ministry, as the adults were? Could we send them to school not as fearful people but as fully sent apostles? Could we tell them their job was not just to tell their friends about Christ and get kids to come to our church, but could they be taught how to become leaders in their school by being servants of their school? Could we tell them that what they do on Monday is as important as what they did on Sunday? Could we champion their passions and facilitate their dreams?

Idon’t have time to tell the stories, but our kids began to transform their school. They became the presidents and captains and managers. They were taught to love their school, corrupt systems and all. They were encouraged to serve their faculty and pray for their friends. They were taught they were viable priests of God who could be trusted now. They were not the church of tomorrow. They were signs of hope today.

Dennis, Ray, and our sister, Marilyn, all found their callings as young children. They were involved in ministry in and out of our little church, which was so small we never had a pastor or a dynamic youth program. And yet, they all preached, sang, and taught the Bible in our little church as children and teenagers. Likewise, they all became trusted leaders in the local schools. Alongside our parents, they helped influence the structure of that portion of our community. Why? Simply because our church intuitively believed in the priesthood of all believers, even though

I doubt anyone in our congregation could have articulated the theology. If that could happen in Saxon, Washington, in the 1950s, could it happen again in Puyallup during the last decade of the 20th century?

5. **Romans 14:5**

   Later on, we began to wrestle with the question of whether a good Sunday of worship makes for a tolerable workweek, or whether six days of great work make for a wonderful day of worship and rest? Does our Sunday worship reflect the stories of how God is moving in and through us during our scattered week of work as He did in our gathered day of worship? Did we have too many programs, so that our people were too busy doing church work rather than serving the city in other sectors of their life?

6. **Philippians 1:3-6, 2:1-3, 3:10**

   We began asking ourselves about partnerships in the Gospel. With whom should we partner? Could we partner with other churches, even those of other theological positions? Could we partner with both saving- and common-grace ministries? Could we partner with both believers and nonbelievers? We decided from the book of Philippians that partnership meant to:

   a. submit to someone else's dream (1:3-6)
   b. serve someone else's interest (2:1-5)
   c. share in someone else's suffering (3:10-11)
   d. be a resource for someone else's ministry (4:11-20)

   Our view of the Kingdom of God grew over the decade, as did our partnerships with others. I am convinced the Trinity is a partnership. We can reflect the image of that Trinity only through similar partnerships. It is one thing to have passion; it is another to join that to someone else's life or to engage in someone else's passion. It may not always work, but I believe it always reflects the nature of God.

7. **Ephesians 5:22-6:10, Genesis 3:14-18**

   Will we continue to cultivate an Old Testament personal and corporate lifestyle, even though we boldly preach a New Testament cross? Does the cross simply save souls, or should it change our social relationships back to a Genesis 1-2 way of life? Should we continue to live under the curse

> of Genesis 3:14 today, or does the cross make it possible for us to live on earth as in heaven?
>
> What does it mean to give away power and authority? About the time Dennis was reading Peter Block's *Stewardship,* he began talking about the process of giving away decision-making power. I want you to know that Dennis by nature is the most competitive, controlling, and competent person I have ever met. I started laughing inside at what he was saying because I knew deep down that it would be impossible for him to do this in the long run. No one wanted the ball in his hands more than Dennis. I was wrong. I want to publicly affirm that what he has done could only be done by the power of the Spirit of God, because naturally it would have been impossible for him to live out, no matter how right he thought it was.

Ray, on the other hand, had modeled a type of servanthood that I had admired from a distance for many years. Six years into our marriage, Diana and I began to struggle with Ephesians 5 in terms of the role of husband and wife. We had been taught that a man was the leader (king) in a marriage and the woman was to be there to serve and help her husband be successful. Our premarital counseling started with "Women, submit to your husband" (Ephesians 5:22), and Diana did just that. Ray one day asked me to take off my evangelical glasses and read the text as it is written. I soon realized that that submission is not in verse 22. It is understood in verse 22 because it is found in verse 21. "Submit one to another out of reverence for Christ" is where a couple should begin their relationship. Reverence Christ and submit to each other.

The concept of mutual submission began a change in our lives that would later revolutionize everything in our relationship, including our view of marriage, parenting, pastoring, and the church's role in a community.

As parents we began to ask if our children were there to make us look like successful parents, helping us fulfill our dreams and callings, or were we there to set aside our dreams and callings to bring our children to maturity? Was my role as pastor more important than their role as a priest of God in their schools or our

neighborhood by using their gifts and passions for the Lord? What an amazing process it has been for us to set aside our callings to serve our children as they learn to walk in their worlds for Christ.

As a senior pastor, would I be willing to set aside my passion to bring the passions of my staff to fulfillment? Could I give away not only my authority but actual power to those who supposedly were under my authority? Even more significant, could we as a pastoral team give away all the power, authority, and social trappings that have traditionally set us apart from the congregation so that men, women, and children could exercise their priesthood in our congregation? Could I not only go from decision maker to advice giver but from the public "doer" of the ministry in our services to allow others to "do" the works of service in our church? Could I trust men, and then women, and then children to do things like serve communion and baptize people, which traditionally have been symbols of pastoral leadership and authority in Baptist congregations?

