Part 1 of 2: A Biblical View of Stewardship
with Darrell Bock, Greg Forster
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Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, Executive Director at the Hendricks Center at Dallas Theological Seminary. And with me is Greg Forster who is Program Director for Matters of Faith and Work and Economics at the Kern Family Foundation, which is located in Wisconsin, is that correct?

That's right, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Now, I don't know where Waukesha is, where is Waukesha?

It's about 40 minutes west of Milwaukee. Our benefactors Bob and Pat Kern started a business there. Actually because and the reason we ended up there is way, way back when they were in college they were working at a Christian retreat center in central Wisconsin and on the train home to their college in Illinois, they went through Waukesha and there was a sign that the Waukesha engine company was hiring engineers. And Bob Kern one of our benefactors was about to graduate as an engineer.

So hence now today many, many years later we're still in Waukesha Wisconsin. Now we're a family foundation. Their company is still going very strong in Waukesha, Wisconsin as well. It's a wonderful little far-flung suburb of Milwaukee.

How large is Waukesha?

Waukesha is a medium-size city. We are actually way on the outskirts of Waukesha. We're not even we're a suburb of the suburb. We're in a more rural area called Genesee Depot, which has about 2,000 people tops, maybe if that. So it's quite a beautiful area.

Well, our topic today is faith and work in what we call holistic discipleship, the idea of a Christian appreciating how their work contributes to their walk and their life and their personal development. And the Kern Family Foundation has been concerned that Christians appreciate the role of work and economics in the Christian life.
The Table Podcast  Faith and Work

So Greg why don't you tell us a little bit about the Kern Family Foundation and its mission and why we have partnered together in talking about this topic.

Greg Forster  Yeah, absolutely. Everything we do at the Kern Family Foundation grows out of the mission and vision of our benefactors. And as I mentioned they struck out on their own, started a business in 1959. And by the time they sold it in 2006 it had 2,000 employees and was quite a large operation. And it really one of the keys to their business leadership was they understood that giving people good honest work to do, that makes a contribution to the community and serves the needs of people around them is really essential to human life. It's essential -- that having work to do, having good work to do is essential to the meaning and the dignity that is intended for human life.

And then the other aspect of their experience that informs particularly the program I work in, Mr. Kern's father was a lifelong Baptist pastor. Mr. Kern grew up in the parsonage in Osage, Iowa. And he learned from an early age the critical importance of a pastor not only to the congregation but to the community at large, that pastors infuse into the life of the culture a moral and spiritual influence that cultures need to have. They help orient people toward the kinds of lives that they are supposed to have. The kind of life that's intended for human beings. And have that shaping affect on people's character.

So our program intends to bring these two worlds together, because most of what we do all day is work. If you add up work in the home, work in the workplace traditionally understood, and then work in neighborhoods and communities and civic associations, all the work that we do to keep our schools going and keep our neighborhoods going

Darrell Bock  You got me sweating. I was gonna say, yeah.

Greg Forster  Most human life is working. If you take out the hours we spend sleeping most of what you got left is working. So if our faith is not informing what we're doing when we're working, then as Mark Green has put it very succinctly, “Christianity becomes a leisure time activity,” because it's what you're doing when you're not it's something you squeeze in when you're not working.
**Darrell Bock**  
Around your work, yeah.

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**Greg Forster**  
So yeah, if our faith is not put into action through our work, then Christianity becomes a leisure time activity. I love that phrase. I use that wherever I go. And I think Christianity cannot be what it claims to be if it's a leisure time activity.

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**Darrell Bock**  
Yes. Well, the seminary and the Kern Family Foundation have partnered together to produce some podcasts related to this topic. We're doing special chapels related to the topic as well. In fact our first one will be done later today, and it will have been posted on our website long before this appears. And we also are doing an annual conference that is hopefully going to do well enough that we can think about moving it around the country. And our goal is to encourage people to think about how they work.

You all have produced a document called Theology that Works. And it's kind of an overview in multiple parts of various themes. And our podcasts are gonna work through gradually, slowly, almost contemplatively this document. And it opens like this. This will help people understand kind of what we're talking about. It starts off by saying, &quot;Today millions of church goers are Christians only for a few hours a week. Christianity is a leisure time activity for them rather than a complete way of life. The withering of discipleship is one of the gravest threats facing the church in our time.

"The main cause to the problem is that churches have disconnected discipleship from everyday life. Too often pastors talk about our walk with God and stewardship almost exclusively in terms of formally religious activities like worship, small group attendance, bible study, evangelism and giving. As crucial as these activities are for every Christian, they will never take up more than a tiny percentage of life for those who are not full-time religious professionals.

