

Conversation Starters for *Every Good Endeavor*

Week 1 – Introduction

From the introduction to the book, pages 18 & 19:

Keller quotes Robert Bellah (sociologist, author): "To make a real difference...[there would have to be] a re-appropriation of the idea of vocation or calling, a return in a new way to the idea of work as a *contribution to the good of all and not merely as means to one's own advancement.*" (my emphasis)

Keller goes on to say: As we shall see, thinking of work mainly as a means of self-fulfillment and self-realization slowly crushes a person and - as Bellah and many others have pointed out - undermines society itself.

When we work, we are, as those in the Lutheran tradition often put it, the "fingers of God", agents of his providential love for others. This understanding elevates the purpose of work from making a living to loving our neighbor and at the same time releases us from the crushing burden of working primarily to prove ourselves.

Questions for thought/interaction

How have you experienced the 'crushing burden' of trying to prove yourself/your worth by what you *do*? Any particular experiences come to mind?

What do you think about this idea of seeing work primarily as a means to 'love our neighbor' as opposed to making a living and what are the implications of that as we consider what work to do? Also, how does viewing our work this way change the way we think about the work of others (i.e. the way we value some work/workers more than others)?

Week 2: The Design of Work (Chapter 1)

Keller quotes Ben Witherington:

It is perfectly clear that God's good plan always included human beings working [i.e. work wasn't part of the curse after the fall], or more specifically, living in the constant cycle of work and rest.

Keller goes on to write:

In short, work - and lots of it - is an indispensable component in a meaningful human life. It is a supreme gift from God and one of the main things that gives our lives purpose. But it must play its proper role, subservient to God. It must regularly

give way not just to work stoppage for bodily repair but also to joyful reception of the world and of ordinary life...There is no better starting point to a meaningful work life than a firm grasp of this balanced work and rest theology.

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- In your own thoughts about work, have you tended to see work as a 'necessary evil to survive' or as a gift from God? What about your experiences of work have formed your opinion?
- How have you experienced or not experienced the 'work and rest' rhythm of life?
- How faithful are you at taking a Sabbath/rest from work each week? What things help/hinder your Sabbath taking?
- At the start of a new year, how might you build in some healthy work/rest rhythms?

Week 3 – The Dignity of Work (Chapter 2)

*All work has dignity because it reflects God's image in us, and also because the material creation we are called to care for is good...*this means that Christians cannot look down on labor involving more intimate contact with the material world...This also means that "secular" work has no less dignity and nobility than the "sacred" work of ministry. We are both body and soul, and the biblical ideal of shalom includes both physical thriving as well as spiritual.

Keller then quotes Jeff Van Duzer from *Why Business Matters to God (and what Still Needs to be Fixed)*:

"Food that nourishes, roofs that hold out the rain, shade that protects from the heat of the sun...the satisfaction of the material needs and desires of men and women...when businesses produce material things that enhance the welfare of the community, they are engaged in work that matters to God."

Keller goes on to say:

We have an excellent foundation if we understand the goodness of creation and the dignity of work. We work in a wondrous world that is designed at least partly for our pleasure...We were built for work and the dignity it gives us as human beings, regardless of its status or pay...every Christian should be able to identify, with conviction and satisfaction, the ways in which his or her work participates with God in his creativity and cultivation.

Some questions for reflection and conversation:

- What do you think of this idea that all work - regardless of status or pay - has

dignity? Have you ever worked a job that you thought was 'below' you? What made you feel that way? How did it "insult" your dignity? What do we do with that kind of view of different types of work?

- How about that last statement...are you able to "identify with conviction and satisfaction the ways in which your work participates with God in his creativity and cultivation"? Why or why not?

Week 4 – Work as Cultivation (Chapter 3)

Two trains of thought/interaction from this chapter which talks about our work as cultivation of culture - following/continuing the work of God in creation.

First - from page 59:

"Whenever we bring order out of chaos, whenever we draw out creative potential, whenever we elaborate and "unfold" creation beyond where it was when we found it, we are following God's pattern of creative cultural development."

Questions for reflection/interaction:

How do you see your work as cultural development? How do feel about the kind of culture it was developing? How can the business sector develop the kind of culture in which people flourish as opposed the developing a kind of culture made of the "haves and have nots" or one where the "rich get richer and the poor get poorer"? How do the last several years of watching what happened on Wall Street and with the whole housing/loan situation inform how we might talk about these things?

Keller ends this chapter with some comments about how the Church sees/interacts with folks in fields of business:

"Indeed, not all business initiatives serve the common good. But so many ministers assume that investors and entrepreneurs are solely out to make money without regard for advancing the common good. If ministers don't yet see business as a way of making culture and of cultivating creation, they will fail to support, appreciate and properly lead many members of their congregations."

