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Discipleship in the Workplace: A Ministry of Faith and Work for First Presbyterian Church of Houston

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Michael Homan

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DISCIPLESHIP IN THE WORKPLACE: A MINISTRY OF FAITH
AND WORK FOR FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOUSTON

Written by

MICHAEL HOMAN

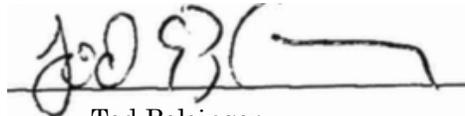
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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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Tod Bolsinger

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Kurt Fredrickson

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DISCIPLESHIP IN THE WORKPLACE: A MINISTRY OF FAITH
AND WORK FOR FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOUSTON

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MICHAEL HOMAN
APRIL 2019

ABSTRACT

Discipleship in the Workplace: A Ministry of Faith and Work for First Presbyterian Church of Houston

Michael Homan

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2019

The purpose of this project is to outline a context-specific discipleship program to equip the people of Houston's First Presbyterian Church (FPC) for missionary engagement in the workplace through the study of Reformed doctrinal and theological foundations that emphasize vocational significance, personal transformation, and contextualized expressions of gospel-informed cultural renewal. FPC is a congregation historically known for its entrepreneurial members and ministries. This project is presented in three parts.

Part One examines the local context of FPC and the uniqueness of the church's ethos. Particular attention is given to the socioeconomic and demographic makeup of the neighborhoods closest to the church and a broad look at the changing face of the city. This section also describes the core values and theological convictions of the congregation, including an aggressive vision and strategy in support of ministry in the marketplace.

Part Two engages the biblical and theological content most relevant to developing a theology of faith and work as a means of discipleship. The discussion examines key Reformation theologians who viewed work as an agent of transformation and sanctification and a means to engage God's providential purposes. The theological inquiry also explores the notion of worldview, utilizing biblical narrative to outline themes of creation/fall/redemption/restoration as the basis for faithful cultural engagement. This culminates in a synthesis to examine both "why" and "how" disciples integrate faith and work.

In order to develop a faith and work ministry at FPC, a ten-week learning cohort was created. This initiative has served as a test of the new model by allowing participants to explore the following: biblical foundations, theological themes, personal transformation, and practical ministry expressions. The cohort has provided the shared language and basis upon which to develop industry-specific vocational networks (guilds) in order to imagine and implement gospel-informed cultural renewal throughout Houston and beyond.

Content Reader: Tod Bolsinger, PhD

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To my beloved bride, Heather. You are a daily reminder of God's amazing and unmerited grace. Thank you for loving me with an unconditional, never-giving-up kind of love. Sarah, Andrew, and Samuel, I love being your dad and pray you will follow Jesus all the days of your life. To my own dad, James, you have modeled for me faithful discipleship and what it means to pray, sing, and mine God's Word for its many treasures. Patricia, your courage to give your very best to nurture our "Brady Bunch" demonstrates the meaning of true sacrifice. Lisa Marie, you are a gift to every student who has ever submitted themselves to your editorial guidance. To those who believed in me, mentored me, befriended me, and served as beloved colleagues and friends in life and ministry: James D. Miller, Ron Pearson, Ryan Moore, Jim Birchfield, Andrew Stepp, Jon Crantz, Elaine Cervini, Rick Davis, Dan Richmond, Dan Guajardo, Christopher Royael, Doug Smith, Paul McEntire, Elliot Forsyth, Dade Dowdle, David and Rachel Quan, Nicole Kenley-Miller, Joshua and Jaclyn Miles. Finally, thank you to Travis, Dave, Adrian, Michael, Edmund, and the countless others who have logged thousands of miles with me on the bike and whose friendship I hold dear. *Soli Deo gloria.*

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PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

“I’m not sure the pastors in our church have a real grasp on what I am facing in the marketplace every day when I go to work.”¹ These were the unsolicited words shared over a cup of coffee by my friend and church member, Dan Richmond, in October 2012. He continued and asked the following question: “Apart from conducting business in an ethical and moral manner, is there any connection between my life as a disciple of Jesus and the arena of work where I spend a significant portion of my week?” Richmond is a geologist by training. At the time he made these comments, he was working successfully for a commercial real-estate developer when his previous employment with an oil and gas company was cut short by layoffs amidst an economic downturn.

In the months following our conversation, Richmond’s words sparked more than a few questions in my mind—in particular, because he serves as an elder at First Presbyterian Church and has taught youth Sunday School faithfully for more than ten years. I found his comments to be unsettling, primarily because someone whom I considered to be a mature disciple was experiencing a meaningful gap in connecting his work to God’s work. I began to reflect upon our conversation and started to wonder exactly what disciples encounter each day in the workplace and how the gospel might speak to those encounters. I pondered the significance of daily work in the life of a contemporary follower of Jesus. I wondered if God truly cared about commercial real estate, the oil and gas industry, the Pillsbury Corporation—and if so, why.

¹ Dan Richmond, interview by author, Tulsa, OK, October 2012.

The integration of faith and work means different things to different people. For some it means laboring in an ethical manner. For others it means praying for co-workers and supervisors or offering to lead a Bible study in the staff breakroom over the lunch hour. Still for others, there is little or no integration because work is simply a means of earning an income to provide for one's family.² However, in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the integration of faith and work is lined with a common thread tying together God's redemptive purposes in the world through the everyday activity of humankind.

David Greusel is an architect and founding principal of Convergence Design, a Kansas City firm specializing in places where people gather. While with another firm, Greusel "was the lead designer on two Major League Baseball Parks: Minute Maid Park, home of the Houston Astros, and PNC park, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates."³ In a presentation titled "The Lie and the Love," Greusel outlines the intersection of faith and work by posing the following question: "A believing architect does which of the following? (a) Puts Bible verses on their business cards, (b) only designs churches, or (c) retires early to do something significant." For him, the answer is "none of the above."⁴ He posits that believers who have bought into such narrow thinking are standing on a lie.

The lie concerning the intersection of faith and work, says Greusel, can take any number of forms: "If you were really spiritual you would become a missionary," or

² FPC Houston members Kim Dang, Steve King, Joy Dowdle, and Chris Champion, interview by author, Houston, TX, January 2016.

³ The Cardus Organization, "David Greusel," accessed May 9, 2015, <https://www.cardus.ca/contributors/dgreusel/>.

⁴ David Greusel, "The Lie and the Love," "The Lie and the Love" (lecture, The Jubilee Conference, The Westin Convention Center, Pittsburgh, 2011), Vimeo, accessed May 9, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/14984254>.

“Nothing lasts forever, except a human soul,” or “Professional success only puts you in a position to do something that really matters with your life,” or finally, “The real value of secular work is that through it you can support kingdom work.”⁵ For many, the summary version of the lie is that so-called secular work (like architecture or working for an oil and gas company) is clearly of lesser value, according to God’s perspective. Such work in itself does not advance God’s kingdom on earth, because nothing on earth save the human soul is of any eternal value.

Insofar as he is highly skilled and driven professionally, Greusel is representative of a significant segment of people who attend First Presbyterian Church (FPC) of Houston. FPC is a large and influential congregation located in the Museum District of the fifth largest metropolitan area in the United States.⁶ Its mission statement, “Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we carry the gospel to Houston and the world,” reflects an outward-facing posture.⁷ The church has been in existence for nearly two centuries and was the first established congregation in the city.⁸ The member base is predominantly affluent and well educated, working in industries such as medicine, law, oil and gas, and space exploration. For many FPC members, a typical week would be lived in three or more arenas. For example, the arena

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Greater Houston Partnership, *Houston Region Economic Development Profile*, accessed June 1, 2013, <http://www.houston.org/assets/pdf/business/Houston-Region-Community-Profile.pdf>.

⁷ First Presbyterian Church of Houston, “Our Beliefs,” accessed October 13, 2015. <http://fpchouston.org/about/our-beliefs/>.

⁸ Judy King, *Except the Lord Build . . .* (Houston, TX: D. Armstrong Co., Inc., 1989), 12.

of employment might include devoting fifty hours for work, seventy to ninety hours to the arena of home/dwelling (including sleep), and twenty-four to forty-eight hours to the arena of community (hobbies, travel, shopping, church attendance, and the like). In other words, nearly 45 percent of a typical church member's waking hours is spent engaging the workplace.⁹

The conversation of faith and work is incredibly important for the local church and particularly at FPC, because it speaks to an arena of discipleship that often is not discussed. For example, church programs frequently utilize Sunday School and/or small group ministries targeting children, youth, and family as a means of promoting discipleship in the arena of home or school. Many congregations employ ministries of compassion, service, and evangelism in order to connect its members to the arena of community through mission. The problem, or challenge, is that FPC does not have a framework to adequately equip its members for the arena of the workplace, connecting their everyday work to the mission and purposes of God. FPC is lacking in its ability to help members optimize and appropriate their discipleship in the context of the workplace, between the arena of corporate worship and the boardroom. Therefore, this final project is ultimately about discipleship and mission, specifically within the context of one's daily work.

At FPC, discipleship has been understood historically as the process of learning and living as an apprentice of Jesus Christ. The context in which discipleship most prominently happens is in the church building through the act of worship (praying,

⁹ Calculated using a fifty-hour work week and assumes eight hours of sleep per night.

singing, Bible reading, hearing the proclamation of the gospel, receiving the sacraments) and through Christian Education (Sunday School classes, Bible studies, retreats, small groups). Mission describes the carrying of the gospel of Jesus both in word and deed as the fulfillment of God's purposes. This customarily happens locally through ministries of service and gifts to community partners, globally through short- and long-term mission trips, partnerships with global churches/ministries, and financial support. While ministries of service and financial support are important, they can be relegated easily to a few special-interest groups in the church who go on short-term trips to third-world countries or volunteer at the local food bank. Ultimately, this may lead many in the pews to believe that mission is only that which helps the poor and the marginalized.

Insofar as there exists a disconnect between personal spiritual formation/discipleship and what it means to be sent on mission in everyday life, Princeton Seminary professor and author Darrell Guder offers this hopeful critique:

We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. "Mission" means "sending," and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history. . . . We have begun to learn that the biblical message is more radical, more inclusive, more transforming than we have allowed it to be. In particular, we have begun to see that the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness. . . . God's mission is calling and sending us, the church of Jesus Christ, to be a missionary church in our own societies, in the cultures in which we find ourselves.¹⁰

In other words, the goal and purpose of both the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ is to see the people of God move from the pews and chairs out into everyday culture as

¹⁰ Darrell Guder, ed., "Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 4-5.

instruments and witnesses who participate in the healing and restoration of creation. To rest comfortably in patterns of a disintegrated life whereby the gospel has no meaningful engagement with one's daily work is to miss the point of the gospel altogether. This is why a ministry of faith and work is absolutely critical to the local church.

The challenge, however, is that beyond ethical living and decision-making the church has very little to offer by way of helping its members to comprehend, practice, and contextualize discipleship within the workplace in connection with the mission of God in the world. This ministry challenge—the critical importance of industry as it relates to cultural activity in the world—and my personal conviction that discipleship and mission are to work in an integrative, symbiotic fashion within the church all lead to the purpose of this final project: to outline a context-specific discipleship program to equip the people of Houston's First Presbyterian Church for missionary engagement in the workplace.

To address FPC's ministry challenge, this paper contains three major discussions. Part One focuses on the ministry context. Chapter 1 begins by examining the unique features of Houston as a global economic and cultural hub, making the case for why this topic is so very relevant for FPC. This includes an in-depth look at the history of the church, its past and current core values, theological convictions, and the entrepreneurial ethos behind the church's long-range strategic plan—aptly named “Vision 2020.”¹¹

The second portion of this paper is rooted in theological reflection. Chapter 2 offers a literature review with special attention given to ecclesiology and missiology

¹¹ First Presbyterian Church of Houston Session, *Vision 2020* (Houston, TX: First Presbyterian Church of Houston, Fall 2012).

within the Reformed tradition, namely the perspective on the integration of faith and work as central to the life of the disciple. A case for meaningful cultural engagement provides the theological vision that serves as a bridge between the ecclesial doctrinal foundations and faith-work integration as an act of discipleship. Chapter 3 expands upon the theological frameworks of ecclesiology and missiology in Chapter 2 by presenting a theological justification for gospel-informed cultural engagement as central to the life of a disciple through faith-work integration. The discussion addresses the historical Reformed perspective, examining Presbyterianism and why its theology uniquely heightens the importance of faith-work integration, while also criticizing a bifurcated worldview and its consequences as established by other faith traditions within the broader Christian community.

Part Three provides the rationale and strategy for establishing a faith and work ministry as a primary ministerial front of FPC in Houston. Chapter 4 includes an outline of the strategic goals for a faith and work ministry. The strategic plan in this paper includes the cultivation of awareness and vocabulary for faith-work integration, personal renewal dynamics and ancient formational practices, a theological vision of how one's work connects to God's work, and entrepreneurship by way of ministry experiments and initiatives reflective of gospel-centered cultural renewal. This takes place within a cross-vocational cohort and learning format away from the walls of the physical church building. Chapter 4 also describes the target population and ministry sustainability through current and future leadership development.

Chapter 5 offers a summary of the pilot project that will launch the faith-work ministry: a ten-week "Faith and Work" cohort for experienced industry leaders that can

be replicated two to three times per year for up to two years. This is followed by the implementation of additional vocational networks for purposes of prayer, fellowship, and continuing education in order to promote sustainable innovation and influence within industries that are most germane to Houston. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the resources needed to carry out this experiment and an evaluation process that will report on the results of the project.

CHAPTER 1

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOUSTON: UNIQUELY POSITIONED FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

This chapter explores the unique aspects of Houston as a diverse city. Positioned within this diverse city is First Presbyterian Church of Houston, as the first chartered congregation in the city 175 years ago. The city of Houston can be considered an “agglomeration,”¹ as it contains the physical clustering and subsequent economic and social benefits of people who work in the same field: doctors in a medical center, engineers and astronauts in NASA, and oil and gas experts in every facet of the industry. The result is groundbreaking medical research, space exploration, and energy exploration that produces and refines a significant portion of America’s energy resource. These three industries are very influential in American culture due to their social, economic, and political effect on human lives. As a result, FPC is aptly positioned to help shape the city of Houston and the world insofar as the members of First Presbyterian Church live its mission statement in the places where they work.

¹ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 169.

An Introduction to Houston: Space City, H-Town, Clutch City, The Big Heart, and Bayou City

Houston was founded in 1836 by two brothers, John Allen and August Allen. They persuaded the first congress of the Republic of Texas to name Houston as the political center, at a time when there was no established city or even a single permanent resident.² The congress accepted this bid over the more established cities of San Antonio and Austin, based upon the promise of commerce and growth. Despite the fact that the capital was relocated later to Austin, Houston continued to flourish as promised and to this day is known for its entrepreneurial spirit where opportunity awaits.³

Since its inception the city has maintained a reputation for exceptional wealth, which has translated into vibrant support for culture and fine arts through means of philanthropy at a rate of more than 1.5 times the national average.⁴ An elder at FPC once remarked, “Houstonians do not show off their money by purchasing opulent homes and/or fancy cars. They love to show off their money at philanthropic galas by how much they give away.”⁵ As a result, not only do museums and theaters tend to thrive, but medical research entities such as Monroe Dunaway Anderson and Methodist Hospitals

² Marguerite Johnson, *Houston: The Unknown City 1836-1946* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1991).

³ Derek Thompson, “Houston Is Unstoppable: Why Texas’ Juggernaut Is America’s #1 Job Creator,” *The Atlantic*, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/05/houston-is-unstoppable-why-texas-juggernaut-is-americas-1-job-creator/275927/>.

⁴ Percept Group, *Ministry Area Profile 2016 for First Presbyterian Church* (Rancho Santa Margherita, CA: Percept Group, October 17, 2016), 19.

⁵ Elder, interview by author, Houston, TX, August 30, 2012.

are able to develop cutting-edge technologies and drug therapies for the advancement of health.

Perhaps the most intriguing demographic feature of the city is the rampant population growth, accompanied by a broad increase in ethnic and cultural diversity. According to the 2010 United States census, Houston is the fourth largest city and fifth largest metropolitan area in the United States, with more than 2.1 million residents in the city and more than 6.1 million residents in its metropolitan area.⁶ Houston is also the most ethnically and racially diverse metropolitan city in the United States in that every ethnic group is now a demographic minority.⁷ Since 1990, the Anglo population has decreased from 54 percent of the total population to 33 percent, whereas the Latino population has grown from 23 percent to 41 percent. African Americans comprise 18.4 percent of the current population, while Asians account for 8 percent, a 200 percent increase over twenty years.⁸

Houston continues to thrive economically as well, offering one of the most vibrant job markets in the nation. Since the nationwide economic downturn in 2008, Houston has added more than two jobs for each one that it lost.⁹ Unemployment rates have dropped to 6.8 percent, more than a full point below the national average. Between

⁶ United States Census Bureau, “Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Incorporated Places over 50,000, Ranked by July 1, 2012 Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2012,” accessed May 7, 2015, <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

⁷ Michael O. Emerson et al., *Houston Region Grows Racially/Ethnically Diverse, with Small Declines in Segregation* (Houston, TX: Kinder Institute for Urban Research, 2011), 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Thompson, “Houston Is Unstoppable.”

2008 and 2010, more than one hundred foreign-owned companies relocated, expanded, or launched new ventures in Houston. Only New York City has more Fortune 500 companies (fifty-two) than Houston (twenty-three).¹⁰ Home to more than five thousand energy-related companies, Houston is considered by many to be the energy capital of the world.¹¹ Houston is also a science and biotechnology center and serves as home to the Texas Medical Center, the Johnson Space Center, and Rice University.

First Presbyterian Church is located physically and strategically at the center of what is now a thriving world-class city. Commuters catching a ride on the Metro Rail system one block away can be in one of Houston's many different influential centers in a matter of minutes. To the immediate south is the Museum District, home of the award-winning Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Natural Science. Less than one-half mile farther south is Hermann Park, one of the city's largest recreation areas. It contains an outdoor theater, green space, golf course, and the Houston Zoo. Across the street to the west is the well-known campus of Rice University, which leads the way in nanotechnology research and advancements in Physics.¹²

Less than one mile south of Rice is the Texas Medical Center, the largest medical facility in the world with a local economic impact of \$10 billion. More than 52,000 people work within its facilities, which encompass 21 million square feet. Altogether 4.8

¹⁰ City of Houston, "About Us: Facts and Figures," accessed June 21, 2015, <http://www.houston.tx.gov/about/houston/houstonfacts.html>.

¹¹ *Interesting Times*, directed by John Carrithers (Kinder Institute for Urban Research, 2014), DVD (Rice University, 2014).

¹² *Ibid.*

million patients visit them each year.¹³ To the north of the church is a now thriving downtown housing many of the aforementioned energy companies such as Exxon Mobil, Shell, Conoco-Phillips, and Kinder-Morgan. To the northwest is the Montrose neighborhood, known for its great restaurants while also serving as the residential and cultural hub for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual community. To the immediate west of FPC is the affluent community of West University and to the east is the Third Ward, one of the most poverty-stricken areas of Houston. Consequently, the geographic location of the church provides a visible context to its members and staff in formulating a theological vision that reflects the makeup and design of this unique city.

