

A Few We May Have Missed: Books to Consider for Your Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

Larry Locke became the editor of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* in 2018. One of the standards that quickly became part of the publication was a requirement that books being reviewed be recently published, generally within about a three-year window. While this standard has kept the journal's book reviews connected to the most recent scholarship, there are a few good books that have slipped through the cracks. This article is an attempt to capture a few of those books for the journal's readership.

In 2012, Tim Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf published a theologically grounded discussion of the meaning of work called *Every Good Endeavor*. In the book, Keller and Alsdorf addressed three major topics. First, they described the plan God has for work. Next, they discussed the reasons why work often seems broken in our world. Finally, they addressed how the Gospel gives a new picture of what work could look like. The overall theme of the writing is that the Gospel provides an opportunity for work to be brought back into line with God's design.

According to Keller and Alsdorf, the creation story makes it clear that work is a good part of God's design. God set the example of working and then gave work to humans. God offers people the ability to work in freedom when they find the right guiding principles to follow God's path. Work is part of how humanity shares in God's creativity and cultivation. In contrast to the Greek emphasis on leisurely reflection, scripture sees work as having dignity in its reflection of the image of God. Human beings are offered the opportunity to participate in God's work as stewards of God's world. The world needs people to work to be all that it is intended to be. The pattern for work is to rearrange raw materials to make life flourish. Therefore, work is the primary way in which those who follow Christ are able to serve the world.

While God's design for work is positive, the reality of a broken world means that work does not consistently align with God's plan. Work can become fruitless. Workers can envision far more than they can actually accomplish. That fruitlessness can impact work that is considered sacred or secular. Keller and Alsdorf note that even though people may not realize their highest aspirations, it does not mean that they have chosen wrongly or were not acting out of a calling. Work can also seem pointless, especially if it is oriented around self-fulfillment rather than service to others. People often choose work to boost their self-image rather than to do what best fits their abilities or the world's needs. Work can also easily become self-centered. This is especially true when people try to gain their value from their work rather than from God. Finally, work can reveal the idols that people honor. Keller and Alsdorf argue that it is possible that everything we do wrong stems from a conviction deep within that there is something more crucial to happiness and meaning than the love of God. The modern business environment raises idols such as individual freedom, work itself, personal gratification, and consumerism.

In contrast to the world's current broken situation, the Gospel offers four alternatives. First, it offers a different story that Jesus Christ, at infinite cost to himself, redeemed the world in order to renew all of creation. The Christian view is that sin infects everyone (Romans 3). An understanding of the Gospel prevents demonizing something or someone that is not bad enough to explain the world's mess or idolizing something or someone that is not powerful enough to change things. The Gospel message means that there is a purpose in work that is far more powerful than profit. Second, the Gospel provides a new conception of the purpose of work. Work is God's way of providing for others. Keller and Alsdorf note here that this is not simply a matter of worldview. A Christian may not build an airplane any differently than a non-Christian would, but God is still working his

providence and love through each person. This means that the working-class jobs executed by Christians are just as relevant to God's work as those of the white-collar world. Third, the Gospel offers an improved moral compass for the work world. Rather than pursuing the highest possible profit, as long as an action is not illegal, the Christ follower can build on virtuous resources to practice honesty, compassion, generosity, and love. Finally, the Gospel offers a reason bigger than oneself to work. This leaves room for passionate pursuit of good goals but also for the experience of deep rest when trusting in God's grace.

Every Good Endeavor is a theologically grounded perspective on what a Christian perspective of work should look like. Those who are attempting to live out their faith in the business world would find it a valuable resource for thinking about God's purpose for work and the implications of that purpose for everyday business. The book would also be a good resource for helping students to develop a reasoned understanding of how the Gospel impacts work life. It should be noted, however, that the book is not light reading. It may be a challenging read for undergraduate students. Helping students see the broad overview of the book so that they could put each chapter into that context would be an important part of using the text with undergrad students.

In contrast to the deep theological grounding of Keller and Alsdorf's work, Ken Eldred's (2010) *The Integrated Life* addresses many of the same questions but from a practical layperson's point of view. Eldred combines his own experience in the workplace with basic biblical principles to argue for living a life that involves one's faith perspective just as much in business life as it does in family or church life. Eldred's story begins as a business person without faith and moves into attempting to figure out how his new found faith should be part of his business. Unfortunately, he found that he received very little help from the church in his effort to do that.

Eldred begins his approach to an integrated life by noting what is missing in the broad secular training for business and what is missing in the church's perspective on business. Eldred rejects the often-quoted idea that "the purpose of business is to make a profit for shareholders" as too narrow and too devoid of legitimate meaning. While he agrees that profit is a necessary condition to meet a purpose for business, he argues that it makes for a poor goal. Instead, the real goal of business should be to serve others to the glory of God. Businesses that serve others effectively will generally be better able to be consistent with profits. Serving "to the glory of God" implies that

a business should act in harmony with God's creative purposes, should perform with excellence, and should be done so well that it reflects positively on the people of God. When businesses follow that model, they build up what Eldred calls "spiritual capital," a level of trust, skill, and governance that makes it possible for people to work together easily. He argues that long-term positive behavior builds spiritual capital that is then slow to erode. He notes a World Bank study that describes as much as 80 percent of the wealth in rich countries as being based on intangible capital grounded in trust (World Bank, 2006).