Questions for reflection/interaction:

How do you react to this comment? How has it been for you as a 'business professional' in the Church? Do you feel like your pastor "gets you"? Do you feel "judged"? Do you feel like your work is 2nd class, even suspect, compared to that of a

doctor or social worker or teacher? How have you been affirmed/supported in your calling to the business world?

Week 5 – Work as Service (Chapter 4)

In this chapter, Keller returns to the theme he introduced in the introduction - that of seeing our work as love for God and neighbor.

Pg. 67 - We are not to choose jobs and conduct our work to fulfill ourselves and accrue power, for being called by God to do something is empowering enough. We are to see work as a way of service to God and our neighbor, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose. The question regarding our choice of work is no longer "What will make me the most money and give me the most status?" The question must be "How, with my existing abilities and opportunities can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God's will and human need?".

Question: How radical is that thought given the context in which you are studying and working? How are the men and women in your program making decisions about what classes to take, internships to do, jobs to search for? How can BIB be a place where this kind of reality/perspective gets reinforced?

He then pushes the point that all work - not just work in the Church - can be sacred and a calling from God. He quotes William Diehl on page 78:

If lay people cannot find any spiritual meaning in their work, they are condemned to living a certain dual life; not connecting what they do on Sunday morning with what they do the rest of the week. They need to discover that the very actions of daily life are spiritual, and enable...people to touch God in the world, not away from it. Such spirituality will say..."Your work is your prayer".

Keller finishes up by pushing us to realize that one of the key ways we connect our Monday thru Friday lives with our Sunday lives - the way we put flesh on this idea of 'touching God in the world' and loving our neighbor - is by doing competent or excellent work.

Question: Do you find it hard to connect your 8 - 5 life with the rest of your life? How is the Church helpful (or not) with this? How could BIB be a community where this happens?

Week 6 – Work becomes Fruitless (Chapter 5)

Keller discusses Genesis 3 - The Fall of Humankind - and its implications for our

work.

"The story presented in the Bible is that while God blessed work to be a glorious use of our gifts and his resources to prosper the world, it is now also cursed because of humankind's fall...Work is not *itself* a curse, but it now lies with all the other aspects of human life *under* the curse of sin..."Part of the curse of work in a fallen world is its frequent fruitlessness." (quote from the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*)

Here are some of his thoughts on how we experience this fruitlessness/frustration as it applies to our work:

"You should expect to be regularly frustrated in your work even though you may be in exactly the right vocation."

"Because of the nature of God's creation, we need work for our happiness. And because of God's intentions for our work - to contribute to the flourishing of the world - we have glimpses of what we could accomplish. But because of the fall of the human race, our work is also profoundly frustrating, never as fruitful as we want, and often a complete failure."

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- How do you react/respond to this?
- How are you experiencing your work *today* - *in your internship*? Are you feeling frustrated? Do you feel like your work is often fruitless? Even on good days that you feel productive - like you are accomplishing things and making contributions - are there ways in which you feel that sting of the curse in or on your work?
- How do we remain people of hope in this reality?

Well, actually, that's how Keller ends:

"Work will be both frustrating and fulfilling, and sometimes - just often enough - human work gives us a glimpse of the beauty and genius that might have been the routine characteristic of all our work, and what, by the grace of God, it will be again in the new heavens and new earth...There will be work in the paradise of the future just like there was in the paradise of the past, because God himself takes joy in his work. In that paradise, you will be useful in the lives of others to infinite degrees of joy and satisfaction; you will perform with all the skill you can imagine...Christians have, through their hope in God's story of redemption for the world he created, a deep consolation that enables them to work with all their being and never be ultimately discouraged by the frustrating present reality of this world, in which thorns grow up when they are trying to coax up other things."

Some final questions for reflection and conversation:

- Is your life and work characterized by this kind of hope? Why or why not?
- What might doing our work like this communicate to the watching world around us?

Week 7 – Work becomes Pointless (Chapter 6)

Read the passage from Ecclesiastes below.

17 So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. **18** I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. **19** And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. **20** So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. **21** For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. **22** What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? **23** All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

Keller begins this chapter with part of this Biblical text and then goes on to talk about it.

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- What do you think when you read this?
- What about the nature of work in our modern culture can make it meaningless?
- Have you ever felt like your work is pointless/meaningless?

Keller states “Lots of young adults are choosing work that doesn’t fit them, or fields that are too highly competitive for most people to do well in. And this sets many people up for a sense of dissatisfaction or meaninglessness in their work.”

He goes on...

What wisdom, then, would the Bible give us in choosing our work?

