

VOCATIONAL STEWARDSHIP
FOR THE COMMON GOOD

K I N G D O M
C A L L I N G

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545-88-848 / 29

Deploying Vocational Power

FOUR PATHWAYS

At most you will spend about

5 percent of your waking hours in [church].

Ninety-five percent of your life you spend in the world. . . .

The scorecard is about the 95 percent [lived] out in the world.

PASTOR VICTOR PENTZ

Church leaders may believe that if they preach the right message (inspiration), provide the tools and forums that help their people identify their gifts, passions and dimensions of vocational power (discovery), and help their members develop mature character for handling their power in a biblical manner (formation), then their members will simply begin stewarding their vocational power effectively. While it's possible that a few smart self-starters may be able to do just that, many parishioners need further practical help. Having seen *why* they should steward their vocational power and *what* that power is, they now need help in discerning *where* to invest their efforts. This is the work of deployment.

In part three, we will closely examine how congregational leaders can equip their members for vocational stewardship along four possible pathways. I introduce them here and offer some comments on the temptations of each pathway that congregational leaders will want to be aware of. Table 9.1 summarizes key ideas about each pathway.

Table 9.1. Overview of the Four Pathways

Pathway	Key Word	Description	Church type	Temptations
1	Bloom	Promoting the kingdom in and through your daily work	All: any size, any outreach strategy	Pietism, triumphalism
2	Donate	Volunteering vocational talent outside your day job	Small to midsize; those with an outreach strategy emphasizing partnerships	Impatience; arrogance toward volunteer or nonprofit organizations and staff
3	Invent	Launching a social enterprise	Midsize to large; those with a high percentage of leaders and "halftimers"	Reinventing wheels; failure to partner; vainglory
4	Invest	Participating in the church's targeted initiative	Midsize to large; those with a narrow and deep outreach focus	Failure to do "ministry <i>with</i> "; failure to recognize mutuality of ministry

INTRODUCING THE FOUR PATHWAYS OF VOCATIONAL STEWARDSHIP

Pathway 1: Blooming where you're planted. The primary and most important avenue for deploying vocational power is in and through one's present work. The first place believers should look to conduct their foretaste-bringing mission is right at the current job they hold. I call this "blooming where you're planted."

Blooming involves reflecting and promoting God's glory in our current vocation. The *tsaddiqim* do this by seeking to live out, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the vertical, personal and social dimensions of righteousness in the context of their vocation. We got a good glimpse of what that looks like when we considered the example of homebuilder Perry Bigelow in chapter two. We bloom when we acknowledge God as our director and audience, and conduct our work in functional, daily reliance on the Spirit. We bloom when we honor God through our ethical practice and when we intentionally and creatively seek to advance shalom for *all* our organization's stakeholders. And we bloom when we act as "intrapreneurs"—people who innovate needed reform within their company or industry sector.¹

Every congregation, regardless of size, can and should place primary emphasis on equipping their members for this expression of vocational stewardship. Some may also have the capacity to equip members for one of the other pathways, and megachurches may have the ability to support all four pathways. Unlike pathway one, though, the other pathways are optional.

Temptations of pathway 1. The temptations in this pathway are two (at least). One might be called pietism; the other, triumphalism.

The pietistic temptation emerges when congregants mistakenly define the mission of faith/work integration too narrowly. That is, they seek to be people of integrity on the job and perhaps attempt to evangelize coworkers, but they do not muse deeply over the work itself. They don't invest time considering how their work images God in his ongoing providence in creation or how their work participates in God's redemptive purposes. They fail to discern how people can bear witness to the *missio Dei* through work in ways other than placing Christian plaques on the wall or leading Bible studies.

Steve Garber, president of the Washington Institute, tells of bringing some Christians onsite to visit a hamburger restaurant owned by a friend of his. This friend has thought very deeply about how to serve God through his business, and he has chosen to adopt some specific policies. Seeking to promote the kingdom virtue of wholeness, this businessman avoids commercial grain-fed beef that contains antibiotics that may have negative health effects. Seeking to promote the kingdom virtue of creation care, he purchases all his produce locally. The visiting Christians that Steve brought to the restaurant were unable to see the kingdom value of this. They could not discern what was "Christian" about this hamburger joint, since the owner wasn't talking about converting his employees and he didn't have any Christian literature prominently displayed.²

A second temptation in pathway one is triumphalism. This can occur when Christians in their secular workplaces forget the doctrine of common grace—the notion that God has granted degrees of wisdom and insight to nonbelievers and that he can advance his purposes through non-Christian institutions. Triumphalism rears its head when Christians assert that only *they* can perceive the true, the good and the beautiful. It surfaces when Christians carelessly use language about "taking" their institution or

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vocational sector “for Christ.” Such language can cause great consternation among secular colleagues. Triumphalism is revealed when believers fail to be good listeners to people of good will who do not share their Christian faith, when believers are inhospitable toward others’ views.

