



Joanna Meyer:

You're listening to the Faith & Work Podcast, where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor and society through our daily work. Welcome to the Faith & Work podcast. I'm your host, Joanna Meyer. I'm joined today by Denver Institute CEO, Ross Chapman. Hi, Ross.

Ross Chapman:

Hey, it's great to be back.

Joanna Meyer:

Well, it has been a big month as you published your first book, *Faithful Work: in The Daily Grind with God and for Others* with today's guest, Dr. Ryan Tafilowski. Congratulations, and how does it feel to be an author?

Ross Chapman:

It feels surreal. Mostly, I'm just really thrilled to be a co-author with Dr. Tafilowski and all of his amazingness. But yeah, we're really excited. It's a good book. We'll talk a little bit more about it later. Just a good introduction to the ideas of, what does it mean to integrate your faith in your work and what are some of the key questions you can ask, and it's a lot of the stuff that we do here with our fellows, and so it gives people a chance to read something that's accessible.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. I think the topic is really important, that word, faithful work, the idea of how do we steward the fullness of what God has given us to do? I'm excited for readers to discover it, and if I were to summarize the themes in the book, I think in the broadest sense, it's this question of, what does it look like to be godly stewards of our work and to have a Christian presence there, which is fascinating, because it brings up so many themes.

The book will hit on some that may seem familiar to listeners, but one that has emerged in the last few days that I had never thought of in spite of 10 years of working at Denver Institute, is this idea of what it looks like to be shrewd or crafty in our work, and the more I have dug into it, the more I've thought, "Why are we not talking about this?" So I'm thrilled. That's going to be our topic of exploration today with Ryan Tafilowski, but before we



jump in, tell us a little bit about your co-author, Ryan, what it was like working with him and also, a little bit about his bio.

Ross Chapman:

Well, it was really a joy to work with Ryan. Ryan was our theologian in residence before my time here at Denver Institute, and as soon as I got here, he left, and I didn't take it personally. I realized, he's also a pastor and a professor at Denver Seminary. He actually serves as the assistant professor of theology and the chair of the theology department at Denver Seminary.

Joanna Meyer:

Kudos to you, sir.

Ross Chapman:

Right on.

Ryan Tafilowski:

Well, thank you. Every time I read that, I think Dwight Schrute, assistant to the professor of theology.

Ross Chapman:

Right on. Well, you're also pastor of Foothills Fellowship Church in Littleton, and you have a PhD in systematic theology from the University of Edinburgh, which had to have been an amazing experience, and your dissertation explored Christianity and the rise of Nazi Germany. You previously served as our theologian in residence, and so we were so glad to have you as co-author because you did so much work on the book and what actually became the book, you could say. Yeah, it was really fun to partner up with you on it and I just appreciate you jumping in and saying, "Yeah, let's do it."

Ryan Tafilowski:

Well, yeah, it was such a blessing to get to work on the book, and even though our names are on the cover, in many ways, that book is the product of Denver Institute as a whole. There were many hands in it. A lot of it was generated through discussions we had in staff meetings and materials that we wrote for events and for S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



trainings and for the fellowship, and so I just feel very grateful to have participated in it, and so I'm really happy to be back at the Denver Institute offices where, for many years I distracted people while they were trying to work, so that's my plan for the rest of the day

Joanna Meyer:

I always, and this is not an exaggeration, I get excited when I know that Ryan is coming to the office for a couple of reasons. One is, he's just super fun as a person, as is his wife, Adrian, who's a good friend of ours as well, but I always learn something new that makes me love God more, or think differently about scripture. Ryan, you have this amazing ability to make theology practical, and so today's conversation about shrewdness, it's a million dollar conversation waiting to happen. Let's just jump in a little bit. This conversation sprung up in a broader conversation about stewardship, and we've talked about stewardship. Eric Most was on the podcast a few weeks ago talking about generosity and whole life stewardship, but we're talking about something very different when we talk about stewardship. We're talking about leveraging influence for godly purposes, but I don't think of the word shrewd as being biblical per se, or my stereotype of godliness does not lean towards shrewdness, and so I'm curious, if you guys were going to think about a negative stereotype of what it means to be shrewd, what comes to mind?