1 – if we have the luxury of options, we would want to choose work that we do well. It should fit our gifts and our capacities...make(ing) the greatest room for the ministry of competence.

2 – because the main purpose of our work is to serve the world, we would want to choose work that benefits others. Does the organization or industry make people better or does it appeal to the worst aspects of characters?

3 – if possible, we do not simply wish to benefit our family, benefit the human community and benefit ourselves – we also want to benefit the *field of work itself*...not just “doing” the work, but increase the human race’s capacity to cultivate the created world.

He includes a wonderful excerpt from Dorothy Sayer's "Why Work?". Among her comments is this - "If you do your work so that, by God's grace, it helps others who can never thank you, or it helps those who come after you to do it better, then you know you are 'serving the work', and truly loving your neighbor."

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- What do you think of Keller's three pieces of wisdom that he thinks the Scriptures give us when considering our work?
- How should we who enjoy the luxuries he mentions – we have power, privilege, position – be good stewards of these as it relates to our vocational pursuits?

Keller concludes this chapter in this way (pg. 112):

The philosopher of Ecclesiastes concludes that satisfaction in work in a fallen world is always a miraculous gift of God – and yet we have a responsibility to pursue this gifts through a particular balance... *tranquility without toil will not bring satisfaction; neither will toil without tranquility.* There will be both tranquility and toil.

So how do we attain this balanced life; one that holds in tension these two things – toil (hard work) and tranquility (rest and an open hand)?

According to Keller, it means:

1. Recognizing and renouncing our tendency to make idols out of money and power,
2. Putting relationships in their proper place,
3. Most of all it means pursuing Jesus – He is the ultimate source of the tranquility we seek because He has toiled for us on the cross.

Some spiritual disciplines that will help us in this:

- Sabbath (intentional rest/putting aside our work)
- Conscious love for our neighbor (vs. using people for what they can do for us)
- "Examen" – daily consideration of where we have known God's presence in our work and our day and where we have not. The ancients call this looking for consolation and desolation.

Some final questions for reflection and conversation:

- Where do you find yourself in this conversation about balance?
- What spiritual disciplines help you to maintain a balance of work/rest and keep your perspectives in place?
- Where do you struggle and how do you need help?
- Any closing comments or thoughts on any of this?

Week 8 (Chapter 7 – Work Becomes Selfish)

Keller suggests that work becomes selfish when it functions as a way to “distinguish myself from my neighbor and to show the world and prove to myself that I am special... [when it is a] shift from work as grateful stewardship of our gifts to neurotic fabrication of our self-worth”.

He reminds us that “the DNA of self-centeredness and competitive pride are at work in each of us.”

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- How does this play out for you? Where are you tempted to ‘make a name for yourself’ in your work?
- What temptations are there in business school in this regard? How does one maintain the right perspective in a competitive environment? How do you interview/put together a résumé with integrity.

He then turns to the story of Esther. He challenges us to consider the ‘place in the palace’ that we all have been given and how we are using or not using the power, influence, position, etc. that we have all been given by the grace of God. (It is reminiscent of the commentary in Daniel 1 about God being the source of all the abilities that Daniel, etc. had that catapulted them into positions of power in the Babylonian court.)

Keller makes this statement in reference to Esther’s choice to use her position to influence the king to save the Jews:

Unless you use your clout, your credentials and your money in the service to the people outside the palace, the palace is a prison; it has already given you your name. You may think you have been given little because you are always striving for more, but you have been given much, and God has called you to put it in to play. It is natural to root your security in the fact that you have a certain measure of control over the variables in your life; to find your significance in having clout in certain circles. *But if you are unwilling to risk your place in the palace for your neighbor, the palace owns you.* p.123

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- How do you respond to this?

- Do you think of yourself as someone having power, prestige etc.? Why is it that we always think someone else has the power, influence etc.?

So, what's the 'remedy'?

Keller says we have to remember grace – in fact, he reminds us of the grace of God to us in Christ even as Esther is a 'type' of Christ for us – one who saves her people because of her willingness to identify with them and mediate for them.

Consider Keller's words:

Jesus, the Son of God, lived in the ultimate palace with the ultimate beauty and glory, and he voluntarily left it behind... He did not do it at the risk of his life but at the cost of his life... He went to the Cross and dies; he made atonement for our sins... His is the ultimate mediation. p.126 – 127

Keller tells us that we need to meditate on these things that become all too familiar with us – we need to do that so that we allow this truth to sink deep into our hearts, into the fabric of our psyches such that it begins to transform us... changing our identity, convincing us of our real and inestimable value in the eyes of God.