Academician Kim Phipps, now president of Messiah College, offers practical advice to Christians in her profession on how to avoid triumphalism. She urges scholars to practice “intellectual hospitality.” This involves

care and concern for the person, and it also necessitates inviting others into conversation, listening without prejudging, and affirming the value of others and their perspectives even when legitimate disagreement exists. Most important, intellectual hospitality involves the virtue of epistemological humility, which roots our openness to the views of others in the recognition that our own mental powers are limited and that the cognitive, experiential, and affective insights of others, especially when they are different from our own, can truly deepen and extend our understanding of others and the world that surrounds us.³

This hospitality is not mere relativism, and it does not require accepting every scholarly opinion. In fact, Phipps notes, intellectual hospitality requires acknowledgment of legitimate conflict. Christians can and should make rigorous arguments based on a biblical worldview. The point is to avoid labeling opponents unfairly, breeching civility, refusing to see the image of God in the people who disagree, and lacking the humility to realize that we can learn from others whose views are different. Phipps’s advice for Christian scholars in the often unfriendly environment of secular academia is applicable to Christians in any secular workplace.

Church leaders equip their flock to resist the temptations of pietism and triumphalism when they teach a robust view of faith/work integration and remind their members of God’s common grace. As they celebrate members who are living out vocational stewardship along pathway one, they need to affirm a wide range of examples. They need to showcase those who start Bible studies at work *and* those who achieve workplace reforms that advance justice, those who promote employee care and those who convince their firms to be more green. As they exhort congregants to influence their fields positively, they should employ the language of servanthood, not conquest. The idea is to encourage congregants to be salt,

to be seed sowers, to be secret givers, to be reweavers of social fabrics that are torn—to be a “faithful presence,” in sociologist James Davison Hunter’s words. “If, indeed, there is a hope or an imaginable prospect for human flourishing in the contemporary world, it begins when the Word of shalom becomes flesh in us and is enacted through us toward those with whom we live, in the tasks we are given, and in the spheres of influence in which we operate.”⁴

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Pathway 2: Donating. The second pathway of vocational stewardship involves donating our skills to organizations other than our regular employer. This includes volunteer service at churches, nonprofit ministries or private or public agencies that can make good use of our particular vocational knowledge and experience in their labors here at home or abroad. This pathway is unique in its concern that volunteer service intentionally capitalizes on vocational power. It’s about getting bankers to serve as bankers, carpenters to serve as carpenters and architects to serve as architects. Such an approach is obviously commonsensical; but in most congregations, there is little or no effort to mobilize members for service according to their vocational talents.

Many congregations may have capacity to equip their congregants for vocational stewardship along this pathway in addition to pathway one. If the church’s outreach strategy focuses on partnering with local agencies (rather than launching new church-sponsored initiatives) pathway two will be a natural fit.

Temptations of pathway 2. The main temptations of this pathway involve impatience, arrogance and failure to appreciate work styles or work environments/cultures different from those with which one is most familiar and comfortable. High-capacity marketplace professionals are likely to find the nonprofit world a different animal than the corporate world. Some of those differences point to weaknesses in nonprofit culture, but others may reveal its strengths.

Pro bono volunteers need eyes to see both, rather than just getting irritated by inefficiencies or the lack of shipshape policies and procedures. They also need to cultivate an appreciation for the talents and skills of nonprofit staff. These individuals may not demonstrate the same kind of “smarts” that the professional volunteers have. They may lack the same level of formal education or training. Consequently, church leaders should be

intentional about reminding their well-educated members that there are many different types of smarts in the world and that a “street education” can count in nonprofit work as much as or more than a college education.⁵

Leaders can also foster an attitude of respect for the community organizations with which they are partnering by modeling that respect. All communications about the congregation’s work alongside these partnering organizations should emphasize the mutuality of the relationship. Leaders should do nothing that communicates, “Well, those nonprofit partners of ours are certainly lucky to have the support of our flock, given how talented and well educated and competent we are.” Avoiding such obviously patronizing language is fairly simple, but leaders need to watch their words diligently when they are praising their members for their service. Affirming should always be done in ways that acknowledge the dedication and talents of the partners as well as the achievements of the congregants.

