



God at Work¹

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My title, “God at Work,” might sound a little odd to some. Many people, including people of faith, don’t have the feeling that God is at work in their day-to-day work. They may affirm that God cares for them *as* they work, but they may be hesitant to embrace the thought that God is actually at work *in* their work. For them, the church is where God is at work; family is where God is at work. But when they step out of ecclesiastical or domestic sanctuary, they feel they step into a space that is secular and foreign to God’s purposes. Yet this cannot be. If there is a God, if that God created the world and is engaged in redeeming it, then God is interested in all spheres of life, not just home or church. But then how does God relate to our daily work?

God is related to our daily work in four major ways, perhaps most clearly illustrated by four major questions that we ask, or at least should ask, as we do our work: (1) How do we succeed at our work? (2) How do we cope with failure? (3) What kind of work should we do, and what kind of work should we leave undone? (4) Why do we work?

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God is at work in our work—God blesses us, and we succeed; God delivers us when we fail; God directs us toward moral responsibility and personal fulfillment; God gives our work meaning by using it toward God’s own creation, redemption, and consummation of the world. Our work matters!

SUCCEEDING, AND THE GOD WHO BLESSES

In all our activity and certainly in all our work, we want to succeed. By “succeeding” in work, I mean three things. First, if we engage in work, we want at least to bring it to its proper end. If I write a book, I cannot stop halfway; I must bring it to completion. Second, to succeed in work means to complete it with excellence. To succeed as a writer, I must write well and treat my subject responsibly. Third, to succeed in work means to contribute through our work to some good, whether that be keeping my body and soul together, providing for my family, or contributing to a larger common good. If no good is created, I have not succeeded.

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To succeed, we need—in addition to our native ability and training—something that can be roughly described as *power*. First, to work well we need sustained exertion of effort over a period of time. If your health fails you, you find yourself needing all your energy just to attend to your own well-being, with none left for work. Second, to work well we need to give work our sustained attention and focus. We are easily distracted from attending properly to our work. To stay with the example of a writer, one of the main reasons writers neither finish their books nor produce excellent ones is that they get distracted. Finally, to work well we need to be able to perform in critical situations—we need to be able to do well on an exam, to close a big deal, to make the crucial play in the last seconds of a tie game, and so forth.

In addition to this kind of broadly conceived power, for success in the way I have defined it we need *creativity*—an ability to imagine new things and new ways of doing old things. Creativity is particularly important in today’s world, which places great stock in novelty. Many are no doubt familiar with the book entitled *The New New Thing* that came out of Silicon Valley a few years ago.² It’s not enough just to come up with a new thing; you always have to go after a *new* new thing. The thirst for novelty is exaggerated in our fast-paced culture. I’ve been served too many creative but failed concoctions by chefs obsessed with novelty not to think that the old is often much better than the new. And yet creativity—including creativity of continuing the old under new conditions—is indispensable for succeeding in work.

We need power and creativity to succeed. But we live in a fragile and uncertain world; this is, if you wish, the metaphysical condition under which we do our work. Our will is not the master of the work’s process or its outcome. We get tired and depleted; we become distracted, and our attention scatters; we make a mistake in a critical situation. Moreover, even when we’ve done all that we can and even all

²Michael Lewis, *The New New Thing: A Silicon Valley Story* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).

that can be done, input, in a fragile and uncertain world, does not guarantee outcome. Hard work isn't always crowned with success. Or maybe no bright idea arrives. Creativity, as is well known, cannot be manufactured. We are, as it were, dependent on the right idea simply coming, almost as an act of grace.

Since power and creativity are in short supply, we often invoke God to help us perform well and succeed in our work. Athletes pray in critical situations, students pray during exams, deal-makers pray. Yet we often dismiss such prayers. First, we might feel that the concerns that give rise to them are petty in the larger scheme of things. Why would God be concerned whether you get an "A" to keep a straight-"A" average, or whether you sell your stock at its peak price or a bit lower than that? Second, we worry that such prayers entail misuse of faith. To invoke God's help in critical situations seems to reduce God to a performance-enhancing drug. Finally, some people may worry that such prayers manifest the wrong kind of understanding of the relationship between God and the world. The prayers presuppose, one could argue, a God-of-the-results account of that relationship. You pray, and miraculously knowledge gets infused into your head even though you haven't tried very hard at all. So prayer becomes a way of avoiding responsibility or making up for a lack of it.

