



Joanna Meyer:

You're listening to the Faith and Work Podcast where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work.

Well, we are back with some bonus content with Kara. One of the reasons why I wanted to keep talking to Kara Martin is that she happens to be at the Denver Institute offices today and we have just had this fun, rambling, rich conversation that I think would be of value to our listeners. And so I just said, "Let's keep talking about some of these themes." And so if you'll humor us, I have a number of questions related to faith and work observations from a friend both of Denver Institute, but also who can offer a glimpse from outside of what the state of faith and work looks like today.

Kara did not pull any punches when she came into the offices. We were talking about faith and work. She goes, "First of all, I have an issue with the ampersand in your name." If you're familiar with the Denver Institute logo, it's Denver Institute for Faith & Work, which we're right here with Catherine, our producer who loves the ampersand, but Kara does not love it so much. Tell us a little bit about why you take an issue with our logo.

Kara Martin:

Well, I think it's very pretty. Very stylistic. My problem is that when you've got faith and work, you're actually having an assumption that those things are separate things, that those things you have to push together. Whereas, I think faith work, were never meant to be separated. Faith should be at the center of every activity that we do, including work. It's got to be the heart of what we do. So if we think about faith and work, often what we're picturing in our mind is a sort of Venn diagram and thinking, "Oh wow, the perfect place is that connection point where the two circles overlap." But I think that's a false understanding of how God created us to be. I think God created us to have faith at the center and heart of us. So it's actually, faith is the circle that's at the heart of all the other activities that we do in our lives.

Mark Greene from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity talks about mandarins and peaches. So if you're a Mandarin, you're sort of segmented. And that's I think the way that functionally, we often live our lives as these different segments. So faith becomes a segment of our life and work is a big segment of our life and maybe they connect a little bit where they're joined together. But he says what we need to do is be peachy, where the zone of the peach is at the very center of it and I guess has impact all through the flesh of the fruit. That's the way God and faith wants to be in terms of our work and every other activity we do.



Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, it makes me think of a nuclear reactor, Christ at the right hot center where the reaction is happening and it spreads out. You really have been offering some very helpful insight and poking at us a little bit, but one thing that had stood out to us this morning in a conversation we had with you was that you said that you really believe that the best faith and work conversations and discipleship needs to happen in churches. Here in the United States, we're seeing a lot of faith and work activity happen through centers, a few of which are based at churches, but they're added on to the church or completely outside of church context like Denver Institute is or academic settings. Why do you think kind of faith and work got broken off from discipleship in the local church? And I'll tease my follow up question is, what does it look like to have a more integrated understanding where churches are discipling their people well about calling and work?

Kara Martin:

Yeah, that's great. I think part of it, I think this is a process that has happened over a period of time. I'm going to blame Plato, Greek philosopher right from the start. For him separating our bodies from our souls, that's his thought, that sort of separation. And I think we've carried that thought. That's part of that separate of faith and work, sacred and secular. That's part of that thing. I would say that Christendom also has a lot to answer for. So when the church took over the running and the government of everything, then it was almost like church was the thing. And then when it retreated from that, it became separated from the rest of life. I think we've had corrections all through history, Christian history on this stuff. Like Martin Luther did a massive correction about it in saying the priesthood of all believers and also every vocation having equal value.

But we keep somehow sort of drifting away from this. I think in the most recent times, part of the drift has been when we've shrunken the gospel down to the gospel is telling people the good news of Jesus so their souls can be saved so they can go to heaven when they die. And if that is what you believe, that Christianity is just about forgiveness of sins for eternal life, then it doesn't matter what you do on earth. And in many ways, we're like the Thessalonians that Paul criticizes who are just lying around being lazy, waiting for Jesus to return. You don't have to care about what you do in this life. It doesn't matter so much.

I think that's a shrunken gospel. I don't think that that's the big story of the Bible. I don't think that's what Jesus actually lived out in his life. And yet I think that became the dominant sort of depiction of the gospel for a period of time. So if all that matters about us is our souls and all we have to care about is what happens after we die, then there's no point in actually being invigorated for what's happening in this life. There's no point in caring for others. There's no point in thinking about our work as anything other than an instrumental thing that just delivers us money to give to the church and relationships hopefully to convert a few more souls for heaven. So our relationships are transactional. I will only love



you if you say yes to Jesus and if you don't, then I'll stop loving you. But none of that actually looks, sounds like Jesus to me at all. That's not living like Jesus.