Ross Chapman:

Climbing the corporate ladder, doing whatever is necessary to get to the top no matter who you have to beat up on the way there. I think you see a lot of shrewdness in today's entertainment around work lives. I just recently watched Suits. That's got this meteoric rise again on Netflix, but it is a depiction of shrewdness, mostly in the negative sense. There are some positive examples as well, which is worth maybe checking out, but it's just like, "Hey, what do we need to do to win?" Whatever it takes is totally fine, and so I think there's a lot of examples like that in popular culture that depicts shrewdness as this negative, "I'm in it just for my own good and I'm in it at the expense of everyone else."

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. I was thinking of Mr. Banks from the Simpsons who's this older man who's hunched over and his hands, he makes this motion with his hands, with the fingertips tapping together, like he's plotting and crafting to



exploit his employees or the general public. You can make a physical motion that you think of, when you think of shrewd. It's curved in on itself. Ryan, what do you think of with the negative stereotype of shrewdness?

Ryan Tafilowski:

Well, it's a good question, and I think the reason that Christians have not thought about shrewdness as a positive aspect of discipleship is because the serpent is described as shrewd in Genesis, chapter 3, and the Hebrew word that is used there is the word, arum and it's an ambivalent word. It's not a positive or negative. It just means crafty or smart, but in a street smarts way, like Eddie Haskell from Leave It to Beaver.

Ross Chapman:

That's a good one.

Joanna Meyer:

Some of our listeners will get it.

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah, he's a wise-talking, street smart kid and he knows how to bend the rules to his advantage, and that's what's going on with the serpent in Genesis 3. He doesn't lie exactly, but he misrepresents the truth. He's very convoluted in the way that he represents God's commands, and he confuses Eve and then Adam, and so I think that association enough has been sufficient for Christians to say, "Maybe we shouldn't be crafty folks," but Jesus actually commends this behavior, so maybe we'll talk about it later.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, we'll talk a little bit more about that. Yeah, I think, words that come to mind with shrewdness has a harsh edge. It's seeking advantage to the harm of others, but let's go back to the biblical roots. What does it mean to be shrewd, according to scripture?

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah, that word, it gets translated, I think most often, crafty in Genesis 3, but it's used over and over and over again in Proverbs to describe a person who is industrious or has a lot of ingenuity or is wise in business or is

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



prosperous, or maybe the way I'd like to think about it, especially in the teachings of Jesus, someone who is shrewd makes the most of their resources, takes full responsibility for all of the autonomy they have. Jesus tells lots of stories about servants being entrusted with power or with resources by their boss, by the lord of the estate, and he seems to commend those servants who take full responsibility for what they have. It's an image of God sharing his power with creatures and then saying, "Okay, go ahead. What are you going to do?" A shrewd servant does what it takes to maximize return.

Ross Chapman:

It takes us right back to Genesis 1 with God's invitation to Adam and Eve to, "Hey, take what I've made and do something good with it. Complete the task." It was perfect creation, but it was not complete and God left room for that, and so I think you're saying, Ryan is, "Yeah, go figure out the best way to maximize." I don't know if that's the right word. That can mean a lot of things, but do something great with what God's already given. Co-create with him.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah.

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah, exactly. Maybe things don't unfold the way that they do if Adam and Eve are a bit more shrewd here. They're depicted in the text as actually being quite naive. Lots of Christian commentators have pointed this out, starting from very, very early on in the church's history. In fact, there's a guy named Irenaeus. It's a name some of our listeners might know. He thinks that Adam and Eve are literal children. This is why they respond the way that they do when the serpent raises the question, and that makes sense. I have a five-year-old and an almost three-year-old, and if they were out in the yard and a snake started talking to them, they'd be like, "All right, Snake, let's do this. What's up? What do you want me to do?"

They're also naked and unashamed all the time. We have to try to keep them in the house without running out without their clothes on, and so they're depicted as being gullible actually, and Adam and Eve don't show the shrewdness that the serpent does, and so they are beguiled, and maybe ... Well, I think Ross is absolutely right. You're supposed to read Genesis 1 and 2, as God entrusting Adam and Eve with his creation to at least an extent, and then seeing what they will make of it. It's a really remarkable thing that God does here, because he

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



makes this beautiful world and says, "Okay, let's run it together." It's like giving the keys to a Ferrari to a fifteen-year-old or something.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, you need to be really discerning and have skill, real skill to drive that Ferrari or take care of all of creation. Here's a couple of references from scripture that helped frame shrewdness in a positive light. Psalm 18:26 says, "To the pure, show yourself pure, but to the devious, show yourself shrewd." Let's hold onto that thought, because it feels shrewdness is situational. We can see that, and then in Proverbs 1 is talking about the value of the book, and it says that the teachings in Proverbs are useful for gaining instruction and wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity to teach shrewdness to the simple and knowledge and prudence to the young, which echoes some of the comments you were making about naivete in early Genesis.

