



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.

Ross Chapman:

Welcome to the Faith and Work Podcast, a podcast where we explore our everyday work in God's world. I am Ross Chapman, I serve as the CEO of Denver Institute, and I look forward to hosting today's episode. Today's episode is the second in a three-part series, where we're exploring themes from our FOR Campaign, which we launched in September of 2023, and it's a five-year strategic plan about the future of work and workers, the church, and the city.

And so we've already done part one. If you haven't had a chance to listen to that, I encourage you to do so, where we talked about our vision really being a chance to see every person's work bring hope and life to their city. One of the things we want to focus on in this episode, though, is the church and work. And I think a lot of us experience a little bit of disconnect at times when we worship on Sunday morning, maybe participate in a Bible study, serve in the nursery or another ministry within the church. And we want to spend some time talking to some pastors today to really hear from them, what have they learned about helping people think about their everyday work and how they can equip them to do that well and faithfully.

Today, we are joined by Neil Long, who is the executive pastor at Park Church - Denver. Neil is a friend from our days together at Taylor University and has been really involved in Faith and Work initiatives at his church and in Denver. And so we're really glad to have him on. He's very articulate and you're going to learn a lot from him in terms of how churches think about this question of faith and work or how they could.

And our second guest is Phil Heller. Phil is the lead pastor at Crossroads Christian Church in Evansville, Indiana. Before moving to Denver, Phil was my pastor. He was my high school pastor actually, and then 17 years later became the lead pastor of the church where we were worshipping. He's an awesome guy and he's been serving in the local church for over 30 years. He's passionate about helping every person discover their true identity in Christ and find their fit in His mission, and he has a personal story to share about some of that. And Crossroads has been actively figuring out what it looks like to begin thinking about integrating a theology of work into all that they do. And so these are two pastors who are really going to help us navigate this conversation.



Oh, great. Well, hey, Phil, why don't you start by just telling us a little bit about your congregation in Indiana. Tell us its demographics, what it's like, any history that you think's important, we'd love to hear about it.

Phil Heller:

Sure. So we're about a 57-year-old congregation. We were a church plant by a congregation that was located in downtown Evansville. They saw rapid growth happening on the east side of our city, and so they sent some representatives of their congregation to see what that would be like to plant another congregation on the east side. They met in a home for a while, and then transitioned to a small preschool, and then bought some property and built their first campus, and then relocated about 20 years later to the campus where we sit today.

And the congregation, it's an upper-middle class congregation. I'm excited to say that in the past four years, that demographic has changed and we see a lot more diversity by socioeconomic, age, but also ethnicity, and that's a really neat thing that's transforming right in front of our eyes. So the congregation obviously, just like most, experienced the pandemic. And so a small list of things that I think are good on this side of the pandemic and one of those very short list things is that it gave us a chance to reset and to really start chasing some things that were maybe moving up in the priorities. And okay, we went down to like, "All right, we are not meeting publicly. And so if we started meeting again, what would that look like?" And I think that allowed some space for this opportunity with the vocational ministry and what it means to live missionally, unpacking that.

Ross Chapman:

That's great. And, Neil, before you tell us a little bit more about your congregation, maybe just a follow-up from that, Phil. Talk to us just briefly about what the congregation's experience is with the Faith and Work conversation.

Phil Heller:

Mm. I think for us we're helping people realize that the place they spend most of their week is not at church and faith is still relevant to that rest of their life. And I think for so long the church as a whole has focused so much attention on a very small, minute portion of a person's life. And so for us awakening people to realize that God and faith and Scripture and the life of Jesus is relevant to every aspect of their life, including where they work, but it also includes where they live and where they play, that's, for some, an epiphany, that's a brand new idea.



And for others, they've been living that for a while, and so it's a chance for us to affirm that, and to learn from them, and also to hopefully multiply it.

Ross Chapman:

Very cool. Well, thanks for sharing. Neil, tell us about Park Church in Denver.