A Theological Vision of Cultural Engagement for First Presbyterian Church of Houston

First Presbyterian Church of Houston was the first established congregation in the city in 1839.¹⁴ With 3,500 members, it became one of the largest and most influential congregations in its current denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), also known as PCUSA. The demographics of the church are largely affluent and Caucasian, though ethnic and social diversity is growing in ways that more broadly reflect the demographics of the city.¹⁵ The membership is stable, hovering around 3,400 in number, and is quite intergenerational, averaging forty-seven years of age—compared to that of the PCUSA

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ King, *Except the Lord Build*, 12.

¹⁵ Lija Shah, interview by author, Houston, TX, October 2016. Shah serves as director of Connections at First Presbyterian Church of Houston.

national average of sixty-one years of age—thanks in large part to a thriving youth, family, and young adult ministry.¹⁶

As Houston continues to grow and change, and as FPC endeavors to be a faithful instrument and witness of Christ, it is important to know and be able to articulate a theological vision that will guide the actions of this entrepreneurial congregation. Author and pastor Timothy Keller says, “Theological vision is a faithful restatement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history.”¹⁷ In the case of FPC in Houston, its theological vision is best expressed through understanding three basic commitments: “Gospel,” “City,” and “Movement.” Gospel refers to the life-altering message about what Jesus has accomplished and its implications for the world.¹⁸ City represents the primary physical place where the church is called to reach with the gospel, rooted in a cultivated love for the people and an understanding of the strategic importance of mission in that place.¹⁹ Movement means the dynamic act of connecting people to God, one another, the city, and the culture.²⁰

Gospel

In June 2011, the session of First Presbyterian Church began the process of developing a theological vision by adopting and living a new mission statement:

¹⁶ Jane Costello, *Session Meeting Packet* (Houston, TX: First Presbyterian Church, November 2013), 6. Costello served as the clerk of session at this time.

¹⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 250.

“Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we carry the Gospel to Houston and the world.”²¹ The pastors crafted this particular mission statement with the help of ministry staff, had it vetted by communication consultants, and it was unanimously approved and adopted by the session. Following its introduction to the congregation, a nine-month preaching and small group series focused on the Book of Acts with this tagline: “We are the Mission.”²² Along with the new mission statement and sermon series was the implication that carrying the gospel, or visible expressions of evangelism and public faith, was no longer the sole responsibility for the Missions and Evangelism department; rather, it was now the goal of every ministry and member of the church.²³

While the definition of the term “gospel” has been much discussed and debated, FPC understands this term as part of its mission statement to be defined within its theological vision in two ways. First, the good news on offer to the world is that Jesus lived, died, was raised, and sent the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). Upon entering into and embracing union with Jesus, one can be reconciled to God, to others, and to the world (2 Corinthians 5:19). Second, the gospel not only has individualistic implications; it has both communal and cultural implications, for it is the kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated as the full display of the life He embodied. He began this ministry in Luke 4:18-20, proclaiming “good news to the poor . . . release to the captives and recovery of

²¹ Jane Costello, *Session Meeting Packet* (Houston, TX: First Presbyterian Church, August 2011), 3.

²² Andrew Stepp, “Shifting to a Missional Culture at First Presbyterian Church” (DMin project, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2013), 4.

²³ Ibid.

sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and the proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor."²⁴ In other words, the grace of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit work in the life of the believer from the inside out to bring about transformation and restoration in the world.

In January 2013, FPC entered into a season of spiritual discernment for the purposes of deciding whether or not its long-term denominational affiliation would remain in the PCUSA or possibly seek dismissal to a different Reformed ecclesiastical body. This conflict points to how the developing theological vision of the congregation is not in sync with the theological vision of the denomination. Keller writes: "Parties who agree on all doctrinal basics can still differ sharply on emphasis, tone, and spirit."²⁵ FPC elders had grown increasingly uneasy about what they perceived to be a theological and missional drift happening between the local church and the broader PCUSA. This led them to search for an ecclesiastical structure with a more unified theological vision, one that upholds the Reformed tradition while also promoting accountable and connectional relationships that encourage and support the flourishing of churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ. The session discovered the new Reformed body of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.²⁶

²⁴ All Scripture has been taken from *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), unless otherwise noted.

²⁵ Keller, *Center Church*, 22.

²⁶ ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, "Essential Tenets," accessed December 13, 2013, <http://www.eco-pres.org/theology/essential-tenets/>.

One of the leading reasons the session identified this denomination as an ecclesial destination is because its core values and theological underpinnings give congregations the framework to cultivate a coherent and compelling theological vision. Some of the core values of ECO include a “Jesus-shaped identity,” or “belief that Jesus Christ must be at the center of daily life and making disciples of Jesus at the core of church ministry.” ECO also advocates “Biblical Integrity.” This is the belief that the Bible teaches everything that is required for the practice of faith and life and takes precedence over all other authoritative sources when it comes to ordering human life. Essentially, the authority of the Bible is to guide one’s daily activity so that it reflects the person and work of Jesus Christ. Another core value is “Thoughtful Theology,” which is the “belief in theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind . . . as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.” A final prominent core value is that of “Missional Centrality,” which is the everyday enactment of the Great Commission through sharing the gospel, personal piety, and missions of justice and mercy both locally and globally.²⁷

Consequently, on February 23, 2014 the congregation voted on a motion to be dismissed from the PCUSA in favor of joining ECO. The motion failed, as the vote required a super-majority (two-thirds “yes” vote) to pass. The final tally came in at 65 percent in favor of being dismissed and 35 percent in favor of remaining connected to the PCUSA. In spite of the outcome of the congregational vote, the leadership of FPC has identified the above-mentioned core values as central to the development of its

²⁷ ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, “Who We Are,” accessed December 13, 2013, <http://www.eco-pres.org/who-we-are/>.

theological vision for mission and ministry as the church moves forward into the twenty-first century. A long-range strategic document that will be introduced later in this discussion, titled *Vision 2020*, embodies elements of these core values as it attempts to flesh out the ministry expressions and initiatives birthed from the visioning process.²⁸

City

FPC exists within a highly institutional tradition with a rich heritage of spreading the gospel and serving others in the city of Houston. As evidenced by the long-range strategic plan adopted in 2014, the congregation and its leadership do not shy away from innovation and change, nor do they lack resources or opportunity. The physical facility is comprised of more than 220,000 square feet. In addition to a sanctuary that offers a place for weekly services of worship, much of the building is occupied Monday through Friday by the Presbyterian School, a private institution housing kindergarten through the eighth grade. The school is known to provide the kind of preparatory education that equips students for some of Houston's strongest academic high schools. The remainder of the building is used for staff offices, church and community programs, and for the benefit of local mission partners. The annual 2017-2018 FPC budget is set for \$7.6 million.²⁹

FPC is blessed to have members who exhibit active participation and leadership in many of the primary industries that drive the Houston economy and community. From corporate boardrooms to teachers in classrooms, from the top offices at NASA to the

²⁸ First Presbyterian Church of Houston Session, *Vision 2020*, 1. Session was charged with addressing this question: "Building on Vision 2013, how do we live into our mission statement?"

²⁹ Cindy Cook, *Annual Report* (Houston, TX: First Presbyterian Church, October 2018).

volunteers at the many philanthropic non-profit agencies, congregants participate in many influential arenas. It is not uncommon to see church members serving both inside the church building (youth ministry, pastoral care, and so on) or volunteering with any one of FPC's many local mission partners.

The most formal and strategic mission partnerships the church currently maintains include the Presbyterian School, Main Street Ministries, and the Nehemiah Center. Each of these entities serves the common good of the city in the name of Jesus, operating independently as not-for-profit organizations that were chartered by the church and continue to be led organizationally and financially by church members. Main Street Ministries meets several needs for those in Houston.³⁰ Such assistance involves helping people obtain personal identification (e.g., birth certificate, picture identifications, driver's license, and the like), so they can apply for jobs or receive assistance from social services. Other programs at Main Street Ministries include the Work-Faith Alliance (helping to put unemployed individuals back to work while introducing them to Christian community) and the Holy Ground ministry (for those who have been released from jail and are trying to transition their way into society). Finally, the Nehemiah Center is a ministry partner that provides a safe haven in the Third Ward by partnering with parents to provide after-school care, tutoring, and programming for pre-school through elementary students.³¹ The Nehemiah Center recently launched a charter middle school and now has witnessed one of its first participants graduate from high school and college.

³⁰ Main Street Ministries Houston, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://msmhouston.org/>.

³¹ Nehemiah Center, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.nehemiahcenterhouston.org/>.

Other recent initiatives undertaken by the church that are designed to engage the culture more faithfully include the launch of the Discipleship house (D-house) in the Montrose community, the establishment of faith and medicine forums at Rice University, and a partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts. The D-house is home to eight young adults, five females and three males, who live in separate homes within the Montrose neighborhood for one year. As part of the program participants maintain full-time employment or study in their respective industries while also agreeing to live communally, study and practice the Christian faith together, and engage their community by fostering new and intentional relationships with others—such as neighbors, baristas, and hairstylists.

In 2013, the FPC college ministry engaged neighbors in the city by hosting a faith and medicine forum at Rice University, prompted by a member of the church who teaches and practices medicine as a neonatologist at the Baylor College of Medicine. Her research involves educating fellow physicians and medical students as to the therapeutic benefits experienced by patients and families who practice faith and how best to utilize a caring, faith-filled approach to communicating with families and their loved ones amidst anxiety-filled circumstances. This particular physician recently attended the Center for Faith and Work conference on Humanizing Work as part of her ongoing research and developed a curriculum for the medical residents in her program, demonstrating how theological reflection and action can result in practices that reflect an integration of one's faith into the workplace.³²

³² Melissa Carbajal, MD, interview by author, Houston, TX, November 11, 2015.

Movement

In September 2013 the session (the church’s governing council comprised of ruling elders) adopted “Vision 2020,” a long-range strategic plan that connotes “movement,” which sets forth how FPC intends to live out the good news of the gospel by connecting people to God, to one another, and to the needs of the city. Vision 2020 can be broken into three parts: the undergirding mission statement,³³ the vision (means by which the mission is accomplished and resulting goals),³⁴ and key strategic initiatives needed to accomplish the mission and vision.³⁵

The goal of Vision 2020 is to articulate a theological vision for First Presbyterian Church that informs the basis for future ministry expressions. The church mission statement, “Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we carry the gospel to Houston and the world,” suggests an outward-facing missional posture that promotes cultural engagement. The “vision” component of Vision 2020 confirms this, stating that FPC desires to be “a Gospel-centered church seeking to encourage, equip, empower and deploy outwardly-focused disciples who desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ wherever God sends them.” FPC lives out its vision in three parts as it “gathers together to worship, pray, learn, encourage, and celebrate; grows into maturity as followers of Jesus Christ through biblical teaching and small group studies; and goes

³³ First Presbyterian Church of Houston Session, *Vision 2020*, 1-2. All discussion in this section about FPC’s mission is taken from these pages.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-4. All discussion in this section about FPC’s vision is taken from these pages.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-11. All discussion in this section about FPC’s strategic ministry initiatives is taken from these pages.

into the world to share the Gospel as individuals in circles of influence and as a body in Houston and beyond.”

The framers of Vision 2020 established several aspirational goals that reflect their desired outcome for a well-lived mission and vision. These goals include equipping every member to be a minister in the places where they live and work, evangelistic efforts that result in ten thousand people making professions of faith in Jesus, the establishment of ten new churches, and \$10 million raised to fund new congregations and mission efforts. In order to accomplish these goals, several new initiatives are underway, including an effort to promote an internal cultural shift that moves church members from the role of “consumer” to that “missionary.” To accomplish this cultural shift, worship services now include testimonies by congregants who model examples of everyday missionary living in their homes, places of work, and service opportunities. More recently, church members have begun gathering in their respective neighborhoods to discuss what missionary living looks like here in the city and to pray for their neighbors.

For members of FPC, one of the key shifts necessary to becoming an everyday missionary and embodying the movement of Vision 2020 is to understand their places of work as a unique mission field. To do so is to avoid sealing their faith from their work in a way that acquiesces to the same values and practices as others. On the other hand, it does not mean loudly shouting their Christian faith in a way that lacks grace and wisdom. Instead, the integration of faith and work as a missionary endeavor is to participate in broad cultural renewal by seeking the common good and allowing the implications of the gospel to be present in the spheres of business, government, and the arts. It means that

pew-sitters who struggle to articulate their faith can contribute to the credibility of the broader Christian community by doing excellent work in a distinctive manner.³⁶

³⁶ Timothy Keller, "Work and Cultural Renewal," *Faith and Work* (blog), January 21, 2010, accessed October 7, 2015, <http://www.faithandwork.com/blog/work-and-cultural-renewal/>.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews six critical resources that inform this project, which is to create a context-specific discipleship model that equips members of First Presbyterian Church of Houston for missionary engagement in the places where they work. The literature is divided into three categories: the nature of the Church (ecclesiology), cultural engagement within the Reformed tradition, and the integration of faith and work as central to discipleship. Ecclesiology, or the study of the Church, identifies the Body of Christ, why it exists, and how it functions. *Center Church* explores the relationship between a congregation’s “hardware” (doctrine) and its “software” (ministry programs), namely how theological vision informs what a congregation is going to do with its doctrine in a particular time and place.¹ *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the North American Church* makes the case for the Church in North America to

¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 17.

remember its primary purpose: to be a people who exist to accomplish God's mission in the world.²

The case for cultural engagement within the Reformed tradition was greatly influenced by the work of Dutch theologians Herman Bavinck, Herman Ridderbos, and Abraham Kuyper.³ What makes their work significant is its redemptive-historical approach to the Scriptures as articulating God's unfolding story of redemption and its implications for missiology, suggesting a holistic Christian worldview that confronts compartmentalized Christianity. In his book, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, Albert M. Wolters builds upon the work of his predecessors by articulating a redemptive worldview that is drawn supremely from the Scriptures alone (rather than Scripture alongside tradition), a hallmark of the Reformed tradition.⁴ In *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper discusses Calvinism and the way it interacts with many aspects of life, inviting believers to think from a Christian perspective about matters beyond pure religion or spirituality.

The final three resources take up the case for the integration of faith and work as central to the life of a disciple. In *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's*

² Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

³ Herman Ridderbos was known for his work, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975). He is one of the foremost developers of the redemptive-historical approach to biblical theology. Herman Bavinck is known for his *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), which discusses the ability to connect theology to everyday life. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Seattle, WA: Fig Books, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition, was instrumental in applying God's sovereignty in the public sphere.

⁴ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 35.

Work, Keller examines numerous aspects of work and the relationship between work and faith and provides scriptural, theological, and practical application while demonstrating how the gospel of salvation through grace frees disciples from the relentless pressure of having to prove themselves and secure their identity through work.⁵ In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard proposes a contemporary critique and approach to the meaning of discipleship, describing how a person who is an apprentice to Jesus learns to truly implement what Jesus teaches in everyday living (including work).⁶ Finally, in *Practicing Theology*, Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass serve as editors for a collection of essays that describe the relationship between Christian theology and practice in a way that helps believers consider how their own practices, a cluster of ideas and activities related to social goals and shared by a social group, might be made manifest.⁷

The Nature of the Church

Ecclesiology is the branch of theology that is concerned with the nature, constitution, and functions of a church.⁸ Formally, the Reformed tradition speaks very clearly of the Church as a covenant people called by God and a place where the Word of God is preached, the sacraments are rightly administered, and ecclesiastical discipline is

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 285-291.

⁷ Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition.

⁸ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical, and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2002), 13.

properly ministered.⁹ There is a difference, however, in what churches say they believe (formally) and what they actually demonstrate they believe (functionally) as they embody their ministry, structure, and the sacraments.¹⁰ The following resources provide a theological basis for the integration of faith and work at First Presbyterian Church of Houston as a critical facet of its missional culture.

Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City
by Timothy Keller

First Presbyterian Church endeavors to dispatch the good news of Jesus faithfully and fruitfully to the city of Houston and to the world. In *Center Church*, Keller provides an ecclesiological basis that articulates the factors that enable a local church to bridge this good news into a particular cultural setting and historical moment.¹¹ Every congregation has doctrinal beliefs, either stated or unstated, much like how every computer has hardware. In the same manner, every congregation employs ministry practices and methods, much like the software that makes use of a computer's hardware. Before choosing specific ministry methods, Keller invites readers to consider their doctrinal beliefs and ask how they might relate to the modern world. The result of that question

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.1.12.

¹⁰ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Random House, 2002), 32.

¹¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 17.

provides the essence of theological vision.¹² In short, theological vision is “a vision for what you are going to do with your doctrine in a particular time and place.”¹³

Keller addresses the Church of the twenty-first century and responds to countless inquiries from pastors and leaders, who continue to wonder why and how he has been able to successfully plant a theologically conservative yet flourishing Presbyterian Church in the heart of Manhattan. He discovered that many came to him seeking to replicate ministry programs (software), but the programs simply did not translate easily into other contexts. The hard work is that of cultural exegesis, interpreting the culture and coming to an awareness of the historical, cultural, and rational filters that condition life in a particular context. In the end, a theological vision that engages the culture does not simply stand against mainstream impulses; rather, it takes the initiative both to understand and speak to those impulses from the framework of the Scriptures.¹⁴

Forming a theological vision requires one to address particular issues that can translate into activity. This includes a clear definition of the gospel and how the gospel can influence human hearts. It also requires an exegesis of today’s culture in a way that informs how the Body of Christ both connects to it and challenges it in its communication. A theological vision also takes into account the context of ministry, where the church is located—city, suburb, town, rural area—and how this affects ministry. It requires the church to understand the degree to which Christians should be

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

involved in civic life and cultural production in making a case to the culture about the truth of Christianity. Addressing and answering these issues can help FPC live out a faithful restatement of the gospel in the city of Houston in the twenty-first century with implications for life, ministry, and mission.¹⁵

In order to cultivate faithful, fruitful, and successful ministry within the local church, three important factors must be taken into consideration: gospel, city (context), and movement. The gospel, by definition, is good news. In the Christian faith it is news that announces salvation and rescue, about what has been done by Jesus Christ to put right human relationship with God.¹⁶ Believing and resting in this news changes a person's standing before God, from a place of alienation to a place of adoption. The gospel also has implications, resulting in a new way of life and leading to good works that reflect the grace extended by Christ. It is important to remember, however, the difference between what the gospel is and what the gospel does. There is a danger in depicting the gospel as primarily joining something (Christ's kingdom program) rather than receiving something (Christ's finished work). When viewed in this dichotomy, says Keller, "the gospel becomes another kind of salvation by works instead of a salvation by faith."¹⁷

Although wonderful and beautiful, the gospel is not proclaimed in a vacuum but rather to real people in real places and times. In the case of FPC, it is proclaimed

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷ Ibid.

primarily in the city of Houston. A city is a social form, a place where people physically live in close proximity to one another.¹⁸ People gather in cities for many reasons—including economic gain, refuge from powerful interests, and cultural enjoyment. Cities are commonly places of greater productivity and creativity. They also can be places of potent evil, as corrupt systems and people can harm the lives of many. Nevertheless, cities have a profound effect on the formation of global culture, bringing together the most highly trained and talented people while also receiving the world's (often poor) immigrant communities. As such, Christians should develop appreciative attitudes toward the city, become a dynamic counterculture wherever they live, and yet be radically committed to the good of the city.¹⁹

The act of announcing and living the good news of the gospel to the city requires thoughtful and imaginative application, which Keller views as “movement.”²⁰ An integrative approach to ministry connects people to God, through worship and evangelism; it bonds people to one another, through discipleship and community; and it opens people to the needs of the city, through ministries of mercy and justice. However, where many churches struggle is in connecting people to the culture, to the places where they live and work each day. This is where the integration of faith and work is crucial to a church. For example, the gospel ought to inform and shape the way Christians create art,

¹⁸ Ibid., 135.

