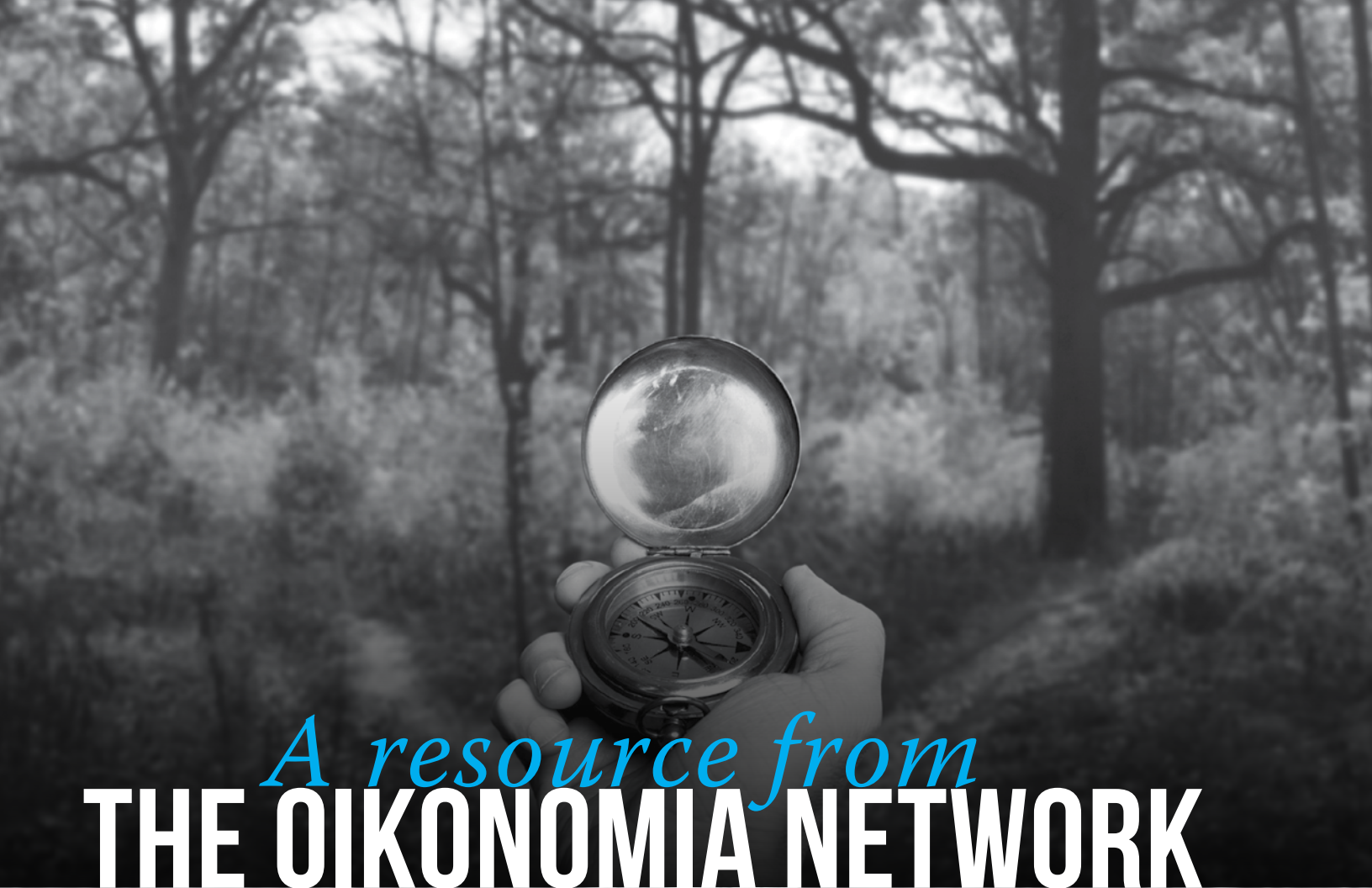


A CHRISTIAN VISION FOR FLOURISHING COMMUNITIES



An initiative of the

OIKONOMIA
NETWORK



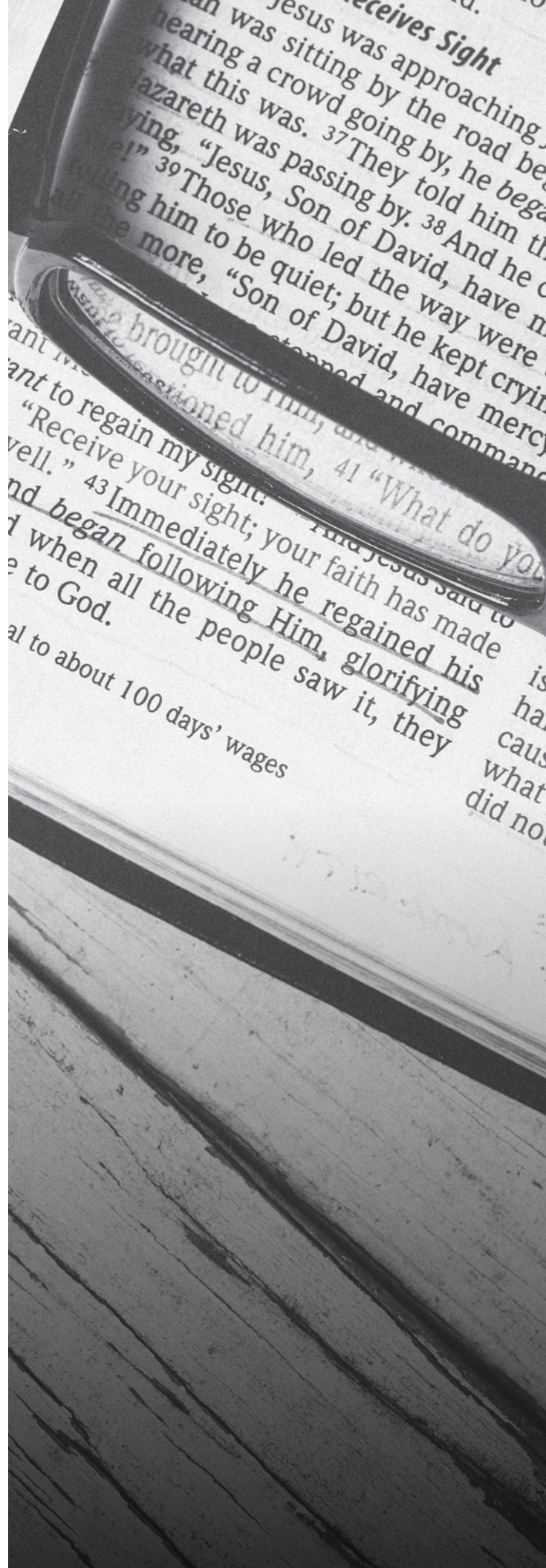
A resource from
THE OIKONOMIA NETWORK

*The Oikonomia Network
is a theological learning
community helping pastors
equip people for whole-life
discipleship, fruitful work
and economic wisdom.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Church and the Economy	6
Basic Facts About Economics	7
The Elements of Economic Wisdom	8
The Central Themes	9
Stewardship and Flourishing	10
Value Creation	11
Productivity and Opportunity	12
Responsible Action	13
Five Pathways to Pastoral Application	14
Pastoral Pathway 1: Theology	17
Pastoral Pathway 2: Pastoral Care	19
Pastoral Pathway 3: Compassion	21
Pastoral Pathway 4: Common Good	23
Pastoral Pathway 5: Youth and Family	25
The 12 Elements of Economic Wisdom	27
Endorsements	28





“Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great?”

God answered Solomon, “Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern my people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like.”

II Chronicles 1:10-12

“Pastors should teach people about work and economics because it’s a theme throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. That’s what I would call the ‘argument from above.’ It’s a mandate of our faith if we want to be orthodox and biblical, no matter what our tradition is.

But the other argument is ‘the argument from below.’ People in the workplace need insight. We’re desperate, really, for ethical insight, managerial insight, economic insight, and the Bible is full of that type of information and insight. I think that out of sympathy and a desire to help our people out in the workplace — and help our country, help our globe, really — we ought to be doing that.”

David Gill