Finally, could we as a church understand that we are there to serve the community, to leave our building and cleave to the people of the city, to set aside our personal passions to help them fulfill their callings? Could we become servants of Puyallup rather than anticipating that Puyallup is there to serve us?

We saw some business owners begin to serve the "business people" in their own companies. We saw men begin to serve their wives. We saw parents submit to their children. We saw teachers and administrators have amazing impacts through servanthood with their schools. We saw children baptize their parents and women baptize their husbands. We saw a church give away its staff to serve others, and we saw a church that was willing to serve other ministries that bolstered the work of other churches.

I wish we could report that it all went so well. We did attempt to put Ray's and Dennis's passions back together again in one local church. It would be fun to say there is enough to merit a book or demand a speaking tour, but in all honesty, we never became an AES of the church world. We still are a relatively small church

in a relatively out-of-the-way location. After 13 years of ministry here, God called Diana and me away from the church we loved to serve our family for a while. We felt we could say with Jesus, “We have finished the work you gave us to do” (John 17). Does the work look finished? Hardly, but then did Jesus’s ministry look complete when he left?

We and many others are convinced that there is much work to be done in the world to help Christians in the church and in the business world live out their callings in unity. The unusual lives of my family illustrate the challenge. Many feel the church at large needs to hear voices of the church, urban world, and business on the same platform speaking about what unites these calls. Over the past two years, efforts have been made to bring Ray and Dennis (a city apostle and a business evangelist) together to form one voice in the curriculum of an international graduate school united by a stewardship view of urban theology and business.

The school is called Bakke Graduate University, not because it is about us but because it is about God’s story. The fancy naming consultants we hired said repeatedly that the two worlds of church/community ministry and business are so far apart that the only word they could find to capture the vision was “paradox.” So it was either “Paradox University” or a name that pointed to a paradoxical miracle that God had created—our family.

It has not been an easy assignment. My brothers are passionate and opinionated about their diverse callings. The worlds of the church and business don’t see things from the same perspective. Yet, there is no question that, in so many ways, my brothers stand securely rooted in the same Gospel and hold deeply the same view of people. They are absolutely committed to servant leadership and the empowerment of people around them. They are both engaged in stewarding both the common and saving grace that God has given them, and they are attracting other leaders and students to whom God has given the same calling, commitment, and vision.

Will you go back with me to May 3, 1990, to my last long talk with Dad? I asked him one final question before I left that evening. “Dad, did you have any dreams for your life?” Instantly, he said, “Yes, four of them.” I could not believe it, because never once had I heard him say anything about dreams or visions or even goals in his life.

He said, “I always wanted to be a missionary, but with World War II and the Depression, I had to come home from Bible school after one semester to help my dad on the farm. But I am not bothered by that anymore, because your brother Ray has become a far greater missionary than I could have ever been.

“I always wanted to give to the poor.” I interrupted him to say, “But, Dad, you have been poor all of your life.” He continued, “I know we didn’t have much, but then you know that Dennis is giving away more in a day than I have made in a lifetime. I could never have given what he and Eileen are giving to the world. That makes me so happy.”

He went on to add, “And I always wanted to be a Bible teacher, but your mother says that I can’t talk my way out of a wet paper bag in public.” I could see a pattern beginning to develop here, so I waited with some anticipation for my name and praise. “Now I know that you and Ray think you are pretty good pastors, teachers, and preachers, but you can’t hold a candle to your sister Marilyn’s ability to teach the Bible. I have never met anyone who loves God’s Word more than she does. I would go anywhere in the world to listen to her teach the Bible.”

“There is one more thing that I’ve always wanted to do. I always wanted to be a basketball player. I always believed that basketball could be used to tell people about the Lord. But I just wasn’t built to be a ballplayer.” (He was 5-foot-8 with a stocky frame.) But you know, Lowell, I have been watching your sons Brandon and Eric play basketball the last 15 years, and they have seen more people come to Christ on their teams than I have been able to lead to Jesus in my whole lifetime.”

I honestly did not know what to say. I know there were tears flowing down my cheeks. This had been a holy moment. I couldn't wait to share it with my family. But then it hit me: Dad might be dying. He could be gone soon. I blurted out, "Dad, what are we going to do when you are gone? How can we live without you?" He put on a huge smile, which came so naturally to him, and his last words to me were this, "Oh, that's easy, Lowell. If Jesus could say to a bunch of lunkheaded fishermen that 'greater things you will do after I am gone than I did when I was here,' shouldn't every father be able to say in faith the exact same things to kids when he is leaving?"

Months after his death, I began to realize that what made my dad so incredible is that he did not only believe that in his death; he lived that way in his life. Everything he did was to help his children accomplish greater things than he would ever do in his own life. He gave us many things as children. His love, food, clothing, a sense of security, his love for God—and now we know his passions that got to be fulfilled only from a distance. "He was a good and faithful servant," and all of his children can unequivocally report that he was constantly living in "his Master's joy."