He ends the chapter this way:

...ironically, when you see how much you are loved, your work will become far less selfish. Suddenly, all the other things in your work life – your influence, your résumé, and the benefits they bring you – become just things. You can risk them, spend them and even lose them. You are free... If you see what Jesus Christ has done for you, losing the ultimate palace for you, then you will be able to start to serve God and your neighbor from your place in the palace. [Esther] becomes a person of greatness not by trying to make a name for herself; and you will become a person of greatness not by trying to make yourself one, but by serving the One who said to his Father, "For your sake, thy will be done." p.127-128

Final questions for reflection/conversation:

- How 'settled' are you in settling the question of your worth not by what you do or what you have or who you know, but by God's value of you? Is it hard for you to root your identity in who you are in Christ? What might help you in this?
- How do you feel about this idea of risk? What keeps you from taking risks? What kinds of things feel threatening to you?

- We talked at the end of the last chapter about spiritual disciplines that can help us with the work/life balance. What spiritual disciplines might help us in this area – of not allowing our work to become selfish, i.e. all about ‘me’?
- Some suggestions:
 - Discipline of generosity
 - Discipline of Scripture meditation/memory (particularly on the themes mentioned above)
 - Daily Examen

Week 9 (Chapter 8 – Work reveals our Idols)

What do you think of when you hear the word “idol”? How is it used in the wider culture? How would you define it in a “Biblical” sense?

Keller starts out the discussion this way:

We have an alternate of counterfeit god if we take anything in creation and begin to “bow down” to it – that is, so love, serve and derive meaning from it more than from the true God. Because, we can set up idols in our hearts (Ez. 14:3 – 7), we recognize that ‘making an image’ of something is not necessarily a physical one but is certainly a spiritual and psychological one. It means imagining and trusting anything to deliver the control, security, significance, satisfaction and beauty that only the real God can give. It means turning a good thing into an ultimate thing. (pg. 131)

He then talks about the *primacy* of the sin of idolatry in this way:

It could be argued that everything we do wrong – every cruel action, dishonest word, broken promise, self-centered attitude – stems from a conviction deep in our souls that there is something more crucial to our happiness and meaning than the love of God.

Idolatry has power over our actions because it has power over our hearts. (pg. 134)

Personal idols profoundly drive and shape our behavior, including our work. (pg. 135)

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- Can you identify some of these personal idols that we are tempted to serve and the behavior(s) that they drive?
(According to Keller:

- Idols of comfort and pleasure can make it impossible for a person to work as hard as necessary to have a faithful and fruitful career.
- Idols of power and approval, on the other hand, can lead us to overwork or to be ruthless and unbalanced in our work practice.
- Idols of control take several forms – including intense worry, lack of trust and micromanagement.

Keller then turns to identify/discuss cultural or corporate idols:

When an individual makes and serves an idol, it creates psychological distortion and trouble; when a family, group or country makes and serves an ideal, it creates social and cultural trouble.

Every society puts before its members some ideas or values that it says will give life meaning. (pg. 136)

He then gives an overview of the prevailing idols of 3 dominant cultures of Western history and considers how they influence and/or shape our work/view of work.

Traditional Cultures

- World contains moral absolutes that are known mainly through tradition and religion
- Wisdom is passed down from one generation to the next through authority figures (parents, priests, rulers, etc.)
- Faithfulness to duties/roles brings meaning to life
- Examples = nationalism (tribalism), racism
- Idols are made out of social stability and the good of the whole over the rights of the individual

Can you suggest ways that the idols of this kind can affect our work?

Modern Cultures

- Idols of tradition, religion, superstition are replaced with reason, empiricism and individual freedom
- Ideal of progress, embodied in the unstoppable forward march of science and technology...implies that science, given enough time, will answer all our questions and solve all our problems.

- Absolutizing of individual freedom means that there is no moral authority or cause higher than the happiness of the self resulting in “choice” and feelings becoming sacred and holy. The individual is now the center of the universe, replacing God.
- Idols are made of the rights and desires of the individual over the value of the community

Can you suggest ways that the idols of modern culture have influenced work/work life?

Idols of Post-Modern Cultures

- Living with the reality that science hasn’t solved all our problems has left us with the realization that it can only tell us what *is*, never how things *ought* to be. With no moral absolutes, everyone must choose his or her own standard for right and wrong. Science will simply serve the interests of whoever is in power.
- Ultimately, postmodern thought makes an idol out of reality as it is. “...if all moral claims are really just power plays and the product of one’s social and cultural location, as postmodern theorists argue, then it becomes impossible to critique any condition in a society. No one has any ability to mount a program of reform or denounce injustice Postmodernism enshrines the present reality, then, as an absolute.”
- Because no one has grounds to agree on any “ends” or goals for the human race, you end up with only means or techniques... technology, uncertainty and the market have become the idols of postmodernism. *Can* implies *will*.

