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## ARTICLE

### Joy at Work Postscript: “Enter Into the Master’s Joy”

Dennis W. Bakke

*The following article is a chapter (actually, the “Postscript”) from Dennis W. Bakke’s seminal book, Joy at Work (paperback 2006; Pearson Venture Group). The chapter provides the underlying rationale explaining Mr. Bakke’s remarkable journey as the co-founder and CEO of Applied Energy Services (AES). The rest of the book — all of it preceding this chapter — is equally enlightening and useful for students, professors, and business practitioners who are inclined to challenge the established paradigm of compartmentalizing the faith and business/work aspects of our lives. We at JBIB thank Mr. Bakke and his publishers for allowing us to re-print this chapter, which is used by permission.*

—Rick Martinez, Editor

“Where do these ideas come from?” was a frequently asked question following my lectures at business schools and other forums on the subjects covered in this book. “Enter Into the Master’s Joy” is my response. It is an attempt to describe the integration of my faith and the secular work to which I have been called. For clergy, this chapter is one person’s view from the pew.

—D. W. B.

Miss McInnes, a petite woman in her early 50s, was my math teacher from 8th to 11th grade. Polio had left her with a withered arm, but her brilliance and dedication were her most important features. During my senior year, I decided to stay at school before home football games, which were played on

Friday nights, instead of spending an hour and a half riding the bus home and then turning right around to get back in time for the game. Miss McInnes invited me to have supper with her before those games, at the local cafe about a quarter of a mile from school. One evening she asked the question put to every

high school senior. "What are you going to do with your life?" I gave her my usual answer: "I don't really have any idea, although I am hoping to go to college." I thought the college answer would bear out the faith she had shown in me. Fewer than 40 percent of my classmates planned to attend college. "I have some advice for you," she responded without hesitation. "Raymond and Lowell [my older and younger brothers, respectively, both of whom had scrupulously avoided taking math from her] have already committed to be pastors. Someone needs to support them."

To my knowledge, Miss McInnes was not a churchgoer or an amateur theologian. But her advice to me captured what I had been taught about the purpose of work and God's attitude toward it. The best occupation for a devout Christian, according to the teachings of my church, was to be a missionary, preferably in rural Africa. My cousin Gordon Bakke filled that role for over 20 years. Second best was to be a pastor or priest. My brothers were called to this kind of work. Third in the hierarchy was the

"helping" professions: teachers, social workers, nurses, and others who served in similar ways, especially those who were not paid high salaries. People seemed to get more credit if they performed these kinds of jobs within a Christian-based organization, rather than working for the government, a public school, or a profit-making organization. Next in line was government work. Homemaking was a respected occupation as well. At the bottom were commercial and business jobs such as secretaries, technicians, factory workers, and executives. The primary path to redemption for these unfortunate souls was to make enough money to support those working in "full-time Christian ministry." They could also atone by volunteering their time to do something significant for the local church or another Christian activity when not at their jobs. Miss McInnes had advised me to use my talents to play the role dictated by my religious beliefs, at least to the extent that I understood them at the time.

When I left Harvard six years later, my ideas about work had not changed significantly. I

accepted a position with the federal government in Washington partly because I had not served in the military. I felt a tug to do something useful for society. Somehow, spending time in government service seemed more consistent with my faith than jumping directly into business. After six more years working in the secretary's office at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and in the Executive Office of the President, my understanding of the interplay between my faith and my work remained the same.

A shift began several years after AES opened its doors for business. A small group of people from Washington Community Fellowship, the church that Eileen and I had helped start, began meeting to pray, study the Bible, and share our lives...My understanding of the relationship between work and faith was reshaped by our Bible studies, conversations, and prayers. Every week I met with another group of friends, including Bill Brooks, Dan Van Horn, and Bob Muir, for breakfast in the cafeteria at the Supreme Court on Capitol Hill. Our discussions focused

primarily on business and the role faith played in it. We called our group "The Business Square Table." In these conversations I tested some of the business ideas that came out of my understanding of Scripture. Soon I was putting them to use at AES, which was still struggling to get established.

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. My views on this point are based on biblical principles, starting with the Creation story in the Bible.

The Creation story begins with God working. He is creating the universe. He then creates mankind in His own image. He assigned humans to manage the Earth and all the animals, plants, and other resources it contained. God gave us the capability and authority to work. Through the act of Creation, He showed us how to undertake this responsibility. Genesis 2:5 says, "... and there was not a man to till the

ground.” This implies that one of the reasons mankind exists is to work.

Work itself was not the goal of life. We were not placed in the Garden purely to work. The Bible says that we were created to have a relationship with God and to honor Him. Work is one of the ways we honor or “glorify” God. Humankind’s first important job description was to manage the Earth and all that comes from God’s creation. I believe this includes the ideas, services, and products that come from the imaginations of people. We honor God by furthering His creation. Work should be an act of worship to God. God is pleased when people steward their talents and energy to achieve these ends.