Neil Long:

Yeah, so we just celebrated 15 years this past summer, just a couple months ago. And it really began with a dream in Texas. There's a group of about 20 people meeting for a Bible study and they said, "Hey, let's go to a city where there isn't a church on every corner, and we're just not seeing a whole lot of Gospel centrality, or there..." Certainly God's at work in so many different ways, but I just wanted to go to a place that was increasingly post-Christian.

And so about 20 or so folks came and we got established in what's called the Highlands neighborhood or also North Side; even that speaks to some of the demographical realities on the part of the city that we're in. So we're close to downtown, but just outside, a little bit north and west of city center. It's a place that's experienced a lot of gentrification, especially over the past 15, 20 years. And so the typical questions that emerge from that, how do you have a faithful presence that pays attention to the history, the present narratives, but also just the realities of a changing culture and the dynamics of the people that are there?

But all the while the vision has been, hey, let's talk about who Jesus is, let's talk about the goodness of His reign and of the fact that He's come to save us in His life and death and resurrection, and let's tease out the implications for every facet of life. That's a lifelong endeavor. And so it's like every nook, cranny, every square inch, whatever language we want to use, but it's to be a follower of Jesus, we want to talk about the practical realities of every corner of our lives. So that was kind of the vision from the beginning and we found ourselves in different types of conversations along the way.

And I feel like you maybe spoke more highly of the seats I've sat in than what's real. I feel like I've been a fly on the wall for a long time. I found myself in rooms with leaders that know so much more and have so much greater experience. But just trying to be a sponge, trying to absorb as much as I can from those who have gone ahead and found areas of fruitfulness and effectiveness, but also from some of the missteps, how do we glean from that?



Our church is a lot millennial, Gen Z, but it's also expanding as well. One of our pastors keeps a running tally of those that are, at least by appearances, over the age of 55, and we're getting a larger group of people. And so even that relates to this conversation, stewarding that season of life, where many of them have had careers, some of them families, asking different questions, but also saying, how do I leave something behind? And how is there a legacy there?

Park is non-denominational in some ways. Maybe we'll talk about being interdenominational. We tend to attract people from... I grew up in the Catholic Church to unchurched to I was kind of the warehouse style, lowest church possible, anywhere in between. Maybe the best way that I've heard our church described is that a PCA church and an SBC church conceived a child and it was raised by an Anglican godfather or nanny or something. We kind of have all of those elements kind of pieced in there theologically, structurally, even liturgically. But trying to look at church history and tradition as something to not be governed by, but to learn from and be students of. And so where that can point us to Jesus and help us walk through the story of the Gospel, we want to leverage that.

Yeah, I feel like whatever things we've tried, we're still so much learners in trying to push into some of these things.

Ross Chapman:

Well, and that's definitely where we want to jump into the conversation is as learners and try to explore this more with you guys. So thanks for taking time. It's fun to hear about your churches and just to remind people that church is a great thing. It's a great place for community and learning together and growing, and it's a bunch of imperfect people trying to figure it out. And just thanks for the way that you guys lead in that space. So just to start, tell us your own journey with the idea of a theology of work, or understanding God's view of work, and your own journey as a church leader.

Phil Heller:

Mm. I can honestly say, no, I didn't have anywhere on my radar this idea of what it means to have faith a part of your work. It was like a part of your life, yes, but not very deliberate on what it looks like, whatever your vocation is, and to see that as a calling. And I was probably guilty, like maybe most youth pastors, of thinking like, "Well, the best way a kid from our youth group could serve God is to go into full-time vocational ministry," which only, in my mind, happened within the four walls of a church.



And I had a pretty humbling moment where I took one of those students who I thought was maybe spoiling their potential, wanting to be a airplane pilot, and actually met him in the town where he was studying two years of instrument license at a state school. And I took him to a youth pastor's conference in that city thinking, "Maybe this will be the thing that convinces him that he can really salvage his potential and turn out to be something great." And actually, providentially, one of the speakers at that conference really confronted the mentality that I was living under of like, "Some of you are guiltting kids going into full-time vocational ministry thinking that that's the only option." And honestly, that was an epiphany for me. I had never really translated it to think that other people could be living on mission and not working at a church, right?

