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Vocation Is Mission:
VOCATION AS A CLASSROOM FOR
SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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Spring Series
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The following is transcribed from Part 2 of the spring “Vocation Is Mission” series of lecture delivered by Rev. Bill Haley in the Rivendell School Chapel, Arlington, Virginia, on Wednesday, May 8, 2013.

Here’s a question. Worst job. What was your worst job or at least what do you remember as being a really bad job? I’ll start. King Kone in high school. It was an ice cream shop that opened up right across the street from my high school so one of my earliest jobs like the real job where I got a real paycheck with taxes taken out, was at King Kone. That was just a really hard, not very great job. Combination of the job that it was, how people tend to treat ice cream people especially when they’re little high schoolers behind the counter, and just a boss who was really intense. And a struggling business and a boss who was really intense with a struggling business who tended to think it was the employees fault that the business was struggling. That was one bad job. The other one was so bad I lasted a day– I broke my ankle and had signed up to do landscaping all summer long but because I had broke my ankle I couldn’t so I went telemarketing for a day. Uh. For Olen Mills Photography. Selling photo packages over the phone! I just realized I just don’t like getting rejected that much. I will say, the redemptive side of the story is I’ve always sought to be kind when I’ve got a telemarketing call. So those are my worst jobs. What about yours?

(Others shared their experience)

Well, those are some of our worst jobs I’m sure. I’m sure we’ve all had others that we could talk about. Not all jobs, of course, are rough like that. Those sorts of jobs present one set of challenges and jobs that can be great can present another set of challenges. I was in conversation a few weeks ago with a guy who works in Manhattan and he works for a very socially responsible startup toy company. It’s a great job! He works really hard. But his challenge, in his words, was that basically when he goes into work, he works so hard that he finds it very, very difficult AT ALL to create any space for God or remember God at all; that really his day with the Lord, as it were, ends at 7:30 AM and picks back up in the evening because he’s working so hard. Another guy I was talking to recently, he’s here in Northern VA, he is an urban planner by background because he wanted to make cities that work. And turns out that his degree is being used in a certain sort of way. He’s helping with the construction of this light rail going to Dulles. So there’s a lot of urban planning that goes into that, right? But his experience is that all of a sudden he finds that he went into urban planning but actually because of his task, he finds himself in front of a computer almost all day as opposed to actually out and about doing urban planning. He’s found it very difficult to know why in the world has God brought me here after all this study and all this work. So bad jobs have their very obvious challenges of what do we do with God in those. But even good jobs have challenges too. I think that whatever our workplace is, many people, many of us experience our workplace, whether paid or unpaid, the thing we spend most of our time doing on a given day, we can find it as that place being a barrier to God, a place we’re not so how He shows up or how we show up to him.

What this talk is tonight is hoping to talk about how, what feels to many of can be a barrier to God, how it can actually be an 8-lane highway to God, or a bridge to God. Our workplace opposed to being a distraction to my walk with God actually being essential to my walk with God. My workplace moving from being a hindrance to my growth or something that merely reminds me of how yet to being matured I am – moving from that to actually being a driver in our spiritual growth. So the workplace as school for spiritual formation is what we’re talking about tonight. I hope that for all of us, this is sort of a redemptive way of looking at what we do, or at least the context and in the places where we are doing what we’re doing.

Let me pray for us. God, thank you very much for this chance tonight to consider this very important place that you have made and that we occupy, that is the place of our labor, the place of our work. Would you please send your Holy Spirit to help us not only to understand but also to be able to take into our hearts so that tomorrow when we go back into that place, we will go into it differently, expectantly, even thankfully. So send your Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to begin with just a bit of cultural context to evangelical culture. In evangelicalism, for many years, the dominant word to describe spiritual development has been discipleship. We've heard the word discipleship often. We disciple people, we get disciplined, we are disciples. And it's a good word. It's a strong word. It implies being a disciple to Jesus, learning from Jesus, following Jesus, and trying to be like Jesus. And the gospels portray vivid examples of 12 men trying to be disciples while they're learning about discipleship. Discipleship is summed up in the phrase, "Follow me." But in the last 10 or 20 years or so, in the evangelical world which has been so strong on discipleship, the language has shifted a little bit. Now a common word you that hear when you're talking about spiritual development, a common phrase you hear is spiritual formation. In some settings, you don't even hear as much about discipleship, you hear a lot more about spiritual formation. It's taken on greater prominence and, I think, greater understanding as well. And in some ways, the interesting thing about this shift is that it follows the pattern of the New Testament. Interestingly, the word disciple or discipleship doesn't even appear after the gospels. After the Holy Spirit comes, new language emerges and is employed to describe the ultimate goal of spiritual development. So the epistle writers especially Paul, all of them do this but especially Paul, speak about being conformed to the image of Christ. Or being transformed or growing from one stage to the next or a process of being changed. And it's in this context, it's with this language, that the metaphor of human physical development or the human life cycle becomes a consistent theme, a dominant image even, when it talks about spiritual development.