But we see that shrewdness is a skill to be acquired that has value for the life of faith, but it can also be a little bit confusing. You want to walk us through Luke 16, Ryan, and tell us a little bit? We're thinking about particularly Luke 16, 1-8. In the NIV, talks a lot about a shrewd manager, part of Jesus's teaching, but it also can be a little bit confusing, so you want to tell us a little bit about that story?

Ross Chapman:

Hey, you want me to read the passage real quick?

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, why don't you read it? That'd be great.

Ross Chapman:

All right, I'll read it and then Ryan, you can help us understand it. That way, I have an easier job. That'd be wonderful.

Joanna Meyer:

Go for it, Ross.

Ross Chapman:

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



All right. Luke 16:1-8. "Jesus told his disciples there was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions, so he called him in and asked him, 'What's this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master's taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg, and I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will come welcoming me into their houses.' He called in each one of his master's debtors and he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master'

'900 gallons of olive oil,' he replied, and the manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly and make it 450.' Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A 1,000 bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it 800.' The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light," and we should say, this was a story that Jesus was telling and this is how he summed it up at the end.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, totally confusing. Ryan, can you help us make sense of it?

Ryan Tafilowski:

No, thanks for having me on. I find this story really beguiling, I think as a lot of commentators have. I do have some thoughts on it. I think I'm appreciative that you read those other Old Testament passages, because I think that helps sketch out some of the backgrounds. Because, Psalm 18, "To the pure, you show yourself pure, but to the devious, you show yourself shrewd," that's another really beguiling passage. You read this and you wonder, "What on earth does this mean? Isn't God always pure?" I think what's going on here is something like, you read the book of Esther, for example, and Haman has got this grand, devious scheme to exterminate all the Jews in the empire. He shows himself devious, and the book of Esther, which is really interesting because God is never named in the book of Esther, but you can see him orchestrating all the events.

It's almost like God's saying, "Oh, you want to play it this way, do you, Haman? Let's see how you do, because I can be pretty shrewd too." How does that story end? Haman being hanged on the same gallows that he was intending to hang Mordecai on, so this is God showing himself shrewd. "I can outwit you when you're trying to outwit me." I think this is part of what's going on here. You've got this going on in the background, and then in Proverbs 1, I love this too because there's a few characters in Proverbs that you meet right from the very



beginning. You get the wise, the foolish and the simple. Now, the wise are those who live with the grain, the moral grain of the universe that God has created.

They live life with skill, they do things, God's wills, and as a rule, they usually prosper. Then you've got the foolish who insist on going against the grain of the universe, against the moral logic of creation and as a rule, things usually come to ruin, and then you've got the simple and they're in between. Then, the simple is just someone who doesn't know what they don't know. They're just inexperienced, basically, and the Proverbs are intended to make the simple person shrewd, to teach them to live life with skill in a broken and fallen creation. These two things, I think are in the background.

Joanna Meyer:

Can we just echo what you said, that to be shrewd is to live life with skill in a broken and fallen world?

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah. Yeah. I didn't know that that was the definition I would use, but I like that. I think that's good.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah.

Ryan Tafilowski:

It's helpful.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, that's worth remembering.

Ryan Tafilowski:

Okay.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, good one.

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



Ryan Tafilowski:

Okay. Okay, so what's going on in this story? I'm not entirely sure. That's the first thing I'll say, but I think a couple of things will help us. Number one, this servant is described as a manager. The word here that Luke uses in Greek is the word *oikonomos*. It is the word for household, but it also is the word for something like economy. It's where we get our word, economics or econ. If you ever took a class in high school, home economics and wondered why it was called that, this is why. An *oikonomos* runs the household. We read manager or we read servant and we think, "Oh, the person who cooks the master's breakfast or something." But actually, this is someone with way more power than that.