¹⁹ Ibid., 171.

²⁰ Ibid., 250.

conduct business and media, and engage in government and scholarship.²¹ The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers viewed “secular” work as valuable and honoring God as Christian ministry. Keller asserts that “when we use our God-given gifts to practice law, nurture children, or build machines,” followers of Christ “are in fact answering God’s call to love and serve the human community.”²² As such, faith changes one’s motivation for work, conception of work, and the ethics for what it means to be a Christian in the workplace. To this end, the local church needs to help congregants work in three specific ways: “accountably” (by meeting together and staying in relationship), “distinctively” (through the lens of the Christian narrative), and “excellently” (with quality and depth of expertise).²³

FPC has grasped an understanding of evangelism that results in conversions, baptisms, and church growth. It also has mobilized for the sake of justice and serving the marginalized, resulting in ministries of compassion and service for the common good born of a desire to serve the least, lost, and left behind. What it struggles to do is mobilize its members for the faithful integration into culture so they can recognize the meaning, purpose, and value of their everyday work within the framework of God’s redemption story. For application at FPC, this is where *Center Church* falls short. It does not connect to the specifics of Reformed doctrinal foundations.²⁴ In fact, it mentions little of how

²¹ Ibid., 330.

²² Ibid., 331.

²³ Ibid., 334.

²⁴ For example: Westminster Confessions, primary theological influencers/people, and church polity.

doctrine informs theological vision or where it might differ. Nevertheless, *Center Church* is comprehensive, applicable, and scholastically credible in its contributions to ecclesiology.

Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America,
Edited by Darrell Guder

Guder is Henry Winters Luce Chair of Missional and Ecumenical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and the editor of this volume, which was written by an ecumenical team of six noted missiologists. In *Missional Church*, Guder and the assembled team of contributors embark upon the task of crafting a future vision for the Church that moves beyond the level of method and problem solving, while examining the central question of who the Church is and why it exists. They contend that the “real issues in the current crisis of the Christian Church are spiritual and theological”²⁵ and set out to explore more fully the *missio Dei*, “mission of God,” rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation. More specifically, they address how “the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness.”²⁶

From the beginning of human history, God has been calling and sending His people into the world in order to be a blessing and bring salvation, culminating in the person and work of Jesus and continuing in the sending of the Spirit. The Church is defined as “God’s instrument for God’s mission.”²⁷ The problem is that in the West the

²⁵ Guder, “Missional Church,” 3-5.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

Church has an “ecclesiocentric view of mission.”²⁸ In other words, mission is viewed as a congregational activity, with local churches serving as the primary beneficiary through institutional enhancement and survival. *Missional Church* argues for a reorientation of Western theology to reflect that God is at the center of mission (not the church). In fact, mission is inherent within the very character and nature of God, beginning with the Father who sends the Son.²⁹ Upon His death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit; and in the end, the Holy Spirit sends the Church into the world as Christ’s instrument and witness.³⁰

Churches, however, are not the end goal of the gospel but rather the instrument and witness of responsible missional ecclesiology. Therefore, they “must be centered on the hope, the message, and the demonstration of the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ.”³¹ The vocation of the Church as God’s called and sent people is rooted in the Bible and is profoundly historical, yet it is also eschatological in that it is rooted in and shaped by God’s promised future. What makes this conversation so relevant, however, is that missional ecclesiology is by definition contextual in that it is translated continually to every culture. Guder highlights, “There is but one way to be the church, and that is incarnationally, within a specific concrete setting.”³² It can be practiced or translated into practice.³³

²⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 10.

³² Ibid., 11.

³³ Ibid., 12.

If churches only can be the Church within specific concrete settings, then it stands to reason that the workplace is one of those settings. With this in mind, the integration of faith and work for members of First Presbyterian Church must include a faithful exploration of the biblical-historical narrative of God’s mission and how work plays a role in that mission. It must include a view of the future and final consummation in a way that informs how believers in Christ make decisions to reflect this end, and it must take up the task of asking what the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ looks like in particular places of industry—such as law, business, education, politics, and the arts—within its specific cultural location.

The final major contribution of *Missional Church* to this project comes in “Missional Leadership,” whereby Alan J. Roxburgh asserts the critical role that leadership development plays in the overall organization and formation of missional communities. Missional leadership first begins and is shaped by the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, Christ takes on flesh to become physically present in order to redeem and renew creation. In Christ’s life, humanity sees the reign of God both inaugurated and announced. In His sending of the disciples, there is “the formation, fulfillment, and empowerment of a new community created and sent by God.”³⁴ In the way Jesus faced earthly principalities and powers, there is evidence of what faithful obedience looks like in the midst of opposition. Such faithful obedience to the Father necessitates that leaders cultivate a spirituality that lives in close relation and reliance to

³⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh, “Missional Leadership: Equipping God’s People for Mission,” in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 185.

the Father through the Spirit, a relationship cultivated and practiced through spiritual and ecclesial disciplines.³⁵

First Presbyterian Church of Houston finds itself located at a crossroads, both in its physical posture to the surrounding community and historically, as it seeks to shift from a modernistic and consumer-based culture to that of a missional community to be faithful and fruitful witnesses to God through Jesus Christ in contexts beyond the church walls. *Missional Church* is an important text for framing the conversation of what this can look like in the workplace. Where the book falls short is that it is deeply rooted in theory with very little emphasis on practice. Nevertheless, for those seeking to understand “missional ecclesiology” and what it means to be sent of God into places beyond the walls of the church, this resource is an important contribution.

Cultural Engagement within the Reformed Tradition

The Reformation was birthed in 1517 when Augustinian friar Martin Luther drafted a list of ninety-five theses, or reforms, to Roman Catholic teachings and practices. He posted these reforms to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenburg, Germany.³⁶ In 1536, as a French theologian and pastor John Calvin published the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a seminal work in expressing his theology that has become a definitive contribution in articulating the doctrinal position of the Reformers. He also intended it to be an elementary instruction book for anyone interested in

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Tim Dowley, ed., *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 360.

Christianity. The central theme of the *Institutes* is that the sum of human wisdom consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. Calvin argues that the knowledge of God is not inherent in humanity nor can it be discovered by observing the world. The only way to obtain it is through studying the Scriptures.³⁷ To this end, a Reformed view of cultural engagement (of which faith and work are a part) needs to first reflect the scriptural narrative of God's activity in the world and in and through the people of God.

The two resources described in this section proficiently connect the scriptural narrative of God's activity in the world together with God's people. In *Creation Regained*, Wolters suggests a biblical and theological worldview that guides faithful Christian engagement. In *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper extracts Calvin's broad themes of God's sovereignty and providence in all things, making the case for how all spheres of life are subject to God's rule and thereby making the case for why Christians are called to engage culture, politics, the sciences, and the arts as a faithful expression of what it means to be the Church.

Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview
by Albert M. Wolters

The distinctive feature of Reformation theology is its adherence to Scripture alone, rather than Scripture alongside tradition (or reason, or experience).³⁸ As such, Wolters "spells out the content of a biblical worldview and its significance as we seek to

³⁷ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 21.

³⁸ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Location 35.

be obedient to the Scriptures.”³⁹ Worldview, by definition, is described as “the basic framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.”⁴⁰ It is the lens, or filter, by which one determines meaning, value, and purpose for life. It determines one’s belief about human life, the character and nature of God, and the meaning of suffering. It serves as the basis for ethics and morality. All of these things hold together in a framework that informs the way people live, essentially serving as a guide or compass that orients them within space and time. Consequently, any legitimate worldview in the Reformed tradition must be shaped and tested by Scripture and “take the Bible and its teaching seriously for the totality of our civilization *right now* and not to relegate it to some optional area called ‘religion.’”⁴¹ This means the Scriptures speak to more than just Sunday sermons; they speak to the arenas of home, family, and society. Consequently, they speak to the nature, purpose, and meaning of one’s work.

To describe that which is distinctive about the Christian worldview, Wolters draws upon Bavinck, who describes the Christian faith in this way: “God the Father has reconciled His created but fallen world through the death of His Son, and renews it into a Kingdom of God by His Spirit.”⁴² These words are intended to be cosmic in nature in that they are true for everyone, everywhere, and everything, at all times. Any attempt to construct a dualistic worldview, whereby the religious/sacred is differentiated from the

³⁹ Ibid., Location 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Location 44.

⁴¹ Ibid., Location 102.

⁴² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 112; see also Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Location 155.

secular/natural world, is rejected—since the Reformational worldview does not accept such a distinction.⁴³

Another way to describe this worldview is around the central organizing principle that “grace restores nature.” In other words, “redemption in Jesus Christ means the restoration of an original good creation.”⁴⁴ If the crux of salvation is to restore a sin-disrupted creation, the integration of faith and work requires an examination of how sin has disrupted one’s work. It also necessitates a careful examination of the doctrine of creation in order to conceptualize what such redemption and restoration entail. It is to this end that Wolters devotes the remainder of this text, looking at the three basic biblical categories of creation, fall, and redemption.

Central to the integration of faith and work is the relationship between the activity of one’s work and God’s creation. Creation, says Wolters, is “the correlation of the sovereign activity of the Creator and the created order.”⁴⁵ Law, by distinction, is the manifestation of God’s sovereignty within creation, that all things live and move and have their being by His decree (Psalm 33:9). Law describes how things were designed to be from the beginning, prior to the effects of sin and the fall.⁴⁶ Whereas the natural law governs the norms of creation, it is crucial to understand what God intends to be the norms of interpersonal relationship and societal interaction. After the sixth day, the

⁴³ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Location 155.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Location 160.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Location 184.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Location 195.

developmental work of creation becomes societal and cultural in nature. It is the task of civilization, in accordance with Genesis 1:28, to “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.” This mandate, often called the “cultural mandate,”⁴⁷ involves the cultivation of what God has created. Such creation is not static in nature but a dynamic unfolding of God’s plans and purposes and takes place through the people God has created and called to “participate in the ongoing creational work of God, to be God’s helper in executing the end blueprint for his masterpiece.”⁴⁸

While Genesis 1 and 2 speak to God’s good creation and the task of humankind within it, Genesis 3 accounts for the story of the fall (sin) and its consequences. As a result, every person, society, institution, and industry have been distorted. Wolters describes the effect of this sin on the world to be that of “perverted creation.” It is a parasite on, and not a part of, creation.⁴⁹ This leaves room to understand all legitimate work as somehow connected to the creation mandate, whereby the evidence of sin does not imply the badness of creation but rather the perversion of good.

Another important matter is terminology and how it affects a Christ-follower’s worldview. In the Scriptures, the term “world” often describes the totality of sin-infected creation. When used by the apostle Paul, it refers to “the totality of unredeemed life dominated by sin outside of Christ,” yet it is in error to see the world as a delimited area

⁴⁷ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 56.

⁴⁸ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Location 528.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Location 729.

of the created order—in other words, an area commonly called “worldly” or “secular.”⁵⁰ Such a bifurcated worldview leaves little or no room for how politics, business, or even sports in any way could be holy or sacred. Instead, a Reformational worldview claims that God is at work to redeem and restore the entire creation, not just pockets of it that have the appearance of holiness (such as churches, non-profits, ministries of compassion and service). This means that even plumbers can find meaning and purpose within their work, serving their customers and providing for their families, all while loving God and loving neighbor.

After delving into the goodness of creation and the effects of the fall, Wolters devotes the remainder of the text to themes of redemption and restoration. In fact, he touts that “redemption means restoration—that is, the return of the goodness of an originally unscathed creation and not merely the addition of something supracreational.”⁵¹ Restoration is not the creation of a new thing but rather the return to an original state. Consequently, a faithful approach to faith and work seeks to discover where and how the good creation has been perverted by the fall, then participates in the activity of returning things to how they ought to be. As the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), Christ has made the way for human beings to be restored to their original state, in right relationship with God and with one another. As Christ’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), the people of God are called and invited to renew and reform all aspects of life in obedience to Christ, including societal structures and institutions.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Location 737.

⁵¹ Ibid., Location 786.

Wolters concludes by laying out what renewal might look like when applied to aggression, spiritual gifts, sexuality, and dance. While this portion was useful, it would have been even more helpful had he spent more time applying the renewal dynamic to formalized institutions—such as law, politics, education, business, trade, and the like—because it is through institutions like these that cultural renewal has far-reaching effects. Nevertheless, Wolters’ overall thesis purports that the Christian worldview finds supreme guidance for life from the Word of God. Consequently, a robust faith that is guided by the Scriptures sees creation, fall, and redemption as part of the created order, an order which Christ is restoring.

Lectures on Calvinism
by Abraham Kuyper

Lectures on Calvinism is a series of lectures sponsored by the Stone foundation and delivered by Kuyper at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898. Over the course of six lectures, Kuyper makes a compelling case for how the theology of Calvin (Calvinism) relates the Christian faith not only to spheres of religion and spirituality but to the state, the Church, the sciences, and many other endeavors of life. By arguing for a full-orbed Christian worldview in place of compartmentalized Christianity, this text takes seriously the working out of the Christian faith and its implications as well as what it means to think Christianly about the world in ways that extend beyond personal holiness. Kuyper asserts that Calvin’s Reformation suggests a cogent and coherent worldview and that by

engaging a variety of spheres Christians can and should have a beneficial historical effect upon society.⁵²

Kuyper's lectures show how Reformation theology encourages robust cultural engagement, pushing back against avoidance or escapism from the world as an unbiblical premise. To make his case, Kuyper addresses three primary arenas of human involvement: human relation to God, human beings' relation to one another, and human beings' relation to the world. Human relationship to God invites people into relationship with the world. Even though God rules in majesty above creation, "God entered into immediate fellowship with the creature, as God the Holy Spirit."⁵³ To engage in the once common "monastic flight"⁵⁴ from the problems of the world is inconsistent biblically with how God responds to the issues of the world. God's character historically calls for an engagement of culture rather than running from it.

Calvinism also speaks poignantly into human interpersonal relationships, elevating the ethic of humility as central to relational flourishing. Kuyper says, "If Calvinism places our entire human life immediately before God, then it follows that all have no claim whatsoever to lord it over one another, and that we stand as equals before God, and consequently equal as man to man."⁵⁵ Rather than promote principles of self-aggrandizement or ambitious pride, applying the grace of God in Christ invites a life of

⁵² Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Location 132.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Location 186.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Location 192.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Location 283.

service unto God in every sphere.⁵⁶ Inherent within the workplace is a system of complex human interactions governed by a plethora of worldviews, often dominated by aspirations of promotion and wealth accumulation as the source of success rather than a byproduct of humility undergirded by the gospel of God's grace.

The final fundamental interpretation that greatly influences one's worldview is that of relation to the world. Whereas paganism places too high a value on the world and Islam a too-low estimate in exchange for sensual paradise, Kuyper argues that humans are important for the sake of their likeness to the Divine image and that the world reflects the Divine creation and ought to be honored as such.⁵⁷ In the same way a particular grace is at work in salvation, Kuyper contends a common grace is at work in maintaining the life of the world even amidst the curse that rests upon it.⁵⁸

Overall, Kuyper's lectures demonstrate a broad application of Calvin's theology and how God's rule and reign are to be considered within every sphere of the world. This application pushes back against the Anabaptist position, which held that the unbaptized world was under the curse and is to be avoided. Instead, "the curse should no longer rest upon the world itself, but upon that which is sinful in it, and instead of monastic flight from the world the duty is now emphasized of serving God in the world, in every position in life."⁵⁹ Therefore, a faithful integration of faith and work "seeks to discover the

⁵⁶ Ibid., Location 289.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Location 325.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Location 321.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Location 331.

treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.”⁶⁰ A fair critique of Kuyper’s lectures would be to note the lack of any scriptural references that would undergird and support his thesis. Such references, if even occasionally offered, would bolster his work among a broader audience.

Faith and Work: Integration as an Act of Discipleship

In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus gives to His disciples the Great Commission: “Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Insofar as believers are baptized, but not living lives in obedience to Christ’s commands, there is a deficiency occurring within the people and institutions charged to do the disciple-making. Therefore, the following three resources address these deficiencies and serve as examples of how disciples might begin to mature and practice their faith. Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor* explores the practice of faithful living in a sphere of life that has received little treatment within the Church: the workplace. By exploring the goodness of work in creation, the effects of sin and brokenness, and the consequences of bringing the gospel to bear on one’s work, a Christian can begin to see work as a part of, not separate from, the life of discipleship. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Willard describes how, when practiced as a way of disrupting people’s typical rhythms and habits, the practices of spiritual disciplines can begin to help believers pay attention and live as apprentices to Jesus—in every sphere, Monday through Saturday. In *Practicing Theology*, Volf and Bass serve as

⁶⁰ Ibid., Location 347.

editors for a collection of essays written by leading theologians about the ways in which Christian practices emerge from personal beliefs, and vice versa.

Every Good Endeavor
by Timothy Keller

A common misperception about how one's faith is related to work is that a Christian's primary role (if not "only" role) is to evangelize those with whom they work.⁶¹ While evangelism is important, it is not the organizing principle for why most people go to work. For example, teachers who are Christian gather in schools in order to teach a variety of subjects like math, reading, and science. If their primary role and responsibility is not that of evangelism, then there must be another purpose at work to bring glory to God. In *Every Good Endeavor*, Keller describes how a faithful engagement in the workplace through discipline, creativity, and excellence can be an act of worship toward the restoration of God's creation. Whether that work be white collar, blue collar, or volunteer, this text speaks to Christ-followers who are trying to make sense of their frustrations and joys.

Keller begins by laying out God's plan for the world; for without God, one's best endeavors fail to fit cogently within any larger framework of meaning and purpose in the world. If the God of the Bible exists and this life is not the only life, "then every good endeavor, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God's calling, can matter forever."⁶² All work, be it that of a plumber or a preacher, can participate in the bringing

⁶¹ Dade Dowdle, interview by author, Houston, TX, February 2015.

⁶² Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 29.

about of a future healed world and showing glimpses of it to others. After laying this foundation and dispelling the notion that certain kinds of work are more important, Keller sets out to answer the questions of why people want to work; why it is so often hard to work; and finally, how the gospel enables human beings to find satisfaction and overcome difficulties in their work.