The Bible does not appear to give priorities to the various kinds of stewardship or work. All kinds of production and management activities honor God. If the work is seen by the worker as something accomplished for God and meeting a need in society, it is pleasing to God. Some roles that modern society tends to see as less valuable and mundane — animal

husbandry and tilling the soil, for instance — are specifically mentioned as worthy endeavors in the Garden. Isn’t it logical that all work that results in food, clothing, shelter, rest or recreation, beauty, and a host of other worthy ends can be acts of worship to God and seen as valuable contributions to society? Are these not activities that can be as sacred as rearing children, teaching school, or even carrying out priestly duties?

When I was a teenager, a camp counselor introduced me to a Bible verse in Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth. “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This verse suggested that all my work and play was to be done for God. I tested the concept at home with what seemed to be the least creative and inspiring job I was assigned: washing dishes. I vowed to approach the twice-daily task as work done directly for God. Over time I realized that meant doing the work with a willing spirit, enthusiasm, and pride in the results. I continually worked on my dishwashing skills with a goal of being the best home

dishwasher God ever employed. Forty years later, Eileen and my children will attest to my seriousness and special joy that is part of almost every dishwashing experience.

Though I often fail to live up to God's highest standards, I realize that my approach to the job is consistent with the expectation God places on all my daily work. God does not differentiate among types of work. Halfhearted efforts and sloppy work do not honor God. He expects me to use my best efforts, talents, and skills in every task I undertake, whatever its importance.

A survey of other biblical stories finds no evidence that God favors church or other religiously related work over other callings and vocations. The grocery store magnate Howard Butt points out that Bezaleel was the first person mentioned in the Bible who was "filled with the Spirit of God." Neither Moses or Joshua received that distinction. Was Bezaleel a priest? Was he God's chosen leader of the Israelites? No. Bezaleel was an artist, a designer, a master craftsman, and later a

contracting executive. He was given the task of helping to design and build Israel's tabernacle in the wilderness.

Most of the heroes of the Bible are people called to secular vocations. Abraham developed real estate. Jacob was a rancher. Joseph was a high government official (in charge of agriculture, welfare, and interior lands and probably the equivalent of a modern-day prime minister) in a nation led by a Pharaoh who did not acknowledge the sovereignty of the Hebrew God. Esther won a beauty contest. Lydia manufactured cloth. Many heroes were military men. My favorite example is Daniel. He was an exiled refugee, an immigrant, who entered the King's University (Babylon's Harvard). Babylon was led by people who did not believe in the God whom Daniel served. There were no Jewish priests or synagogues in Babylon. Worship and prayer were conducted by lay people. In this setting, Daniel rose to the rank of prime minister and may have served as interim king when Nebuchadnezzar had to step down because of insanity. These biblical characters were

not clerics or in the helping professions. Indeed, they served as leaders in organizations that stood in opposition to everything they believed about God and His role in the world. They worked for secular organizations.

There are some who argue that the New Testament paints a different picture in this regard. I do not read it that way. I have already mentioned Lydia, and I could list others with similar callings. Again I quote Howard Butt:

The idea that daily secular work is spiritually inferior comes to its ultimate destruction in the person of Jesus of Nazareth — the Carpenter. The word translated “carpenter” is also the word for “builder,” someone in the construction trades (since there was little wood in the area, construction trades probably meant stone or masonry work). The Greek word is “tekton,” from which we get our word “technology.”

Traditionally we have thought of Nazareth as a rural village and the carpenter’s shop as a

quiet, rustic place with a small number of employees. That may not be the real picture. In 1931, the University of Michigan began archaeological digs at the ancient city of Sepphoris, just 4 miles northwest of Nazareth. From that research we know today that Sepphoris was a burgeoning, upscale Greco-Roman metropolis of 30,000 or more people located on the powerful East-West trade routes. Sepphoris was a moneyed city full of Jews, but also Greeks, Arabs, and Romans. Following an uprising around the time of Jesus’s birth, the Romans destroyed the city. Sepphoris was being rebuilt during Jesus’s lifetime — during his building-business lifetime. Herod Antipas made Sepphoris his capital for ruling Galilee. During Jesus’s later public ministry He avoided Sepphoris, probably because of its Herodian politics and the fact that Herod had Jesus’s friend and forerunner, John the Baptist, beheaded. During his years in the building business, I find it hard to

believe that Jesus and his team didn't work in Sepphoris. In construction, it was the biggest thing going in his area and not far from home.

This is all speculation, of course, but it is likely that Jesus spent 75 to 85 percent of his working life in the building profession making money or its equivalent in order to support himself and his family. It is also likely that he sold his products and services to people who did not recognize or acknowledge His deity. Many of them may not even have been Jews. He did what most people in the Christian church today would call secular work.

Jesus ordains another type of work different from the stewardship approach described in this book. Introduced in Matthew's Gospel, this other type of work is commonly known as the Great Commission. "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on Earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Thus, Christians have two callings, or job descriptions. First, they should use their talents and energy to steward the Earth's resources to meet their physical needs and those of others. Second, they should present the good news about Christ's redemption and all of its implications to people around the world. The Bible indicates that Christians are called to both these jobs, although our time commitment and effort toward each may not be equal. Family life is a good example where both job descriptions apply. Both of these assignments from God are part of our requirement to seek His holiness. Seeking holiness requires us to pray, study, reflect, and ask forgiveness for our transgressions. Our daily work is also an important element of the holy existence to which we are called. Our work and our faith come into alignment if we keep in mind these four lessons:

1. As part of seeking holiness and honoring God, we are called both to steward resources to serve people's physical needs and also to spread the story of redemption and the other teachings of Jesus. While the evangelical wing of the modern Christian church often puts the emphasis on work related to the Great Commission, there is little evidence that God considers this a higher calling than the work of managing His creation.