If you think of an *oikonomos*, think of Joseph in Potiphar's house. He's in charge of everything. He can do business on Potiphar's accounts. He can sign instead of Potiphar on contracts. He's got total discretion, so I think that's an important clue. The master has said, "Here, here is all my stuff. You are in charge. I'm going to go away and do whatever. I'm going to go on my yacht. You are in charge." And so, we are told that he's been doing a really bad job of managing, and there's all these debts that have run up and he's not collecting them, so he's doing bad business, and then his master comes home and says, "Hey, let's settle up the accounts. I want to see how you've been doing," and the guy goes, "Oh, shoot. I've got to do something.

I'm going to get fired." What does he do? He goes around to all of the debtors and says, "Hey, slash your bill in half. Just pay me back half." He doesn't think he's going to save his job. He's angling for his next job, so when he's out on the job market, he'll say, "Hey, remember that one time that you owed all these barrels of oil and I cut your debt in half? Hire me now." The master comes back and says, "You know what? Respect. You're a pretty bad manager, but I actually like what you did here," and that's the puzzle of the parable. Why does he like what he's done here? Now, I don't know. Here's my best guess. I think what's going on is that the master is happy to see the manager finally doing his job and taking full responsibility.

Even though he's going to lose a bunch of money, he would rather have his *oikonomos* do the job rather than just sit around, in the same way that Jesus tells another parable involving three *oikonomoi*, the Parable of the Talents. He says to the third one, "You at least could have put it in the bank and I could have made interest," and I think the implication is, "I would've rather had you lose all this in some venture than just sit on it." I think he actually likes the audacity of the *oikonomos* here, with the implication being that God's people have been given a tremendous discretion. We've been given a lot of rights and responsibilities as adopted sons and daughters,



and God wants to see us venture it, and he wants to see us be shrewd rather than simple. I don't know. I've been talking for a long time.

Ross Chapman:

No, that was excellent. Well, when you start talking about the Parable of Talents, I think I like to reflect on that and think, Jesus didn't really give us an answer to that third manager who just stuck it in the ground and didn't do anything with it. He just says, "You're a wicked servant," and I think ... The question I always thought was like, "Well, what if you were going to do something with it, but then you lost it all?" The other two guys, a 100% return. What is this? This is like a dream world, and so Jesus doesn't really answer that and I think it's because the point of it is, if you do something, it will return something valuable for God in some way, a kingdom fruit of some kind.

I think that's maybe what you're getting at there. I wouldn't try to say that I would know what this parable is about, but going with what you're suggesting, I think that aligns well with the idea of, "Hey, you didn't just sit around, that you actually, you did something. I'm glad that you acted and you tried to make the most of what you could with the situation that you created for yourself," and then in the Parable of Talents, it's, "Hey, I gave you these things and I wanted you to do something with them. You didn't even try." I think we're supposed to try, so that really resonates well, I think in terms of what is Jesus really trying to get at there.

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah. Frederick Buechner, and I can't remember which of his books. It's in, *A Crazy, Holy Grace*, I think, has a short reflection on the Parable of the Talents, and he says that where the lazy manager failed is he didn't trade with his life. That's the language he uses. I love that so much. That no matter what life you have, no matter what you've been given, and Buechner makes the point that it might be sorrow that you've been given. Buechner's life was extremely tragic, especially his early life, but he came to see that God had given him that pain to trade with, to get out into the marketplace and put that pain to use. "But instead," he says, "We bury what we've been given," and I think that's very much in the background here. Yeah, to Ross' point, I think he looks at this shrewd manager, even though he's been dishonest and says, "Finally, that's the authority I wanted you to work with, so now keep doing it and don't be the worst."



Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Hi, I'm Jeff Hoffmeyer, vice president of advancement here at Denver Institute for Faith & Work, and I'd 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](https://denverinstitute.org/give) or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Joanna Meyer:

Let's look at some other examples of shrewd, faithful people that we see in scripture, because there are a lot of them. I think you see them concentrated in the Old Testament, because you get the narrative recorded. You see that play out in story a little bit more. But what are some examples that we see, especially in the Old Testament? We mentioned Esther and Mordecai.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, I think there's a lot. We were talking earlier and we mentioned those in the Old Testament who are living in exile, which you could maybe define as all of them, have this measure of shrewdness in the stories we hear, so Daniel and his friends in the fiery furnace, Joseph. We could probably keep going because there are-

Joanna Meyer:

Nehemiah.

Ross Chapman:

There's also a bunch of women who are shrewd.

Joanna Meyer:

Yes.

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



Ross Chapman:

Joanna, do you want to tell us about a couple of more of them?