The reasons why people want work can be described in utilitarian terms; work is useful, sensible, and pragmatic for human survival. Keller holds that the motives of work are rooted much deeper in what it means to be human and created in the image of God, where the essence of work and the act of creation are observed first in the very nature of the Triune God. At the core of the biblical story is a God who labors, working to create the world as an artist does a masterpiece.⁶³ As part of this good creation, God forms and fashions human beings, creating male and female in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). In Genesis 1:28 God tells human beings to "fill the earth and subdue it." Therefore, the very act of work commanded in Genesis 1:28 is an expression of the very image of God imprinted upon every human being at birth.⁶⁴ According to the biblical narrative, humans not only need to work for how it provides for their everyday physical needs, they need work (and rest) because it is foundational to human makeup; it is a significant medium or expression through which people offer themselves to God. Although work existed in the Bible before the curse, it is often thought of it as a necessary evil or even punishment because it is can be laden with so much difficulty. However, "work is as

⁶³ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 48.

much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality . . . without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness.”⁶⁵

Even though work is central to the nature and character of God and God’s purposes in the world, it is often tiresome and filled with meaningless and fruitless overtones. Whereas the task of work occupies such a dominant volume of time in human life, it also takes on significant meaning—for good or for ill. Consequently, Keller warns of the idolatry of work, reminding readers: “You will not have a meaningful life without work, but you cannot say that your work is *the* meaning of your life. If you make any work the purpose of your life—even if that work is church ministry—you create an idol that rivals God.”⁶⁶ An idol is anything that becomes more important than God—whether family, sports, money, power, sex, or one’s profession. In Exodus 20:2-3, God gives the Law to the Israelites in the form of the Ten Commandments, the very first of which states: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” Still, time and again the Israelites forget what God has done on their behalf and grow fickle in their impatience, crafting false idols and golden calves (Exodus 32:1-35). The challenges and idols facing the members of First Presbyterian Church of Houston are not that different. As such, Christians seeking to be faithful must learn to discern the shape of the idols within their professions and industries, identifying the ways in which the good things they are trying to accomplish have become distorted intentionally or unintentionally.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 40.

The seriousness of sin and self-centeredness is also on display in Genesis 3:6, when Adam and Eve fall from grace after disobeying God by eating the fruit of the one tree God forbade. The effects of sin upon humankind have wrought havoc upon the world and, by extension, work. Due to the fall, “the experience of work will include pain, conflict, envy, and fatigue, and not all our goals will be met.”⁶⁷ Feelings of frustration and fruitlessness are to be expected, even when working in exactly the right vocation.⁶⁸ When this happens, work is no longer a way to cultivate the wonders of the created world or serve the basic needs of a neighbor. Instead, it becomes a way to accumulate power or notoriety or significance.⁶⁹ At the heart of frustration and fruitlessness is the desire to be like the Israelites in Genesis 11, who were out to make a name for themselves (rather than proclaim God) in the building of the Tower of Babel. The Israelites’ desire “to make a name” indicates an identity crisis of the first order. Instead, the Bible demonstrates that “we either *get* our name—our defining essence, security, worth, and uniqueness—from what God has done for us and in us, or we *make* a name through what we can do for ourselves.”⁷⁰ In other words, work can be idolatrous when it becomes the dispenser of one’s spiritual value, which is a value that ought to be attained only from God.

Only with an understanding of the gospel, claims Keller, can one begin to overcome the difficulties and obtain satisfaction and significance within one’s work. The

⁶⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 114.

gospel is “the true story that God made a good world that was marred by sin and evil, but through Jesus Christ he redeemed it at an infinite cost to himself, so that someday he will return to renew all creation; end all suffering and death; and restore absolute peace, justice, and joy in the world forever.”⁷¹ With a gospel worldview, one can begin to strategically shape how to go about doing work. While it may not appear noticeable to the public, a gospel-centered business would have a vision for serving the customer in some unique way. It might take shape as avoiding adversarial relationships and exploitation or emphasizing excellence and product quality or even maintaining an ethical environment, even if a high standard of ethics means a loss of profit margin. In a business shaped by the gospel, “profit is simply one of many important bottom lines.”⁷²

Due to the gospel, Christians have a deep resource from which to orient themselves in the midst of the workplace, with a different set of virtues guiding their actions. Love begins to occupy a primary place in the imagination, forming not a utopian view but one which humanizes industry—where “contacts” become “people,” where treating people with dignity in the midst of downsizing requires strength. The gospel means there are different inputs that contribute to key decision-making moments, including the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of the Scriptures. The gospel enables employees to work with gladness in their hearts, as working unto God for the glory of God.⁷³ For employers, the need to manipulate, demean, or terrify employees is replaced

⁷¹ Ibid., 163.

⁷² Ibid., 168.

⁷³ Ibid., 214.

by respect, sincerity of heart, and goodwill, because God does not deal with human beings as they deserve but rather through the lens of grace and the response of gratitude. Finally, Christians ought to be known for their generosity, for their lack of ruthlessness, for their calm and poise in the face of difficulty or failure. They can reject sectarianism, because the gospel gives to the believer every good and perfect gift in Christ and negates the impetus for meeting legitimate needs in illegitimate ways.

Every Good Endeavor is the most accessible and practical treatment of faith and work for the twenty-first century. It is not a theological treatise on vocation, but it does offer a depth of interpretation that moves it far beyond the realm of ministry self-help. Where it could be stronger would be to include a broader treatment of some significant segments of contemporary culture—for example, specifying responses for those who are students, stay-at-home parents, and retirees—given that they make up such a significant number within the current population. Nevertheless, no other text has resonated more with members of First Presbyterian Church, and it will continue to be a primary resource in shaping the faith and work ministry within the congregation for years to come.

The Divine Conspiracy
by Dallas Willard

When Christians engage in the practice of discipleship, they discover that life patterned after Christ begins to alter habits, patterns, and responses to sin. These life changes not only affect individual lives but also can have far-reaching effects upon the cities, towns, and even the nations where Christians live and work. *The Divine Conspiracy* has greatly influenced how believers think about the meaning of discipleship by weaving together biblical teaching with scholarship, science, and spiritual practice in

showing what it means to be an “apprentice” to Jesus. For example, if the rhythm of Jesus was to keep the Sabbath or welcome the outsider, these same practices might also begin to shape workplace environments to push back against unhealthy work schedules or hostility to new employees. Ultimately, Willard uses Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as his cornerstone in exploring ways to experience and be guided by God in such a way that results in a more authentic and dynamic faith. Consequently, *The Divine Conspiracy* is an important conversational partner for this project in that a meaningful engagement with the workplace as an expression of that faith becomes a natural byproduct of one’s discipleship.

Where Willard stands out is in his ability to address the disconnection between the message of God’s amazing grace in Jesus Christ and its effect on the ordinary life of a disciple. When Christians reduce the purpose of Christ’s work to solely that of forgiveness of sin and ignore its implications for the Christian life, then the gospel they are employing is not the whole gospel but the “the gospel of sin management.”⁷⁴ In political terms, to those on the right being a Christian is often simply a matter of having their sins forgiven. To the left, one is often considered a faithful Christian through a significant commitment to the eradication of social ills.⁷⁵ In other words, a Christian is either one who is ready to die and face judgment day or one who has a profound commitment to justice and love in the social arena. To land exclusively on one side or the other is to miss the point. Willard says, “The gospel Jesus speaks is not knowledge about

⁷⁴ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 40.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

God but an intimately interactive relationship with him.” The word “interactive” is the operative element here.⁷⁶ For those who serve in church leadership, Willard presses the point even further by asking, “What can we reasonably expect would be the result from people actually believing the substance of my message?”⁷⁷ To the extent believers in the pew fail to connect the significance of Christ’s atoning work for their lives and its manifestation in their spheres of influence (including the workplace), pastors and leaders are complicit in preaching and participating in the gospel of sin management.

In his eighth and ninth chapters, Willard takes on what it means to be a student, or disciple of Jesus, along with developing a roadmap for Christlikeness.⁷⁸ He stresses the necessity of intention in living the life of Christ, showing that the objective is not “external conformity to the wording of Jesus’ teaching about actions in specific contexts” or “the profession of perfectly correct doctrine.”⁷⁹ While these are important features, they are not the goal. The goal, says Willard, is to “dearly love and constantly delight in” the Father and combat “old habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and action.”⁸⁰ This kind of training leads to doing that which was modeled by Jesus: an intentional disruption of one’s “automatic” thoughts, feelings, and actions by doing different things—essentially,

⁷⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 271-374.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 320.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 320-322.

the kinds of things that demonstrate restraint from the old kingdoms and positive engagement into “the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13, NAS).”⁸¹

In order to faithfully practice the Christian life, Willard argues for the practicing of spiritual disciplines as a means to the kind of disruption that brings about thoughts, feelings, and actions that reflect kingdom values. Disciplines of abstinence (solitude, fasting, silence) are designed to help remove destructive and unhelpful things from one’s life; they engage the body differently as a means to conquer the actions that govern life as if God and His kingdom were irrelevant or inaccessible.⁸² The disciplines of engagement (study, worship, service, prayer) are intended to build the right kinds of attitudes and habits into daily life, making the body a reliable ally and resource for the spiritual life.

For the purposes of this project, a transformative ministry of faith-work engagement must include practices that disrupt the prevailing dualism that results in a bifurcated worldview of sacred versus secular realms of existence. No matter the job, industry, or practice, Christ has invited the believer into a life reflective of God’s kingdom, even in the midst of different spheres of living, including the sphere of work. Spiritual practices that cultivate whole-life discipleship beyond that of sin management are necessary for every Christian, for as they transform the life of the believer they transform the places and contexts in which that believer lives. Consequently, a life patterned after Christ begins to pay attention to how kingdom values might inform the way of one’s work, decision-making, and patterns of engagement with others.

⁸¹ Ibid., 322.

⁸² Ibid., 354.

Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,
Edited by Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass

The Christian life does not exist in a vacuum but instead plays out in the form of practices—in real moments, with real people, in real places and times. The same could be said of theology and belief. For example, whereas much ink has been spilled concerning the doctrine and mystery of the Lord’s Supper, very little attention has been given to the nuance of how this sacrament shapes individuals and communities to uniquely put their faith into everyday practice by welcoming the stranger or visitor as an act of hospitality—or in the case of this project, how deeply formed and held beliefs begin to shape interactions with peers (or adversaries) in the workplace. With this in mind, Volf and Bass have compiled essays from a variety of theologians who seek to bridge the gap between believed theology and applied practice in the lives of believers and their communities.

At the outset, Bass describes Christian practices as the “patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in the light of God as known in Jesus Christ.”⁸³ In the first chapter, Bass points to the sacrament of baptism as a way of showing how Christians enter into an entire way of life rooted in the story and grace of God. As a result, their practices become “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in

⁸³ Dorothy C. Bass, “Introduction,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 40-41.

the light of God's active presence for the life of the world."⁸⁴ Volf bookends the compilation of essays by exploring the disconnect between that of theology and what he calls "real life," namely that "at the heart of every good theology lies not simply a plausible intellectual vision but more importantly a compelling account of a way of life, and that theology is therefore best done from within the pursuit of this way of life."⁸⁵

In between the opening and closing essays exists real-life examples of how Christian practices have emerged from a variety of contexts and communities. One such practice that serves as a dominant theme in several essays is the practice of hospitality, which occurs every time someone makes room and/or welcomes another person, often through providing a meal or shelter. Through hospitality, "hosts make room for those with no place, sharing themselves and their lives rather than only their skills."⁸⁶ In an essay on encountering the "other," Gilbert I. Bond describes how the practice of hospitality within an Anabaptist community and an Afro-Baptist community provided a means of connecting worship to engaging the outsider.⁸⁷ One such example is the practice of greeting people by name, which requires an implied effort to know and recognize

⁸⁴ Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 189.

⁸⁵ Miroslav Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2812.

⁸⁶ Christine Pohl, "A Community's Practice of Hospitality: The Interdependence of Practices and of Communities," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1452.

⁸⁷ Gilbert I. Bond, "Liturgy, Ministry, and the Stranger: The Practice of Encountering the Other in Two Christian Communities," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1613.

every person that comes through the door of their fellowship.⁸⁸ It is precisely in these types of practices, cultivated and rooted in theological reflection and worship within this project's prescribed cohort model, whereby believers in the workplace can draw upon scriptural narratives as a basis for what it means to humanize their environments and treat co-workers with a sense of welcome, dignity, and grace, even as Christ has done for them.

Finally, Kathryn Tanner's essay provides an important reminder about the improvisational way theological reflection arises "within the ordinary workings of Christian lives to meet pressing practical needs."⁸⁹ The simple act of making someone feel welcome in one's home requires real-time adjustments and responses, absorbing inconveniences while balancing other responsibilities against the requirements of hospitality.⁹⁰ Knowing what to do or how to respond is rarely easy or conclusive. Often, it is even messy. This makes the case for why thoughtful reflection is required not only to help shape one's practices but also after the fact in order to discover the beliefs, habits, and conditions that helped to shape one's practices.

Practicing Theology does not address specific workplace scenarios or case studies per se, which could have been beneficial for the purposes of this project. However, it provides concrete examples that translate easily. For this reason, the Faith and Work cohorts resulting from this project will read selected portions of these essays, and

⁸⁸ Ibid., Location 1778.

⁸⁹ Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 2595.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Location 2621.

participants will be invited to reflect upon and share first-person case studies that describe their actions and practices resulting from both workplace conflict and workplace success.

CHAPTER 3

A THEOLOGY OF GOSPEL-INFORMED CULTURAL RENEWAL AND FAITH-WORK INTEGRATION

This chapter presents a theological justification for gospel-informed cultural engagement as central to the life of a disciple through the integration of one's faith and work. It argues for the theological importance of this framework by briefly addressing the historical Reformed perspective on ecclesiology and missiology, examining the Reformed tradition and why its theology uniquely heightens the importance of faith-work integration. It also critiques the consequences of the bifurcated worldviews as established by other faith traditions within the broader Christian community.

In addition, this chapter gives special attention to the primary theological themes that undergird cultural engagement and faith-work integration, providing a working definition of the gospel and establishing a theology of work. It offers an explication of the Reformed theological themes of grace, sovereignty, and exilic living as a framework for discipleship in the twenty-first century. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the normative pattern of renewal and restoration within the biblical storyline as it emerges from Creation. The discussion focuses on how it is enacted through the nation of Israel and the

life of Christ and transforms the community of believers, as they carry this gospel to the ends of the earth.

Missional Ecclesiology and the Reformed Tradition

Ecclesiology is the branch of theology that is concerned with the nature, constitution, and functions of a church.¹ Within the Reformed tradition there are three critical functions that are most prominently esteemed: the proclamation of the Word of God, the right and proper administration of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline.² Of keen interest, however, is whether or not the formal beliefs of a church translate into definitive action and demonstration within its ministries and practices. For example, the formal ecclesiological framework for congregations located within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is outlined in the *Book of Order*, in a section titled the “Great Ends of the Church.” The Great Ends of the Church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world.³ By definition, these Great Ends of the Church represent why FPC Houston was constituted in 1839 and what it believes itself called to be and to do.

¹ Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 13.

² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.12.

³ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—Part II* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2011-2013), 38.

In order to functionally fulfill the Great Ends of the Church, FPC Houston has adopted the statement, “Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we carry the gospel to Houston and the World,” to reflect an ecclesiological framework often referred to as the “gathered-scattered” people of God. In this framework the people of God gather to worship (where the Word is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments are enacted) for the purpose of being scattered, or sent into the world as the herald of Christ’s Lordship to bear witness to the kingdom of God that is both now and yet to come.⁴ The Church gathered is reflective of what happens on the church campus or when Christians meet together, typically in reference to the formal and official program of the congregation.

The Church scattered represents a Christian’s life of service that flows from the formal, organized activities of the local church—particularly as people make their way as Christ’s ambassadors into homes, schools, workplaces, and community activities, or wherever the Christian goes. Practically speaking, as a Protestant Reformer Luther aptly describes the link between faith and vocation as living out the commandments to love God and love one’s neighbor. He writes:

The prince should think: Christ has served me and made everything to follow him; therefore, I should also serve my neighbor, protect him and everything that belongs to him. That is why God has given me this office, and I have it that I might serve him. That would be a good prince and ruler. When a prince sees his neighbor oppressed, he should think: That concerns me! I must protect and shield my neighbor. . . . The same is true for shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do

⁴ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 114.

so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor. When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present; that is not Christian living.⁵

Within the Reformed tradition, the orientation of the believer to a posture of “sent-ness” echoes Calvinism’s “ethical orientation of its lay members towards demonstrating the reality of their state of election by a wholehearted management of their work.”⁶ Stated more robustly, it is the living out of two prominent theological themes at work within the Reformed ecclesiology: God’s sovereignty and God’s providence. To affirm God as sovereign is to support God’s activity in originating, upholding, guiding, and ruling His world, including overruling any activity that seeks to thwart God’s purposes. God accomplishes this in two ways: either directly, without mediation, or indirectly through the involvement of human responsibility.⁷ This upholds the activity of Christians being participatory in nature toward God’s redemptive purposes.

The doctrine of divine providence asserts the truth of God’s intervention in the world, not only in Creation and His upholding of the universe but specifically in God’s extraordinary intervention in the life of people (cf. Romans 8:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). God’s providence is most specifically on display throughout the Old Testament, as God establishes a covenant with Israel (Genesis 12:1-3) and continuously intercedes on their behalf for their good (Genesis 6:17-18; Exodus 19:5; Psalm 105:10).

⁵ Martin Luther, “Sermon in the Castle Church at Weimar (October 25, 1522, Saturday after the Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity),” in D. Martin, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 60 vols. (Weimar, DE: Herman Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883-1980), quoted in Frederick J. Gaiser, “What Luther Didn’t Say about Vocation,” *Word & World from Lutheran Seminary* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 395.

⁶ Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Pub., 1958), 63.

⁷ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Location 197.

This covenant is later renewed and expanded as God intercedes incarnationally in the life (Luke 4:15-19), sacrificial death (Romans 5:8), and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:6). Within the doctrines of sovereignty and providence, God's power and God's provision are acknowledged, but so too are the means by which God acts within space and time to bring about redemption—in other words, through the work of God's people—thus describing why a thoughtful engagement of faith and work is essential in the life of the Church's formation and mission.

The Unintended Consequences of a Bifurcated Worldview

When it comes to the study of justification for salvation—a person's right-standing before God—one's own good works are indeed insufficient grounds upon which to claim any sense of righteousness or right standing (Romans 3:19-23). Indeed the gospel is good news not due to what one has done but due to what Christ has done (Ephesians 2:8-9). While good works are as filthy rags and insufficient for the purpose of salvation, they are still part and parcel of living out God's created purposes (Isaiah 64:6; Ephesians 2:10). As such, the significance of gospel-informed cultural engagement is seen more clearly when viewed through the lens of eschatology, the final events of history and the ultimate destiny of humanity.