"We urgently need to recover the calling to whole life discipleship. The largest portion of our life, our work in the home and in our jobs, is excluded from our concept of discipleship and stewardship. Most churches have nothing spiritually powerful to offer for the activities that define our daily lives other than the other six days of the week. This leaves us preaching of faith that is not relevant to the totality of people's lives. And it also risks the rise of a legalism in which discipleship is equated with religious works."
I think that says it very, very nicely. That there's almost a secular sacred divide between the workplace and the way people think about it. And the way we think about a religious activity in our church attendance. And this schizophrenia - if I can say it that way - this schizophrenia is not healthy for discipleship.

Tell us what you have found interacting with pastors and with seminaries. You're connected to 16 evangelical seminaries that you currently support these days. And that number is growing. Tell us what you have found about seminary preparation of church leaders in terms of addressing this area and how you're trying to address that problem?

**Greg Forster**

Yes, our concern is that seminary education is doing an excellent job of preparing pastors in some of the areas the traditional areas like theological learning, and all of the things that seminaries specialize in, but that there is a neglect in the seminary of helping pastors understand the lives of people in their work.

**Darrell Bock**

Like most of the people sitting out there in the pew.

**Greg Forster**

That's right. And an interesting reflection of this is not exclusively, but most of the time the seminary professors who get engaged with our program are people who had non-church related jobs at some point in their career and then went back and felt a call to ministry and ultimately became seminary professors. But they have experience in the so called “secular workplace.” And they understand that life. And they when we bring them this connection to work in the economy their response is, "Well, yeah, I know all about how critically important this is to my spiritual life, because I've lived that. And too many of my students are never going to live that. We need to help them understand what it's like to be in the workplace, the non-church workplace."

And so we're helping make those connections. We have everything from curricular integration initiatives where faculty will meet in colloquia or seminars or retreats to talk about what is the relevance of this to my New Testament class, my Old Testament class, my ethics class, my history class, my systematic theology class?
We had a fantastic experience this summer. There's a conference that we sponsor seminary professors to attend called Act in University. And we had over 100 seminary professors from seminaries evangelical seminaries across the country, twenty two evangelical seminaries and 100 professors. We gave them a workshop where we asked them to divide up by discipline. We had a table of New Testament people, a table of Old Testament people, two tables of ethicists, a table of systematic people and we covered every discipline in the seminary. And we invited them to just spend time brainstorming how can you connect the workplace and work in the home and the economy at large and everything else that is in this sphere or domain of life. How can you connect that to your classes?

And they were really engaged. They took fantastic notes. And just - -there was no table in that room where people were not really, really engaged with this. And I sat there just watching the action. And I thought, "This group comes from every point on the evangelical spectrum from Presbyterians to Pentecostals, we had every type of evangelical in the room. And they represent a diversity of regions of the country, ages, races, and they were all engaged in thinking together about how every discipline in the seminary could make this connection to work.

And I just thought this is a fantastic, exciting thing. It's really demonstrating, I think, the crying need for this. That this is a missing piece that the training of pastors has not incorporated and needs to incorporate. And we also, in addition to the curriculum sponsor, extracurricular activities, lots of chapel talks, after a sort of evening lectures, lunch, lunch discussion groups, student reading groups and a wide variety of extracurriculars and then there are institutional partnerships where seminaries will work together with other types of institutions whether that's denominational bodies or business ministries or publishers or a lot of local churches.

So the big question we're wrestling with in our network now is what does it look like in a church when that church has really embraced a mission to integrate faith with work and the economy? What does that look like? There are a few churches you can point to where people have been on top of this. Tom Nelson is one of those but not a lot of them.
So seminaries are in many cases engaging with local churches, because they have alumni, have churches and working with pastors who share this sort of insight that this needs to be done to figure out, because largely we don't have a lot of models. So we don't know what it looks like when a church does this. It's really a voyage of discovery for us, kind of entrepreneurial the way our benefactors when entrepreneurial in creating their business. We're being entrepreneurial in that way.

_Darrell Bock_

So you started excuse me, but you started to do this in the seminaries and to figure out ways to get seminaries to train in this area and my understanding now is you're finding that although that's a very important piece, that's not the only way to kind of get the message out. And so I understand there's a development in the philosophy of approach of not only dealing with the classroom in the seminary curriculum, which is where you're focus has been. But really trying to get the message and the emphasis out interestingly enough in the marketplace, which is actually what you're talking about.

And talk about some of the initiatives that are taking place in that direction and where you're going in terms of your use of media and that kind of thing.