So this language for example, Romans 8:29, "For those whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Not simply predestined to be followers of his Son, much more to be conformed to the image of the Son. 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all with unveiled face, beholding the Glory of the Lord, are being transformed." Changed, in the same image, from one degree of glory to another.

My wife Tara has had 4 babies and she had each of those babies naturally. I am quite convinced that no man has ANY understanding of what it's like to give birth to a baby. Is there an amen? And probably, any man who would try to tell you that he is in pain like he's having a baby, is going to get what kind of look from a woman? The same look that Deirdre is giving me right now! There's smile but there's steel; her eyes are thinner or her face is getting redder! What man in his right mind would dare apply the image of childbirth to himself? What in the world would every make a man feel like he was giving birth. Well, we could ask that question of Paul. Because he actually gives us that term to talk about something that he so desires, that he wants. Anyone tell me what it is? Remember what made Paul feel like he was having a baby? Galatians 4: "I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." That sounds like something very different than I am again in the anguish of childbirth until you figure out how to follow Jesus. It's different isn't it? Romans 12:2, "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind." So conforming, transforming, this is the language of spiritual formation. And back to Paul, the reason why Paul is so clear, so consistent, so passionate, so unrelentingly focused on Christ

being formed in his followers, on Christians growing up into maturity, the reason he is so focused on those who would come to believe the reality about Jesus, living into the reality of Jesus living inside of them, is a very simple reason. It's because it's exactly what he experienced, it's what he himself had come to know precisely because he himself had come to experience this reality.

So, it's amazing to me that one of the very first words that the apostle Paul puts down on paper in Galatians 2. So we're looking at about 20 years after he was converted and 20 years after he was converted he starts writing letters. And among his first words were these from Galatians 2:20, this is the reason why he is so passionate about Christ being formed in us, he says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. It's no longer I who live, it's Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I now live by faith in the Son of God who loved and gave himself up for me." How many of us could say with that kind of clarity and confidence? I'm not even alive anymore so has Christ taken up residence in me. So much is my life not my life but merely an extension of Christ. I think this for most of us, this is another universe from our understanding and the experience of our Christian life. Friends, when Christ is fully formed in someone, when it's Jesus fully living inside them, when they are mature, they become powerful people. People who change others simply by being around them. People who love transforming people, people who walk into the room and you feel like the room is different because they're in it. People in whose presence you feel like you're in the presence of God and the reason for that is because well actually, you are in the presence of God. Christ living in someone.

So a dear friend of mine, a dear friend of many of ours, is Rich. He's a lawyer downtown DC. I visited him once in his office and he was talking about the various ways he had tried to be a Christian in that place. Whether it was having a Bible on his desk, or having something that would say to someone who walked into his office this is a person of Christian faith. He talked about how he didn't find that compelling after awhile. He wanted to know what next there was. So we talked about that and I likened it to this. I said, you know Rich, there are two ways of bringing light into this office. One way is to basically have a flashlight in your pocket and pull it out and shine it every now and then when you want to bring light into the office. The other way is to be light and have God live so much in us that we radiate. That's another way of bringing light into an office place.