Christians often have held dualistic positions on the future of the world, highlighting an extreme disconnect between the present and the future, the sacred and the secular, complete with the destruction of the present world in the end and the creation of a new world.⁸ Those holding this position lean on scriptural texts like 2 Peter 3:10, which

⁸ Ibid., Location 151.

highlight how Christians await the day when “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire.” Others postulate congruence between this world and the next, believing that the present world will not be annihilated but instead transformed into a new heaven and new earth as referenced in Revelation 21:3-5, which underscores how “the home of God is among mortals. . . . He will dwell with them . . . making all things new.”⁹

However, a bifurcated worldview that fails to connect the present with the future provides no compelling basis for meaningful cultural engagement. If the world will be destroyed and a new one created out of nothing, the implications for human work and cultural renewal take on a posture that becomes radically individualistic and exclusively vertical in relation to God. Human work and activity become short-term means of preparation and purifying the individual soul, either to earn salvation or to achieve a higher spiritual state in the afterlife. Since the cumulative results of any work are destroyed in the final apocalyptic/annihilation event, human activity is stripped of any real ultimate significance. It is not stripped of immediate significance, for there is nothing contradictory in wanting to live in the world and use it for as long as it lasts. There remains a broad implication in the annihilation view that is detrimental to cultural involvement. Volf agrees and emphatically writes:

Belief in the eschatological annihilation and responsible social involvement are logically compatible. But they are *theologically inconsistent*. The expectation of the eschatological destruction of the world is not consonant with the belief in the goodness of the creation: what God will annihilate must be either so bad that it is not possible to be redeemed or so insignificant that it is not worth being redeemed. It is hard to believe in the intrinsic value and goodness of something

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 90.

that God will completely annihilate. And *without a theologically grounded belief in the intrinsic value and goodness of creation, positive cultural involvement hangs theologically in the air.*¹⁰

Only with a coherent link between the world as it is and the world as it will be (in the end) does cultural involvement and human work find significant meaning. Therefore, the framework of what churches ought to be doing in mission changes dramatically with the assumption that this world will not find its end in apocalyptic imagery but rather in the redemption and restoration of what was lost in the fall of Genesis 3. The language used most frequently to describe this view in the New Testament is that of “the kingdom of God.” Jesus preaches and teaches about this kingdom not as postmortem destiny, not as an escape from this world into another one, but in reference to God’s sovereign reign and rule coming “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).¹¹ Similarly, Matthew’s gospel account points to other ways, seeking the kingdom (Matthew 6:33) and the meek inheriting the earth (Matthew 5:5). This coincides with Romans 8:21, where Paul writes that the “creation itself . . . will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God,” and offers scriptural support for an earthly locale of God’s kingdom, where in the end “the resurrected people of God will inhabit the renewed earth.”¹²

In addition to the wealth of New Testament support for a restored and redeemed world, the Old Testament also supports cultural engagement as a means to an ultimate

¹⁰ Ibid., 92-93.

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 17.

¹² Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 94.

corporate end rather than the view purported through annihilationist, individualistic purification in preparation for the afterlife. This is most clearly on display in Jeremiah 29:5. Here the prophet proclaims the words of the Lord to the Israelites, who have been sent into exile at the hands of the Babylonians. God’s instruction to them was this: “Build houses . . . plant gardens . . . take wives and bear sons and daughters . . . and seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, for in their welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Another key text that supports cultural engagement is the Valley of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37. Here the prophet declares God’s intention of restoration by “attaching tendons. . . recreating flesh as skin,” where God says, “I will put new breath in you and you will come to life” (Ezekiel 37:6). In this way, the prophet reveals God’s plan of reconstituting existing material rather than destroying it and beginning all over again. Both Jeremiah 29 and Ezekiel 37 demonstrate God’s plan to use exilic living as a means of accomplishing His purposes in this world of bringing dead things to life and restoring His creation.¹³

The final validation of a transformative worldview finds its support in and through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the second person of the Trinity, who took on flesh in the incarnation. Jesus made a distinct and unique correlation between this world and the next, the physical and the metaphysical. His earthly presence, which began with His birth to a virgin girl in Bethlehem (Luke 2:6-7), confirms and validates that God indeed cares about the material world He created and has a plan for its redemption. Jesus

¹³ David Kim and Richard Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal: Empowering and Equipping the Laity* (New York: Center for Faith and Work, 2013), 15-18.

inaugurates a firsthand look at the coming kingdom in the Gospel of Luke with his declaration to “proclaim good news to the poor . . . liberty to the captives . . . recovery of sight to the blind . . . liberty for the oppressed . . . to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus’ death (Luke 23:46) and resurrection (Luke 24:6) connect the immediacy of His promises with the promise of final consummation in the new heavens and new earth on display in Revelation 21.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus not only demonstrates God’s victory over the condemnation of sin, it also pieces together a portrait of how the once-marred physical body of Jesus is now healed, in spite of what appears to be the remaining scars and wounds of the cross. When Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room and breathes on them to receive His Spirit (John 20:22) He first shows them His nail-pierced hands and wounded side as hard evidence, validating that the One who stands before the disciples is not a dream or hallucination but the living, breathing Savior. A resurrected Christ whose wounds have been healed—yet still remain—is a critical link to comprehending the connection between the kingdom now (Luke 4:18-21) and the kingdom yet to come (Revelation 21:4-5). Jesus, in the act of presenting His healed wounds to the disciples, demonstrates how the final work of healing and restoration has already begun, a significant sign to believers in showing how the redemptive work of Christ’s victory over sin and death is both effectual in the present age as well as in the age to come (Matthew 12:32).

The appearance of a glorified Christ—post resurrection, yet in the present age—is significant in linking the future promises of God to present-day realities (John 20:20-23). Similarly, Jesus gives His final marching orders in the form of the Great Commission

(Matthew 28:19-20) to his band of followers and then proceeds to the right hand of the Father (Acts 1:9) with a redeemed, glorified body. Of critical importance is Christ's appearance in the upper room in John 20:20-29, whereby the wounds of crucifixion were still visible and present. Christ ascends not with a body whose wounds have vanished but instead with wounds visibly on display yet healed. In this final act, Jesus once again connects the present reality of this age with the age to come (Matthew 6:10), thereby modeling for the disciples (then and now) how their ministries of healing and redemption are significant both here on earth "as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Finally, on the day of Pentecost Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the created world—into the hearts and minds of His disciples—in order that the gospel be proclaimed and the Great Commission be fulfilled as Jesus comes again in glory to rule and reign forever (Matthew 28:19-20). With the sending of the Holy Spirit, Christians are empowered to bear witness to the resurrected and ascended Christ at all times, everywhere. Whereas the presence of Christ was previously realized exclusively wherever Christ was located physically, now the "body" of Christ is ably charged to be present both locally and globally (Acts 1:6-8).

If the creation establishes God's commitment and love for the world (Romans 1:31), if the incarnation unveils His plan to be reconciled to the world (2 Corinthians 5:19), if the death and resurrection accomplish this reconciliation (Romans 5:10), and if the ascension prepares the way for the Spirit to break in (John 14:26), then ecclesiology and eschatology ought to equip the Body of Christ with a clear view of the restorative imagery that is therefore expressed in the Scriptures. Restoration imagery affirmed by Jesus and described by New Testament authors is like the box top of a jigsaw puzzle. Since human beings know what the finished puzzle looks like, they know how to begin

putting the pieces back together in full anticipation of Christ's return. Until that time, the Church has a job to do in co-laboring with the Spirit to enter into all the world, inside and outside the visible Church.¹⁴ It is the same job the Church has had since the day of Pentecost: to bring the life of heaven to birth in full view of the prayer the risen Savior taught His followers to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven" (Matthew 6:19).

Theological Themes

Every individual faces unique workplace contexts. What is defined as success in one organization (e.g., shareholder value) may be different from another (e.g., graduation rates). Not only are the contexts different, but each individual brings unique personalities and skills to the job, let alone varying degrees of maturity in their lives as disciples. Therefore, in order to craft a program design that brings together one's faith with one's work, it is necessary to parse out the unique elements of the whole and to think theologically about them before putting it all together. For example, the institution of marriage within the Christian context may have as its goal the desire to glorify God and bless the world. In order to accomplish this goal, it is necessary to understand how communication, conflict resolution, sexuality and affection, family of origin, and finances all contribute uniquely to a flourishing marriage.

In the same way, several theological themes emerge as a basis for the faith-work conversation, the definitions of which help provide a framework for the purposes of this

¹⁴ Volf, *Work In The Spirit*, 114.

project whereby future cohort participants can begin to consider what an integrated worldview of faith and work looks like in their specific context. These theological themes include but are not limited to the following: the gospel, the theology of work, “sphere sovereignty,”¹⁵ and “exilic living.”¹⁶ What follows is a brief definition of each and its connection to understanding well-rounded, vibrant, meaningful Christian living.

Gospel

. Within the context of the mission statement of First Presbyterian Church of Houston, the gospel is the good news—on offer to the world—that Jesus lived for all people (John 3:16), died for all people (2 Corinthians 5:15), was raised personally for each individual (1 Corinthians 15:4), and ultimately sent the Holy Spirit for each person (John 14:15-17). If a believer enters into and embraces life with Jesus (Romans 10:9), that individual can be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19), to others (Colossians 3:13), and to the world (Colossians 1:20-22).

Second, the gospel not only has individualistic implications; it has communal implications. In the kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated is the full display of the life He embodied. The ministry He began in Luke 4:18-20 proclaims “good news to the poor . . . release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and the proclamation of the year of the Lord’s favor.” In other words, the grace of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit

¹⁵ Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 461-503.

¹⁶ Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 15-18.

work in the life of the believer from the inside out and the outside in. A poor woman may not have financial means nor a blind man have sight, but each share the common ground of salvation and reconciliation with God as sufficient means of grace amidst the trials of life. Together the community of believers are bound together by the work of Jesus, rooted in gratitude for what Jesus has accomplished, while working together (in the case of the poor woman or blind man) to push back against systems of poverty and lack of adequate healthcare provision in the world God created and the world God loves (John 3:16).

Applying the gospel to one's work has both individualistic and communal implications. For disciples who always have looked for promotions as a means of self-esteem, an engagement with the gospel frees them to receive disappointing news without internal devastation and to receive news without becoming too puffed up. For someone else, understanding and applying the communal aspects of the gospel may help redefine individual and corporate approaches to conflict resolution or perhaps encourage them to think more thoughtfully and broadly about their lending practices or policy engagement. Nevertheless, receiving, embracing, and applying the gospel sits at the heart of faith and work integration.

Theology of Work

Practically speaking, in order to connect one's daily work with the work of God in the world, it is also important to develop a theology of work. Such a framework helps in understanding the inherent meaning and purpose of work for human beings from the very beginning, while also comprehending its challenges. When Christ-followers are able to see and apprehend the significance of their work within the context of God's greater

redemptive work, they can begin to navigate and assimilate the everyday implications of work as an act of Christian discipleship to the glory of God.

In Genesis 1, God sets Himself as the original worker when He created and shaped the heavens, the earth, and everything in between. Here in these first acts, God deems His work as very good (Genesis 1:31). God not only works but invites others to engage in work as well. He commissions the human beings He created to walk in His footsteps and become workers as well. He goes one step further and issues a call for them to carry on the work with a cultural mandate to “fill the earth and subdue it.” The very nature of God putting humans to work prior to the fall in Genesis 3 highlights the validity, dignity, and necessity of work as a basic human need. Oftentimes work is understood as a necessary evil or form of punishment insofar as it is separated from any larger purpose.¹⁷ For some, work is seen and understood as a means of funding one’s hobbies, interests, philanthropic endeavors, or retirement plans. However, the ability to meaningfully practice a skill for the purpose of participating in creation and cultivation, is, at its core, a reflection of what God created humans to be and to do. Interestingly, those who chose the path of idleness over work were chastised and exhorted to put their hands to good use for the sake of the common good (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15).

Validating the design and dignity for work also helps to provide theological contextualization to the negative aspects of work that one often experiences in life. Such negative aspects might also be defined as pictures of brokenness or sin insofar as they do not reflect the will of God. Work can sometimes feel meaningless, fruitless, or

¹⁷ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 37.

disappointing. Due to the realities of sin, the experience of work likely will include conflict, unethical behaviors, and fatigue.¹⁸ “What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain. . . this too is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). In this reference, the author of Ecclesiastes is contrasting humanity with the God whose labor led to real rest (Genesis 2:2). Broken and sinful people create broken systems, resulting in seasons of fruitlessness, a reminder that fruitlessness serves as a sign of God’s curse for human rebellion (Deuteronomy 11:17). Summarily, a theology of work provides a bookend of creation and cultivation over and against aspects of work that reflect sin and brokenness. Such a framework helps disciples locate and understand their own personal experiences within the Christian journey, rather than holding them as unrelated to their faith and call to mission.

Sphere sovereignty

Developed by Kuyper, a Dutch theologian, the doctrine of sphere sovereignty purports that God’s sovereign rule extends over every square inch of human life and that all cultural spheres exist equally and directly as *coram Deo*, “before the face of God.”¹⁹ The concept of sphere sovereignty provides a framework of God’s created world that organizes itself into societal communities, each with its own responsibility and purpose as designed and governed not by the church or religious institutions but by God. When

¹⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹⁹ Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 371.

those within each distinct sphere recognize their unique responsibilities before God, humankind flourishes through the fulfillment of the purposes for which it was created.

Sphere sovereignty is present in the Old Testament. The Genesis 1 creation account establishes an understanding of distinctness of purpose within agriculture—for example, as plants, insects, and animals are created “each according to its kind” (Genesis 1:11-12, 21, 24-25). In the sphere of agriculture, every form of vegetation, insect, or animal is uniquely created to fulfill specific purposes that lead to the growth and distribution of food sources for the purpose of human flourishing. Another example is that of the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses in Exodus 20:1-17. Although the law was given as a means to worship and serve God, it also outlines the basis of law by which humans are to live within civil societies. In these two Old Testament examples, the sphere of agriculture is distinct from civil government, but each has a role to play in the process of human flourishing.

In the New Testament, the doctrine of sphere sovereignty finds its basis rooted in the authority of Jesus Christ as established in the New Testament. Ephesians 1:20-23 describes the Lordship of Jesus as He sits at the right hand of God and serves as the head over all things, given to those of the Church who are called to be His body. Another example is Matthew 28:18, whereby Jesus reminds His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Here Jesus makes the claim that He is Lord of all, even if that Lordship is not accepted and embraced by all. To this end Kuyper is emphatic that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority and that overall acceptance of His Lordship is

critical to human flourishing.²⁰ Therefore, the sovereignty of Christ is delegated to human beings and institutions—in other words, differentiated spheres—whereby no one human being or institution can claim ultimate authority on earth as each sphere contains distinct laws and responsibilities.²¹

Sphere sovereignty addresses all aspects of human aggregation. Of primary importance for Kuyper were the spheres of education, civil government, agriculture, family, the church, and the arts. The connection of each of these spheres comprises the experience of human life.²² Each sphere seeks to esteem and respect creational boundaries, so that the differentiated God-given norms for family life and civil government should be recognized such that a family does not operate like a government and the arts do not operate like an educational institution. For Kuyper, this meant that Christians ought to form entities or guilds within each of the spheres, free from ecclesiastical and political control. As such, the modern-day church in its specific context can learn from Kuyper how to discern God’s creational purposes within each sphere and respond accordingly.²³

Sphere sovereignty is an important framework to consider within the broader conversation concerning the integration of faith and work. Each sphere lives out the church gathered and the church scattered in its own arena of work, in order to make the confession of God’s sovereignty concrete.

²⁰ Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” 463.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 467.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, Location 371.

For example, a community of Christian artists, informed by Reformed thought and resting on an integrated (as opposed to a bifurcated) worldview, might take up the task of curating art that highlights themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration for the purposes of community display or perhaps for the development of art collections donated to local museums and galleries. That same guild might commission songwriters to compose works that reflect themes of redemption and reconciliation in response to the racial tensions that persist in today's communities. They might enlist poets to give voice to the thousands of women who are sexually abused but are afraid to speak up due to fear and shame.

Another example might be a group of Christian physicians and researchers working together to better understand the nuances of in-utero genetic testing and/or reproductive therapies through the same lens of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. In each of these cases, whether related to art or medicine, sphere sovereignty helps believers to discern, pray, and act in ways that apply the gospel and establish the Lordship of Jesus Christ in both specific and broad arenas of life and society.

Exilic Discipleship

The final theological framework that lends itself in theological formation is that of “exilic discipleship,” a term that originates from the exilic period in the Old Testament when Israel in the north and Judah in the south were both removed from their homelands to live as aliens and strangers in a foreign and hostile kingdom (2 Kings 17:5; 25:21). It was within this prolific period that God gave His people the difficult command to seek the welfare and prosperity of a city that embodied cruelty and brutality. In this endeavor,

the Israelites were to be an ongoing blessing to the opposing powers through the building of houses and planting of vineyards (Jeremiah 29:7).

Exilic discipleship is an important concept because it models how a disciple is called to live when the surrounding culture and powers provide an environment that is void of security, power, influence, or comfort. Jeremiah 29 and Psalm 137 reflect the complexities of living in a foreign land among foreign powers, whereby one is at the mercy of the ruling authorities. Citizens in exile are often subject to personal and public ridicule on the basis of their faith (Psalm 137:3). Belief in God is mocked, causing feelings of insecurity, bitterness, and even rage (Psalm 137:9). The New Testament also uses the term “exile” to describe God’s people (1 Peter 1:1, 17) as well as “aliens and strangers” (1 Peter 2:11) who are citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Philippians 3:20). In this is found a continuity with the Old Testament exiles who yearn to return home that culminates with the return of Christ (Hebrews 13:14). In both Old and New Testament accounts exilic discipleship establishes a paradigm in which fruitfulness is judged not on the basis of political, ethnic, or financial influence but rather upon faithfulness to God in the midst of hardship. Such faithfulness in the face of adversity is esteemed throughout the Bible. Most notably, Hebrews 11 lists and discusses many Old Testament heroes, culminating in the lifting up of Christ as the ultimate and faithful One.

The exilic perspective of Israel’s history takes on a heightened context when contrasted with the “Jerusalem perspective,” which refers to the golden age of the Solomonic monarchy when nations came to regard Jerusalem as a national power with an

unparalleled sense of identity and security (1 Kings 10:1-9).²⁴ The Jerusalem perspective has as its goal the establishment of security and identity apart from the surrounding cultures—to build a kingdom within a kingdom. In the Jerusalem perspective, Israel seeks to reinforce its culture, religion, and identity through the building of the temple (1 Kings 6:1). Nations flocked to Jerusalem under the influence of Solomon’s leadership and wisdom, thereby making Israel a dominant and secure culture in the midst of an ever-changing political and socioeconomic world (1 Kings 4:34).

When the Jerusalem perspective is contrasted with the exilic perspective, it begins to provide clarity and uniqueness to how disciples can be formed within modern contexts. Exilic discipleship assumes certain difficulties and challenges are to be part and parcel of one’s earthly calling and leads to understanding the importance of one’s context as in service to the world as God’s people.²⁵ It purports an outward-facing orientation rather than an inward orientation, while recognizing that challenges are to be a part of an earthly calling. It does not seek to eliminate them as an end goal.