_Greg Forster_

Yeah, our focus is our primary focus is still pastors. We've been working in seminaries largely. Our foundation has a ten year record of working of supporting seminaries even though the program on work and economics is a little newer. Seminaries are kind of our traditional long term home.

But the focus of our seminary support has always been training pastors. And so we're now engaged in a number of activities that reach out to pastors who are already in churches as opposed to just working with training future seminarians.

_Darrell Bock_

Right, because they're not all at seminaries.
"Greg Forster" Yeah, yeah, I know. We are trying to be good stewards of our benefactors’ resources and get the maximum impact from them. So several initiatives are at work there to reach pastors in the field. One we are reaching out to pastors who got their degrees through a scholarship program that we've had to see if they're interested in making this work in economics connection. And a number of them are, so we're kind of drawing them together into a network of pastors, which is called the Kern pastors network. So those who got their scholarships through our who got their degrees through our scholarship program can get engaged with that program.

We've also made a couple of grants to major evangelical media organizations like Christianity Today and Right Now Media. Those are brand new. We just made the grants. And the initiatives there are going to be developing some video products and other media written and visual media products to help tell the stories of Christians in their workplaces who are integrating their faith with their work. And to get those out into the ministry world where pastors can be equipped with that to kind of demonstrate here's what it looks like when people put their faith to work.

"Darrell Bock" Well, that's great. And that's an important development it seems to me to get the message to those who are already pastoring in the field. We've kind of framed what the Kern Family Foundation does. Let's talk a little bit about the message in some senses that it has. And in this document Theology that Works, you all have talked about the value of work from a theological perspective. And you've got a nice list of things here that connect to biblical themes.

And again this is not always the greatest way to use video. I'm going to read, because it's just such a nice list. It says, "Work is the subject of tremendous theological and pastoral importance," and I think that's actually one of the important things to realize is that stewardship or oikonomia is actually woven through the scripture in a variety of places.

“'It's a mode of participation in God's creative and redemptive activities. It was given to us to manifest the image of God exercising the stewardship and responsibility he made us for, this is Genesis 2:15. And imitating his attributes, John 5:17. It puts to use the talents God gives us. It has how we serve our neighbors in our everyday activities. It's one of the main ways we reflect the character of Christ, Mark 10:42 45. It carries out the cultural mandate developing the potential for creation.”
You know one of the foundations for this of course is Genesis 1 and 2. We're created to be regents alongside God who are responsible for managing and stewarding the creation and that takes work and labor. Of course since the fall it requires much more work and much more labor, but that's an important grounding.

“It manifests the restorative aspect of Jesus' work applied to us through the Spirit. It obeys God's direct commands, Exodus 29 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10. It's one of the core elements of discipleship and spiritual formation. And it certainly is the drive powering human civilization.”

You know one of the first podcasts we did was with Andy Crouch of Christianity Today. And we were talking about culture and how culture works. And he talked about sometimes we don't think about culture broadly enough. That we think of culture as primarily ideology. But really culture is it is the way it shapes us in terms of how we live and how we engage in life. And work certainly is a major component of that. And one of the points that you make in this piece that I think is so valuable that I'd like for you to elaborate on is that when most people think about work they say, "Work equals money."

Yeah, you're cringing.

**Greg Forster**  Yeah, yeah.

**Darrell Bock**  And the point that you're making is no, work doesn't equal money. Money is a byproduct of work. What work is really about is about value and service and contribution. That's actually the point Andy Crouch was making. That when we do our work well in the culture we contribute to the culture. We serve others. We make life more effective for others.

So let's talk about that a little bit.

**Greg Forster**  Yeah, I'd say the deep sort of underpinning thought here that you were getting at when you were talking about Andy saying we have too narrow a view of culture. That's absolutely right. I actually in that Theology that Works document often use the word ‘civilization’ rather than ‘culture’.
They are really kind of synonymous. The difference is when you say culture people think of art or ideology. When you say civilization people realize that it means everything that's going on including businesses and community activities. It's the whole package of social activity. That's all culture. His last book Culture Making really stresses that we make culture is something we make, human activity makes.

Now how does this apply to our work? Well, we have to understand work as a cultural activity. We have to understand that the economy is a cultural system. So when people think work is about getting money, it's a materialistic view of work. Essentially it focuses on the tangible at the expense of the intangible. And to have a Christian view of human activity we have to understand that the intangible, the spiritual is just as real as the material.

Now it's important not to start thinking that the material is unreal or evil. It's not. But we have to integrate the spiritual with the material. And we have to understand the spiritual reality of everything that we do. The spiritual reality of work is that it serves human needs and creates value for other people.

So if I'm if my job is to work in a factory where I pull a lever and that's my job to pull the lever on this machine at the right time, and that is actually not too far off from a lot of people's jobs.

