Taking Your Soul to Work
Overcoming the Nine Deadly Sins of the Workplace

R. Paul Stevens and Alvin Ung

Eerdmans Publishing House
2009
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Note: All Scripture quotations are from the Today’s New International Version (2005) unless otherwise noted.

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(Eugene Peterson)

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Introduction

“My work’s killing me,” said Alvin, as he dipped his skewer of chicken satay into peanut sauce. “I simply don’t have enough time during the day – and night – to get things done.”

“You’re in a tough spot,” said Paul, as he watched the satay vendor grilling the skewered meat on a bed of red-hot coals. A heady mix of turmeric, lemongrass and coriander filled the night air. “I’ve only been in Kuala Lumpur for two days but I can see that everyone’s in a rush and working very long hours. Everywhere you go, work has become so stressful – with increased competition, unrelenting job demands and global financial turmoil. Companies are acting like headless chickens.”

“I’ve heard of a chicken that lived for 18 months with its head chopped off. That’s me…for the next three months,” Alvin said. “Then I’ll try to get my life back. Start swimming laps. Stop working weekends. Talk to my wife. Revive my prayer life.”

“What happened to your prayer life?” Paul asked.

“My work suffocated it. I believe in God and continue to serve in church. But to be honest, for 70 hours a week or more, during the most productive hours of my day, I behave as if God doesn’t exist,” Alvin said, as he absent-mindedly stirred the satay sauce with a bamboo skewer. “Paul, do you really think it’s possible to grow spiritually while I’m working in my crazy, relentless job?”
“Yes.”

Alvin mused to himself. How do I grow spiritually when I work? That question had popped into his head unbidden. It sounded implausible. He was usually too stressed out during work to be conscious of God’s presence. After work, he was too drained and brain-dead to pray. Worked seemed to be a hindrance, not a catalyst, for spiritual growth.

“I’d like to experience what it means to grow spiritually when I work,” Alvin said. “Could you help me?”

“My dear friend, I may be older than you, but I’m no saint. It’s one thing to face the external pressures of busyness and stress. But I’m painfully conscious of even greater pressures assaulting us from within – greed, anger, envy, pride and much more. These things really hinder our spiritual growth in the workplace.”

The conversation lapsed into silence as the twilight glow of the tropical sky got swallowed up by the encroaching darkness. The red hot coals from the satay vendor glowed bright and hot.

“I have a proposal,” Paul said. “Let’s meet regularly to talk through and pray about how we can grow spiritually when we work.”
“Given that I live and work in Malaysia, and you’re in Canada, we’d have to do this by email or telephone. And hopefully, once in a while, we could meet face-to-face,” Alvin said.

“For a fruitful conversation, I think we’d need to address three things. First, we’ll need to identify the soul-sapping struggles that are hindering us from growing spiritually while we work. This diagnostic work is tough but necessary. Next, we can reflect on how the Spirit of God enables us to work wholeheartedly. And thirdly, we’ll imagine the wonderful ways in which we can work differently with God’s help,” Paul said.

“Let’s do it!” Alvin said.

* * *

Do you long for something more in your job than just making ends meet or climbing the corporate ladder? Do you yearn for the abiding presence of the Living God – energizing your thoughts, words and actions – while you work? Or do you wish to discern God’s transforming work in your workplace and join him in fulfilling that agenda? Or maybe you simply have this sneaking suspicion that there’s just got to be something more – something of greater value and meaning to work itself – than merely enduring a one-hour commute, surviving office politics and pleasing your bosses.

If you said yes to any of the above, we wrote this book for you.
Like you, we desire to take our souls to work, to be attentive to God’s presence in the midst of a busy and intense work life, and be gradually transformed into loving and holy persons while we work. These remain our personal aspirations as we met for two years – in Bali, Kuala Lumpur, Vancouver and other places – praying and talking about what it means to grow spiritually in the workplace. At the same time, we bring different perspectives to our discussions because we come from different places, cultures and work experiences.

Alvin Ung grew up in Malaysia, worked as a financial analyst, a foreign correspondent with the Associated Press, and a senior manager in the telecommunications industry before studying spiritual and marketplace theology at Regent College, Vancouver. He has subsequently managed a private foundation and worked as a senior executive in a Malaysian investment fund. Paul Stevens, a Canadian, has been a pastor, a carpenter, a business person, a professor of marketplace theology and leadership, and is now professor emeritus of marketplace theology at Regent College. He continues to teach and lecture in churches, theological schools and companies.

We first met one another in a marketplace theology class taught by Paul. Over the years, we became friends as we co-taught classes, worked and traveled together – constantly interacting with our Eastern and Western perspectives of work and life. We are both “works in progress” on the journey of integrating faith and work, as will be apparent from our ongoing conversations.
We are followers of Jesus Christ. As such, our sensibilities, worldview and writing are drawn from the rich tradition of Jewish and Christian Scriptures. At the same time, we desire that people of all faith traditions, or people seeking a deeper spirituality, might find this book helpful. We’ve discovered few non-academic books that seek to integrate work and spirituality. So, for this book, we’ve tapped the treasury of Christian spirituality – Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox – to help shed light on what it means to live as whole, integrated people in the workplace, family and personal life.

Alvin, who spent more than a decade working in Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim nation, has observed that the search for spirituality goes deep among his Muslim colleagues. A colleague once told Alvin:

“A Muslim is someone who’s surrendered to God. This entails much more than outward acts of going to the mosque on Friday or praying five times a day. Being Muslim is more than counting the number of times we pray; it’s learning to be prayerful when we are working. Tragically, among many Muslims today, there’s a disconnect between our faith and our work. That’s why corruption, injustice and inequity remains entrenched in many Islamic countries. We would not behave in such a way if we were totally aware that Allah is with us in all things. Though I am far from this, I aspire to live this way.”

As followers of Jesus, we, too, aspire to live this way – our lives surrendered to God, in prayerful union with Jesus, who is also Lord of the marketplace.
Reasons for a Spirituality of Work

Without a deeper understanding of why we work, life becomes bleached of meaning. We will feel stuck working in dead-end jobs that engage only a fraction of our gifts and aspirations. “When work is soulless, life stifles and dies,” said the existentialist philosopher Albert Camus.¹

Therefore a spirituality of work is necessary. Consciously or not, we are developing a spirituality of work when we agree with the following presuppositions:

First, God is everywhere (including the workplace) and God loves everyone (including the worker). Second, we cannot do everything by ourselves. We depend on people; and we are especially dependent on God. While God has given us active roles in developing and growing ourselves, fundamentally we cannot do this without God. Therefore, thirdly and most importantly, God is actively seeking us out because He wants to continuously impart in us the qualities of His own being, making us more fully human. In this book, God’s loving activity of seeking us out and transforming us will be called the “fruit of the Spirit.”

While the term “spirituality” could mean many things to many people, we resonate most with Gregory Pierce’s description of spirituality of work as “a disciplined attempt to align ourselves and our environment with God and to be a concrete bodily expression of God’s Spirit in the world through all the effort (paid and unpaid) we exert to make the world a better place, a little closer to the way God would have things.”²
From the above, there are three key movements in the spiritual life that help to describe a spirituality of work. We have organized this book around these three movements:

1. Identifying the struggles that prevent us from coming alive at work
2. Cultivating the Spirit of God who equips us with life-giving resources
3. Imagining the outcome of a Spirit-led life that welcomes God at the centre of work

**Identifying the struggles:** In the first part of this book, we consider the ways in which soul-sapping struggles are deeply embedded in the life of the worker and the workplace. We have identified nine “deadly” sins that can easily entangle us as we work. Like weeds, these sins grow deep in our souls as well as within the workplace (the culture, processes and systems); they must be rooted out continuously. We have included exercises that can help us in this challenging but invigorating process.

**Cultivating the Spirit:** Next, we consider how God has given us nine life-giving resources to bring about transformation in our souls, as well in the organizations we work for. Each gift of the Spirit (e.g. love, joy, peace, etc.) serves as a healing antidote to the soul-sapping struggles. We have included real-life examples of the Spirit’s mighty work. We’ve also suggested some spiritual disciplines for daily practice. Besides removing
obstacles that could hinder us from knowing ourselves and knowing God, these
disciplines help us become more receptive to God’s work in our lives.

**Imagining the outcomes of a Spirit-led life:** Finally, we consider the results of
workplace spirituality – what we get out of life and work when we welcome God into the
centre of all things. We have included thumbnail sketches of ordinary saints – people
from all walks of life, past and present, from the East and West – whose lives embody the
attributes we’ve discussed.

**How to Use this Book**

The three parts of the book are clearly laid out in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifying the Soul-Sapping Struggles</th>
<th>Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit</th>
<th>Imagining the Outcomes of a Spirit-Led Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pride</strong></td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Continuous Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being imprisoned within yourself as No. 1</td>
<td>Feeling the exhilaration of having God as No. 1</td>
<td>Experiencing continuous communion with God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greed</strong></td>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>Persistent Gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflaming the passion to possess more than you have</td>
<td>Cultivating a character that gives rather than takes</td>
<td>Experiencing the freedom of knowing that all you have comes from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lust</strong></td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Beautiful Purity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining how people can be used for self-interest</td>
<td>Practically caring for the best interests of others</td>
<td>Experiencing wholehearted love for God and neighbor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gluttony</strong></td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Joyful Relinquishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding satisfaction through excessive consumption</td>
<td>Being governed from the inside through values and the Spirit’s leading</td>
<td>Experiencing the freedom to release possessions and to live and work more simply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anger</strong></td>
<td>Gentleness</td>
<td>Surrendered Contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using passion to manipulate and control people and circumstances</td>
<td>Empowering others by renouncing personal agendas and expressing meekness</td>
<td>Experiencing the satisfaction of who you are, what you have and what you do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloth</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Life-giving Rhythms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing minimal or the least important work, and loving ease</td>
<td>Persisting in important work with utter reliability</td>
<td>Experiencing a pattern of life that produces excellent work without being consumed by it</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Envy</th>
<th>Kindness</th>
<th>Neighbor Love</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling the pain of someone else’s advancement and possessions</td>
<td>Putting others at ease, and rejoicing in their gifts and achievements</td>
<td>Experiencing the ability to meet the needs of others, and to contribute to their well-being</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restlessness</th>
<th>Patience</th>
<th>Vocational Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking and feeling that there’s always something better somewhere else</td>
<td>Having the ability to remain where you are with meaningfulness and hope</td>
<td>Experiencing the certainty that you are in God’s will and doing God’s work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boredom</th>
<th>Peace</th>
<th>Heavenly-Mindedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having insufficient passion or interest to give yourself heartily to work and life</td>
<td>Having a passion for completeness and harmony, no matter what the situation</td>
<td>Experiencing the meaning and joy of work that will last in view of eternity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We hope you’ll read the book from beginning till end.

You may also wish to use the chart above as a diagnostic tool. So if you find yourself personally challenged with a specific struggle (e.g. “greed”), then follow the chart horizontally by reading the corresponding fruit (“goodness”) and outcome (“persistent gratitude”). These interrelationships aren’t set in stone, though. You’ll find it helpful to review other related chapters and themes. For example, the chapter on “greed” can also be read in relation with the chapters in Part 2 on “self-control,” “love” and “peace,” as well as the chapters in Part 3 on “joyful relinquishment,” “surrendered contentment” and “neighbor love.” Feel free to use the chart above, along with the thumbnail descriptions, to facilitate your reading or discussions with friends.
We hope you’ll find each short chapter enriching and applicable for your life. The book can be used as a conversation starter between spiritual friends, colleagues or among members of a small group. You could read one chapter a week for thirty weeks. Or you could read the book ‘horizontally’ – three chapters at a time (e.g. greed, goodness and gratitude) – as the basis for a monthly group study. The exercises can be easily adapted for personal reflection or group discussion. We do encourage you to seek out one or more dialogue partners, as much of spiritual growth happens in fellowship and intentional community.

The process of writing this book together has been deeply fulfilling – and salted with God’s presence – as we prayed together, wrote and edited one another’s writing. We wish to thank Alvin’s wife, Huey Fern, who supported us from start to finish, by providing feedback and help with bibliographic research, editing and proofreading, and doing so with wholehearted commitment and love. We are also deeply grateful to Paul’s wife, Gail, for her hospitality and encouragement.

**What You Can Hope to Gain by Reading the Book**

- How to handle frustrations, challenges and ambiguities that you face every day.
- How your work can be a source of spiritual growth rather than a hindrance.
- How your work can draw you towards God.
- How to keep God in mind while working even if the work is all-consuming.
- How to discover God’s will for you in the workplace.
- How God is most present to you in times of struggle, pain and even failure.
How work is the context in which you may overcome your hidden compulsions and discover new strengths in your character.

The workplace is a major arena for the battle of our souls. We spend the bulk of our waking hours at work. We are besieged daily by hundreds of thoughts and decisions that lead to good or evil. If we allow sin to burrow itself in our lives without any awareness of its toxic effects, it’s as if we’re handing the keys of our heart to Satan. We are allowing evil to mar, maul, distort and diminish our humanity. Our relationship with God becomes estranged, strained or deceitful.

In ways that we’re not aware, there are “sinful passions at work” in employee mindsets, organizational structures and company goals (Rom. 7:5). The first step in realizing this is by realizing that sin begins in small ways – in our selves.

Sin starts as a thought. If we mull on the thought, we will struggle between choosing good or evil. We yield to temptation when we act on an evil thought. Continuous action produces a habitual pattern that gains control of our will, our desire, our character, and our lives. When this happens, sin embeds itself deeply within us. The result is debilitating: we know that sin is destroying us but we feel helpless against its assaults. “That’s who I am,” we insist. “I can’t change.”
However, when we begin to identify and face up to the devious and diverse ways in which sin has taken root in our hearts, several things begin to happen:

- We feel grateful that God loves us even in our depravity
- We recognize that we are helpless without God
- We discover that the process of struggling against sin makes us more aware that God is with us, and that He will lovingly lead us to a fruitful outcome
- We gradually experience the freedom and joy found in Jesus Christ.

The following nine chapters seek to help us tackle the difficult questions, struggles and issues faced in the workplace. In the Bible these are known as the “works of the flesh” which the apostle Paul outlines in Galatians 5:19-21. These inner dispositions – things such as idolatry, selfish ambition, impurity – are ways in which sin is eating us up from within. These are evil impulses that cause us to act as though Jesus Christ has not done his redemptive work on the cross.

**Nine soul-sapping struggles in the workplace**

There are all sorts of workplace sins: stealing stationery, claiming credit for work you didn’t do, blaming others for your mistakes, lying, spreading gossip, calling in sick when you’re not, and behaving in deceitful ways when you think nobody’s watching. Such impulses are grounded in deeper soul-sapping struggles.

In the history of the church this struggle has been understood through what is called the “Seven Deadly Sins” (along with their Latin names): pride (*superbia*), envy...
invidia), wrath (ira), sloth (acedia), avarice (avaritia), gluttony (gula) and lust (luxuria).
The earliest Christian formulation of a list of deadly sins came from the desert father and theologian Evagrius of Pontus (345-99 A.D.). Evagrius and his followers went into the desert to be freed from the seductions of the world and to seek God wholeheartedly. What they found in the desert was they had to deal with themselves. In the same way, we may seek to escape from the ‘demons’ at home by going to work, only to discover that these same ‘demons’ have accompanied us into the workplace. Gregory the Great, the sixth century ‘Doctor of the Church’ who finalized the list of seven deadly sins we know today, observed that these sins have generative capacity: they produce offspring. “From envy there springs hatred, whispering, detraction, exaltation at the misfortunes of a neighbor, and affliction at his prosperity,” wrote Gregory. “From anger are produced strife, swelling of the mind, insults, clamor, indignation, blasphemies.”¹

In the same way, as we consider deadly workplace sins, we must deal with overeating, eroticism, aggression, laziness and busyness, despair, restlessness, envy of other people and their gifts, and selfish ambition. No list of sins could ever be comprehensive. But we’ve found this traditional list of the seven deadly sins to be helpful in diagnosing our sinful predispositions. And they are deadly indeed. For example, an extreme form of sloth could result in depression that leads to death. Not least, the seven deadly sins continue to be prevalent and relevant in the modern workplace. To this list of seven, we’ve added two more – boredom and restlessness. Boredom and restlessness are like evil twins; they sneak up to people in the workplace in ways barely recognized or acknowledged.
All the nine workplace sins drain us from the will to love God and discern his presence in the workplace. These so-called deadly sins describe the dark side of work and the worker. They explain why we often find work so frustrating, unfulfilling, sweaty and just plain hard. However, as we cooperate with God in battling against the workplace sins (pride, greed, lust, etc.), we begin to embody the character qualities of the Spirit of God (e.g. joy, goodness, love, etc). As a result, our lives are characterized by prayer, gratitude and purity. From the following chart, you can see where we are going.

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The first step toward deeper growth in God requires a deepening awareness of sin’s insidious grip on our hearts and mind. We begin with pride, one of the deadliest enemies of the soul.

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Pride: Grasping Equality with God

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AU: “It’s good to take pride in a job well done. Or to take pride in the accomplishments of someone else. And yet we know that there’s a dark side to pride. How do you see pride affecting people when they work?”

PS: “Pride makes you boast about being a self-made person. When things go well, you think you’re the only one who did it. When things go bad, it’s someone else’s fault. You make extravagant promises. You set high expectations. But when things spiral out of control, you shift the blame elsewhere. You sincerely can’t believe that all these people failed you. This happens at work all the time.”

AU: “I don’t think people set out to be arrogant or blame-shifters. They don’t make it a goal in life. And yet they turn out like that. What gives?”

PS: “Pride blinds us from seeing the reality of who we are. It inflates our ego, distorts our vision and walls us off from God. So we lack God’s perspective. We do not seek his help. We stand at the centre of the universe. We trust only ourselves.”

AU: “If we cannot trust God then we have to control everything ourselves.”
PS: “It’s easy to recognize pride in other people. But much harder to recognize these symptoms in ourselves.”

AU: “Sounds like if we don’t admit we’re tempted by pride, we may already have fallen into it.”

A. Rethinking Pride

There are two kinds of proud people we meet in the workplace. Mr. Solo Flyer takes all the credit for his accomplishments. His conceit makes him chronically incapable of recognizing how he has received help along the way, especially from the people below. The second type is Ms. Insufferable, who projects arrogance, treats people with disdain and makes you feel as if the five minutes she has given you is worth more than the latest stock tip from Warren Buffett. Mr. Solo Flyer and Ms. Insufferable consider themselves “superb” above all, which befits the Latin translation, “superbia.”

Biblical pride has a wide range of meanings. In its positive sense, pride is used of God to emphasize His glory, excellence and beauty. In contrast, when used of humanity, pride becomes distorted. It is attempting to appear above others, feeling conspicuous about one’s self, being haughty and puffed up by self-conceit. Pride devises schemes to toy with the weak (Psa. 10:2). Pride causes us to deceive ourselves (Obad. 3). The book of Proverbs, a manual for attaining wisdom, associates pride with arrogance, evil behavior, and perverse speech.
Therefore God opposes the proud (James 4:6). In fact, he detests them (Prov. 16:5). Pride estranges us from God (Psa. 138:6) because instead of attributing glory, excellence and beauty to God, pride causes us to make a petty grab for equality with God. An attitude of pride is fundamentally opposed to Jesus Christ, who did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage (Phil. 2:6).

B. Pride at Work

Pride permeates the modern workplace. Like the air we breathe, pride is absorbed into our celebrity culture, corporations, and self-image. This workplace sin often masquerades as ambition, confidence and chutzpah. It makes us unwilling to listen to or acknowledge any painful truths about ourselves. We deceive ourselves – though not God, who sees everything. One of the reasons why pride is so deadly is that it grows imperceptibly within us. It’s killing us but we don’t know it.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the remarkable eleventh century monk, understood the anatomy of pride. Serving as the spiritual leader of the Cistercian monastic order that influenced the commercial, intellectual and religious life of Europe, he suggested that pride begins innocuously but gradually leads us down a precipitous ladder that results in complete estrangement with God and self. 1
The Precipitous Ladder into Pride: where are you on these 12 steps?

1. Being curious: Are you curious about matters that do not concern you? Curiosity seems harmless. But it’s the gateway to other ills. Your curiosity about your colleague’s salary could lead you to envy her, pity yourself or strive for more.

2. Unbridled speech: Are you talking about the things you’re curious about? You complain, gossip and make passing remarks about people and affairs that don’t directly impact you. You can’t keep secrets.

3. Senseless optimism: Are you convincing yourself that things are always okay? The more you talk, the more you’re seeking to console yourself. You focus on what you’re good at. You laugh about your pain. Trivial things in life entertain you.

4. Boasting: Are you constantly hinting or telling people about your achievements? Your compulsive need to feel good is now expanding. You’ve got to tell people how great you are. You enjoy the feeling of people taking each word you say so seriously.

5. Sense of being special: Are you feeling more special than others? Your boasting makes you think you’re much better than the average guy. You deserve to stand out. You’re the star in your team.
6. Arrogance: Are you believing in your own propaganda? You sincerely believe all the praise people are lavishing on you. You’re smarter, brighter and savvier, period.

7. Presumption: Are you thinking that you know best…all the time? You butt into meetings, interrupt conversations, change decisions. You don’t need to ask people what they think as long as they ask you what you think.

8. Self-justification: Are you constantly explaining away your actions? If people confront you, you reply: a) I did not do it; b) I did it, but it was the right thing to do; c) It was wrong, but I meant well; d) Someone else made me do it.

9. Insincere confession: Are you saying sorry only if you have to? At this point, more and more people are aware of your prideful behavior. If confronted, you’re willing to shed false tears as you confess your wrongdoing. But you’re not at fault, really.

10. Rebellion against peers or superiors: Are you willfully ignoring the people who are correcting, rebuking or challenging you? You feel contempt and scorn for people and things in general. Your disdain extends to God.
11. Feeling free to sin: Are you feeling pretty good about the evil you’re doing?

Banish shame, fear and guilt! Forget what moralistic people think of you. You’re not governed by that. In your private moments, you feel a tinge of regret or remorse. But you shrug it off.

12. Habitual sinning: Are you sinning with total abandonment and freedom? You can’t stop even if you wanted to (but you won’t). The minions of evil – lust, greed, anger, envy and despair – control you. You have given Satan the open access to the door of your heart.

C. Overcoming Pride

It is easy to hurtle down the many steps into pride, but much harder to climb our way out of it. Given the deceitful nature of pride, efforts to extricate ourselves from the crevasse of pride could leave us in greater danger of falling deeper into it. Pride robs us of self-knowledge. For example, we know of bosses, supervisors or associates who talk a great deal about humility and yet project arrogance in their demeanor. Such arrogance is evident to all except the proud person.

The opposite of pride is humility. Bernard of Clairvaux defines humility as “the virtue by which a man [sic] recognizes his own unworthiness because he really knows himself.”\(^2\) Such persons are blessed by God with seeing themselves the way God sees them. They harbor no illusions about themselves. God is not delighted or impressed by any good thing they do because their best is not worth God’s filthy rags. Yet God loves
them deeply. God is delighted when such people offers themselves to God – even the broken pieces, such as failure, sorrow and sin.

But we cannot seek humility (e.g. “Friends, I’ve attained humility!”). Humility is a byproduct of seeking a deeper union with Jesus Christ. Jesus is the model of humility and gentleness; he will shape us into his likeness if we permit him to do so. In the same way, we cannot root out pride through direct means. We cannot work harder at self-improvement. There are, however, indirect means of dealing with pride (see Exercise below).

Not least, the Spirit equips us with the fruit of joy, that frees us from captivity of self, and gives us the exhilaration of being captivated by God and other people.

**Exercise**

Review the “Precipitous Ladder into Pride,” and reflect on the questions. Ask God to help you identify which step you are on the Ladder of Pride. Depending on where you are on the ladder, Michael Casey, a Benedictine monk in Australia, has suggested some exercises that will help you cultivate humility through indirect means.³

1. Restraint of speech (practise this if you’re somewhere between steps 1-3 on the ladder of pride): Keeping silence doesn’t come naturally in a world of noise, hurry and crowds. Practice verbal restraint by becoming an intentional listener during lunch conversations this week, speaking fewer words, and asking questions motivated by genuine concern. Stop gossip or unprofitable talk.
2. Become a servant (steps 4-7): The lowliness of Jesus Christ is demonstrated by forgetfulness of self, and concern for others. Imitate Jesus as a servant in the workplace by identifying certain types of work that are usually below you (e.g. photocopying or washing dirty dishes left by colleagues). Do this secretly, faithfully and with joy for one week or one month (or more).

3. Radical self-honesty (steps 8-12): Reflect on some sinful or habitual patterns of behavior that emerge while you work (e.g. irritability, perfectionism, not tolerating mistakes, etc). Confide in a trusted friend that you are leading a double life. Give your confidante permission to provide tough feedback, if necessary. Pray together, asking for God’s help and mercy.

2 Bernard, Selected Works, 103.
3
Greed: The Desire for More

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<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflaming the passion to</td>
<td>Cultivating a character that</td>
<td>Experiencing the freedom of knowing that all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possess more than you have</td>
<td>gives rather than takes</td>
<td>you have comes from God</td>
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PS: “It’s tempting to regard work purely as the means for gaining more money, more possessions, and more comforts in life. Do you struggle with that temptation?”

AU: “Thankfully, I don’t usually think of work solely as a means for making money. In our career choices, my wife Huey Fern and I have experienced big swings in our income. We’ve earned far more than we needed working in finance and investments. We’ve also chosen voluntary unemployment and part-time jobs. We’re learning to trust God in plenty and want. But I sometimes think, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to have just a little bit more?’”

PS: “Like you, my wife Gail and I have led an exciting life over the past five decades. I’ve counselled students, founded an inner city church, worked as a carpenter and taught as a professor of marketplace theology and leadership. Our income has fluctuated like crazy, sometime 50% down, and sometimes 100% up. Through all this, our lifestyle has not changed much. And now that I am retired I have no regular income.”

AU: “So you’re no longer tempted by the desire for more, right?”
PS: “I wish. I always enjoyed using my Nikon digital SLR camera…until the day I had lunch with my friend Peter, and saw what his newest Nikon model could do! One thing I have learned: it’s not about how much money you have or earn, but about what money and possessions mean to you.”

AU: “That sounds great. As a principle. But I’m wondering if it’s possible to work in a highly paid job without becoming greedy? Or am I kidding myself?”

A. Rethinking Greed

These days, it’s okay to be greedy, as long as you’re not crass, arrogant or grossly insensitive to other people’s feelings. This outlook is spurred by organizations that link reward CEOs with excessive compensation packages. Donald Trump, a real-estate mogul and TV celebrity says, “I have mixed feelings about greed being a workplace sin. I believe that you have to be motivated by some sort of insatiability for success.”

People usually regard greed as the drive to achieve and acquire more, in the shortest time possible. Ironically, this passion makes us feel discontented with what we have and obsessed with what we do not yet have. The fourth century Christian monk Evagrius of Ponticus, who spent the final decade of his life in prayer and scrutiny of his unruly emotions, wrote that greed is not merely the tendency to accumulate more material things. Greedy people, says Evagrius, are preoccupied with “thinking about what does not yet exist.” The Ten Commandments calls this variant of addictive thinking “covetousness.”
Biblically, greed or avarice (Latin word: avaritia) is generated when our desire for God is channelled toward the things that God has made. At the root of it is the inclination to regard bread (or provision) as something distinctly separate from God. We see this dynamic at play within the heart of humanity, in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve found themselves gazing at the fruit from a tree. The fruit was good for food, a delight to the eyes and it would make them wise, they mused. In the garden of plenty, they were tempted with provision, beauty and power. They faced an ageless conundrum that confronts us today: would they turn to God and trust Him to provide for their needs (in want or plenty)? Or would they satisfy those desires in whatever means seemed fit to them? Alexander Schmemann, a prominent twentieth century Orthodox Christian priest and writer, observed that Adam’s primal sin was much more than munching on a forbidden fruit. “The sin is that he ceased to be hungry for Him and for Him alone, ceased to see his whole life depending on the whole world as a sacrament of communion with God.”