Exilic discipleship encourages a developed view of public engagement, including vocational engagement, rather than expecting the public to show up at the church in order to be formed. Exilic discipleship encourages believers to take seriously the engagement of their neighbors in an attitude of servanthood rather than seeking to build a dominant kingdom within a kingdom. Taken together, these practices of exilic discipleship can be of great benefit to those in the workplace who face difficulties and challenges, ultimately

²⁴ Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 23-25.

²⁵ Ibid.

encouraging faithfulness and perseverance in environments where competing values and beliefs are tangibly present.

Biblical Patterns of Cultural Engagement and Renewal

The biblical patterns of cultural engagement and renewal can be viewed through unique and distinct patterns, or “perspectives,” in relating to epistemology.²⁶ Viewing the Scriptures through differing perspectives enables the reader to gain an enriched understanding of God’s perspective. Theologian John M. Frame describes it this way:

Often, however, God’s revelation to us of his own perspective is itself multi-perspectival in structure. He has, for example given us four gospels, rather than one. It is important for us to hear the story of Jesus from four different perspectives. . . . Similarly, God has given us both Kings and Chronicles, though these books overlap in many ways. He has given us both a prose account (Ex. 12-14) and a poetic account (Ex. 15:1-18) of his deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Many of the Psalms, too, give us poetic accounts of what other Scriptures present in prose narrative.²⁷

In the same way, biblical patterns of cultural engagement and renewal can be viewed through the following perspectives: normative, existential, and situational. The normative view takes into account the grand storyline of the Bible through the lens of creation, fall, and redemption. The existential view takes into account the themes of death, resurrection, and glory, experienced not only by the nation of Israel but by Jesus Christ. The final view reflects the situational circumstances by which the New Testament Church experienced heart change, the consequences of which carried over into their communities and into the world.²⁸ It is through these varying perspectives that disciples can begin to better

²⁶ John M. Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism,” *Frame-Poythress* (blog), June 2012, accessed October 26, 2018, <http://www.frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 21-22.

assimilate the contours of Scripture into their lives as it relates to their engagement of work and vocation.

The normative perspective is used to describe the patterns of creation, fall, and redemption that happen throughout Scripture. The creation/fall/redemption narrative finds its origins in the Genesis account of creation, beginning with God as the ontological source of all things in Genesis 1. By contrast, the apocalyptic vision of John the seer in Revelation 21 provides the capstone account of the final consummation, the restoration of all things, by describing the new heaven and new earth as a place where every tear will be wiped away and “death will be no more” (Revelation 21:4).

Between Genesis and Revelation the fall of humanity is captured through the sin of Adam and Eve and results in separation from God and the introduction of pain, suffering, and death as prominent consequences of sin (Genesis 3:17-19; 4:8; Deuteronomy 28:15; Romans 8:21; Revelation 21:4-5). Through Abram, God initiates a covenant with the Israelites (Genesis 15:18), a covenant of God’s faithfulness that unfolds throughout the Old Testament (Exodus 2:24; Joshua 21:45) and finds its ultimate fulfillment and redemption through the reconciling life, death, and resurrection of God’s son, Jesus (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:26). The gospel of Jesus and the gospel about Jesus are attested to and revealed through the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Book of Acts depicts how the ascension of Jesus led to His sending of the promised redemptive gift of the Holy Spirit of God (Acts 1:9-11), a gift that is creatively at work in and through the Church (Acts 2:1-4; 4:28-31; 28:30) and the world to witness firsthand the redemption on offer in Jesus Christ. It is through the normative perspective

that disciples see the main contours of Scripture as the standard for what they are directed to believe about themselves and the world.

The second pattern of cultural engagement and renewal is that of an existential perspective, highlighting the themes of death, resurrection, and glory through which God's activity is experienced. Such patterns are experiential in nature, taking into account the many feelings and emotions inherent within one's life. The Exodus account depicts the Israelites groaning and crying out to God (Exodus 2:23). It also reveals the experience of joy, resurrection, new life in their liberation through the celebration of Passover (Exodus 12:17), and the eventual glory of reaching the promised land (cf. Isaiah 60). In the New Testament the disciple Peter experiences not only the death of his Lord but the pathos of denial—causing him to weep bitterly (Luke 22:62). He experiences the joy of hearing about Christ's resurrection (John 21:7) and the power of proclaiming Christ's glory (Acts 2:14-42). The Bible not only captures facts, it captures feeling and emotion in patterns that reflect death, resurrection, and glory. In the same way, these patterns are evident in the workplace through experiences of conflict, failure, success, and accomplishment. As disciples apprehend their experiences in light of these same patterns, they can begin to better understand how their circumstances might ultimately correlate with God's plans and purposes.

The final pattern for cultural engagement is that of the situational perspective. The situational perspective takes into account how the gospel is outworked in the human heart (personal renewal), in community (community renewal), and in the world (cultural renewal). These forms of renewal are on display in the Book of Acts as well as in New Testament epistles—whereby the apostle Paul outlines the realities of how the gospel not

only has changed individual hearts but communities and cultures. Acts 2 tells of the conversion of the earliest disciples, who immediately began to live differently as a community as a result of their newfound faith (Acts 2:42-47). Due to personal and communal renewal, many churches were planted while cultures began to experience transformation in the face of rampant idolatry (Acts 19:23-40). This pattern of heart/community/cultural renewal can be seen throughout history.²⁹ As individual hearts changed by the gospel gather in community to establish important institutions, such as schools and hospitals in the name of Christ for the sake of the world,³⁰ they also work together to bring down the tyranny of slavery, racism, and injustice.³¹ In the same way, disciples in the workplace have the opportunity to consider how they might contribute to communal and cultural renewal within their place of work as well as within broader spheres of industry.

Thinking theologically about the themes of gospel, work, sphere sovereignty, exilic discipleship, and patterns of cultural engagement provides an inroad for disciples to

²⁹ James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60-77, highlights several historical examples. From the late eighth century through the ninth century, monasteries became the locus of cultural work in what became known as the Carolingian Renaissance, in which education, law, literature, theology, art, and music all flourished. Another example is the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s whereby pastors and theologians such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and Charles Wesley furthered networks of renewal resulting in the establishment of libraries and charity schools. If there is an example whose life mission touches this theme it is that of William Wilberforce (1757-1833). Wilberforce was a devout Christian whose ideals and activism were fed by his faith, as he sought moral reform in British society and the abolition of the legalized slave trade.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 66. Hunter also highlights the Reformation. Although most notably driven by figures such as Luther and Calvin, it resulted in the establishment of smaller groups of theologians, professors and students who became known as the “academy,” a social form which resulted in the establishment of educational institutions. By 1600, nearly four hundred academies had been founded in Italy alone.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16. Hunter mentions some well-known examples, which include Bishop Desmond Tutu (anti-apartheid), Pope John Paul II (ending communism in Poland), and Dorothy Day (suffrage).

begin thinking theologically about their places of work beyond that of the classic disciplines of prayer, Bible study, and worship. In order for such classic disciplines to be applied specifically into practices, these theological themes are dissected and included as part of the overall program design in this project—most notably in the program reading materials, discussion, and in each participant’s final project presentation with a particular focus on how these themes help to diagnose individual or corporate brokenness along with the subsequent “prescription,” or practices, designed to bring healing and restoration.

PART THREE

GOALS, PLANS, MINISTRY STRATEGY, AND EVALUATION

CHAPTER 4

GOALS, PLAN, AND PREFERRED FUTURE: A FAITH AND WORK MINISTRY AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOUSTON

In light of previous discussion about FPC's ministry context and Reformed ecclesiological foundations undergirding a mandate of cultural engagement, this chapter develops a ministry plan designed to launch a comprehensive Faith and Work Ministry at First Presbyterian Church. This ministry emerges as part of the congregation's Vision 2020 for Houston. The ministry plan involves the introduction of the important biblical, theological, and formational frameworks that are central to the integration of faith and work within the life of a maturing disciple.

Ultimately, the ministry plan calls for the development of Faith and Work cohort groups. These function as a fellowship program for members of FPC who serve in key industries that drive and support the city of Houston and its flourishing economy. The cohort program is designed to create a common experience and shared language from which networks can emerge within specific vocational sectors and prompt more in-depth study as a potential second phase of the program.

Theological Implications and Ministry Overview

A targeted ministry helping FPC congregants integrate faith and work seeks to effectively address the ministry challenge of advancing everyday discipleship in the workplace and necessarily must reflect the theological conclusions established in the third chapter of this project. There are three key theological conclusions upon which the Faith and Work Ministry will be based. The first is that a ministry of faith and work should be established as a discipleship pathway and reflect the missional ecclesiology at FPC. The second asserts that a ministry of faith and work should address the subject of a Reformed theological worldview as it relates to themes of creation (validity of work), fall (sin and brokenness), redemption (gospel), and restoration (renewed creation). The final theological conclusion is that a ministry of faith and work should include not only cognitive learning but also existential approaches to discipleship. With these conclusions in view, a ministry of faith and work in the local church can be formative for participants in their desire to grow in Christian maturity (Ephesians 4:13-16). Additionally, it can be missional in its approach to living out the gospel in ways that are restorative to the city (Jeremiah 29:7).

Ministry of Faith and Work: A Discipleship Pathway Reflective of FPC's Missional Ecclesiology

The current pathway for discipleship at FPC follows a traditional model of attending weekly services of worship and participating in a Sunday School class or mid-week small group. These classes and groups are often organized around demographics and provide training on reading and studying the Bible as well as content-specific topical studies on the Christian life. The classes and groups also serve as a means of fellowship

and care when its members experience transition due to health concerns, death, trauma, family dynamics, and the like. However, at the time of this project, no such class, curriculum, or group existed that provided context-specific discipleship as it pertains to the workplace.

As outlined in the beginning of this project, it is not uncommon for an individual to spend upwards of 45 percent of his or her waking hours engaged in the arena of work. Therefore, if the discipleship and formational ministries of the church are to help equip disciples for the workplace, sphere-specific cross-training as it pertains to the integration of faith and work is one way to assist disciples in a manner that carries them from Sunday worship into the boardroom on Monday. When disciples at FPC integrate their faith with their work, they begin to live into the church's mission statement to "carry the gospel to Houston and the world." The challenge will be to help potential participants understand their need for such learning, if they have not yet considered the theological depth of faith-work integration. It is also possible that having never experienced a vocational crisis might cause them to want to grow in this area.

Ministry of Faith and Work: Based on a Reformed Theological Worldview

Given FPC's Reformed theological roots, the subject of a Reformed theological worldview as a broad rubric for faith-work integration is important, particularly as it relates to themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. These four themes are not only inherent within the Christian story but also are present within the workplace. Creation supports the validity and cultural mandate of work. The fall is reflective of sin and brokenness experienced every day, both personally and corporately. Redemption

points to the promise of the gospel and its implications for renewal and forgiveness in seasons of despair. Restoration points to the future hope and promise, giving a framework for how one's work can connect to God's purposes of restoring creation.

The Reformed theological themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration are particularly vital, as they begin to push back against what previously has been described as a bifurcated sacred-versus-secular worldview. To this end, Fuller Theological Seminary vice-president Tod Bolsinger offers helpful analysis as to why FPC's Faith and Work Ministry is an important matter for churches to address:

The growing faith-and-work movement points to the reality that marketplace leadership requires wisdom to discern not only right from wrong but also prudence from folly, prescient from rash. For a Christian in the marketplace not only does one's company depend on the ability to respond to a changing world, but so do the livelihoods of one's employees and stockholders. In addition, Christians in the marketplace often need to make moral decisions about a technology or business practice when there is no previous experience. They must weigh the possibilities for economic growth for the company with the risks to the company or how it might affect the common good.¹

In the scenario described by Bolsinger, all four themes are present: understanding the creative value of a technology, the fallen/sinful implications of a decision, the redemptive livelihood of employees/stockholders, and the restorative potential of a company to affect the common good. Utilizing this collective lens of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration—though it requires some help in translation between the language of the Bible and the language of the boardroom—provides a key rubric for those seeking to integrate their faith with their work.

¹ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 20.

Ministry of Faith and Work: Using Cognitive, Existential Approaches of Engagement

A ministry of faith and work should include cognitive, existential approaches to explore and discern how to faithfully engage in one's work. Cognitive approaches reflect the common practice of studying the Bible and applying the basic lessons and principles learned. An example might be following the first ten commandments in making decisions to guard against stealing (Exodus 20:15) or practicing the golden rule (Matthew 7:12). Cognitively, it is also important to understand and locate the role of one's industry within the broader spectrum of cultural activity.² For example, the oil and gas sector provides the energy to fuel progress and development, medicine provides healing, and education provides learning. Each has specific functions and end goals, but they are interconnected in important ways that make up the fabric of a city like Houston. When one industry thrives, suffers, or goes through crisis (e.g., the Enron debacle), it affects the entire community.³

Not only should a faith-work ministry address cognitive aspects of how faith and work intersect, it also should facilitate existential learning. In the same way that biblical characters experience the pathos and consequence of sin, contemporary disciples also must grasp affectively the implications of sin and idolatry that lie in obvious and hidden forms within each person individually as well as broadly within the industry.⁴ An

² Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 29.

³ Jim Yardley, "Enron's Collapse: The Hometown; Fall of Enron Ends Its Dance With Houston," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2002, accessed October 31, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/14/us/enron-s-collapse-the-hometown-fall-of-enron-ends-its-dance-with-houston.html>.

⁴ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 40.

employee who experiences conflict with a co-worker may experience pride or enact revenge. A company that idolizes shareholder value may be prone to inflate the books or take inadvisable risk. These experiences can result in emotions such as pain, fear, doubt, or anger. Therefore, inherent within a faith and work ministry should be an introduction to spiritual disciplines and practices modeled by Jesus: an intentional disruption of one's "automatic" thoughts, feelings, and actions by doing different things—the kinds of things that demonstrate restraint from the old kingdoms and encourage positive engagement into "the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13).⁵

Looking into the future, the goal for First Presbyterian Church of Houston would be to launch and support its Faith and Work Ministry as part and parcel of the church's discipleship and mission program. In the same way that congregations target their programming and efforts toward children and youth ministry, music ministry, and/or local and global mission, the same kind of attention, budget, and energy will be given to outline an integrated strategy of discipleship for gospel-informed cultural engagement in the workplace. Such a ministry should incorporate a reformed biblical-theological worldview as well as cognitive and existential approaches to formation.

Strategic Goals for a Faith and Work Ministry

The strategic goals for a ministry integrating faith and work seek to ensure that participants can demonstrate an understanding of how their faith intersects their work cognitively, experientially, behaviorally, and entrepreneurially. The goals are accomplished and measured initially through a capstone project completed by every

⁵ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 322.

member of the cohort and presented personally to the group in a way that reflects their learning and application. Beyond the initial cohort groups, participants are invited to participate in further learning and engagement by teaching future cohorts and establishing vocational networks within their specific industries. Particular attention is given to establishing networks within medicine, oil and gas, law, and finance/business as these are the primary industries that guide Houston and affect FPC congregants.

The first goal is to create an awareness of the biblical and doctrinal foundations that undergird a ministry of faith and work. The purpose of setting this goal is to foster an understanding of how the Bible intersects and supports this subject, supporting an awareness of the biblical and theological foundations for why work matters beyond that of the utilitarian need to feed one's family and pay the bills. Participants fulfill this goal by studying the grand narrative of the Bible through the theological lens of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Therefore, the expected outcome is to study and understand the original design and purpose for work (creation), the effects of sin on human work (fall), the gospel and its effects on human work (restoration), and ultimately how one's individual work or industry connects to God's ultimate purposes (restoration).

The second goal is for participants to learn personal renewal dynamics and ancient practices that can help shape spiritual growth in the workplace. The purpose of setting this goal is to provide tools that can disrupt everyday patterns and activities experienced at work for the purposes of personal and corporate flourishing. Participants fulfill this goal by completing a personal case study of workplace conflict and resolution, participating in practices of prayer, and experiencing the spiritual disciplines of abstinence (solitude, fasting, silence) and engagement (study, service, prayer, and

hospitality). As a result of these practices, the goal is to see participants become more spiritually self-aware, making decisions and responding to situations that take into consideration their Christian faith.

The third goal is for participants to develop a theological vision that helps establish a link between their job/industry and God's purposes of restoration in the world. The purpose of setting this goal is to lay the groundwork for innovation and entrepreneurship within the workplace that reflects the gospel's ability to redeem and restore all things. Participants fulfill this goal by learning to identify ways in which their specific job or industry reflects aspects of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Therefore, the expected outcome is to be able to articulate the inherent value in one's work, understand the unique aspects of what might be sinful or broken, imagine how the gospel can change it, and create the basis for action plans that can be implemented for purposes of restoration.

The final goal is for participants to cultivate new experiments and initiatives within the workplace that reflect their learning and formation. The purpose of setting this goal is to foster brainstorming toward deliverables that can be effectively implemented and measured. Participants fulfill this goal by identifying areas of personal and corporate deficiency, sinfulness, or brokenness and then offering solutions and rationale for how the redemptive and restorative aspects of the gospel are fulfilled in each initiative.

Strategic Content for the Faith and Work Cohort

The core curriculum for the cohort groups includes two primary books along with the Bible and a notebook comprised of readings, handouts, and spiritual formation

exercises. Each participant receives a copy of Wolters' *Creation Regained* and Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*. Both books were selected because they are accessible to the lay reader and provide a comprehensive treatment of the subject material from a Reformed perspective.

There are various biblical texts that are studied. One key passage is Genesis 1, for its treatment of work and culture making from the beginning of time. Another is Genesis 11, which discusses human beings' proclivity to "make a name for themselves" as part of their fallen nature. The purpose of this one is to show historical examples within Judeo-Christian history of this self-serving nature and discuss ways these tendencies are still present today. John 3 is selected, because it contains a conversation on the gospel of God's love for the entirety of the cosmos, which helps lay the foundation for a unified view of God's interest in every person, industry, and culture, particularly as it is all part of the created order as opposed to a sacred/secular divide. Psalm 19 is read devotionally, in order to gain insight into God's sovereignty over the entire cosmos as well as God's providential action within the world. Matthew 6 is included, because it contains the Lord's prayer and can serve as a model for prayer at work. Jeremiah 29 is presented as a model for exilic living and/or working in hostile environments. This contributes to a broader conceptualization for how one can work within a difficult or perhaps corrupt situation, while still maintaining faithfulness to God. Each week participants read one of these texts together and discuss it using a set of guiding questions provided by the facilitator.

In addition to the two primary books and selected biblical texts, the facilitator also provides supplemental reading materials for the cohort participants to address a variety of theological themes. These materials include selected chapters from N. T. Wright's

Surprised by Hope.⁶ Wright makes a compelling case for an eschatological validation of human work today and its implications for the new heaven and new earth. This information can help participants understand how their daily tasks find significance in building toward the reconciliation and redemption of all things. Other handouts include a section of Augustine's *Confessions* on the stealing of the pears and the human proclivity to sin,⁷ which offers helpful analysis of how we think about and analyze original sin and our fallen nature as a basis of better understanding the gospel. Also, a handout on exilic discipleship by David Kim and Richard Mouw evaluates the social contexts of the Israelites while in Babylonian exile up against that of life in Jerusalem. This prepares participants to live and work within social and political structures, whereby the goal is not power or wealth but instead faithfulness to God.