So I think that's how things became separated out. And functionally, what happens now is that both society and church have come to this agreement that churches will just focus on their activities and their programs. And so your pastor will keep saying, "Don't get so caught up in work, come over here and do our programs." And their main focus is attracting people in rather than equipping and sending people out. And society says, "Well, your faith is just this private thing. We don't want it to affect what we do in society. So don't bring your faith to work and don't be open about it because it's going to interrupt on what we want to do and what we want to achieve." So there's all those. Both sides are saying, "Don't live out your faith and work, neither side actually wants it."

I don't think that's who we are meant to be as disciples of Jesus. I don't think that shows the world who Jesus is and what He's like. And I think we're reaping the benefits of that. And really it's the cost of that, and the cost of that are that we're increasingly seen as irrelevant to society as Christians. Our churches are shrinking, our churches are failing to be able to attract people in because people don't want that message anymore. And we are not able to speak truth into the great causes and concerns of the world.

Joanna Meyer:

What does it look like for churches to begin to be, this is a, I realize a massive question, but what is it like for churches to be discipling people for whole life discipleship?

Kara Martin:

Yeah, there's lots of different expressions of that and ways it might look. I think one of the fundamental things is my friend Dave Benson in England talks about smashing the hierarchy, which I feel is really nice. And that's the Christian hierarchy of professions. Right at the top is missionary and next comes minister, quite a way down is the youth pastor.

Joanna Meyer:

Sorry, youth pastors.

Kara Martin:

Then you might have doctors and teachers, helping professions, they're okay. But then other professions way down, way down. I think that hierarchy is all wrong and the more that we do to sort of symbolically smash that, I think the better. For example, who are the people that we pray for and commission? Is it only the missionaries? Is it only the pastors? Is it only people who are doing stuff for church or do we actually pray and commission for everybody? So I see churches that have begun this process of



interviewing someone on behalf of a vocation and then praying and commissioning the people in those vocations. And I think that makes a massive difference. When from upfront you see your vocation, teacher, accountant, whatever it is, you see that actually being talked about and celebrated for the opportunities and the challenges and then prayed for and sent out, I think that's wonderful.

One of the really simple things, and I've done this a couple of times in churches, is the benediction, the sending out. One of the ideas I picked up from Alistair Mackenzie, great New Zealander, he suggested is that for the benediction you get everyone to face the doors, the exit points of the church. Because the benediction is a sending out, yet most of the time we are looking forward. But actually if you get people to turn around and you actually say, "Now, think about the context where you're going to be. Now, we're going to send you out into those places to be agents of reconciliations, to be followers of Jesus, to be Jesus with skin on in those places." That's a really powerful thing to do as well.

I was in a Bible college and I sort of ran an institute that was part of a Bible college and one of the problems was the things that we taught were sort of add-ons. And that's what faith and work can seem like, an add-on. The main difference that we realized, and actually another Bible college has now done this, is actually they've made discipleship for whole of life as the central theme for everything they do. So if you are learning about theology, you're thinking about how does this apply to my whole life? If you're learning the New Testament, you're looking at passages and thinking, what difference does this make to how I live my whole life? So that's I think full integration. And same with in a church situation, it's not just these occasional things that we do, but if we can actually make an awareness of shaping people for their whole lives to be at the heart of how we preach, what we talk about, who we interview, that's I think going to really make a massive difference.

And what you've got then is not a huge amount of effort to draw a few people into church to hear a gospel message, but you've got people who want to represent Jesus, hundreds of them, they're in your congregation pews going out into the world with contact with 10 to 50 people during the week, being Jesus to them, actually liberated to set the gospel free.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, I was fascinated. A few years ago, we interacted with the speaker from the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, which you had referenced earlier. One of their local churches had done a calculation of how many people were touched by the direct programming of the church during the course of the week and how many people were touched by their parishioners in the context of their daily work and neighboring and the numbers were staggeringly different. So much more touch points, many more touchpoints through people's daily work if you're able to disciple them for that.