B. Greed at Work

Greed is probably the most common workplace sin. It ranges from the innocuous and insidious to the garish and diabolical. Much of unrecognized greed stems from noble intentions to build a safe and secure financial base for loved ones. Even poor people are not exempt from greed.
It’s easy to chuckle at the victims who fall for email scams (“I am Mrs. Jewel Howard Taylor. Last year, my husband, Mr Charles Taylor entrusted some large quantities of diamonds to me. This is why I need you to travel to Nigeria….”). It’s more difficult to identify how our personal spending habits, credit card purchases and investment strategies could be motivated by greed.

It’s easy to become angry with high-level executives who enrich themselves with bonuses and fat salaries while their employees are paid below fair wage for their work. It’s also easy to rail against greedy pharmaceuticals, rapacious credit card companies and unscrupulous banks in Third World countries. But it’s much harder to identify the ways we’ve been co-opted by a consumer culture that makes it a norm for us to cultivate the “good life.” If we’re not careful, we can use our own children as excuses to make more money for family vacations and to finance their college degrees. The reverse side of greed is being exceedingly thrifty or stingy, hoarding things instead of being generous toward God or people.

One complicated example in which greed affects our thought-life and actions comes in the form of advertising. Richard Pollay, professor emeritus of advertising history, notes that the advertising industry has been aggressively conducting research on how to rearrange people’s thoughts and motivations about what they actually need. Modern advertising does not merely provide information to assist consumers in making rational choices among products. Through visual imagery, advertising taps on our
predisposition to be discontented with what we have. “Non-wants become wants; wants become needs,” says Pollay.  

C. Overcoming Greed

Greed, like all other struggles, is an indication that we were made for something more than things – we were made for God himself. We were created to be sustained by God’s generosity, and to depend on the provisions He has given us. In what practical ways can we overcome greed by depending on God’s provision?

1. Regard shopping as a spiritual discipline: do not buy things impulsively, thoughtlessly or simply on the siren appeal of advertising e.g. develop a shopping list by asking ourselves what we want vs. what we need.

2. Resist the ‘siren’ call of pervasive advertising: be aware of how television is a doorway to thousands of ‘buy me’ messages, and discuss with family and friends the values embedded within billboards and ads that inundate us on a daily basis.

3. Break the power of greed by giving. In a famous sermon on “The Use of Money,” the Methodist preacher John Wesley once said, "Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can."  

4. Expand the goals of our job scope to include social responsibility i.e. caring for broader stakeholders and not just shareholders. (Dennis Bakke’s story in Joy at Work is a good example of this.)

Ultimately, as God calls us to put to death the soul-sapping struggle of greed, He also calls us to respond to the Spirit who empowers us with goodness and develops in us
a character that gives rather than takes. Greed is not so much rooted out as it is expelled by the presence of something greater in the heart – the goodness of God. Such goodness, given by the Spirit, transforms us into people overflowing with gratitude. No longer inflamed by the passion to possess, we experience the freedom of knowing that all things come from God.

An Exercise

1. Review the suggestions on overcoming greed (e.g. shop differently, resist advertising, expand your job scope and give generously). Brainstorm with friends or loved ones on how you can creatively apply this in your life.

2. Consider the three exhortations in Wesley’s advice: “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.” In what area is God calling you to grow, and what is one small step you can take?

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4 Richard Pollay and R. Paul Stevens, “Advertising,” in Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds., The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 26. Approximately 150 of the articles from The Complete Book are available free and can be copied from the following website: www.ivmdl.org/cbec.cfm. The Complete Book can be purchased in its entirety in soft copy (CD Rom) along with other Bible resources from the internet. See “Bible Explorer.”
6 Dennis W. Bakke, Joy at Work: A Revolutionary Approach to Fun on the Job (Toronto: Viking, 2005).
Lust: The Erotic Workplace

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lust Imagining how people can be used for self-interest</td>
<td>Love Practically caring for the best interests of others</td>
<td>Purity Experiencing wholehearted love for God and neighbor</td>
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AU: “It just occurred to me that many offices bring together talented, attractive and like-minded people for long hours and shared work. Mostly, we’re on best behavior. But that doesn’t mean that we’re sexless or emotionless. How do we develop healthy relationships with people of the opposite sex without these relationships spilling into lust?”

PS: “You are right in pointing out that the workplace is erotic. People fall in love all the time at work. I’m sure you know of people who have gotten sexually involved with a colleague.”

AU: “Or wish they could.”

PS: “Not surprising, isn’t it? After all, people work side by side for hours, days, months, and years. They dress well. They look good, and they perform at the top of their game. All this contributes to a subtle yet real eroticism in the workplace.”

AU: “Yes, even in Asian workplaces, where people dress modestly, sexual tension can creep in. A meaningful glance. An accidental bump on the shoulders in the elevator. Lunches that last longer than usual. Office romances aside, it’s not unusual to encounter
dozens of sexually explicit ads on the way to work, even in a religiously conservative Islamic country.”

PS: “Well, we cannot turn off our sexuality the moment we leave home for work, unless we play dead. It’s inevitable that we come to work as whole people, including our sexual appetite.”

AU: “Are you then implying that our sexuality could actually play a role in helping us grow spiritually when we work? Or are we playing with fire by dallying with lust and other forms of forbidden fruit?”

PS: “I think that both could be true.”

A. Rethinking Lust
Lust is commonly thought of as an intense sexual desire for someone else. The feelings are accompanied by a craving for gratification and excitement. From a Christian perspective, the word “lust” is commonly translated in Greek as epithymia, a sexual sin that perverts the God-given gift of sexuality. As with all the Seven Deadly Sins, the early beginnings of lust occurs as a thought, a disposition or attitude that eventually leads to action, including fornication, adultery and other sexual perversions. Jesus said as much: “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).
Jesus’ closest friend, the apostle John, identified three different ways in which lust unleashes its terrible energy:

- the cravings of sinful people, or the lust of the flesh
- the lust of their eyes
- the boasting of what they have and do (1 Jn. 2:16).

Here, John alludes to how lust is interlinked with other deadly sins. Lust is similar to greed because it creates an inner craving to possess things or people that do not belong to us. Lust is also similar to pride because it generates the inward desire to boast about one’s self. The combination of greed and pride – possessiveness and inwardness – makes lust a deadly enemy. Lust is not interested in loving the person but in treating the person as a body. It is essentially self-serving. “In lusting for the other, I really love myself,” says Karl Olsson, former president of Theological Seminary in Chicago. “The other becomes an instrument of my satisfaction: a bright plaything which finally grows shabby and unwanted.”

Sexuality in itself is good. It involves physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the human person created by God. The word “sex” (secrea in Latin) connotes something has been cut apart that longs to be reunited. Franciscan priest Richard Rohr notes that sexuality ensures that we would never miss the fact that we are hardwired for relationship: “It is so important that we know that we are incomplete, needy and essentially social that God had to create a life-force within us that would not be silenced.”
Sexual arousal is normal, healthy and good. But to allow that arousal to become a fantasy of a sexual affair with someone who is not your marriage partner means that arousal has become lust, the desire to possess another. “If your sexual desire is not guided by respect for the honor of others and regard for the holiness of God, it is lust,” says theologian John Piper.³

This life force must therefore be directed. Protestant reformer Martin Luther famously said that it is one thing to have a bird land on your head – you can hardly stop the arousing thoughts from popping up in your head from time to time. But it is quite another to let the bird build a nest there. The great saint and doctor of the church, Augustine of Hippo, wrote deeply and insightfully about the idolatrous appeal of lust in his autobiography *The Confessions*. He said lust disturbs the whole person, mingling mental and physical craving. “So intense is the pleasure that when it reaches its climax there is an almost total extinction of mental alertness; the intellectual sentries, as it were, are overwhelmed.”⁴

**B. Lust at Work**

In the modern workplace, lust creeps into our hearts and minds through the Internet and office romances. Usage of porn in the workplace persists despite companies cracking down on inappropriate emails and installing blocking software. Researchers have speculated that the rise of portable computers and mobile phone devices have made it easier to surf porn sites undetected. Meanwhile, sexual tension will continue to exist in
any workplace where people with similar interests, education and abilities find themselves unable to pursue a romantic connection for any number of reasons (e.g. marriage, policy enforcement, etc). Extra-marital affairs are common enough and the consequences of fallout are even more well-known: mutual recrimination, accusations of harassment and unfair treatment, decreased work performance, and especially, emotional damage inflicted on aggrieved spouses and children. And yet four out of ten people have admitted to office flings, according to recent workplace surveys conducted in the UK and Australia.⁵

      Given the pervasiveness of lust in our sexually overheated societies, it’s easy to forget that lust starts with the imagination, or in the “heart,” as Jesus once said (Matt. 5:28). Some forms of lust are especially subtle. A friend of Paul’s, from New York City, wrote the following observation:

     Women do not sin less when it comes to our sexuality, but we do sin differently. While men lust, women cause them to lust. We know we can do this; we like it when we can do this; it is power. While men have to learn the difference between arousal and lust, attraction and obsession, lust and love, women need to learn how to attract without causing them to lust. Our job is much more difficult. While we do not assume the responsibility of men's own actions, we do often create the environment they live in.

     The worst result of lust is not only the diminishment of oneself and the one lusted after. But as every Christian who has struggled with sexual addiction knows, lust
ultimately results in the loss of intimacy with God. The strange attraction of lust – for both men and women – is particularly pernicious because the sensual pleasure seems so fleeting and ephemeral compared to lust’s consequences (spiritual estrangement) and love’s rewards (intimacy with God). To put it in bluntly: would you prioritize a sexual climax above experiencing God’s love? Probably not.

C. Overcoming Lust

Our soul-sapping struggle with lust offers us clues to our heart’s great longing for something deeper and more real: to be loved intimately by God, and to love people with that same intimate, pure love God has for us. Love conquers lust. Lust looks to be serviced; love serves. This conversion from lust to love is a long and slow road, but we can start now, with several guiding principles and practical steps below. (It’s helpful to keep in mind the admonition of Matthew the Poor, an Orthodox monk, who says that the most devoted spiritual practices cannot atone for a single sin. Rather, our unflinching focus on mortifying sinful desires is simply a way of sharing our love and tender feelings toward God.⁶)

1. Know that your heart’s deepest desires are for God. Hunger and passion for God puts all lesser desires into perspective. Are you harboring the illicit desire to bed the spouse of another? Stirred by the sensuality of porn? Then consider how, in the words of Methodist Bishop William Willimon, “our God wants to make love with us, and enjoys having us, in our own fumbling ways to make love to God.”⁷ Christianity is not about extinguishing desire but directing it toward the One who
has created us for communion with Himself. Such a realization will lead you into the heart of prayer.

2. Reduce exposure to erotic stimulation in the choice of movies, novels and internet sites. During business trips, consider the moments when you might be exposed to visuals and people that could lead to sexual arousal. Put in place a plan that will help you avoid temptations (and arrange outdoor activities and visits with friends to fill the void). In a sex-saturated society, this is a life-giving spiritual discipline that helps to break lust’s secret lock on your heart.

3. Pray for a colleague, a customer or a supervisor whom you find attractive. This keeps you from treating people as bodies, and gives you God’s view of the person. “Delight to the eyes” becomes an opportunity to confess beauty to God, since God is delightful and beautiful.  

4. Seek accountability partners. Prioritize time to develop trustworthy friends, or a group of peers, who care enough to ask you tough questions about your private life.

5. Identify the early beginnings of lustful thoughts. Consider the time, circumstances and people – and any other triggers – that stir your imagination before you work, when you work, and after working hours. The more sensitive you are to lust’s early beginnings, the less acute the battle will be. Your heightened vigilance also
helps you become more responsive to the Spirit’s gentle and quiet guidance in your heart.

An Exercise

Prayerfully review the guiding principles on overcoming lust.

- Are there any specific actions that you must urgently carry out? Share your intent with a trusted friend today.

- Are there any long-term attitudes or behaviors you desire? Go for a long walk and ask God to “create a clean heart” within you (Psalm 51).

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6 Matthew the Poor, Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 118.
8 See “the beauty of the LORD” Psalm 27:4.
5

Gluttony: Excessive Consumption

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<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gluttony</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Relinquishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding satisfaction through excessive consumption</td>
<td>Being governed from the inside through values and the Spirit’s leading</td>
<td>Experiencing the freedom to release possessions and to live and work more simply</td>
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PS: “I’ve visited food capitals around the world in the course of teaching, consulting and coaching. Along the way, my hosts have brought me to fantastic restaurants offering sumptuous dishes. Do you think the pursuit of good food actually dulls our spiritual senses?”

AU: “Hopefully not! Where I come from, we are serious eaters. We talk about what we’re going to eat for dinner during breakfast. Business deals are clinched during a fine meal. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. But we don’t reflect enough on how excessive consumption hinders us from living well. For example, with all the easy access to affordable food, I’ve become desensitized to the plight of one billion people in the world who do not have enough to eat.”

PS: “Eating should revolve around communion, fellowship and the sharing of life. In Latin, the word ‘company’ means ‘shared bread.’ When we work together, we are sharing food and the means of livelihood. Gluttony turns eating into excessive consumption. And yet, as Christians, we’re usually not troubled by it. Gluttony has become a respectable sin, hasn’t it?”
AU: “It seems like we’ve lost the central meaning to why we eat. So, Paul, when does the appreciation of good food and good company become excessive?”

A. Rethinking Gluttony

We usually associate gluttons with grossly obese people, Roman bacchanalia or vomitoria. But we cannot judge gluttony by bodily appearances alone. Some obese people are “cursed” with glandular problems while other gluttonous people are “blessed” with a high metabolic rate – looking slim and trim even after stuffing their faces. Gluttony encompasses much more than guzzling super-sized meals. Food eating disorders, such as anorexia, is arguably a reverse form of gluttony.

The sin of gluttony lies in finding satisfaction through excessive consumption. We use the word ‘gluttony’ for a variety of excesses: ‘He is a glutton for work.’ ‘She is a glutton for punishment.’ ‘He’s a glutton for attention.’ Gluttony is about having too much of a good thing, be it excessive television, sex, leisure, company or work. Gluttony putrefies life-giving activities into addictive indulgence. Since medieval times, Christian thinkers and philosophers have linked lust and gluttony. Both indicate a lack of self-control (which, as we will see, serves as the Spirit’s life-giving resource that enables us to live well).

In a narrower sense, gluttony is an inordinate preoccupation with food and eating. On a basic level, it reduces our energy for work and relationships. We become
preoccupied with self-pleasure rather than caring others. Ultimately, gluttony drives out mindfulness of God and people. The first test faced by Adam and Eve came through eating; their failure to obey resulted in alienation from God. This is tragic because God has always intended food, work and fellowship to go together.

In the Bible, God’s first gift to humankind was food (Gen. 1:30) and it is something we are asked to pray for daily (Matt. 6:11). Eating in the Bible is often a picture of God's blessing (Deut. 6:11; 8:10-12; 11:15; Psa. 23:5). It can be a means of grace (Lk. 24:31; Acts 10) and a ministry (Matt. 25:35 "I was hungry,” Jesus said, “and you gave me something to eat."). Eating is frequently a part of biblical festivals. Under the older covenant, people were encouraged to use their tithe to buy food and drink for a festival in Jerusalem (Deut. 14:22-26). Jesus later used the feast-motif as a metaphor of God’s Kingdom (Lk. 14:15-24) and it seems that God had in mind the Wedding Supper of the Lamb in the New Heaven and New Earth when he created the world (Rev. 19:7).

There is more to eating than mere ingestion and nourishment for survival. The experience of taste manifests an openness to the world, tinged with wonder and appreciation,” writes philosopher Leon Kass. We eat to live, we eat to enjoy the fellowship of people, and we eat to experience aesthetic pleasure. On a mystical level, eating is sacramental. By faith, Christians believe in the real presence of Jesus in the bread and wine eucharist (Matt. 26:17-30).
**B. Gluttony at Work**

Gluttony is debilitating in the workplace. It results in drowsiness and reduced mental alertness. People have often acted silly, lost their dignity or indulged in slovenly behavior as they gorged themselves on meals. Excessive food and drink – especially common in Asian business settings – could encourage suspension of judgment. Even business lunches on the company tab might tempt people to over-indulge. More seriously, a gluttonous workforce is going to be a sick workforce. Workers will not function at maximum capacity because of the many diseases and illnesses related to obesity.

Pope Gregory I defined the vice of gluttony in five ways: “Sometimes it forestalls the hour of need; sometimes it seeks costly meats; sometimes it requires the food to be daintily cooked; sometimes it exceeds the measure of refreshment by taking too much; sometimes we sin by the very heat of an immoderate appetite.”

This thoughtful critique has several implications, namely:

1. You can be a glutton by eating too often throughout the day, paying no attention to when you eat.

2. You can be a glutton by eating too expensively.

3. You can be a glutton by being too fastidious about your food – consumed in large or small amounts. Some people eat like they’re gourmands and restaurant critics on the Food Network. On the opposite spectrum, a gluttonous person may not
crave a lot of food but insists on the “teeniest weeniest bit of really crisp toast.”
This person is gluttonous because he or she is determined to get what he or she wants, however troublesome it may be to the host.  

4. You can be a glutton by wanting more and more. Besides uncontrolled eating, the excessive preoccupation with food manifests itself in opposite extremes, such as anorexia and the rejection of food altogether. You could argue that dieting is pursued not for health but solely for beauty is also a form of gluttony.

5. Your preoccupation with gluttony could leave you vulnerable to sin’s offspring, especially lust, because both are related to the inability to control the body’s excessive desires. The desert fathers and mothers were especially aware of this psychosomatic link, and often suggested that lust could be constrained in tandem with fasting.

C. Overcoming Gluttony

There is a correlation between godly living and learning to eat in a moderate, temperate and restrained manner. The most serious forms of gluttony are spiritual in nature: excessive consumption results in selfishness, blatant disregard for the wellbeing of others, indifference to suffering, living in gratification, and finding satisfaction in personal pleasure instead of God. Because of this, the cure for gluttony is ultimately spiritual.
1. Start with self-knowledge: Develop a growing awareness of your relationship with food. You may wish to record the time spent in planning, buying, preparing and eating food. Do you really want to consume so much time and energy? Do you need to confess to God any excessive food compulsions? What are other meaningful things you’d love to do besides food-related activities?

2. Lifestyle changes: Consider taking small steps in reforming lifestyle and attitudes related to food. For example, you could practise a modest form of partial fasting by deciding not to eat desserts except for special occasions.

3. Thanksgiving: Learn to give thanks for available food rather than always craving for something else or something more. “The right food,” writes Clement of Alexandria, “is thanksgiving.” The food we eat is a constant reminder that we depend on God’s faithfulness and goodness. Paul says the same thing: “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Ultimately, Jesus says that our perspective toward food and work reveal whether we trust God – or worry excessively about daily provision: “Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow” (Matt. 6:33, The Message).
An Exercise

Gluttony is not just about eating too much but also includes your attitude toward food.

- Is your concentration at work affected because you’re thinking about food?
- Do you snack too much before and after meal times?
- Do you spend too much on food?
- Do you obsess about the quality of food? Are you annoyed, or do you complain excessively, when a dish fails to meet your expectations?
- Are you a picky eater?
- Do you eat too much, and do you do it too eagerly?

Prayerfully reflect on Matthew 6:33 (The Message) and look out for opportunities this coming week to apply this verse in your life.

6

**Anger: The Burning Desire to Control**

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<th>Struggle</th>
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<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Gentleness</td>
<td>Surrendered Contentment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using passion to manipulate and</td>
<td>Empowering others by renouncing personal</td>
<td>Experiencing the satisfaction of who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control people and circumstances</td>
<td>agendas and expressing meekness</td>
<td>you are, what you have and what you do</td>
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AU: “I don’t think of myself as a walking time bomb. I don’t usually get mad at coworkers, scheme against bosses or punch my fist against the wall. I don’t humiliate others or stoke people into a rage. I try to be nice. And yet, do you think that deep down, we all struggle with anger in some way or other?”

PS: “Typically we think of anger as the tough and mean cigar-chomping Big Boss who thinks it’s okay to goad, bully, intimidate or shout as long as he gets the job done. But what about when we seethe in silence when our colleague steals our idea and gets all the credit? Isn’t that anger?”

AU: “Or when we stare contemptuously at people who show up late for meetings?”

PS: “Or get frustrated with the spouse who tells us we’re working too hard?”

AU: “Or when we marinate in self-disgust after flubbing our presentation in front of the chairman of the board?”
PS: “Or sometimes we just feel a nagging irritability throughout the day. And we get madder at ourselves for not being able to pinpoint the cause.”

AU: “Some nights, as I get ready for bed, I see the face of the offender in my mind’s eye. And I’m playing and replaying that awful scene, earlier in the day, when he yelled at me for something that wasn’t my fault. Boy, I feel like yelling back at him.”

PS: “It’s so easy to get angry when things spiral out of control.”

AU: “Yeah, I’m getting angry about all the ways that I can’t control anger!”

A. Rethinking Anger

“On a business terrain, the player who fights without anger is at a distinct disadvantage, because the real guns out there are furious all the time, and are truly happy only if they are stomping on the face that they have just torn from the bleeding skull of their despised adversary,” wrote Stanley Bing in his book, Sun Tzu was a Sissy: Conquer Your Enemies, Promote Your friends, and Wage War. “Other than patience and a hollow leg, anger is the single most important personal attribute that a warrior can possess.”

Bing, the irreverent columnist for Fortune magazine, wrote the above tongue-in-cheek, but he’s probably correct in surmising that most people use anger as a powerful tool to manipulate and control people and circumstances.
Anger, one of the Seven Deadly Sins, shows up in countless ways where we live and work: general harassment, whether sexual or some other form; favoritism of one employee over another; criticisms of employees in front of staff or clients, or behind their backs; withdrawal of earned benefits; betrayal of trust and poor communication.

Anger becomes sin when it is allowed to boil over without restraint, resulting in a “sawed-off shotgun” consequence in which everyone in earshot is hurt, leaving devastation in its wake...often with irreparable consequences. “Fools give full vent to their rage,” says the writer of Proverbs (Prov. 29:11). Rather than speaking the truth in love, we allow rotten and destructive words to pour from our lips (Eph. 4:15, 29). Anger also becomes sin when one clams up, doing the “slow burn.” This causes one to become irritable and fly off the handle over any little thing, often things unrelated to the underlying problem.

But not all anger is destructive. In the Bible, anger is described as a burning, seething force that can be aroused in human beings and also in God. Two Greek words are used in the New Testament for our English word “anger.” One (orge) means “passion, energy;” the other (thumos) means “agitated, boiling.” Biblically, anger is God-given energy intended to help us solve problems. Examples of biblical uses of anger include Paul confronting Peter because of his wrong example (Gal. 2:11-14), David being upset over hearing Nathan the prophet sharing an injustice (2 Sam. 12), and Jesus getting angry
over how some Jews had defiled the Gentiles’ place of worship at God’s temple in Jerusalem (Jn. 2:13-18).

Paul implies that not all anger is sin when he writes, “In your anger do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). The spiritual fathers of the church observe that anger has great force to fight against demons or destroy evil thoughts. “Expressing anger can be God-pleasing and constructive when our underlying motivation is to restore relationships, fight injustice or battle evil,” writes Tomas Spidlik, a scholar from the Eastern Orthodox tradition.²

Though present in God in the form of righteous anger, and harnessed by Jesus Christ as zeal for God’s house, most forms of anger residing within us are destructive. Anger turns to sin when it is selfishly motivated (James 1:20), or when anger is allowed to linger (Eph. 4:26-27). Instead of using the energy generated by anger to attack the problem at hand, one attacks the person instead.

B. Anger at Work

Of all our emotions, anger is the most explosive, often raw-edged, and a catalyst for other destructive forces such as envy, pride, depression and murder. Even when we try to suppress anger, we do violence to our inner selves and irreparably harm our loved ones. Anger freezes over a warm and generous heart, leaving behind a permafrost of politeness and niceness (punctuated by icicles of resentment and sarcasm). If left unchecked, this could lead to depression. The thoughts of wounding others results in wounding self.
Anger will cause us to sabotage friendships, professional relationships and community life. Ultimately we become estranged from God (angry people cannot pray).

John Cassian, a fourth century theologian, has reflected extensively on how anger can potentially rupture community life, especially within the two monasteries he founded in Europe. His insights are especially relevant to the modern workplace (and the church, too), where anger is disguised or suppressed by forced smiles and cordial emails.

1. He warns against short-term solutions in dealing with anger. We could try to conceal our annoyance or pretend to smooth things over or seek false peace. But Cassian says that is a band-aid solution. Our cool demeanor creates a more terrible problem: we become scornful of others.3

2. We face double jeopardy when we use silence and derision as weapons to provoke others into anger: “A spiteful silence surpasses the harshest verbal abuse, and the wounds of enemies are more easily borne than the sly compliments of mockers.”4

3. The poisonous effects of anger become deeply embedded when we seek to be nice to one another even though deep down, we harbor hatred. Cassian warns against toxic relationships where we attempt to preserve a veneer of niceness. Too easily, we become like Judas who offered a “feigned greeting and a kiss of deceitful love.”5

4. Often we’re unable to tell that we’re suppressing anger. But our bodies don’t lie, suggests Cassian. Suppressed anger often leads to loss of appetite, sleeplessness and fantasies of controlling people.6 At the heart of anger is the desire to control.
C. Overcoming Anger

Companies have attempted to contain the radioactive results of workplace anger through anger management seminars, executive coaching to help CEOs overcome fits of rage, and even yoga and meditation classes. Other strategies include conflict resolution, taking a time out, positive self-talk, managing stress and developing EQ skills.

Cassian, who spent decades observing how disputes were mediated among monasteries, suggests several ideas for dealing with anger that are applicable in the workplace: ensure you remain calm in your lips as well as depths of the heart; do not speak in rage; say no to vengeance; and ask God to enlarge your hearts so that the turbulent waves of wrath will be dissipated in the harbor of love. These restraints on the mouth and the heart are crucial when people work in teams.

It is generally not advisable to eradicate anger head-on, lest we become even more angry when we fail or realize we cannot control anger. Rather, overcoming anger requires indirect means of surrendering to God the desire to control. This includes:

1. Cultivate meekness: the first step is to confess your struggles with anger before God. Do not fret over your own imperfections. Of course, you must rightly be displeased and sorry when you commit faults, but it is usually a sign of the desire to control when you become angry at being angry. Meek people are not shocked by sin; they admit their struggles to God and to others.
2. Cut off anger at the roots: become aware of the early beginnings of anger in your heart, and how it grows from a tiny seed into a redwood tree. Should you find yourself becoming angry, do not suppress anger in a violent or forceful manner, which will only exacerbate the situation. Rather, cry out to God for mercy.