And so for me, I had a lot of confessing and a lot of repentance. And actually that person was sitting right next to me, and after that session, I turned to that person and actually apologized right there on the spot and said, "I'm sure you have felt feelings of guilt from me or pressure from me to do something with your life and go into working at a church, and I just wanted to tell you that I can't wait for the day when I walk down an airport and I pass you in your captain's uniform and I say, 'Hey, it's so great to see you,' and you tell me that you're off to the next flight, but maybe you're leading some Bible study in an airport with a bunch of other pilots, or maybe I'm on a flight and you just start the flight with prayer. I just know the way that you live your life now is going to translate into what God is calling you to be as a pilot. And I want to just let you know I'm proud of you and I affirm that."

I'll need to just let you know, full circle, actually, about two years later, after completing all that training, this person called and said, "Hey, I have some news. I've taken a job at a church." So it did backfire a tad bit, especially in this conversation, but I will say that that was a very big turning point for my mind and my heart.

Ross Chapman:

Oh, that's awesome.

Phil Heller:

And I hope that I've not made anybody else feel that way since. I'm sure there may have been a few, but that has really been the beginning of my understanding of, what does it look like for all of us to live on mission, where we live, where we work, where we play, and that began the process. I think that was your original question.



Ross Chapman:

Yeah, that's a big factor, if somebody confronts you in a public way and you have the opportunity to just address it right there. That's kind of dramatic, but what a cool response from you. I just want to affirm that's really awesome of you to just say, "Hey, go do the Lord's work wherever it is that He's calling you. And forgive me if I've said that's limited to one thing in my mind." And so that's incredible. And I know there's more to talk about here, Phil, but, Neil, why don't you jump in and help us understand where you started with this conversation and how has that evolved and what factors led to where you are today?

Neil Long:

Yeah, I'm your classic, rural Midwest boy, and so work ethic, it was built in from day one. So the value of work and humans as workers was certainly something that was prized. And I mean, that's something that I carry with me today and am so grateful for. You do your work, you do it well, you do it with integrity, and it matters. How it mattered I think was maybe a little bit more open to interpretation. I think what I implicitly received was, hey, it matters because you're able to provide for your family and you're also able to be generous, and you're able to provide something for others. And so I just saw that modeled beautifully in my own family and the community I was around, the church I was in.

But at the same time, another message that snuck in was similar to, Phil, what you're saying, was, well, sure, all work supposedly, maybe theoretically matters, but if you really want to do the stuff that has true impact and influences the kingdom and to live on mission and all the things that the youth conferences are about or whatever else, you need to sell all, go cross-culturally, and live so visibly sacrificially that everyone can see your postcard up on the wall at the church and everything else. And that's not to denigrate that call, that's such a real call for so many, but at times that was kind of like, well, those are the Green Berets. Those are the Christians who really follow Jesus' command, and everybody else should feel mild to severe guilt for not being them and try to appropriate whatever principles from their life they can in their every day. So that, "Do you work in the church? Do you work in some sort of inner city ministry, the nonprofit world," and it kind of tiered out from there.

And so I carried that implicit, I guess, functional theology into undergrad. And my world at Taylor got opened up to just the way that systems operate. And so I began studying economics and politics and just how different dynamics of authority and stewardship and all these things, these questions that I didn't realize I had until I



started hearing some of the responses. And that ended me up, switched my major, and then I ended up taking a businesses mission class. And I guess that was kind of my gateway drug, if you will, into the broader Faith and Work discussion.