Pathway 3: *Inventing*. Vocational stewardship along the third pathway is a form of what author Andy Crouch calls “culture making.” In his book by that name, Crouch argues that “the only way to change culture is to create more of it.”⁶ Pathway three involves drawing on our vocational power to launch a new social enterprise that seeks to advance the kingdom in a fresh way. It is about creating new or alternative institutions (big or small) that implement innovative ways of addressing social problems. Vocational stewardship along this pathway brings foretastes of shalom first to the direct beneficiaries of the services provided by these new organizations. In some cases, it can also bring about significant, far-reaching cultural or social change. Social enterprises like the Grameen Bank, for example, which birthed the modern microfinance industry, have revolutionized life for millions of people worldwide.

Churches with significant numbers of high-capacity congregants or “halftimers” (professionals at a point in their career where they are seeking greater significance in their marketplace work) may want to build structures for supporting pathway three.

Temptations of pathway 3. The principal temptation of pathway three involves failure to listen or to partner. Excited about her new idea, a high-capacity Christian may fail to realize that others have been working on the problem long before she came along. In this circumstance, church leaders may need to ask the entrepreneur gently whether she’s done thorough

homework and familiarized herself with what others have tried. If others are already laboring in the same vineyard, church leaders should urge their entrepreneurs to consider how they might partner with existing programs rather than reinvent the wheel.

In the same way, professionals who have proven themselves excellent problem solvers in the business realm may fail to see where there are limits on the transferability of those skills. In this circumstance, church leaders should remind the entrepreneur that an idea or approach that worked marvelously in the corporate or technical sector may not succeed in the social sector.

Church leaders need also to be “as wise as serpents” about the sad reality that some of the social entrepreneurs in their flock may be motivated by vainglory and disinterested in partnering with others because they want to “do their own thing.” The ego is a persistent little devil. Church leaders need to discern whether a potential entrepreneur’s proclaimed desire to serve others through his or her venture is actually masking a hunger for personal recognition.

Pathway 4: *Investing*. Finally, pathway four involves participating in a targeted, intensive initiative by a congregation to serve a particular people group, neighborhood or cause in a way that strategically employs our vocational power. Some congregations have chosen a narrow but deep strategy for affecting community renewal. They’ve honed in on a particular neighborhood or a particular problem, such as failing schools or the troubled foster care system or international sex trafficking. The aims of such initiatives are bold—and to accomplish their goals, these congregations need to garner the vocational power of all their members. They seek to create on-ramps for service by members of all different professional skill sets. Pathway four funnels all the diverse talents of congregants toward the same target.

Obviously, if the church’s outreach strategy is built on this narrow-but-deep approach, supporting members in vocational stewardship along this pathway makes sense.

Temptations of pathway 4. The principal temptation to fight on this pathway is the failure to undertake the work in a “ministry with” paradigm as opposed to a “ministry to” paradigm. For example, if a church has targeted an economically distressed community, it must guard against its talented, fast-paced, powerful members running roughshod over community

residents in so-called helping initiatives. As Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert explain so well in their recent book, sometimes such “helping” actually hurts.⁷ The biblical approach is one of shared power, mutual respect and equal dignity.

As in pathway two, believers with significant vocational power to draw on must do so without an inflated sense of their importance and with genuine regard for the different skill sets that those they are serving bring to the table. Leaders of a targeted neighborhood initiative must engage the residents of that neighborhood, learning what *their* desires and dreams for the community are. Community residents must be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the initiative. Church leaders mobilize parishioners to come alongside local residents to assist them in advancing their dreams by drawing on their own particular vocational assets, knowledge and networks. Similarly, when the focus is on an issue rather than a place, Christians stewarding their vocational power should partner with the people most affected by that issue and seek *their* input into diagnosis, prescription, implementation and evaluation.

Finally, church leaders on pathway four can also help congregants to avoid the temptations of paternalism or superiority by taking care to point out the *mutually* beneficial character of ministry. They should emphasize that both sides can learn much from one another and that God’s desire is to see both transformed.

Pathway 1

BLOOM WHERE YOU’RE PLANTED

The church exists for the mission, for the sake of the world.

Yet it is organized to build itself up as an institution.

It blesses the work its members do within the institution but pays no attention to the work they do “outside” the church.

REV. DAVIDA CRABTREE

In 1985, Tom Hill’s company, Kimray, was experiencing hard times. The Oklahoma City firm, which produces sophisticated control gauges and thermostats for oil and gas companies, was in a bust cycle. This was not unusual in that industry. In fact, several years earlier, Kimray had gone through an even worse time. Hill remembered that recession all too well. Back then, he had allowed the firm to grow too large during a boom cycle, not placing funds in reserve. When the market tanked, the subsequent layoffs he was forced to make were gut wrenching.