But despite such concerns, which I will respond to below, it is very important to connect God with success in work. Indeed, biblical traditions make that connection rather consistently. I am thinking especially of the Old Testament tradition of God's blessing. In the Old Testament there are, roughly, two kinds of blessings. God's blessing is the constantly given power of God that makes for human flourishing. That is what it means, for instance, for the whole human race to be blessed by God at the dawn of creation. Humanity is to be fruitful and multiply, and God's blessing is the constant life-giving power that makes this possible. But often in the Old Testament, blessing is also a very specific activity of God directed at a particular undertaking. God crowns an effort with success, be it in procreation, business, or war.

The biblical tradition of blessing suggests that God is concerned with our success. We should claim this dimension of God's relationship to our work. We should certainly not leave concern with success to the reigning spiritualities of the day. If you go to a library and look through the books on spirituality and work, you will see that most of them deal with that issue: the relationship between spirituality and success. Their main theme is how you can harness spiritual energies to succeed. These various spiritualities are often very shallow, usually no more than the spiritual equivalents of performance-enhancing drugs. But people are drawn to them partly because Christian theologians and ministers, especially in mainline denominations, have kept God and success as far from one another as they possibly could.

It's not that mainline denominations haven't been concerned about the question of work, at least up through the 1970s. Many books, articles, and church docu-

ments have been written on the topic. But most of this literature is primarily about the *demands* God places on our work—about the moral dimension of work. I believe that the moral dimension of the question is extraordinarily important, especially in today’s climate in which we seem to be plagued by high-profile scandals in many spheres of life, from industry to journalism, science, politics, and academics. But moral dimension, the dimension of moral demand, is not the only important dimension of work.

Most fundamentally, God is not a demander; God is a giver. And that holds true not just in the realm of salvation, when the well-being of our souls is at stake. It also holds true in the realm of creation and therefore in the realm of work. If it is in God that we live and have our being, then it is in the power that comes from God that we do our work. God gives, and therefore we can work. God gives, and therefore we can succeed in our work.

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Moreover, if God is concerned with us, then God is concerned with our successes and failures, even the petty ones. Our concerns may be misguided, and then they’ll need to be corrected. But none of them are too small for God. God wants to empower us to succeed in our work. After all, our very mundane work is part of our service to God. Of course, God’s relationship to our success in work is not only that of giving energy and creativity; God also offers guidance in and meaning to our work. But nonetheless, it is *God* who sustains us; it is *God* who gives us power and creativity. Hence it is quite appropriate to ask God to bless our endeavors and help us succeed, in the sense of success I explained earlier.

But in asking God to help us succeed, are we abdicating some of our own responsibility? We would be if the only way to think of prayer were simply as asking God to break into the processes that are part and parcel of the world as God has created it, if when praying we were always asking God to do things instead of us. But that’s not the case. There is not just the God-of-the-ends account of God’s relationship to the world; there is also the God-of-the-means account of it. God works through human means to achieve God’s ends. So we can pray not just for God to bring about a finished product, so to speak, but to make us willing, capable, and effective instruments in God’s hand. Which is what we were created to be in the first place.

OVERCOMING FAILURES, AND THE GOD WHO DELIVERS

My second point has to do with breakdowns, with so-called failures in our work. None of us likes to admit to failures. Yet all of us fail. My colleague at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, David Miller, told me of an author who wanted to

write a book on failures in large business corporations. The book ended up unwritten because none of the CEOs, even those who were retired, would talk about their failures. Understandably, we design our lives to keep failure at bay and, when it does happen, to make it invisible. The result is often the difficulty in speaking of ourselves as having failed. Yet when we work, we are always in danger of some sort of failure. We need help not only to succeed; we also need help when we have failed.

Things break down in spite of our precautions: we fall sick at a critical time, we get injured at work, and so on. We fail to achieve our goals in spite of our best efforts; we work hard and nonetheless get a bad grade, get fired from a job, or lose a big deal to a competitor. It's even tougher when we have worked hard and worked with integrity, and we fail anyway. We act in a moral way, we do the right thing, and precisely because of that, we fail. Then there is the failure that lies within success itself. We have climbed to the top; we get the corner office, or whatever the equivalent is in our own field of work—and we still feel deeply dissatisfied. A certain melancholy envelops, like cold mist, our very success.

