

MATT RUSTEN



# Pastoring *for* Monday

HELP YOUR  
CONGREGATION  
INTEGRATE  
FAITH AND WORK



Taken from *Pastoring for Monday* by Matt Rusten

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# Why Pastoring for Monday Matters



I'VE NEVER MET A PASTOR who didn't want to make more and better disciples of Jesus. To nurture a growing community that was learning to follow Christ in every moment and every place, worshiping God and loving their neighbor in increasing measure. But in the early years of my pastoral leadership, I noticed that there was a common struggle that many Christ-followers experienced for which I didn't have many good answers.

The struggle I'm referring to goes by many names. The Sunday-to-Monday gap. The challenge of an integrated life. The worship and work chasm. It's the struggle to meaningfully and consistently experience life as a follower of Jesus in the place where people spend most of their time—in their daily labors, whether paid or unpaid.

Can a middle manager in a company with six thousand employees carry a sense of joining in God's mission for the world? Can a person working in HVAC sales embrace a sense of calling from God, first to know him and be known by him, and then to be sent to represent and honor

him in their sales role? Can a software engineer working on code for an app keep in step with the Spirit? Can a real estate developer negotiating a land sale grow in their love and devotion to God, not in spite of their job but through it and because of it?

These questions, for me, are deeply personal before they are pastoral or professional. These questions make me think about my dad, who passed away a few years ago.

### **My Father's Story**

Kenneth Rusten spent forty years as a public school administrator, always in towns of less than one thousand people. The schools were small by any measure, and some grades would have less than ten students in a classroom. These are class sizes that are so small that even if you were valedictorian, you might wonder if you could claim you were in the top 10 percent of your class on the college application. Even so, my school left an enduring impact, serving as a vital lifeline for every family in our small town.

A few years before my dad passed away, I had a chance to ask him about his work. His eyes lit up and his voice became animated as he explained what made his job meaningful. Dad started talking about his early years, as he worked long hours, flying down to the Twin Cities on numerous occasions for several court cases before finally winning approval to build a new high school in his small town.

As I asked my dad about the significance of the new Grygla High School, he quickly recounted the exact percentage of students going directly into the workplace after graduation: 90 percent. In other words, the high school, not a college, would need to be the center of vocational training for emerging adults. To provide students with legitimate opportunities to work and earn a wage after graduation, under my dad's leadership, the school prioritized five areas of vocational training, which at the age of eighty-two (almost fifty years after his work there), he rattled off without hesitation: metals, carpentry, auto tech, business, and home foods.



Then, he listed the companies where the high school graduates found jobs: Marvin Windows, Polaris, Arctic Cat. It was evident that my dad found delight in working to help rural kids in northern Minnesota find stable jobs after high school, so they might experience economic dignity. And over time, the small school helped provide an economic lift to the entire region.

He did this work with scant resources and meager budgets, shrewdly saving every possible dime for future needs. In a twist of irony, soon after my dad retired from his final school assignment, a new gas pipeline and a large flour mill were built on the outskirts of town. Both brought a significant amount of tax revenue to the school district—the school would no longer need to pinch pennies on such a tight budget.

Even so, years later, a local farmer was talking to my dad and commented, “Ken, it seemed like when you worked at the school, we always had money.” Actually, it was quite the opposite. But my dad was a wise manager with the little he had been given. He loved others by finding a way to save money for larger projects that could help students flourish long after they graduated.

And then, every single Sunday, we’d show up at church. My memory is not exhaustive, and I don’t mean to be uncharitable, but I don’t think there was a single moment when my dad ever heard his pastor or a leader in the church say, “Ken, thank you for serving as a high school superintendent. God has you exactly where he wants you. The school where you work is your parish, and the teachers and students you serve are your flock.<sup>1</sup> I know your work isn’t easy. How are you doing? How can we as a church be praying for you in your ministry?”

There are many other ways they could have communicated the same message, but they never came. And as far as I know, they never came for any of the other members of our congregation, whose days were filled with tilling fields and fixing engines and caring for children.

In their silence, it seems as if they didn’t care. Maybe God didn’t care. As my dad woke up at six every morning and sometimes worked late into the evening so that a tiny school in a rural community could provide



small-town kids an opportunity to learn and eventually find jobs in the economy, was God up in heaven yawning with boredom, or tapping his watch, impatiently waiting for my dad to do something more important with his life? The biblical witness, not to mention the example of the church throughout history, leads me to say I cannot believe it.

Perhaps I'm being unfair—after all, growing up, I suspect my pastors were doing the best they knew how to do. So I'll state it positively: I think it would have made a huge difference in my dad's life if he had heard some version of those words of recognition, blessing, and encouragement. I'm guessing they would have been words of life. I'm guessing they would have helped to enliven his faith and engage him more deeply in the church.