2. I realize that there is nothing more important than a person's coming into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Clergy and others who are set apart to lead us spiritually are obviously important in God's design for the world. However, their calling does not automatically rank higher than the work of farmers, executives, homemakers, administrative assistants, politicians, artists, teachers, factory workers, or investment bankers.

3. Being called to work in a "secular" organization is no better or worse than being called to work in a church, a para-church organization (such as Habitat for Humanity and World Vision), or an institution run by Christians. God may call us to work for Him in any of these settings, regardless of our occupation and particular talents. Moreover, if I am called primarily to evangelism, working in a secular company or other institution might be a better fit than working in the friendly confines of a Christian setting.

4. If I see my work as a mission for God, my attitude and behavior at work are likely to change in a markedly positive way.

The assistant pastor of a church I once attended counseled young people who were having trouble in a secular workplace to quit their jobs and seek positions in church work or employment in some other Christian organization. While there may be individual cases



where this kind of advice is appropriate, I don't think it is a practical approach in a world where devout Christians are a minority. In the United States and Europe, there is a trend to make religion primarily a private matter. In other words, whatever a person does at home and church regarding God is acceptable, but don't bring faith into the public square. The movement to keep God out of the schools, government, and companies is contrary to the biblical mandate to steward all parts of the Creation, including the public institutions we call secular.

Some churches and other Christian organizations have abetted this separation of "sacred" from "secular" by operating their own nurseries, schools, social services, and charities. By doing so, they are inadvertently aiding those who would keep the church out of the public square. We should encourage the gifted people in church-related enterprises to at least consider switching to secular schools and companies where their faith may have a bigger impact. We need more Daniels to speak with words and deeds

in all the important institutions of modern societies.

Members of my church developed an effective after-school learning center for children in the neighborhood. The program was expensive. It required over \$100,000 of the church's \$150,000 mission budget to provide part-time services for 30 to 40 children. A discussion among church members ensued regarding what changes should be made. I suggested shutting down the program (even though my wife had helped to start it 10 years earlier). In its place, I advocated a new approach. Why not provide \$10,000-a-year supplements to entice up to 10 young Christian teachers to work in the public schools of the inner city around the church? The new teachers would be marked by the church as God's ambassadors to the children in the neighborhood schools. I suggested that this strategy might have a greater impact on neighborhood children than our little center at the church. Like a lot of my schemes, the idea did not fly with others in the congregation. It was, however, the kind of thinking

that logically comes from understanding the concepts of work, callings, and mission as presented in the Bible.

I asked one of the volunteers at our church learning center where he was employed. "I am working part time serving tables at the local restaurant so I can have as much time as possible to work at the learning center," he said. Most church members saw his decision as laudable and consistent with his faith and with God's priorities. He believed the job at the learning center was much more significant in God's view than the role at the restaurant. I have already suggested that this isn't necessarily true, at least if I interpret Scripture correctly. With his attitude and philosophy about work, was he really doing justice to his job at the restaurant? Was he treating the role of waiter as one ordained by God? Was he performing his job as God's steward serving the dozens of people who sat in his area of the restaurant each night? Was he cutting corners? Did he have a godly attitude? If he didn't see his work as a sacred responsibility, would he do his best? Would his light shine

brightly for God, or would he go through the motions to earn money and save his best efforts for the learning center? It is all too common for Christians to put their voluntary efforts in community service or at their church ahead of the work that pays their salary and occupies most of their time. Similarly, people often give a lower priority to their work at the factory or office than they do to their responsibilities at home. This is not biblical. I also am not convinced that the common admonition from pastors to put family life ahead of work outside the home is consistent with Scripture. Jesus, for example, appeared to put His work ahead of family. On the other hand, idolizing work, or always putting work ahead of family responsibilities, is not biblical, either.

A gracious, godly woman met me at the airport to take me to the Christian conference where I was to speak. On the drive to the hotel, she asked me what I was going to say during my workshop session the next day. I gave her a five-minute synopsis of what I believed to be the principal purpose of organizations and my

passion to create joyful workplaces. “Are you part of the ‘success to significance’ movement?” she asked, indicating her approval if I was. “No,” I said. “I think that idea is very dangerous and is based on an incorrect reading of Scripture.” She almost drove off the road but recovered quickly enough to probe my thinking further.

The “success to significance” idea was popularized mostly among wealthy evangelical Christians through the inspirational book, *Half Time*, written by my friend Bob Buford. Bob tells the story of owning and operating a very successful communications company. At the “halftime” of his life he decided that he had made enough money and that it was time to do something more significant. He chose to move into the nonprofit sector. Unfortunately, many people have taken Bob’s personal story and made it a road map for their own lives. I see no evidence from the Bible or my Christian experience that working in a business is any more or less significant to God than becoming involved in the voluntary, church-related, or

not-for-profit activities that many Christians now think are more worthy of their talents and time. My reading of Scripture indicates that nearly every kind of work is significant, if it is consistent with the person’s calling and the person is working to glorify and worship God.

