

EXCERPT



Faithful Work

In the Daily Grind with God and for Others

January 9, 2024 | \$15, 112 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0791-4

The gospel transforms our ordinary work into a sacred calling—to redeem souls, systems, and structures. This guide by Ross Chapman and Ryan Tafilowski invites you to reflect on the meaning and purpose of your life’s work, helping you transform your work into a way to love God, serve your neighbors, and bring hope to our culture.

Work Is Essential to Life; Make it Good

Would anyone argue work is not essential to life?

Our organization’s hometown, Denver, is a city often trying to work as little as possible to make more time for play, yet even this city would say work is essential. Flexible work that pays well is highly sought after because it enables play, whether it’s winter sports in the Rocky Mountains, biking the many trails and streets of Denver, or enjoying evening entertainment and food.

Work, then, is essential because it’s the thing that allows me to have a more desired thing. It’s the means to a self-determined end.

That self-determined end may not be about skiing, hiking, or nightlife for you. Maybe it’s more financial resources to live comfortably or take a big vacation. Maybe it’s working enough to go on cruise control during retirement. Maybe it’s what has to be done to pay the bills. Maybe it’s what brings a preferred status among peers and family members. Maybe it’s just the rhythm and routine society has created as an attempt to keep things running and progressing.

There is no escaping work, it seems. Work really is essential to life. But it’s essential for much bigger reasons than the ones we’ve just covered.

Often in our local communities of faith, the story of work is untold or limited to an instrumental understanding of it, meaning our everyday work can only be a means to something more important. And that something is typically determined by us or our spiritual leaders. Countless faithful churchgoers have gotten the message their daily work is mostly about two things: (1) providing financially for the work of the church as expressed through church-led ministries, nonprofits, and missionaries, and (2) evangelism. Sometimes work is not even given an instrumental value; rather it is perceived as getting in the way of “spiritual” activities.

Many factors contribute to low views of work—views of it that are limited, narrow, or negative; we’ll explore some of them in this short book. But that’s not the story of work in Scripture. Scripture has a very high view of work.

The first thing God tells us about himself is that he is a God who works. “In the beginning God created” (Genesis 1:1). Or said another way, God worked. Out of nothing, he made the universe and everything in it. That’s more work than one person or all of humanity together can even imagine. And it’s better work than we can imagine too. God likes work and he enjoys work, so much so that it is the first thing he tells us about himself.

Of course, God also had a purpose in the work he did—a self-determined one. But it’s one thing for *God* to have an instrumental view of work, because he is true, just, and wholly good; it’s quite another thing for *humanity* to have a self-determined view, because humanity is not wholly good, just, and true.

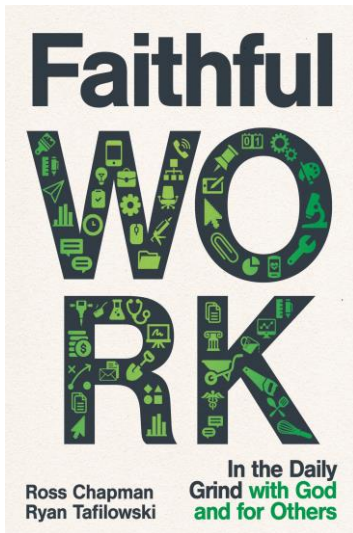


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“Your work needs a new story. This is the heart-arresting challenge Faithful Work compels us to consider. Whether you enjoy your work or are struggling with it, this well-crafted and practical book will help you discover how faith shapes and brings meaning to your Monday world.”

—**Tom Nelson**, president of Made to Flourish and senior pastor of Christ Community Church, Kansas City

It was God’s plan from the beginning that our daily work would come alongside and submit to his work and purposes. Our work adds to his work. When we do our daily work out of who he intended us to be—his image bearers given the responsibility of bringing fruitfulness to his creation—we experience a taste of what it really means to be human, to live life to the full.

The origin story of work is good, exciting, and empowering. It’s a message about the dignity and purpose of all the daily work of humanity, not just what we consider spiritual or sacred work.

But our everyday experience of work is broken.

Sometimes, work is just hard and frustrating. Results do not reflect the effort given. Bad work is rewarded and good work is ignored. Systems create winners and losers. Abuses of power, injustice, and poor or evil products abound in our daily work experience. It’s toilsome and fruitless, frustratingly counterproductive, and difficult to align with God’s purposes.