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Oikonomia Network Introductory Video





THE CHURCH AND THE ECONOMY

“IT IS certainly the task of the Christian spokesperson to teach, train, and exemplify both the foundational traits (of the fruit of the Spirit) and the more specific traits required in the economic domain – industriousness, self-control, moderation, and responsibility for oneself and others. That is the responsibility and posture of love. To repeat, we should put to rest once and for all the idea that these traits are ‘private’ and that public economic flourishing is independent of them. Public well-being and prosperity essentially depend upon them, properly understood and implemented.”

*Dallas Willard, University of Southern California
Oikonomia Network 2013 Faculty Retreat*

THE CHURCH IS IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF IT.

The church does not exist for economic purposes, but one of its tasks is to teach us to love our neighbors, which leads us to value and to promote economic flourishing.

THE CHURCH’S PROCLAMATION AND PRACTICE MUST APPLY THE GOSPEL TO ALL OF LIFE.

The church does not exist to build up its own programming and institutions, but to equip all Christians to be disciples and serve their neighbors in everything they do in the community.

THE CHURCH IS EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT IN A DIVERSITY OF GIFTS AND CALLINGS.

Pastors and other religious professionals are unique and indispensable in the life of both the church and the community, yet all Christians are in full-time service to Christ on spiritually equal terms.

THE CHURCH BEARS WITNESS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The church helps the economy flourish when it teaches general moral truths, helps people interpret their lives, cultivates strong character, and manifests the work of the Spirit in the way we participate in the economy.