So as I was walking out of the office, I said goodbye to Rich and a guy, who I also knew, kind of hustled after me and he caught up with me right after I had got into the elevator. And what he said was, he basically made my point. It was actually about Rich. He said, you know you have no idea the difference that Rich makes in this place. It's like Christ himself is working here. Pretty high praise, right? And he went on just to talk about how much Rich's presence had been helpful to him, professionally and as a believer, and how much he had seen Rich become basically a pastoral presence in the lawyers' office by virtue of who he was, by virtue of his character.

Mother Teresa had this affect on people all the time. I have many stories about others that I could share about her impact on their life and many quotes about that, but I've never met a person who didn't encounter her even in the smallest way who really wasn't changed by her. And I frankly wouldn't even tell this story except that it happened to me again not that long ago, I would say 6

weeks ago. I was at a conference in Philadelphia. In a gathering in a room of about 250 people, I was introduced as someone who's life had been touched by Mother Teresa. You know, my story is so small but that was how they mentioned me. So whatever happened with this party and as soon as this guy stopped talking, this guy had made his way all the way across the room to come seek me out and find me and talk to me about Mother Teresa and he wanted to tell me his story. A few years ago, or years ago, he was flying to Calcutta on business and he asked his hosts if he could simply visit the Home for the Dying of Missionaries for Charity. That's all he wanted to do, was go to the Home for the Dying. But to his shock and to his chagrin and also his excitement, his hosts had actually set up a meeting for him with Mother Teresa, one-on-one. That's not what he intended, but that's what happened. And so they met together for only 15 minutes but this guy told me, he said that fifteen minutes absolutely changed my life.

I think of Gordon Cosby, recently deceased and much beloved pastor in Washington, D.C., he was that kind of guy. I don't anybody who spent time with Gordon who still doesn't remember what he said. Amazing. Most people that I've talked to who spent much time with him walked away feeling like they were changed and blessed a lot. I was trying to think about other folks who some of us might know that kind of exude that same sort of presence, we have somebody from the religious world, we have someone from the business world, and I thought of Steve Sckanke who some of us know. Steve who is very professionally accomplished – politics, business- and yet one who kind of exudes the calm presence of God when he's around regardless of what the challenge is. Maybe some of you have had experiences with him that are different than mine, but in my sixteen years of knowing him I've become more and more impressed by him just in the way that he does his work well, but also the way he follows God well and the way he pours into other people well and genuinely the fact that when Steve is around, I feel blessed.

How this happens, how we become like Christ. In order to be people who bring light to a room when they walk into, who bring light into their workplace as opposed to turning it on and turning it off, how we become these sorts of people is called spiritual formation. How we're formed into the image of Christ. And the simplest definition I've come across for this comes from a Methodist, Robert Mohalland who used to teach at Asbury Seminary until he retired in his book *Invitation to a Journey: A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*. And in it, he describes what is now almost a classical definition of this, at least in the evangelical community. And that is "The process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others." If discipleship is summed up in the phrase, "Follow me," from the early Gospels, spiritual formation is summed up in the phrase that comes from the Holy of Holies of the Gospels, John 15. That is, "Abide in me."

So what happens as Christ by the Spirit, by his own Spirit, continues to take up residence in us, and is more fully and more consistently as it were in power. So what happens as we live into and as we experience the promises of the union with Jesus which creates union with the Father by the Holy Spirit that Jesus talked about so consistently and especially near the end of his life. Without unpacking this definition too much, it's encouraging as we immediately recognize that from this definition of spiritual formation that it is a process. That is, spiritual formation happens over time. Somehow over the long course of our lives, God's action, His action, our willingness, our circumstances, and our response to circumstances and the power of the Holy Spirit weave

together and we're changed. We become more and more like Jesus over time. And not only does spiritual formation require time, it also requires a context.

So this past weekend out at our place in the country, we had some folks out and we put some plants into the ground. In fact, we worked with the soil to prepare the soil to put the plants into the ground. These plants needed a context for growth. Spiritual formation requires context within which it can happen. Thankfully, one of the major contexts where our spiritual formation takes place is in the workplace. It is the place that we get up and go to day after day after day after day. And that's why I want to talk about the workplace as a school for spiritual formation, what we can learn in our workplace that helps us become more and more like Jesus. But is there anything that anyone wants to say at this point? We're kind of at a natural breaking point and then I'll go through some of these things and then I'll talk some more.