Kara Martin:

Absolutely.



Joanna Meyer:

So I'm going to ask you to offer a little bit of outsider perspective, because I think it's really helpful. I know in my friendship with you, at times, you as an Australian have spoken into my life as an American and said, "You know, here in Australia, we don't experience God the way that you do. Some of the things that are hangups or attention points for you, like that's not universal to the Christian experience." And it was so helpful for me to have that kind of perspective. So I wanted to ask you a couple reflection questions for us, both me and our listeners about, what does an Australian have to say to Americans about faith and culture? And so I wanted to ask a little bit about what it's like to live and work as a Christian in Australia because although there are pockets of strong faith tradition in Australia, it's a very secular culture that's at times very hostile to Christianity. So tell us a little bit more about what it's like to live as a Christian in Australia, especially in a work context.

Kara Martin:

Yeah, I think if we're talking about really secular places, Europe's probably the most secular and then I would say United Kingdom's the next, and then it's Australia and then probably America. So just as Australians look to England and Europe and think, "This is the future that's coming," you can look at Australia and say, "That's the future that's coming." And some of it's really hard actually because of this, the church wanting to keep faith to themselves and society wanting to keep faith private, it's often very hard to speak about your faith and live out your faith in work and in a public setting. And we've had some very high profile situations where people have basically... Just recently, one guy was given a choice of taking a high profile job running a football franchise. To do that, he was told he would have to leave chairing his church committee. And that was the black and white choice that he was given.

And yeah, they're very high profile, but there are other things that are coming that are much better challenging that everybody has to face. A lot of it's around inclusivity in the workplace. There's a lot of sensitivity around that, and I'm sure that's happening here a fair amount as well. So I think one of the big things is the change in definition of what acceptance is. So acceptance used to be that I will accept that you're different from me and I will actually support your right to be different from me, and that's okay. But now acceptance of someone is to advocate on behalf of them. So it's about actually, it's the Wear Purple Day or whatever, Wear Rainbow Day or whatever it is. But it's also sign this petition on behalf of, like as part of that. And it's being an advocate for not just accept difference.

There's a writer in Australia, Stephen McAlpine, said, "Christians used to be the good guys, you know, used to be proud to be a Christian and now we've become the bad guys." And I think that's the thing that's becoming increasingly obvious in Australian society. Now that's not the full story. I think what's actually happening is there's this sort of tension of the separation out. There's almost a denial and a fight against the Christian heritage that has been so strong in both my country and your country. And so there's a sense of needing to separate out and then there's got to be a way of working together. So I



think the employee resource groups that are part of large organizations are an example of the way that companies have tried to work out, well, how do we live with these faith differences that we're experiencing in our workplace? How do we make some peace with that?

So yeah, I think there are some big challenges at the moment. I think it's hard. And when I look at how many Christians were in the church with me on Sunday here in Denver, I think, "Wow! You've still got a culture which loves going to church. You've still got a culture where there's a fair amount of biblical or Christian literacy." I was telling you guys earlier of my pastor who became a chaplain on a navy warship. And when he had church, he had five people turn up to church out of a crew of over 1,000. And he was telling them about David and Goliath and he could see the furrowed looks and he said, "Do you know this story?" And they didn't know this story. That might really surprise us because that's a really basic story. Like, everyone should know that, shouldn't they? Even people who aren't Christians. These were people who, five people from the ship who were elected to come to church and they didn't know it. And that's the level of loss of biblical literacy in Australian society.

I think you guys still have a lot of biblical literacy and understand Christian terms and so on. So you should really enjoy that and utilize that and not take it for granted and not assume that it's always going to be there. But that's a really great base to work from that you guys have that in Australia, we don't have anymore.

Joanna Meyer:

What skills do you think Australian Christians have had to learn to thrive in, we could use the biblical metaphor of exile, of being in a country that isn't receptive to your home country? What skills are they learning?

