

EXCERPT



When Work Hurts

Building Resilience When You're Beat Up or Burnt Out

March 11, 2025 | \$18, 208 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1024-2

Meryl Herr (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is the owner of The GoodWorks Group LLC, a consulting firm specializing in educational program planning and evaluation. She previously served as director of research and resources at Fuller Seminary's Max De Pree Center for Leadership, where she conducted research and created resources to help Christian marketplace leaders integrate their faith with their work. Meryl lives with her family near Athens, Georgia.

When Work Disappoints

Disappointment at work is an everyday experience for most of us. It happens when work fails to live up to our hopes or expectations. We don't finish everything on our to-do list. Only one person attends the online event we planned. Customers prefer our competitor's product to ours. Our boss tells us that our report needs another round of revisions. We overcook the chicken—again.

It's all frustrating. But for the most part, we can deal with that level of disappointment. We re-examine our priorities and brush up our time management strategies. We receive the one attendee with hospitality and gratitude and think about how we might better promote the next event. We do some market analysis to re-assess our customers' needs. We dig in and fix the report. We finally buy a new oven.

But sometimes the disappointments are more profound. I think of a 2019 Indeed commercial that depicts a group of professionals standing in a conference room. (You can view the 2019 Indeed commercial at www.popisms.com/TelevisionCommercial/211533/Indeed-Commercial-Promotion-Indeed-US-2019.) At the front of the room, we see Claire, gleaming in expectation as her boss prepares to announce the name of the company's newest vice president. As soon as the "m" sound rolls off her boss's tongue, Claire's face begins to fall. The promotion went to her colleague Michael. We get the sense that she had been passed over before. She's crushed.

In 2022, news outlets began talking about the "Great Resignation" because people in the United States were quitting their jobs in record numbers (Maury Gittleman, "The 'Great Resignation' in Perspective," *Monthly Labor Review*). They quit their jobs during the Great Resignation because work had become a Great Disappointment. The Pew Research Center found that people who quit their jobs during that period tended to do so because of low pay, no opportunities for advancement, and feeling disrespected at work (Kim Parker and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Majority of Workers Who Quit a Job in 2021 Cite Low Pay, No Opportunities for Advancement, Feeling Disrespected" *Pew Research Center*). Patrick quit a job for all three of those reasons.

He was working as an adjunct professor for a small college. From the outset, the pay was terrible. Patrick had dreamed of becoming a professor for years and thought he could tolerate the low pay for a season in exchange for an opportunity to get his foot in the door. At one point, he did the math and figured he could have been making about the same amount working retail. That was rather infuriating since the teaching job required a doctorate; still, he was willing to accept it for a while.

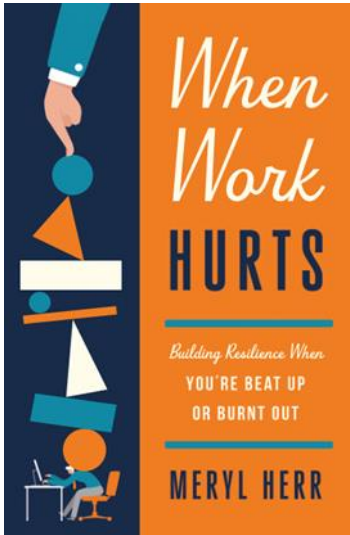
But soon, the possibilities for advancement went from slim to nil. He felt like some people in the university didn't respect him. Others made him feel like he had nothing to contribute to the school beyond the few tasks they had asked him to do. Patrick's disappointment became so profound that it festered into resentment and bitterness. Like a poison, it started seeping into his relationships and his work. Even his students began to pick up on his cynicism. He knew he should quit but needed the money and wanted to hold out hope that it would get better. But it didn't. Things got worse. And he left. To Patrick, it felt like a bad breakup, like waking up to the realization of unrequited love. And it hurt.



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When work wounds us, sometimes it leaves little cracks—cracks small enough that we can mend with patience, time, and care. Other times work smashes us to pieces. When that happens, we can stay on the tear-stained carpet for a while. But even though it feels safer on the floor, where there's no way we can fall any further, we can't live there. Eventually we need to get up and survey the damage.

The Bible offers some insight on how to stand up and examine all the broken pieces in and around us after work demolishes us. There's a place in the Bible where we see God's people leveled, their city reduced to rubble. And there's a man who finds himself left to take in all the destruction. Maybe if we study his response, we can glean some wisdom for what to do when work tears us apart.

