

Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work

by Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf

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Timothy Keller is senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, a church he started in 1989. Today Redeemer has more than 5000 regular Sunday attendees. Keller is also a prolific writer, with new books coming out every year. Katherine Alsdorf started and developed the Center for Faith and Work at Redeemer Church after a career in business. She held various executive leadership roles and was CEO of One Touch Systems and Pensare.

Every Good Endeavor follows the biblical framework in developing the need for understanding our daily work in light of God's plan. It begins where the Bible begins in Genesis, where the authors trace the foundations for who we are as humans, and the role of work in that design. Work is not a result of the curse, but a part of the way we are made. In this biblical account, the authors develop the case in the first section for God's intention for our work, the dignity of work, and the role of work both in cultivating our world and serving our world.

But while work itself did not come about because of sin, work is indeed impacted by sin. As a result of sin, we see from the continuing biblical account in the second section that work has become fruitless, pointless, selfish, and even an idol. None of this takes away from the original plan for work as good and purposeful, but it has certainly changed the way in which work is carried out.

What does this complex and contrary foundation for our work mean to Christians today? In the third and final section, the authors create a vision for carrying out our work in the face of these two dueling realities. The pivotal ninth chapter establishes the tone. It is not about living naively as if there were no sin, or living hopelessly in the broken world, but about going forward with a full understanding of both. It is about gaining the "lenses of a Christian worldview" (p. 180). And it is not just thinking about work in general, but getting specific about work in business, journalism, education, the arts, and medicine. It is about bringing a touch of Christ to our world of work.

This third section then develops a new picture of our work. This includes avoiding hierarchy in seeing some work, whether in the church or in leadership status, as higher than other work. And this picture of our work breaks down the dualism that has so plagued the church, and replaces it with a type of integration that the Scripture calls us to. We also have a new direction for the work itself. It is not just getting by, but doing our work well in service to God. This work gets carried out with a new power that comes from God. This includes an insight into God's principles for our work, and an understanding that work is to be balanced by rest and Sabbath as taught and modeled by God in the Scriptures. In addition, we need to recognize the common grace of God and avoid the arrogance of Christians thinking they have the only insight.

The book concludes with an epilogue describing the purpose and practices of the Center for Faith and Work at Redeemer. While not every church can do what Redeemer has done, there are ideas here that are broadly useful.

In one sense, this book follows themes that have been discussed by those in the faith and work movement for many years. There is no new groundbreaking insight here. In a more important sense, however, this book is an extremely valuable contribution to understanding the connection between our faith and our work. There are several reasons for this conclusion.

First, Tim Keller is an outstanding, even brilliant, communicator and this book demonstrates the point. The case is made clearly, built on a solid biblical base, and illustrated well. It pulls together ideas and communicates them in a way that has not been done before. Second, Katherine Alsdorf brings a world of workplace experience to the story. It is easy to read her credible, substantial, practical insight into the realities of the workplace. This is not a sermon from a pulpit, but a well-grounded, real, useful account that will benefit people on both sides of the pulpit. Third, it brings these ideas together in one well-communicated whole that make this an ideal book to share with both work place Christians and pastors alike.

Several nuances of this account stood out for me. One is the use of the J.R.R.Tolkien story “Leaf by Niggle” which helps us capture a wonderful concept. In some mysterious way, the work we do here on this earth is not fleeting, but eternal. And seeing our work with eternal value adds to its purpose and meaning. Second, the authors recognized that different traditions of the Christian faith (e.g. Lutheran, reformed, charismatic) may see this integration of faith and work in slightly different ways. They leave room for differences while they develop the focused argument.

I also liked the way they dealt with the many dimensions of the reality of sin in our work. Not only are they direct about the pain and brokenness in our work, but about the seeming futility of work that is the very real experience for so many. It is too easy to glamorize work from the foundational perspective of God’s purpose, or to demonize work from the reality of brokenness, but this book walks the line between the two. It exemplifies what a colleague recently said about our work in the reality of our world. “Sometimes we see our work as all bad or all good. Sometimes we acknowledge that maybe it is 50% bad and 50% good. But in reality, our work is 100% good, and 100% bad—at the same time.” Living in this tension is our present reality.

This book is outstanding and should be read by pastors and workplace Christians alike. It should be discussed and applied in our churches and our workplaces. I highly recommend *Every Good Endeavor*.