(Questions & Comments from the Audience)

Let me dive into how the workplace can be a classroom for spiritual formation by starting with two terms that I just HATE. It's probably the right word – two terms that I hate. One is the “ministry” as in I'm being in the ministry it's a term that I hear often and I cringe every time. As in so, Bill, when did you get called to “the ministry.” Or we talk about people who go into full-time Christian work as having a ministry. So that's one term that really just makes my skin crawl. And sometimes I respond with more sanctity than others. It depends on the person I'm talking to, how much I think they can take, it depends on how good or bad of a day I've had. Second term that I hate, again that makes my skin crawl, is the clergy versus the laypeople. I just never understood how being referred to as a layperson could make anybody feel good. Does it make anybody feel good?

There's a way even in the Roman Catholic tradition that the notion of clergy versus laypeople obscures a profound truth that is profoundly Biblical which is the priesthood of all believers. I think many people use that terminology and by virtue using it, it immediately sets up a hierarchy of worth, doesn't it? A worth of person and also a worth of job. And it introduces this false dichotomy and a hierarchy between people that is just profoundly unhelpful. And that's true across denomination, it's true across Christian traditions. Even a tradition like the Crostic tradition that does a pretty good job of emphasizing the priesthood of all believers doesn't it engender most of its members walking around feeling like they're priests. That is to say, walking around feeling like they, as well as every other believer, is charged with the task of taking what God has given, of thanking him for it, and consecrating into His service for the good of the world and the glory of God. That's what a priest does.

I remember hearing Alexander Schmemmann reflect on why priests wore clerical collars. Alexander Schememann would say, to remind everybody else of what their fundamental vocation is. That every human being is made to take what God has given, thank Him for it, consecrate it for His use, and use it for the good of the world and the glory of God. That's what humans do. And so, we can be grateful then for Martin Luther who said,

“Priests and bishops are supposed to employ God's Word and the sacraments. That is their work and office...Each shoemaker, smith, farmer and the like has his own office and trade, but

nevertheless all are equally consecrated priests and bishops. And each with his office or work is to provide aid and service to the others."

That's profound, isn't it? We're all priests but we have different tasks, different functions, different ways that we get at our priesthood. If in fact we are all priests, it says something about then the context of our priesthood which for most people is NOT going to be in church. But for most people, the context of their priesthood is going to be in either the home, or the workplace, or, if we understand what the home actually is, the domestic workplace.

It's with that in mind that I've become really encouraged by a Catholic Archbishop, Francis Xavier Van Thuan. He was a bishop in the 1970-80s. In 1975, he was chosen as the Archbishop of Vietnam. And shortly thereafter, it was a bad time to be a fairly religious character in Saigon with the Battle of Communism raging. So a couple months after he was put into office, he was actually kidnapped and put into jail, tossed into solitary confinement for 9 years, and he spent another 6 years just in jail so 15 years total. While he was in solitary, his desire to pastor his flock still burned deeply within him, so he would write little notes to his people, to his sheep as it were, on the outside of the prison. And these little notes would be smuggled out, they would be hand-copied and they would be passed around the city. And this is one of them. It says:

Saints do not do anything extraordinary, they simply carry out their ordinary activities...The worker will become a saint in the workplace, the soldier will become a saint in the army, the patient will become a saint in the hospital, the student will become a saint through studies, the priest will become a saint through his ministry as a priest, and a public servant will become a saint in the government office. Every step on the road to holiness is a step of sacrifice in the performance of one's mission in life.

That's a completely different cast on what the workplace is: It's the school of our sanctification, it's the school of our becoming a saint. And I love that he puts in here this long line of occupations, several of which are vocations. The worker; the soldier; the patient – someone in a hospital bed; a student; In the middle, on par with all the others a priest; and a public servant. Isn't that just a great list and a great way to make a list? These are some of the places where it's made me ask the question, well how? How does one become a saint in their workplace? How – if we spend so much time in our workplace, how is it not lost in God's economy as it relates to our own formation? Because it better be a place for our spiritual formation, precisely because we spend so much time there. I know many, many, many people, and I'm sure you do to, that feel like, basically, what they do from 7:30-5:30 is in God's economy a waste for the world and a waste for their own lives and nothing reminds them of how miserable they are. Have you ever had that experience or know people who feel that way? Like I just cannot think that what I am doing here has any purpose, all it's doing is making me a worse person.