Can you suggest ways that the idols of post-modern culture have influenced work/work life?

Finding Hope for Our Work

Keller ends this chapter with the reminder that nothing will be put perfectly right until ‘the day of Christ’. So work will be put completely right only when heaven is reunited with earth and we find ourselves in our ‘true country’. (pg.151)

But, in the meantime, the gospel does give us hope and the resources for satisfying and faithful work as we wait for the completion that Christ will bring. Here’s what Keller suggests:

1 – the gospel provides an alternate story line for our work – we’ve talked about this a bit already...there is a different narrative about human life and work

2 – the Christian faith gives us a new and rich conception of work as partnering with God in his love and care for the world.

3 – the gospel gives us a particularly sensitive new moral compass

4 – the gospel radically changes our motives for work and fills us with a new and durable inner power that will be with us through thick and thin.

It's these implications of the gospel on our work that he tackles in the last section of the book.

Final questions for reflection/conversation:

- Overall thoughts or impressions on this chapter/topic?
- How do we begin to really see the idolatry around us and in us?
- How might this community help in that?
- What spiritual disciplines would help us in this endeavor?

Week 10 (Chapter 9 – A New Story for our Work)

This chapter discusses 'world views' or personal and corporate narratives that affect the way we view the world and live in it.

Keller states that a worldview consists of posing and answering 3 questions:

1. How are things supposed to be?
 2. What is the main problem with things as they are?
 3. What is the solution and how can it be realized?
- (p.160)

He goes on to say

Only the Christian worldview locates the problem with the world not in any part of the world or in any particular group of people, but in sin itself...without understanding the gospel, we will be either naively utopian or cynically disillusioned. We will be demonizing something that isn't bad enough to explain the mess we are in; and we will be idolizing something that isn't powerful enough to get us out of it. This is, in the end, what other worldviews do. (p. 162)

He frames the Christian worldview within the ideas of Creation (plan), Fall (problem) and Redemption & Restoration (solution). God created the world and everything in it good. Sin has entered the world and everything in it is now tainted/effected and we are powerless to fix it. God acts to redeem the world He has

made. In Keller's words "The whole world is going to be redeemed. Jesus is going to redeem spirit and body, reason and emotion, people and nature. There is no part of reality for which there is no hope." (p.163)

Keller then spends some time thinking about worldview and the gospel in various fields/disciplines.

(For discussion with MBAs, print out the pages from the book which pertain to business.)

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- What do you think of the way he summarizes/characterizes the business world?

He finishes by encouraging all of us no matter what field we are in to think about, look at, and do our work through a Christian worldview 'lens'. He offers these questions as ones that can help us to this:

- What's the story line of the culture in which I live and the field where I work? Who are the protagonists and antagonists?
- What are the underlying assumptions about meaning, morality, origin and destiny?
- What are the idols? The hopes? The fears?
- How does my particular profession retell this story line, and what part does the profession itself play in the story?
- What parts of the dominant worldviews are basically in line with the gospel so that I can agree with and align with them?
- What parts of the dominant worldviews are irresolvable without Christ? Where, in other words, must I challenge my culture? How can Christ complete the story in a different way?
- How do these stories affect both the form and the content of my work personally? How can I work not just with excellence but also with Christian distinctiveness in my work?
- What opportunities are there in my profession for (a) serving individual people, (b) serving society at large, (c) serving my field of work, (d) modeling competence and excellence, and (e) witnessing to Christ?

Questions for reflection/conversation:

- Have you considered any of these questions as you have thought about business in general or your company in particular?

- Do conversations like this happen at all within your program/with your peers? Do people look at company vision/mission statements seriously? Are people inclined to head toward a particular company because of its mission statement?

Week 11 (Chapter 10 – A New Conception of Work)

Last week's chapter focused on the Christian worldview as a point of guidance/reference for their work – “giving them a deep and layered vision of human flourishing that often enables them to work in ways distinct from those around them”. (p.184) In this chapter, Kelley discusses an important corrective to an error that could emerge from focusing too much on the worldview perspective – the idea that only Christians do work of value or it can lead us to privilege white-collar work.

“As an extension of God's creative work, the Christians' labor has its orientation toward God himself, and we must ask how it can be done distinctively and for his glory. As an extension of God's providential work, our labor has its orientation toward our neighbor, and we must ask how it can be done excellently and for his or her good.” (p.184)

So Keller turns to a discussion of 'Common Grace' – “It counteracts the elitism and sectarianism that can creep into our approach to work when we grasp the distinctiveness of the Christian worldview.” (p.186)

Common grace vs. saving grace is the gift of God to all human beings who are made in his image. It includes talents, abilities, privilege etc. It also includes the general revelation that the world around us communicates about the glory of God.