One of the primary purposes of the local church is to encourage, prepare, and hold people responsible for their life missions, ministries, and callings. I suspect that the percentage of churches that do a good job of fulfilling this purpose is quite low. Few churches put the same emphasis on both the Great Commission in Matthew and the stewardship mission of Genesis. While churches generally do a good job helping people with religious matters, they often overlook the secular roles we fulfill at God's behest. Some jobs are wrongly considered more pleasing to God than others. The result is an institutional church that misses the opportunity to adequately prepare the majority of its members for the important roles they should play in the world.

> The work set forth in the Great Commission of Matthew is almost always called "evangelism." But the church has had a hard time agreeing on a name for the responsibility God gave us to manage creation. … The stewardship work I am referring to is not just an activity that supports evangelism. It is important and necessary work in and of itself—for the products and services it provides to society, as an act of worship to the Lord of Creation, and because it places Christians in positions of helping restore the world as God intended it to be. This kind of work puts more emphasis on the quality and quantity of tents than on the money it generates for evangelism.
>
> Dennis Bakke, *Joy at Work*, pp. 264-265

Reaction

Reaction questions

- Which of the five sectors do you find you work within? How would you rank these sectors in your life by (a) time invested? (b) importance to your call? (c) where you want to increase your time and energies in the next five years?
- What do you think the new role of business should be today as it replaces national boundaries with corporate identities and becomes the primary source of power, justice, communication, and community? How might that change the role of Christian business leaders?
- Dennis Bakke has at times described "two commissions":
    1. The first commission is to steward creation through our work. In *Joy at Work* this is referred to as the "stewardship mission or command."
    2. The second commission is to make disciples through evangelism, teaching, and mission, from Matthew 28.

  Do you think we should put the same emphasis (p. 263-4) on these two commissions? Why or why not?

  How are you involved in both commissions? How does your church support both commissions?

You May Be One of the Theologians of Our Time!

Much of the theology of the past 1,700 years has in some way been affected by the interaction of the church and the governmental system the church found itself within. From the conversion of Constantine in A.D. 312, to the end of the Byzantine Empire in the east in A.D. 1453, to the last vestiges of the Holy Roman Empire in the west in A.D. 1806, much of the Western world was governed directly by the church or by church-appointed and church-sanctioned rulers. The great powers of the world were largely monarchies overseeing military-based colonial empires, and most of those empires had close connections to the church.

As a result, governments and their politics heavily influenced Christianity. Indeed, if you want to understand the numerous theological traditions of the West—Catholicism, Lutheranism, Anglicanism, the Reformed tradition, the Anabaptists, the Puritans—you must first understand the political climates that gave birth to and shaped their distinctive views.

But something dramatic happened in the late 19th and 20th centuries: Centuries-old colonial systems broke apart, and military power gave way to economic power. In the last decades, the rising power centers of the world have been market-based and capitalistic economies dominated by multinational corporations. Indeed, many companies today have larger gross revenue than the gross domestic product of most nations. This means that leaders of commerce are quickly assuming the roles of power and influence once held only by kings, emperors, and national governments.

And just as Christianity was so influenced by the governmental sector in the first 2,000 years of its history, some predict that it will be similarly influenced by the commercial sector in the next era of

history. The question is: Will Christianity in turn influence the commercial sector?

It is a time of both opportunity and danger, similar to what the Faith faced in the fourth century. At that time, the church had to quickly develop a theology to define its role in the relationship between itself and the state. Now, the church needs to quickly develop a theology to define its role in the relationship between itself and commerce. Many of the concepts we've raised in this Bible study could fill whole chapters and books, whereas we've skimmed over them in a few sentences. As a result, you may have felt at times in your discussions that your group was in uncharted territory. And you may wonder why there isn't a better map provided by some "experts." The reason is because the church is still marshaling its "experts" in this area—*and you may be one of them, especially if you work in the commercial sector.*

Many of the best theologians of this century will not be academics in ivory towers but frontline business practitioners, immersed in the changing world of today's marketplace, yet deeply reflective, in community, and deeply connected to the timeless truths of Scripture.

Group Discussion Questions

(1)What questions, new thoughts, or concerns were raised as you read this session?
(2)How has your life—now or in the past—been involved with the five sectors? How has your workplace role prepared you to work in the other sectors? How do you see parallel themes of stewardship, trust, humility, giftedness, power, values, culture, and joy in all the sectors you work within?
(3)How do you anticipate your stewardship in each of the five sectors in the future? In which ones will you increase your efforts, and in which ones

will you decrease your efforts?

(4)How do you respond to Dennis's challenge to emphasize both the First Commission to steward the world through work and the Second Commission to evangelize and make disciples? Does your church do these two equally well? If not, what should be the next steps to improve them? How can your church be more supportive of people who work primarily in other sectors?

(5)What was your reaction to Dennis Bakke's appeal to church leaders in his postscript to commission members in business and extend the work of the church into the marketplace?

(6)Imagine yourself as an officially "commissioned" worker. With this in the forefront, what specifically would you do differently today in your work?

(7) How are you living out Colossians 3:17? How is your church helping you do this?

(8) Pastor Don Overton said that, in the past, he has treated business people in his church like tools and toys. What has been your experience as a businessperson in the church? Do you have any programs for dialogue?