Joanna Meyer:

Well, we started brainstorming and I was like, "Oh, gosh, so many of the women that you see in the Old Testament were shrewd." Think about Abigail riding out to meet David to save her foolish husband's butt, or Jael driving a tent pen into an enemy's head. Esther ...

Ross Chapman:

Rahab.

Joanna Meyer:

Rahab, Ruth, all of them had a measure of knowing how to wisely navigate life in difficult circumstances.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, Ryan, you had the Hebrew midwives you mentioned earlier as well.

Joanna Meyer:

Yes.

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah. Yep. They've been given an unequivocally evil order to undertake, and they know that they can't very well say to Pharaoh, "We're not going to do it," because Pharaoh has already shown that he has a callous disregard for life, so he's not going to spare them. What do they do? They lie. They say, "Yeah, we tried. We got there, but these Hebrew women, they have kids, and then they're back in the fields. What do you want us to do?" Doesn't mean that God's people can lie when it is convenient. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is, that's how the story goes. Let the scripture speak for itself. I hadn't thought about Ruth, but I think of Naomi in the Ruth story,



incredibly shrewd. She knows that unless they do something skillful, creative, inventive, they're up a creek. They're destitute, they've got no kin, and they're going to end up on the street and she says, "Here's what you do. I want you to go and make yourself irresistible to Boaz. Do it." It's the royal line of David and Jesus.

Joanna Meyer:

Rahab-

Ryan Tafilowski:

Pretty amazing.

Joanna Meyer:

All of those women that you see in Matthew in Christ theology, shrewd women.

Ross Chapman:

Absolutely.

Joanna Meyer:

It raises a question, we'll talk a little bit about, what does this mean in daily life? But that does raise the question, are we discipling people to have this vision of leveraging influence for good in their lives? I would say in women's ministry, are we raising women to be shrewd women of integrity, godliness and influence and shrewdness?

Ross Chapman:

What a good question.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, it's a good question.



Ross Chapman:

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer:

Let's talk a little bit about, how do you actually live this out, because the reality is, shrewdness does have a lot of negative implications if it's used the wrong way. What's the balance and how do you know if you've gone too far? What are some of the motivations that might indicate we've gone too far? How do we know how to leverage this?

Ross Chapman:

Ryan, I definitely want to hear what you think. The first thing that came to my mind was, what's your motivation? I think if your motivation is not in alignment with God's wisdom or the way that he's made his commands and values known and the way he's set up the world, then it seems like it's probably about you, and it seems like that's not the best way to use shrewdness. I think the parable we read maybe challenges that a little bit, because that guy basically just did what was going to be best for him, but in the same way demonstrated that he could still put to use his master's resources in a way that his master always wanted.

But yeah, I think if you look through the stories of those in exile, I think they were after what God wanted. There was an evil that they were facing, or there was a sense of un-shalom, to use a word I'm making up, but the idea that this isn't the way God intended things to be. It wasn't intended that the stranger in Israel would not be treated with dignity, but that's the situation that Ruth and Naomi were in, and so that shrewdness was blessed by producing the royal line. An incredible story. I'm just thinking out loud and letting Ryan think more. Joanna, you can also jump in on what you think. It's a great question.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, that word, tempered comes to mind. I think in scripture, you see a caution against letting your passions run wild. Wisdom is knowing how to appropriately express passion in a godly way, but also knows how to restrain the inherent desires and drive of the human heart, and so I think shrewdness is also tempered understanding of power. You know how to use it, and you also have a sense of integrity, if it's going to harm someone else for you to do that.



Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah. I think you're both onto something really important here. Something about shrewdness that is common across the scriptures is that it's a virtue that is needed only when we are living under sinful conditions. You don't get the sense reading Revelation 20 and 21 and 22 that anyone needs to be shrewd in the new heavens and the new Earth, because systems will work like they are supposed to. There won't be injustice to negotiate, for example. I think the point about it being a virtue for exile is a really good one, because as I think about it, Joseph and Daniel for example, are living under two objectively horrific regimes and opponents of Israel in Egypt and Babylon, and their stories seem to suggest that God's people can find a way to flourish and to thrive, even in the midst of unjust structures that are evil or exploitative.