“So through his common grace God blesses all people, so that Christians can benefit from, and cooperate with, non-Christians.” (p.188)

Some passages of Scripture that give us understanding of this are:

- Psalm 19
- Exodus 32:1 – 4
- Isaiah 45 & Genesis 20
- Romans 1

“God gives out gifts of wisdom, talent, beauty and skill according to his grace – that is, in a completely unmerited way. He casts them across the human race like seed, in order to enrich, brighten and preserve the world.” (p. 191)

“An understanding of common grace, as well as an experience of God's pardoning grace in Christ, should lead us to freely and humbly work with others who may not share our faith but can be used greatly by God to accomplish enormous good. At the same time, an understanding of the gospel worldview means we should at times respectfully pursue a different path or winsomely point out how our own Christian faith gives us powerful resources and guidance for what we are doing.” (p.192)

Questions for reflection/conversation:

Have you thought about this idea of common grace before as it relates to work and to the value of work done by others?

What dangers might we avoid if we have a robust view of/commitment to both a Christian worldview and the doctrine of common grace?

Christian cultural enclave (I'll only go to/work with Christian doctors, businesses, etc.)

Confusion as to why there are nice/generous non-Christians who put us to shame sometimes

How might an understanding of common grace be a lens through which we see the culture around us and how might it give us opportunities to dialog with the culture?

How might this help us from being dualists – from dividing the world into sacred and secular spheres?

“Dualism leads some to think that if their work is to please Christ, it must be done overtly in his name (so you have to write/sing songs about Jesus, you have to use your education degree to teach in a Christian school, etc.)...or Christians think of themselves as Christians only within church (or religious activity). Their Christian life is what they do on Sundays and weeknights, when they engage in spiritual activities. The rest of the week they have no ability to think circumspectly about the underlying values they are consuming and living out.” (p.196)

Keller ends with this – “Ultimately, a grasp of the gospel and of biblical teaching on cultural engagement should lead Christians to be the most appreciative of the hands of God behind the world of our colleagues and neighbors.” (p.197)

Week 12 (Chapter 11 – A New Compass for Work)

Keller starts this chapter by discussing ethics.

Give a brief definition of ethics and your experience in your ‘ethics in/for business’ class. On what basis are ethics – right and wrong – determined? How satisfying is all that to you?

Keller makes the following statements about ethics and the limitations of the usual/cultural conversation:

“They tell us that is the practice is legal and if everyone is doing it, the only fundamental question is: Can money be made?”
p.199

“...many business ethics courses and books argue...business owners and employees should be honest and fair...we should treat employees with generosity, and we should give back to the community. But why? ...The most common answer is: It’s good for business. It enhances your reputation, and in the long term it creates a more favorable business environment. In other word, most people argue – or at the very least, live out – ethics on the basis of cost-benefit analysis. Integrity is profitable; dishonesty isn’t. And most of the time, at least in the long run, this is true” p.199

The foundation for ethics for Christians:

“We are to be honest, compassionate and generous not because these things are rewarding (which they usually are, hence the cost-benefit approach to ethics), but because they are right in and of themselves – because to do so honors the will of God and his design for human life.” p. 203

He goes on to point out that “sometimes, of course, that will put us in the minority and even at a disadvantage”. P. 203

(If there is time, read the Howard story on p.200 and 202)

Keller moves on to speak of the different virtues that mark the Christian. While there are certain character traits that are, in general, appreciated by all humans by virtue of being created in God’s image (i.e. honesty, generosity etc.), there are things that mark us (or ought to) as believers - a higher standard, if you will, predominated by love and it’s ultimate display in God Himself.

Keller ends the section this way:

Think of the cliché that nobody ever gets to the end of their life

and wishes they had spent more time at the office. It makes good sense, of course, up to a point. But here's a more interesting perspective: At the end of your life, will you wish that you had plunged more of your time, passion, and skills into work environments and work products that helped people to give and receive more love? Can you see a way to answer "yes" to this question from your current career trajectory?

Different view of humanity

All human beings are made in the image of God and therefore have an inviolable right to be treated with honor and love, regardless of whether they culturally, morally and personally appeal to or offend us. (This is in significant contrast to the context in which Christianity began/spread.)

Belief in the image of God can bring a new dimension to the conduct of organizational life (e.g. hiring, layoff, firing)

The concept of human rights, born out of the theological virtue of love, has been appropriated and deployed widely today by many people who do not believe in Christianity or indeed in God at all...some have also warned that in a thoroughly secular society, without the belief in a loving, personal God from which the whole concept came, long-term commitment to human rights could wane. Christians must remain absolutely committed to an understanding of human rights based on the image of God.

p. 209

Different Source of Guidance

Not just a set of rules to follow, but a heart/mind of wisdom.