Next Session—Return on Investment: Stewarding Rewards

Bible Readings:
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14
Matthew 25:14-30
1 Corinthians 4:1-5

SESSION 10



Return on Investment: Stewarding Rewards

Bible Readings for This Session
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14
Matthew 25:14-30
1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Other Reading
Joy at Work, Postscript: Enter Into the Master's Joy (pp. 245-275)

DVD Session Ten: The Master's Joy
One of the fruits of the spirit is joy—which means
God designed us to experience joy. The reward of serving
others is tremendous and shouldn't be missed.
Come, enter into the Master's joy.

Introduction

In this study we have seen that:

1. We humans were made by God to work.
2. We were made by God to find joy in our work. That intention was frustrated—but not obliterated—by the Fall.
3. Christians have the "first fruits of the Spirit," giving them a unique ability to envision work in its original, joyful state.
4. This "Garden vision" and stewardship responsibility compel us to work with joy and to build workplaces of joy.

By now, we hope you are better able to envision the Garden of Eden extended to

modern times. We hope that “Garden vision” is a part of how you view the world—not that you live with your head in the clouds, but that you see the true reality beyond this temporary fog we call the fallen world. Christians with “Garden vision” do great things. They risk great things for God. They also see the true rewards of stewardship that others miss.

> “GARDEN VISION” IS A PART OF HOW YOU VIEW THE WORLD—NOT THAT YOU LIVE WITH YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUDS, BUT THAT YOU SEE THE TRUE REALITY BEYOND THIS TEMPORARY FOG WE CALL THE FALLEN WORLD.

An Absolute Call: Results Not Guaranteed

Throughout this Bible study, we have seen repeatedly that human beings are absolutely called to bring joy to work. However, in Session 6 we saw that the results are not guaranteed. Ecclesiastes teaches us that we live in a fallen world where all of life is marked by *hebel*, or futility. Therefore, success is more about being faithful to the task, not accomplishing the results. Yet not accomplishing the results we hope for causes pain. So why would we risk pursuing something unseen—namely, joy—when the chances of always getting it seem so slim? The answer is: Because the “upside potential” of taking that risk is so great.

Years ago, Brad asked an older, godly businessman how he had lived such a long, consistent life obeying God. Brad was expecting the man to share some deep, profound insight from Scripture, some secret gem that would sustain a person when confronted with temptation and help him or her stay motivated to follow God. But to Brad’s surprise, the man answered, “A life focused on my self-interest.”

Pressed for more, the man continued, “I’ve spent my whole life calculating return on investment for companies. So I realized long ago that it was in my best self-interest to obey God. When I did the cost/benefit analysis, everything else I was tempted to do just wasn’t worth it. Of course, obeying God requires a heavy investment. But doing so gains a phenomenal return. Life has a natural way of

making sure you feel the pain of that investment. So you have to choose to keep your eye on the return. But if you do, you'll make the right choices in your life."

This Bible study presents you with a call that is not easy and holds great risk. Yet the reward of obeying that call is great. Conversely, the cost of not obeying the call is severe. In Session 1, we calculated that the average person works 111,800 hours in a career. So, we can spend that huge chunk of our life experiencing drudgery at work, or we can choose to find joy.

Obstacles to Joy

Part of the risk is calculating the potential obstacles. Dennis Bakke writes:

> Joy will be difficult to experience. It requires that we understand that the major purpose of work is to use the resources of the created world to serve our needs and the needs of others. Work is likely to be experienced as a difficult and meaningless endeavor if we stray from God's original purpose (*Joy at Work*, pp. 260).

There are plenty of things that can cause us to "stray from God's original purpose" in our work. Here are nine that we can expect (*Joy at Work*, p. 238-239, headings added):

1. **Selfish managers.** Managers and bosses won't restrain themselves from making decisions. Leaders believe it is their right to do so. They are "in the best position" to make the call. By a large margin, their refusal to delegate responsibilities is the reason that so many people are bored and unhappy in their jobs.
2. **Unauthentic motives.** Leaders have the wrong motives. They may allow subordinates the freedom to make significant decisions, but they do so primarily because they believe it will lead to financial success or serve other objectives unrelated to a fun workplace. Working people aren't fooled.
3. **Shallow purpose.** The organization's purpose is shallow or selfish. If employees can't adopt the mission of a company as their own, and if they can't see why it's worthwhile to society, the likelihood of joy at work diminishes dramatically.

4. **Passing of blame.** Mistakes are often attributed to systems rather than to human error or outside forces. When mistakes are made by lower-level employees in decentralized organizations, blame is often assigned to the practice of delegating decisions. The result: a return to the top-down, hierarchical structures of the past.
5. **Limited information.** Information is provided only to senior executives and board members. Sharing information, including financial data, with every employee is crucial to fun workplaces. It makes people feel trusted and important.
6. **Governmental requirements.** Senior executives certify all information required by the government. Unless ways are found to circumvent this regulatory rigamarole—at AES, we would make plant people "officers" so they could perform certifications—lower-level employees are marginalized.
7. **Part-time boards.** Boards of directors require decisions to be made by themselves or by senior leaders. Board members work part time and typically get to know only a few top executives. Because directors are unfamiliar with people at lower levels, they tend not to seek their advice or rely on their expertise. When excluded from decisions, employees become estranged from the enterprise.
8. **Class systems.** Management and labor are adversaries. Hourly pay, overtime work, unions, perks, uniforms, and numerous other artificial and unnecessary distinctions create a class system in the workplace.
9. **Condescending attitudes.** Employees are treated like children. Paternalism and the desire for security prevent people from taking risks and responsibility.