Because initially I came in as, "Oh, this is great space to be a platform for sharing the Gospel, and serving the poor, and planting churches, etc., et." And it certainly is that and can be that, but my mind and understanding and hearing the stories of different ways that God was leveraging the talents and the experience and the education of people in all of these different industries, all of these different fields, not just for the sake of some other end, though that is often the fruit of it, but for the work itself, for the actual investment of their time and energy and talent, for the good of loving their neighbor. And from there, a whole new world of literature opened up to me. And I received many mentors from afar, but also able to just have conversations with people that were further down the road, and began kind of building out that theology more formally, and then starting to tease out what does this mean for the life of everyday Christians?

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, I mean, it's just great to hear your journeys. I don't think they're unique to people who maybe grew up in church with similar mentalities. It's just that you two became church leaders and maybe other people became something else, but those seem like prevalent ideas still, and hopefully less so, but I think they're still really there.

And so the next question really is, what's it like then being in this position of church leadership? Understanding that people might have some of those views and also have certain expectations of what church should be and how it should interact in their life, how are you leading through that for them to start seeing this is bigger than maybe you were thinking about or you could think about this differently? And I think it's just a good question to ask, is there anything practical that you guys do that really help with that?

Phil Heller:

Hmm. I think it begins with just our decision to follow Jesus. I mean, it's not a compartmental-ed invitation, right? I mean, Jesus says if you lose your life, you'll find it. And that's a very comprehensive invitation he makes to follow Him. And so it's easy to do that for an hour, an hour and 15 minutes, depends on how long the preacher goes on Sunday. It was easy to do that for a very small section of life. It's a lot harder to do that just in my own life as a husband, as a father, as a neighbor, as a person who drives down the expressway, as



somebody who just interacts at the grocery store. And I often say in my own world, "I have to bring faith to my work." Just because I'm a pastor doesn't make it automatic or give me any free passes, right? I can't preach a sermon as a jerk, right? I can't manipulate or abuse people in the name of leadership of a church.

Ross Chapman:

Right.

Phil Heller:

I mean, those are things... That's where my faith has to intersect my work. And so I try to keep that same perspective as I think about anyone's sense of calling about how they go about life, and I try to help affirm that and also tease that out in that it's not just what you do here on this campus or within these four walls that count. I mean, it's important. We gather for a reason, but we really have changed our mentality to say, "We don't gather as the end goal." We actually gather to send, gather to scatter. We gather to equip and empower you for the rest of the majority of the rest of your day, the rest of your week, the rest of your life, right?

And so practically speaking, it's trying to recognize that that is just as significant and bringing equal value to that, saying, "Find your calling." And your calling could be to serve within the walls of the church in a kid's ministry setting, or in a worship leadership setting, or it could be as a part of a production line at a local factory, or it could be as an educator, or it could be as a stay-at-home mom, it could be as the mayor of the city. All of those are equal in value of this sense of calling. And so some of that is in the language that we use and in the things that we are teaching toward and speaking toward, but then also maybe my favorite thing is to visit and affirm and celebrate that when I see it happening, and to tell those stories, to give people a chance to identify themselves as somebody who is on mission in one of those contexts.

So maybe a practical exercise, something we did just recently, just a couple of weeks ago in a weekend service, we celebrated people who are living on mission in those variety of contexts. And so I used some words to describe what it might look like if I was an educator who views my work as sacred and am trying to leverage every opportunity as an educator for the mission of God. I described what that looked like and I asked, "If you feel that way about your role in education, would you stand up?" And there were people who stood up. I described what that might look like in the medical field, what that might look like as a businessman or a businesswoman, what it might look like in the trades, what it might look like in a variety of those contexts and asked people to stand up in each of those settings if that's kind of what described them.



And after doing so, I thanked them for living that out. And then I also said, "If you find yourself operating in that context, but you didn't feel like you could stand up because that doesn't describe you right now, I hope you took notice of somebody who did stand up, because there's somebody that you can learn from. There's somebody who is going to the same work you go to every day, but they're viewing it in maybe a much different way than you are right now, and they can help you."