Darrell Bock Right.

Greg Forster If we don't help people to see the spiritual nature of that act, the tendency is for them to simply think this lever makes a paycheck, right? I sit here and I pull the lever and the lever makes paychecks. We want people to ask, "What does this lever do?" Because if they're not asking that, you can see how they're going to be in trouble in all kinds of ways.

Darrell Bock Yeah.

Greg Forster They're essentially trapped and dependent on this system of being paid to pull a lever. They live in a very small world where they don't see the reality of what's going on.
Now let's say for a moment that the lever makes a widget that goes into the breaking system of a car, right? So we want people to think through, "Okay what I'm doing is making safer cars, and because the cars are safer, customers are willing to pay more for them and that's why I get paid to do this, because the car company can charge a slightly higher price for the car. That's why they give me the money to do this." But once we see that whole system we can see, “Oh the biggest significance of what I'm doing is making the world a better place by making cars safer.”

The paycheck is a byproduct as you said of making cars safer. Now we don't want to say paychecks are unimportant, because supporting your household is biblically a fairly important imperative.

*Darrell Bock*  
That's right.

*Greg Forster*  
However while supporting your household is important and again we get that integration of the material with the spiritual. While supporting your household is important, you want to support your household by doing good honest work that makes the world a better place.

And if we get people focused on that, “How do I support my household by doing good honest works that makes the world a better place?” all the pieces fit together very nicely and people can build a life that's meaningful and satisfies not only their material needs, but their spiritual needs, which are deeper and which the church is supposed to be especially concerned about.

*Darrell Bock*  
Yeah, I think the big problem here is that if work is simply seen as the paycheck, then the person has huge chunks of their lives that don't connect. And I go to my job to do my job, so I can have a check to do the things I really want to do.

*Greg Forster*  
The dualism.

*Darrell Bock*  
That's right.

*Greg Forster*  
The dualism, yeah.
Darrell Bock

And that dualism means that in one sense that even though I'm at work, I've checked out of life while I'm at work. I'm just gonna go through the motions and do my thing, and then I'm really gonna pick up my life once I've punched clock and I walk away. And that seems to me to be that's taking a large portion of your life and making the time that you spend at work significantly irrelevant.

And I do think it's fair to say, because I've sat in a lot of churches and you don't hear messages about this at all. In fact when we did the podcast with Andy Crouch on culture making, he made this point. That he actually tracked the messages that he was listening to over a couple of year’s period. And he said when work came up it came up as it wasn't the point.

Greg Forster

Yeah.

Darrell Bock

And often the illustrations were negative. And so all you were doing is reinforcing this idea of when you go to work, you're doing something that really isn't related in central to your life. It's disconnected. And we're reinforcing that in the churches.

Greg Forster

And I think it also this negative view that causes people to disconnect when they're at work also changes the way people live the rest of their lives as well, because people have a deep hunger for meaning and a deep hunger to find satisfaction in something.

Now as Christians we know how why we were made that way, because we have a hunger for God. And a hunger for living lives that are meaningful in God's world.

Now if people take satisfaction in serving others, then they can be finding that meaning and that satisfaction that they were made for all day long in their work. If we disconnect work from that search for meaning, that hunger for meaning, then in that little portion of life that's left when we're not working they're going to be seeking meaning in all kinds of things. The satisfaction of their desires and appetites, and it's all gonna be about finding meaning by consuming and satisfying myself, gratifying my desires.
Darrell Bock

So what you're suggesting is that if you don't have a theology of work that's positive in some ways, actually what you're doing is not only are you not only you're risking turning yourself inward, turning yourself into being self-focused in a way that doesn't lead to service and contributing to humanity and when you leave work--A lot of people, they go to work. They wear themselves out in this disconnected state. They come home and they say, "I just want to park." And they aren't thinking about contributing at their work. They're just doing their job. And they really aren't thinking about contributing once they leave their work either.

Greg Forster

Yeah, and this is why the concept of stewardship is so important. Stewardship is now a word that we use to refer to giving money to the church and coming and showing up to do church activities and that kind of thing. Historically the Christian view of the human person is to be human is to be a steward of God's world. And stewardship is a concept that allows us to hold all these pieces together.

I go to work, because I'm a steward of my work. I'm a steward of the world in my work. I'm making the world a better place. And when I come home, I'm a steward in that time as well. I have to use that time at home or in my leisure to be a good steward. It creates a holistic understanding of the purpose of human life to be a steward for God, creates a holistic understanding what have we're supposed to be as human beings that allows us to integrate these pieces instead of having that divide that becomes destructive in both worlds.