This list provides a good starting point for considering the various obstacles that await anyone responding to God's call that we reclaim the purpose and joy of work. It is a daunting list! It is quite formidable because it is supported by business norms, cultural norms, business education, and laws. Yet by the same token, this list also provides a road map for the issues that must be addressed if one intends to turn around an office, a work group, a division, an entire organization, or even a whole sector.

The Rewards of Work

For most people today, the primary rewards of work are financial success, brand dominance, production quotas, or market share. Yet so many who attain those rewards, and are deemed successful by the normal yardsticks of success—money, power, position—so often stand on their pile of trophies amazed that all of it does not give them the sense of peace and purpose that they had hoped for. Why, we even have songs that say, “Money can’t buy you love.” And we have story after story of people late in life wishing they had invested more in their relationships and other sources of true joy, even if it had meant making less money. In fact, as people search for a centered life in their later years, they often find that their long years pursuing financial success alone have created habits and addictions that become almost insurmountable obstacles in trying to achieve their new life goals.

The same applies to organizations, especially businesses. From a short-term, limited perspective, many businesses might be called successful, but from an eternal, broad perspective, they look more like failures. The opposite might also be true, as *Joy at Work* suggests: A business could conceivably lose money (in the short run), yet still be considered a success by having accomplished broader and more-transcendent goals that reflect the things God values.

So, do you want to make your workplace a success from that godly perspective? One hopes that you do. But beware: When joy becomes the new yardstick of success, the rules radically change. For one thing, all of the obstacles listed above come into play—in addition to the “normal” obstacles (the *hebel*) that allorganizations face daily, successful or not. To make matters worse, much of what you do will not be understood by your peers or by other stakeholders. And when joy is your aim, there’s no guarantee that you’ll get the more visible, tangible results of success favored by the old way of working (not that success is guaranteed for the old way, either).

Yet there is one guarantee that God makes: He promises to reward those who honor Him. And that reward makes any struggle and risk worth whatever it costs.

WHEN JOY BECOMES THE NEW YARDSTICK OF SUCCESS, THE

RULES RADICALLY CHANGE.

The Reward of Joy

Read the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Then consider Dennis's comment on this passage in *Joy at Work* (pp. 259-261):

> Most teachings on this passage focus on using our talents in a manner that will result in some useful product or service for the world. The parable also reinforces my interpretation of the purpose of work. It helps support my conclusion that the purpose of business and of other man-made institutions is to steward resources with a goal of creating products and services beneficial to people. It reminds me that stewardship is more about the eight to 10 hours a day I work at the office than it is about the two hours a week I volunteer at the church or at another not-for-profit organization. The parable also supports my emphasis on accountability in the workplace.
>
> My primary reason for focusing on this passage, however, is the phrase "enter into the master's joy." I have never heard a sermon, read a book, or seen a study that concentrated on the meaning and importance of these words. Notice that each time the lord or master reviews the work of the servants who took risks in managing the resources entrusted to them, the master congratulates the servant for a job well done and then adds the words—"enter into the master's joy." I conclude from this parable that God enjoys our stewardship work just as He enjoys His own work. By implication, we ought to enjoy our work. Note also the absence of decision making by the Master. God is not a typical boss. All the stewardship decisions were delegated to the servants. The linkage between joy and decision making is very much evident in this passage of Scripture. Joy at work is possible if we invest our talents as God intended. In that way we honor God and can experience His joy. The Olympic runner Eric Liddell expressed it well in the movie *Chariots of Fire* when he said, "When I run, I feel His pleasure."

GOD ENJOYS OUR STEWARDSHIP WORK JUST AS HE

ENJOYS HIS OWN WORK.

Until Adam and Eve sinned and were driven from the Garden, the working environment there was described as a paradise. Work was a central element of this paradise. Not only was work an act of worship, but it also was fulfilling and rewarding. Of course, after Adam and Eve broke their relationship with God, all of life, including work, became more difficult and troublesome. For some, that is where the story ends. Mundane daily work is seen as an obligation, a burden, or even pure drudgery, rather than the joyous experience it was meant to be.

Fortunately, that is not the end of the story. For Christians there is more. There is redemption. Christ came so we could re-establish our relationship with God. That fact has many implications, but for the purpose of this book it means that our work can be redeemed as well. While we cannot re-create the perfect work environment of the Garden, we can do everything possible to make our work environments as close to the Garden's standards as possible. We can approach our work as God designed from the beginning by helping create the workplaces that God intended. Despite sin, joy at work is still possible.