That's worth thinking about, although we need to be really careful here, because the Bible clearly does not prescribe an ethic where you just do whatever and say, "Oh, the world has fallen." For example, you read Proverbs, it commends shrewdness all over the place, but almost on every page, it also condemns shady dealing. God's people do not use false weights and measures, they don't cheat in business, they don't lie to get ahead. Now, can they take advantage? Here's an example, and I don't want to press this too far, but maybe I can put it like this. Cheating on your taxes, bad, not shrewd, evil. Taking advantage of the tax code for every loophole, shrewd. Now, the tax code itself might be unjust. I'm not saying that. I think that a good case could be made, but you can't change the tax code, and God's people are living in the conditions set by the society around them. Yeah, we don't cheat, but we're shrewd. Does that make sense?

Ross Chapman:

Yeah. Actually, when you were talking, it reminded me of what God calls his people to do through Jeremiah when they're in exile in Babylon. He says, "Seek the flourishing of the city where I have you," and he says to do normal things, have a family and work hard and work your vineyard and build houses. Then he says, "You want to pray actually for the city you're in to prosper, because if it does, so will you," and I think maybe there's an element of that in the ... Living in exile and being shrewd is you're not just seeking your own good, you're seeking the good of others.



You're pursuing this idea of, "I really want the person that I'm working with or who would benefit from my shrewdness to flourish, to have life a little bit better," and if that's the motivation, there could be a lot of reasons to be shrewd then. In your tax code example, can you then leverage those resources that you're going to save for something God cares about, or you're just going to spend it on things for yourself? Maybe that would be ... You could be shrewd either way, but the end goal could be bad or good still.

Joanna Meyer:

Can shrewdness coexist with the fruits of the spirit? I'd argue that they could, but it's going to take just great discretion. You going to have to navigate under those together, but that's a good balance. It'll help you from going too far if you're considering them together.

Ross Chapman:

That's good. Yeah.

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah. I was thinking of, as you said that, Ross, and the question of the fruits of the spirit, Joanna's really good one. Like you see, Joseph is extraordinarily shrewd, but he never leverages it to his own advantage ever. It's always on behalf of other people. In fact, he resists all the special perks that he gets as a member of the royal court. He won't eat the food and he won't take advantage of his power, and so there's something like Philippians 2 happening there, where Paul says that even though Jesus was in the very form, God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

That construction in Greek, and I'm not a New Testament scholar, I want to be clear, but my understanding is that construction in Greek is really notoriously difficult to translate, because it means something like, "Refused to use his status to his advantage," like, "Don't you who my dad is?" You never hear Jesus saying this ever. In fact, in the one interview with Pilate, he says, "Hey, don't you know that I could have you killed?" Jesus is like, "I don't think you know who you're talking to, and I don't think you know who my dad is, but nevertheless, no one takes my life from me. I lay it down." There's an element here of power that is not self-serving.



Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, and all those Old Testament examples that we set that were godly examples of shrewdness were used for a kingdom end. It was used in light of the bigger picture of God's people and the preservation of the Jews.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, industriously use your power for the things God would want to see in the world.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, yeah. Let's talk a little bit about practically how you live it out. We had a few historical examples of when people were shrewd. I would love to hear from both of you. You gave examples from the civil rights movement, examples from earlier in the abolitionist fight, but tell us a little bit more example of how have we seen this lived out in the life of the church?

Ross Chapman:

I really love the example of William Wilberforce and the Clapham group who set out to abolish slavery, and one of the things that they did was ... They did a lot of things, all of them probably pretty shrewd, but one that was sticking out for me was when they had ... I'm pretty sure it's Josiah Wedgwood, who was the leading artist of the day, and they asked him to create a coin that had an image of a slave, a man in chains, and on it, it just said, "Am I not a brother and a man?" And so, this thing got distributed widely because of Josiah Wedgwood, his influence and power and popularity. Now, popular culture had this coin that constantly reminded them of the humanity of the people they were enslaving and I think that was just a really shrewd thing to do, to put it on people's minds. I think you can go back in the history books and go, "That was a moment when things turned, when the popular opinion about slavery started to shift."

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, and I think of Wilberforce, he knew how to play politics. It took his entire lifetime, when you think about it. He played the game for decades, but he was shrewd. He knew how to work every angle in the fight for ending slavery.

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



Ross Chapman:

That's right. He sure did. Up until three days before he passed away is when it finally ... Slavery was totally abolished in the UK-

Joanna Meyer:

That's amazing.