So the question, How can the workplace be a place where we are trained and formed to become like Christ? So let's just look at these; there are seven of them. I've given a list, each one of them I'm actually going to give you a word that goes along with each one to help you remember it if you would like to.

The very first one, not surprisingly, is the word love. The workplace can be our school of spiritual formation when there we learn to love. We do talk about vocation a lot as we should and one of the messages that I always want interject into that conversation precisely because I want to be reminded of it myself, is that the deepest vocation that comes to us all is the vocation to love. Mother Teresa said it as simply as anybody. She summed up the logic: “If we’ve been created in the image of God, then we’ve been created to love because God is love.” This seems like such a simple, obvious place to begin and we’re like, ok, move on because I get this one. Of course we get this one! It makes a lot of sense. But I think it’s safe to say that more than anything else that we do on earth, when through Christ we love like Christ, that that’s when we live into our design as human desire, that that’s when we live into our nature, our destiny, and we fulfill our deepest calling - Our deepest calling to be those who image God, the God who is love, when we love through Christ, like Christ, we’re doing what we were made to do. So this thing about learning love is no small thing. It just happens that our workplace often throws us the hardest possible people to love on a regular basis. You are there with them not because you want to be with them, but because you are both working in the same office. And as much as you would like to not be around them, as much as it is great sometimes to not be around them when you’re not around them, say on weekends, that person there who’s hard to love can actually be the God is offering us in order to learn love. Does that make sense?

I remember one of my workplaces with a person who caused perpetual challenges to me and to one of my co-workers. I work in a church. And finally we both got sick of hearing ourselves talk about this and, frankly, were convicted by the Holy Spirit that we needed to stop. And we needed to do two things: we needed to pray for this person every day and commit to pray for this person every day which we did and that we needed to figure out what would love do here? We did that, you know, and made a commitment that we’re not going to talk about this. How have you been doing about praying about this? What opportunity have you had recently to consciously choose love in this person’s direction – that became the context of our conversation. And it was good. If spiritual formation is the process of becoming like Christ, and if in order to become like Christ we must become more loving, then we can bet that any challenge to our becoming more loving is actually an opportunity for our own spiritual formation. Wouldn’t that change how you walk into your office?

This is a choice that we can make. Hard. But you remember Francis Van Thuan in prison, writing on little scraps of paper, notes? Early on in his experience he wrote, “I decided then and there that my captivity would not be merely a time of resignation, but a turning point. I decided I would not wait, I would live the present moment and fill it with love. No, I will not spend time waiting; I will live the present moment and fill it with love.” And that’s what he did. In that moment, his vocation was to be in jail. God’s will for him in that moment was, he was in jail, and he decided he would not waste it but he would use it as an opportunity for the fulfillment of his vocation in that moment of his life to be the place he would learn love. Turned out early in his captivity, his captors would rotate the guards, as you would do, you would rotate, but then they stop rotating and basically just assigned him his own set of guards because so many guards were becoming believers because of his witness to them and because of his love to them. They finally just gave him a Christian set of guards so that he couldn’t convert more. That’s a powerful story.

So love. Workplace as school for spiritual formation is where we can learn to love. In fact, I would say the workplace is our graduate school for spiritual formation in this regard.

Second word – Consecration: to work until the Lord. A couple of years ago, we did a *Vocation is Mission* lecture and I took one of our times and I went through the NT and I tried to find every time the word work is used and explore what did it say? And this one really surprised me because we’ve often heard, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than men.” That’s common to us. What’s not perhaps as common to us: this was actually written to slaves. That’s the context of those words and I will guarantee that none of us here have work contexts nearly as difficult as any slaves. So when Paul was writing this to people who are in that situation, it says something about how he expects that we can do our work even under terrible circumstances, even in something as awful as slavery. This passage is not being used to justify slavery, but rather it’s to help people who are not going to be out of that situation in the near term figure out, how do I do this? When it’s not going to change, what do I do? So Colossians 3:22-24, “Slaves, in all things, obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord, rather than for men. Knowing that from the Lord, you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” Then Paul goes on to talk about what’s going to happen to slave owners. So another way our workplace can be a school of our own spiritual formation, of our own becoming like Christ, is for us to do our work for God more than for anybody else. And thus, to do it with the best that we can do it, realizing it’s not about filling a quota or making a boss happy or looking good in front of board, it’s fundamentally about doing good work for God’s sake. We take that and we consecrate it and say God this is my best work and I’m giving it to you for your service, it’s you who I’m doing this project for. Dorothy Sayers in her wonderful book “Why Work” talks about this value of excellence. The the shear value of simple excellence in our work –