Or, on the other side of the ethical coin, we have done well, but we have done well at the expense of moral integrity. We are good as workers, but we are bad as people. We are maybe a bit like Albert Speer, Hitler's architect—a great architect involved in a corrupt project and who turned out to be an extraordinarily bad person. He worked for Hitler because he was an exceptionally good architect who wanted to succeed. The goals of his profession took precedence over his integrity as a human being.

In a finite, fragile, and highly competitive world, failures regularly threaten our work. When things break down and people fail, they often turn to faith. A critic may object once again: If you come to God in your failure, doesn't it reduce God to being a servant of your need? If in success God functioned as a divine performance-enhancing drug, doesn't God function in failure as a divine Band-Aid? But if God is concerned about us and if God is at work in our work, then God will be concerned about both our successes and failures in work. God helps us succeed, and God helps when we fail.

Along with the tradition of God's blessing in the Old Testament, there is also the tradition of God's deliverance. God doesn't just bless persons and what they do; God delivers them, as well. At the heart of the tradition of deliverance, we find the question of work. Liberation from slavery in Egypt was the defining act of God's deliverance for the people of Israel. Cruel taskmasters oppressed the people of Israel, and God redeemed them. So to a large extent, the exodus was redemption from bad work. Others sin against us, and we suffer. God promises to deliver us from such suffering.

Consider, first, our frequent failure in spite of integrity. God promises that if we do what is right, ultimately we cannot fail to achieve happiness or to succeed in the most comprehensive sense of that term. That is the famous issue that Immanuel Kant addressed in such a compelling way. Why should I do good—and do

good for the sake of good and not just for the sake of a benefit I get from it—if when I observe the world, those who do evil often seem to thrive? Kant’s response was that it makes sense for people to do good for the sake of the good itself only if life in the world works in such a way that you don’t have to act immorally in order to end up being happy. Only God can be the source of such a world; only God can ensure that our moral behavior and our happiness match.

Second, in case of failure when we have done our best or maybe were unable to do our best, God gives us a sense of worth beyond our successes and beyond our failures. True, work is part and parcel of our identity. Who we are is shaped in part by the kind of workers that we are. But we are more, much more than our work, because we are the beloved children of God both in success and in failure. God does not love us because of our success, and God does not love us any less when we fail. And it’s God’s love that ultimately matters.

Third, God delivers even when we have failed morally. This message is central to the great act of deliverance in the New Testament, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is a forgiving God who, as the Lamb of God, carries our transgressions. That applies to transgressions not just in our private relationships but in our work as well. There is life beyond a major offense that a person has committed in his work, beyond an academic’s manipulation of data to obtain federal funds, beyond a CEO’s misreporting of earnings to attract investors, beyond a politician’s misuse of power to gain personal favors. God forgives such offenders, too. In all such situations, recognizing and naming the wrongdoing is necessary, and often the restitution of misappropriated goods will be required. But the God who does not count our transgressions against us and who removes our sins from us promises to give us new life even when we have failed in such ways.

Finally, God delivers us from the feeling of failure that can lie within our very success, from that melancholy emptiness that sometimes accompanies it. We’ve achieved what we wanted, and we still feel empty. We are like a child who wants a toy and, when she gets it, plays with it for a day or two and then craves another. Or we need achievements like a drug addict needs a drug. Success can become a compulsion, like gluttony, that exists to cover up feelings of emptiness. Such emptiness inevitably sets in when we forget that we are made to find satisfaction in the infinite God and not in any finite object. It also sets in if we work just for ourselves and don’t see our work as a service to a community and as part of God’s ongoing engagement with creation. I will return to this idea in the fourth section when I address the relationship between God and meaning in work.

KNOWING WHAT TO DO, AND THE GOD WHO GUIDES

What kind of work should we undertake? The question has two sides. One is moral. What kind of work is morally commendable and what kind of work are we obliged, for moral reasons, to avoid? The other side of the question is personal. Where should we pour our energies, and how should we employ our talents? There

are many things in the world that could be done, there are also many things that need to be done. There are many things that each of us is capable of doing and doing well. But that doesn't answer the question: What should *we* do, and what should we take on here and now?

Traditionally, the great Christian spiritual teachers have approached the second and personal side of the question about what we should do through the idea of a calling, or as I prefer to say, through charismas, which combine calling and gifting. God calls us to particular activities out of many possible things we could do and things that need to be done. Often we don't have the luxury of making a choice. We are stuck with the work we have and consider ourselves lucky to be able to put bread on the table. Even in such situations, we can see our work as God's calling—God's calling to contribute our modest share to the well-being of our family, our community, our world. But often we do have a choice—to continue with work we are doing, add to it another kind of work, or change the course completely.