“Give something back” is another phrase thrown around by business leaders. It is a concept as flawed as “success to significance.” Giving something back assumes that I took something I shouldn’t have while working. Certainly this would not be the case if I saw my business as God intended it, a stewardship ministry to serve the needs of others and, in the process, my needs as well. Stewarding resources to meet the needs of others is a legitimate “giving” activity. Few activities are more socially responsible or Christian than using one’s talents to work at or manage a business. “Giving back” is relevant only if I have misappropriated and mismanaged the resources I have been given to steward.

John Pearson, the extraordinary CEO of the Christian Management Association, invited

me to speak at his group's annual conference. Before the gathering, we discussed the disturbing implications of the "success to significance" philosophy. "You see those individuals standing over by the window?" he asked, pointing to three men who appeared to be in their 30s. "Each of them was very successful in a high-tech industry in Southern California. Each one made a large amount of money. All quit their jobs and began searching for something more significant to do. They have all become disillusioned. They have not found a more significant way to use their talents than the jobs they quit. Now, they play a lot of golf."

Christian Wright, a 22-year-old graduate student, was working for a Christian development organization trying to help poor people in rural Uganda who had no running water or electricity. He became aware of AES's efforts to build a power plant on the Nile River that would supply electricity to both Uganda and Kenya. He was later hired by AES leaders in London to assist the development team for the project in Kampala. For more than four years he applied integ-

rity, creativity, enthusiasm, and business savvy to overcome economic, political, and environmental problems. He was able to bring the project near to the point where it could be funded and built. Chris is a devout follower of Jesus Christ. Like many others of faith at AES, Chris came to understand his role in the company as his calling from God, and his ministry, and his way of serving others. Few clergymen, missionaries, or social workers draw as heavily on their faith as Chris did while helping plan this project. If the Uganda power plant is eventually built, this profit-making venture will very likely do more good for the people of Uganda, especially the poor, than all the aid the government has received over the past 25 years from foreign nations, foundations, and church organizations. The projected price of the power from the plant is less than half that of the current fossil-fuel alternatives (and not nearly as damaging to the environment). It would triple the number of people who have access to electricity in that small country. Chris Wright and his colleagues at AES and in the

Ugandan government were doing God's work.

I met Steve Hase at church on Capitol Hill in Washington several years after AES had opened its doors for business. He was a recent graduate of Duke, where he had played junior varsity basketball. I enticed him to join our young company as a bookkeeper and financial assistant in our central financial services office, which employed only three other people at the time. His 6-foot, 7-inch frame and basketball skills were prized when the AES Arlington office competed against the hotshots from the new power plants becoming part of the company. Within a few years Steve was recruited to help in the company's business-development efforts. His colleagues soon recognized his extraordinary skills as an ambassador, a bridge builder, negotiator, and problem solver when AES faced controversial issues that involved public citizens, government officials, and other interests.

After six years with the company, Steve volunteered to move with his wife and young children to Cumberland, Mary-

land, a small and economically struggling town in the mountains of western Maryland. AES had identified Cumberland as a possible site for a new coal-fired power plant. Steve was asked to lead the local development of the plant.

I recently spoke at a civic function in Cumberland. It had been over six years since Steve had left the city for another AES assignment. Even now, he is remembered for his gracious manner, integrity, and courage, his love of the people of the community, and his creativity and tenacity in solving problems. He left Cumberland to live in Manchester, New Hampshire. Again, he was able to solve problems and win the hearts of an entire community, allowing AES to build a power plant in a city where few thought it possible. He may be the best example of how a Christian should and can approach business. He lived his faith openly. It affected everything related to his work. He saw his work as a calling from God as well as a duty to AES. He used his talents to solve problems and serve the needs of the community. In all

his work, he attempted to operate with the kind of humility, love, honesty, and persistence that Christ modeled for us. He did God's work as it is supposed to be done.

People of faith carry out their callings in a variety of settings and organizations. My sister, Marilyn Bakke Pearson, for example, has been a devoted mother, wife, and homemaker for most of her adult life. For many years she taught Bible each week to upwards of 500 women in Wilmette, Illinois, and in Devon, Pennsylvania. She also has a passion for making living spaces beautiful as well as functional. She manages to achieve that goal whether the budget is big or small. In her decorating business, she ministers to people by listening to the specifics of their lives and brings joy to others. Her decorating business honors God every bit as much as her roles teaching Bible or being a homemaker.

Genesis tells us that God paused at each step of the Creation process to pronounce His work "good." The joy He found in both the process and the extraordinary results

is obvious. God enjoyed working. Jesus reminds us of God's enjoyment of work in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30:

For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of these servants came and settled accounts with them.

So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides

them.” His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the master’s joy.” He also who had received two talents came and said, “Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.” His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the master’s joy.”

Then he who had received the one talent came and said, “Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.”

But his lord answered and said to him, “You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought

to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has 10 talents.

“For to everyone who had, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

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.”

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.