The only Christian work is good work done well. Let the Church see to it that the workers are Christian people and do their work well, as to God: then all the work will be Christian work, whether it is church embroidery, or sewage farming”

Another phrase that I picked up almost 40 years later I’ve come to hate, though I’ve never realized it, I’ve been increasingly discontent with this phrase – and that phrase is Christian music. Is a crappy song that says I love you Jesus a “Christian song?” I don’t know. Dorothy Sayers would say no! And she would say that a song done with excellence is a Christian song. Dorothy Sayers a little bit more:

...The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly—but what use is all that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hands that made Heaven and earth.”

So this is saying, our excellence and our product matters as a consecrated offering to God. And even in some of the worst work environments, still we can find profound joy in simply doing our best for God's sake, not simply our boss' sake. Does that make sense?

Related to that is the third one: Work is our worship. We're all familiar with Brother Lawrence, saintly Brother Lawrence, in his romantic little kitchen, peeling potatoes with a song in his heart, exalting Lord Christ as his Savior, who gave him such joy in peeling potatoes. This is from the "Practice in the Presence of God." "Practice in the Presence of God" is not unlike "My Utmost for his Highest." Fantastic books that have warped millions of people early in their faith such that they abandon them because they couldn't figure out how to make them work, only to come back to them in their later Christian years after they've learned a thing or two about submission and death of self and finally that's where this stuff makes sense. Anybody else have that experience?

So Brother Lawrence in our romantic view of him: there he is peeling potatoes for the glory of God and that that's just the way he was! Well, no it actually wasn't just the way he was. He was in a religious order in France 1642 and at the monastery from his earliest time, he spent most of his time in the kitchen and initially he hated it, could not stand it. In fact, for the first 10 years he hated it. First ten. They chaffed his situation and this is what he said, this is his words, "I must tell you though that during the first ten years I endured great suffering." That's how he described his work and his workplace. And though his first decade as a monk was full of anguish, one day he experienced a profound peace that never diminished. He says, "I suddenly found myself changed and my soul, which up to then was always to serve, a profound interior peace." And from this day on, from when he became initially aware of the unusually intense presence of God with him, it became a practice for him where he cultivated an awareness of God's presence and no longer did he dread his work in the kitchen, but now he could for the first time feel as if he were as close to God as he was when he was at the altar precisely because he was where God's presence was. And then he goes on to say, basically, it doesn't matter where you are – you can always worship in your work because God is always with you at your work.

He goes on to say, "let us think often that our only business in this life is to please God and doing our common business (his language for the workplace) without any view to pleasing people but purely for the love of God. We ought not to grow tired of doing little things for the love of God who regards, not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed." That is one stiff message in Washington. I'll read it again. "We ought not to grow tired of doing little things for the love of God who regards, not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed." That's so refreshing, isn't it? In Mother Teresa's words, there IS no greater calling. There are no small acts only great acts with great love, I think it is. Right? Everything can be our worship.

So we discipline ourselves then to do our best both as a consecration and as worship. So now Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God."