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We reflect on what kind of work we should do partly because the future is uncertain. We don't know what is going to happen to us and to our immediate surroundings. We don't know what the consequences of our actions will be. We don't know where our contributions can be most effective and most appreciated. Today, we increasingly ask the question of what we should do here and now not only because the future is uncertain but also because the course of our life is not charted for us. In contemporary societies, our roles are not preassigned to us as they were in more traditional societies: if your father was a butcher, you continued in his footsteps. For the most part, that is no longer true, at least in industrialized societies. We choose among multiple options the work we will do.

The approach of traditional societies to the question of a calling has its advantages. One of them is the excellence that comes from generations of workers doing a particular kind of work well, the father or a mother passing on the secrets of the trade to sons and daughters. It's no accident that Bach was such an excellent musician; his father and uncle taught him as he himself taught his own two sons, also first-rate musicians. The transmission of excellence is one advantage of having a course charted from the start. The other may be freedom from the paralyzing effect of being faced with multiple choices, able to discern clearly neither what we are suited for nor what the future holds if we embark upon a given path. There are also disadvantages in inheriting a calling. “But I don't want to be a cobbler!” says a son of a cobbler. Or as I said to my father, “I don't want to be a minister; I want to be a

theologian.” It is important for us to be able to break away from tradition and find our own specific gifts and callings.

Today we are more or less forced to choose. But how do we go about it? We can’t just take our inclinations at face value. We can be attracted to types of work we are not suited to and for which we are not needed. We can be repelled from work that is a perfect fit for us. So the question of calling is the question of where we fit with our own work and where we are needed even if we are not the most satisfied in what we do. What are our gifts and callings? How do we discern them?

As we seek to discern our gifts and callings, we have to take into account, first, the abilities God has given us. That seems obvious to us today in the industrialized nations. But for most of humanity’s history—and in many parts of the world—the question of abilities was not even asked. People did, for the most part, what they had to do to survive. But since we can choose, we must attend to our abilities. What am I good at? What does the community to which I belong—what do my family, my friends, my church, my civic community—tell me about what I am good at? The discernment of gifts is a communal, not just an individual, process even if the individual concerned plays a crucial role. Second, we need to consider the needs of the broader community. Often we misperceive not only what we can contribute but also where our contribution meets the needs of the world. We want to give, but nobody is ready to receive what we offer. Discernment of what we should do should always involve both ourselves and our community, because God’s callings and gifts always involve both.

In addition to discerning our gifts and callings here and now, we also need to discern what kinds of work are morally permissible and therefore *can* be a gift and a calling. Some types of work are clearly morally acceptable. We may not be particularly attracted to being garbage collectors, but from a moral standpoint, it is a fine kind of work and—on top of that—a communal necessity. Other kinds of jobs are morally clearly out. Even if I could earn a ton of money, I should never be a hired killer. But there are some types of work that may be ambiguous. Is it morally permissible to produce, market, and sell assault weapons or sex toys? Is it morally permissible to work in a company that excessively pollutes the environment?

There is also a place for discernment *within* morally responsible types of work. Here I am drawing a distinction parallel to the one that is often made in the just-war theory, the distinction between the just resort to war (*ius ad bellum*) and the just conduct of war (*ius in bello*). Analogously, there is the question of the moral permissibility of a certain type of work and the question of the moral permissibility of doing it in a certain way. Within a kind of work that is morally acceptable, we still need to make decisions about what is ethical and what is not. It is morally acceptable to run a telecommunications company, but it is not morally permissible to mislead investors.

There is a *legal* dimension to this question, too. Laws are meant to protect the public from unscrupulous individuals and institutions. Yet as important as the le-

gal dimension may be, it is not sufficient on its own. For the most part, a person working in a competitive environment tries to do the legal minimum. Unless such people are guided by a higher *moral* law, the deciding question will most often be, “What can we safely get away with and still be within the bounds of the law?”