We may also find work less enjoyable if bosses make most of the important decisions. The Creation story does not

assign people, even leaders, the responsibility of "managing" other people. The Bible says that people are to have dominion over the animals and plants. It encourages humans to act as stewards for the world we live in. It does not, however, encourage us to dominate other people. It never classifies people as "resources." The Bible does endorse leadership. What is the difference? Biblical leadership requires those in authority to serve the people they lead. Leaders do whatever it takes to allow followers to use their talents effectively. Thus, good leaders delegate decisions and create an environment in which others can manage God's world. Notice that God delegated the decision of naming the animals to Adam. Even more important in the Creation story is that God allowed humankind to make the ultimate decision of life. He gave us the choice to acknowledge and follow God or to reject Him. We were created in God's likeness as moral beings with the ability to reason, make decisions, and be held responsible for the consequences. Living in relationship to God in a manner that is consistent with God's plan

for His creation is the best recipe for a joyous and productive life.

The question of leadership authority and its effect on organizational decisions remains difficult to understand. In my chapter on leadership, I discussed the dilemma of a leader who, on one hand, is given authority over the entire organization and, on the other, is supposed to refrain from making decisions that others in the organization can make. My research and experience suggest that leaders do have the authority to make all decisions and direct all actions. Leaders are responsible for all that goes on within the organization. There is, however, no requirement that leaders make all or even most of the decisions for which they have authority. God certainly had the authority to name the animals, but he did not use that authority. In the Parable of the Talents, the master gave his resources to his servants and entrusted them with decisions about their use. God could certainly control His creation through micromanagement, but He chose to delegate most decisions to us. Where God tends to take action is on matters of

morality and questions of right and wrong. Shouldn't we follow His lead when we decide which decisions to make and which to delegate? God created humans in His image. We are to be creators like Him. We should follow His path. As the Parable of the Talents shows, I do not believe He meant that most important decisions should be left to Himself or to human leaders acting on His behalf. God wants us to enjoy our work just as He did.

Bear with me while I retell the story of Joseph's life in Egypt with a contemporary slant in order to make a contemporary point. When Joseph, son of Jacob, went to Canaan Temple of Yahweh on the Nile, he joined a small and struggling group of believers. There were servants and slaves who, like Joseph, had been sold into bondage and taken by force to Cairo. Other members were young people who had fled their homes in Canaan to seek their fortune in the exciting urban life of Egypt. Still others were merchants and travelers who had come to the great city to ply their trade.

Early on, Joseph distinguished himself as one of God's

special people. He had moved rapidly from household slave to head steward at the home of a high government official. After being framed by the official's wife and sent to jail, Joseph received advice from the elders and priests of the temple to leave domestic management and join the temple staff. His ability to interpret dreams and understand prophecy would be especially useful at the temple.

The Hebrew priests became more aggressive in recruiting him for temple work after his prediction that a seven-year famine would hit the entire Middle East. Certainly those in the temple who were of Canaanitic descent understood the dire consequences that a famine would have on family and friends back home. They strongly encouraged Joseph to lead a new Center for Canaan Refugee Relief (CCRR), operated out of the temple. The CCRR would begin immediately to store food and other necessities for members of the temple and relatives in Canaan and elsewhere. The center would collect money and food from congregation members and other supporters. They would send

requests to family and friends for similar support. With the money collected they would pay Joseph's salary in his important role as director of the center. They might also buy a little food with the extra money they received. Temple members would be encouraged to donate whatever food they could for the cause. Volunteers would be asked to drop by the Center after they finished their 16 hours toiling as domestic workers in Egyptian homes. They could help package and store the food.

Enter Pharaoh. He offered Joseph the job of chief operating officer of the country. The priests and elders of the temple tried to dissuade Joseph from accepting the job. "It is a godless government. It discriminates against our people," they argued. Joseph would be selling out to the worst kind of secular organization possible. One frustrated temple leader predicted the job would cause him to lose his faith in Yahweh or at least dilute righteousness. His once bright future in the ministry would be lost. He would be trading a chance of doing something significant for

God for worldly wealth, fame, and power.

Joseph took the job with Pharaoh, of course, and served his God and society from the new position. He still worshiped weekly at Canaan Temple. His friends and temple leaders were friendly, but they made little connection between his new role in the government and the programs and ministries of the temple. The temple leaders scrambled to find a new leader for CCRR in order to continue their program to prepare for the upcoming famine.

This apocryphal story of Joseph is presented to show how many modern Christian churches, especially those with a bent toward social service, might react to people like Joseph in their congregations. Joseph is an Old Testament portrait of Christ. He is betrayed and falsely accused of wrongdoing. He is restored to a lofty position so he can help save the world. He forgives his brothers for betraying him. All too frequently, leaders in Christian churches do not understand the implications of the Joseph story for members of their congregation and the

church's theology of work and mission.

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. Would our understanding and zeal increase if the Christian

church could agree on a common way to identify this important work?

Presbyterians and a few others call it the “cultural mandate.” Because of John Calvin’s theological insights in the 16th century, Presbyterian doctrine concerning the redeeming qualities of working in secular organizations is quite similar to my own. While the theology of the “cultural mandate” might be alive in the Presbyterian church, it is my impression that the average layman neither understands the term “cultural mandate” nor uses it to describe his daily work for the Lord. “Cultural” has taken on different meanings in modern society and may no longer be an effective way to communicate the essence of this type of work.