The fourth thing is submission. Our workplace teaches us about submission. It helps form us because we learn submission. That is that we receive the day's work as God's will for us on that

given day. Might not be so tomorrow – don’t know! I might get fired today. I might quit today. I might get killed today. I might be sick tomorrow. But to receive the day’s work as God’s will for us that day and thus feel defined in it. This insight comes from Elisabeth Elliot. Her first husband was Jim Elliot, the famous missionary. Her second husband also died young. Third husband, I think they lived long and happily together. Elisabeth Elliot had known a lot of suffering, she was of New England stock meaning she didn’t dress up her words very much. She tended to speak plainly. Those who weren’t accustomed to hearing her thought maybe she spoke harshly. But beneath that rough New England exterior, who had lived a lot of life and saw how things actually are, she could communicate bruskiy. And she told a story once at my seminary that I was privileged to hear, where she said, talked about this young woman who came up to her at a missions conference. And this young college student came up to her and said, Miss Elliot, what is God’s will for my life? How can I know God’s will for my life? Elisabeth Elliot looked back at her and said, well, what are you doing now? And the girl said, well I’m a student. And she just said God’s will for you is to study. That was it. But that’s helpful, isn’t it? You know what, I actually don’t have to be too concerned about out there, because I know what I’m to do today and what I’m to do today is what’s in front of me to the best that I can as consecration, as an act of worship and learn love, submit it to God in the place he has me on this day.

Now, we’ll come back to talk later about how to move. But our workplace as a school for spiritual formation can teach us submission to the will of God for our life on any given day.

Another one that I’d like to talk about is trust. That is – the workplace can become a place we become more like Christ because there we can learn to rely on God for wisdom in the details of our work. This is just such a wonderful passage in Luke 5:1-11. So Jesus hasn’t spoken much to the disciples yet – he’s about to call them. We find here that probably Jesus’ first words to Peter were probably something like, Can I use your boat?

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

So Jesus said to Peter, “Can I use one of your boats?” No – that’s not really in here, I made that part up. He probably says something to them to ask them for the boats, right?

Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land.

And then he does that, he teaches and he comes back in. “And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, y“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And now at this point, they were washing their nets, right, they had already been out fishing all night. Peter says, we’ve been out fishing all night, we know, we’re fishermen Jesus, you’re not a fisherman. But they do that and then they get this huge abundance of fish. I just love the notion that Jesus knows the ins and outs of our work far better than we can because he knows all things. Here you have a carpenter showing the fishermen how to fish. It’s like, you know, my life would probably be easier if I were more willing to invite God into the details of my work – to trust Him for the details of my labor and to bring him into that. That is to rely on him more and more in the details of what I’m doing. Some people do that well, I could do it better. But I just think that relying on

God for wisdom in the details of work is something we can learn, something we can experience. A huge danger in DC, in the Washington area, is to think well, I'm smart enough to figure this out. Well, you probably are! Which limits us from being able to actually be given whatever God wants to give us. We might have a great idea, God might have a better one if we learn to trust him in the details.

Sixth one is the workplace is a classroom for spiritual formation because it is a place we learn to pray. Prayer the venue for our relationship with God and when everything is an opportunity to pray, then anything is an opportunity to be with God. Wonderful Catholic prayers – they have a series of prayers, different versions, different verbs, different people, different settings and so on – but basically the larger title of the “Morning Offering”. I'm sure there are many other versions of this, but here's one from that tradition:

A prayer you say in the morning: Eternal Father, I offer you everything I do this day – my work, my prayers, my ministry efforts, my time with my family and my friends, my hours of relaxation difficulties, my problems. My stresses, which I shall try to bear with patience. Join these my gifts to the unique offering which Jesus Christ, your Son, renews today. I pray that, vivified made anew by the Holy Spirit, and united to Jesus, that my life this day would be of service to you and to your children and would help consecrate the world to you. Amen.

That is powerful. I pray that my work today would help consecrate the world to You. That's great. What a wonderful way to approach our work and prayer.

So that's one way that our work can help us pray. Another way is to turn our tasks into prayer. I have a lovely book here by Gunilla Norris called “Being Home: Discovering the Spiritual in the Everyday.” So basically she goes through her day and writes a prayer for the things that she finds herself doing that day. Being home, so if one's workplace is the home, this is helpful. Or do you ever find yourself doing laundry? How many of you ever hang up clothes to dry? So she's reflecting on hanging out the clothes to dry. Listen to this turning of a task into a prayer: “As I hang up these clothes, let me think about what it means to be on the line. It may not be about courage or bravery or intention, it may not be about social action, good works, or justice. It may be something before that, something much earlier, something more simple and humbling. It may be just about clinging for dear life. I pin these wet clothes to the line, the image of joining, of clinging to something, if I really know that you are my lifeline, then to cling to you in my primary business,” she says to God. “There's so many spiritual traps if I'm the one who puts me on the line. Instead let me simpler, let me just cling to you.” My guess is that day when she was hanging the clothes on the line, she didn't experience a very mundane task as drudgery.