We get more clues in Genesis and the rest of the Bible as to how to make work joyful. Above all, we must be humble. We are not God. We were created as limited, fallible human beings. Those characteristics apply to all people, including those of us who are leaders. Recognition of this truth, especially by leaders, is the first step to creating a workplace filled with joy.

Joy will be difficult to experience. It requires that we understand that the major purpose of work is to use the resources of the created world to serve our needs and the needs of others. Work is likely to be experienced as a difficult and meaningless endeavor if we stray from God's original purpose.

For Dennis, the ultimate reward is the Master's joy. It is the thrill of decision making. It is the deep satisfaction of making a difference. And yet, it is even

more than that.

The Reward of the Master's Joy

The key to good stewardship of the creation is to discern what the Owner wants and then do what that Owner wants. The great result or reward of that stewardship is twofold: both the joy of doing what we were created to do, as well the joy of the Owner. Imagine being in sync with all that we were originally created to be and do. Could there be any greater joy? To go back to our rightful role of limited, finite creatures who do not have to be like Atlas, trying to carry the whole world on our shoulders. To have confidence that our Creator is in full control. That He knows exactly what we need, and desires to see our needs met even more than we do. And to know that our Creator loves us deeply.

Our culture today offers countless strategies for finding success, significance, happiness, fulfillment, and meaning. But God says the route begins and is sustained by *surrender*—surrender to being a creature designed by Him and to a willingness to follow His agenda for our lives.

We typically apply the idea of "surrender" to our church life, because that is where the concept of surrender is usually discussed. We are told to surrender our finances by tithing to the church. To surrender our time by regularly attending and serving in church programs. To surrender our will by submitting to a community of others—for example, by yielding to their dreams for the church, or their style of worship, or their choices for a new facility, or their preferences for a new pastor. Likewise, we are told to surrender in our marriages—to learn mutual submission and a love that is not self-seeking. And to surrender in our role as parents, with the understanding that God has given us our children and has a purpose for their lives that goes beyond our agendas.

> THE KEY TO GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF THE CREATION IS TO DISCERN WHAT THE OWNER WANTS AND THEN DO WHAT THAT OWNER WANTS.

So the idea of surrender is quite familiar to Christians. Yet most of us have never

been called to surrender our *work* to God. Not to the point that it changes the purpose of our work, or that it changes the purpose of our organizations, and or that it puts our roles at work in much greater risk. But how can we be wholly surrendered to God if our work is not surrendered to God? A life partially surrendered is not a life surrendered. We cannot compartmentalize our work and leave it untouched by God's call to stewardship.

There's no question that talk of surrendering our work to God and taking on the responsibility for stewarding our work may at first seem like a route *away* from freedom and joy. Words like "stewardship" and "responsibility" have negative connotations for many of us. For example, "stewards" are bound to someone else's agenda. "Responsibility" may feel like taking on nothing but worry, or agreeing to take blame and criticism for decisions we'll be forced to make without adequate resources or full authority to make those decisions.

But what if the agenda we are bound to comes from One who is infinitely powerful, all-wise, and all-good? In that case, being bound to Someone else's agenda means being connected to the very best thing we could possibly do. Especially knowing that we were *made* to take responsibility, to *enjoy* making decisionsand getting feedback on them. The responsibility that stewardship involves turns out to be something that brings great joy to us.

The Reward of Worship

Most people probably think of worship as an event that occurs on Sunday mornings, usually involving singing, praying, and listening to a sermon. But the Bible teaches that worship is any attitude or action that *ascribes worth to God*. It is revering God for who He is. By that understanding, the ways we worship can take many forms. (It also means that just because we use traditional forms doesn't mean we have an attitude of worship.)

Read Psalm 148. The first 10 verses describe the sun, moon, trees, and animals all praising God in worship. *They do so by being what God designed them to be*

and doing what God designed them to do.

If that is how the creation and the animals worship God, what about the way human beings should worship God? Romans 12:1 is plain: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” Our bodies were made for work; that is how God created us. Our intended function can be seen in our form. We are creatures designed for work, and to do that work willfully surrendered to God’s agenda for the earth. Therefore, our “spiritual act of worship” is to work in agreement with God. No wonder Romans 12 goes on to say that we must work according to the gifts God has given us. We ascribe glory to God when we do what God designed us to do, acknowledging that we are doing it for God, not for ourselves.

The Reward of Contentment

In the introduction to this study, we defined *joy* as “a deep, abiding, inner peace that no circumstances can take away, because we are in God’s will and aware of God’s presence.” That kind of deep contentment—a peace that supersedes all the wins and losses of our day-to-day work world—is a treasure of great value. It does not depend on our circumstances but on our God.

The last verses of Ecclesiastes (12:13-14) read as follows:

> Now all has been heard;
> here is the conclusion of the matter:
> Fear God and keep his commandments,
> for this is the whole duty of man.
> For God will bring every deed into judgment,
> including every hidden thing,
> whether it is good or evil.