My brother Ray identifies this kind of work as our public ministry. Unfortunately, “public” is today usually associated with secular or government institutions. Christians probably would not identify their work in business or other private institutions as public ministry.

Tent-making ministry, so named because the Apostle Paul

made tents to fund his missionary work, is sometimes suggested as an alternative. However, this name suffers from the connotation that work is valuable only because it enables people to evangelize. 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.

The term “marketplace ministry” has become popular among para-church organizations and some churches as well. I like the word “marketplace,” but it is not being used in a way consistent with my view on work. The marketplace movement appears to encourage people to use their workplaces to evangelize either by word or deed. This marketplace mission is certainly consistent with the

Great Commission, but it does not sufficiently serve the important goal of stewarding God's resources to meet societal needs.

The phrase "lifestyle evangelism" also falls short. It is primarily a method of letting our behavior at home and at work reflect the character of Christ so that others might know the truth about who He is. This is certainly the way Christians should live and work, but it fails to recognize the importance of our creative efforts and the need to reform our workplaces.

Stewardship ministry reflects the essence of the role that God gave Adam and Eve in the Garden. They were managing resources to meet physical needs. Unfortunately, "stewardship" is a word that the church usually associates with charitable giving and tithing. It has come to refer to the small amount of money people give away, rather than the money they make and the talents they use to celebrate God in their daily lives.

Opus Dei (God's Work) is an increasingly important Catholic movement that advocates holiness in all that we do. It elevates the sacredness of our

daily work. Even so, I don't believe it celebrates, to the extent God intended, the work we accomplish and the places where we work.

Someone suggested that I name the kind of work I am discussing "The Net Minders' Ministry." Jesus called his disciples away from the fishing nets so they could spend most of their time in evangelism. Today, many of us are called to tend the nets so that others can eat and meet other material needs. We could also name this kind of mission effort after Daniel, Joseph, Esther, or any of the hundreds of biblical characters who made this kind of ministry famous. Their example is a powerful reminder that God intends our daily work to be a substantial part of our service to Him.

The way Christians identify the type of work they do often reveals their attitudes toward work. When devout Christians say someone is working "in full-time Christian service" or "in ministry," it usually means that the person works for a church or a para-church organization. It does not cover Christians employed by governments,

businesses, or public schools. Does this imply that people are not doing God's work "full time" if they work in secular organizations, especially profit-making enterprises? There appears to be a misguided notion in many Christian circles that someone working for The Washington Post, General Motors, Harvard University, the Department of Energy, Walt Disney, Goldman Sachs, or the local barbershop is doing something less significant for God than people who work at the First Baptist Church, Young Life, or the Presbyterian Mission Hospital in Pakistan.

If Joseph had been a member of a modern Christian church, he might have quit his job in the Egyptian government and headed back to his family in Israel. By today's logic, it would have been time for him to give up his power and wealth so he could give something back to his people at home. This idea that "Christian work" is somehow superior to the practical work of commerce most likely came from the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. They influenced early Christian theologians such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Plato's

dualism divided the world into a higher level of great ideas and rational thought and a lower level of less worthy activity, such as work. In *Your Work Matters to God*, Doug Sherman and William Hendricks argue that this dualistic thinking led Christians to believe that their daily work has no intrinsic value. Christian churches and theologians have perpetuated these ideas by elevating the clergy and spirituality above the laity and the practical work that most people undertake. This is not at all consistent with Judeo-Christian Scriptures.

In addition, the powerful 20th-century movement to make faith private by pushing religious thought and opinion from the public square has contributed to the idea that religious beliefs should not be part of our public life, which for many of us is our work. This approach encourages people to freely exercise their faith at home and at church, but not at their workplace. Some churches have unwittingly abetted the movement to remove God from our schools, businesses, and governments by isolating themselves from the secular

world. Churches have created their own schools, social services, and enterprises in an effort to help disadvantaged people. This separation of the “spiritual” from the “worldly” has contributed to the confusion among people of faith regarding the sacred nature of their daily work.

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?

I have put significant emphasis on accountability to God and to our business supervisors for the work we undertake. As discussed earlier, accountability is a necessary ingredient of the enjoyment of the work we do. The local church ought to be a primary vehicle for holding Christian people responsible for their vocational work.

Most Christian churches require people classified as “missionaries” to report periodically to the congregation on their work. Pastors and staff members

also report on their efforts to serve, as do volunteers and participants in church-sponsored programs. People who work outside the realm of the institutional church are rarely asked by the church to account for their work. There are no reports from homemakers. Government employees don’t talk about their work. Lawyers, accountants, nurses, and teachers are not required to tell their fellow congregants about their efforts to serve God through their work. People in business are not asked to provide a record of their stewardship.

Years ago, I asked the elders of my church if I could submit AES’s annual report as part of my accountability to the church and its members. I received no response. For the next few years, I placed a few dozen of the company reports in a conspicuous location within the church as both a partial report on my “ministry” and as a way of saying that the church should hold me accountable for all of my work, not just the 5 percent of my time I spent in worship and other church-sponsored activities. In addition, I added the annual



report of the Mustard Seed Foundation, our family foundation, so that church members could better hold Eileen and me responsible for our work in that part of our lives. Few other individuals or families followed my lead. Leaders of the church seldom discussed the need for accountability for the way we served God through our secular work.