This was an experience Hill never wanted to repeat. He vowed then and there to God that he would operate Kimray debt-free in the future. “We put back reserves in good times to carry us over during the lean times,” Hill says. “That commitment alone enables us to operate successfully under varied economic climates.”¹ When the bust of 1985 arrived, Hill found himself with a financial reserve but more employees than he had work for. His response was that of a *tsaddiq*.

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News (November 25, 2009) <www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/11/25/eveningnews/main5777661.shtml>.

¹²Hammack, "Gourmet Giving," p. 64.

¹³Stan Grossfeld, quoted in "The Pulitzer Photographs: A Glimpse of Life," produced by the Newseum, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴Ronald J. Sider et al., *Linking Arms, Linking Lives: How Urban-Suburban Partnerships Can Transform Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 127.

¹⁵John Philips, real estate developer, interview with the author, Chicago, June 28, 2010.

¹⁶Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from Helen Bach, administrative supervisor, Olive Crest, are from a telephone interview with the author, September 23, 2010.

¹⁷Kevin Brennfleck and Kay Marie Brennfleck, *Live Your Calling: A Practical Guide to Finding and Fulfilling Your Mission in Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), pp. 36-39.

¹⁸Craig Pitman, "The Christian Artist in Ministry," ArtsReformation.com (April 12, 2006) <www.artsreformation.com/a001/cp-ministry.html>.

¹⁹"Our Impact," Carson Scholars Fund <<http://carsonscholars.org/content/about-csf/our-impact>>.

²⁰Brad Bell, "A Dislocated Heart," sermon delivered at The Well Community Church, Fresno, Calif., September 5, 2009 <<http://thewellcommunity.org/podcast/the-feed-sermon-podcast/1/dislocated-heart-nehemiah-11-4/220>>.

²¹All quotes from Tim Schulz, founder, ReVive Industries, are from a telephone interview with the author, September 2, 2010.

Chapter 8: Formation

¹I'm indebted to Tim Keller for this insight.

²Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, "Avodah: Vocation, Calling, Service," My Jewish Learning <www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ethics/Business_Ethics/Themes_and_Theology/Value_of_Work/Work_as_Calling.shtml>.

³Kenton Beshore, *Rooted: Connect with God, the Church, Your Purpose* (Irvine, Calif.: Mariners Church, 2010), p. 108.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁵Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor: Seeing Others Through the Eyes of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 96.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁹Tim Keller, "A New Kind of Urban Christian," The Christian Vision Project (June 15, 2006) <www.christianvisionproject.com/2006/06/a_new_kind_of_urban_christian.html>.

¹⁰Gary Haugen, *Just Courage: God's Great Expedition for the Restless Christian* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p. 18.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 20, emphasis added.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³Brad Pellish, associate pastor, Bethany Bible Church, interview with the author, Phoenix, December 3, 2009.

¹⁴Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), pp. 16-17.

¹⁵Steve Gillen, campus pastor, Willow Creek North Shore Community Church, telephone interview with the author, September 7, 2010.

¹⁶As vice regents, our stewardship responsibility is to *develop* the creation (that's the Hebrew word *abad* in Genesis 2:15, where it says Adam was to work the garden) and to *protect* it (that's the Hebrew word *shamar* in Genesis 2:15, translated as *tend*).

¹⁷I'm indebted to Andy Crouch for this insight.

¹⁸Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p. 230, emphasis added.

¹⁹Quoted in Amy L. Sherman, *Being There: Faith on the Frontlines—Successful Models of Faith-Based, Cross-Sector Collaboration from the 2006 Partners in Transformation Awards Program* (Indianapolis: Sagamore Institute for Policy Research, 2006), p. 41.

Chapter 9: Deploying Vocational Power

¹Tim Keller, "Cultural Renewal: The Role of the Entrepreneurs and Intrapreneurs," Center for Faith and Works, Entrepreneurship Forum 2006 <www.faithandwork.org/2006_ei_forum_page3037.php>.

²Steve Garber, president, Washington Institute, personal conversation with the author, October 13, 2010.

³Kim S. Phipps, "Prologue: Campus Climate and Christian Scholarship," in *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation*, ed. Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 174.

⁴James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 252.

⁵See Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁶Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p. 67.

⁷Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009).

Chapter 10: Pathway 1

¹All quotes by Hill are from Matthew Myers, "CEO Profile: Tom Hill, President, Kimray Incorporated," Christ @ Work <www.christatwork.com/data/PDFFiles/Tom%20Hill%20interview.pdf>.

²Rev. Dr. John Yates, "Seek the Welfare of the City: A Vision for Pastors and Pastoring," Commencement Address at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., May 16, 2008.