The passage underscores our ultimate accountability as human beings to God. Usually this passage (and others like it) are seen as a “heavy stick” text intended to warn us to behave rightly. Note the words “fear” and “judgment,” which strike

a rather dire tone. But in light of the Parable of the Talents, as well as Dennis Bakke's perspective on that parable, can you see a different understanding of the Ecclesiastes passage? All of us will give an account of our work to God someday —yes, to God, who is the Source of our joy. Our great privilege is to bring satisfaction to Him. When we do that, we enter into His joy, a joy that cannot be removed and has no end.

Another "heavy stick" passage on accountability is 1 Corinthians 4:1-5:

> So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Paul is discussing his own stewardship as an apostle. But the passage can be seen as having broader implications for the rest of us, given that each us has been given a stewardship by God over some aspect of the creation. How does this passage dovetail with the Parable of the Talents? What greater reward can there be from our work than receiving praise from God?

Reaction

Reaction questions

- Have you ever considered *joy* to be one of the rewards of your work? Of your business (if you work in business)?
- Do you think God feels joy as He watches your organization do its work?
- How might your own role as a leader and manager help you appreciate the joy that God experiences—or does not experience—as the Master over all of the endeavors and enterprises of His human creatures?

Executive Summary of Joy at Work

Postscript: Enter Into the Master's Joy

As Bakke grew up in his Christian home, he observed that people seemed to get more credit for contributing to society if they did it within a Christian rather than a secular context—with the exception of homemaking. Bakke always wanted to do something useful for society and felt called to service in the secular arena, but he didn't believe that work in government or business would be as honorable as church work. Searching for intersections between his desire to contribute, his calling, and his faith, he joined Christian Bible study and discussion groups and began to formulate a values- and principles-based approach to business.

"God is not a typical boss," Bakke writes. God delegated decision making to humans from their introduction in Eden. Adam's and Eve's jobs, and those of all humans who followed them, were to act as stewards—that is, keepers of the earth and all that was created there. God appears pleased by all human work, not preferring one type over another. All kinds of production and management activities appear to honor and please the Creator, particularly if they please the person who does them.

Bakke asserts that everyone working, regardless of where, should see his or her work as a sacred responsibility. We are called upon to steward our talents and skills and to use them in stewardship of the planet where we apply them. "Entering into the Master's joy" is a matter of recognizing that linkage. The Creator has delegated the decisions about earth's stewardship to us, and we ought to take that responsibility as a sacred trust and as a duty to honor our Creator in all we do.

Group Discussion Questions

(1) What part of the outline of this study has been most meaningful to you and why?

1. We humans were made by God to work.
2. We were made by God to find joy in our work. That intention was frustrated—but not obliterated—by the Fall.
3. Christians have the "first fruits of the Spirit," giving them a unique ability to envision work in its original, joyful state.
4. This "Garden vision" and stewardship responsibility compel us to work with joy and to build workplaces of joy.

(2) Joy starts with surrender to God, thus restoring us as God's representatives stewarding His creation in the way He desires. What is the hardest part of your life or work for you to surrender?

(3) In your workplace, which of the nine obstacles listed are the most prevalent?

(4) Describe what specific things would be different for you and for those you work with if your work and your workplace experienced more joy. How would things be different for other stakeholders of your organization—customers, employees, shareholders, vendors, regulators, families of employees, etc.?

(5) How is joy distinct from happiness, enthusiasm, or even comfort?

(6) Name three personal reasons that make pursuing joy at work worth the risks for you.

Talents

A talent was a unit of money in Jesus's day—a rather large unit of money, actually. While a talent may have represented about $1,000 in today's currency, in that culture it probably represented far more.

A talent was worth 6,000 denarii. One denarius was what a common laborer could earn in one day—about 16 cents to 18 cents. So in the Parable of the Talents, when the master gave the first servant five talents, he wasn't just giving him $5,000. He was giving him a sum that the average person would have to work 82-plus years (a lifetime) to earn. Even the servant who was given one talent was being handed a significant responsibility. His one talent represented 6,000 days of common labor—about 16½ years, with no days off.

In this world everything is upside down. That which, if it could be prolonged here, would be a truancy, is likest that which in a better country is the End of ends. Joy is the serious business of Heaven.

C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer, p. 93

What now?

It is hoped that the concepts of 'Garden vision', stewardship, trust, purpose, humility, gifts, power, values, the Master's joy and other things you've discussed over the past 10 weeks have made lasting changes in how you view your work. In most cases this study has not added new insights but has provided words to describe what you already knew deep within, but hadn't overtly expressed. God created us with a joy and meaning in our work. We have all experienced this. Knowing why work gives us joy provides a new purpose and intentionality. It gives us an ability to open up the same doors for others.

Often, deep changes in perspective filter up to decisions in daily life in unexpected ways. Also, it is sometimes surprising how members of a group will quickly grow deep friendships when they are discussing topics that don't have simple answers.

For some, the next step is to recruit some friends and go back through this study with a new group. You'll be surprised at how many new insights you'll see the second time through the exact same material.

For others, the next step is a dedication of their work to be a source and place of joy. It is a step of faith, accountability, and hope. It

cannot be accomplished alone. Hopefully this study has opened up new areas of your life to be surrendered to God and has provided some committed companions for a successful life journey of finding joy at work.

