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Katherine Leary Alsdorf

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Every Good Endeavor Author Katherine Alsdorf on Why Faith@Work is Important



More than ever before, humanity is in a crisis over work. People change jobs and careers 6 times or more in their lives. Robotics will threaten even professional level vocations over the next decade. Darwinian competition trumps teamwork and human dignity. Our work – our commitment to bring God’s truth, love, and human dignity to the work lives of all people – has never been so important! How can we better equip ourselves for our work, for our calling? How do we help others work in a world that is increasingly unaware of and even hostile to the hope of the gospel? How does the Biblical story and a deep understanding of the gospel give us the resources to persevere, the winsomeness to witness, the character to be just, and the calling to make a difference?

Katherine Leary Alsdorf (BA, Wittenberg; MBA, Darden School, UVA) founded Redeemer Presbyterian Church’s Center for Faith & Work in New York City and served as Executive Director from 2002 - 2012. She established the intensive Gotham Fellows program, an Entrepreneurship Initiative to start new gospel-centered ventures, Arts Ministries, and numerous vocation groups. She now helps churches in other cities to establish faith and work ministries. She spent 25 years in the high tech industry in California and New York. She is co-author with Tim Keller of *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*.

- Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (Dutton, 2012)
- Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* (Dutton, 2009)
- Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Crossway, 2011)
- Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (InterVarsity, 2008)
- Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Eerdmans, 1985, 2005)
- Steve Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior* (InterVarsity, 2007)

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I am honored to be here to kick off the Summit and set the stage for why this connection between faith and work is so important. In particular, I want to emphasize why the collective efforts of everyone in this room are so important in this century, in this decade, right now.

So three simple reasons:

- Christians need it.
- Our churches need it.
- The world needs it.

Let's start with how much Christians need and want the faith and work connection. I left a long career in the tech industry and moved to New York City in 2002 to help Redeemer start a marketplace ministry. And I did that basically because I knew how much I needed it. I'd become a CEO and a Christian in the same month, and I didn't know how to do either. By 2002, I'd spent a decade wrestling and trying to figure out how my faith should shape and influence my work. When I got to New York and was barely situated, my phone started ringing off the hook. Calls from young people in the church eager to be part of this new kind of ministry. They wanted to connect their faith with work. Sometimes, it's because something is missing from their work maybe meaning. Sometimes, it's because the work is so hard it's just constant toil. Sometimes it's because they feel so uncomfortable in their environment, with the values in their workplace, they don't know how to handle it. And sometimes, it's because they doubt their faith in its entirety because it just doesn't seem to matter in 90% of their life. I look around, group after group, and I think, here are some of the most educated and advantaged people in the world, and they are so struggling with faith and work. And I'm expecting that you see the same struggles.

So it seems to me after working on this for a decade and a few years, that whether they grew up in the church or were brand new Christians, one of the problems was that **they needed more Bible, and more theology. In particular, they need the whole Bible story.** A better understanding of God that helps them understand themselves. It seems almost as though Genesis and Revelation were left out of their Bible training. And maybe they really were, I mean, who wants to touch Genesis ever since the Scopes trial, and Revelation is pretty hard for anyone to understand. So they really do need Genesis. I tell them they should read chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis every month until it goes deep, deep, deep into their being. God made the heavens and the earth and everything in it, and it was good. They were made in God's image, and they are very good. They were given work to do on God's behalf, to fill the earth and steward it. They were given the Sabbath to rest and worship God. And they need chapter 3 just as much. It really does help to remember that everything was broken, that sin really is the cause of all of our problems of work. The sin in the world and the sin in ourselves. We're so overwhelmed by sin and we cover it up. We don't even like the word really. I tend to use the word brokenness just because it comes across as a little bit more palatable. So they need Genesis---and they need Revelation. They need the part of the story that's the kingdom come. His kingdom come, the new heavens, the new earth, the New Jerusalem. Some of our traditions do a better job with this than others. But this part of the story, in which God will wipe away every tear and make everything new is the good news. It's our hope. It's the goal

we're working toward by faith. I cannot tell you the number of times we hear, why didn't I ever hear the whole story of the Bible like this? Why didn't anyone ever talk about work as something God laid out right in the very beginning?

But they also need to be able to apply that Bible to their work. They might have faith in God and relationship with Jesus, but they don't really know how to apply it. I find preoccupation with rules and practices. Just tell me what I should do or what I shouldn't do. You know what I mean. Should I or shouldn't I work on Sunday when my boss is working on Sunday? Should Jane take a part in this play where she has to take off her clothes? Is it wrong to develop advertising for a cigarette company? Or on the practices side, leaving a Bible on your desk, I mean sometimes it's just a symbol with no meaning. **It is so much more than rules, this integrating our faith with our work.** How can we help people see and experience that the gospel changes everything, that it actually has real power in our own work lives. The best place is to start with our own hearts. Can the gospel really change our hearts, and how does that happen?