3. Cultivate gentleness during the periods you aren’t angry: if you are naturally loud, speak gently to colleagues and loved ones. Pray for your enemies. Forgive others as Jesus forgave. When you practice this, you will discover that you are deeply loved by God (who has restrained His anger against you and embraced you as His child).

Anger purified by love and gentleness, can become a powerful force of transformation in the workplace. We will no longer use anger to manipulate and control people and circumstances. Rather, with the Spirit’s help, we will naturally renounce personal agendas and seek to build people up.

An Exercise

1. Identify five moments of frustrations in your workplace. Review the ways in which you might have suppressed or disguised anger:
   - Did you conceal your annoyance?
   - Did you seek false peace?
   - Did you use silence as a form of retaliation?
   - Did you pretend to be nice to people you despise?
   - Did you suffer from insomnia and loss of appetite because of workplace stress?
2. In your desire to become a gentle soul, prayerfully consider how you can creatively apply Cassian’s three suggestions on overcoming anger.

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4 Cassian, *Conferences*, 569.
5 Cassian, *Conferences*, 569.
6 Cassian, *Conferences*, 570.
7 Cassian, *Conferences*, 574.
Sloth: Pathological Busyness

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<th>Struggle</th>
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<th>Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sloth</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Life-giving Rhythms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing minimal or the least important work, and loving ease</td>
<td>Persisting in important work with utter reliability</td>
<td>Experiencing a pattern of life that produces excellent work without being consumed by it</td>
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AU: “Paul, how do you find the time to attend to the important things when there are so many competing, urgent demands?”

PS: “What’s going on in your life that prompts you to ask this question?”

AU: “The past few weeks have been really crazy. There’s just too much going on: multiple deadlines, new projects, an overseas trip. But I’m pretty sure the crazy stuff will blow over in a few months’ time. Then, I will get serious about spending more time with my wife during the weekends. And stop checking the Blackberry after midnight.”

PS: “You sound pathologically busy.”

AU: “At least I’m not lazy. I’m not idle. I don’t neglect my duties. I don’t laze around with a pina colada five days a week. Better to be busy than lazy.”

PS: “My hunch is that the workaholic and the lazy bum are closer to one another than you think.”
A. Rethinking Sloth

Some people seem to harbor a severe aversion to work. Their work habits are reminiscent of three-toed sloth in the Amazon that hangs upside down from branches and moves so sluggishly that moss grows on its sun-drenched belly. Similarly, slothful people slouch along in stupefied apathy, allowing their talents to wither away. At work, their lazy habits become reprehensible, as they work diligently to avoid work, resulting in more work for their colleagues.

“There are few things I hate more than laziness,” said real estate mogul and TV celebrity Donald Trump. “I work very, very hard and I expect the people who work for me to do the same. If you want to succeed, you cannot relax…. I never take vacations because I can't handle the time away from my work. I recently read that these days, a high percentage of the people who do take vacations tend to check email and voicemail and call in to the office when they leave. Those are the people I want working for me.”

Trump misses the point here. Lazy people aren’t the only ones who are slothful. Extremely busy people can also be slothful. Consider the symptoms of a workaholic who works all the time: he ignores family and loved ones; he ignores pain signals telegraphed by his body; and he’s self-absorbed. She treats people in a perfunctory manner. And without the high-adrenaline buzz of work, she feels useless, listless, guilty, and depressed. Such withdrawal symptoms are strangely similar to someone who’s chronically lazy.
The book of Proverbs inveighs against the sluggard and praises hard work. But there are more nuances to the matter than what appears at first sight. Derek Kidner, in his commentary on Proverbs, makes a summary observation that the slothful will not begin things, will not finish things and will not face up to things. Here, it is assumed that even the slothful person works. The heart of the problem lies in the fact that the morally and spiritually lazy person is someone who prefers to whittle away at lesser problems while refusing to attend to the most important work at hand. “Consequently, he is restless with unsatisfied desire,” says Kidner, and “helpless in the face of the tangle of his affairs.”

The slothful person’s appetite is never filled (Prov. 13:4). To be more exact, he actually has a huge desire to do what is righteous, but he simply refuses to spring into action to do what he knows he must do (Prov. 21:25-26).

The chronically lazy person chooses to do minimal work while the work-obsessed person exerts tremendous energy doing less important work. In both cases, they harm themselves and the people around them. Sloth has also deadened their spiritual senses from being attuned to the work of God.

B. Sloth at Work

When we consider how sloth creeps its way into the workplace, five kinds of slothful personalities come to mind. These include:

1. Indulgent Irene drifts from one amusement to another. She despises the daily tedium of work. She conceives of life as an endless cruise on the Aegean sea: no
stress, no tears, no anxiety, no decisions except what to eat and where to sun one’s self. Unfortunately such a dream world doesn’t exist.

2. Holy Joe works sluggishly during the day but perks to life the moment he leaves office and walks into church. He refuses to invest himself fully in the workplace, claiming that his day job is “secular” and pays the bills, but has no bearing on serving God. Despite Joe’s zeal, he undermines his Christian witness due to his half-hearted attitude at work.

3. Disengaged Diana has tuned herself out. She works for a salary but does not want to make a difference. Though present in body, her mind’s elsewhere. She is uninvolved, uncommitted, uncaring. Diana may not think that she’s a problem but her attitude demoralizes her coworkers and sucks energy out of the room.

4. Abdicating Andrew likes being a spectator. He ignores the needs of the world around him, including people in dire trouble. He looks the other way when he thinks someone’s asking for help. Do not count on him to speak up for truth, especially when that requires any personal sacrifice.

5. The Extreme Evelyn is the most common manifestation of a modern-day sluggard. She’s a highly talented knowledge worker who loves her job and feels validated by her accomplishments. Evelyn has bequeathed the perks of an ultimate road warrior i.e. Blackberry, business class travel, a bottomless expense account. Her work is often alluring, exciting…accompanied by the adrenaline rush of clinching deals or completing projects.
In a December 2006 article published in the *Harvard Business Review*, Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Carolyn Buck Luce studied people who held “extreme jobs” i.e. high-paid professionals who work 60 hours or more per week and hold jobs with at least five of the following characteristics:

- Unpredictable flow of work
- Fast-paced work under tight deadlines
- Inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one job
- Work-related events outside regularly work hours
- Availability to clients 24/7
- Responsibility for profit and loss
- Responsibility for mentoring and recruiting
- Large amount of travel
- Large number of direct reports
- Physical presence at the workplace at least 10 hours a day.\(^3\)

The financial pay off for such hard work can be huge. There are, however, numerous hidden costs. Most extreme workers say they don’t get enough sleep or exercise; they overeat; they neglect relationships with children; and after a 12-hour day, they feel too tired to even talk to their spouses. They don’t properly maintain their homes. They are unwilling to do manual labor – from putting out the trash to scrubbing the toilet.

Workaholism brings spiritual dangers as well. Since it causes people’s brains to shut down, they have no energy to think about anything other than work – relationships,
marriage, children, health, parents, church, relationship with God, and especially matters of eternal consequence. They are waiting for life to get less busy, then they’ll put things right. But chances are, they’ll doggedly persist in doing the same things over and over again. They will toil in jobs that violate their basic principles, even when survival does not absolutely demand it. They work obsessively until they lose the capacity for self-awareness. With their inner vigilance lulled to sleep by sloth, they linger on in settings that steadily kill their spirits.

“Slothful people,” says Frederick Buechner, “may be very busy people. They are people who…fly on automatic pilot. Like somebody with a bad head cold, they have mostly lost their sense of taste and smell. They know something’s wrong with them, but not wrong enough to do anything about it.”

C. Overcoming Sloth

Jesus Christ offers us a sharply contrasting model that has huge implications on how we work. When accused of healing a paralytic on Sabbath, Jesus said: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working” (Jn. 5:17). Jesus did not abdicate when he saw desperate need; nor did he use Sabbath laws to justify inaction. In contrast to the sluggard, Jesus is fully responsive to the Father. He sprung into action and healed the man.

Yet Jesus is no workaholic. He realizes his limitations and harbors no illusions about self-sufficiency. He puts it starkly: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by
himself” (Jn. 5:19). A person with a profound self-knowledge and God-knowledge would never fall into the trap of work addiction. The key to effective and godly action lies in seeing God’s action in our world. Such inner sight requires discernment that enables us to become like ants that innately know the best season for harvesting food (Prov. 6:6-11).

We are hewing at the roots of sloth when we resolve to be faithful to both great and little tasks. “Great opportunities to serve God rarely present themselves but little ones are frequent,” says Francis de Sales, who wrote Introduction to the Devout Life, a classic guide on the spiritual life.⁵ We break the chokehold sloth has on us when we learn to be at peace with housework, calmly washing dishes and “doing the meanest household chores cheerfully and filled with love and affection for God.”⁶ The preacher arranges chairs; the CEO throws away trash in his office; the manager waters his colleague’s geraniums. All around us, in the workplace and our neighborhoods, there are always humble duties we can do for God’s pleasure. Mother Teresa was a great example of this. “In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love,” she is heard speaking in that gravelly voice of hers in “Mother Teresa”, the deeply moving film produced by Ann and Jeanette Petrie.

The practice of sabbath – ceasing from work for a 24-hour week – can be part of a healing process from sloth. People who are on a treadmill of working harder and harder to support a particular lifestyle desperately need this.⁷ Sabbath is not merely cessation from work. A sabbatical life grants us God’s big view of the meaning of our lives as we entrust our work to the God who “neither slumbers nor sleeps” (Ps. 121).
An Exercise

Review the five personalities listed above (from Indulgent Irene to the Extreme Evelyn).

Do you embody any of their attributes? Prayerfully ask God to change your attitude towards work. Share your hopes and any specific next steps with a friend.

4 Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC (San Francisco: Harpers, 1993), 109-110.
6 de Sales, Introduction, 201.
Envy: The Pain of Another’s Advancement

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>Envy Feeling the pain of other’s advancement and possessions</td>
<td>Kindness Putting others at ease, and rejoicing in their gifts and achievements</td>
<td>Neighbor Love Experiencing the ability to meet the needs of others, and to contribute to their well-being</td>
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AU: “I feel sheepish for admitting this. But why is it that I feel displeasure when somebody else is succeeding?”

PS: “Any specific example comes to mind?”

AU: “It seems so trivial. During a planning meeting, a colleague got up and started to sketch a chart on the white board: a really elaborate one, with boxes within boxes, bullet points, and arrows pointing this way and that. He incorporated everyone’s feedback. The strategy, the goals, the next steps and the detailed action plan were all there. He drew it perfectly the first time. Most importantly, it galvanized the team and spurred everyone to action.

“I should have been rejoicing with my colleague. But within me, I asked myself, ‘Why couldn’t I have done it?’ I felt sorry that I didn’t have the skills and experience.’”

PS: “No one is exempt from struggling with envy, especially in the workplace, where we are so prone to comparing our achievements with that of others. Fredrick Buechner, a
pastor and prize-winning author, says that ‘Envy is the consuming desire to have everybody else as unsuccessful as you are.’”

AU: “I can see how envy transforms me into a negatron. Rather than value my gifts and celebrate the gifts of other people, I berate myself and disparage their accomplishments. It’s awful.”

PS: “At least you’re able to recognize the early signs of envy. Some of us are eaten up by envy and we don’t even know it.”

A. Rethinking Envy

Envy (individa in Latin) is a primal sin among the seven deadly sins. Along with pride, the ancient doctors of the soul considered envy the most intractable and pernicious of the seven deadlies, more so than lust or anger. Envy fuses together jealousy and selfish ambition. It is described as demonic (James 3:16). It is a magnet for other vices. It compounds the effects of other deadly sins. Envy is diabolical, said Saint Augustine of Hippo, because we rejoice when we see the misfortune of a neighbor, and feel displeasure when we see someone prosper.²

Not surprisingly, many theologians and spiritual directors consider envy or jealousy a deadlier foe than anger. “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” observes the writer of Proverbs (27:4). Like cancer, envy consumes our inner being. It “rots the bones” (Prov. 14: 30).
In the Hebrew Scriptures, envy is usually related to jealousy, rivalry and misplaced zeal. We are shown that envy distorts good intentions by imbuing them with evil; the end result is usually terrible. Cain longs for God’s approval but he falls into envy and kills his favored brother. Rachel yearns to bear a child but envy causes her to detest her sister’s fertile womb. Saul, who longed for his people’s approval, drives himself mad (literally) with envy as he mobilized his troops to hunt down David, his protégé. The prime example of how envy putrefies good intentions into greater evil can be found in the behavior of the chief priests who delivered Jesus to his death. The religious leaders convinced themselves that they were acting out of the good of the nation, but the gospel writers, who reflect God’s perspective, pointed out that the chief priests did it “out of envy” (Matt. 27:18).

Paradoxically enough, the more we grow in virtue, the more susceptible we are to envy. So even after Peter was forgiven and commissioned by Jesus thrice to feed his sheep (Jn. 21), Peter couldn’t help being curious about whether the Lord was treating a fellow disciple more favorably. “What about John?” Peter quizzed Jesus. But Jesus replied curtly that it was none of Peter’s business.

**B. Envy at Work**

Envy often begins when we compare ourselves upward or to those around. We hear voices in our head saying, “I deserve this more than that lazy, good-for-nothing fellow
sitting next to me. Why did he get promoted when I got passed over? Why am I being treated so unfairly compared to so-and-so?”

Inevitably, such comparisons causes us to resent our station in life and envy someone else’s calling. A homemaker might resent her invisible status and envy her spouse whose office work gains him public praise. We might demean our tasks at hand, while casting an envious eye on someone else’s project that appears to be fast-tracked for success. It doesn’t help that most companies today function in a globalized environment where winning is prized: it’s okay to tear down the reputations of organizations and rivals we envy.

Envy can be legislated in company policies, societal norms and national legislation, causing greater conflict between the haves and have-nots. Those who enjoy the entitlements (be it senior management, political leaders or certain ethnic groups) often cling to their rights and privileges, even when it’s clear that others will suffer. Meanwhile, the have-nots who stew in resentment are waiting for the day when the privileged will be punished. In both cases, envy causes people to drag other people down.

Dorothy Sayers, the twentieth century literary critic and author, calls envy “the great leveler”: if it cannot level things up, it will level them down. “Rather than have anyone happier than itself, it will see us miserable together,” says Sayers.³

Among Christians, envy takes the form of spiritual competitiveness. It is easy to envy those who appear to preach better, teach better or even pray better. Envy is sinister
because its early beginnings are so mixed up with good things. In fact, our desire for
greater good could be the very thing that arouses envy: a winsome personality;
effectiveness in Christian ministry; polished education; vivacious children; a seemingly
trouble-free existence. We might even long for ‘holy’ things: a seat on the church
committee; theological education; or to be recognized by others as a wise leader. Hardly
anyone admits to suffering from full-blown envy. We naturally learn to disguise its
ugliness and this makes it difficult to recognize the evil of envy – even its minor
forms – in ourselves.

Like all the other deadly sins, there’s a progression in envy that begins in the
mind, seeps into our feelings, slips onto our tongue, and gets played out in action.

- **Looking:** Envy begins with looking around. For example, you measure yourself
  against people who’re similar to you. How much money are they making? What
  are they driving, wearing, seeing and doing? You feel anxious and resentful. At
  this stage you’re not sinning. You’re simply looking.

- **Self-pity:** The more you look, the more you feel sorry for yourself. You’re
disgusted by his success. You’re dejected because you deserve the glory, not him.
  At this stage, envy has penetrated your thoughts.

- **Guerrilla warfare:** You verbalize your thoughts, anxiety and resentment. You
gossip, spread rumors and find small, indirect ways to tear down her
accomplishments through backhanded compliments and faint praise. You’re actively sinning through your words of envy.

- Full-blown war: Your words become action. Day and night, you conceive of how to actively destroy his reputation – or deprive him of happiness. You even enlist conspirators to spite him, directly and indirectly. You’re now in envy’s thrall. And you’re probably the most miserable person in your office right now.

C. Overcoming Envy

There are no easy remedies against envy. The first step is to be vigilant against this chameleon-like foe. We suggest the following steps:

- Guard your eyes. What are the things you see that cause you to compare yourself with other people?
- Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Become aware of “poor me” words and thoughts.
- Don’t spread even the slightest rumor about your neighbor or do anything that “assassinates” your colleague.
- Kill envy by teaching ourselves to be grateful to God for whatever he has given us, whether big or small, whether water or dryness.

The exact opposite of envy’s grasping nature is found in Jesus’ call for us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Envy is the only one of the seven deadly sins that is listed in the Ten Commandments: “You shall not covet… anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exod. 20:17). This commandment, taken positively, challenges us with two questions.
First, do we love God enough to be content with whatever he gives us? And second, do we love our neighbor enough to not covet what she has?

In loving our neighbor, we embody kindness – a fruit that results from life in the Holy Spirit. We rejoice over our colleagues’ gifts and achievements, as if these were our own (James 2:8). Rather than tearing people down with our words and actions, we become natural at putting people at ease.

An Exercise

1. Recall one recent even at your workplace where you found yourself feeling envious. Where were you on the progression of envy (i.e. looking, self-pity, guerilla warfare, full-blown war). Write a prayer of confession and ask God for healing.

2. On a daily basis, identify five to ten things that give you joy. Give thanks to God.

3 Jarvik, “Envy.”
Restlessness: The Desire to Run Away

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<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>Restlessness</td>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Vocational Confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking and feeling that</td>
<td>Having the ability to remain</td>
<td>Experiencing the certainty that you are in God’s will and</td>
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<tr>
<td>there’s always something</td>
<td>where you are with meaningfulness</td>
<td>doing God’s work</td>
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<td>better somewhere else</td>
<td>and hope</td>
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PS: “You’ve worked in six jobs, in six different fields, in four different countries. And you’re still in your thirties. Have you ever struggled with restlessness, or the thought that there’s always something better out there?”

AU: “For sure. We live in a business culture where people are rewarded for notching up skills and competencies by moving around in different companies or divisions within the shortest possible time. By positioning myself as a relentless learner who thrives on acquiring new skills, I am rewarded for restlessness!”

PS: “You sound rather pleased with yourself. Too pleased, in fact.”

AU: “You might be right. Do you think restlessness is a spiritual ailment?”

PS: “It can be. One consequence of restlessness is that if you’re constantly moving, or constantly running away from problems, you will not face up to your true self. Old problems will resurface. If you had trouble delivering on promises in your old company,
you’ll probably over-promise and under-deliver in the new company. People who move around too much often lose the capacity for thoughtful reflection.”

AU: “Ouch. And thanks for suggesting that I should reflect more thoughtfully on this issue.”

**A. Rethinking Restlessness**

Certain kinds of jobs are inclined to cause restlessness: the deskbound writer churning out crappy first drafts; the preparation cook cubing carrots for the stock pot; the high-school teacher grading badly written essays; the accountant wading through Excel spreadsheets. Most jobs that involve continuous stress, repetition, or solitary work will drive us to distraction or induce in us the urge to go and do something else. However, people who are engaged in highly stimulating work can also feel the itch of restlessness. Many people feel they are labouring in the wrong career, while others find success but no satisfaction in their jobs. They can’t shrug off the thought that there’s always something better out there.

Evagrius of Ponticus, the fourth century theologian who possessed a brilliant, intuitive understanding of the inner life, classified these thoughts and feeling as **acedia**, a term which has no equivalent in modern language. **Acedia** is marked by a profound restlessness that leaves us agitated, discouraged and ungrateful for our present circumstances. In our jet-setting culture of mobility, job-hopping and globalization, restlessness might seem integral to life. To be called a “road warrior” or “global nomad”
often confers prestige and respect. Not so for Evagrius. Among a pantheon of sins, Evagrius classified acedia as one of the eight deadly thoughts\(^1\) that lead us away from allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Acedia has been called the “noonday demon” because it usually attains its greatest force during the day. At the most basic level, acedia is deadly because it causes us to despise our present circumstances, work and even life itself. At the same time, this spiritual sickness drives us to desire things that are tantalizingly out of reach. We run madly from place to place, searching for something or someone that will bring satisfaction to longings we do not know how to describe. “Acedia wages a two-pronged attack, an entangled struggle of hate and desire,” writes monastic scholar William Harmless.\(^2\) The prophet Isaiah likened restless people to the troubled sea whose constant movement churns up muck and mire (Isa. 57:20-21).

Not all forms of restlessness are harmful, though. Jacob, from the Old Testament, and the woman from Samaria, from the New Testament, embodied such restlessness. Jacob wandered from place to place seeking out one blessing after another but never finding what he truly wanted. In the same way, the unnamed Samaritan woman lingered in the noonday sun, thirsting after something deeper. Their restlessness ultimately drove them into the arms of God. The brilliant theologian, Augustine of Hippo, who wrestled with restlessness throughout his twenties and thirties, observed in his Confessions: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”\(^3\)
B. Restlessness at Work

The first sign of restlessness at work occurs when we carry out our tasks half-heartedly – though we might be present in body, we are absent in spirit. Gradually we begin to abdicate, justifying our responsibilities as other people’s work. We learn the art of ‘tai chi,’ using our hands and feet to ward off assignments headed our way and diverting work to other people’s desks. Perversely, even as we become lackadaisical workers, we fantasize about how we can be doing great things for God in some faraway place, like helping missionaries haul medical supplies into the hilly regions of Sulawesi for starving villagers.

Acedia afflicts workplace people in subtle ways. Do we perpetually think of changing jobs, advancing our careers, or waiting for that special call from the headhunter? Sometimes this masks a deeper problem. For example, after we have switched jobs for the fourth time in three years, it’s no surprise if we find the same issues boomeranging back – with even greater force – in our new place of work. Unresolved relationships and misunderstandings have a tendency to do that. If this is your track record, running away does not help. It only makes things worse.

Benedict of Nursia, a sixth century expert on community life, warned his monks from adopting the lifestyle of a “sarabite” (people who live without principles) or a “gyrovague” (people whose law is to do whatever strikes their fancy). Such people are always on the move, never settling down. They are not rooted in community. Such constant movement and rootlessness will result in a downfall, warns Benedict.
In our approach toward work, do we behave like sarabites or gyrovagues? Is our life guided by a rule of life? Or do we simply go where we like, and do what we like?

C. Overcoming Restlessness

The most basic step in wrestling against the spirit of restlessness is in choosing not to run away. To remain rooted where we are (even if for a season) requires us to be committed to our work, family, community and country, in good times and bad. There are lessons God wants to teach us in the present moment, the present situation. In the fourth century literature of the desert fathers, there is a short story which depicts a young man travelling a great distance to seek out a famous monk for spiritual advice. The old man discerned that the younger fellow was trying to run away from his “cell” – the learning space to which he is called to work and to pray. So the old man advised the younger one: “Stay in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”

If you choose to remain where you are, here is what you might discover:

1. You see reality as it is. You cease to live in a fantasy world daydreaming about what-ifs. Instead of casting around for short-term fixes (e.g. eying that lucrative job in Dubai), you realize that you must first change yourself. Or, to be more precise, you are now ready for God to change you. You realize you are stuck with these people: your family, your colleagues, your neighbours, your countrymen. And you had better make the best of the situation. So you begin to listen. You
become more attentive to people, events and issues that you used to ignore. (Part of seeing things as they are could mean acknowledging that there are situations – such as a toxic workplace or being stuck in an abusive situation – which entails the need to move on, and not remain.)

2. You discover that your present situation is exactly the soil needed for nurturing the virtuous life. There is no point for a married man to dream of the prolonged solitude of the monk. The middle-manager should not pine for the simple life of a student or the retired life of a CEO. “These useless desires usurp the place of virtues I ought to have – patience, resignation, mortification, obedience, and meekness under suffering. They are what God wishes me to practice at this time,” says the seventeenth century spiritual director Francis de Sales.6

3. You gain the wisdom of knowing when to move on without running away. You become more perceptive to God calling you – as he did with Abraham – to trust God and follow him further down the path of downward mobility, relinquishment and self-surrender. Sometimes this call comes unexpectedly, just as you think you’ll remain where you are for the rest of your life. Quite evidently, such a call will not come while you are struggling with the urge to run away.

4. You celebrate and use what gifts and talents you actually have, not what you wish you possessed. The flipside is also true: you stop fantasizing about acquiring
more and better talents to serve God, and begin the patient process of honing the
skills and abilities that God has already given you.

The masters of the spiritual life through all ages say that when we choose not to
run away – in person or in spirit – we will ultimately grow in love. We learn commitment
and fidelity. We are no longer controlled by the demonic impulse to rush headlong into
greener pastures. We discover more of God’s faithfulness. We find security in God. We
are content with who we are, what we have, and where we are. We are where God wants
us to be. And we are free.

An Exercise

Draw a time-line of your life by listing down dates for every major career move or job
change you’ve experienced up till today.

- At any point, was your job change motivated by the desire to run away?
- Identify the names of the people who influenced you and impacted how you work
  at each stage.
- What did you learn in that situation?
- Thank God for the growth you experienced in dealing with any struggles or
difficult situations.

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1 For Evagrius there were eight, rather than seven deadly sins.
AU: Is boredom a serious spiritual issue for Christians in the marketplace? I’d think that most of us are over-stimulated rather than bored. Have you ever been plagued by boredom while you worked?”

PS: “For a whole year I was bored to death with my work as a religious bureaucrat. Lots of repetitious, mindless work. It was numbing. My wife had to give me a book to read on the adventure of living! Have you ever been bored at work, Alvin?”

AU: “I’ve worked for companies that seek to be fast-paced, innovative and creative. They reward ‘engaged employees’ who love their jobs and are willing to go the extra mile for their companies. So my gut response is to say, no, I’m not bored. And yet…..”

PS: “And yet what?”

AU: “It’s possible for an all-consuming job to generate a reverse kind of boredom. If the pace is always intense, if there’s constant change and perpetual motion, if we’re always
stimulated, it’s possible to go into sensory overload. As a foreign correspondent, I spent several years writing about crises, conflicts and calamities in the region. It was stimulating at first. But after some time, a kind of ennui set in. ‘There’s nothing new under the sun,’ my colleagues and I would sigh, as we jetted off to cover yet another political-sex-corruption-environmental-(you-fill-in-the-blank) scandal.”

PS: “When we’re bored, it feels like ‘slow death’ at work. We feel as if our hearts have been ripped out. We find no meaning in manual or mental work. Our senses, emotions, and intellect shut down. We’re dying. But we can’t summon enough energy to revive ourselves.”

A. Rethinking Boredom

Culturally North America is “bored to death,” “bored stiff,” “bored to tears,” “bored silly” and even “bored out of one’s skull.” People are bored with their marriage partners, school and sex. They are bored with work, church, prayer and even television. Surveys indicate that up to half of North Americans are either temporarily or permanently bored, a trend that is all the more disturbing for a society that is spends billions of dollars on entertainment and fun.

Boredom begins with having an insufficient passion or interest to give ourselves heartily to work and life. It’s an absence of feeling that leads to emotional flatness, passivity, and lack of interest in anything or anybody – including God. It alienates us from God, destroys human relationships and becomes a form of voluntary suicide.
Therefore, boredom is not so much a sin but a symptom of sin, a sign that our relationship with God, life and ourselves has been broken. In Romans 1, the apostle Paul writes that the fundamental sin is failure to reverence God or give thanks to Him. From this primal sin comes all other sins – including futility (1:21), a variant of boredom.