Ross Chapman:

... in the British Empire.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. He's an embodiment of what it meant to be shrewd, and yet he was also a very godly man. They talk about the Clapham Circle's goals was to ... I'm going to paraphrase this poorly, but was for the advancement of moral behavior. They had a deep integrity and commitment to moral action.

Ross Chapman:

The Reformation of Manners.

Joanna Meyer:

Yes, that was it. That's it.

Ross Chapman:

He wrote a book called Real Christianity that's totally worth checking out sometime.

Joanna Meyer:

The Reformation of Manners. It was an unheeded use of power, but it was surgical application of skill and influence.



Ross Chapman:

Yeah, absolutely.

Joanna Meyer:

Ryan, you talked a little bit about the civil rights movement, elements of shrewdness that were in there. Could you elaborate on that?

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah. I think there's two figures here that come to mind for me. One is Martin Luther King Jr. who's extraordinarily shrewd politically and theologically, and here I have in mind the ethic of nonviolent resistance. They would defy unjust laws, and then they would suffer the consequences, but they would endure them nonviolently, and part of the rationale for King in doing it this way is that he was convinced that opinions would only change if the barbarism of white supremacy became transparent to people, and he didn't think arguments would work. He did write and speak, but what he really thought is there was going to have to be images of white people behaving like animals towards Black people, and so nonviolent resistance actually does this.

By refusing to meet hate with hate, he was able to show an image and ask the question, "Well, who's being barbaric here? Who's actually acting less than human?" I don't think the civil rights movement would've worked any other way. I also think of another architect of the civil rights movement, a Black theologian named Howard Thurman who wrote an important book called *Jesus and the Disinherited*, and in that book, he's talking about, what does it mean to be disinherited? That means, well, to be Black in the 1940s and '50s, to not have civil rights, to not have any access to the levers of political power, to be completely disinherited, and so he says, "What recourse did the disinherited have?"

Basically, it's shrewdness, and he gives a few different models, but one is, he says that sometimes the oppressed resist oppression by dragging their feet or by playing dumb or acting confused. They're crazy like a fox. They know exactly what they're up to, but that can gum up wheels of oppression, for example, or it can slow down legislation, or it can just create tons of red tape that makes it hard for unjust goals to advance. He says, "If you don't have any other tools at your disposal, you use what you've got," and so there's a tremendous theological imagination and creativity in the civil rights movement that I think is really bound up to this idea of shrewdness.

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



Joanna Meyer:

I like that sense of skill and imagination. Let's talk about a couple of real world examples where people might experience this. I think about, on a daily basis, we have opportunities. We're trying to negotiate a deal. You're trying to make something work for your company's advantage. How do we live shrewdly in moments like that? It might be negotiating your salary, it might be closing on a business deal. What does shrewdness appropriately look like there?

Ross Chapman:

This is where it'd be really nice to have somebody who makes deals every day.

Joanna Meyer:

Like your wife.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, she does. I would think, looking for the win-win is a shrewd idea. It might be more commonplace than it was in the past, but I think there was always a perspective throughout history that if you were wealthy or winning, you were taking from everyone else. I think in today's economics, really, we're trying to grow the wealth pie, you could say, for everyone, and so a win-win is really possible, and if that's the case, then being shrewd looks like, "Hey, what is it that the person across the table from me is interested in? What benefit are they looking for, and how could I provide that while getting what I want?" That feels like a shrewd strategy. Maybe not a super practical example for you.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah, but I appreciate what you're saying, because godly shrewdness isn't exploiting the other person.



Ross Chapman:

Exactly.

Joanna Meyer:

It's not exploiting and getting as much possible from them.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah. I think if you're managing people, shrewdness is something that you need in the sense that you want to be industrious and thoughtful about what each member on your team needs, wants, what they're good at, what they don't like doing, where they need support, where they'd rather do something alone versus with a team, and aligning all of that on one team, even if your team's two, three, four. Maybe, it's more than that, but that takes a lot of crafty skill that comes through experience and trying some things that work and learning some things that don't work, and I think that's a great example of how we can take this idea of being shrewd and say, "I'm actually for the good of the people I lead." If that's the case, then how can I help them advance and grow in the ways they want to and contribute to this goal that we have as a team?