Another segment of content is provided to help cohort participants cultivate spiritual disciplines to strengthen their spiritual walk, which can have affective and behavioral implications in their workplace. Essentially, there is one handout per week. The self-counseling project prompts participants to reflect upon an incident in the workplace that prompted a reaction that was sinful or resulted in conflict. The participant spends time identifying the root causes of the incident while also applying Scripture, prayer, and the foundations of the gospel. Finally, the exercise concludes with a prompt to reflect upon behavioral change that demonstrates one's faith in Christ.⁸ The prayers of

⁶ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 93-122, 189-206.

⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29-30.

⁸ Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 33-37.

discernment and of examen are given as prompts to pray through the events of one's day with the invitation to analyze the thoughts, feelings, and emotions present within one's interior life. This exercise is designed to aid participants in becoming more aware of spiritual promptings in the hope that it leads to deeper intimacy with Christ.⁹ Selections from Volf and Bass' *Practicing Theology* on the subject of hospitality offers participants the opportunity to translate their theological learning into practices that reflect a compelling way of life. The specific practices identified in these essays include the intentional sharing of meal times with those who are culturally, ethnically, or politically different and taking time to learn people's names while being thoughtful to greet others by name as a way of humanizing the workplace.¹⁰ Selected devotional readings from Kim's *Glimpses of Greater Glory* are designed to help participants get a sense of the whole narrative of Scripture through the unique, individual storylines contained therein. As a result, the participant begins to see how familiar biblical texts take on heightened meaning within God's redemptive purpose in history.¹¹

Finally, digital and multimedia content are used. One is architect Gruesel's video lecture titled "The Lie and the Love."¹² This brief video is to be shown during the first meeting in order for participants to get an idea of what it means to think and act

⁹ Ibid., 41-47.

¹⁰ Reinhard Hütter, "Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosures of Practices in Worship and Doctrine," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 2363-2594.

¹¹ David Kim, *Glimpses of Greater Glory* (New York: David A. Kim, 2011), 1-6, 8-11, 36-38, 73-76, 100-104, 115-147.

¹² Gruesel, "The Lie and The Love."

theologically about their jobs. A second video titled *Interesting Times* is shown during the sixth week of the ten-week cohort.¹³ The video is a mini-documentary and research project conducted by Stephen Klineberg, a sociologist at Rice University. *Interesting Times* provides an analysis about the city of Houston from its very roots, capitalizing on more than thirty years of research data collected by Klineberg and his sociology students. The documentary highlights the value of human culture making, while also postulating about what challenges the city will face. Cohort members are encouraged to watch this video as an example of how one might form a theological vision for their city and begin to imagine how their work might contribute to the flourishing of the city.

Due to the level of conversation and analysis required for a deep theological dive into the subject matter, the Faith and Work cohorts are conducted in a small-group format. The groups are no larger than ten people in order to facilitate discussion among all participants and promote depth of relationship and friendship, which often is not possible in large-group settings. The groups last for ten weeks, because the length of time is consistent with other short courses offered through FPC. The duration allows for enough time to introduce and cover important content but is not so long that it prevents participants from making the commitment to attend and complete the learning.

Each session spans approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Cohorts meeting over the lunch hour gather for sixty minutes, while cohorts meeting in the early morning or evening gather for ninety minutes and use the additional time for devotion, prayer, and the practice of spiritual disciplines. Those cohorts meeting for only sixty minutes are

¹³ *Interesting Times*, directed by John Carrithers (Kinder Institute for Urban Research, 2014), DVD (Rice University, 2012).

asked to complete the spiritual exercises at home. The meeting place for the cohort ideally should be away from the church campus as a way to reinforce theological thinking and inquiry in the marketplace. In this setting, participants can walk out of a cohort meeting at 1:00 p.m. and into their board meeting at 1:30 p.m. Other possible meeting places include locations of cultural significance, such as an art gallery, a corporate boardroom, or a community center.

Leadership and Target Population

A critical component of this Faith and Work cohort project is to identify individuals who are both competent in their profession and established in their Christian faith and identity. The first pilot group specifically has targeted elders and active church members with at least three years of experience in their respective field. These individuals have understood that their experience within the cohort can lead to an evaluation that shapes future curriculum, format, and final project guidelines. Particular emphasis has been given to recruiting participants in the medical, oil and gas, and legal professions, although participation is not limited to these three industries alone. Finally, special emphasis has been given to inviting church members who serve in senior leadership positions within their industries so as to lend credibility to the initial pilot project and provide helpful guidance for future cohorts.

As the architect of this ministry strategy and due to my expertise in discipleship, theology, and preaching, I have served as the first facilitator. However, since the cohort participants are leaders already developed in their own fields and spheres of influence, the pilot project naturally has happened with future cohort leaders in mind. Looking into

the future, the next steps for cohort graduates are to network by industry and/or to begin facilitating future cohort groups. After the first year of this pilot project, ideally there will be four to six individuals from at least three prominent industries in Houston who will have concluded their ten-week study. These individuals are encouraged to network with other cohort graduates within their field of work for purposes of prayer, conversation, and idea-sharing of gospel-shaped ideas and initiatives. Target industries include the Houston Medical Center, downtown oil and gas companies, the legal profession, and a fourth “catch-all” network for those not working in medicine, oil and gas, or law.

Cohort graduates not only are encouraged to participate in fellowship and prayer with one another but also are encouraged to serve as future cohort facilitators. Upon completion of the first three cohort groups, careful analysis is being given to further expansion and replication of the Faith and Work cohort experience as a ministry front of First Presbyterian Church and expression of Vision 2020. Potential expansion opportunities include following the best practices of the Redeemer Center for Faith and Work and its offshoot ministries that exist nationwide.¹⁴ These groups include the Cascade Fellows¹⁵ in Seattle, Washington in conjunction with Fuller Theological Seminary; the Nashville Institute for Faith and Work; and The Collaborative,¹⁶ a ministry of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando.¹⁷ Ministry expressions to be considered include

¹⁴ Redeemer Center for Faith and Work, accessed October 15, 2018, <http://faithandwork.com/>.

¹⁵ Cascade Fellows, accessed October 15, 2018, <http://cascadefellows.com/>.

¹⁶ Nashville Institute for Faith and Work, accessed October 15, 2018, <http://www.nifw.org/>.

¹⁷ The Collaborative, accessed October 15, 2018, <http://collaborativeorlando.com/>.

crafting a curriculum that can be used to integrate with Sunday School and small group ministries (facilitated by cohort graduates), stand-alone seminar events that invite local and national leaders to speak on “Faith and Work” subject matter, and perhaps a deeper dive into faith-and-work integration through a nine-month fellowship program modeled after the Gotham Fellows ministry currently underway at the Center for Faith and Work in New York City.¹⁸

¹⁸ Faith & Work, “Gotham Fellowship,” accessed October 15, 2018, <https://faithandwork.com/programs/1-gotham-fellowship/>.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

This chapter describes the specifics of the pilot ministry project implemented with three distinct Faith and Work cohort groups between March 2014 and May 2016. Particular attention is given to the project scope and sequence, leadership development of the facilitator, and necessary resources. Finally, this chapter includes an assessment and evaluation of the pilot project, drawing upon presentations made by each cohort participant at the conclusion of the cohort experience as well as subsequent interviews conducted by me.

Timeline and Implementation Process

In order to implement a ministry of formation targeting the subject of faith and work, a ten-week pilot project was established for targeted members and friends of First Presbyterian Church. Over the course of two years, three separate groups completed the curriculum and provided valuable feedback about their learning that helped to shape future programs and curriculum. The weekly gatherings were designed to last sixty to

ninety minutes over the course of ten weeks and were formatted to include both lecture and group discussion, involving reflection.

Participants for the pilot project were identified and invited based upon their industry of vocation, experience level, and willingness to provide feedback at the conclusion of the cohort. Special emphasis was given to identify church members who had experience and leadership in the area of oil and gas, law, and medicine in order to discover how the integration of faith and work might provide for emerging ideas that could begin to shape the leading industries of Houston.

In January 2014, I sent personal email invitations to members of First Presbyterian Church. This resulted in eight individuals (three females, five males) agreeing to participate in the pilot program. Three participants were from the oil and gas industry, including the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a major corporation and her administrative assistant; three attorneys; one doctor, working for the Houston Medical Center; and one professional from a marketing firm. This cohort met for ten consecutive Thursdays beginning in March 2014, coinciding with the beginning of Lent. The meeting location was the corporate boardroom of the Kinder-Morgan company, at the invitation of the participating CFO. Upon learning about the program, the administrative assistant to the CFO asked if she could participate and also agreed to have lunch waiting for the cohort each week as a much-welcomed act of hospitality.

Over the course of ten weeks the cohort was assigned readings from the following primary texts: *The Holy Bible*, *Creation Regained* by Wolters, *Surprised by Hope* by Wright, *Every Good Endeavor* by Keller, *Glimpses of a Greater Glory* by Kim, and other

short readings.¹ The group also watched different videos about projects happening within the public sector that have been launched by individuals seeking to integrate their Christian faith into their vocation or to shape culture for betterment of the common good. Participants received a binder at the beginning of the study in which handouts and printed materials could be assembled over the course of the cohort, including each week's agenda and assigned homework/reading for the week ahead.

Each meeting of the cohort began with fifteen to twenty minutes of reflection and discussion of the previous week's reading assignments, followed by ten minutes of silent devotional reading of biblical texts in support of the day's lesson. After studying the Bible, the next portion of cohort time (twenty minutes) was spent introducing, studying, and discussing broad theological concepts that could assist the learner in forming a worldview that supports gospel-empowered cultural renewal. These concepts included the doctrines of sovereignty and providence, sin, election (for salvation and service), the cultural mandate, common grace, exilic discipleship, ecclesiology, missiology, pneumatology, and eschatology, among others. The format of this section included an introduction to a particular theological concept, a period of discussion, and a look at a modern-day case study of where this may be at work in the city of Houston or beyond.

The concluding fifteen minutes of each meeting took up the study of personal theological formation and the practice of spiritual formation. This portion of the class is where the learning was designed to move from a 10,000-foot view down to the ground level utilizing a variety of comparative frameworks. These frameworks included

¹ These included articles by Mouw, Kuyper, Keller, and excerpts from the writings of Augustine—all detailed in Chapter 4.

identifying the biblical patterns of creation-fall-redemption as the main contours of the Scripture and how we understand God, ourselves, and what is happening the world. We also evaluated biblical patterns of death-resurrection-glory as the way in which we personally experience the gospel in daily life from an existential perspective. Finally, we looked at how one's personal transformation of heart begins to shape communities and cultures and highlighted the importance of personal transformation as the way in which the gospel is worked out in the human heart (personal renewal), in community (community renewal), and in the world (cultural renewal).² Each meeting opened and closed with prayer and included the sharing of personal prayer concerns.

By way of sequence, the first meeting focused on fostering relationships among the participants and establishing the scope and sequence of the cohort's curriculum and goals. The group began with participants introducing themselves, sharing personal aspects of their lives concerning family and faith, specifics about what they do by way of work, and their reasons for wanting to participate in the cohort. Afterwards, we watched a seven-minute video presentation given by Greusel titled "The Lie and The Love," followed by fifteen minutes of discussion. Then the participants were given the books and materials to be used over the course of the cohort with a short overview each book's contribution to the study. The meeting concluded with the sharing of personal joys and concerns and group prayer.

The second meeting began with a twenty-minute discussion on the introduction, and the first and ninth chapters of Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*, "The Design of Work"

² Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 22.

and “A New Story for Work.”³ Participants were asked to share their primary takeaways from the reading as well as identify their key insights, questions, and challenges. Next, the group spent ten minutes reading and reflecting upon the creation account in Genesis 1, followed by fifteen minutes of discussion on the implications of work and creation as central to God’s character as well as the cultural mandate given in Genesis 1:22. The final ten minutes were spent introducing the topics to be covered in week three along with the assigned readings for discussion. The meeting closed with the sharing of joys and concerns and group prayer.

The third meeting began with participant-led discussions on the previous week’s assigned reading. The first was a ten-minute discussion on personal heart formation from the first two chapters of Andrew Murray’s *Humility*,⁴ followed by a ten-minute discussion based on Wolters’ *Creation Regained* and this question: “What is a worldview?”⁵ The final discussion was based on the second chapter of Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor* concerning “The Dignity of Work.”⁶ Next, the group spent five minutes reading and reflecting on John 3:16-17 followed by fifteen minutes of presentation by me as the facilitator on the meaning of God’s love for the world, with particular focus given to the word study of *cosmos* and its implications. The theological terms of sovereignty and providence also were introduced. The final ten minutes were spent introducing the

³ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 19-30, 153-184.

⁴ Andrew Murray, *Humility* (Mitchelville, MD: Fig, 2012), 1-9.

⁵ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 1-12.

⁶ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 31-41.

topics to be covered in week four along with the assigned readings for discussion. Week three also saw the introduction of spiritual disciplines to be completed by participants at home. A handout on the Prayer of Examen was distributed and discussed.⁷ The meeting closed with the sharing of joys and concerns and group prayer.

The fourth meeting began with a five-minute devotional reading of Psalm 19 followed by prayer. Next came participant-led discussions on the previous week's assigned reading. The first was a ten-minute discussion on personal heart formation from the third and fourth chapters of Murray's *Humility*,⁸ followed by a ten-minute discussion based upon Wolters' *Creation Regained* and the topic of creation.⁹ The final discussion was based on the third and fourth chapters of Keller's *Every Good Endeavor* concerning "Work as Cultivation" and "Work as Service."¹⁰ Next, I gave a fifteen-minute presentation/summary of the key takeaways concerning creation and culture and its implications for faith and work. Hospitality was introduced and discussed as one example of a gospel-shaped practice with the assignment of returning the following week with one or two examples of how they practiced hospitality in their specific workplace context.¹¹ The final ten minutes were spent introducing the topics to be covered in week five along

⁷ Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 45-47.

⁸ Murray, *Humility*, 10-17.

⁹ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 13-52.

¹⁰ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 42-72.

¹¹ While there was no handout on hospitality, there was much discussion on creation as the original act of hospitality, substantial sharing of personal examples of transformational hospitality, and a group brainstorm on ways hospitality could be practiced.

with the assigned readings for discussion. The meeting closed with the sharing of joys and concerns and group prayer.

The fifth meeting began with a ten-minute devotional reading and discussion of Genesis 4:1-8 on the Tower of Babel and the temptation to “make a name for yourself.” Next came participant-led discussions on the previous week’s assigned reading. The first was a ten-minute discussion on sin and the fall from Wolters’ *Creation Regained*,¹² followed by a fifteen-minute discussion based on the fifth and sixth chapters of Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor*, “Work Becomes Fruitless” and “Work Becomes Pointless.”¹³ As the facilitator, I gave a ten-minute minute presentation on the theological topic of idolatry and its implications both in the lives of individuals and upon industry. The prayer of discernment was introduced, discussed, and assigned for homework as one example of a spiritual formation practice that invites the Holy Spirit to be a part of personal self-reflection.¹⁴ The final ten minutes were spent introducing the topics to be covered in week six along with the assigned readings for discussion. The meeting closed with the sharing of joys and concerns and group prayer.

The sixth meeting began with a ten-minute devotional reading and discussion of Matthew 6:5-14 on the Lord’s Prayer, with particular focus on asking the question: “How would your workplace or industry look/act differently if God’s kingdom would come and God’s will be done?” Next came participant-led discussions on the previous week’s

¹² Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 53-68.

¹³ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 75-107.

¹⁴ Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 48-53.

assigned reading. The first was a ten-minute discussion on personal formation from the fifth and sixth chapters of Murray's *Humility*,¹⁵ followed by a fifteen-minute discussion based on the seventh and eighth chapters of Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*, "Work Becomes Selfish" and "Work Reveals Our Idolatry."¹⁶ As the facilitator, I gave a ten-minute introduction to a spiritual exercise called "The Self-Counseling Project." It is designed to help participants practice the spiritual discipline of meditation and journaling, by reflecting upon a workplace conflict that they have previously experienced.¹⁷ Afterwards, participants received instructions on how to prepare and present their final capstone project to be presented during weeks eight, nine, and ten. The final ten minutes were spent introducing the topics to be covered in week seven along with the assigned readings for discussion. The meeting closed with the sharing of joys and concerns and group prayer.

The seventh meeting began with a ten-minute devotional reading and discussion of Jeremiah 29:4-14, with particular focus on themes of exile and what it means to be faithful to God in a hostile or foreign context. Next came participant-led discussions on the previous week's assigned reading. The first was a ten-minute discussion about renewed creation from Wright's *Surprised By Hope*,¹⁸ followed by a ten-minute discussion on gospel and redemption from Wolters' *Creation Regained*¹⁹ and concluding

¹⁵ Murray, *Humility*, 18-26.

¹⁶ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 108-150.

¹⁷ Kim and Mouw, *The Gospel and Cultural Renewal*, 37-41.

¹⁸ Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 93-108.

¹⁹ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 69-86.

with a ten-minute discussion on “What Is the Gospel?” from the ninth chapter of Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor*.²⁰ Next, I gave a ten-minute presentation on the perspectives through which faith and work can be experienced, using the biblical patterns of normative (creation-fall-redemption), existential (death-resurrection-glory), and situational (heart-community-world) as models of engagement. Next, participants shared reflections from the previously assigned Self-Counseling Project. As the facilitator, I introduced the practices of solitude and Sabbath-keeping as ways in which participants could practice subsequent rhythms of rest and spiritual discipline. Participants were asked to report back the following week and share how they had practiced solitude and Sabbath-keeping. The final five minutes were spent reviewing what was expected in the final capstone presentation. The meeting closed with the sharing of joys and concerns and with prayer.

The eighth meeting began with a ten-minute devotional reading and discussion of Luke 4:14-20, with particular focus on themes of realized eschatology and the gospel that Jesus proclaimed and lived while on earth. Next came twenty minutes of participant-led discussions on the previous week’s assigned reading, including the tenth and eleventh chapters of Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor*,²¹ the fifth chapter and conclusion from Wolters’ *Creation Regained*,²² and the twelfth chapter from Wright’s *Surprised By*

²⁰ Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor*, 153-184.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 185-232.

²² Wolters *Creation Regained*, 87-118.

Hope.²³ As the facilitator, I gave a ten-minute presentation and review on the theological themes of common grace and sphere sovereignty. Afterwards, participants watched a twenty-minute video titled *Interesting Times*, a sociological look at the city of Houston based upon research conducted by the Kinder Institute at Rice University. The final five minutes were spent reviewing what was expected in the final capstone presentation. The meeting closed with the sharing of joys and concerns and group prayer.

The ninth and tenth meetings were identical. Each participant had fifteen minutes to present his or her final capstone projects. The capstone projects were autobiographical in nature and were designed to demonstrate the participant's biblical-theological learning, personal application, and ideas for the future. Many participants utilized handouts or Power-Point to lend visual aids to their presentations. The presentations included major takeaways, including aspects and examples of work that reflect creation (the importance of one's industry in culture), the fall (idolatry and sin faced in the workplace), redemption (how the gospel has personally influenced and shaped work), and restoration (examples of future action items and expressions of ministry that can be introduced). Each presentation concluded with five minutes of questions and answers between the presenter and remaining participants along with a personal prayer offered by a cohort member for the presenter.