And if this had been done consistently, I imagine that the church of my youth would have increased my dad's propensity to expect God's activity at school board meetings and in hallway conversations with parents at music concerts. Perhaps my dad would have been reminded as a direct result of his church attendance to lean on God's sustaining grace and the Spirit's empowerment as he engaged in difficult conversations with disruptive students, or to listen and discern God's direction as he prepared board reports and negotiated salary contracts with teachers.

My dad didn't lack purpose in his work. But his church never helped him see that his work was also connected to God's purposes in the world. He never heard that his place of work was a place of spiritual formation and ministry. In reflecting on my dad's life and in listening to the stories of so many church members across the country, I have come to see that my dad wasn't alone. Call it *vocational unawareness*. Mechanics, insurance brokers, middle managers, caregivers, and so many others have never heard directly from their church how God sees, values, and stands ready to empower his people amid the stresses, joys, and necessity of work.

But this reality was only one version of the Sunday-to-Monday gap. I began to see other iterations as I stepped into the world of pastoral ministry. I would regularly hear God's people wrestling with a variety of experiences, all unique, and yet all united in how they confirmed the challenge of living an integrated life.



## Vocational Restlessness

I'll never forget a conversation I had with a congregation member while pastoring at a church in the Midwest. I was recruiting a team for a summer mission trip to a Latin American country, where we would be working with a local partner to serve at-risk children in their neighborhood. We interviewed all interested participants from the church to learn about why they were hoping to join us.

“So Greg, why are you interested in coming on the trip?” I asked. I wasn't expecting to hear anything too novel. Most people expressed some version of God's heart for the world and the bigness of God's kingdom, and wanting to see God at work in a different place. But I was taken aback by Greg's succinct answer. “*I want to go on this trip because I don't get to do what you get to do.*”

I knew exactly what he meant and it broke my heart. These were not words of flattery, as if he wanted my job. They were not words of levity, as if he were trying to make me laugh. They were words of longing—for a more meaningful experience, even if just for a week, than his daily life could give.

In Greg's professional life, he worked as an executive for a national clothing brand. He managed a large team with a large budget. His department was focused on growing the school uniform portion of the business, and they were stuck in a period of stagnation. As he endured late hours at the office and difficult conversations with employees and the management team, he was tired and frustrated.

On the surface, Greg was struggling with a stressful season of work, of the sort that would be challenging for any person. But below the surface, Greg struggled with something much deeper. A nagging suspicion drained him of emotional energy. He didn't seem to believe God cared about his work—much less that his role leading a team selling school uniforms had anything to do with God's kingdom.

This version of the Sunday-to-Monday gap is a *struggle with vocational restlessness*.



Greg was not necessarily expressing a desire to leave his work situation but to search for purpose and spiritual impact outside it. He deeply wanted his life to count for Christ. He believed the gospel and was seeking to live a life dependent on God's grace. And yet he was spiritually restless at his current post.

A one-week mission trip to a Latin American country would serve to give Greg a taste of God-honoring work and purpose. In his mind, a mission trip to a foreign country represented *real* ministry, the activity God might be pleased with. To be sure, God cared deeply about the work going on to serve children in the Latin American context. But for Greg, managing a large group of people at a national clothing brand didn't have much to do with following Jesus. At the very least, it didn't seem like a meaningful contribution to living in God's kingdom.

As Greg's pastor, I longed for something different. It wasn't that I was disappointed with him for his answer or that I didn't sympathize with his difficult circumstances at work. But I wondered what formational influences had led Greg to experience such a chasm of experiencing God's presence and believing God delighted in him as a child of God during church-sponsored activities, versus the perceived absence of God's delight and a lack of sensing that he was joining God's mission in the world through his daily life at work.

After all, our church was a Bible-believing, gospel-centered, Christ-exalting church. We emphasized relying on grace and trusting Christ and walking with the Spirit. We encouraged spiritual disciplines and preached the Word of God. We weren't a perfect church, but by many measures we were a healthy church. But Greg's experience left me with a haunting question: How many people in the congregation felt as he did?

As a church leader, I didn't assume our church or any other church he had attended was entirely to blame. But I also didn't assume we were off the hook either. Had we missed opportunities to help our entire congregation embrace a sense of mission, not merely in their church coordinated activities but especially where they showed up every day as salt and light—in their work in the city, whether paid or unpaid?



I came to realize that Greg's experience was only one iteration of the gap. There were several others.

## Vocational Disillusionment

Elaine loved the church. She was engaged in Bible studies and volunteered on Sundays. In my conversations with her, she had a deep interest in spiritual formation and a curiosity for how biblical principles applied to leadership development. In many ways, she was a model Christian, growing spiritually with a deep commitment to the local church.