Boredom can be alleviated by watching a movie, downloading YouTube clips or seeking some form of mindless amusement. But the great Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard considered boredom as the pathway to other deadly sins. A classic case of how boredom leads to death can be found in the Bible. One day, King David, who should have been out working on the battlefield with his soldiers, found himself at loose ends. He idly watched Bathsheba bathe. His bored mind eventually led him down a tangled path of fantasy, lust, adultery, lying, betrayal and murder.

Not all boredom leads to sin, though. To lapse into daydreaming at work because one is not engaged with the project at that moment is harmless. A short bout of boredom often precedes a fecund and creative period of activity. A little daydreaming could also possibly be a sign of health since leisure requires the freedom to move in and out of consciousness. Interestingly enough, people who waited on God often wrestled with boredom. Qoholeth, the brilliant writer of Ecclesiastes who questioned the meaning of life, found that everything was the same “under the sun.” The Psalmist likened boredom to sorrow that weakens our souls. “My soul is weary with sorrow [boredom]; strengthen me according to your word,” cried out the Psalmist (Psa. 119:28). Both Qoholeth and the Psalmist concluded that the pursuit of God overcome the paralysis of boredom.
B. Boredom at Work

Boredom is not simply an absence of activity. One can be busy and bored at the same time. Rather, boredom results from too little or too much stimulation. We get bored from endless meetings, repetitious paperwork, and battling office bureaucracy. Boredom strikes when we’re trapped in monotonous jobs with limited opportunities to make a difference or to shine. Bored employees feel their abilities and knowledge aren’t valued or harnessed by the organization; they get distracted, demoralized or they give up hope. Boredom unplugs us from our work and our colleagues. Our work space feels like a prison cell. Even people who have arrive at their corner executive suite might find themselves asking, “Is this all there is to life?”

It’s inevitable that work will always have some form of boredom woven into it. Boredom is part of the human predicament, observed the seventeenth century genius Blaise Pascal, whose creative mind pioneered new discoveries in the fields of mathematics, physics, philosophy and theology. Said Pascal: “Man is so unhappy that he would be bored even if he had no cause for boredom, by the very nature of his temperament.”

C. Overcoming Boredom

Like many spiritual maladies, we do not find healing from boredom by attacking the problem head-on. The journey toward healing from boredom requires humbly acknowledging before God the ways in which we have been wounded by boredom, and
receiving God’s grace. What God offers us, through the Spirit, is peace. Peace provides us the God-given passion for completeness and harmony, no matter what situation we’re in. The peace of Christ fills us from within and expels boredom.

We propose below some guiding principles on moving from boredom to peace in Jesus Christ:

1. Turn boredom into prayerful waiting. Boredom is an indicator that something has gone awry in our soul life. And it can be virtually impossible to diagnose the roots of boredom and the mysterious desires of our heart. Thus, the need to turn to God. While waiting can be boring, it can be made contemplative by actively asking God questions with deep longing for insight (as Job did) or turning to God for strength by hearing the Word of God (as the Psalmist did).

2. Gain an eternal perspective by keeping the Sabbath. Contrary to the advice of many well-meaning leaders and most parents, the answer to boredom is not simply to work harder. Most bored people need to work less and learn how to keep sabbath, which is God’s deepest provision for an apathetic spirit – one day a week to recover our priorities and celebrate the presence of God. The world offers work and leisure (with no sabbath); the Bible offers work and sabbath (with some leisure).
3. Develop a contemplative lifestyle by doing things meaningfully and attending to people, things and situations in a more complete way which includes their aesthetic and spiritual meaning. We can’t subdue boredom by pinning it to the ground. But boredom can be expelled from our hearts – like an unwelcome tenant – when we recover our passion for God. The human predicament, as Kierkegaard said, is a failure to be our (true) selves—creatures in love with God and therefore in love with life.\(^5\) Pascal, out of his own struggle, claimed the answer to boredom lies in an act of faith, or rather a visitation of grace: “Happiness is neither outside us nor inside us; it is in God, both outside and inside us.”\(^6\)

**An Exercise**

Reflect on a typical day at work and identify moments/periods of boredom:

- Is the boredom a result of personal factors (your temperament and how you’re wired) or the environment (workplace culture or job function)?

- How often do you dream of doing something different? Do you depend on constant excitement or stimulation to keep you alive?

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Nine Life-Giving Resources for Workplace Spirituality

11
Introducing the Spirit Fruit

Why we need the Spirit in the workplace

The Spirit of God’s Son has incredible power in breaking sin’s stranglehold in the workplace and in the life of the worker. Through the Holy Spirit, our bodies become a living receptacle, or “temple,” for God’s presence.

The Spirit also battles against the sin embedded deep within us. We are given the Spirit’s life-giving resources – love, joy and peace; patience, kindness and goodness; gentleness, faithfulness and self-control – that can be deployed as we work. This life-giving list is described as the “fruit” of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggles</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lust</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Purity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gluttony</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Relinquishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Gentleness</td>
<td>Surrendered Contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloth</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Life-giving Rhythms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envy</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Neighbor Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restlessness</td>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Vocational Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Heavenly-Mindedness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we work, we cannot help but produce evil, as evidenced by the nine soul-sapping struggles. But the force of greater good is produced by God’s Spirit who lives in us. Evelyn Underhill, a twentieth century Christian mystic, says that fruit of the Spirit are “ways of thinking, speaking and acting, which are brought forth in us, gradually but inevitably, by the pressure of Divine Love in our souls.” As can be seen from the chart above, the Spirit’s fruit transforms our most desperate struggles into joyful outcomes. The Spirit’s goodness transforms our greed into goodness, God’s love transforms lust into purity.

How do we tap into the Spirit’s awesome resources? Not by sheer effort. Most of us have experienced the bitter failure of “making every effort” of getting rid of lust, pride and anger. We don’t win our battles against sin that way.

Rather, we come to God by faith, trusting in Him. We surrender our mind and our body to Jesus Christ. When we do so, we experience the Spirit’s resources enabling us to overcome the soul-sapping struggles. Everyday, we submit our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13). Specifically, we are to:

1. Think and reflect on spiritual attributes (Phil. 4:8)
2. Get rid of vices that hinder the Spirit’s work (Eph. 4:31)
3. Make every effort to add virtues to our faith (2 Pet. 1:5)
But remember: we can only do the above – thinking of good things, ridding sin and exercising virtue – by cooperating with God. The nine attributes of Spirit fruit are gifts. We exercise these gifts by intentionally allowing God, and asking Him, to enter our hearts and permeate our work.

The next nine chapters describe how the fruit of the Spirit serves as life-giving resources for workplace spirituality. They function as an antidote to the poison of the soul-sapping struggles. They remove obstacles that hinder us from working with freedom. They offer us a fresh perspective of seeing God in the workplace. They are new muscles we can exercise and strengthen so that we draw closer to God while we work. Evelyn Underhill says, “Our spiritual life depends on His perpetual coming to us, far more than our going to Him.”

As we draw on the Spirit’s resources, we discover the strength to overcome the nine soul-sapping struggles in the workplace, and to live and work as God’s agents.

Joy: More Than Happiness at Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being imprisoned within your self as No. 1</td>
<td>Feeling the exhilaration of having God as No. 1</td>
<td>Experiencing continuous communion with God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PS: “Do you experience joy while you work?”

AU: “I suppose it depends on the work I do. When we went canoeing together on Clearwater Lake, we did a lot of work, paddling the canoe, hour after hour. It can be incredibly repetitive and painfully slow. But as we meandered along the lake shore, I saw an eagle soaring above. I felt the warm glow of the setting sun lighting up the sculptured rocks. There’s lots to see if we travel slowly, listening to the dip, dip of the paddles and the drops of water flickering off the blades into the mirror-calm lake.”

PS: “We certainly experienced joy canoeing together, didn’t we? But what about joy in the workplace – when we are faced daily with multiple deadlines, an overflowing email inbox and countless meetings?”

AU: “That’s exactly the situation for me. But even in the most stressful situations, I have experienced. A short conversation with a colleague can become an opportunity to listen to what God is doing in her life. There are holy and joyful moments throughout the day when we share our hopes and struggles – over lunch or around the water cooler.”
PS: “What you are talking about sounds much more than just being happy at work. There’s a fundamental difference between joy and happiness, isn’t there?”

AU: “Yes, you experience joy when you sense God’s presence, here and now.”

A. Rethinking Joy
The hallmark of joy is living responsively to the Spirit no matter what we’re doing in the workplace – sitting through a sales pitch, dealing with an irate customer, stepping into a difficult board meeting, or dealing with a colleague who dislike us. Joy is more than happiness. Happiness is an emotion – feeling good, having well-being. But you can have joy even in adverse times. Joy is God-connection, God-infusion, whole person exhilaration, blissful well-being, a spiritual transcendence. Noted Bible teacher William Barclay says that joy is “the distinguishing atmosphere of the Christian life.”

Scripture is full of joy – people who are exhilarated by having God as No. 1 in their lives.

Joy is the alter-ego to pride. Pride stems from the energy we summon to prop ourselves up as Number One. Joy stems from the energy we express in worshipping God. Pride strips us of joy; joy strips away pride.

Joy is not only a personal experience but can be the dominant atmosphere of a workplace culture. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). The story of God’s good news starts and ends with joy. Joy filled the night sky when the
angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. And one day, joy will fill the cosmos when the dynamic rule of God is established in the new heaven and new earth.

While speaking about remaining in the love of God, Jesus said, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (Jn. 15:11). Far from bringing people soul-deadening religion, the impact of Jesus on a human life is intoxicating and exhilarating. The highest statement of the spirituality of work in Scripture is found in the Parable of the Talents. In the conclusion of the story told by Jesus, the master rewarded two workers who invested their wealth and abilities fruitfully by saying to them, “Enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:23 RSV). When we work wholeheartedly, work becomes a means for entering God’s presence and enjoying God’s joy.

**B. Joy at Work**

Dennis Bakke, the former CEO of AES, a US-based energy company, writes in *Joy at Work* that “most people don’t believe that fun and work can coexist.” He describes a miserable workplace where workers are lazy and work primarily for the money. Workers put their own interests ahead of what is best for the organization; no one wants to be responsible; and employees need to be constantly told what to do.² The result: employees want higher pay and better benefits but fewer hours on the job.

Bakke then explains what he did to transform a bureaucratic energy utility into a joyful workplace. He focused on empowering people to use their talents, delegated
decisions to the lowest level, built dynamic and fluid teams, created a sense of community, and imparted the knowledge that what one is doing has significant purpose. This sounds an awful lot like management-speak, except that Bakke did it. He did redemptive work by engineering the culture of a workplace to become joyful. Bakke didn’t do it alone; he did it by cooperating with the Spirit who wants people to enter into joy.

There is room for joyful creativity in the workplace, no matter how seemingly oppressive things can be. John Ruskin, the nineteenth century writer, suggested that the masses have no joy in their work and therefore they look to making money as a way of pursuing pleasures outside of their work. It was particularly the joy of making things with one’s hands, Ruskin argued, that was lost by the Industrial Revolution.³ The Information Age and the present Age of Creativity perhaps offer more scope for creativity as work moves from repetitive tasks to creative interventions, a kind of craftsmanship in the imagination and mind, though there is still need of individually hand-crafted things.

Work that we enjoy doing enables us to use our gifts and talents. We lose all sense of time when we are doing it. We might even day dream about our work when we are not working. But alas, there is no perfect fit this side of heaven. Few people are constantly ecstatic about what they do. And workplace spirituality does not guarantee that frustrating work will become 100% fun. (Anyway, experiencing joy at work is more than merely having fun.)
C. Cultivating the Fruit of Joy

Joy begins when we know why and for whom we work. Most of us work for love whether we realize it or not. That is, we work to provide for people we love, such as our spouse and children, our neighbors and friends, perhaps even our nation. Love has an endless capacity to transform work into a sacrament of joy.

Ultimately, there is joy in working for God, for God receives our work. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, the Lord himself addresses the righteous ones by saying that their work – feeding, clothing, visiting and welcoming – was work that “you did it to me” (Matt. 25: 40). It is easy to relegate this text solely to social relief projects. But the work of feeding, clothing, visiting, welcoming, and giving drink to the thirsty are ways of loving our neighbours and supplying their needs. Most of our jobs have the potential of fulfilling the above – if only we have the capacity of seeing things from God’s point of view.

The world is languishing for lack of this joy. The apostle Paul says that joy comes when we keep in step with the Spirit, aligning ourselves with God and God’s leading, remaining in God’s love (as Jesus said) and keeping the commandments of Jesus – which is simply to love.
An Exercise

1. Identify specific moments of joy you’ve encountered over the past week:
   - In what ways did you experience joy working with your colleagues, staff, customers, etc.?
   - In what ways did you experience joy while doing the work itself?
   - What are some things you’re grateful for in your organization’s systems, processes and structures? (e.g. health benefits; robust code of ethics; meritocratic reward system, etc.)
   Will you allow yourself to be purposefully exhilarated by joy even when your daily work may be lacklustre or just plain difficult?

2. Practice the discipline of thanksgiving by recalling and thanking God for 5-10 specific moments that give you joy each day.

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AU: “You’ve worked as a pastor, carpenter, dean and professor. What does it mean, for you, to be doing good work?”

PS: “I’ve valued doing “the Lord’s work” both on the job and in the church. The several years I spent as a carpenter were good because I was doing good work – building and renovating houses. The work fit my gifts and abilities. And I had a sense that I was doing God’s work, just as when I was a pastor.”

AU: “And what about when you became an academic dean of Regent College?”

PS: “I had the privilege of hosting a remarkable theological faculty composed of good people. Along the way, I discovered that the seemingly tedious administrative duties could also become a good ministry – I was playing a role in creating an infrastructure and culture in which faculty and staff could thrive.”

AU: “That’s a very helpful perspective on how to view the tedious aspects of work. On one hand, I could see my past job as a series of relentless projects, and gripe about it. Or
on the other hand, with the Spirit’s creative help, I can see myself doing ‘good’ work by
empowering future leaders and creating environments for their talents to flourish.”

PS: “The wonderful thing is this: as we seek to do good work, God is transforming us
into a person of goodness, to be a giver rather than a taker.”

A. Rethinking Goodness

Goodness is a simple word that conveys highly attractive qualities in a person such as
integrity, honesty and uprightness. In contrast to a greedy person, who’s inflamed by the
passion to possess, a good person is someone who gives rather than takes, who shares
rather than hoards. The Greek word for ‘goodness,’ agathosune, used by the apostle Paul
only three times in the New Testament,¹ conveys true prosperity of life (Eccl. 6:3).

As we seek after the true prosperity of goodness, we are not left bereft in our
quest. The fellowship of the triune God accompanies and empowers us. As we become
more aware of the goodwill shared between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we will be
transformed. We will aspire to be more and more like Jesus, the perfect human person
who walked across the stage of history. Jesus is an immensely attractive person because
his goodness transcends justice. With justice people get their due. But with goodness, a
person desires to give even more. He gives all that might benefit and help another.² Jesus’
sacrificial act on the cross – giving us his life – is perhaps the most significant act of
goodness in history.
According to an old legend, a bishop who was offered the power to heal declined and asked instead for goodness: “The thing I most desire is that God would bestow upon me the gift of doing a great deal of good without even knowing it myself.”³ In the Christian tradition this goodness has been often been expressed in almsgiving.

B. Goodness at Work

The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas identified seven corporeal areas of almsgiving, in which good deeds address bodily needs. In the table below, we’ve suggested modern equivalents of almsgiving in which goodness can be carried out through business and industrial activity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven Areas of Almsgiving (Medieval)</th>
<th>Seven Areas of Almsgiving (Modern Workplace)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feed the hungry</td>
<td>Food industry, restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give drink to the thirsty</td>
<td>Water management, beverage provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothe the naked</td>
<td>Textile and clothing enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbor the harborless</td>
<td>Hospitality industry and hotels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the sick</td>
<td>Medicine, healthcare, counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ransom the captive</td>
<td>Enforcement agencies, military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bury the dead</td>
<td>Hospice and funeral services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Granted, there is a shadowy and exploitative side to all modern businesses listed above. Nonetheless, a lot of good has been done – and is being carried out – through business and human enterprise in the twenty first century.
Aquinas also addressed the seven spiritual deeds for almsgiving: to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to reprove the sinner, to forgive injuries, to bear with those who trouble and annoy us, and to pray for all. These are the inner dispositions that we can adopt as we work and relate with our colleagues everyday.

A powerful form of almsgiving sweeping the world in the recent decade is expressed through microfinance, which provides credit, savings and insurance services to poor or low-income clients. Centuries earlier, the medieval Jewish mystic, Maimonides (1135-1204), had already contended that creating new wealth for the poor is the highest degree of charity.

1. A person gives, but only when asked by the poor.
2. A person gives, but is glum when giving.
3. A person gives cheerfully, but less than he should.
4. A person gives without being asked, but gives directly to the poor. Now the poor know who gave them help and the giver, too, knows whom he has benefited.
5. A person throws money into the house of someone who is poor. The poor person does not know to whom he is indebted, but the donor knows whom he has helped.
6. A person gives his donation in a certain place and then turns his back so that he does not know which of the poor he has helped, but the poor person knows to whom he is indebted.
7. A person gives anonymously to a fund for the poor. Here the poor does not know to whom he is indebted, and the donor does not know whom he has helped. But, the highest is this:

8. Money is given to prevent another from becoming poor, such as providing him with a job or by teaching him a trade or by setting him up in business and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding out his hand for charity. This is the highest step and the summit of charity’s golden ladder.\(^5\)

C. Cultivating the Fruit of Goodness

Good people enrich others. In doing so, and often without realizing it, they find real wealth – prosperity in God. The contrary is also true. Jesus tells the story of a rich entrepreneur whose crops yielded an incredible profit. So he planned to build bigger barns, stop work and revel in food, drink and sensual pleasure. The rich man was the antithesis of an almsgiver. God assessed the man’s work as failure. “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. This is how it will be with those who store up things for themselves but are not rich towards God” (Lk. 12:20-21).

Jesus poses us a challenging question: What does it mean to be rich towards God? We suggest the following:

1. Invest in the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:19-21, Lk. 12:31). The kingdom of God is not just spiritual. It involves the active rule of God that encompasses spiritual, personal, social, political and economic dimensions. Kingdom work creates new wealth, alleviates poverty, brings well-being to people, embellishes and improves
human life, and battles against organizational structures propped up by greed. We
don’t have to do “Christian work” or serve in Christian NGOs to invest in the
kingdom of God. Any good work, motivated by love of God and neighbor, is
kingdom work.

2. Embrace the purpose of God. Human beings are invited to share in God’s work.
Because God is creator, sustainer and redeemer, and because God is also provider,
judge, instructor, revealer, covenant-maker, and community-builder, we can join
God as coworkers in a wonderful variety of work, from agriculture to genetic
engineering, from homemaking to journalism. What makes work “Christian” is
not the religious character of the work but the fact that our work is performed
with faith, hope and love.

3. Treasure the priorities of God. In Luke 16 Jesus tells a story of a manager about to
lose his job. This manager shrewdly goes to all his bosses’ debtors and negotiates
outrageous reductions in their debts. This endeared the manager so much to the
debtors that when he was sacked, they welcomed him into their homes as their
friend. “Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone,
you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings,” says Jesus (16:9). Jesus is not
encouraging deceitful “buying” of friendship. Rather, he calls us to use our money
in ways that build lifelong friendships. The one treasure we can take from this life
to the next is the relationships we have made through Christ.

4. Hunger for the presence of God. We are to love God over all competing loves,
treasuring God more than any other treasure. Like the Psalmist we proclaim that
God is our portion, our treasure, our all in all. “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psa. 118:1).

So being rich towards God does not mean we stop working. Being rich toward God is embracing the Spirit’s gift of goodness that transforms our ordinary work into something beautiful.

An Exercise

Spend some time in prayerful reflection, asking God to illuminate specific and creative ways in which you can be rich toward God by:

a) Investing in the Kingdom of God
b) Embracing the purpose of God
c) Treasuring the priorities of God
d) Hungering for the presence of God

In light of the above, how can you express goodness in your workplace for the coming week? What are some acts of spiritual almsgiving (e.g. instructing the ignorant, forgiving injuries, praying for all, etc.) you could put into practice? Specify the names of people you want to bless.

1 2 Thess 2:17; Eph 5:9; Rom 15:14.
Love: The Greatest Thing to Give and Receive

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lust</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Purity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imagining how people can</td>
<td>Practically caring for the</td>
<td>Experiencing wholehearted</td>
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<tr>
<td>be used for self-interest</td>
<td>best interests of others</td>
<td>love for God and neighbor</td>
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PS: “Love is probably the most potent and life-giving force in the workplace. Yet few leadership and management gurus talk or write about love.”

AU: “People fear showing love in a dog-eat-dog world. One evening, I asked a colleague for advice on a stressful situation. I told him I was on the verge of drowning. He gave lots of advice, and volunteered to help me, which I accepted with gratitude. Just as I got up to leave, he asked me if I knew anybody who provided help to drug addicts. He said his daughter had been arrested by police and tested positive for drugs. Tears rimmed his eyes. He felt he’d failed as a father. “I don’t know what to do, but I’m willing to do anything to help my daughter,” he said.

“At that moment, I felt God’s loving presence with us. My colleague and I were openly bearing one another’s burdens. My colleague demonstrated love by taking time to listen and provide astute advice. And I sought to love my colleague by supporting him in his personal pain.”

PS: “You were giving and receiving love toward one another.”
AU: “Yes, I discovered that loving one another is never a sign of weakness.”

PS: “Indeed. By loving God’s people, we are loving God.”

A. Rethinking Love

We long to love and be loved. As parents, we aspire to love our children. And we rejoice when our children receive our love. It is a universal human longing to perfectly give and receive love. Love, or caritas, is the will to do good for the other.

For people of faith, it is also a universal human desire to be loved by God, and to love God. The tradition of Christian spirituality notes that God is “lover, the beloved and the love itself.” That is, love is not just an attribute of God. Love is who God is, and love is what God does.¹ Because of this, two corollaries are true:

1. Almighty God, the master of the universe, longs for us to love him as children love a wonderful father, said the Venerable Bede, the seventh century Benedictine monk and Doctor of the Church. “It would be no small thing if we were able to love God in the way that a servant loves his master or a worker his employer. But loving God as father is much greater still.”²

2. We are deeply loved by God. So it is not surprising that in listing the fruit of the Spirit, the apostle Paul started with love. The list is a progressive series with God’s love as the crucial starting point. The English Christian mystic Evelyn Underhill says, “Love is…that tender, cherishing attitude; that unlimited self-
forgetfulness, generosity and kindness which is the attitude of God to all His creatures.”

As noted earlier, our soul-sapping struggle with lust is an indicator that we long for something deeper and more real. We long for God’s intimate, pure and chaste love to work in our lives and transform us from within – making us loving people. “The first-fruit of His indwelling presence, the first sign that we are on His side and He on ours, must be at least a tiny bud of this Charity breaking the hard and rigid outline of our life,” says Underhill.

B. Love at Work

In the workplace, the most powerful evidence that we are loved by God is when we practically care for the best interests of others. Lust looks to be serviced; love serves.

Consider below, a personal evaluation of how you are demonstrating love in action during the daily routine of work (the questions are based on 1 Corinthians 13, adapted for the workplace):

- Are you willing to do small things even when no one is watching?
- Do you look out for opportunities to show kindness to people who are usually ignored, shunned or overlooked?
- Do you rejoice with the successes of your colleagues and peers?
- Do you resist the temptation to draw attention to yourself?
- Do you treat everyone with respect and courtesy?
• Do you actively choose not to provoke other people?

• Do you consciously choose to frame things in a positive manner, giving your colleagues the benefit of the doubt (while not being blind to their foibles)?

• Do you restrain yourself from inflating other people’s faults, or exposing their weaknesses in order to tear them down?

In reviewing the questions above, it may strike you that loving people is not something that comes naturally, especially in the workplace. One possible reason is because we have ceased to regard our colleagues as people. Large corporations tend to dehumanize employees into units of productivity (labeling people as human capital or resources etc). We cannot love units of productivity; we can only love people.

So how do we receive God’s love as we work?

C. Cultivating the Fruit of Love

God, through the Holy Spirit, pours out his love into our hearts if we are willing recipients of God’s love. Below are two considerations that have transformed the hearts and minds of great Christian servants and leaders over the centuries, enabling them to become living receptacles and conduits of God’s love.

1. Consider forming covenantal relationships with the people you work with.

   Biblical love is best characterized by “hesed,” a Hebrew word that describes a relationship so faithful, so kind and so compassionate that it’s called a
“covenant.” This covenantal relationship transcends the call of duty. Quite often, the relationship is sparked off when one person is spurred to do something—entirely voluntarily—for another person in a time of real need. Over time both people demonstrate abiding loyalty and commitment toward one another. It’s a friendship that seeks the good of the other. Covenantal relationships require us to become attentive to people who are shunned (because of “wrong” academic education, race or background etc). We focus on developing others for their sake. We seek creative ways to generate enthusiasm rather than fear. In short, we seek to love people as they are, made in God’s image. The best example of intertwined ‘hesed’ relationships can be gleaned from the Book of Ruth in the Hebrew scriptures.5

2. Consider and contemplate Jesus’ working relationship with the Father. The best working relationship in history is the loving relationship between Jesus and his Father. “No other source, whether inside or outside of religions, even comes close to what God in Christ shows of love,” says Christian philosopher Dallas Willard.6 In his three years of active ministry in Palestine, Jesus set the example for us on how to work with the Father. The gospel of John offers a rich treasury on how Jesus worked to do the Father’s will. First, Jesus declared that the ultimate goal of his work was to reveal the Father’s love and glory. Then Jesus carried out his work in a number of ways: by loving the people he met in daily life; by loving the Father in private prayer; and by living within the limitations of his human frame.
By contemplating the relationship of Father and Son, we receive the Spirit’s resources for loving our jobs, our colleagues, bosses, subordinates and even the company itself, with its systems, structures and culture. We begin to love the things related to work, from pens to photocopy machines, seeing these as tools for God’s use. At the same time, working with love requires us to struggle against unjust or evil practices embedded within the organization’s systems and culture. Not least, as we come to love the things and people that God loves, we begin to love ourselves deeply (not selfishly) in the same way that Jesus Christ loves us.

An Exercise

By contemplating Jesus’ working relationship with the Father in the gospel of John, we can derive guiding principles and attitudes applicable to the workplace. Below is a list of mindsets (by no means exhaustive) that we could adopt while working. Pick one mindset that challenges or inspires you, and bring it alive in your workplace, for as long as you think is necessary.

1. I am an agent of the living God sent to bring faith, hope and love into the marketplace. Just as the Father sent Jesus to be with us, God has sent me into the workplace. I am God’s Sent One.

2. Apart from God, I can do nothing. Without God, I have no energy, creativity or initiative.

3. With God, I have limitless resources to draw on, working with power and glory, pointing people to Jesus.

4. I can do only what God does – nothing more, nothing less.
5. I choose work that has enduring value.

6. I choose to avoid that has no eternal value.

7. My work is a gift from God.

8. My work is to glorify God.

9. I relinquish my own will in order to do God’s will.

10. The work God calls me to do is always good – no matter how dry or difficult.

11. I shall be responsive to God’s slightest touch and guidance.

12. I am loved by God. He is deeply pleased with me.

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15
Self-Control: Resolving the Work-Life Dilemma

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<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gluttony</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Relinquishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding satisfaction through excessive consumption</td>
<td>Being governed from the inside through values and the Spirit’s leading</td>
<td>Experiencing the freedom to release possessions and to live and work more simply</td>
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AU: “Some days, my colleagues and I are convinced that we can’t go on like this – working too much, doing too much, maybe eating too much. It’s a crazy lifestyle – constantly spiraling out of control.”