Joanna Meyer:

I was thinking about a friend of Denver Institute who works for a large corporation that had an annual evaluation policy, where the bottom 20% of the organization would just be cut, regardless of how they were performing, and he looked at his own team and he was like, "Nobody's on the bottom 20%. I have hired and trained a high-powered team. I'm not going to arbitrarily just cut someone that I nominate as the poor performer." And so, he was shrewd in saying, "Okay, I can't not nominate somebody for this, but I'm going to do my darnedest to get them out of this danger zone that they're in," and so that was one of his goals was to see how hard could he play politics, how shrewd could he be to preserve his team that he really valued. That to me, I think is a really great example of shrewdness.

Ross Chapman:

That's a great example. Absolutely.



Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah. I think, just one other thing too, and to be clear, I'm a pastor and a theologian, so don't look to me for business advice. I'll just be clear on that. But I do serve as a pastor of a small church, and we have a modest budget, and when it comes budget time, we have to be shrewd, meaning we can't be sentimental, nor can we be callous. Anytime you're dealing with a culture, with people, you've got to balance these two interests. For example, we can't just give 20% raises to all of our staff, because if we do that, then there won't be a church in a year.

That's sentimental, but we do need to figure out how we can reward workers for good work in a way that still prioritizes the health of the organization and the organization's future. That idea of living skillfully means that you have to be able to take several factors into account, and you need to think about the present and the future and the big picture, and one of the reasons that shrewdness appears so often in the proverbs is that this is a skill that needs to be learned by experience. We don't know how to do this. There's some trial and error involved, surely.

Joanna Meyer:

Fascinating. Okay, so as we're wrapping up our conversation, I have a few questions for our listeners. One is, is there a particular area of your daily work that you can look at now and think to yourself, "I need to gain some skill that I currently don't have. I need to understand how to play skillfully, or there's a place where I need to leverage influence." Identifying, is there an opportunity for you to grow in your shrewdness? Another question would be, what steps do you need to take to do that? Is there someone in your life that you could actually ask about this, someone that you know that is a very savvy organizational leader, or maybe they're a business person in your community and you're like, "I want to learn from your example."

Take them out for coffee and ask them these questions about, how have you gained this skill to know how to make a deal? When do you know when you've gone too far? Have you ever made a mistake and felt like you regret the level of shrewdness that you've had? But begin to explore that, and then ask the Lord to reveal, are there areas of your leadership? If you're a woman and you're listening to this podcast, I would say, is there an opportunity for you to grow in this area because it's maybe a character quality that hasn't been encouraged or developed in your current discipleship? That might be a question to ask. Lots of opportunities for application. Any other questions you want to leave with our listeners, guys?

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



Ross Chapman:

Well, I just have one encouragement which is, one of the primary reasons we do the Faith & Work Podcast is to help people move from thinking well about God's work, which we want to help you do, like his view of work and what his vision for it is to actually doing it, and doing it in a way that brings a greater sense of life to the full for those that you impact through your work. Being shrewd and finding where you need to be shrewd is such a huge opportunity to do just that. If you've found a thing that's, this could be better, or maybe you could just rethink your work in light of this idea of being a shrewd manager or worker, I would just encourage you to ... This is your opportunity. God's put it out in front of you, and he said, "Do something. If it fails, that's okay. Do something. Try," and so that's my great encouragement. Ryan, what do you got?

Ryan Tafilowski:

Yeah, I would only add, in John's gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, "No longer do I just call you servants, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing, doesn't know his master's business, but I've called you friend." And so, I would just add, just the disclaimer that yeah, right, be shrewd. Go be that industrious oikonomos, but remember that in the end, actually, you don't work for God, you're God's friend. You've been adopted as a son or a daughter, so actually, your status in the beloved doesn't depend on whether you close that deal exactly like you should, or whether you maximize returns each quarter or anything like this. Do that stuff, it's good, it's fine. But in the end, remember, he calls you friend, not just servant. You bring a pastor in, you get a Sunday school answer at the end, but I think that's important to keep in mind.

Joanna Meyer:

I think it's a beautiful way to close our conversation, and we'd love to hear from you if this concept intrigues you. Did we nail it in today's conversation? What would you add? Feel free to email us at podcast@denverinstitute.org.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, and just a couple of quick things at the end, go check out this new book, Faithful Work: In the Daily Grind with God and for Others by Ryan and myself. I think it'll be a great resource for you and maybe some friends to help you engage in this conversation, and then lastly, would love for you to come participate with us this year in Business for the Common Good, Friday, March 8th. You can get your tickets now. Hope to see you there.

S21: E2 Does the Bible Really Tell Us to Work Shrewdly?



Joanna Meyer:

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