I might be able to help somebody in a pastoral setting, but I've never worked at a factory, I've never been a teacher, I've never been a physician. So those are ways that we're trying to connect the dots of what it looks like and then help people equip others for that same sense of mission, same sense of purpose through their work.

Ross Chapman:

Well, that's super encouraging. I would have loved to have been in that service, at that gathering. It would've been super awesome. Just a quick recap of what I heard you say, Phil, is that there were kind of three main practical things that you're thinking about. The first is with this workplace visit idea of you're going and seeing people in their workplace and helping them connect the dots. And then you're also doing a recognition thing on a Sunday gathering affirming people's work. And then you mentioned language as well, you're trying to be really intentional about your language. So, Neil, are those things that you guys have done and what has that looked like? Are there other things that you're doing as well that are kind of that practical, "This is what we're doing to try to help people get this"?

Neil Long:

Yeah, I feel a lot of resonance with what, Phil, you're sharing. Yeah, it's kind of gone in different seasons, but when I've done workplace visits, it is so vivid that that's impactful for that individual, even in the way that they will show up to small group or to church or the way they want to even invest in that community, because I would imagine they feel seen and valued in the particulars of what so much of their life and energy gets invested in. And for good reason, because that subtle divide can be carried by so many people in the church. Even if they imagine, "My pastor probably assumes that their work is more important than mine," this is conveying something different.

So workplace visits, yeah, highly recommend. It takes a little bit more logistically and time commitment, but you also get to see different parts of your city or your town. Maybe find a local spot that they enjoy going to. Some people feel less or more comfortable of you actually touring their work environment. But when I've been invited



in that space, it honestly feels somewhat sacred, where I'm getting introduced to their coworkers, maybe to their boss. I see the specific environment where so much of their work takes place. And yeah, it's really a sweet invitation.

We've done what we've called vocational commissionings as well. We basically broke up our whole church into 12 different industries or broad sectors. And it's not perfect. Certainly people are kind of like, "Ah, I fit in one or two, or maybe three, I'm not really sure, but as best we can, let's break it up." So we did this in 2019. One Sunday out of the month, we would take about five to seven minutes, and one of us would hop up and we would describe that sector of society, that industry, that feel, that area of work within the broader narrative, trying to situate it in creation, fall, redemption, restoration of this is what God intended for this kind of work. We know that sin and brokenness finds its way in, but Christ has come and He's filled us with His Spirit, those who trust in Him. And He sent us back out to live on mission, bearing fruit in His kingdom in that industry, and this is the call upon our lives.

And so we would have people in that different industry stand up, and we would applaud them, thank them, and then have people, if they were close by, put a hand on a shoulder or extend a hand and pray for them in their work, a true commissioning to go back out into their everyday lives.

Yeah, so people have shared. One guy is like, "I've been in the church for 30+ years. I've worked in the same industry for 30+ years, but I've yet to in a church context be affirmed in that way, have my work be situated in that story, and then to be so affirmed and sent back out." I don't think he wanted to admit it, but he's like, "I had a tear emerging in my eye because of that," because it just hit something pretty fundamental to who he was.

So that's something that we've tried in the past. COVID has disrupted that and we've not gotten back to it since. But we still, when people will become members at our church, one of the forms in the form that they fill out, they check which industry they're in, and that automatically sorts on our church community builder program into these different vocation groups. So we'll leverage that at different points. Just recently, we had a couple in our church, they're in healthcare, have been for several decades, and we sent an email out to that group and saying, "Hey, they gather on the third Friday of each month in their homes." And it's informal mentorship, it's relationship building, it's talking about being a follower of Jesus in the practice of medicine and however that gets worked out.