PS: “Edward Hallowell, a Harvard psychiatrist, calls this attention deficit trait. ADT is caused by a hyperkinetic environment, when workplace pressure increases and people ‘suck it up’ without complaining. ADT people multitask obsessively, answer questions in superficial ways, hurry all the time, spend little or no time with friends, work longer hours and sleep less. ADT people find it difficult to generate fresh ideas.

AU: “How do you refill that empty tank?”

PS: “Hallowell says that ADT can be controlled by re-engineering one’s work environment to create ‘human moments,’ getting enough sleep, exercising and switching to a good diet.”
AU: “Sounds like Work-Life Balance 101! And yet most of us struggle to find that balance. It’s not as east as it sounds.”

PS: “Indeed. The antidote to a crazy lifestyle is not striving for more work-life balance. Rather, it is cultivating self-control”

A. Rethinking Self-Control

We long for an equilibrium in life where we can oscillate between activity and rest, work and play, engagement with people and personal time for reflection. This pursuit seems tantalizingly elusive, though, in view of the craziness of modern life.

More people across the board – from entry level to senior management – are experiencing burnout due to overwork and stress. Time for family, meaningful conversation, leisure, creative hobbies and church has vanished. The proliferation of email, cell phones, laptops and Blackberries have resulted in increased work hours and loss of privacy and silence. A recent American survey conducted by the Center for Work-Life Policy indicates that eight out of 10 people say their jobs are affecting their health.² The New York Times reported that sixty two percent of survey respondents say their workload has increased over the last six months, while more than half say work leaves them overtired and overwhelmed.³

Not all of the pressures are external; sometimes we are the cause of our own drivenness and misery. A Christian executive of a multinational corporation said that on
Sunday he ranked God, family and work as the top three in order of priority. On Monday, however, he admitted that the order shifted to work, family and then only God. Tragically, this downward spiral is motivated from the desire to have it all – a great job, a fat salary, well-educated children, five-star rated vacations, the latest gadgets and a vibrant religious life.

In contrast to the gluttonous urge to milk the most out of life, the gift of self-control granted by the Holy Spirit nourishes and governs the inner person – giving us control over our actions and appetites. We find satisfaction not from excesses or the drive to have it all. Self-control helps us find satisfaction in God, accepting whatever He gives us.

The infusion of God’s grace through his indwelling Spirit results in self-control (egkrateia). Self-control gives us the inner strength of restraint, or the ability to have a grip on one’s self. The apostle Peter exhorts his readers to “make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control” (2 Pet. 1:5-6). The effort we exert is not to attain self-mastery, but to cooperate with God and to seek his help. God, in his grace, grants us self-control, or the ability to exercise self-denial in order to quell the human impulse to sin. The writer of Proverbs likens the soul of a man without self-control to a city that cannot defend against enemy attacks because the walls have crumbled (Prov. 25:28). That is exactly what happens if we exercise no restraint over our passions. Self-control functions as a robust door that guards our soul and prevents the minions of anger, lust and other deadly sins from overwhelming us.
B. Self-Control at Work

Jesus of Nazareth is the exemplar of self-control at work, but he did not set out to achieve work-life balance. There were times Jesus was so engaged in service that he did not have time to eat. Widows, demoniacs and anxious parents petitioned him to wield miraculous power. Out of compassion for people, Jesus was besieged by the fierce urgency of now. And yet he lived a disciplined, self-controlled life. Surrounded by a crowd that made demands that only the savior of the world could meet, Jesus “dismissed the crowd” (Mark 6:45). This required inner strength. Jesus could have been tempted to heal more and more people. But mindful of his mission, Jesus probably had say: “I can’t heal you right now, I’m sorry. I must be alone with my Father.” That is the paradigm of self-control – doing the right thing at the right time to draw close to God.

Current workplace attempts in seeking self-control can be found in the pursuit of a “work-life balance” i.e. juggling the demands of work and personal life. Proponents of work-life balance propose that we keep a log, explore flex hours and job-sharing, say no, seek domestic help, practice yoga or meditation, prioritize leisure time, get enough sleep, or seek out professional help. Ironically, the quest to achieve work-life balance makes us feel even more scattered and dissatisfied. It’s entirely possible that seeking work-life balance can become a form of excessive consumption – the desire to have it all, and to be able to juggle as many balls as possible. This has led John Dalla Costa, a Canadian business consultant, to conclude that “balance is bunk.”

4
When we have self-control we can say no and yes with integrity, no to one more assignment that will lead to work overload, and yes, to an assignment we can do with passion and competence. We will be able to leave the workplace with unfinished business knowing that God never requires us to do more than he gives us time in which to do it. We will give not only “quality time” to our families and friends – as though this kind of time can be organized – but quantity time. (In passing we note that quality time of focused and deep interaction happens when we are ‘hanging out’ with people and are sensitive to the leading of the Spirit.) When we have self-control, we can give ourselves to an exercise program or to an enriching hobby without feeling guilty.

Ultimately, dealing with a life spiraling out of control is a spiritual. We need to allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit who produces the fruit of self-control in us. Self-control enables us to be governed from the inside through values that are aligned with God’s. A person with self-control learns to respond to the Spirit’s leading. Instead of a gluttonous lifestyle, where we seek to have it all, self-control enables us to live in alignment with Godly principles. Instead of the modern pursuit of a balanced life, the apostle Paul prayed that God “may strengthen [us] with power through his Spirit in [our] inner being, so that Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:16-7).

In other words, it is the Spirit who gives us self-control in dealing with work addiction and the overwhelming pressures of contemporary life. Self-control is better than balance, more attainable, and maybe even more desirable. Balance is about doing everything in moderation and living a completely composed life with all our priorities
lined up like ducks in a row and worked out in calculated precision like a sequenced computer program. Nothing disturbs the perfectly balanced person. Such is not the quality of a person whose heart is lined up with our passionate God. The great saints did not live balanced lives; nor did the prophets. They filled their days with white hot passion, enflamed by a mighty cause. The apostle Paul spoke about working with all the “energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:28).

C. Cultivating the Fruit of Self-control

There is a better way than attaining balance through time management and breaking down one’s life into a series of action items. The better way comes through viewing all of life as sacred. We may never live the balanced life. But we can make every effort to seek God’s help. In doing so we gradually gain self-control. How do we begin this journey? We propose three steps.

1. Identify the areas where you might lack self-control:
   - What are your cravings?
   - What are the things that you believe you truly need?
   - What are the things that you think, dream or fantasize about in your spare time?
   - What the things you cling on to, or fear letting go?
   - What are the areas in life that give you a sense of security?
   - Are any of the things above more important than God?
Note: By answering the questions with specificity, you will be able to confess any sinful preoccupations before God.

2. Specify the priorities in your life. Do not list them out as bullet points but sketch them out as an interdependent web of essentials: e.g. family, work, rest, sleep, service, church, social responsibility, citizenship, personal recreation. In the middle of this web, place God at the centre – not the top of a list. Hence we see that God is central to our work, family, church and everything else. Note that we are not listing down “religious life” (e.g. church attendance, quiet times and witnessing) at the center. Rather, God must be at the center, because God is in all things.

3. Put into practice some spiritual disciplines that will allow the Spirit to control your life:
   - The daily discipline of ongoing relinquishment: find as many creative ways to release possessions in order to live and work more simply.
   - The daily discipline of walking through the narrow gate: renounce the mindless approach to life where you walk through a broad gate. Rather, choose the way of the cross – following Jesus into difficult but life-giving places that requires sacrifice (Matt. 7:14).
   - The daily discipline of keeping company with Jesus Christ: establish your ultimate life goal of having Jesus always before and behind you. Seek to
draw closer to Him daily, until your dying breath. If you do this, your life will unself-consciously become governed by self-control.

An Exercise

Review the questions, suggestions and spiritual disciplines on cultivating self-control.

Share what you’ve learned with a friend this week, and express one thing you’d like to put into practice. Ask your friend to check-in on you regularly for a month.

4 Dalla Costa, Magnificence at Work, 34.
Gentleness: The Strength of Meekness

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Gentleness</td>
<td>Surrendered Contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using passion to manipulate and control</td>
<td>Empowering others by renouncing personal</td>
<td>Experiencing the satisfaction of who you are, what you do</td>
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<td>people and circumstances</td>
<td>agendas and expressing meekness</td>
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PS: “In a highly competitive workplace, a crucial management skill is the ability to get things done. Would it be seen as a sign of weakness if you aren’t able to push through your own agenda?”

AU: “There nothing wrong with getting people to buy into my agenda, especially if the agenda is aligned with God’s values and the corporation’s highest aspirations. Being assertive sometimes can be a good thing.”

PS: “Does that mean that the spirit of gentleness has no place in the workplace?”

AU: “It’s certainly rare. On one occasion, I was roped in by two bosses to prepare for a potentially explosive meeting. Just in case things went wrong, they wanted to ensure that none of our heads rolled. So we brainstormed tactics. At one point, the two bosses suggested a good-cop-bad-cop routine. One of them said, ‘Let’s get Alvin to play the bad cop. He could spread the blame around.’ But the other boss quickly replied, ‘No way this will work. Alvin would never do it. He’d never tear down other people’s reputations. He’s too much of a gentleman.””
PS: “It must be gratifying to be known as a person who refuses to backbite or blame others.”

AU: “Yes, I felt grateful. That’s one occasion when it felt good to be considered a ‘gentle’ man!”

A. Rethinking Gentleness

In a high-performance organization, a gentle manager is like a speck of dust in one’s eye – inconsequential yet irritating to the body politic. He would be obsequious, groveling, weak, probably passive aggressive, and therefore, someone to be watched out for. In contrast, we admire leaders who are hard-charging, Type A personalities such as “Neutron Jack” Welch. It seems as if gentleness has no place in today’s hyper-competitive workplace. And yet perhaps it is in shark-infested waters of the business world that the godly qualities of gentleness are most needed.

The Greek word for gentleness or meekness is “prautes.” An attribute of the fruit of the spirit, it is used to describe a powerful animal that has learned to accept discipline, such as a bridled horse which generates tremendous speed and power at the master’s bidding, or a dog that’s fierce toward strangers but friendly toward the master’s children. Similarly, the Bible describes a gentle soul as one whose quiet but firm disposition in dealing with people reflects her willingness to surrender her desires and disposition toward God.
Moses is one such example and was called “the meekest man on earth,” precisely because he allowed Yahweh to guide his every step. He rose from a stuttering shepherd to become a prophet-statesman. Millennia later, the Lord Jesus Christ, the New Moses, described himself as “meek and gentle.” The apostle Paul subsequently, identified a gentle spirit as a key leadership attribute for Christian leaders to flourish in hostile circumstances. Note that Moses, Jesus and Paul were no pushovers: they were tough. In facing overwhelming odds and bitter rivals, they responded with a most uncommon grace, by being a gentle soul. Paul observed that God’s elect clothe themselves in meekness (Col. 3:12). He exhorted all Christians to let their gentleness be evident to all (Phil. 4:5). (This exhortation to be gentle appears in the Bible at least two dozen times.)

As such, gentleness and meekness are highly valued attributes in Christian spirituality. They are used only to describe courageous and disciplined people with nerves of steel. Gentleness is the conduit for harnessing strength and power. It serves as a tiller for a 3,000-horsepower tugboat surging along a river. A gentle person is a person of great power who has restrained his strength for the good of the weaker one. A wise action or word, carried out judiciously and timed perfectly, can inspire change even in the toughest or most complicated situation. “A gentle tongue can break a bone,” observes the writer of Proverbs (Prov. 25:15).
B. Gentleness at Work

The entire life of our Lord Jesus embodies gentleness. He is our role model for becoming gentle souls in the workplace. “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,” Jesus said (Matt. 11:29). Jesus’ disciple, Matthew, later concluded that Jesus’ attitudes and actions cohered with the suffering servant in Isaiah who submitted his will to God. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory” (Matt. 12:20). Jesus deals gently with people on the verge of falling apart. He reconciles and strengthens the weak and the suffering. Jesus inspires people to change; repentant people who encounter him never walk away in despair.

Such gentleness calls for a profound respect for the personal dignity of the other. Such a person studiously avoids any coercion, intimidation or threats. If possible, she might seek to change a wrong attitude through a kind act or persuasive word, but she will refuse to force her hand against the other person’s will. A gentle person seeks to move at the pace of another person’s readiness to make changes or embrace a goal. She’s exactly the kind of person you’d like to have as your boss or as your leader. Sure of herself, she empowers you in a way that’s best suited for your needs.

As you reflect on your working life, consider the questions below as indicators of the Spirit’s gentle work in your life in the workplace:

- Do you allow subordinates to make mistakes, treating them in a firm yet compassionate manner?
Do you confer equal respect in the way you speak to the secretary or tea lady as with the CEO?

Do you delight in serving others?

Are you responsive to the slightest touch of the Spirit, or do you require heavy discipline before coming to your senses?

Are you aware of what you do not know, so that you are willing to receive instruction with meekness and a teachable spirit?

Do you choose to listen and build relationships with your opponent/boss/staff/negotiating partner, no matter how difficult they are? Or do you browbeat them into submission by ramming ideas down their throat?

Are you able to rebuke without anger? Argue without getting being dismissive? Treat everyone with complete courtesy?

When you correct someone or provide feedback, do you give him hope and greater determination for excellence? Or does the person become discouraged or driven to despair?

C. Cultivating the Fruit of Gentleness

We do not become gentle souls through self-effort. Gentleness is part of the fruit of the Spirit. When we rest secure that we are strong, we do not need to be pushy or arrogant. We do not fight or exhibit a belligerent or pugnacious spirit. What a contrast this is to people who amass the symbols of power, money and reputation as a show of strength (though inwardly they feel feeble).
On a deeper level, gentle people have gone through these steps: surrender, renunciation, obedience, subservience. It is the willingness to be molded. This willingness to give up power produces radical change in the way we treat others. Paul tells Titus to “be ready to do whatever is good,… and always to be gentle toward everyone” (Titus 3:1-2). This requires bearing wrong done to you, yet remain willing to help others.²

What do gentle souls do, or not do?

- People who are gentle do not wound people others with rash words or cold disregard.
- They choose to be vulnerable. They acknowledge their vulnerability to sin and weakness. This enables them to empathize deeply with other people’s struggles.
- They respond with “gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15) when faced off against people who mock, ridicule or dismiss them.
- They do not give in or buckle under pressure, especially when ethical principles are compromised. They might appear to be weak. But their goal is actually to reconcile people to God and with each other.
- They are not paralyzed or overwhelmed when confronted with the pain of other people. This is because they, too, have learned what it means to endure pain and to joyfully accept daily crosses as gifts from God.

When we choose the path of gentleness, we find freedom for ourselves, as we discover the reality of a gentle God who loves us. We are like a spring of water, or a
source of refreshment for people who meet us. Amma Syncletica, a wise Egyptian desert
mother, said: “Choose the meekness of Moses and you will find your heart which is a
rock changed into a spring of water.”

An Exercise

Gary Thomas, a writer and founder of the Center for Evangelical Spirituality, suggests
three steps toward cultivating a spirit of gentleness.

1. Consider Jesus’ gentleness (Isa. 40:11, 42:3; 1 Pet. 2:23). What enabled Jesus to
   endure the harshest treatment without retaliating (when he very well could)?

2. Be gentle toward yourself. How are you inclined to feel about yourself when you
   fall short of perfection? Circle all that apply (add any additional words that come
to mind): angry; ashamed; disgusted; amused; pessimistic; frustrated; forgiving;
   accepting; embarrassed; resigned; confident; sad. How did Jesus respond to the
   people in the following passages (Lk. 7:36-50; Lk. 19:1-10; Lk. 23:39-43), all of
   whom had failed in some way?

3. Be gentle toward others. How do you usually respond when someone lets you
   down? Summarize what the following verses say about showing gentleness to
   others (1 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; 1 Pet. 3:8-9; 3:15). Do you
   know someone who needs a touch of Jesus’ gentleness in his or her life? How can
   you be a channel of gentleness to that person?

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1 Psa. 18:35; 37:11; Isa. 40:11; Zech. 9:9; Matt. 5:5; 11:29-30; 12:20; 1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 5:22-
   23; 6:1; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:3, 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 3:2; Heb. 5:2; James 3:13;
2 Judith C. Lechman, *The Spirituality of Gentleness: Growing Toward Christian Wholeness* (San Francisco:
   Harper & Row, 1987), 146.

17

Faithfulness: Workplace Integrity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sloth</td>
<td><strong>Faithfulness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Life-giving Rhythms</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing minimal or the least important work, and loving ease</td>
<td>Persisting in important work with utter reliability</td>
<td>Experiencing a pattern of life that produces excellent work without being consumed by it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AU: “Paul, you’ve taken on many challenging projects that don’t yield immediate results. What helps you to work wholeheartedly and faithfully when things get difficult?”

PS: “When I left pastoral work to work as a carpenter, I learned there was much more to becoming a skilled craftsman than merely tinkering on woodworking projects. The biggest challenge my boss and I faced was in finishing the projects we’d started. We found it much easier to start new projects, but it took us ages to do the finishing touches, which meant it took us ages before we got paid! That’s when I learned the importance of being reliable, and the ability to persist to the end. I was eventually rewarded with a partnership in the company.”

AU: “That was quite a switch in jobs, from pastor to carpenter. What did you discover in doing something completely different?”

PS: “I discovered that most jobs are open only to candidates with years of relevant experience. That approach is wrong. Dee Hock, President of Visa International, argues that we should ‘hire and promote first on the basis of integrity; second, motivation; third,
capacity; fourth, understanding; fifth, knowledge; and last and least, experience. He says that without integrity, motivation is dangerous; without motivation, capacity is impotent; without capacity, understanding is limited; without understanding, knowledge is meaningless; without knowledge, experience is blind. Experience is easy to provide and quickly put to use by people with the other qualities.”

AU: “Some companies I’ve worked with seem to think that money is the best motivating force in spurring productivity.”

PS: “Definitely not. Money motivates neither the best people nor the best in people. The key is spending most of your time managing yourself – your ethics, character, principles, purpose, motivation, and conduct.”

**A. Rethinking Faithfulness**

Faithful people are highly valued in the workplace. Their word is trustworthy. Work gets done even when nobody’s watching. When there are people watching, the faithful worker has nothing to hide. She accomplishes her tasks in a single-minded manner. She may not necessarily be a superstar in the company. And sometimes, she may balk at taking on new challenges – not because she’s bone-lazy but because she needs to be convinced that the work is important enough and that she can deliver on her promises. She is trustworthy. Faithful people are marked by integrity.
The Greek word used, “pistos,” describes a man whose faithful service is reliable and dependable. Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of the faithful worker. He demonstrated his by becoming the faithful high priest who accomplished his atoning work on the cross, forgave our sins, and brought us into God’s presence. Theologian William Barclay contends that Jesus’ faithfulness was so exemplary that not only can humanity depend on Jesus, “but God also can depend on Jesus.”

In receiving the fruit of the Spirit, we are receiving the character of God who is faithful. The more we rely on God, the more faithful we become. This quality of fidelity is what we look for in servants (Tit. 2:10).

B. Faithfulness at Work

Faithfulness gets expressed in the workplace primarily through integrity. A person of integrity demonstrates consistency between his inner and outer life, and between his word and deed. A person who acts with integrity becomes dependable and reliable and, therefore, faithful. He leads a ‘transparent’ life.

Integrity, therefore, is a parallel word for faithfulness. Stephen L. Carter, a professor at Yale Law School, defines integrity as the ability to:

1. Discern what is right and wrong
2. Act on what has been discerned, even at personal cost
3. Speak openly about one’s understanding of right and wrong.
In Deuteronomy 17:15-20, God describes the attributes of a “king” whose rule is marked by integrity. The integrity and faithfulness of the king – or any leader – need to be worked out in six different areas:

1. Social integrity: “The king must be chosen from among his or her own people” (Deut. 17:15). No one can influence the system without participating wholeheartedly in it. This advice is often not heeded in the search for newly appointed executives or pastors.

2. Financial integrity: “The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself…he must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold” (Deut. 17:16,17). Today, CEOs have no qualms being paid two or three hundred times the salary of entry-level employees. Many business and political leaders have also fleeced their citizens. People without financial integrity cannot work with faithfulness.

3. Directional Integrity: “The king must lead people in the right direction and steer them from folly (Deut. 17:16). In the same way, leaders must be faithful in casting a vision – articulating a destiny and hope that points to greater trust in God rather than retreating to the security of the “tried and true” trust of one’s abilities.
4. Sexual integrity: “He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray” (Deut. 17: 17). One of the most common areas where leaders fall is in the area of sexual fidelity. Inflated by pride and bored by the mundane, they seek new thrills that undermine their trustworthiness and faithfulness to people.

5. Conscience integrity: The conscience of the king is bound to a higher authority. “He is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law…it is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life” (Deut. 17:18). Without a conscience shaped by God, people become unmoored, and lack the faithfulness to persist in important tasks.

6. Relational integrity: “He must not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites” (Deut. 17:20). Herein lies the greatest challenge – for a high-ranking person to regard herself as no better than her peers. Personal humility and meekness must characterize the leader, or for that matter, any person who seeks after God.

C. Cultivating the Fruit of Faithfulness

The workplace is the crucible where we discover our deep need of God; in other words, we come to know ourselves as needy, hungry and longing for God to transform our character. We would not be able to become faithful workers without God’s help.
The first step in seeking God’s help would be to discern the areas in which we need to grow in faithfulness. There are three things we can do:

1. Ask for feedback: Seek out feedback from colleagues for areas of growth. Listen carefully to any criticism without trying to explain yourself. Criticism, whether true or not, is valuable in revealing any internal inconsistencies within yourself.

2. Consider a specific occasion when you have let someone down: what happened? What were the circumstances that led you to become unfaithful to that relationship?

3. Reflect on any failures you’ve experience due to your performance at work. Consider if it was an issue of integrity related to any of the six areas (social, financial, conscience, etc.) above.

While the questions and exercises above might appear too introspective, they are life-giving because we gain greater knowledge of our divided selves. “Without external work we could not know ourselves fully, for only in daily work do we have a perfect opportunity to observe ourselves; it is then indeed that we discover the good and evil in ourselves, and see our merits and faults,” notes Polish Cardinal Wyszynski. As our Achilles heel is exposed, we become more ready to come before God in a posture of surrender, humbly seeking his help in our desire to become faithful servants.

In your prayers, you could also ask God for the tenacity and courage to:  

1. Invite a colleague or friend to become an accountability partner: in your dealings with him or her, go the extra mile in sharing your weaknesses. Give your friend
the license to relentlessly follow through to ensure that you are keeping your word.

2. Obey God promptly: when you sense the Spirit’s gentle and quiet promptings, do not delay. Do not boast about your actions but do it cheerfully – and with great love.

3. Choose one small area to grow in faithfulness: identify a specific area in your life, or a specific task entrusted to you in the workplace. As you learn to be faithful in one small area, you will become faithful bigger things. At the very least, you would be safeguarding yourself from over-promising and under-delivering.

An Exercise

1. Review the steps and ideas for cultivating the fruit of faithfulness. Choose the most significant area and ask God to reveal his own character in you.

2. Review the six areas of integrity required in a leader and determine which area in your life that needs the Spirit’s fresh infusion. Write down a few necessary things (short to long term) that will help you become a faithful worker. Display this list prominently (e.g. bathroom mirror) as a daily reminder.

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3 Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, 110-111.
Kindness: Putting Others at Ease

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Envy</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Neighbor Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling the pain</td>
<td>Putting others at ease, and</td>
<td>Experiencing the ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of someone else’s</td>
<td>rejoicing in their gifts and</td>
<td>to meet the needs of others,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advancement and</td>
<td>achievements</td>
<td>and to contribute to their</td>
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<tr>
<td>possessions</td>
<td></td>
<td>well-being</td>
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AU: “This might sound like a naïve question. But I’m wondering what would it look like if leaders in business, politics and Christian organizations treated one another with kindness?”

PS: “My father, the president of a steel company, embodied kindness. Every summer, I worked in a different division in the company – punch presses, warehouse, shipping, payroll, and filing. It gave me the opportunity to observe my father at work. His office door was always open. All day, a stream of people went in and out. He welcomed people, listened to them, put them at ease. He forgave people who made mistakes. Long after Dad retired, my cousin met the sweeper who worked for my father. This man said that Ernest Stevens treated him with dignity and made him feel important.”

AU: “The story of your father shows that true hospitality – or demonstrating kindness – cannot be done for show. It cannot be engineered into a system or process. Kindness in action is a matter of the heart.”
PS: “Yes. I’ve been deeply challenged by the words of Jean Vanier who founded the L’Arche communities for the disabled. He observed that managers who practice an open-door policy (telling staff that they are always welcome to come in for a chat) often ended conveying, in a thousand small ways, that they are too busy. ‘The door of my office may be open, but the door of my heart is closed.’”\(^1\)

AU: “Kindness doesn’t come naturally especially to people who’re goal-oriented and fixated on outputs.”

PS: “With the Spirit’s empowerment, we will learn the art of putting people at ease, and rejoicing in their gifts and achievements.”

### A. Rethinking Kindness

We commonly think of kindness in the workplace as being kind to coworkers, to the community and to oneself. Kindness is caring and respecting colleagues: sharing an extra cup of coffee, baking cookies for the secretary pool, chatting with the office cleaner, or helping a new hire feel at ease. Kindness can also be expressed to the wider community: giving spare change to the homeless guy on our way to work, organizing collection boxes for victims of natural disasters, and mobilizing coworkers to help out in a charity. Not least, there’s kindness to oneself which includes managing stress, exercising and seeking work-life balance. Hard-boiled companies and managers usually dismiss kindness as a fluffy concept that has no impact on the bottom-line. But most HR professionals argue otherwise, asserting that a kind workplace increases employee retention and engagement.
The New Testament Greek word for kindness, *chrestotes*, is often associated with God. God reveals his kindness by holding back judgment, being willing to forgive, and caring for creation and people by making sun and rain to fall on the just and unjust. He is the ultimate host in creating space and time in which we can experience a profound welcome, acceptance and freedom. In the Psalms, God shows his kindness by not giving up on us, and his concern for the poor and afflicted (Ps 140:12). Above all, God’s supreme act of kindness, asserts William Barclay, is demonstrated when Jesus renounced heavenly privileges to take on our lowly human form.²

Kindness defuses fear, hidden agenda and manipulation. It heals conflict. Kindness, says classic commentator Plummer, is “the sympathetic sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease, and shrinks from giving pain.”³ Kindness stands in diametric opposition to envy. Envy causes us to feel terrible when someone else is happy; kindness causes us to rejoice with the achievements of others. Envy seeks to pull people down; kindness builds people up. In choosing to demonstrate Jesus’ kindness, we are choosing the journey toward selflessness.

B. Kindness at Work

The workplace offers daily opportunities to be aware of God’s kindness, and to offer that same kindness to people we meet. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you,” says apostle Paul (Eph. 5:32). God has forgiven us and showed us compassion. In the same way, we are called to show
compassion to unreasonable bosses, resist the temptation to brush off difficult customers, and forgive colleagues who wrong us.