But the fact that something is legal does not mean that it is moral. The latter is the question of right vs. wrong, not of legal vs. illegal, though, of course, these two issues often overlap. In regard to compensation, there are no legal limits on the discrepancy between lowest-paid worker and the CEO. But there are moral limits to such discrepancy. Is it morally right to earn as a CEO of a company a thousand times more than the lowest-paid employee? To take another example, it is legal to run companies who use child labor in impoverished countries, but is it moral to do so? There are, of course, gray zones when it comes to moral issues. Sometimes no matter what we do, it seems we are going to overstep the boundary of what is morally good.

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There is also the question of going beyond what is morally permissible and discerning what is morally *excellent*. A year or so ago I was speaking at a Young Presidents Organization event. At a black-tie cocktail party, I was talking to someone who introduced himself to me as a graduate of Harvard University. We were chatting, and so I asked him, “What do you do?” He responded, “You will laugh when I tell you what I do.” I said, “Well, try me.” And he said, “I’m making urinals.” And I said, “Well, most men need them...” And he said, “I’m making flush-free urinals.” And I said, “Wow! What an extraordinary thing to do. A lot of water, which is increasingly becoming a scarce resource, is wasted on flushing urinals! If disposal could hygienically be done without water, it would be an immense environmental benefit.” This person’s work was morally excellent, not just morally permissible.

We need to look at the issue of vocation and work from the perspective of moral excellence rather than simply from the perspective of what morally passes the test. Here, too, God is at work as the God who commands us to live lives that will mirror God’s own character in the world. Equally significant, God is the one who not only helps us discern what is right and excellent but also gives us the power to do it. True, some Christians keep God out of the moral dimension of their work lives. God saves souls and directs private morality; God even enhances performance and heals wounds. But God seems detached from the moral decisions we are facing every day in our work. The practice of leaving God’s moral demands out of the work world may explain why some very devout Christians have acted so morally irresponsibly as CEOs of their companies. It is crucial to discover the moral import of our faith for the work we do.

KNOWING WHY WE WORK, AND THE GOD WHO GIVES MEANING

We are human and, as human beings, we live in part by posing the question of the meaning of life and of the activities that comprise our lives. When we work or when we play, we don't "just do it," as the Nike commercial puts it. Rather, we ask why we do what we do. We also reflect on whether our answers to the "why" question are adequate. Is the purpose for which I work sufficient to sustain me over time both as a human being and as a worker? Is the purpose for which I work in sync with the nature of reality—with who I am as a bodily, as a spiritual, as a communal being, and with how the world is made up?

There are many possible and mutually not exclusive ways of construing the meaning of work. One purpose that immediately comes to mind is to put bread on the table—and a BMW in the garage, some may add. Put more abstractly, the purpose of work is to take care of the working self. We are "material" girls and boys, living in a "material" world. We have needs that can be satisfied only by material means—we need food, shelter, transportation. We are also aesthetic girls and boys, who enjoy the beauty of the material things we need. And we are competitive beings. Often we want material things not because we need them but because we want to have more and better things than our neighbors do. Work and the things work procures then serve to boost our self-image and define our success. "The one with the most toys wins."

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But if we think of the purpose of our work as simply attending to ourselves and our needs, we enter what some people describe as the squirrel cage of dissatisfaction. What we have is always neck and neck with what we want, though what we want usually ends up ahead. And so we seem to be victims of Lewis Carroll's curse, "Here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place." When we take a moment to pause, we bump up against the question of whether simply satisfying the needs of the self is adequate as the purpose of our work. It is not. And in our quiet moments, we realize that we want our lives to have weight and substance and to grow toward some kind of fullness that lies beyond ourselves. Our own selves, and especially the pleasures of our own selves, are insufficient to give meaning to our lives. When the meaning of work is reduced to the well-being of the working self, the result is a feeling of melancholy and unfulfillment, even in the midst of apparent success.

The second candidate for the purpose of our work is the thriving or flourishing of our communities. We are communal beings. We live from community, and even the most "self-made" man is as much other-made as he is self-made; he has

had a mother, he has had a teacher, he has had a culture with its practices, institutions, traditions. And because we are such communal beings, we find the meaning of work in community. That community can be a family whose needs we seek to meet, a corporation for whose flourishing we work, an ecclesiastical community to whose mission we want to contribute, a civic community whose vibrancy we strive to sustain, or even a world community.