So yeah, we've tried a variety of things from being a part of our mission sermon series to doing curriculum for our whole small groups to try to tease out some of these things and the contours of real lives. And yeah, each one I feel like works well in some ways and we're always learning more.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Hi, I'm Jeff Hoffmeyer, Vice President of Advancement here at Denver Institute for Faith and Work, and I would like to invite you to become a part of our new monthly partner community. Whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you, as a monthly partner, you will receive a welcome box. You'll have exclusive access to private digital content, personalized vocational coaching, and discounts for Denver Institute content and experiences. To become a monthly partner, simply visit denverinstitute.org/give or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Ross Chapman:

Is there any particular language that you're intentionally using or not using that you feel like is important for these practices that you're doing?

Phil Heller:

I probably find myself saying like, "Living on mission," probably the most to describe what I think of when I think of sacredness to your work and all of life being centered in the followership of Jesus. I have probably pulled away, based on the story I shared earlier, from saying like, "Oh, you've made a commitment to full-time Christian service," because that's a trigger I think that says, "Well, that means you're going to work at a church or you're going to be a missionary;" where all of us are... I mean, the call to the Great Commission wasn't just to go work at a church, right? It was to go into all the world in all the ways. And so that's something I've tried to stay away from saying. And those may be two examples I can think of.

Ross Chapman:

Great. Anything for you, Neil?

Neil Long:



Yeah. Similarly with the ministry language, even the word ministry can just as easily be translated in the New Testament as service. So trying to broaden that in people's minds, that there's a ministry of, fill in the blank, any type of industry, and that is not by any means confined to the walls of the church or a certain job title or whatever else. If we're called by God, a follower of Jesus, then we are in ministry. We are serving, loving our neighbors, laying down our lives, a living sacrifice, taking our education experience, agency resources, all of those things to actively image God. So we use that language a lot of, how do we image God through our work that we're representing Him?

And that's where the pointing two, Genesis 1 and 2 and Revelation 21 and 22, just often... I remember Andy Crouch was out here a number of years ago, and he's like, "Oh, we've shaved off the first two and the final two chapters of the story of Scripture." And we see the goodness, we see the original mandate and call in Genesis 1 and 2, and we see where all things are headed, this garden city. And so highlighting those portions of Scripture as well for people to understand this is what humanity was for from the beginning.

John Frame has this excellent little piece where he talks about how the Great Commission is simply republishing the cultural mandate for a post-fall era and saying, "It's the same call, but now people are not reconciled to God, and so we need Jesus, we need to be filled by the Spirit," things that weren't required or were already built in to the pre-Genesis 3 world. So now, we need to become disciples by His grace and through faith, but now we're called to reengage the original commission through our everyday lives as the people of God in the spaces we're called to be in.

So I guess that doesn't give specific language, but those are different kind of broader categories of language, metaphors, places in Scripture that we'll point people to.

Ross Chapman:

Well, that's great. I'm super encouraged by both of you guys and what your churches are doing. I think it's super helpful. And certainly one of the reasons Denver Institute exists is to help people get language that makes sense to them in their daily work, and I'm just excited to see what you guys are doing.

I think there's three big takeaways here for church leaders listening in. The language is just to ask, what language is good and maybe what's not helpful, is just a really good place to start. I love that you both have done the workplace visits. That feels like such an impactful thing for the individual person you're visiting, but



also it probably influences you as the church leader and, I think, the whole congregation because of that. And just getting the chance to commission people in their daily work in whatever way.

So those feel like simple things, but I also know that the life of the church leader is quite demanding and busy, and people are always asking you to do something better, or have you considered this? And maybe those three things could just feel like a lot. And I think it's important just for people to hear from you all. You've been leading during a really challenging time and thinking about more things to do or more questions to consider might just feel like, "All right, I'm just done. This has been a hard season. I can't do anymore," maybe throw in the towel. And we've seen that be a problem. And so I'm just like, "What's sustained you guys?" And what would you say also in terms of this conversation, has this maybe even contributed to your joy in work, in being able to see people connect these dots with the majority of their time? Just speak to that however you feel is... If that makes sense, or if it doesn't, that's fine, but love to hear any input you have.