Kindness, however, should not only be expressed in relationships; kindness has to be embodied in the culture and values of the organization. We have a role to play in this. Many companies these days do not embody kindness to staff, especially in their systems, structures and policies. In an era of downsizing and global competition, shareholders often reward senior management for combining roles and creating greater responsibilities for staff in order to increase productivity and to beat the competition. As a result, people become more stressed, overworked and underpaid.

There’s a huge need for people to step forward in embodying the spirit of kindness demonstrated by God. It begins by understanding how organizational culture works. Edgar Schein’s seminal study of organizational culture defines the following as key elements of culture:

1. The observed behavioral regularities in a group (e.g. Jill is held up as a model employee for showing up for work fifteen minutes early)
2. The dominant values of the group (Joe the sales manager implies that any kind of misrepresentation is permissible as long as the deal is clinched)
3. The rules or “ropes” of the group (John plays squash every week with the boss because it’s the way to climb the corporate ladder)
4. The feeling or climate that is conveyed (Jean has learned to hold back on sharing her concerns during meetings because her colleagues do not welcome negativity).
Schein says that members of the organization who share the culture and beliefs often do it unconsciously. In most organizations, culture is not formed overnight but through a long process. The charisma of the founding president plays a large role in embedding the cultural DNA that determines most of what the company will become. As the company evolves, several things happen:

- Members take on the founder’s assumptions, usually subconsciously
- Some companies never ‘allow’ their founder to die or leave, no matter how many successors have come and gone
- Cultures incarnate not only the strengths of founders but also their weaknesses.

It is extremely difficult to transform the culture of a company; many change management books have been written to address this. Usually, whoever tries to do so will encounter overt and covert resistance from the culture. Rather than try to root out those weaknesses, Schein suggests that the opposite approach is usually more fruitful: to find out everything we can about the contribution our predecessors have made, and to celebrate what they’ve done for the organization. This allows the members of the organization to move on with new changes.

C. Cultivating the Fruit of Kindness

Practicing kindness comes more naturally to some people than to others. No matter who we are, the Spirit of God has demonstrated to us kindness through Jesus Christ. In our prayers, we can ask God to reveal to us how He would demonstrate His kindness toward
ourselves and coworkers. Inevitably, we’ll discover how we can play a role alongside God in loving diverse people in diverse situations.

Cultivating the Spirit’s fruit of kindness could possibly involve:

- A change of attitude: “I will not wait for others to be kind toward me”; “I will take first step”; “I will look at people in the eye, listen to them attentively, and be sensitive to their unspoken needs.”

- Reaching out to those below you: mentor someone younger who’s interested in your career; welcome new hires by treating them to lunch and share your ‘lessons learnt’; help someone shy feel at ease; teach a skill, and learn from others.

- Reaching out to peers: listen with compassion; leave a tasty treat or encouraging note for someone you can’t get along with or someone who’s going through a difficult time; help out overworked colleagues; express appreciation to bosses and supervisors.

- Reaching out to people outside the organization: send thank you notes to clients and coworkers; mobilize friends and coworkers to donate time and skills to worthy causes; perhaps cut down on work hours to spend more time with loved ones.
An Exercise

1. Does the culture of your organization embody kindness? How did it come about?

2. In what ways can you contribute to the workplace culture in your sphere of influence (large or small)? What acts of kindness can you practice through: a change of attitude; reaching out to people within the organization; and reaching out to stakeholders outside the company?

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3 Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit*, 97.
Patience: Remaining Where You Are With Hope

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restlessness</td>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Vocational Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking and feeling that there’s always something better somewhere else</td>
<td>Having the ability to remain where you are with meaningfulness and hope</td>
<td>Experiencing the certainty that you are in God’s will and doing God’s work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

AU: “Thank you for challenging me to consider the dangers of restlessness. Rather than running away, it’s important to stick it out when things get tough. In light of this, what does it take to work with patience and hope in all that we do?”

PS: “Frankly, like you, I get restless. Except for the last twenty years where I taught at Regent College, I have moved from assignment to assignment on a regular four-year cycle: pastoring, student counseling, carpentering, doing business, being a dean, teaching, and being a marketplace mentor.”

AU: “Nevertheless, you’ve remained in one place, Regent, for a long time. I’m sure you must have learned a thing or two about patience.”

PS: “Hopefully so. I think of a beautiful word, “longanimity,” coined by Cardinal Wyszynski. Longanimity is the ability to go the long haul, choosing not to change things for fairly trivial reasons, and not always longing for new work. This perspective on patience has helped me live out my vocation as a teacher and equipper at Regent College.”
A. Rethinking Patience

The workplace offers a myriad ways to test our patience: snarled traffic, staff that’s slow on the take, pompous bosses, tedious work, irritable colleagues. Small wonder that Margaret Thatcher, Britain’s famously short-fused ex-prime minister, was once heard saying: “I am extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end.”

Some people think that patience is a passive posture of helplessness adopted by weak-spirited. In the Bible, however, the Hebrew and Greek words for ‘patience’ are used to describe God working mighty deeds in his patience. God abounds in steadfast love and patience by bearing the sins of people, refusing the rebellion of human beings and never giving up on people. Jesus is our exemplar. As Lord of lords he patiently bore his human limitations; he was punished for transgressions that were not his own. Jesus’ ultimate act of patience lay in choosing to remain on the cross, when he could have ordered heaven’s army to rescue him from suffering. That is the character of divine patience.

As a fruit of the Spirit, patience is the work of Jesus Christ, helping us become more like God, in sticking with things, holding out hope for people and persisting in our callings. Patience is the chief attribute that enables us to fulfill our life’s goal of abiding, or remaining, in Jesus Christ. In contrast to a restless spirit, patience is having the ability to remain where we are with meaningfulness and hope.
Therefore we are called to run with “patience” the race marked out for us (Heb. 12:1) in the same way that Abraham, Job, the Old Testament prophets, Simeon, Paul, John and the New Testament apostles exercised patience and endured suffering in waiting for God (Heb. 6:15; Job 1:21; James 5:10; Lk. 2:25; 2 Tim. 3:10; Rev. 1:9). Evelyn Underhill, a modern Christian mystic, once said that God works in tranquility. And tranquility seldom goes into partnership with speed.¹ Like the other gifts of the Spirit, patience is not something we work up by sheer will power but by trusting in Him in all circumstances.

B. Patience at Work

We need the Spirit’s gift of patience whenever we feel like running away from intractable issues at work. Patience is our greatest ally when we have made a dreadful mistake. Or when we dreamily idolize greener pastures. Or when we’ve simply run out of courage or motivation.

“The prime virtue gained through daily work is patience,” said Cardinal Wyszynski, mentor to the late Pope John Paul II. He likened patience to the rungs of a ladder which we can climb, bringing us closer to God. What brings us down that ladder would be the threefold temptations of: a) the longing for new work, b) unfaithfulness in work that has been entrusted to us, and c) the desire to change jobs for trivial reasons.²

If we find ourselves struggling with these temptations, we are most likely wrestling with the question of whether our work is part of our calling. If this particular
work is part of our God-given calling, then we should persist. Eighteenth century Puritan thinker William Perkins developed this thought most eloquently by asserting that everyone is called, and that all callings are equal (whether one is homemaker, pastor or magistrate). Anyone who becomes a Christian should be assisted to discover his or her calling.3

As we seek to be faithful to our calling, we must also be aware of sinful tendencies that erode our ability to persist, such as envy of other people’s callings, and ambition. The most serious threat undermining our ability to persist in our calling is impatience, which causes us to leave our calling when trouble comes. For people tempted to abandon their calling, Perkins, who lived in an era before anesthesia was invented, called for courageous tenacity: “Continue in your calling as a surgeon continues to cut his patient even though the patient screameth much!”4

Being patient, however, doesn’t mean being inflexible, or slow to act. There are certain seasons in life when it’s necessary to flex and change. Jesus and the apostle Paul showed great adaptability in sharing the gospel and responding to people’s needs. However, the general pattern of Jesus’ life was to remain true and faithful to his calling. He spent three years walking with his disciples; He had important things to do but he did not rush.
C. Cultivating Patience at Work

There are no short cuts or easy solutions for cultivating the Spirit fruit of patience. It is tempting to try to run faster and to short-circuit the journey toward character transformation. Patience takes time. Often it requires us to remain where we are as we wait for God to move. But what can we do while we wait? We suggest the following:

- **Make it your default option to not easily leave whatever you are doing.** When asked by a young disciple about how to please God, Antony of Egypt, the venerable founder of Eastern monasticism, said: “Whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes in whatever you do; do it according to the testimony of the holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it.” This pithy advice applies to almost every occupation. If we stick with things when trouble comes, we will inevitably grow stronger.

- **Reflect on the specific situations that test your patience.** Ambition and envy are inhibitors to patience. It is easy to feel restless when you compare yourself to other people who seem to have better jobs and brighter prospects. But before God, you begin to realize that the very thing that is in your hand – be it your job or project or current responsibility – has great potential for good.

We learn patience not by grinning, grimacing and bearing pain. To be patient (i.e. remaining where we are with meaningfulness and hope) is simply to wait for God’s timing. The Psalmist declares: “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil. For evil men
will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.” (Psa. 37:7-9). As we wait and hope in God, we are given a new vision to God working in our lives, blessing us with meaning and purpose, empowering us to keep going.

An Exercise

1. Identify a specific occasion past or present when you felt restless or afflicted by the urge to run away:
   - Did you ask “why me?”
   - Did you feel self-pity?
   - Are you willing to turn to God with a concrete request for renewal in this area?

2. If you willing to turn to God, you may wish to proceed with the following:
   - In your prayer, affirm that your struggle with restlessness has been decisively defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
   - Breathe in the Spirit’s empowering presence, asking God to renew you with the gift of patience.

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20
Peace: Bringing Wholeness and Harmony

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<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Heavenly-Mindedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having insufficient passion or interest to give yourself heartily to work and life</td>
<td>Having a passion for completeness and harmony, no matter what the situation</td>
<td>Experiencing the meaning and joy of work that will last in view of eternity</td>
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AU: “During our canoeing trip together, I sat in a folding chair and watched the sun set behind a heavy bank of clouds that shrouded the mountains in deep purple. I listened to the gentle lapping of the waves against the lakeshore. I wasn’t doing anything else but I wasn’t bored. I felt absolute bliss and serenity. Could it be possible that we’re created to live in utter calm and peace?”

PS: “You must have forgotten how hard it was for us to paddle the canoe against the wind to get to the lakeside campground.”

AU: “That’s true. Achieving a state of bliss was hard work. My arms and back ached for one week after the trip.”

PS: “The peace that God gives us is not about striving for utter calm. It’s also not about the absence of stress and pressure. It’s about presence – discovering that God is present among us, and he is helping us each step of the way, no matter how crazy things get.”
AU: “I hope I discover God’s peace when I return to the world of office politics and back-to-back meetings.”

A. Rethinking Peace

Few people consider the workplace as a sanctuary of peace. Modern companies are beset by cutthroat competition, economic uncertainties and shareholder concerns. High-performing workers face more pressure to perform as they are ‘rewarded’ with increasing challenging assignments. Laggards are told they need to shape up or ship out. Today, more and more people are working under high stress and sacrificing relationships, rest and reflection along the way. Small wonder that people long for peace – or less stress.

From a Christian perspective, God’s peace calls for much more than personal stress management. The peace given to us by Jesus is not about absence (of tension and problems) but presence, says Eugene Peterson, professor emeritus of spiritual theology at Regent College. “There is nothing lethargic or static about peace; it involves total participation in life at its most vital…. When we receive God’s peace, our experience is not of being removed from conflict so that we can live a quiet, undisturbed life on our own terms. No, we are plunged into life on God’s terms, the light-filled action of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the three-ring circus of salvation.”1 God’s peace is vibrant, passionate, fully alive. It stands in stark contrast to boredom, which sucks the life out of us, sicken us, causing us to lack passion in our work and relationships.
The Hebrew word for peace, “Shalom,” means “may you be well.” The peace of Christ ushers in right relationships in every sphere of life – with one’s self, and with colleagues, nations and God. Jesus did not come to bring outward calm while storms seethed within communities and corporations. Rather than false peace, he brought a sword that divided between truth and falsehood, between idolatry and true service of God (Matt. 10:34). Then Jesus took that ultimate step of becoming a “peace offering,” placing himself between a righteous God and sinful humanity – atoning for sin and reconciling the two warring parties.

B. Peace at Work

We can be recipients of God’s peace while we work. We can also be channels of God’s peace in the workplace. There are at least three different dimensions through which we can give and receive God’s peace:

1. **Seek peace through righteousness and justice.** True peace requires a passion for completeness and harmony, waging war against evil and injustice, whenever necessary. “Righteousness and peace kiss each other,” declares the Psalmist (85:10). Seeking righteousness and justice in the workplace calls us to be attentive to the downtrodden and suffering among us. While it is possible to ignore the plight of the needy as we pursue a stress-free life, this would not be true Christian peace.
2. **Seek peace among enemies and those who persecute us.** The peace of Christ is attained by harmonizing diverse people and personalities. We do not arrive at peace by forcing conformity, ignoring tension, or papering over disagreements. “For Jesus,” says award-winning author Frederick Buechner, “peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle but the presence of love.”

Repeatedly, Jesus promises us his peace, not a generic peace, but one that transcends human understanding. “My peace I leave with you; my peace I give you,” he tells his disciples, shortly before he is arrested, tortured by soldiers, tried by a kangaroo court, ridiculed by religious leaders, and dismissed as a charlatan by passers-by (John 14:27). Yet on the cross he forgave everyone – a cosmic act that mystified human understanding but brought harmony to human strife. We have now been bestowed with that same peace. When we are betrayed or berated by bosses or colleagues – and we forgive them – surely we are passing the peace of Christ.

The workplace provides numerous opportunities for Christians to grow as peacemakers. Workplace conflict often flares up from small incidents, such as a carelessly sent email or lunchtime gossip. Sometimes, keeping peace means keeping silence. In other situations, Christians must seize opportunities to resolve conflicts by stepping in as mediators. “Peace is right relationships in every sphere of life,” says bible scholar William Barclay.
3. **Seek peace among fellow believers.** Jesus urges us to not only pass the peace to our enemies, but also commands fellow Christians to be at peace with one another (Mark 9:50). However, seeking peace among believers can often be a greater challenge because of our ‘Christian’ tendency to avoid conflict or be nice to one another. These insidious patterns of denial, passive-aggressive indirectness and unspoken resentments can often be toxic especially in Christian ministry. By not talking together, we do not work together. The irony, of course, is that most relationships are strengthened as people work through conflict and resolve their differences in a meaningful manner. This requires listening without judgment or jumping to conclusions, taking risks, and developing creative options. The default option – pretending that everything’s okay – may appear peaceable, but this is false peace. Jerome, the fourth century doctor of the church, bluntly observe that “as long as we are unable to make peace with our brother, I do not know whether we may offer our gifts to God.”

C. **Cultivating the Fruit of Peace**

Jesus was comfortable with himself, whether in crowds or alone. He was not flustered by crowds but welcomed them. He valued solitude but did not become a recluse. Caught in a storm that terrified experienced fisherman, Jesus remained calm. Jesus, the human embodiment of God, maintained his equilibrium amid the complexity of life. Sought out as a wise counselor, then ridiculed, mobbed by people, then rejected by a mob, he rested in the knowledge that even the worst, if it happens, will be the best. That inner certainty is peace.
We, too, can receive this peace that Christ embodies. Fundamentally, we must acknowledge that we are enemies of God due to the evil in our hearts. But thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, we have become friends of God, and therefore enemies with evil. Origen, the great second century theologian, observed that “we shall have even greater peace with God if we continue our active hostility toward the devil and fight against the vices of the flesh.”

This new relationship far surpasses the Greeks’ ancient search for “ataraxia” (tranquility, quiet mind, total indifference, stillness). As we wage war against evil and desire peace with God, the God of peace reveals himself.

An Exercise

Read Philippians 4:6-9 and invite the God of Peace to enter your life’s circumstances, especially the workplace. You may wish to practice the following:

- Do not worry (a sin that undermines our trust in God). “Do not be anxious about anything,” says Paul. The decision to trust – and not worry – requires daily vigilance. As you work, become more attentive or any worrisome thoughts that trouble you during the day.

- Pray. Rather than become obsessed about your worries, name these worrisome thoughts and share them with God (1 Pet. 5:7). The workplace provides ample opportunity for practicing this! Also take time to specify moments of gratitude (Phil. 4:6).

- Think on holy things. In your daily work, articulate the small but significant moments that are noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and
praiseworthy. We recommend that you do this after dinner or before bed. You’ll be surprised how everyday will yield a harvest or praiseworthy things (Phil. 4:7).

Nine Fruits of Workplace Spirituality

21
Introducing Outcomes

As we experience freedom from the soul-sapping struggles, and our lives become more infused with the Spirit’s work, our attitude toward work will change.

We will begin to work prayerfully and consider work to be living prayer. The quality of our work will be characterized by gratitude and purity of motivation. Though we might win praise and financial gain for our work, we understand the need for ongoing relinquishment and surrendered contentment. Instead of seeking work-life balance, our life will be governed by a life-giving rhythm, and spurred by love of neighbor. Not least, we will gain an unshakeable confidence of our God-given vocation; we know that at least some of our work will not be in vain, but will endure in the new heaven and new earth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggles</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lust</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Purity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gluttony</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Relinquishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Gentleness</td>
<td>Surrendered Contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloth</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Life-giving Rhythms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envy</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Neighbor Love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The nine outcomes above – which describe results of the Spirit’s work in our lives – are by no means exhaustive. There’s so much more to experience besides the nine outcomes we’ve identified. This is only the beginning.

The Spirit’s work in our lives is gradual and good. We will be changed for the better. But does that also mean that we will always find increasing satisfaction in our daily work?

This question preoccupied “Qoholeth,” the Hebrew professor of philosophy who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. He asked: what does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? Qoholeth responded to his own question with a profound insight: We will not find life’s deepest satisfaction in doing the work itself, but we find deepest satisfaction in being with God, who works alongside us.

Many of us say we want to work for God. Indeed, we have encountered pastors, missionaries, accountants, business executives and home-makers whose sincere and heartfelt goal is to work for God. But the apostle Paul, himself a tentmaker and disciple-maker, hinted on the ominous possibility that such work could be in vain (see 1 Cor. 15:58). The key thing that safeguards our work from becoming futile, meaningless and a vanity is that we perform the work in faith, hope and love for Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:3).
Therefore, work is an evangelist that draws us closer to Jesus Christ if we have the right motivations and attitude. Jesus does not promise us the good news that we will be insanely happy and successful in our jobs. Jesus promises us better news: in our work, we will find satisfaction in Him. He alone can fill the God-shaped vacuum in our souls.

In hiddenness and humility, Jesus comes to us in the workplace not to dictate what we should do with our lives but to offer himself as our companion on the journey.
AU: “Some days, during unexpected moments at work, I’m surprised by joy. It’s an awareness of God’s abiding presence – I’m working with God, and my work matters to God.

PS: “Have you always had these experiences of God’s presence with you in the workplace?”

AU: “Absolutely not. I’ve never considered myself to be a prayerful person to begin with. However, when I pursued my theological studies during my sabbatical, I read about ancient Christians who aspired to ‘pray continually’ and ‘give thanks in all circumstances’ (1 Thess. 5:17-18). It sounded impossible that anyone could pray all the time. But I tried to put it into practice as I wrote theological papers. I prayed before I began an assignment. Writing prayerfully, without anxiety or rush, I would thank God for the insights. Each keystroke would be an act of worship. When the work was done, I thanked God for helping me. Slowly I began to see that my work – and the process of working – could be a form of prayer. God was helping me become more aware of his movements in my heart.”

PS: “What was it like when you got a ‘real’ job again?”

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being imprisoned within your self as No. 1</td>
<td>Feeling the exhilaration of having God as No. 1</td>
<td>Experiencing continuous communion with God</td>
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</table>
AU: “At first, I felt as if my world had caved in. I was stressed and often paralyzed by deadlines and I couldn’t pray. And I was too worried to think about God. One day, however, I was struck by a simple thought: I should regard my workplace as a “monastery” where God is already present. I could pray quick, short prayers for my colleagues during work. During lunch, I imagined Jesus Christ as our unseen conversation partner. When I felt stuck, I would ask God for help. So there were lots of opportunities to pray, because I felt stuck so many times a day! Slowly, I realized that God has been keeping company with me all this while – even when I did not naturally turn to him.

PS: “Your story reminds me of God’s people in the Bible: Abraham, Moses, David, Boaz, Ruth, Nehemiah, Daniel, Jesus, and Paul. When we consider the variety of work they did – prophet, nation-builder, shepherd, administrator, judge, warrior, king, poet, gleaner, homemaker, just to mention a few – we see that their kind of work was not very conducive for prayer. Yet they prayed before work, during work, and after work. They experienced communion and friendship with God.”

AU: “And they prayed in so many different ways while they worked. They prayed with words. They prayed in silence. They sang and shouted, they moaned and groaned. They share their joy, anger, despair, thanksgiving, and frustrations with God. They prayed with their friends and colleagues. But they also prayed in private, when no one was watching.”
Work and Prayer

Without prayer our work life is impoverished. The apostle Paul demonstrated the richness of joining prayer and work. Besides writing about prayer, he prayed as he wrote letters (as part of his pastoral work). For example, in writing to Christians in Colosse, prayer and work frames the beginning and ending of Paul’s letter about what the new life in Christ looks like (Col. 1:3, 9-12). For Paul, there’s no clear separation between prayer and work:

- Prayer and work are directed to God (Col. 1:3, 9, 12; 3:23).
- Both are animated and energized by Jesus Christ (1:11, 29).
- We work and pray with wholeheartedness and joy (3:23, 4:2).
- Prayer and work require continued attention (1:3, 9).
- Prayer leads us toward a life of good work and carrying out Christ’s work (1:9,10; 3:3,4) while work leads us toward depending on Christ’s power through prayer (1:29).
- Work strengthens our relationship with the Father (3:23) while prayer makes us thankful to the Father (1:12).

Taken together, prayer and work are synergistic. “It is not possible to do lasting, versatile, fruitful and effective work without linking it with prayer,” says Cardinal Wyszynski.¹ When we work prayerfully we will:

- See people through God’s eyes and we are able to speak the truth, comfort the hurting, help the hopeless, and listen to the lonely.
- Become aware that God is guiding us even in the most frustrating experiences at work.
- Find ourselves overcoming pride.
Discover joy in the work that we do.

Be inundated with hope that the products of our minds and hands – no matter how menial – will have eternal value.

A minister once asked the Indian mystic, Sadhu Sundar Singh, “Do we need to pray more, or to work more, or to divide our time in doing both?” He replied: “Both are equally necessary. Prayer without work is as bad as work without prayer. As a clucking hen to satisfy its instinct continues to sit in some dark corner even after its eggs have been removed, so the life of those who remove themselves from the busy life of the world and spend their time wholly in prayer is as fruitless as is the hen’s.”

**An Example: The Prayerful Chef**

Nicolas Herman, commonly known as Brother Lawrence, was a cook in a barefooted Carmelite monastery in Paris in the year 1666. Because He was an unordained monk, he did not pray upstairs with the clergy and ordained monks. Instead, he worshipped God amid the clatter of pots and pans in the hot kitchen. As the years passed, the monks and people outside his monastery felt that Brother Lawrence had somehow discovered an amazing sense of the presence of God in his life. They peppered him with questions and letters on how to be aware of God while working. Brother Lawrence’s conversations and written replies were eventually compiled into *The Practice of the Presence of God.*

Consider below a few of Brother Lawrence’s quotations which we have adapted for readability. They shed wonderful insights on what it means to be praying continuously while working:
“In order to form a habit of conversing with God continually and referring all we do to Him, we must first attend to Him with some diligence. After some attentive care, we should find his love inwardly exciting us to it without any difficulty.”

“When we are offered an occasion to practice some virtuous act, we must address ourselves to God, saying, Lord, I cannot do this unless You enable me. When we do this, we receive strength more than sufficient.”

“When I failed in my duty, I confessed to God, saying, I shall never do otherwise if You leave me to myself; it is You who must hinder my falling and mend what is amiss. After this, I gave myself no further uneasiness about it.”

“For me the set times of prayer are not different from other times. I retire to pray, according to the directions of my superiors, but I do not want such retirement, nor ask for it, because my greatest business does not divert me from God.”

“When I fail in my duty, I readily acknowledge it, saying, I am used to failing; I shall never do otherwise if I am left to myself. If I do not fail, then I give God thanks, acknowledging that the strength comes from Him.”

Which of Brother Lawrence’s prayers is appropriate for you today in the workplace?
3 Adapted from Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Spire, 1967), 19.
5 Lawrence, *The Practice*, 22.
Persistent Gratitude

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<tr>
<td>Inflaming the passion to possess more than you have</td>
<td>Cultivating a character that gives rather than takes</td>
<td>Experiencing the freedom of knowing that all you have comes from God</td>
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AU: “I’ve met senior executives who don’t feel grateful for their work or found time to enjoy what they already have. If it seems so hard for wealthy and accomplished people to feel gratefulness, what about the rest of us?”

PS: “Since young, I’ve been fortunate to meet grateful people. And they usually count among the poor. My grandfather, for example, was a fisherman who sailed his schooner to Labrador to fish for six months of the year. He had no auxiliary engine or radar. But everyday, he always expressed thanks for the fish he caught and for safe travel.

AU: “Have you ever been poor yourself?”

PS: “There have also been seasons in my life when I didn’t have much. My wife Gail and I lived in the inner city of Montreal for six years, experiencing poverty as we worked alongside the poor. I’ve also worked as a tradesperson for six years. Through it all, I have learned that it is not the amount of money we make, the prestige of the job, or the social importance of the work that makes us greedy, or thankful. Instead, it is the predisposition
of our soul. A heart of gratitude lies in being content with what we have, and recognizing that everything that comes our way – including trials and setbacks – is a gift.”

AU: “Gratitude also delivers us from a lot of workplace struggles. When you’re grateful, you don’t think of quitting for the wrong reasons. You do not envy someone else’s job. Gratefulness kills a grumbling and complaining spirit. You can’t be angry and grateful at the same time. Gratitude really does safeguards us from falling into sin.

**Work and Gratitude**

We are dependent on God for everything: provision, protection, joy, work, relationships, family, and ultimately life itself. Therefore, being grateful lies at the heart of what it means to be a human being. It is inhuman to be ungrateful.

The journey from greed to goodness requires that we recognize that we are not autonomous. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann notes how our fundamental sin is rooted in the lack of gratitude (or “eucharist,” the Greek word for thanksgiving): “In the biblical story of creation, man is presented as a hungry being, and the whole world his food….The ‘original’ sin is not primarily that man has disobeyed God; the sin is that he ceased to be hungry for Him and for Him alone. The only real fall of man is his noneucharistic life in a noneucharistic world.”

We pile disaster upon ourselves when we refuse to revere or give thanks to God, says the apostle Paul. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul describes a catalog of sins –
sexual confusion, gossip, idolatry and murder – and notes that all these “sins” stem from the primal sin: irreverence and ingratitude. The heart of sin lies in our willful refusal to thank God even though we know all along that there’s a God.

The exact opposite happens when we express gratitude to God. Gratitude is the truest response to who God is and who we are. And one of the outcomes of being filled by God’s Spirit is that we lead grateful lives. What does a grateful life look like?