"Knowing the right thing to do in the 80% of life's situations in which the moral rules don't provide a clear answer" p.210

How can we become wise so that we are good decision-makers?

Not merely believe in God, but know him personally

Know ourselves

Learn wisdom through experience

Without the knowledge of God and self that the gospel brings, experience may teaches us precious little' but if we know God and self, then time deepens our understanding of human nature, of the times we live in, of the power and use of words, of how human relationships works. All this leads to wisdom in decision-making. p.211

It is through the ministry of the Spirit that we are made wise.

“The Spirit does not make us wise in some magical kind of way, giving us little nudges and insider tips to help us always choose the best stock to invest in. Rather, he makes Jesus Christ a living, bright reality, transforming our character, giving us new inner poise, clarity, humility boldness, contentment and courage. All of this leads to increasing wisdom as the years go by, and to better and better professional and personal decisions.” p. 212

Different Audience

We all work for an audience, whether we are aware of it or not. Some perform to please parents, others to impress peers, others to win over superiors, while many do what they do strictly to live up to their own standards. All of these audiences are inadequate. Working for them alone will lead to overwork or underwork- sometimes a mixture of the two, based on who is watching. But Christians look to an Audience of One. p. 218

Questions for reflection/conversation:

What are your thoughts about these ‘differences’ that ought to distinguish Christian ethics?

Because of their different virtues, view of humanity, source of guidance and audience, Christians should be marked by the following differences as they do their work:

Christians should be known to not be ruthless. They should have a reputation for being fair, caring and committed to others. They should be marked by sympathy and an unusual willingness to forgive and reconcile. There should be a lack of vengefulness, sanctimony, and spite. p. 218

Christians should be known to be generous, and in the workplace this expresses itself in many ways. As business managers, they can be generous with their time and investment in their employees and customers. As small business owners, they can take less personal profit in order to give customers better value and employees better pay. As citizens they can be discernibly generous with their time and money, giving away more of their income than others in their economic position. They can consider living modestly, below their potential lifestyle level, in order to be financially generous with others. Christians should also be known to be calm and poised in the face of difficulty or failure. This may be the most telling way to judge if a person is drawing on the resources of the gospel in the development of personal character. Christians should not be seen as sectarian

Keller finishes the chapter this way:

Theological and ethical reflection on our field of work is not easy. It is easier by far to focus on your own job and merely seek to work with personal integrity, skill, and a joyful heart. That is indeed a major part of what it means for a Christian to do faithful work, but that is not all it takes. Christians are to think persistently and deeply about the shape of work in their field and whether (in biblical terms) it accords as well as possible with human well-being and with justice. p. 225

Questions for reflection/conversation:

Have you known Christians in the business world who are examples of the things that Keller speaks of?

Where have you known ethical challenges in your work? What has helped you to deal with them?

How can the Christian community play an important role in these issues?

Week 13 (Chapter 12 – New Power for Work)

Part 1

“Many people are trying to get a sense of self through productivity and success – but that burns them out. For others the motivation is to bring home a paycheck so they can enjoy “real life” – but that makes work into a pointless grind. These motivations are what we could call the “work beneath the work.” And they are what make work so physically and emotionally exhausting in the end.” p. 227

Questions for reflection/conversation:

Have you known the kind of physical, emotional or spiritual burnout of which he speaks b/c of an attempt to get a sense of self through your work – i.e. building your self worth, security and meaning through what you do/produce? What is that experience like and where does it leave us? How about the everybody’s working for the weekend (Loverboy) syndrome? Have you or people you know lived like this? Where does that leave us – particularly during the week?

“We have said that the gospel replaces the story that animates our work, it alters our conception of what work is, and it reorients the ethical compass we use for work. In addition to all this, the gospel also gives us new power for work by supplying us with a new passion and a deeper kind of rest.” p. 228
Passion

Keller tells us that ‘without something bigger than yourself to work for’ all of our time and energy is at its core self-serving idolatry even though it may not look that way on the surface or to others. Our contemporary culture magnifies the self-serving sin nature inside each of us, but masks it as ‘normal’, ‘logical’, etc. It tells us that “nobody has the right to tell us what is right/wrong for us - that in the end there is no standard or authority higher than the Choosing Self.” p.231

Keller then takes the reader through a discussion of Romans 12 and the idea being a ‘living sacrifice’.

Questions for reflection/conversation:

Read Romans 12.

The beginning of this chapter is pretty familiar, but what are your thoughts on what it might mean to ‘present yourself as a living sacrifice’?