I noticed that most people who were paid a stipend or salary by the local church were expected to report on a regular basis on their activities. Missionaries and pastors who were financially supported by the church were held accountable for their work. I asked to be part of the church budget. "Put me in for \$1," I suggested. No leaders took seriously my request to be part of the church budget so that I would be held accountable for my daily vocation. Why should someone with an income in excess of \$1 million a year be included in the church budget? Why should a business person report on his activities to other church members?

Each of us is accountable to God and our fellow man for the

stewardship of our talents and skills, no matter what financial remuneration we receive for our work. Every organization should hold its members and employees responsible for their work.

The local church should develop methods to do this for all its members. The Catholic tradition of regular confession is one way to get at this, although confession focuses mainly on one's failures. It misses the opportunity for fellow congregants to celebrate the contributions and accomplishments of another member's work. There is little doubt that the relevance and vibrancy of the local church would increase if it were more engaged with its members. Similarly, asking members to report regularly to the church community on their jobs, social and recreational activities, and home life would encourage and expand their faith and their appreciation of God's work in the world.

Most churches hold important ceremonies to commission people for jobs or tasks they are planning to undertake. The ceremony celebrates the commitment the person has made to the job, asks the Lord's blessing on

the work, and “marks” or sets the person apart for the special role he or she will undertake. Commissioning is both a solemn and an affirming act.

Unfortunately, commissioning is almost always limited to pastors, missionaries, church staff, and volunteers. We are missing the opportunity to honor people who are called to other work, including parents and homemakers, through the uplifting process of commissioning. I have several times requested from my church leaders that I receive such a commission, but it has never been given. Some suggested mass commissionings — all the lawyers in one group, all the homemakers in another, and all the business people in another. I do not favor a group approach. I believe commissioning should be administered in a manner similar to baptism. Commissioning should be reserved for those who are mature in their faith and are fully committed to carry out their calling in a manner that is consistent with God’s word. Refusing to commission people for secular contributions runs contrary to God’s view of work.

Several years ago, my brother Lowell invited Eileen and me to speak on the fourth and final weekend of a missions conference at his church. It was the first missions conference I had ever attended that included business and other daily work by its members as missions of the church. As a prelude to the conference, a person from the church had taken dozens of pictures of individual church members doing their daily work: a man pumping gas, my mother pushing a grocery cart at Safeway, a young mother caring for her children. The sign above the pictures read “Our Missionaries.” During the conference, over 50 church members who were teachers in the local public schools were honored. What a powerful and beautiful way to help people understand their mission role.

Mission conferences, especially in the evangelical wing of the church, tend to concentrate on the important mission of the Great Commission. Some mission conferences also include the work of Christian-run organizations. Mainline denomination churches often emphasize

their social outreach programs, such as tutoring, drug counseling, and operating senior centers. However, few incorporate the work of those called to use their talents to provide products or services to society. These missionaries deserve a place in the missions conference. God is holding them accountable for their ministry. Shouldn't His church do likewise? These ministers are painters, government bureaucrats, football players, students, homemakers, waiters, taxicab drivers, bankers, and car salesmen. In most congregations, 80 to 90 percent of the members fit this missionary category. These people need encouragement in their mission. Mission conferences would be structured in a very different way if church leaders understood and supported the stewardship roles that these people play in God's kingdom...

...I recall only two or three visits to my place of work by one of my pastors in the past 30 years. I doubt that I am an exception. If our daily work is a sacred calling from God, pastors and priests should come to the workplace often. For people like me, a pastoral visit

affirms the importance to God of my daily tasks and reinforces the idea that my work has been ordained by God. It inspires me to do my best. I am reminded that I am God's representative at my place of work and that I am accountable to Him for my behavior and actions on the job and especially for the service or product I help provide to society.

For pastors, these visits help celebrate the variety and importance of each calling and vocation that God ordains. They lead to a fuller understanding of the challenges and temptations church members face. Sermons and teachings can be better targeted to the needs of the congregation. As the Catholic scholar Michael Novak notes, "Few preachers seem to take pains to understand, reinforce, and encourage business as a Christian calling. Preachers seem more comfortable in the pre-modern economy with pre-modern images and therefore give very little guidance regarding the unique opportunities, restraints, and temptations of a business person's realm. A preacher who is able to use business metaphors would touch

a lot of hearts.” In *Your Work Matters to God*, Sherman and Hendricks estimate that more than 90 percent of Christians have never heard a sermon that drew a connection between their religious beliefs and their work life.

In visiting workplaces, pastors are going where their congregation ministers. My brother Ray was visiting one of his parishioners at her factory job. “This is my minister,” she shouted to her colleagues over the workplace noise. “No, she is your minister. I am her pastor,” he corrected. The local church ministers to the community primarily in the places where church members work. There is no better place for pastors to connect with church members and the larger community than in the workplace.

The local church is mainly concerned with drawing people into worship, helping them establish a relationship with Christ, and nurturing and preparing them for service to others. Within the Christian church worldwide there is considerable disagreement about the definition and priority of

each of these goals. My own bias is that the church should concentrate its pastoral and administrative resources on evangelism, worship, and nurturing and equipping members for service. I suggest that churches operate service programs (schools, companies, feeding programs, social service organizations, housing complexes, and other businesses) only in the rarest instances.