1. **A grateful life transforms how we view and experience work.** When we are thankful for everything, we discover that problems, difficult colleagues, personal struggles and losses become a means of grace and learning. Gratitude opens up new pathways in growing in Christ-like character. It’s in going through life’s crucibles – as Jesus did on his journey toward the cross – that we become like Jesus and experience God with us. Along the way, gratitude transforms our relationships into mutual, two-way transactions. “When gratitude is the source of our actions, our giving becomes receiving and those to whom we minister become our ministers,” says author Henri Nouwen. Thanksgiving sanctifies life.

2. **Persistent gratitude releases us from being controlled by how good or bad things are.** Through gratitude we gain a God-sized view of life. At its most basic, thanksgiving delivers us from discontentment. Gradually we gain a clearer vision on what God’s doing in our lives and workplace – things are not merely as they seem. A life of
prolonged gratitude – thanking God in seasons of plenty and famine – is simply a childlike trust that God is God and we are not.

3. **Thanksgiving gives God God’s due.** Daily work is full of situations where even an occasional breathed word of thanksgiving can be transformative. For which of these do you wish to say thanks to God today?

- Your coworkers
- Your boss or supervisor or anyone else to whom you are held accountable
- The corporation or organization where you are employed, or work as a volunteer
- A performance review
- Hard experiences when you are confronted with your own inadequacies
- A challenge or seemingly insoluble problem
- A failed project
- A successful project
- A bright idea that will improve systems and processes
- A breakthrough in a production, service or marketing challenge
- Financial concerns
- Provision and pay
- A coffee or drink enjoyed during a break
- A lunch conversation
- The very fact that you are able to work
- The work that you have been given to do
An Example: The Grateful Dentist

After becoming a Christian in university, Dr. David Gunaratnam wanted to become a missionary. However, when he qualified as a dentist, he felt called to pattern his life according to the apostle Paul, who worked as a tentmaker while growing God’s people. For David, this meant joining the civil service as a dentist and working in small towns in rural Malaysia. He developed his dental practice with faithfulness, quietly gaining renown for his skillful hands and gentle demeanor. He was later bequeathed one of the country’s highest honorific titles for his services.

And yet there is much more to David than his vocational identity. His biggest legacy are the lives of Christians who were discipled and shaped by David over the past five decades – many of whom are now senior pastors, theologians, missionaries and leaders of organizations in Malaysia and throughout the world. As one, they describe “David G” as a man who is humble, discerning and profoundly grateful toward life.

David’s gratitude is all the more remarkable because he and his wife Christina have two children, one of whom is severely autistic. Mark, who’s now 33 years old, has the aptitude of a three-year-old child. In appearance a fine young man, Mark requires intense care-giving; he cannot be left alone.

“When Mark was diagnosed as severely autistic with an IQ of 60, Christina and I were in shock,” David said. But while reading the book of Job, David was struck by an epiphany: in times of suffering, it is a better thing to ask God to reveal himself than to ask
why God allows the righteous to suffer. “We felt led to walk through the pain, and to pray, ‘Lord, just show us yourself.’ And in the goodness of the Lord, we were overwhelmed by God’s presence with us – even as we allowed the Lord to take control of our lives.”

And what has loving Mark taught David and Christina about gratefulness?

First, they discovered that God has given them genuine love for Mark. During the early years they knew they’d be unable to generate the gentle love needed to care for their son – not while Mark was tearing into books, writing on the walls, and ripping up furniture. “It’s a love that comes from God.”

Second, David and Christina found that their relationship has grown deeper. There were times when they felt at wit’s end in helping one another with caring for Mark. But in their prayers, they discerned that Christina’s main ministry would be to serve Mark, while David’s ministry would be to serve his wife. The challenges of caring for their son created a genuine bond with their son – and toward one another.

Third, they discovered freedom to minister to people in a radical, new way, with God at the centre. The severe curtailment of personal freedom – with Mark needing constant care and supervision – meant that their home could have felt like prison. Instead, it became a hospitable space for neighbors, church members, friends, strangers, patients and even David’s nursing staff, all of whom were drawn to their living room because of
bible studies, counseling sessions and conversations. They’ve all met Mark, of course. “God has revolutionized our thinking and approach to Christian ministry because of Mark. We realized that for the Lord to accomplish his will, Mark must be a part of the family,” David said.

People who’ve visited their home say they’ve been profoundly changed because of observing this family, as well as being blessed by David’s gift of growing deep people and being an attentive listener.

“This difficult circumstances that David G has faced in raising Mark adds weight to his wisdom,” said David Tan, a lay leader of a local church. “When you talk to him, he’s thankful and grateful that you know him, and that he knows you. He listens very intently to you, hanging on to every word, because everything you say is important. He makes sure he understands you perfectly. You get the sense that he’s truly grateful because he has met you. What a rare quality to find in a person.”

What are you truly grateful for in this season of your life?

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AU: “I’ve seen lots of people who work in a half-hearted manner, myself included. Or people might work hard, solely because they want to get ahead. But it’s less common to see a person who works wholeheartedly out of good and pure motivations. Paul, what does it look like for us to work with purity of heart?”

PS: “The bible states that the pure in heart shall see God in all spheres of life – including the workplace. Our hearts become deeply aligned with God’s heart. And we truly love our neighbors, including our colleagues, as ourselves.”

AU: “If that’s the case, I’ve fallen far short of the mark. And I could do much more in caring for the best interests of others.”

PS: “The experience of a pure heart is not reserved for the sinless. Sinners deeply pained by their frailties and weaknesses have the greatest potential to experience purity of heart. Purity of heart is for those who stumble, fumble and fall. It is also for those of us who are filled with joy when we discover that we’re working with a pure motivation of love. Like King David, we beseech God, ‘Create in me a clean heart.’”
Work and Purity

Purity is beautiful. But it is not beautiful to those who resist God. How do we get purity? While only God can create a pure heart (Psa. 51:12, Prov. 29:9), the journey toward purity of heart requires active struggle on our part to mortify sin (Psa. 73:13-14).

When we work with purity of heart, we will:

1. **See God in all spheres of life – including the workplace (Psa. 24:3-4).** Biblical writers suggest that a pure heart is empty (ready to be filled by God’s love and commandments) while the hearts of the wicked are stuffed with thoughts of well-being, wealth, pride and malice (see Psa. 41:7 and 73:7). As we walk with God and work wholeheartedly, we become upright and blameless people (Psa. 119:80). We gain the eyes to see God renewing and redeeming our workplaces. “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God,” said Jesus (Matt. 5:8).

2. **Experience God working through us.** We will work with one aim: to be one with Jesus Christ, and to share his goal of working alongside the Father (Jn. 5:19, 36). We will join Jesus in bringing God’s Kingdom into every sphere of life: the care of creation, neighborhoods, workplaces, churches, families, the poor and the rich, the healthy and the sick, the weak and the strong.

3. **Will one thing.** We always say yes to God always. In fact, we will do whatever it takes to ensure nothing gets in the way of our journey toward God. “God is one and all,” said the
Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, “therefore the pure in heart will one thing.”¹ God, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, promised his people “singleness of heart and action” (Jer. 32:39). This theme emerges in the teachings and the lives of great souls through history. In twentieth century India, Mother Teresa echoed this theme: “Your vocation is to belong to Jesus.”²

4. **Live an undivided life.** The pure in heart experience coherence of words, thoughts and deeds: our public and private lives are in sync. We will speak, think or do the right thing, whether or not anyone is watching us. We will not be driven by inner compulsions or external motivations. Rather, our actions will be motivated by love, joy and peace that come from the presence and power of the risen Christ working with us and within us in every aspect of our lives.

5. **Be enjoined to God.** The outcome of purity of heart is to love God for who he is – no more, no less. God is all that we love and all that we want. John Cassian, chronicler of the wisdom of the desert fathers, said that a pure heart is the entryway into the heart of our Trinitarian God: “[God] will be all that we are zealous for, all that we strive for. He will be all that we think about, all our living, all that we talk about, our very breath. And that union of Father and Son, of Son and Father, will fill our senses and our minds.”³

**An Example: A Pure Bureaucrat**

Life in the workplace can be hard, hurtful, and downright scary, especially in politics. People may resent you and try to bring you down. Daniel, a young Hebrew man, experienced this
firsthand. As a believing Jew, he was carried away in exile to be schooled as a bureaucrat in the pagan Babylonian court. Like most civil servants he worked under multiple governments. Gifted with innate intellect, verbal skills and integrity, Daniel vaulted to the most elite positions in the world’s largest empire at that time. Officials envied Daniel’s success and tried unsuccessfully to derail his political career. In a long series of twists and turns that led to an elaborate plot to murder Daniel, his purity of heart was revealed in several ways:

- **In a time of crisis, Daniel did not panic; he prayed and glorified God.** There was a time when King Nebuchadnezzar was about to execute all the wise men of Babylon because they could not interpret the meaning of his dream. Daniel and his friends prayed, received the interpretation, and told the astonished king what the dream meant. On both occasions when Daniel was called before the king to interpret dreams, Daniel gave credit to God (Dan. 4:1-37).

- **Daniel did not flinch from speaking the truth – no matter how difficult.** Another king, Belshazzar, saw a frightening vision while feasting. The king’s wife said to her husband, “There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him” (Dan. 5:11). So once again Daniel stood before the king and told the unvarnished truth – that the king’s days were numbered because of his spiritual debauchery.

- **Daniel led an utterly blameless life.** In his later years, Daniel was elevated to the third highest position in Babylon. King Darius, Daniel’s next boss, also liked Daniel. Envious administrators tried to dig up dirt on Daniel but learned something everyone else already knew: Daniel was impeachable. “They could find no corruption in [Daniel], because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent” (Dan. 6:4). Because they couldn’t expose Daniel for bad behavior, they resolved to attack Daniel for his single-minded pure
love and faith in God. (Leading a blameless life does not exempt us from trials and opposition.)

- Daniel cultivated a vibrant prayer life – no matter the cost. Daniel’s loyalty to God in the moment of crisis was no accident. Forced to choose between not praying daily to his God versus being eaten by lions, Daniel chose the latter. He knew the source of his success and guidance for each new day came from God. So no matter how busy or dangerous things became for Daniel, he never neglected prayer. In the lion’s den, Daniel was rescued by God. But even if Daniel did not live to tell the tale, he made it evident that his relationship with God mattered more than anything else, even life itself.

In what areas of your work-life do you desire consistency of word and action?

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1 Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (Radford: Wilder Publications, 2008).
Joyful Relinquishment

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<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gluttony</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Relinquishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding satisfaction through excessive consumption</td>
<td>Being governed from the inside through values and the Spirit’s leading</td>
<td>Experiencing the freedom to release possessions and to live and work more simply</td>
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</table>

PS: “Since our first conversation, do you think you’re gradually being transformed by God into a person with self-control? Have you found greater freedom from excessive consumption?”

AU: “My wife and I have been finding creative ways to voluntarily relinquish things. For example, in a middle-class culture where it’s normal for a husband and wife to own two cars and two cell-phones, we have chosen to share one car and one cell phone. We certainly aren’t suffering. It’s our small way of saying no to excessive consumption and saying yes to self-control.”

PS: “How did this journey of relinquishment begin for you?”

AU: “One day, while I was reading the Bible, a thought popped into my head. ‘Stop reading mystery novels.’ I knew the thought could not have come from me because I loved reading mystery novels. In fact, I used to devour four books a week while working and studying. But I knew that God, in a mysterious way, had spoken to me. So I stopped reading mystery novels. As the weeks passed, I was finally able to admit that I had
become obsessed with reading the novels. The act of reading late into the night was fueling my addictive personality, which became an entry way for other soul-sapping struggles, such as lust, pride, sloth and restlessness. I discovered that by stopping an indulgent habit, I was able to pray and work with greater joy. And I was no longer such an easily distracted person.”

PS: “Sounds like you’ve experienced the joy of relinquishment. For most people, relinquishment sounds terribly unappealing. I once saw a cartoon of a man being baptized by immersion. The pastor said that everything that goes under the water belongs to God. The last frame shows the man underwater with his hand above the water still grasping his wallet!”

AU: “The wonderful thing about practicing relinquishment is that it frees us from a grasping spirit. We relinquish the things that have a stronger grip on our soul than God – be it possessions, social standing, family ties, friendships, bodily needs.”

PS: “Wouldn’t it be wonderful for Christians in the workplace to practice relinquishment – especially in the area of money? As we practice relinquishment, we’ll experience greater freedom to release possessions to live with greater simplicity, in alignment with God.”
Work and Relinquishment

When we work with a deep sense of ongoing relinquishment, we will:

1. **Be content with our wages.** This was exactly what John the Baptist told the soldiers who sought him out for counsel (Lk. 3:14). John’s advice assumes that the soldiers were being paid fair wages, just as the apostle Paul instructed Christian employers (“masters”) in the city of Colossae to pay their servants “what is right and fair” (Col 4:1). For today’s middle-class workers who enjoy salaries that are benchmarked according to market rates, being content with wages is an indicator that we’re on the path toward relinquishment. The practice of relinquishment is an important safeguard from the constant push for more and more – an upward trajectory that can become counter-productive if one becomes “too expensive to retain.”

2. **Become free from the idolatry of money.** Money can be a means of grace; it can also be a death-dealing god. Jesus made this plain and clear in his encounter with a wealthy young man (Matt. 19: 16-26). The young man had approached Jesus asking: “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” Though financially successful, the man’s poignant question revealed that money never satisfies. He felt an emptiness and longed for something more. Diagnosing the man’s deepest ills, Jesus said, “If you want to be perfect, **go, sell** your possessions and **give** to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, **follow** me” (Matt 19:21). Shackled by the idolatry of money, the man walked away
sorrowfully. But those of us who learn the art of ongoing relinquishment will find joy in the ongoing process of going, selling, and giving to the poor. As we do this, we gain the Kingdom of God. We gain our eternal treasure: Jesus Christ.

3. **Engage successfully in spiritual warfare against the stranglehold money has over people, organizations, and even the church.** This spiritual warfare is unceasing, even for the greatest saints, because money is not a neutral medium of exchange; money has the ability to inspire devotion. “Those who love money never have enough,” declared the philosophical writer of Ecclesiastes (5:10). Money makes us covet only the things money can buy. It makes us feel secure, guilty and beholden to it — money is like a deity. “You cannot serve God and Mammon,” says Jesus (Lk. 16:13). In the midst of a greedy and needy world, the real reason for embracing simplicity and relinquishment is to reflect the values of the kingdom of God.

4. **Experience the joy of giving.** “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can,” declared the preacher John Wesley in his sermon on “The use of Money.” Wesley’s famous dictum is within reach for us. Jesus may not call everyone to sell all possessions as he did with the rich young man but we are all called to give generously, as Zaccheus the tax-collector did, the moment he experienced Jesus’ friendship.
An Example: A Simpler-Living Business Executive

One afternoon, Barney (not his real name) roared into the parking lot in his motor bike and took off his helmet. “Paul, I was just thinking and praying for you!” he declared.

I found this to be so characteristic of Barney, a gentle and soft-spoken senior executive of a global IT company who was always praying for people in his heart, like a true priest. Many times Barney has telephoned me and said, “This morning God put you on my heart. Is everything OK?” Barney always had the uncanny knack of doing this at a moment of personal need.

When he was part of the senior management team, Barnabas could have lived “high on the hog,” but he and his wife Rachel had opted to live more simply by practicing the “theology of enough.” Compared to his peers, Barney lived in a modest North Vancouver home, drove a modest vehicle, and enjoyed modest local vacations. Barney and Rachel shared one car. They had enough.

Barney also chose the path of downward mobility. On one occasion, when offered a promotion, he asked to be demoted. Barney wasn’t afraid of additional wealth or responsibilities. What troubled Barney was that this new job would take him away from caring directly for colleagues. This was the very thing he was most gifted in – an integral part of his calling to be a ‘pastor’ in the marketplace. So he asked for – and got – a demotion. The significant pay cut also gave him significantly more time to spend with his wife, family and neighbors.
When Barney retired from his executive position, he did not retire from his
calling. In tandem with his path of downward mobility, Barney now rides the bus or his
motorcycle to save on parking. He continues to care for people living downtown,
especially the bicycle courier men and women who regard him as a chaplain. He
volunteers as an escort for prisoners who are temporarily leaving prison to visit their
families. He does all these and more for the sake of Jesus Christ whom he loves.

How much is “enough” for you? Think of this in terms of housing, vehicles,
vacations, clothing, and eating out.

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Book of Everyday Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 896-900
3 John Wesley, “The Use of Money,” in Max L. Stackhouse, Dennis P. McCann, Shirley J. Roels and
Preston N. Williams, eds. *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in
AU: “Paul, I think I’m learning to complain less these days. I didn’t know that I was a whiner when things got tough. Then one night, while I was eating dinner with my wife and a friend, I heard God’s voice telling me to stop complaining.”

PS: “God told you to stop complaining?”

AU: “Yes, I think so. I was telling my dinner companions about my workplace woes: the long hours, the stress, the relentless work, and how I felt ignorant and stupid all the time. On and on I went. Then suddenly, I heard two words. Stop. Complaining. The voice was gentle but firm. And I was taken aback. Had I been complaining? Immediately, I realized I had been whining for one hour! I made a snap decision: I would stop complaining.

PS: “And what did you discover?”

AU: “That I complained much more than I realised. And it was very difficult to stop. But I also discovered that I was becoming less fearful, doubtful and self-pitying. I was..."
walking into the office with a confident stride and a smile. I discovered more and more things to be thankful about on a daily basis.”

PS: “The more you complained, the more you gave in fear. By not complaining, you broke the vicious cycle. You gradually gained the courage to confront situations that troubled you. And it sounds like you became much more contented once you surrendered your complaints to God.”

**Work and Surrender**

How much money do we need before we know it’s enough? That was a question that I (Alvin) posed to my friend, who had worked together with me in Malaysia’s largest telecommunications company.

“How much is enough?” I asked John Tan (not his real name).

“Five million,” John said.

“Okay,” I said. Then I recollected that he had already owned several houses in a wealthy suburb. “Sounds like you’re almost there.”

“No, no, no,” he said, with a wave of his hands. “The five million doesn’t include stocks, assets and homes. I’m looking for five more million – cash.”
A few years later, John and I met up for lunch (his treat). We had moved on to other jobs. He was now a senior vice president of a startup telecommunications company. I reminded him of our earlier conversation years ago.

“How’s the big five coming along?” I asked.

“The goalpost has changed,” he said. “Inflation has soared. I need to provide for my children’s education. I’m now looking at fifteen.”

Most people balk at the notion of living a contented lifestyle. We instinctively feel the need for more and more. It’s hard to be satisfied with what we have. However, Christians are called to live a surrendered life. Such a surrendered life need not be a weakness but a position of strength. We are imitating the Lord Jesus who demonstrated inner strength by walking toward the cross because he had surrendered his will to the loving Father.

This life of ongoing surrender is one of the outcomes of being filled by God’s Spirit. When we live in surrender to God, we will:

1. **Stop trying to control everything and everyone.** Anger is the burning desire to control (we do this directly or indirectly when we seethe in silence, gossip, feel frustrated, berate ourselves for our stupidity or feel irritable). The antidote to anger is an ongoing surrender to a trustworthy God. This does not mean we abdicate from responsibility. Rather, we gain the ability to wield authority without being manipulative or controlling.
2. **Accept whatever God gives us in life and work.** Some people feel that God has withheld from them the joy of “fulfilling work.” With surrender, frustration with God is transformed into courage: to accept whatever God gives, and to give whatever God requires, because God has given Himself to us. The great saints in the spiritual life could have become angry with God as they faced problems beyond their control e.g. mockery, diseases, abandonment, or martyrdom. But, they accepted whatever God gave them. “Come then…let us be resigned to our frailty and dependence on God, who would never reduce us to being unable to walk on our own feet if he had not the mercy to carry us in his arms,” writes Jean-Pierre de Caussade, a Jesuit priest who was described by his peers as “a friend of God” even as he struggled with the drudgery of administrative duties and a life of anonymity.¹ Mother Teresa of Calcutta, another exemplar of the surrendered life, said: “I belong to Jesus. He can do to me whatever he wants.”²

3. **Experience deep contentment.** We know that we are nothing without God; we acknowledge that everything we have belongs to God, including the struggles of life. We are thankful for everything. “To discover God in the smallest and most ordinary things, as well as in the greatest, is to possess a rare and sublime faith. To find contentment in the present moment is to relish and adore the divine will in the succession of all the things to be done and suffered which make up the duty to the present moment,” writes Jean-Pierre De Caussade.³
An Example: The Contented Farm Worker

Set in a time of moral and political chaos in ancient Israel, the book of Ruth tells the story of a Moabite woman who joins her mother-in-law in settling back in Bethlehem, six miles south of Jerusalem. Ruth faced overwhelming odds in adjusting to life in a new country: the locals were generally hostile toward Moabites; she was a widow with few prospects of remarriage; and not least, Ruth also had to care for Naomi, her bereft and embittered mother-in-law. Most people in Ruth’s position would have fallen into despair. But Ruth showed resilience by going to a nearby farm and began gleaning stray stalks of barley left behind by harvesters. In a serendipitous twist of events, Boaz the landowner fell in love with Ruth, they married, and they bore a son whose future progeny would one day include King David and Jesus Christ.

While this story ends joyously for Ruth, Boaz and Naomi, what interests us most is Ruth’s radical trust in God as she battled the odds. What helped Ruth down the journey of surrendered contentment?

- Ruth gave herself completely – to Naomi and to God. She held nothing back in her radical decision to follow Naomi to Israel: “Where you will go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried,” Ruth said (1:16-17). Ruth renounced any self-chosen plans. She held on to nothing but her newfound trust in God. Similarly, Francois Fenelon, the seventeenth century spiritual director, has noted that in the spiritual life, “we must give all…when God asks it. If we have not courage to give, at least we can let him take.”
Ruth lived fully in the present. Surrendering to God’s plans does not mean passivity or a wistful longing for the past. Ruth responded proactively to the opportunities of each day, no matter how small. Since she and Naomi had arrived in Israel during the barley harvest, so she resolved to pick up leftover gleanings from the edge of a field even though the task seemed futile (1:22-2:2). Ruth’s creativity turned evil days into good. “Sometimes what seems evil becomes good if we leave it to God and do not forestall him with our impatience,” says Fenelon.

Ruth learned to be faithful in small things. She accepted the toil and hardship of work (Ruth 2:7, 17, 18). Day after day, she worked without resentment or self-pity. She was not fixated by the big things in life. She did not preoccupy herself with marrying to a rich landowner, or giving birth to a child, or becoming accepted into society. She simply did her job faithfully – and did not despise her lowly work.

Ruth embraced the hardships – and the blessings. Despite her strength and determination, she didn’t cling to self-sufficiency or resist being a recipient of mercy and love (2:10-14, 21; 3:17, 4:13-15). In response to Naomi’s matchmaking advice, Ruth said, “I’ll do whatever you say” (3:5-6). In response to Boaz’s hospitality and generous sharing of food, Ruth accepted with grateful thanks. Ruth’s embrace of both life’s pains and joys made her a receptacle of God’s loving kindness.
Ruth learned the art of waiting. Despite Ruth’s track record of taking bold initiatives, she was not wracked by anxiety when she had to wait in times of acute uncertainty. For example, after boldly hinting to Boaz of her willingness to be betrothed to him, she was told by Boaz to “stay for the night…. lie here until morning” (Ruth 3:13). So Ruth waited, chastely, and without agitation. The next day, Naomi also advised Ruth to “wait” for future events to unfold (3:18). So Ruth waited again, with the knowledge that the future is in God’s hands, not hers.

Like Ruth, the apostle Paul experienced wild oscillations between fame and rejection, hospitality and hunger, friendship and suffering, rest and restless nights. Paul revealed the secret of his contentment in a letter to friends in Philippi: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

For what specifically do you need to be thankful today?

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3 De Caussaude, *The Sacrament*, 84.
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Life-Giving Rhythms

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<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<td>Sloth</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Life-giving Rhythms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing minimal or the least</td>
<td>Persisting in important</td>
<td>Experiencing a pattern of life that</td>
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<tr>
<td>important work, and</td>
<td>work with utter reliability</td>
<td>produces excellent work without being</td>
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<tr>
<td>loving ease</td>
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PS: “We’ve discussed that working too much, or too little, can become a form of sloth.

We can also be slothful by focusing only on the urgent things without attending to important things. Marriages, families and personal reputations have collapsed because of our inability to prioritize important work and to do it with faithfulness.”

AU: “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could produce excellent work without being consumed by it?”

PS: “We can do that by integrating the best of Mary and Martha, the two women who hosted Jesus in their home in Bethany. Traditionally, active Martha has been branded as a distracted and busy woman who scolded Jesus, while contemplative Mary was praised for sitting at Jesus’ feet listening attentively to him (Lk. 10:39). But Martha actually did the right thing in making a meal to express love and hospitality to Jesus. Her motivations were good but her attitude was wrong. Martha felt overcommitted, unsupported and had too high expectations of herself. In her dilemma she blamed God and spoiled the party for the disciples, for Jesus and for Mary.”
AU: “Most of us are Marthas. My colleagues and I have felt overcommitted, unsupported and struggling under demanding expectations.”

PS: “In his love for Martha Jesus said, ‘You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or only one.’ Jesus wasn’t judging Martha’s action in making a meal. Jesus probably valued Martha’s actions in showing hospitality. But he gently rebuked her for trying to do everything perfectly – a five course gourmet meal - leaving her with no time for listening to and communing with him. ‘Mary has chosen what is better,’ Jesus concludes.”

AU: “Sounds like what we really need is a combination of Mary’s attitude of listening to Jesus and Martha’s actions of serving Jesus.”

PS: “That’s precisely the secret of developing a life-giving rhythm that can sustain us as people who work amid today’s challenges.”

**Work and Life-Giving Rhythms**

For most people, work-life balance is an elusive pursuit. It becomes idolatrous when we seek to balance the competing demands in our life without God at the centre. Instead, what we need is a life-giving rhythm that mixes together the active and reflective life. This ‘mixed life’ of action and reflection – governed by the Spirit’s gift of self-control – is a wonderful corrective to the mixed-up life.
With the Spirit’s gift of self-control, we will:

1. Live a principled life, possibly governed by a rule. For centuries, monastic communities have emphasized the value of a rule in order to pray and work. We too can profit from living faithfully and flexibly according to a rule. You may go about this by praying to the Holy Spirit for guidance and insight, and then formulating a rhythm for yourself on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Resist the urge to accomplish too much; go gentle. You will discover that you won’t be able to fit everything you want into your rule of life. Here you must make choices. What are the good things you must say ‘no’ to in order to say ‘yes’ to something better?¹ (Meeting with a spiritual director or wise friend may help you discern your yeses and nos). Many people who live with a rule have integrated the rhythm of reading Scripture, living an examined life, keeping the Sabbath and going on extended retreats – as laid out below in the points below.

2. Listen regularly to God’s voice through the reading of Scripture and prayer. Since Jesus reminded us that we do not live by bread alone, great saints through the ages have meditated on Scripture in two simple ways:

   o “lectio continua” – reading the one chapter of the Old Testament starting with Genesis 1, one chapter from the New Testament starting with Matthew 1, and one Psalm. In this way a person actually reads through the Bible almost once a year and the Psalms twice a year.
3. Reflect daily on what God is doing in our lives. Great saints have practiced living an examined life, in some way or form. Such a person will instinctively or intentionally pray to God (usually at the end of the day) and ask the following questions:

   a. For what moment today am I most grateful?
   b. For what moment today am I least grateful?
   c. Review your day slowly: What are you thankful for? What do you regret?
   d. What patterns do you see over the last day, week, month, or year?
   e. What do these patterns tell you about your relationship to God?
   f. Weave your reflections into prayer, telling everything to God and asking God for understanding. Allow God to move you – and to surprise you, if necessary.²

4. Keep the Sabbath and recognize the need for rest. This means ceasing from work and celebrating the goodness of God and reflecting on the meaning of life.