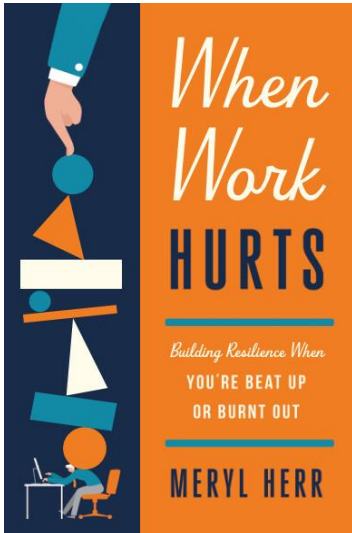
—adapted from Chapter one, “When the Walls Fall Down”



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The Leading Christian Expert on Work Hurt

"In a broken world, we all experience hurt from our work. But there can be times when pain experienced in the workplace is emotionally devastating. In *When Work Hurts*, Herr is an empathetic guide, helping those who have been wounded at work feel seen and heard. Written from her own experience of pain in the workplace, her journey towards experiencing a renewed sense of calling, and grounded in Scripture, Herr gives gentle and wise prompts to begin the healing process, so we might reclaim a sense of hope in God's purposes for our work."

—**Matthew Rusten**, president of Made to Flourish

"The context of work has been a source of personal fulfillment and joy while also so much disillusionment, pain, and heartache in my life. In this powerful book that weaves together personal anecdotes and theological promises, Meryl Herr points us to a hopeful message that transcends our stories of work hurt without trivializing their impact. For those navigating past or present work hurt as they read this, I hope you will be encouraged—as I was—that our stories are located within a larger narrative that is still unfolding, and our co-laboring in stewarding God's creation is not in vain."

—**Mark Muha**, vice president for student development at Biola University

"*When Work Hurts* offers deep insight into the pain and challenges of the workplace, blending personal stories, biblical wisdom, and practical advice. It speaks to those who feel the weight of work hurt, guiding them toward healing and hope through God's redemptive purposes. As a pastor equipping the church for mission in the marketplace, I find this book invaluable. It calls us to face work pain honestly, find resilience, and live as faithful witnesses in our vocations. It is a must-read for anyone seeking to integrate faith and work with purpose and hope."

—**Artie M. Lindsay, Sr.**, pastor of spiritual formation at Tabernacle Community Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

"For too many people, work is more of a Genesis 3 rather than Genesis 1 reality. Meryl Herr knows that personally, and she brings honesty and deep compassion to this important book. Packed with stories of 'work hurt,' this highly accessible volume offers at least three beautiful gifts. First, no one who's dealing with disappointments, oppression, confusion, or toxicity at work will feel alone again after reading it. Second, it gives language to help all of us articulate the many ways work goes sideways—which is necessary if the 'faith and work' movement is to be grounded in reality, not romanticism. Third, and most important, it plumbs the wisdom of the Bible's historical books to aid contemporary Christians in pursuing everyday faithfulness amidst the challenges of the modern workaday world."

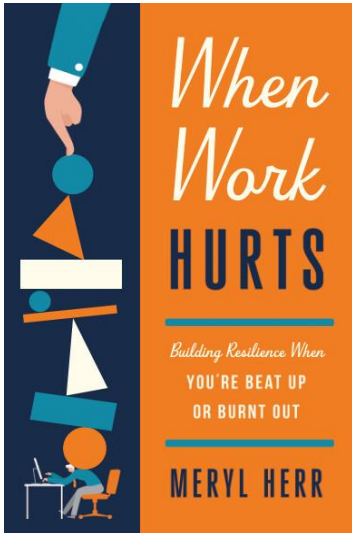
—**Amy L. Sherman**, author of *Agents of Flourishing*



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"When Work Hurts honors sacred places of loss by getting 'eye-level'—gifting us with stories that don't feel preachy or contrived, but honest and real. And then, as if hope were a thing that shows up quietly in the dark, it guides readers stepwise into the wisdom and provision of God's story. This book is a simple and profound gem for the many moments when our lives are not."

—**Jeanette Thomas**, cofounder and facilitator of Brandhearted

"When Work Hurts is a compassionate, insightful guide for Christians navigating the harsh realities of work life. Meryl Herr—the leading Christian expert on this topic today—masterfully blends empathy, social science, biblical wisdom, and her own experience, offering readers faith-grounded tools to process pain and find healing. This is an important book at an important time. Strongly, emphatically recommended!"

—**Bryan Dik**, author of *Redeeming Work* and coauthor of *Make Your Job a Calling*



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