During the week, Elaine also held a demanding job as an executive in a large healthcare system. She was good at it. She had a graduate degree from a prestigious university. She led a large team. She was on the fast track to the C-Suite.

But Elaine had a nagging sense that she wanted to make a more direct impact for the kingdom of God in her work—a place where her Christian faith could be expressed openly and often. She prayed about what she should do and landed on an answer—she would quit her current job in healthcare and start a Christian-oriented business. Not only would she hire employees who were fellow Christians, but the products they sold would help Christ-followers to communicate their faith wherever they went.

With hundreds of hours of work and all the grit it takes to start a business, Elaine launched her new brand. Team members were hired. A website was created. Designs were submitted. Marketing ensued. Weeks turned into months. But the idea wasn't catching on. In the first year, sales didn't grow as they would need to in order to sustain the business.

I saw Elaine try to remain resilient, but I also sensed that she was frustrated and maybe a bit embarrassed that things hadn't worked out. As we talked, it was clear that she had grown disillusioned with God's leading. "I really thought God was leading me to do this. If he called me to do it, and I stepped out in faith, why did the business end up failing?"

Elaine's story was multifaceted. It encompassed her understanding of how God leads us and how we hear his voice. It challenged her



theological vision of success and failure. It also was tied up with her sense of which kinds of work please God, and where she could be used for his purposes.

While Elaine's willingness to take an entrepreneurial risk and trust God was admirable, her vocational disillusionment was unsettling to her faith. In God's providence, we often grow spiritually when our faith is disrupted. But watching Elaine walk through this journey, I was again confronted with uncomfortable pastoral questions: Had we been pastorally misleading, always telling stories of how trusting God led to success? Had we adequately provided a much richer and more truthful account of God's presence with us, even when we fail at work? Had the church failed to help Elaine, and those like her, with formational experiences and themes regarding the vocational life?

### **Vocational Woundedness**

If some were vocationally unaware, like my dad, or vocationally restless, like Greg, and others were vocationally disillusioned, like Elaine, still others were vocationally wounded, like Edmund.

As a pastor, I was hearing stories from across the country that were resonant with my local experience. One came from the testimony of Edmund Moy, the director of the US Mint from 2006–2011. A committed follower of Christ, he had seen great success in business throughout his life and was a leader in his local church. But a storm was brewing at the beginning of Moy's appointment. The subprime mortgage crisis would threaten the existence of several banks and prominent financial institutions, and Moy was thrust into a central role of serving the country in the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

That role would require exhausting, long days at the office, seeking solutions that would affect the lives of tens of millions of people who were suffering economic hardship. Needless to say, during that season Moy wasn't leading small groups at his church or volunteering for Sunday school. Because of his absence, the church elders put Moy's membership status on probation—they determined that his dedication



to his work was not fitting for a Christian who was called to put God first. As Moy told his story, I could hear the pain he bore even years after the event.

This might seem like a gross example of ecclesiastical overreach and a giant lesson in missing the point, but as I've talked to workers across the country, I hear echoes of this struggle being expressed.

At times, congregation members carry wounds as their work is overlooked and not counted as a significant place of ministry. I heard one such story from a blue-collar worker I'll call Reggie. As a machinist, he spent a lifetime working on gears and mentoring a younger generation to learn a trade that keeps all kinds of machines that we rely on every day functioning properly. In this blue-collar setting, he had personally mentored many young apprentices, modeling and teaching them the values of God's kingdom.

With tears in his eyes, Reggie told an audience at a gathering, "This is painful to say, but I've lost hope in the church. I've been a part of thirteen different churches, and only one has been interested in my work or affirmed my work as a place of ministry." In Reggie's experience, the church's position was that ordinary working life didn't count for Christ. Ministry was the work of a chosen few who were sold out for Jesus. If he had value at all, it was to write checks for those who were doing the real work of being on mission—people in paid church or missionary roles.

Sometimes the Sunday-to-Monday gap means workers feel their Sunday gathering at church does nothing to affirm or commission them in their daily ministry. This can happen through blatant devaluation of work (as in the case of Edmund), or through consistent silence (as in the case of Reggie).

Taken together, these vocational vignettes do not encompass the breadth of ways people experience the struggle to integrate Sunday worship and Monday work. But in my pastoral work, these vignettes were clues that our discipleship in the church was not consistently comprehensive or durable enough to help people live integrated lives of following Jesus amid the day-to-day realities of work.

## A New Story for Work

God's people need to hear a new story for their work. The story is that the tip of the spear, the daring frontline, the beating heart of God's mission in the world is wherever his people, the church, filled with his Spirit, scatter to represent him and serve others amid their everyday work, whether paid or unpaid. Ordinary work is neither a disruption from what God cares about—the thing that pulls us away from the spiritually important stuff—nor a distraction from the gospel. As Steven Garber has said, “Vocation is integral, not incidental, to the *missio Dei*.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus' call to “go and make disciples” is just as relevant for an individual who goes into a corporate marketing job, or for a carpenter at a job site, as one who goes to Abu Dhabi to plant a church. Some go to Jerusalem and Judea, while others go to the ends of the earth.