If we work for the well-being of community, it gives our work a richer texture of meaning than if we work just for ourselves. In our work, we are not only self-seeking, we are giving for the benefit of others. And as we read in scripture, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Yet the question remains whether concern for a community’s well-being is substantial enough to make our work fully satisfying. If our own well-being and the well-being of community is all there is to work, isn’t our work in some sense like building sandcastles on the seashore? It’s meaningful as long as the activity and its results last, but it is ultimately futile. A tide comes and washes away all the hard work, leaving no trace of it. If there is no more to our work than the benefit of community, transitoriness will swallow us and all our work, and our work will remain ultimately meaningless. Our work can find its ultimate meaning when we don’t do it for ourselves or for community only, but when we work for God. But what is the relationship of God to the meaning of our work?

There are four major ways in which we can think about how God relates to the meaning of our work. First, we can think of God as being, in a sense, our *employer*. As we strive to satisfy our own needs and contribute to the well-being of the community, we work for God, we serve God. Here God gives us tasks to do in the world—commands us to have dominion over the world (Gen 1) or to “keep and till” the garden (Gen 2)—and we do what God commands.

Second, we can think of our work as not just fulfilling God’s commands but achieving God’s *purposes* in the world. When describing the judgment of the nations, Jesus says to the sheep at his right, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt 25:34–36). Whatever the “sheep” did to the least members of Jesus’ family, they did that to him. God loves creation and all creatures, and when we care for their well-being, we work for God’s interests, we work for God.

Third, in our work we *cooperate* with God, and that gives meaning to our work. Consider the second account of creation in which, in the form of a story, God’s original purpose with humanity is laid bare. It starts with the statement that there was no vegetation on earth after God created it. Two reasons are given for this: first, God had not yet let rain fall on the ground and, second, human beings were not around to till it. Only when human beings come onto the scene and start

working can God's work of creation be completed. God creates, God preserves, God's blessing is enacted, God transforms the world in anticipation of the world to come—and in all that, God makes us God's own coworkers. We work with God, and God works through us. We make decisions in boardrooms, we flip hamburgers at McDonalds, we clean houses, we drive buses—and by doing that, we work with God and God works through us. No greater dignity could be assigned to our work.

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Finally, God makes sure that none of what is true, good, and beautiful in our work will be lost. In God, everything that we have done in cooperation with God will be preserved. In the world to come, our work will not disappear. We ourselves will be followed by our works, as it says in the book of Revelation (14:13). That makes sense if our identity partly resides in our work and its achievements. Even in the world to come, I could not meet Gutenberg and not think of the printing press he invented, or meet Einstein and not think of his relativity theory, or meet the Apostle Paul and not think of the Epistle to the Romans. The results of our work—the cumulative results of generations of workers across the globe—will also be preserved in the world to come. They may be preserved just in God's memory; or they may be preserved as actual building blocks of that new world.

The work of each one of us is then a small contribution to the grand tapestry of life, which God is weaving as God created the world, is redeeming the world, and will consummate the world. This is the ultimate meaning of our work.

ON DOING OUR WORK WELL

This then is how God is at work in our work: God blesses us, and we succeed in work; God delivers us so that we are not weighed down by our failures; God directs us so we can be workers who are morally responsible and personally fulfilled; and God gives meaning to our work in that God gathers all our efforts on behalf of ourselves and community and works through them to create, redeem, and consummate the world. We do our work well when in these four ways God is at work in our work. All four are important. If we leave one out, we fail to engage in our work the way God intended.

In conclusion, let me briefly note that working well in these four ways is not just a matter of getting the right information and then applying it. We don't learn to work well the way we learn to assemble a product whose parts have arrived at our home in a box. To work well, it is not enough to have a set of instructions and follow the steps in the proper order. If we examine it carefully, we will see that work is a very complicated human activity, or at least every satisfying

work is a very complicated human activity. The way we become good workers is by being apprentices of other good workers. Working with such workers can teach you what no book can.

As a consequence, a good worker is a good worker not just for the sake of work well done but also for the sake of the workers well taught. Good work multiplies itself, and it does so by being imitated. It is amazing what effects good workers can have on their neighbors, and the higher up in the hierarchy of a company good workers are, the greater effect their own good work may have.

Good workers don't just replicate themselves in others who are willing to learn from them. They also help create institutional environments that foster good work. There are good institutions, businesses, schools, law firms, hospitals, that almost invite good work because they are set up in such a way that working well makes sense. As we reflect on what it might mean for God to be at work in our work, we need to think about crafting individuals as well as institutions that would do the kind of work with which God would be pleased. ⊕

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