This is why so many people, including and sometimes especially Christians, assume work is bad. It’s like it is bent in the wrong direction. But the origin story of work contradicts this assumption. Work was given as a good gift and an invitation to be cocreators with God.

When humanity rebelled against God and took work into their own hands, work got harder and less fruitful. *Yet work remains essential to life, and like everything else in God’s created world, it needs redemption.*

This is why the second statement follows the first. Given that work is essential to life, make it good. To redeem work or to work redemptively means, simply, turning bad and broken work into good and godly work wherever it is encountered. That is the task of the worker who follows Jesus.

If we as Christians see work the way God does, then we must find and seek to heal the brokenness in our daily work as people in the public, private, and social sectors. We must also find ways to make the work of family and the work of being a good neighbor redemptive.

Why? Because Christians can be more than just engaged, good, or successful workers. They can be redemptive workers. Every industry needs them to be.

Can you imagine Jesus turning a blind eye to bad systems, practices, and products in his industry of craftsmanship? Can you imagine Paul making inferior or mediocre products as a tentmaker? Jesus and Paul spent an awful lot of their time in everyday work, and I’m confident they found ways to work redemptively in their industries.

The daily work of Christians is the church’s greatest opportunity to complement God’s work. Yet for centuries, that opportunity has been largely ignored and often squandered. It must not continue.

—adapted from the introduction, “Our Greatest Opportunity is Daily Work”

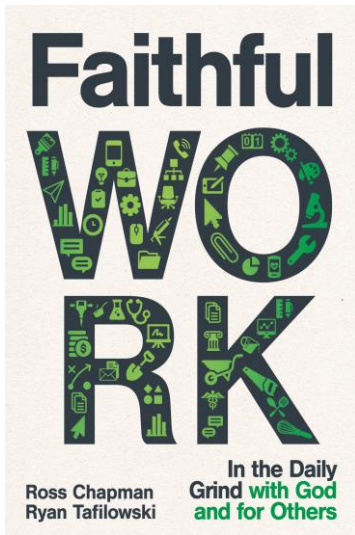


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“In this short but essential primer, Ross Chapman and Ryan Tafilowski have created a down-to-earth guide to understanding God’s view of work, which is meant to play a redemptive role in a broken world and in our individual lives. This book has helped me look at my own work—both the paid and unpaid varieties—in a new and hopeful light.”

—**Angie Ward**, associate professor of leadership and ministry at Denver Seminary and author of *I Am a Leader: When Women Discover the Joy of Their Calling*

Authentically Integrating Faith and Work

“Grounding their argument in the mission of God, vocation and calling, and even political theology, Ross Chapman and Ryan Tafilowski speak to our deepest longings to participate in God’s holistic, redemptive activity and to love our neighbor. They inspire our imaginations with a call to see daily work as intrinsically valuable, missionally focused, life giving, and transformational. Embracing the theology of work the authors carefully unpack in this book will lead to new joy in our daily work, new vision for its purpose in the world, and new hope in its capacity to contribute to the flourishing of all. This is a must-read.”

—**Patty Pell**, assistant professor of theology, justice, and social advocacy at Denver Seminary

Ross Chapman is the CEO of Denver Institute for Faith and Work. He previously founded and served as president and executive director of For Evansville in Evansville, Indiana, an intermediary, movement-based entrepreneurial organization committed to cultivating collaboration among churches and community leaders for the common good.

Ross describes his calling as an animating desire to see the Church bless the city through the everyday lives of Christians in workplaces, neighborhoods, and families and through the visible unity of local churches. He served as the executive producer for a series of short films that encourage love and compassion toward neighbors through For Evansville Films. Two of those films won a regional Emmy.

Previously, Ross was the executive director of CHARLOTTE/ONE in Charlotte, North Carolina, and worked with dozens of local churches to engage Millennials. The organization merged with FORCLT in 2019 as a strategic part of a larger city transformation movement. He holds a doctorate of ministry in faith, work, economics, and vocation from Fuller Theological Seminary. He lives in the Denver area with his wife, Candace, and their three sons.

Ryan Tafilowski is assistant professor of theology at Denver Seminary and lead pastor of Foothills Fellowship Church in Denver. He holds a PhD in systematic theology, a master’s in theology in history from the University of Edinburgh, and a bachelor’s degree in biblical studies from Colorado Christian University. He has served as theologian-in-residence for Denver Institute for Faith and Work. He is the author of *Virtue and Vice at Work*.



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