## My Pastoral Journey

This message existed below the waterline of my theological convictions for many years—present but not yet visible. I've been in leadership positions in several churches through the years, but my experience at one church in particular deeply shaped my conviction that helping followers of Jesus have confidence that they have been sent into their places of work, paid or unpaid, to experience God and represent him to the world is vitally important.

I joined the staff of Christ Community Church in Kansas City in January of 2009. Led by Senior Pastor Tom Nelson, the church was planted in 1989 and has grown to become a multisite parish model with five campus locations in the Kansas City metro area.

In the early 2000s Tom Nelson made a purposeful, significant shift in the church's ministry priorities. In a display of leadership humility, he confessed to his congregation that he had been spending the *majority* of his time equipping people for a *minority* of their lives, focused on attendance at church programming rather than prioritizing how following Christ would shape the places where people spent most of their time—at work, whether paid or unpaid.<sup>3</sup>



This conviction led to a number of changes in the way the church prioritized vocational discipleship, and it deeply shaped my pastoral paradigm. But what affected me as much or more than the example of my fellow pastors was the collective impact I saw these priorities make on the congregation. Members embraced a sense of calling and purpose in the spaces where they worked each day. It was both consistent and diverse in its expression. I was changed because I saw a vibrant example of the church, being the church, at work.

## **Made to Flourish**

In 2015, I joined the staff of Made to Flourish, founded by Tom Nelson, as its first executive director. Our task from the very beginning has been to come alongside pastors and churches across the country to empower them to integrate faith, work, and economic wisdom for the flourishing of their communities. We long to see the local church form people in the gospel for all of life.

In the time since our founding, I have had the privilege of leading and learning from a growing movement of leaders, whether pastors or deacons or elders or simply engaged members, who both pray for revival and seek to help the whole church live out faith in the context of daily work. They consistently communicate how formation in Christ and life in the Spirit is lived out in faithful, excellent, cruciform-shaped, grace-informed work—in the classroom, boardroom, workshop, and restaurant.

They are living examples that show the Sunday-to-Monday gap doesn't have to be the lived experience of most church members. They are charting a different path, and a growing number of churches across the country are embracing it. In the pages that follow, we'll explore what that can look like, whether you lead or attend a church in Manhattan, New York, or Manhattan, Kansas.

Other books and essays have done a fine job of articulating the biblical story of work, the expansive mission of God, and the wide variety of callings of his people in the world, so I won't be redundant.<sup>4</sup> Instead, I'm



offering something else—reliable models and paradigms on how this might take shape in a local congregation.

It is for this reason that I write this book—to help us reimagine and inhabit a new way for local churches to form Christians who follow, represent, and commune with Christ amid their daily work. What would it look like if it became normative for local churches to know, affirm, equip, and commission congregation members to embrace a sense of calling and mission in their everyday labors? What language would be avoided? What practices would be prioritized?

These questions are all the more urgent because there is another group of people who do not regularly attend worship services at church, and their numbers are growing. I'm talking about *onlookers*—or the group that researchers call the “nones,” people who are religiously unaffiliated or who have left the church and no longer believe the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

Church attendance is no longer the default setting for a majority of Americans, and it hasn't been for some time. This is not breaking news. Researchers like Ryan Burge have noted that something like 40 million American adults have left churches in the past twenty-five years, the fastest pace in any twenty-five-year period in US history.<sup>6</sup> This trend is consistent across every denomination, race, and area of the country. We are not merely living in a post-Christian age, we are living in a pluralistic society.

While this might seem like old news, it prompts an important question. If a growing number of people aren't coming to church, how will they see and experience the gospel put on display? Where will the truth and transforming nature of Christ become plausible? The gospel is embodied and becomes plausible as Christ-followers, as salt and light, serve their neighbors amid their daily work.

Work matters to God—it must matter to his church. If you are a leader in the church, I know you likely believe that, perhaps even deeply. But alongside conviction, we must also adopt concrete, repeated practices that demonstrate our conviction. I don't mean to suggest that pastors need to become experts on the ways modern work is conducted and experienced.



Rather, as shepherds of God's flock, there are meaningful paradigms and practices that we can adopt to help the entire people of God embrace the task of mission in whatever area of work they serve.

And of course, even the best practices are useless without the enlivening Spirit of God. So we pray, may God our Father, by his Spirit, bring to fruition your every good intention to help your congregation live out the gospel in their everyday work. We ask this so that God may be glorified in his people and among the nations. Amen.



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