Phil Heller:

I would say the motivation for me maybe to continue has been maybe why I got into this in the first place, and that was just I wanted to serve God and I wanted to serve people. And so some of that I didn't know what I was getting myself into, right? And so, yeah, there's a long list of responsibilities and expectations and pressures. And so part of it is reminding myself, what's my calling? My calling is to just serve God and to express my faith in every aspect of my life. And so, in many ways, I'm not asking anybody else to do something I'm not trying to do myself or not willing to do myself.

And again, just because I'm a pastor, I don't get any free passes, a get out of jail free card that comes and be like it just automatically happens. And so for me, it's constantly remembering and being intentional and disciplined about living that out myself. And so, while that's not easy, it's not easy for any of us to do, that helps me be mindful of what it might be like for others who are chasing that same pursuit. And when we equalize, whether I'm serving at a church or a factory or a school or so on and on, when all that is equalized, it's the same pursuit.

Every context will have its unique challenges, and the grass can certainly look greener from the other side like, "Oh, it'd be a lot easier to do this if I worked at a church, or if I worked at a school, or if I..." Everybody can look at the other person's grass and think it's a lot greener. And so what I've tried to do myself and tried to normalize is that we're all called to this. And that way we can encourage each other, we can learn from each other. And it might look uniquely different in its application, but the heart of it is still the same. It's about loving God and



loving people. It's about seeing His kingdom come, His will be done on earth as in heaven, restoring what He intended life to be. And so as I experience that personally, then I can notice it and recognize it in others and celebrate that as an equal, as a shared, common experience.

And I'll just say that that's motivating to me. It doesn't always happen. And yeah, I hold onto the stories when I see it happen, because those motivate me to see it more and to have it multiplied more. And those have sustained me in dark times where it's like, "Is this really making a difference? Is this really worth it? Do I really have what it takes to help?" Those are the things that have been sustaining in those moments.

And just to circle back to those workplace visits, when you see somebody get it, gosh, that makes me want to get out of bed the next day. When I see somebody in their workplace living it out, living their faith out in very tangible and expressive ways that I know is meaningful and beneficial and serving other people, that's like, "All right, who else can I help do that? Who else can I help foster that in?" So that's a little bit of the encouragement and the sustaining for me

Ross Chapman:

Thanks, Phil.

Yeah. Yeah, how about you, Neil?

Neil Long:

Yeah, I'm trying to think back to different conversations I've had with pastors and church leaders and where maybe some of the pockets of resistance come in, and probably the two largest ones, the first would be a resistance of conviction. It's like, "Well, I'm here to preach the Bible. I'm a Jesus person. I'm going to preach the Gospel and this is what I'm going to do. I don't need to kind of get into these tertiary or secondary components."

And I've posed the question before, which area of your people's lives do you want them to not care about faithfulness to Jesus? It's like, "Well," the obvious answer is, "I want them to care about every facet of their lives. No, I want that to get applied and worked out and teased out in all the different facets." And then to turn toward, well, if they are spending the majority of their waking hours where they invest, a lot of their best energy goes to this one environment, then would it not be faithful pastoral ministry to speak to those areas, to have a



presence within, to have a voice within, to provide whatever guidance or a sounding board or whatever else to try to guide them in that endeavor?

So that's the first area of resistance. The other would be probably resistance of capacity. It's like, "Oh yeah, I'm on board theologically. I see the goodness of that, but I just don't have the space for that. I've got so many things and so many needs, and people are constantly emailing, texting, and I couldn't squeeze in another program or initiative." And I think that the best starting point is probably moving from thinking about program and toward a posture toward our people. I don't think the right next step is, "What book study do we need to do? What's our new sermon series? Let's roll it out next semester." That's probably not the next best step. But rather, what if we took a posture of curiosity with our people?