Assessment Process

Instead of just administering a survey to solicit opinions and comments, the assessment process was trifold. It included a self-assessment that was conducted by each

²³ Wright's *Surprised By Hope*, 189-206.

individual, which then was presented to fellow cohort participants, followed by a qualitative interview with me for the purpose of offering personal reflections and constructive feedback. It was set up this way in order to facilitate the participation of every cohort member in an efficient, yet personable manner.

For this reason, at the conclusion of the cohort, participants were asked to complete a final project and present it to the others in the group. This fifteen- to twenty-minute presentation was organized and arranged to help participants synthesize and articulate their learning in a way that reflected the biblical themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration within their professional field of focus. Questions addressed in light of creation included the following: “How do you understand your work and industry in light of the creation and cultural mandate to ‘be fruitful, multiply, and subdue/fill the earth?’” and “What is the significance of your work?” and “Is there anything creative or innovative about what you do?”

Subsequently, participants were asked to identify the ways in which they experience the fall or sin and brokenness within their work. Questions to be answered included these: “What are the ‘shadow sides’ of your industry?” and “Where do you see implications and effects of sin in the workplace?” and “As a result of the fall, how have you experienced your work to be meaningless or fruitless?” and “What are the dominant idols you have discovered internally/personally, and externally, within your industry?” The purpose of posing these questions was to help participants see where themes of sin and brokenness affect the workplace both personally and corporately.

After answering and articulating the answers to these questions and personal examples, participants were asked to apply the theme of redemption to their work. It was

suggested for participants to ponder the following: “What is the gospel, and how does the gospel intersect your life and work personally and/or corporately?” and “What Scripture verses come to mind as you consider a redemptive view of God’s activity in the world?” and “Describe what your industry would look like if it were more God-glorifying? How might things be different?” The purpose of posing these questions was to help participants apply scriptural and theological frameworks to their places of work in order to show how one’s faith could shape and influence work in a coherent way.

Each project concluded with participants being asked to identify and articulate restorative initiatives that could serve as actionable items to incorporate in their places of work and in their personal spiritual formation. The action items were to consider their learning and engage in experiments, approaches to work, or new initiatives that are reflective of trying to be more God-glorifying in their professional environment. The initiatives were to include strategies to renew one’s own heart, initiatives that encourage renewal within smaller workplace environments, and initiatives that encourage gospel-shaped renewal in the specific industries.

The intended outcome of this ministry project was to introduce a discipleship program that brings faith and work together to emphasize vocational significance, personal transformation, and contextualized expressions of gospel-informed cultural renewal. By way of evaluation, the first cohort accomplished this goal. Each participant finished the ten-week study, and there was spirited discussion at each gathering that reflected thoughtful preparation and completion of the readings. The final presentations also were well-prepared and revealed a firm grasp of the subject material.

Of particular note were the ways in which participants identified the pitfalls and idols within their industry and how recognizing them within faith constructs has helped bring about change. One attorney stated:

The billable hour is our god. Even 15 minute increments. We even had a scoreboard at the office and turned our billable hours into a competition. I still lament the fact that one day when I was at my son's soccer game I thought to myself, "I could be billing a client right now rather than being here." I was consumed by it. Managing time is always a challenge for attorneys, but managing rhythms of rest has become an increasing conviction in light of my faith.²⁴

As a result, this participant grew to recognize how a system of measurement and financial metric within the legal profession can begin to shape and influence one's practices of work and rest. He began to apply a theological concept (idolatry) to better understand the personal tension he was experiencing between his life at home and life at work. As a countermeasure to the demands of time, he began to implement intentional practices of rest and presence.

The cohort participants representing the oil and gas sector identified money, power, and pride as dominant themes that plague them personally as well as corporately.

One individual commented:

As a land-man, I often come across mineral-rights agreements whereby less-informed property owners have not been treated fairly. Analysts and prospectors can easily manipulate the numbers to distort the economics of a project, and ultimately, distort the business to investors. There is a lot of pride and self-glorification in my office culture, so much so that sometimes I find it difficult to be happy for my peers when they are recognized for an accomplishment.²⁵

²⁴ David Quan, interview with author, Houston, TX, May 7, 2014.

²⁵ Tanner Sykes, interview with author, Houston, TX, May 7, 2014.

When asked about controversial practices, such as fracking and environmental concerns, the same participant provided this perspective:

Some of the opposition to industry practices are totally bogus. Yes, there are bad actors, but this is a very small segment. However, we are prone in our industry to a relentless pursuit of creating shareholder value at the expense of adequate investment in sustainable practices. The temptations are many, both personally and corporately. For example, high water usage in drought prone regions and high disposal rates are concerns I have that are not very popular items of discussion.²⁶

For this participant, growth happened when he identified the industry idols of greed, pride, and potential environmental concerns within the oil and gas industry. Upon completing the cohort he was able to affirm the cultural and economic values the industry provides to the common good through energy and jobs. However, he was also able to articulate fault lines within the industry through the lens of his Christian faith, thereby demonstrating how to think theologically about his job.

For another participant, completing the cohort was personally transforming. It helped him formulate a perspective of work that gave his life purpose and meaning after years of feeling as if he had failed God. He recounted:

I'm not sure you understand the magnitude of what this study has done for me personally. My Southern Baptist daddy always told me that this world belonged to the devil; that the only meaningful work one could ever do was to share the gospel so that people would be saved. I was raised with the understanding that daily work was laborious and only to be done as a means of providing food and other necessary means for your family. When I went to law school it was at the expense of moving to Africa to be a missionary. I love what I do, but to this day I have felt like I was a huge disappointment to God because I am an attorney and not a missionary. But I've come to see that the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it; that God created it all and called it good; that I can be a part of God's grand restoration project in a meaningful way and still share the gospel in other ways.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Dade Dowdle, interview with author, Houston, TX, May 14, 2014.

The reflections of this participant were not only an affirmation as to why the ministry focus of faith and work is a noble undertaking; they were helpful in a pastoral way, serving as a reminder that the burdens carried by church members are often tied to their self-worth insofar as that worth is shaped and influenced by their vocational choices and actions.

In addition to meeting the program goals that highlight vocational significance and personal transformation, the final outcome was to see participants institute personal and corporate practices that reflect gospel-informed cultural renewal. To this end, each participant was asked to identify action items, experiments, or ministry expressions that could be implemented in their work place. Where possible, some participants identified spiritual practices such as prayer, hospitality, and gratitude as personal goals. The CFO of the major oil and gas company commented:

In my role as an executive, it is far too easy to hole-up with the other executives and see our employees as assets and liabilities rather than people. I want to do a better job humanizing the work place; learning names, and hearing stories in a way that reflects an incarnational model similar to how Christ was and is present to others. As such, my personal initiative is to take all different levels of employees to lunch each week and focus on both listening well and showing gratitude.²⁸

This initiative reflects one of the project learning objectives of implementing spiritual practices within the workplace. In particular, it highlights the practice of hospitality as described by Christine Pohl. She writes: “As a way of life, an act of love, an expression of faith, our hospitality reflects and anticipates God’s welcome.”²⁹ The very act of creation

²⁸ Kim Dang, interview with author, Houston, TX, May 14, 2014.

²⁹ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 187.

can be seen as an act of hospitality in that God created a space whereby human beings are welcomed in a creative, anticipatory fashion as part of God's purposes. Insofar as one discovers practices in the workplace that accomplish the same kinds of anticipatory welcome through such examples as open access to supervisors, non-discriminatory policies, and adequate provision through wage and benefits, a workplace cultural value is established that reflects the virtue of hospitality.

As mentioned earlier, one of the participants in the initial cohort was the administrative assistant to the CFO. Her presence made for robust discussions about corporate culture and how employees of varying levels interpret and respond to actions of executives. This particular woman identified personal goals of starting a company Bible study and a desire to begin using her work breaks to do her daily devotional as a way of reminding herself that God is with her and at work through her daily work. Finally, she established a goal of showing greater appreciation for the service departments that help her do her job more efficiently (e.g., security guards, receptionists, mail room workers, and the like) by writing more thank-you notes and more frequent verbal expressions of gratitude.³⁰

By way of evaluation conducted through group discussion and interview, the primary critique offered by cohort participants was that the assigned readings were too lengthy—and, in a few instances, some of the concepts were difficult to grasp by lay readers who are not accustomed to the theological terms and constructs often assumed by clergy or those in academia. Murray's *Humility* was one such example. The books that

³⁰ Gwendolyn Riley, interview with author, Houston, TX, May 21, 2014.

received the most praise and attention for their content, accessibility, and application were Keller's *Every Good Endeavor* and Wright's *Surprised by Hope*.³¹ Participants also expressed appreciation for being able to meet in an office setting in the middle of a work day, as it helped them to contextualize the conversation as well as recall stories and situations that were happening in real time. Attendance was satisfactory as well. For most weekly meetings, at least six of eight participants were present. The absences were due to travel schedules and other work-related conflicts. For this reason, future consideration should be given to offering the cohort during the evening and/or on the weekend, if it will aid in more consistent attendance and participation.

The Faith and Work cohort idea was initiated through conversations with the senior pastor, associate pastors, staff, and prospective participants. After gaining consensus and approval among pastors and staff, a presentation was made to the Equipping and Sending Committee as the oversight entity for this particular project. The first cohort was launched in March 2014, followed by two additional cohorts in October 2014 and January 2016 with the full support of staff, committee, and session.

As a result of these efforts, in January 2016 First Presbyterian Church formed the department of Mission Innovation and launched two significant initiatives, the Main Street Fellowship and Project Flourish. The Main Street Fellowship was launched as an expanded nine-month theological and spiritual development program integrating faith, work, and discipleship, designed to equip Christians for gospel leadership in the world. The fellowship incorporates three primary elements to further the spiritual, social, and

³¹ Cohort participants, interview with author, Houston, TX, May 21, 2014. This discussion occurred during the final meeting.

cultural renewal of participants in their sphere of influence. First, the fellowship encourages a biblically and theologically informed imagination with regard to all aspects of life—especially in the workplace. Next, it invites corporate reflection among peers from diverse backgrounds and vocations. Finally, it encourages strategic action and participation with regard to spiritual, social, and cultural renewal within the city of Houston.³² In September 2018, the Main Street Fellowship Program was expanded to include two distinct cohorts to be completed by May 2019.

Building upon the Faith and Work focus is Project Flourish, a “social impact initiative whose mission is to accelerate the impact of entrepreneurial activity that aims to transform and renew our city and world for ‘the good.’”³³ To date, more than \$250,000 has been given away to businesses and incubator organizations with plans for an additional \$250,000 to be given away by the year 2020. Participants undergo a challenging process designed to enhance their projects or ventures through hands-on coaching from a team of experienced mentors, concluding in a business-plan competition before a panel of judges, supporters, and potential investors. Grant recipients receive start-up funding, consulting, and potential partnership opportunities with First Presbyterian Church of Houston.

³² First Presbyterian Church of Houston, “Main Street Fellowship,” accessed October 31, 2018, <https://fpchouston.org/grow/adults/main-street-fellowship/>.

³³ Project Flourish, accessed October 31, 2018, <http://projectflourish.org/>.

CONCLUSION

The goal of both the gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ is to see the people of God move from the pews and chairs out into everyday culture as instruments and witnesses who participate in the healing and restoration of creation. Beyond ethical living and decision-making, First Presbyterian Church of Houston lacked the necessary formational pedagogy to help its members comprehend, practice, and contextualize discipleship within the workplace in connection with the mission of God in the world. This ministry challenge, the critical importance of industry as it relates to cultural activity in the world—and my personal conviction that discipleship and mission are to work in an integrative, symbiotic fashion within the church—all led to the purpose of this final project: to start a context-specific discipleship program to equip the people of Houston's First Presbyterian Church for missionary engagement in the workplace.

Upon offering the initial pilot of cohort study groups, several willing participants emerged, eager to investigate this topic rigorously. The participants met weekly for learning and discussion. They completed several homework assignments that included the study of Scripture and other content-specific books and materials. Finally, participants engaged in spiritual practices and disciplines designed to introduce them to disruptive practices that would help them reimagine their work places.

In the wake of this endeavor, First Presbyterian Church has launched two subsequent programs as a direct result of the Faith and Work cohort program. The first program, titled Project Flourish, is a business-plan contest granting \$250,000 in seed

money to “gospel minded start-ups for the good of the city and the world.”¹ The second program, called “Main Street Fellows,” has expanded the Faith and Work cohort from a ten-week program to a thirty-week, top-tier training program for outwardly focused Christian leaders and seeks to provide theological, spiritual, and relational foundations required for meaningful and sustainable integration of faith and work.²

Project Flourish and Main Street Fellows have received positive feedback in their first full year of operation. Project Flourish received more than sixty applications for funding and recently awarded \$240,000 to five different finalists. More than one hundred members of FPC served as navigators and coaches to the various entrepreneurs seeking to have their ideas funded, providing expertise from a variety of disciplines in order to seek the good of the city and the world. Main Street Fellows is concluding its second year and currently is receiving applications for two new cohorts beginning in Fall 2019. One participant offered this comment:

Main Street Fellows helped me think about my theology different. . . . I’ve been a casual consumer of a theology that provided nothing more than that of fire insurance; a theology that provided no framework of what to do with my life after a salvation experience. It left me terribly empty. But now I’ve discovered that God wants to use my life to not only share the gospel with others, but to see this gospel at work in the world for purposes of redemption in every area of life in this world, from what I do in the office to what I do at home with my kids.³

¹ Project Flourish, “Award Recipients,” accessed November 9, 2018, <http://projectflourish.org/2018awardrecipients/>.

² First Presbyterian Church of Houston, “Main Street Fellowship Program Details and Commitment,” accessed April 18, 2018, <http://fpchouston.org/grow/adults/main-street-fellowship/>.

³ Dade Dowdle, “Main Street Fellows: Dade Dowdle,” interview by First Presbyterian Church, Houston, TX, 2018, Vimeo, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/257557875>.

Such a theology begins to answer the original question posed in this project about how one's faith ought to inform one's practices each day.

Critical to the examination and study of faith-work integration is not just cognitive learning but also faithful practice. Senior managers can learn to go through corporate layoffs, by not only offering fair and generous severance packages but by providing counseling and placement services that facilitate redemptive chapters of life for affected employees. Co-workers who disagree and find themselves failing to act Christianly can practice forgiveness and reconciliation. Supervisors who recognize discordant work environments can begin to practice hospitality and presence while modeling a just and positive workplace culture that faces problems with maturity and dignity. When the practices of Christian disciples in the workplace begin to reflect the Christ they represent, a credible dialogue and witness to others can be created. This also can make for a workplace environment that attracts and retains fruitful employees. When a construction job is completed honestly for a fair price, it honors the consumer, promotes future business, and contributes to the flourishing of the community.

One of the practical observations stemming from this project is that the practice of spiritual exercises can be driven by many different motivations. From a sheer "balance sheet" perspective, a non-hostile workplace that practices hospitality and justice and equity promotes longer employee retention and improved performance. The impetus of this project, however, is not measured by profit and loss but by the belief that there is a higher value in seeking first the kingdom of God, from which fruitfulness will be a result (Matthew 6:33; John 15:16). The spiritual practices addressed in this project do not have

as their focal point a set of external behaviors but rather enhance the interior life, from which actions find their origination in a creative and Spirit-filled capacity.

That said, in order to better incorporate the importance of spiritual practices into future cohorts, small changes will need to be made—particularly a little less time given to biblical and theological analysis and more time for the study and application of spiritual practices and disciplines. By design, the initial pilot project curriculum only introduced said practices. What it lacked was an interpretive lens to aid in the improvisational work of deciding which disciplines were best for each person and context. With this in mind, the current Main Street Fellows program has subsequently incorporated more practices of prayer, contemplation, hospitality, and discernment through retreat experiences, longer weekly meetings, and a longer program duration that allows for more interactive dialogue whereby participants can report back on their practices and learnings in real time.

This ministry project was born from a desire to respond to the direct questions being posed by disciples seeking to live their salvation out loud in a way that honors the purposes for which they were created. It reflects a desire to identify the prevailing beliefs that contribute to a disconnect between faith and work, while also clarifying the theologies that reflect the Reformed tradition's commitment to the transforming power of the gospel in the everyday culture. What began as an attempt to apply FPC's missional strategy in an entrepreneurial way has resulted in transformation for cohort participants and additional programs and projects that are being owned and driven by members of the congregation, each one reflective of the Vision 2020 to see church members move from being consumers of the gospel to missionaries who carry the gospel into their respective spheres of influence.

On a broader scale, the successful completion of this ministry project opens up additional possibilities for expansion beyond the walls of First Presbyterian Church of Houston into the broader Christian community. From the perspective of feasibility, the first recommendation would be to meet with denominational leaders in order to discuss ways in which a faith and work curriculum might be packaged and developed for use in other local churches. This would entail the development of a spiral-bound course guide uniquely designed for both leaders and participants and a recommendation on how to use the materials for an eight- to ten-week class that can be offered in any local church. The course guide would include week-by-week readings, discussion questions, and spiritual practices similar to what occurred in the FPC Houston cohorts outlined in this project. Ideally, a faith and work curriculum for the local church should be proposed as a “lab” and not a lecture or an interesting small-group discussion topic. Instead, the expectation is that participants would complete the homework, practice the exercises offered, and integrate their learning and formation in workplace contexts in a likeminded manner as those who participated in the cohorts at FPC.

The implications of expanding the faith and work ministry to contexts beyond FPC Houston not only can benefit a local church from a discipleship perspective but might also have evangelistic purposes. Interestingly, in each of our ministry cohorts, at least one participant asked a co-worker to participate. This was not by original design but will be applied to future cohorts, because it creates more dialogue among colleagues and opportunity for institutional evaluation and change. The content and subject matter are unequivocally taught from a Christian worldview; but the themes of idolatry, workplace conflict, establishing safe and dynamic workplace environments, and innovation for the

sake of the common good are topics germane to all people regardless of individual belief systems. For example, one cohort participant, Dr. Melissa Carbajal, a neonatologist with the Baylor College of Medicine, recently instituted training that has received grant funding in which her medical residents are trained to better relate to the spiritual needs of the parents whose babies are in intensive care receiving treatment. Dr. Carbajal shared the following with me:

I was guided by my faith in Jesus Christ, whom I believe to be the ultimate healer, to begin this continuing education program for our medical residents. Though the training is sensitive to people of all beliefs, the ultimate goal is to bring healing and holistic patient care. Naturally, I am able to share that I offer the training from the worldview of being a Christian, but the broader purpose is to provide better care through attending to the holistic needs of our patients.⁴

Much like this, expanding the faith and work conversation through the local church and into other community organizations, institutions, or industry hubs can provide a natural on-ramp for the Church to be a credible witness within other communities and industries. With continued prayer, learning, and application, it is my hope and prayer that the kingdom of God continue to be realized and reflected in the city of Houston and the world even as it is in heaven.

⁴ Melissa Carbajal, interview by author, Houston, TX, 2016.

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