The other day at our garden retreat, we talked about the various tasks that we would be doing and how it was that we could turn them into prayers. And so when the young man who was a McLean Fellow last year, Matt, when he volunteered for compost duty, I was kind of excited to see how he turned that into his prayer. At the end of the day's reflection, he did talk about how the work was hard and how it took work to turn up the compost and to put it into a bucket and yet knowing that from all that stuff would come good fruit, that it would nourish the soil. So his prayers became all about God, what's the hard work I need to do in my life to turn my own compost so that it can be made into something that will be good soil for my own heart or good

soil for the world. Do you know what word he used to talk about his work composting that day? Transformational! He took an hour or two of throwing a combination of leaves and hay and cow manure and who knows what else and called it a transformational experience because of the way it let him encounter God.

So in a more office like setting, I remember at The Falls Church when I used to do copies. Whenever you're trying to do this it's like Lord Jesus, make me a copy of yourself. Copy yourself, copy yourself in me, make me like You, make me holy, make me loving. And those would become my prayers at the copier. Not all the time! But when I was on my game as it were, you know, when I was aware that right there that day at The Falls Church was where I was to be being made into the image of Christ and as much as I am not good at admin, it made that admin stuff sane for me. I will also tell you that about some of my current work right now. One of the things that I do is leading, starting and leading a nonprofit – I cannot stand the forms! The 1023 form for IRS status, the taxes with the accountants, but I'll tell you what – when I consider that to do my work well is an opportunity for me to worship God, it's a big deal. When I am somehow able to pray, Dear Lord please help me be as concerned about sin in my life as I am about whether or not these numbers add up right now. It just changes it. So, workplace is school for spiritual formation because we can learn to pray.

And lastly, discernment. That is, paying attention to our discontents and letting our discontents be a goad to discernment. So you might think that what I'm doing here is trying to make you happy about your difficult job. Make sense? Helping you be content in what is really quite a sucky situation. And you know, why don't you just deal with it? I'm just trying to paper over with spiritual-isms how bad it actually is. Maybe that's what I'm doing tonight, you know, we pastors are actually good at that, at not taking stock at how rough it can actually be for somebody – putting pat spiritual answers on them. I assure you that I'm not because sometimes our workplace can be so difficult that it actually becomes a goad for discernment – that is to say, it becomes the impotence where we finally listen to God. And I'm sad to say, that of course that I'm most interested in hearing from God when my life is harder rather than when it is better. I think that's probably the way it is for most of us. That is, we create the space to listen mostly out of pain. C.S. Lewis of course, "Pain is God's megaphone" so maybe it's designed that way. But the point is that our workplace can be a place of spiritual formation because it can take us into discernment to pay attention to the will of God for us.

Wonderful little story from this book by Kim Boiken; she was practicing silence, she was trying to get thoughts out of her brain so she could be with God. She's writing and reflecting on the thoughts that come and come and come. She says,

"Some thoughts are more insistent than others. Sometimes you notice a thought and you let it go and it pops right up again and it keeps popping up over and over and over. It maybe that this thought needs some special attention after the period of silence is over, maybe something you need to take care of. There was a long stretch when in my silence, I kept having thoughts about how much I hated my job and I finally realized that I didn't need to just keep noticing and letting go of these thoughts. I needed to get a new job."

Make sense? So I find that the challenges we face in our work, the difficulties we face in our work, can actually be like redeemed by God to be his gentle way to pulling us back into discernment, which is to say to listen to Him in order to decide right from wrong, good from bad, what do I do, what do I not do. That place becomes a very, very fertile field for our relationship with God and the more we lean into that, the more we become like His son by virtue of what He does in us when we are with Him.

So, seven ways for how the workplace can be a school for spiritual formation.