So as we spend time with them, which I imagine we're doing, we're doing pastoral care, they're coming to the church building, or we're in their homes, or we're getting coffee, or whatever else to move toward them in this spirit of curiosity, learning about, what is it like to go to work each day? What clients do you serve? What interactions with customers have you had? What are some of the pinch points with your boss or the people you manage? What are some of the questions you're wrestling with right now? And you begin drawing out. You think of how often, especially if we as pastoral leaders have a preaching or teaching role, we're often the ones that are speaking and everyone else is in the position of listening and receiving. But what if we flip that when we're sitting down for a lunch meeting and we're listeners, we're learners, we come in with this curious wonder, and we get invited into this space that they actually care quite a bit about and have a lot to say?

Start doing that over the coming weeks and months, and I have found my own imaginative capacity has grown, even as I think about illustrations, or biblical texts that I'm studying, or how does this come to bear on our people? You begin doing your annual planning process or whatever that is, these things start to find their way in, because we're starting to know our people better and we're starting to think about what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus in these spaces, and now I have more context for it.

So I would really push against adopt a new program, find this new curriculum, or whatever else. Those things have their place, but I think the beginning point has got to be a renewed posture toward our people that leads into the more particular things.

Ross Chapman:



Well, Neil, that's great, man. That actually answers the next question I was going to ask, and then we're getting close to wrapping up. But the question was going to be, where should a church start if a church leader wants to kind of dive into this, and you just answered it, start with curiosity, not a programming strategy kind of thing. But it reminds me of just a good way to live out what Eugene Peterson says, which is that the shepherds should "smell like sheep". And so the best way to do that is to go be with them and listen to them and just be curious about them. That's an incredible charge, so thank you for that.

So, Phil, last question goes to you, and that is, what if people are in a local congregation and they love their church, but they are frustrated because they don't feel like their church understands their work life or they don't really feel like they're talking to their work life? And this is something that we hear quite a lot about at Denver Institute and it may be even one of the reasons we exist, and so we want to see churches do this more, but how would you encourage somebody in your church who came to you and just said, "Hey, why don't you ever talk to me about my work life," or, "I can't connect the dots"? What would your encouragement be to them?

Phil Heller:

I think it's be the change you want to see. And so I operate from a pretty high level of empowerment and equipping, and so if I was in that situation, I'd want that person to be empowered to join the effort in that regard. And I'm blessed to be in a situation where I'm not the only person on our staff team. I was parented by a father who was a lone ranger pastor for many of his years, not by choice, but just by circumstance. I mean, pastoring churches where he was the janitor, the youth pastor, the song leader, the preacher, the hospital, Mary Berry guy, all that, right, and his capacity to do one more thing's not there. And I did appreciate what I recognized as a young boy, my dad inviting people into being part of the solution.

And certainly there is a juggernaut to that. I mean, if a person in the congregation approached their pastor or a church leader and they're not open to that and they won't give them permission for that, then that is a tough spot. I would still say keep trying, keep going, ask again, or just operate in ways that aren't contrary or obnoxious, but do the things that you feel like you would like to see done, right?

And so start visiting fellow brothers and sisters in Christ at their workplace. That's something. It doesn't just have to be the pastor to do that. Start building an ecosystem where that's celebrated and there is language that is resonating among people who have a common understanding of that. I would hope that that church leader would recognize that and affirm it. Even if they are not personally involved, they don't have to be to give its



affirmation and its place. So that's probably the one thing I would say is like, "Just go for it. Do it. Start doing the things that you would like to see," and watch how that might bear fruit.

Ross Chapman:

That's great. Well, Neil and Phil, thank you so much for spending some time today and being willing to share some of your own personal journeys, and also just what it looks like in your church, and your heart for this conversation. It's really exciting to hear, and I've been encouraged. So thanks for taking the time to do that.

Neil Long:

Yeah, thank you, Ross.

Phil Heller:

Awesome. Same.

Ross Chapman:

Thanks for joining us and thanks for listening today. If you'd like to take a next step, we would strongly encourage you to talk to your church leader about this conversation. Maybe you can do something about it, maybe they're already thinking about it, but we encourage you to take that step.

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Joanna Meyer:

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