The church should encourage governments, private social service agencies, and companies to perform these services rather than diverting scarce economic and leadership resources away from its primary mission. There are exceptions, of course. The church may participate in one of these undertakings because it offers an opportunity to evangelize. Or it may operate one of these services because no other organization is willing or capable of doing so. Even in these cases, I think it would be better if churches enlisted their members to own and operate programs rather than relying on church staff. This is the Joseph model that I have long advocated...

...One of the reasons that churches hesitate to pull out of social programs is their desire for public credit and acclaim. I have been involved in several late-night meetings with church leaders to discuss who should operate a proposed new program. Inevitably, someone will say, "The church won't get credit if we don't run the program." This is true. A church that initiates and manages a service program is often honored for being progressive and responding to the needs of the community. However, most churches are not good administrators or owners of organizations that make products or deliver services. Typically, neither the church's primary mission nor its governance structure fits the management needs of this type of organization.

I believe the pressure to run such organizations would decline greatly if churches used different criteria to judge their effectiveness. I think local churches should show their love for the community and evaluate the effectiveness of their service in a very different way. A church's service to the community should be measured by the sum of the

work carried out by its members. This would include both voluntary and paid work at home, in businesses, at church, and in other not-for-profit organizations. Thus, the services of the church might include the efforts of 15 public-school teachers and two principals, the owner of a local florist shop, three police officers, the county councilwomen, a metal lathe worker at a local factory, a CFO of a large international oil company, the headmaster of a Christian school, a retail clerk at the local hardware store, an instructor at Gold's Gym, a local leader of Young Life, 42 mothers with small children at home, six members of the military, and a volunteer youth football coach. As members of the church, all these people would bring credit to the local church and, more importantly, to God. This approach is far more consistent with the idea that all work should be equally useful to the Kingdom of God. The combined efforts of individual church members would probably exceed the impact of even the largest and most sophisticated local church operation.

One of the most important roles of the local church is helping people discover the work that God has planned for them and then empowering them to perform that work. As parents, we are urged to raise our children in a way that's consistent with their natural gifts so that they can use their talents in the way God intended. The church is expected to help parents in this task. Many churches do an excellent job of encouraging and empowering children for vocations that are considered Christian in nature. Church leaders write recommendations for young people to Christian colleges. Sometimes churches even provide scholarships for those headed to Bible schools or seminaries. But most churches are less helpful and encouraging when it comes to areas of service in secular organizations. This is another hangover caused by the dualism in the church. It is better to be a pastor than an actor and better to teach homiletics at a seminary than mathematics at MIT.

At the Mustard Seed Foundation (MSF), we are trying to counter this bias with a radical scholarship plan. Our Harvey

Fellows program provides funds to graduate students who are headed for careers where Christians are underrepresented in such fields as the arts, media, finance, academia, and technology. For example, the MSF might award a stipend to a devout Christian who wants to study journalism, as long as that person plans to attend one of the nation's top five graduate programs in journalism. This program is the foundation's way of empowering and marking those Christians who will be the "missionaries" in these fields later in life. It is an example of a strategy the church could use to increase its involvement in all of society.

Recently, I joined my brothers Ray and Lowell and my sister, Marilyn Bakke Pearson, to develop a university that will give doctorate ministry degrees and a master's in business administration. The school, not so modestly named Bakke Graduate University, will seek to celebrate the study and practice of both the stewardship command of Genesis and the Great Commission of Matthew's Gospel.

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus referred to the full range of gifts that people have been given to carry out their life's work.

The Master did not consider one type of work more worthy than another. His only injunction was that people should be willing to risk failure by using their gifts so that the results for the Master might multiply.

Business and other secular work is both a mission (to help people in practical ways) and a mission field. The good news of the Bible is that God plans to redeem us and that we were made in His image so that we could continue His work of creation. We glorify God through our enthusiastic and creative stewardship of the resources he has given us to serve others and provide for ourselves.

When I was a child, we sang a song in Sunday school called "Dare to Be a Daniel." Back then, interpretation of the song focused on Daniel's courage when he faced the lions, standing firm against his enemies and refusing to recant his faith in God. Today, the song takes on additional meaning. I am called to be like Daniel and

serve God by working effectively in a world that is hostile, or at least indifferent, to His existence and to His message. Like Daniel, I am called to steward the resources entrusted to me, both to meet my own needs and the needs of the world around me. In all of this work, I am charged with using my talents and skills to glorify God. Dare to be a Daniel and enter into the Master's joy!

Watch a video interview at [www.DennisBakke.com](http://www.DennisBakke.com).

Dennis We. Babkke was raised in Saxon, Washington, and graduated from the University of Puget Sound, Harvard Business School, and the National War College. He co-founded The AES Corporation in 1981 and served as its president and CEO from 1994 to 2002. Bakke is the author of the New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller, “Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach to Fun on the Job” (PVG, 2005). He is now president and CEO of Imagine Schools, a company that operates elementary and secondary (K-12) charter schools in 10 states. He and his wife, Eileen, live in Arlington, Virginia.