Keller’s comment:

In fact, the term ‘living sacrifice’ is deliberately paradoxical because

sacrifices were dead. That's part of what it meant to be a sacrifice. To say to God's people, "I want you to be a living slain thing," is meant to be a jolt it's a way of saying you have to continually be in the rhythm of dying to your own interest and living for God. That's the passion God asks of you. p.232

Where does this passion come from? Look at verses 1 & 2 in Romans 12. What is it about God' mercy that would cause us to live this way?

"Instead of working out of the false passion... which is born of selfishness, your are working out of true passion, which is born of selflessness. You are adopted into God's family, so you already have your affirmation. You are justified in God's sight, so you have nothing to prove. You have been saved through a dying sacrifice, so you are free to be a living one. You are loved ceaselessly, so you can work tirelessly in response to a quiet inner fullness." p. 233

- We have just begun the season of Lent which ends with Christ's *Passion* – as Hebrews puts it "who, for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame". How is God inviting you into living passionately instead of selfishly? What kind of spiritual disciplines will you employ to help you in this? How might you 'use' Lent to reflect on this – particularly as many of you think about heading into new jobs/living situations soon?
- Next week we'll look at the second half of the chapter which deals with work and rest.

Week 13 (Chapter 12 – New Power for Work)

Part 2

The Power of Deep Rest

“All of us are haunted by the work under the work – that need to prove and save ourselves, to gain a sense of worth and identity. But if we can experience gospel-rest in our hearts, if we can be free from the need to earn our salvation through our work, we will have a deep reservoir of refreshment that continually rejuvenates us, restores our perspective, and renews our passion.” p. 234

Questions for reflection/conversation:

What has been your experience with regards to Sabbath-keeping? Do you come from a legalistic kind of tradition? Do you come from a faith community where there is no talk about Sabbath or differentiation btw days? Do you have regular practices with regards to Sabbath?

Read Exodus 20:8 – 11 and Deuteronomy 5:12 – 15

On what basis do each of these passages appeal with regards to “keeping the Sabbath”?

What does it mean practically for us?

Appeal to creation – rhythm of work and rest built into the very fabric of life. “Overwork or underwork violates that nature and leads to breakdown. To rest is actually a way to enjoy and honor the goodness of God’s creation and our own. To violate the rhythm of work and rest (in either direction) leads to chaos in our life and in the world around us. Sabbath is therefore a celebration of our design.” p.235

Deuteronomy 5 ties Sabbath observance to the Exodus – that point in history where God redeems his people from slavery and brings them out of Egypt to form a new nation.

God portrays the Sabbath as a reenactment of emancipation from slavery. It reminds us how he delivered his people... anyone who cannot obey God’s command to observe the Sabbath is a slave, even a self-imposed one. Your own heart, or our materialistic culture, or an exploitative organization, or all of the above, will be abusing you if you don’t have the ability to be disciplined in our practice of Sabbath. Sabbath is therefore a declaration of our freedom. It means you are not a slave – not to your culture’s expectations, your family’s hopes, your medical school’s demands, not even to your own insecurities. It is important that you

learn to speak this truth to yourself with a note of triumph – otherwise you will feel guilty for taking time off, or you will be unable to truly unplug.
p. 236

Sabbath observance is also an act of trust. We stop our work for one day and remember that 1) God is still working and 2) that the world still turns and doesn't fall apart. God, not us, is in charge and it is He who keeps it all afloat.

Questions for reflection/conversation:

Do you find this to be a challenge? In what ways?
What has helped you along the way to press into Sabbath-keeping in a way that is both faithful to God's call and life-giving?

Keller ends this chapter – and the book – by reminding us of the deepest sense of rest from our work that is ours because Jesus has finished His work and offers it to us. Our resting in the finished work of Christ alone is what frees us from the 'work under the work' – that driving need to find significance and meaning by what we do/accomplish. Without this true rest in Christ, all of our work will ultimately be unsatisfying and we will never be able to truly rest or relax.

Here is how he ends the book:

When your heart comes to hope in Christ and the future world He has guaranteed – when you are carrying his easy yoke – you finally have the power to work with a free heart. You can accept gladly whatever level of success and accomplishment God gives you in your vocation, because he has called you to it. You can work with passion and rest, knowing that ultimately the deepest desires of your heart – including your specific aspirations for your earthly work – will be fulfilled when you reach your true country, the new heavens and the new earth. So in any time and place you can work with joy, satisfaction, and no regrets.

p.241

Questions for reflection/conversation:

How does this chapter (and the entire book, actually) speak to you as you consider the work that God is calling you into? Or how does it affect the way you may pursue work (the type of work you look for, the places where you will look, etc.)?

What have you found particularly engaging or challenging?
Are there ways you are thinking differently or plan to act differently?