Well, work opens up so many possibilities. Are you jealous of your coworker? The gospel can change that. Do you fear that you'll fail at what you're doing? How does the gospel calm your fear? Are you having trouble getting up in the morning to face work? Or trouble stopping work in order to rest. As a matter of fact, work is a bit of an idol factory. It leads us to overvalue success or money or security or recognition or comfort. And the gospel helps us to root out those idols and turn to Jesus for our salvation. And when we do that, we change. Our hearts change. I love it. I love it when it happens to me and when I see it in others. I see people change from hating to loving their colleagues, from fearing failure to stepping out in faith. This gives a good start in applying the gospel to work and our work lives. Once we experience the gospel transform one thing in us, we grow in confidence that God is at work in us.

The third problem our young people face is as Christians they don't really know how to live in this post-Christian culture and in the city. We're not in Jerusalem anymore. At least for those of us in Canada, or the Northwest, or Europe, it may be a lot more helpful to think of ourselves as in Babylon as opposed to Jerusalem. We're not of the culture, but we are in it. Jeremiah's letter to the people of God is so helpful. Jeremiah 29 has almost become a mantra for our people at Redeemer. In Jerusalem, everyone believed as we did, and it was just a matter of living it out. In Babylon, we are to seek the welfare of people who oppose and sometimes are hostile to us. We're to help them flourish and still live out a God-fearing life in their midst. My colleague, David Kim, who's my successor running the Center for Faith and Work, coined the expression exilic discipleship. We need to disciple people for living in exile. We need to give them a sense of mission, perseverance when it's hard, an expectation of brokenness, and imagination for gospel renewal. And we hope they approach their faith and their work with humility. As the post-Christian culture spreads, we're all learning new ways to see God still at work in the world. And this is a really important part of connecting our faith and our work. It's working faith-fully.

The second big reason we need to be out there helping people with their faith and work, faith-fully, is because our churches need this so much. I hope a lot of us are coming alongside churches to help them minister in this area. Our churches need to focus on people and their work in the

world. Most churches have this inward, gravitational pull---we pull people in for worship, and in for small groups, and in to serve in the children's ministry. Here's our chance to send. Here's the best outreach program of all: the church scattered.---The church scattered in all the companies, schools, hospitals, civic organizations, retail, every part of the city and culture. Everyone in the church is a missionary and everyone is missional.

Personally, I think the problem is a little bit of a vision and a little bit of a leadership issue. The pastor needs to believe that God will use the people of the church from Monday to Saturday as they're scattered out in the world and needs to prepare them for it. And it's a bit of a leadership issue---you certainly can't control them while they're out there, and you can't count their presence in your pews. But you can still lead them as the church scattered. **Equip them. Give them a vision. Give them an imagination for a renewed world.**

Faith and work ministry focus absolutely changes a church. It helps change a church from a consumer culture to a serving culture. Everyone has a job of some sort or another. It helps the church move from a church for ourselves to a church for a city or community in which we live and work. It helps the church get the gospel much deeper into our hearts.

So Christians need it, our churches need it, and lastly, **the world needs to know how faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ can fix what's broken.** By "the world" I mean two things: people who are longing for meaning and purpose in their lives, and the actual institutions and places where we work. **Faith and work ministry could be the forefront of evangelism for the next couple decades.** Because work is one of the biggest pain points in our culture.---If we as the people of faith can work with purpose, partnering with God in his love and care for the world, if we can admit our mistakes more readily because we experience God's grace, if we can love others and serve them because we've been loved and served, if we can find hope that helps us persevere because we believe in his kingdom that will end all brokenness and wipe away every tear, then, I think the faith and work movement will be the forefront of evangelism.

There are cracks in our secular humanism. The turbulence in the job market's just growing. When I was 30, I was told I'd have 4-5 jobs in my lifetime, and that's certainly been true. But young people are telling me that they've had 5 before they're 30. And they're afraid that any job path they pursue will be done by robots in the next 10 years, even the work of educators, doctors and lawyers. The meritocracy that we work in rewards some but it certainly doesn't reward all, and our inequality gap just widens. There's a cynicism out there that undermines work.---Our faith offers a new story for work and a new compass for work. Many more people will be open to consider it.

So the people in the world need the gospel, but so do our institutions. We forget that God cares about our institutions, our culture, our earth, our nations, the whole world. He created it all and without him, it would have all fallen apart by now. One of the purposes of faith and work ministry is to help people of faith serve in the world in a way that renews and brings hope to broken companies and workplaces. Sometimes we're so focused on the Christian and not on the work itself that God has him doing.

How can we help our people live out of such a deep experience of the gospel that they become agents of influence and change in their places of work? I love to study organizations and their cultures and what makes them tick. It really is amazing how one person can change a whole group, even if they're low on the totem pole.---Is finance broken? Absolutely. But I get to see Christians work in finance institutions and make a difference. Education's broken. They think they're the savior of the universe---knowledge and rational thought will save all humanity. But it's also an institution God uses for justice. Is medicine broken? Just ask the doctors.

I pray that our church scattered into each and every industry and profession and workplace will be used by God to transform those institutions, and be agents of his justice in the world along the way. I pray that we the people in this room can help equip them and imagine in a better way. I pray that we could help them work in the truth and faith that the gospel changes everything--us, our churches, and the world God's placed us in.