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Our thanks go first to Dennis Bakke for his courageous example of leadership at AES and his courageous willingness to write up his story in *Joy at Work.* By placing himself under the microscope, he has allowed the rest of us to both study and critique his efforts. Dennis's work at AES had intentional biblical roots. His hope is that this study will help participants investigate and apply those same biblical roots, even if they have questions about some of the fruit they saw on his AES tree.

Dennis joins us in thanking the group of participants listed below who helped Brad and Bill develop this companion study through a weekly Bible study in Dallas. They responded to our rough drafts of the material with invaluable questions and suggestions, adding stories from their own lives, insights from their various perspectives, and wisdom from their seasoned experience. This is not something written in a writer's loft but in a restaurant on Tuesday mornings, by people coming together around the Bible before going into the work world to fulfill their callings.

These co-writers are:

- Jim Beckett, founder and CEO, Beckett Publications, Inc.
- John Cox, head of strategic planning, investor relations, and recruiting, HBK
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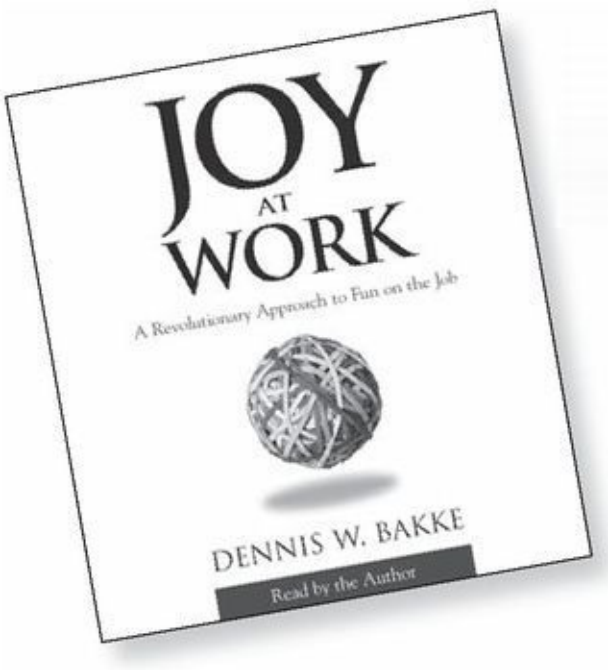
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JOY AT WORK RESOURCES



Enhance your small group Bible study
with the following resources:

Audio Book



Listen to Dennis Bakke share his inspiring tale is own voice.

Uabridged; 9 hours 28 minutes

D: $30.00/$40.00 Can.
8 compact discs; 0-9762686-2-0
Cassette: $26.00/$36.00 Can.
6 cassettes; 0-9762686-1-2

Power Trip

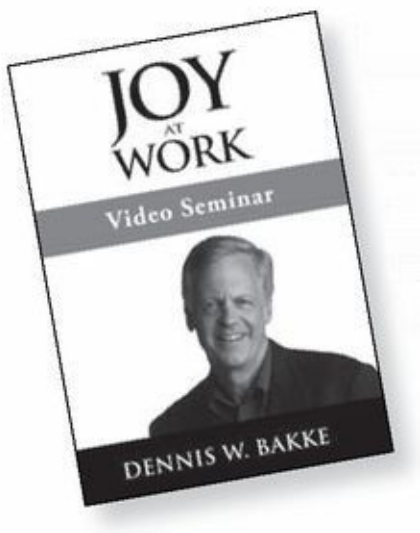


Emmy award-winner Paul Devlin captures the ciples of *Joy at Work* in his internationally acclaimed documentary, *Power Trip*. It's the amazing story of how AES tries to transform the dysfunctional ctricity-distribution system in Tbilisi, capital of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia.

Struggling against corruption, assassination, and treet rioting, AES manager Piers Lewis must ade the Georgians to pay for, rather than steal, electricity. This "compelling and passionate tale of a country rebuilding itself" (Hollywood Reporter) has "suspense, comedy, and some colorful characters" (Variety) and develops into an "increasingly absurdist standoff between Communist-inspired cynicism and tenacious capitalist zeal" (New York Daily News).

Available on DVD and VHS. Running time 85 minutes.

DVD Seminar



The *Joy at Work* DVD Seminar is a must for any leader who wants to bring principles, purpose, and fun to the workplace. In four inspiring lectures, you'll erience Dennis Bakke's passion for transforming ganizations, where every person—from custodian to CEO—has the power to use his or her talents free of needless bureaucracy. Filmed before a live audience, the following lectures will challenge verything you thought you knew about business.

- Purpose Matters
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Running time 3 hours; includes bonus footage.

The DVD is an excellent training resource for any business or non-profit. Available exclusively at DennisBakke.com.

To order JOY AT WORK resources
or to place group orders of the
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www.DennisBakke.com

For *Joy at Work* updates, sign up online today for the JOY AT WORK JOURNAL and receive our monthly e-newsletter. It's easy to sign-up and you'll only receive the monthly updates.

1

Ownership and Control: Rethinking Corporate Governance for the 21st Century, Margaret M. Blair, The Brookings Institution, 1995.

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