   Sabbath is a law and a gift. “If you cannot afford to take one day a week for rest, you are taking yourself too seriously,” says pastor and spiritual theologian Eugene Peterson.³ Sabbath provides us the opportunity to reflect on what God has done
and receive new insights on the God for whom we are working. Sabbath prepares for the coming week by reminding us that God is the centre of all our work.

5. Recognize the need to withdraw from busyness and activity in order to pray and reflect. Many Christians who have understood the secret of living well realize how important it is to spend at least two days a month for prayerful contemplation. This may also involve reading edifying books. Concentrated courses at theological schools often provide a rich context for learning and reflection.

An Example: The Restful President

The leader of a company needs to devote a lot of time and energy to attend to people and issues. The same goes for the leader of a religious institution, who also has to live out his spiritual values in an authentic manner, while delivering on results and expectations. Over time, this can become exhausting, intoxicating or disorienting – or all of the above.

During the summer of 2007, Rod Wilson, the president of Regent College, a premier theological institution in North America, experienced this firsthand, as he poked around the narrow streets of Hay-on-Wye in Wales. By most measures he was doing well. He had just completed a successful fundraising campaign that resulted in the construction of a new, multi-million dollar library. The college accrued no new debts. Students were enjoying the library. The faculty remained supportive of his leadership. He
was also able to find time to teach and speak. The Board urged him to take a well-deserved summer break.

At first, Rod, an avid reader, was energized to live in Hay-on-Wye, a town of one thousand four hundred people with thirty eight used bookstores. Determined to put aside a performance- accomplishment- and success-oriented mindset, Rod and his wife, Bev, did not use a cell phone, computer, the Internet, email or car. “We walked, read, slept, ate, talked and moved from a lifestyle characterized by doing and performing into one that was marked by silence, contemplation, and being,” Rod said.

But something more happened while he was in Wales. “I experienced significant withdrawal pains, both psychologically and physically. I yearned for work and production, and was troubled by having nothing to do. For me it was a significant crisis,” Rod confessed. He also realized that he had been exclusively pursuing work. He had prized doing more than being. Sabbath had become irrelevant and insignificant to him.

“The crisis in Wales made me realize in a new way that God’s economy is based on a tapestry of replenishment and work… God can be seen in both the contemplative and in the active,” Rod observed in retrospect. He returned to Vancouver with the resolve of living a new rhythm. He would be strictly religious about Sabbath, he decided. He would keep a 24-hour day of rest. On that day, there would be no email, Internet or computer usage of any kind. He would spend time with family, or friends, or in the
garden, but he would not do anything remotely related to work. One day a week, the
president of Regent College would be unreachable.

Implementing the practice of Sabbath was challenging at first. People were
puzzled by how Rod had become tardy in responding to emails sent out over the
weekend. And his cell phone didn’t work either. But gradually, people learned to
accommodate themselves to Rod’s revised schedule.

In cultivating a life-giving rhythm of rest and action, Rod had recovered more
than merely well-being. He discovered God in the centre of life. “In the past eight
months, I have been surprised by how the regular practice of Sabbath has produced an
unexpected outcome – the deepening sense of Shalom,” Rod shared.

What Spirit-inspired patterns have been helpful to you thus far? What rhythm
could you add to this?

1 Adapted from M. Basil Pennington, A School of Love: The Cistercian Way to Holiness (Harrisburg,
2 Tim Muldoon, The Ignatian Workout: Daily Spiritual Exercises for a Healthy Faith (Chicago: Loyola
AU: “We’ve discussed how envy is deeply embedded within us. What do you think is the clearest indicator that we’re no longer under the grip of envy?”

PS: “When we’re no longer preoccupied with ourselves and less concerned about how we are doing. Instead, we become preoccupied with the concerns of other people – not in an obsessive or inquisitive manner – but because we desire to love and to bless them.”

AU: “Would it not make a huge difference in my workplace if I made it my goal to find creative ways to love and bless my coworkers, bosses and staff on a daily basis?”

PS: “That would revolutionize the workplace. Jesus summarized the whole law in the twin commandments to love God and to love neighbor. Which means that we can do this on a long-term and sustainable basis only when we’re motivated by loving God.”

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<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
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<tr>
<td>Envy</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Neighbor Love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling the pain of someone else's advancement and possessions</td>
<td>Putting others at ease, and rejoicing in their gifts and achievements</td>
<td>Experiencing the ability to meet the needs of others, and to contribute to their well-being</td>
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Work and Neighbor Love

Envy is a sneaky, secretive sin that seeks to tear people down. Henri Nouwen, the beloved author on Christian spirituality, was deeply acquainted with his proclivity toward selfish envy: “It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life.”¹

In a wonderful contrast, the love of neighbor is generous, joyful and seeks to build people up. Instead of brooding about ourselves, we long to develop the good that is in the other. Rather than resentment, we rejoice when others succeed.

As the Spirit increases our desire to work with love of neighbor, we will:

1. Care for people within the organization. We love our colleagues in the workplace when we focus on meeting their real needs. We value them firstly as people – regardless of their skills, competencies or position. We do not spend time only with like-minded people but we also look out for those who are shunned or marginalized (Lk. 6:27-38; 14:12-14). In a workplace where there’s little time to relate with one another, we seek to create a hospitable space where we care enough to listen to our colleague’s personal challenges.

2. Show tough love when it is needed. In some circumstances, acting out of love may require coaching a mediocre employee for improvement, initiating a tough conversation with a controlling boss, or reprimanding errant behavior in a team member. In other situations, acting out of love could mean the
opposite: keeping silence and yielding to the other. The underlying principle is that we do whatever it takes to benefit others, not ourselves.

3. Care for resources within the organization. As stewards, we are called to manage the organization’s assets, which include tangibles such as paper clips and photocopy machines, and intangibles such as ethics, vision and value system. The most important assets are people. Good stewardship requires the willingness to serve, rather than control, the people around us, says management consultant Peter Block.2 "The first order of business is to build a group of people who, under the influence of the institution, grow taller and become healthier and stronger," says servant leadership guru Robert Greenleaf.3

4. Care for people and resources outside the organization. Our love for others, motivated by God’s love for us, should reflect God’s love for the world. In today’s business parlance, this includes corporate social responsibility, where we show loyalty toward clients, customers, suppliers and broader stakeholders in society.4

Loving our neighbors near and far is a journey that lasts a lifetime, as illustrated by an ancient exchange between Basil of Caesarea and a young desert disciple:

Once a young man went to a desert and asked the desert father for a word. The abba said, “Will you not return until you have fulfilled this word?”
“I promise.”

“Then love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.”

Twenty years passed, but the young man had the temerity to come back. “I have done what you said. Now speak another word to me, father?”

“Yes, I will but you must not return until you have fulfilled it completely.”

“I promise.”

“Then, love your neighbor as yourself.”

The young man never came back.

An Example: The Loving Homemaker

Gladys Stevens, Paul’s mother, loved her neighbor – literally.

During the long and dark Canadian winters, when Paul was a young boy, Gladys would prepare wonderful three-course meals for her husband Ernest, her two sons and anyone who happened to be around. Invariably, Gladys would think of Albert Jupp and his aging mother who lived in a one-room shack up the hill. Night after night Gladys would send Paul up the hill with roast beef and baked potatoes (or whatever was on the stove that night) for Albert and his mother. Gladys would also keep the outside tap open all winter so that Albert could get two pails of water each day for washing and drinking.

Gladys grew up in a very poor family in Newfoundland. Her father was a fisherman. At sixteen she went to Toronto to work in the homes of wealthy people as a domestic help. She married Ernest and settled down to raise a family. She gave birth to three children, though the middle child was born dead. After each birth, Gladys
sunk into a deep depression, and had to be hospitalized for weeks. In spite of this, she loved everyone in sight, be it relatives, strangers, and family. Paul remembers coming home from high school many times only to find that his bed or a dresser or some other large object had disappeared – Gladys had given these to some newcomer in town. She was possibly the most generous person Paul has ever known.

Gladys had grade six education but a wonderfully simple faith. In everything – be it reversals, opportunities or challenges – she spoke of God with love and gratitude. That was surely the secret of her neighbor love.

Which of your neighbors, near or far, is most on your heart to be loved?

2 Peter Block, Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1993), 22.
3 Quoted in Peter Block, Stewardship, 22. Also see Chris Lowney, Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company that Changed the World (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003), 169.
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Vocational Confidence

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<tr>
<td>Thinking and feeling that</td>
<td>Having the ability to remain</td>
<td>Experiencing the certainty</td>
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<tr>
<td>there’s always something</td>
<td>where you are</td>
<td>that you are in God’s will</td>
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<td>with meaningfulness and hope</td>
<td>and doing God’s work</td>
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AU: “What is one clear indicator that we’re growing spiritually when we work?

PS: “You develop a growing confidence of God’s call in your life. You are able to work with a deep certainty that whatever you’re doing is aligned with God’s will for you.”

AU: “No matter what job I do? No matter how crazy or boring or meaningless?”

PS: “Yes. We may pick our jobs, or pursue an occupation. But as we grow, we become increasingly responsive to God’s unique calling for us. We realize that we’ve been chosen by God. This gives us the confidence to work wholeheartedly, knowing that as we work, we become united with Jesus Christ.”

**Work and Vocational Confidence**

One thing is certain: we will be in vocational transition for our whole life. This sense of transition is particularly acute for people in their twenties and thirties, who will likely work at least eight different jobs until retirement. Given that vocational transition often stirs up doubt and uncertainty, this means we need to be attuned to hear God’s voice all
our lives – times of flux and change are not necessarily bad. They offer renewed opportunity to trust in God who knows what’s best for us.

As stated in the chapter on patience, the Puritan William Perkins observed that all callings are equal. The calling must fit the person and the person to the calling. To discern our callings, we are to explore our affections, desires and our gifts. Since we can be biased in judging our own inclinations and gifts, a robust process of discerning our calling should involve seeking advice and help from wise and trusted people. This discernment process, crucially, involves listening attentively to the One who calls us to himself. We are not merely call to do something; we are called to God himself.

Our calling is to more than a job – it is to a complete way of life. In seeking to live a called life, we will:

1. **Experience dynamic purpose and direction in our lives.** The reason for this is we are not “doing our own thing” or merely what brings us pleasure. We are doing the Lord’s work. Whether we are farming or designing a computer program, whether we are a homemaker or a sales person, whether we are in the field of business or medicine, whether we are pastoring or building houses, it is truly possible for our lives and work to be in harmony with God’s grand purpose of bringing about the reign of his Kingdom into all creation.
2. **Work and serve in love.** God does not call us to something for which we have a deep loathing. On the contrary, his will is written into the very fiber of our lives. Our passion, our gifts and talents, the personality given to us at conception, the providential circumstances of our lives, and God speaking directly to us – these are the ingredients that help us discern where we are to work. We are created to love work and work for love. “The important thing is not to think much, but to love much; do, then, whatever most arouses you to love,” said the medieval mystic and spiritual guide, Teresa of Avila.¹

3. **Gain a newfound confidence that we are loving our neighbor when we work.** Many modern workers these days do not see the “neighbors” they are serving. For example, lab technicians, computer programmers, copy-editors, kitchen staff and people who work behind the scenes do not meet the customers or stakeholders they are serving. Nonetheless, if we discerned that we are called to the work, and if we sense that this work is meeting a deeply felt need in the wider community, then we are indeed loving our neighbors with our work. Frederick Buechner, a contemporary Christian author, expresses this elegantly: “The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work that you need most to do and the world most needs to have done…. Thus, the place God calls you is the place your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”²
4. Discover that work not only has intrinsic value (worth doing for itself, not just for the pay) but may well endure and find its place in the new earth that God will be remaking.

5. Experience God at work within us. God is shaping, molding, and renewing us as we work, thus bringing us into a deeper union and fellowship with Him. Just as our lives are works in progress, our work is in progress. And our life with God is also in progress while we work.

An Example: The Called Merchant

Calvin Seerveld, a Canadian theologian, tells the story of his father who owned a fish shop at the Great South Bay Fish Market in New York. The shop smelled like fish. It was always a bustling, happy place to work, with lots of laughter. As a young boy, Calvin worked there.

One day, on a busy Thursday afternoon, Calvin watched his father trying to convince a reluctant customer – a prosperous lade from the neighborhood – that the carp was a good buy. They both scrutinized the fish. Using his beefy hands, Calvin’s father brought up the fish into the light. The fish’s eyes were bright. The gills had good color. The flesh was firm. As the woman gazed at the beautiful fish, her resistance crumbled. The price seemed right.

“Beautiful!” exclaimed Calvin’s father. “Shall I clean it up for you?”
The woman assented. She ruefully how smoothly the deal was struck. “My, you certainly didn’t miss your calling,” she told Calvin’s father.

In reflecting on this boyhood moment, Calvin Seerveld observed that the woman had inadvertently spoken the truth about his father. “My father was in full-time service for the Lord, prophet, priest and king in the fish business, consecratedly cutting up fish for the glory of God,” Seerveld wrote.3

How wonderful it would be that more of us had this sense of vocational confidence in the work we do. Do you? If not, will you consider developing a process that will help you discern God’s calling in your life?

Practical Heavenly-Mindedness

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AU: “Do you think if our work done on earth will survive in heaven?”

PS: “This question interests me deeply because I am now at the age when many of my dearest friends and family have died, and I myself am aging. I think of two lines from a poem that says,

‘Only one life, ‘twill soon be passed.

Only what’s done for Christ will last.’

It’s not our role to figure out what kind of work will survive in heaven. Nothing we do in itself will last. But we can rest assured that work that is carried out with faith, hope and love – done for the sake of Jesus Christ – will somehow find its place in the new heaven and new earth.”

AU: “Will I find in heaven the kayak that you built for your grandchildren?”

PS: “I’m not sure whether the books I’ve written will survive the purging of God’s holy fire. But I really hope you’ll see the kayak in heaven. I built it out of love.”
Work and Heavenly-Mindedness

There’s a saying which speaks of people being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. But the reality is that authentic heavenly-mindedness is the most practical thing on earth. The Puritans, for example, were skilled administrators and craftsmen who stressed the importance of living each day with the knowledge that we will die, and that there’s an art in learning how to die well. In contrast, many people these days live as if death is not a part of reality.

Having a sense of one’s mortality can often be construed as being despairing. Certain cultures even consider talk of death to be taboo or bad luck. And yet such a seemingly morbid worldview is a biblical mindset that points us to the reality of heaven. “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things,” Paul exhorted (Col. 3:2). In the same way, John Baillie, a pastor, used to pray: “O Lord, grant that each day may do something so to strengthen my hold upon the unseen world...that as the end of my earthly life draws ever nearer, I may grow more and more conformed to the life of the world to come.”

Practical heavenly mindedness is the only way to make ultimate sense out of life in this world. C.S. Lewis, the Oxford don and Christian apologist, said, “Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither.”

When we work with heavenly-mindedness, we will:
1. **Gain an eternal perspective on why we work.** One day, we will enter into the joy of the master (Matt. 25: 21). In the meanwhile, we live and work like servants in Jesus’ parables who labored diligently because they knew that their master would one day return.

2. **Gain a cosmic understanding of our personal calling.** Our calling or vocation does not cease with retirement or death. In some mysterious but marvelous way, our specific calling will continue into the new heaven and new earth.

3. **Gain hope and courage in overcoming all kinds of obstacles – be it external and internal.** We will not lose hope because we are told, again and again in the Revelation, the last book of the Bible, how Jesus has already overcome all obstacles. He will usher in the perfect reign of God and bring perfect order and harmony to everything.

4. **Care for planet earth and its environment.** Our planet will somehow last for eternity and be transfigured by the Lord. We work with an authentic hope that the fruit of our work will endure in the “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1). Catholic theologian Yves Congar observes that “final salvation will be achieved by a wonderful refloating of our earthly vessel rather than the transfer of the survivors to another ship wholly built by God.”³
5. **Know that the work we do in this world (whether manual or mental) has intrinsic value.** The resurrection of Christ has conquered death and given us the hope that our work, purged of sin and renewed by God, will somehow find its place in the new heaven and new earth. Just as “earth’s crammed with heaven,” heaven is also crammed with earth. “When the final consummation comes, the work you have done, whether in Bible study or biochemistry, whether in preaching or in pure mathematics, whether in digging ditches or in composing symphonies, will stand, will last,” writes bible scholar N. T. Wright (1 Cor. 15:58).

**An Example: The Heavenly-Minded Prisoner**

On a rocky outcropping off the island of Patmos, an old man stood and watched the dark gray waters of the Aegean Sea churning below. By right, he should be in chains, a prisoner sentenced to exile by the Roman authorities for subversive activities as a follower of Christ. But his guards had taken pity on him. A harmless old man, they said.

So John the Beloved was allowed to walk around the barren island without chains. He had been here a long time. There wasn’t anywhere else to go. He spent most of his waking hours writing letters. Or he’d sit still, eyes closed, dozing in the sunlight. At least, that was what the guards thought. But John the Beloved was seeing and experiencing life on an entirely different plane of reality. The past, the present and eternity existed as one. For John had a secret nobody else knew: as a young man, he had heard the heartbeat of Eternity.
Fifty years ago, he had befriended Jesus of Nazareth. John loved Jesus the moment they met. For three shimmering years, John became a part of the Twelve, who walked with Jesus everywhere he went. One night, before the terrible events had unfolded, John was in the upper room in Jerusalem eating supper with Jesus and the Twelve. In great affection for his friend, John laid his head against Jesus’ chest. Hours later, in Gethsemane, John overheard Jesus pray to his “Father.” These were two small moments in an amazing series of events that unfolded: Jesus crucified, Jesus buried, Jesus bursting into life from the grave, and Jesus ascending bodily into heaven.

It had taken John the Beloved several more years of prayerful reflection before he realized the staggering truth: Jesus, his Palestinian friend who spoke Aramaic, who died and rose again, was also the eternal Word who created the universe. Therefore, when John laid his head on Jesus’ chest, he had heard the heartbeat of eternity beating. In touching Jesus, John had touched Eternal Life. In listening to Jesus pray, John was listening to a conversation between God the Father and God the Son.

Now, back on Patmos, John reflected on his life. He was, at heart, a very practical man. He had been a pastor of many churches in Asia Minor. He had counseled troubled souls. He had shared firsthand insights to new believers. But he knew that what would sustain their faith would not be fundraising campaigns, membership drives or seeker-sensitive services. John saw a different reality. He saw the Spirit’s mighty work. He saw the final victory of the slain Lamb on the throne – Jesus Christ – who has overcome all the oppressive regimes and seductive powers for all eternity. He saw a totally
transfigured heaven, a renewed earth. Nothing would ever be the same because of the man whose heartbeat he had heard.

Yes, John’s eyes were closed. But he was not dozing. As a prisoner for the Lord, stuck on a wind-blasted rock, John knew there was one thing he could do to encourage Christians facing severe oppression or terrible discouragement as they worked. He would find a way to convince future generations of Christians of a new way to live – to adopt a heavenly mindset.

In a culture openly hostile or dangerously friendly to Christian faith, John was convinced that the only way we can work with integrity would be to discover a heavenly reality. And the most important cosmic fact was this: through the cross, Jesus has already overcome Satan and his allies. Jesus Christ, the perfect human being, is seated on the throne, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

John knew that the vision of heaven, and of Christ triumphant, would sear the imaginations of jaded Christians who lived compromised lives in the workplace. John also knew that our work in this world, whether manual, mental or spiritual, would endure forever if we did it for the sake of the risen Lord. Jesus himself had told John so: “I am making everything new” (Rev. 21:5).

Not least, John knew that the deepest joy we can anticipate is meeting the risen Jesus face-to-face – to know God as God knows us. Such heavenly knowledge
transformed John. In some way, John knew, instinctively, that this would transform you and me.

Your work will somehow last and be continued in the new heaven and new earth. In what ways does this knowledge impact your approach and attitude toward your work?

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Epilog: one last conversation on what it means to grow spiritually in the workplace

There are two motorboats bobbing in the water. One of them is Paul’s – the one that will bring us back to civilization.

We have been here for three days in a cabin on the anvil-shaped Ruxton island with no running water, no electricity and no Internet access. The power for our laptops, which we have been using to write this book is fed by the sun. The water we drink is pumped from a well. The heat that warms us radiates from a wood stove. After sundown, the silence that settles into the night is thick – like a wool blanket that has descended from the heavens and engulfed this small hand-built cabin in the vastness of the Canadian Gulf Islands.

At first blush, Ruxton Island seems like the last place on earth you would go to complete a book on the spirituality of work. A book on work should be written in the buzz of a city, perhaps in Vancouver or Kuala Lumpur, where we live. But here we are – along with our respective wives – editing the final drafts of the book in one of the most tranquil spots on earth.

You don’t come to Ruxton to make a living. There are no businesses here: no ice-cream shop, hot-dog stand, bar or local restaurant. You come to Ruxton to relax and watch the world go by. You come here to read. You come here to get away from people. Decades ago, a hippie came here to live off the land. He cultivated a small farm behind
his cabin. He raised chickens. He grew beans, potatoes and squash on the shallow topsoil. He also grew his hair long. But since his death a few years ago, all trace of the farm, and any evidence of the work of his hands, have been swallowed up.

Yet if we look close enough, even on Ruxton Island, the world of work is close at hand. At any moment, in any place, someone – or something – is hard at work. We invite you to spend a few minutes, on a quiet Saturday afternoon, to walk along the rugged shoreline:

You’ll see the sun’s rays breaking through dark masses of clouds. A slight northwesterly wind is churning up the water, causing ripple after ripple to flow into the bay, pushing seawater into the tide pools. Idle seaweed, plastered against rock, suddenly burst into life, waving their green arms in sync with the swirling water. Purple starfish creep along the rocks hunting for oysters. Small fish dart in and out of nooks and crannies, looking for food, or to escape from becoming food. Hermits crabs drag their homes like backpackers looking for odd jobs. This tiny acreage at your feet is full of marine animals hard at work – hunting, hiding, digging, tugging, foraging and feeding. These activities are being replicated throughout the island, on land, across the sea, and in the air, where the seagulls pinwheel and the eagles fly. Through creation, we see a million glimpses of God at work.

Open your eyes: God is on the move.
God is on the move, not just on a quiet beach on Ruxton island, but perhaps much more so in a multistory office block, a factory production line, a woodshop, a classroom or kitchen. God is at work wherever people are working. God is at work through you, as he is working through us. Also, our lives are also a work in progress. Through work work, we are progressing toward God.

In writing and editing this book together, we see God working in our lives. We wish you this same joy of discovering God at work in your life. In the same way we’ve been enriched by our conversations with one another, we hope you’ll find a friend with whom you can start a conversation on what it means to be growing spiritually in the workplace. Meanwhile, we invite you to eavesdrop on our final conversation.

PS: “We’re nearly done with our conversations on growing spiritually while we work. Through our discussions, I’ve learned that watering plants in my apartment can be a seamless experience of working for God and with God. What have you learned?”

AU: “I’ve learned that the workplace is a playground for learning to love God, and to love people. Like any playground, I can get into scrapes. There could even be a neighbourhood bully. But it’s also in the playground that I make friends and learn to play and work with them. I learn to experiment. In the same way, there’s no better place than the workplace to put into practice the ideas and guiding principles we’ve discussed in this book. Like a playground, I can try new things at work everyday, for example, learning to
be thankful for struggles, or treating people with gentleness, working with a heavenly mindset. I’ve also been discovering the importance of living within my limitations.”

PS: “Living within your limitations – what does that mean for you?”

AU: “We like to see ourselves as human beings with limitless potential. But the danger is that we could ignore our dark sides. And that can really hurt us. For example, since young, I’ve always wanted people to admire my intelligence, and to lap up every word that I say. So I’m willing to do whatever it takes – even work to the point of exhaustion, or neglect of loved ones – to please people who think highly of my teaching or speaking. I’m driven to take on leadership positions in churches and Christian organizations not because I primarily want to serve people, but because I want people to admire me. The ancient teachers of spirituality labeled such behavior as vainglory, a form of pride. The problem with vainglory is that I deceive myself into thinking that I am glorifying God with my work when in reality I am subtly trying to impress people. The danger with working solely with my strengths is that I end up with an inflated sense of self. On the contrary, when I live within our limitations, I discover new God-given strengths.”

PS: “And how does the workplace teach you about working through your limitations?”

AU: “In all the jobs I’ve taken on so far, I’ve been drawn to taking on new challenges. During the learning process though, I have often felt ignorant, incompetent and stupid. But, I’ve discovered the redemptive side of living within my limitations. They safeguard
me from being inflated with vainglory. Because I’m trying to survive at work, I’m not thinking of impressing anybody. More importantly, in my weakness, I realize that God is helping me. And it fills me with joy and gratitude.”

PS: “In other words, your struggles in the workplace are potentially an avenue for the Spirit’s blessing.”

AU: “Absolutely. We all face debilitating spiritual struggles when we work. Therefore it’s important to identify the struggles so that we can surrender them to God. Then we’ll discover that the Holy Spirit empowers us to work in a radical new way. Unwittingly, and in an unself-conscious manner, we become more and more like Jesus Christ. God makes something beautiful from even the most soul-sapping struggle.”

PS: “How true. With me, work has become an arena to know myself. I see myself struggling with drivenness. But over time, God has been healing me from this drive to perform and become more productive.”

AU: “I’ve definitely appreciated working with you. While you always take time to catch up with me on personal matters over coffee, yet you’re very effective in getting things done. Do you think that a deeper understanding of workplace spirituality has made you more effective in doing your work?”
PS: “Possibly, but that would not be its main purpose. Spirituality is not a motivational technique for reviving tired workers. It is not a three-step Christian program for getting things done. Christian spirituality is far more subversive. It’s the Spirit of God working to transform us from within; our inner transformation then affects everything we do and why we do it.”

AU: “Would you say then that one indicator that we’re growing spiritually is that we become excellent at our work?”

PS: “We don’t pursue excellence as the ultimate goal. But because we know that we are serving God and doing the Lord’s work, we are motivated to do the best we can. We want our work to be ‘something beautiful for God.’ At the same time, sometimes we have to do certain things less than perfectly simply because the limitations we face in time and resources do not permit us to do it perfectly.”

AU: “The key thing is that we’re keeping company with God while we work. I think it was Cardinal Wyszynski who said that if we love God, it is impossible not to tell him so when we are working.”

PS: “Indeed. We will have more depth and sensitivity to the Spirit’s leading as we experience God in the workplace.”

AU: “Does that mean that God will also help us achieve a perfect work-life balance?”
PS: “You’re pulling my leg, aren’t you? You know that I don’t believe in work-life balance. That’s not the key question in growing spiritually while we work. The key questions are these: How do we keep company with Jesus Christ while we work? And how does God keep company with us while we work? When we ask these two questions throughout our lives, we’ll always discover something new to learn.”

AU: “You’re right. When we are aware that we are working with God, and God is working with us, the issue of work-life balance fades in the background.”

PS: “That’s because we’re not distinguishing between ‘work’ and ‘life.’ Rather, because God is in the centre of all things, all of life is sacred.”

AU: “And when we discover that God is in the center of everything, there is true balance.”


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