

Work and Purpose

God has refined my faith more in my work than any other life arena. I've had my fair share of faith-filled moments and God-influenced refinement in every part of my life, but the workplace is where God has shaped my faith most profoundly.

I surrendered to Jesus early in my marriage, shortly after my first son was born, while starting a new business. There was a lot happening at the time. The business was where God's presence and influence was most magnified for me. Our new company started off great, and we had two solid years of positive growth and success. Unfortunately, we encountered major obstacles getting into the third year that wrecked much of what I had put my trust in. For starters, I always believed hard work was rewarded with success. Well, I had never worked harder or longer until that time, putting in the hours and making the sacrifices only to find our business on the verge of bankruptcy. Working harder wasn't helping.

I believed if I stayed organized and proactive, I could control the situation. That didn't happen. I was organized and paid great attention to the details, but over and over again things would happen that I couldn't anticipate. I was clearly not in control.

During that season of work, I realized the power of surrender. There was no question in my mind I could not manage myself through those sleep-deprived months of wondering when the next

shoe would drop and the business would close. Even when I prayed and asked God to fix things, nothing changed. To borrow one of those traditional Christian sayings, I had to “let go and let God.” It was a season of turning over control of every area of my life to the one who is in control anyway.

Eventually we sold our business, avoiding personal bankruptcy and the unpleasant circumstances that come with it. The downside was that I was 35 years old, unemployed, a new dad, and wondering what in the world I was going to do for a job. Then one day, the phone rang, and it was a friend of mine named Steve. He was running a business in Seattle, and asked if my business partner and I would come help him with a project. That project turned into another project, which turned into another, and opened the door to starting a consulting business.

The consulting stage was a huge shift from the retail business. We didn't have employees or any real estate to support. This business was a new way to make a living. During this season, I realized the power of God's provision. I had read my Bible, and knew that Philippians 4:19 said, “*And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus,*” but I never knew what that really meant. In this case, it literally turned out to be *all* my needs. In the six years we operated that business, I never once made a formal sales call. I had plenty of conversations with follow-up requests or putting together a proposal, but I never had to find new business. It seemed as though every time projects were winding down (meaning finances were winding down), the phone would ring with a new opportunity. Over and over again, we were provided for. Unlike the previous stage of surrender in which I learned I didn't have control over anything, this stage taught me that God does control everything. He demonstrated his ability to provide, and the effect was a powerful impact on my faith.

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After several years of working as a consultant, I was offered an opportunity with Mattress Firm. I accepted a position in Houston, and our family packed up and relocated from Atlanta. I had never expected to land in Houston, but I believe it was where God wanted us. It was a big change going from being my own boss to working for a corporation, but the challenge was exciting. I had opportunities to share my faith more openly. In some cases, sharing looked like a prayer of encouragement or words of support to coworkers. In other cases, a few coworkers surrendered their lives to Jesus.

God moved me out of my comfort zone and prompted me to be bold. I remember the influence of 2 Timothy 1:7 on my heart: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” A spirit of power. A spirit of love. A spirit of self-discipline. These traits rolled around in my head and my heart and proved to be very convicting. This season of work solidified my commitment to share my faith openly and let the name of Jesus be known every chance I got. Over time, I had many chances to share, and I am so grateful for the work I was given to do.

In early 2017, after I had transitioned to a new role in the company, we reorganized some of the reporting structure. Unfortunately, the set up didn't work well for me, and I found myself at a fork in the road. Although the company presented me with a very good opportunity to move into a different role, I realized it was time to move on to a new season of work. Once again, God was using this new season to shape a part of my faith that had never been very strong. He was teaching me how to wait for him.

As new work opportunities came along, I committed first to pray and seek God's plan for my life. In many cases, God was quiet, and I waited for a clearer understanding of what to do next. Waiting for anything is hard, but waiting for God is a real challenge for me. God often works in years and decades while I think in terms of minutes, hours, or maybe a day or two. It's scary. But when I read

my Bible and consider the work God has done in my life, I rest in his promises that those who wait for him will gain new strength. I like the way that sounds.

There was a time in my life when I looked to my work for significance and meaning. I had a tremendous amount of identity wrapped up in what I did and who I was at work. Fortunately, after I surrendered my life to Jesus, God reshaped my perspective on the purpose of work. Work became less about who I was, and more about what God wanted me to do at work. I had a chance to represent Jesus in a way that could open opportunities to share the message of salvation with the people around me. My identity became who I was as an adopted child of God, and work became a place to share that truth. Every person who surrenders to Jesus has an opportunity to do the same thing!

The Bible says that every follower of Jesus is a priest and part of a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). My favorite definition of a priest came from my friend Winston: “a person who talks to God about people and talks to people about God.” That is who we are in every arena of life, including our workplace. We were each created for a purpose, and work provides a powerful environment for living out that purpose—reflecting characteristics of the God who created us.