While Eldred argues that secular training for business has missed the mark, he also argues that the church has failed to give people a broad enough view of business. Eldred argues that the church has not taught that work is good, mandated, and sacred, and that work can be both a ministry and a high calling. Work is an opportunity to create value for others and to transform both the marketplace and society by providing an opportunity to contribute to redeeming the world.

So, what does it look like for Christians to integrate their faith into their work life? Eldred begins with the idea of seeing God as a partner in work. Rather than assume God is uninterested in their business life, they should look to God for wisdom, joy, peace, and support. That does not guarantee financial success, but it does provide a firm foundation to rest on for business practice. Second, Christians should live out faith at work by practicing Christian virtues like grace, joy, encouragement, and respect for others while leaving behind jealousy, selfish ambition, and judgment. Third, recognize that work is one of God's ways to meet the needs of others and to shape people into the kind of people they are called to be. This should lead to transforming the marketplace into a place where people's lives are impacted more positively.

While *The Integrated Life* is not as theologically grounded as the Keller book, it offers practical advice based on the experience of a business leader attempting to integrate his faith into all parts of his life, including business practice. This text is a relatively easy read, but it does not have a strong systematic organization that makes it hold together as strongly as an argument for a particular approach to integrating faith and work. It does, however, offer practical suggestions that students could consider applying to their future work life. Many students would probably appreciate the practical ideas coming from an experienced practitioner.

Both of these texts note the lack of significant help that the church has given to those attempting to live an

integrated life in the secular realm. They both note the need for the church to live up to the idea that all work is a calling from God. That need also offers an opportunity for the Christian academy to help fill the gap. While CBFA schools have made that part of their mission in terms of helping future business leaders think about integrating faith and business, it may be that the CBFA could also offer help to churches and business professionals who did not attend CBFA schools. Until the church takes seriously the idea that business is a calling and an opportunity for ministry, there will always be the danger of Christian business leaders compartmentalizing their lives.

The third book reviewed here probably would not normally get reviewed in *JBIB*. Strictly speaking, it is not related to the integration of faith and work. *BE 2.0: Turning Your Business into an Enduring Great Company* (2020) is an update to *Beyond Entrepreneurship* (1992) by Jim Collins and Bill Lazier. Lazier was Collins' mentor at Stanford. They co-wrote the 1992 book, but Lazier passed away in 2004. Collins created a new version of the book that includes the original text along with insights he has learned from his research into great companies. The book includes all of the text of the original book, but it includes sections titled "Jim's View from 2020" that include additional insights from Collins' research. Collins is not writing from a Christian perspective. He has described himself as a "seeker" and as a "friend" or "ally" to Christian views of leadership. While he is not intentionally trying to address an integrated life, it is notable how often his conclusions are similar to those of the other writers reviewed here.

The original core of *Beyond Entrepreneurship* is focused on building a business from a people perspective. The authors do not address business plans, financials, accounting practices, or even marketing approaches involved in building a business. The focus of the text is on how to develop an organization where employees are engaged and committed to creating a sustainable business that meets a societal need. That development starts with a combination of leadership style (practicing good character traits) and leadership function (developing a common mission and values for the organization). The mission then leads into an overall long-term strategy that focuses on a small set of strategic priorities. The new business then needs to find ways to develop creative solutions to problems and to develop people who can do the day-to-day work with excellence.

In the 2020 version of the book, Collins adds insights from the research that led to his best sellers *Built to Last*,

Good to Great, *How the Mighty Fall*, and *Great by Choice*. He does not generally indicate areas where he feels that the original text was wrong, but he often attempts to build onto the ideas from the original text with the key principles developed in his research. Through this process, *BE 2.0* becomes something of a synthesis of all of Collins' work. It is a good way to introduce the broad set of ideas that Collins has developed over the years.

What is also noticeable is how often the conclusions that Collins and Lazier reach from their research are consistent with ideas presented by writers like Keller and Alsdorf and Eldred. They reject the idea that the primary goal of business is profit and instead argue that the purpose of a business should be to fill human needs and impact the world. They argue that business leaders must practice authenticity, humility, trustworthiness, and respect for others. They call for a disciplined commitment to finding good people, supporting them in their work and developing a company that creates results that are good for society.

Collins and Lazier are not building their understanding of how business should work on a specifically Christian foundation. If Christians believe that God's direction is the correct direction for life, then it should not be surprising that serious scholars of how business works would find that the evidence points to the same conclusions that Christians have. One approach to using a text like this in a business class might be to challenge students to think about which of the authors' perspectives might be most consistent with Christian thinking and where the authors might sound good but possibly be presenting a view that does not match up well with scripture.

All three of these texts offer insights that could be valuable to implementing good ideas in a business environment. Keller and Alsdorf and Eldred relate more to how Christian business persons might apply their faith in a business environment. Either of these texts could be used to help students think about how their faith might impact business decisions. Collins offers more of a research-driven perspective of what factors lead to good management. Students would find that many of those factors would also lead to good practices in the business world.

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