Kara Martin:

Yeah. I think first of all, it's knocked of normalism because there's no advantage in pretending to be a Christian, so you got to really believe it. I think that's actually a healthy thing. You don't have people who are just along for the club or for the fun of the culture or whatever cultural Christians. You have people who genuinely believe. I think it refines your faith, it makes you stronger, it builds resilience. I think it helps to define what you believe as well. So yeah, it becomes clearer what the differences are in terms of what we believe and how we live and why we do that. And those differences have the opportunity of attracting questions as well.

It becomes stranger why you won't take any phone calls or reply to emails on your Sabbath. That becomes a weird thing. So why do you do that? And you get to explain why. It seems stranger to hang out on a beautiful Sunday morning and go into a building and hang out with other weirdos. Why do you do that? So some of those behaviors, because they become increasingly starkly different. It becomes stranger to actually not be absorbed by monster ambition, not to want to push down other people to



push yourself up. When you're a Christian and you live and love differently, that actually begins to attract much more interesting questions. So there's opportunities in that. You get an opportunity to really understand what it means to follow Jesus.

Joanna Meyer:

You have the opportunity of looking at American Christianity and just noticing differences. As an Australian, what observations would you give back to the American church?

Kara Martin:

I may never get invited out again. I'll take that risk. Well, I see an incredible politicization of issues that for Christians in Australia, we'd see as Christian issues, but in America seem to be politicized and separated out. So in Australia as a Christian, you'd be for justice, you'd be pro-life, you'd hold both those things. But in America, it feels like you have to choose, are you going to be for justice or are you going to be pro-life? It's almost like you have to make a choice between them. I just feel that's such an artificial choice.

Yeah, I think there are some issues that are highlighted in America as really significant critical issues, which aren't even on the agenda in Australia. They're just not given the same prominence and you don't decide whether someone's really a believer or not, depending on how they answer that question. So I think there's some of those things that are really different.

I think one of the other things that is really stark to me is the focus on individual freedom and how that's become part of the Christian conversation in America in a way that it's just not a part of the conversation in Australia. And I can understand the historical and social reasons for appreciating freedom, and the Bible does say a lot about freedom and I think that's important. But the individualization about personal freedom, I just find that quiet antithetical to the Christian message. The Christian message is all about corporate and community and looking out for each other and sacrificing my wants and desires for the other. So yeah, that whole conversation I find quite strange. I do understand the historical roots of it, but yeah, the way it's expressed.

And I think the linking of Christianity to the love of nation, also is something that feels quite strange to your average Aussie. We love our country, we don't have as many flags as you do.

Joanna Meyer:

I don't if anyone has this many flags.



Kara Martin:

And it's great to be proud of your flag, but there's a sense of God tied to the future of the nation in America, which is not a thought at all in Australia. I think Australia's origins is, it was seen as the great Southland of the Holy Spirit. That was its first name.

Joanna Meyer:

Really?

Kara Martin:

Yeah. And there's some beauty in that history, which Christians understand and love, but we don't see it as putting Australia above or over other places. And we don't see that that tie between what God wants for Australia versus for other countries. The way that gets expressed in American culture, we find quite strange.

Joanna Meyer:

I have one last question, changing topic a little bit. If people are intrigued by what they've heard from you in both the main podcast and the bonus content, how can they learn more about your work? We're linking to two of your books in our show notes, but you have a lot of other stuff going on where people could continue to learn with you. Tell us what you're up to.

Kara Martin:

Sure. I have a podcast which I do with a guy in Australia, Stephen Field, that Abby referred to. So Worship on the Way to Work. So that's an easy thing to plug into. Just 15 minutes, once a week. Also, I have a website, workshop.com.au, where there's video content. Yeah, and I guess some of the other work I do, I do work with Seed, which is an Australian company similar to the American company, Practice. So we are really focusing on how we can help people to become redemptive influences in their workplaces or through their businesses. So that's great work. I enjoy doing that. And I teach leadership at Gordon Conwell too. So that's sort of a local place to get involved with. And as part of the part of the macular center, we've got a book on Sabbath coming out next year sometime, which I think will be a really good read.

Joanna Meyer:

So fun. Well, thanks for your insights, Kara. Love getting to talk to you, my favorite Aussie.



Kara Martin:

Thanks, Joanna. Bye.

Joanna Meyer:

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