THE CHURCH CAN BE POLITICAL WITHOUT BEING PARTISAN.

The church must proclaim truth and challenge injustice in all areas of life, including those under the stewardship of civil authorities; but it is not the calling of pastors to take sides with political parties or factions.



BASIC FACTS ABOUT ECONOMICS

"I SERVE you with my talents, and you serve me with your talents. The result is a divine division of labor in which everyone is constantly giving and receiving in a vast interchange, a unity of diverse people in a social order whose substance and energy is love."

Gene Edward Veith
God at Work

THE ECONOMY IS A MORAL SYSTEM.

What kind of economy we have is based on what kind of people we are; in turn, what kind of people we are will be affected by what kind of economy we have.

WORK IS FRUITFUL.

Human work doesn't just move stuff around; when we create value for people, our work is productive, and helps wealth and well-being grow over time.

EXCHANGE IS FRUITFUL.

Work is a social and cultural activity; economic exchange creates value far greater than what individuals can create on their own.

INCENTIVES MATTER.

There is such a thing as human nature, and our behavior responds powerfully to economic incentives even when we don't realize it.

CIVIL JUSTICE MATTERS.

Government helps the economy flourish when it safeguards the rule of law and personal liberties, ensures fair play, and expands opportunity for people to become self-supporting and successful.

The Elements of Economic Wisdom

At the core of the Economic Wisdom Project are the 12 Elements of Economic Wisdom. We have designed them in the form of proverbial declarations, or “wisdom statements.” They are generalizations that are broadly applicable, rather than absolute laws for all cases. Communities rely upon statements of this kind to teach their shared moral wisdom – a practice modeled throughout Scripture, especially in the book of Proverbs. The Elements of Economic Wisdom presented here apply biblical wisdom to the modern economy.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS?

THESE ELEMENTS ARE	THESE ELEMENTS ARE NOT
Proverbial statements	One-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter answers
Generalizations with broad applicability	Applicable to every case without exception
Invitations to wrestle with complex issues	Denying the complexity of the issues
A starting point for dialogue and reflection	A substitute for dialogue and reflection
Grounded in biblical and theological learning	A replacement for biblical and theological learning
Informed by extra-biblical observation, experience, and scholarship	God’s authoritative Word
In organic continuity with historic Christian thought and practice	An uncritical retread of outdated formulas
Addressed to the issues of a particular time and place	Universal guides that will work equally well anywhere, anytime
Moral commitments that transcend political divisions	Involving the church in a partisan agenda
Speaking to a post-Christendom culture	Compromising our commitment to the Bible and the Kingdom



THE CENTRAL THEMES

THE ELEMENTS

CENTRAL THEMES

We were given stewardship over the world so our work would make it flourish for his glory.

STEWARDSHIP AND FLOURISHING

1. We have a stewardship responsibility to flourish in our own lives, to help our neighbors flourish as fellow stewards, and to pass on a flourishing economy to future generations.
2. Economies flourish when people have integrity and trust each other.
3. In general, people flourish when they take responsibility for their own economic success by doing work that serves others and makes the world better.

Through economic exchange, we work together and create value for one another.

VALUE CREATION

4. Real economic success is about how much value you create, not how much money you make.
5. A productive economy comes from the value-creating work of free and virtuous people.
6. Economies generally flourish when policies and practices reward value creation.

Economic systems should be grounded in human dignity and moral character.

PRODUCTIVITY AND OPPORTUNITY

7. Households, businesses, communities, and nations should support themselves by producing more than they consume.
8. A productive economy lifts people out of poverty and generally helps people flourish.
9. The most effective way to turn around poverty, economic distress, and injustice is by expanding opportunity for people to develop and deploy their God-given productive potential in communities of exchange, especially through entrepreneurship.

Economic systems should practice and encourage a hopeful realism.

RESPONSIBLE ACTION

10. Programs aimed at economic problems need a fully rounded understanding of how people flourish.
11. Economic thinking must account for long-term effects and unintended consequences.
12. In general, economies flourish when goodwill is universal and global, but control is local, and personal knowledge guides decisions.



STEWARDSHIP AND FLOURISHING

We were given stewardship over the world so our work would make it flourish for God's glory.

ELEMENTS

1. We have a stewardship responsibility to flourish in our own lives, to help our neighbors flourish as fellow stewards, and to pass on a flourishing economy to future generations.
2. Economies flourish when people have integrity and trust each other.
3. In general, people flourish when they take responsibility for their own economic success by doing work that serves others and makes the world better.

God created human beings to be good stewards of this world. We carry out that stewardship when we do work that helps God's world flourish. In the beginning, God put Adam and Eve in the garden "to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15) and appointed them as stewards over creation (Genesis 1:28). The Fall has infected our work with toil and frustration, but our "to-do list" remains the same: do work that serves others, and cultivate blessings out of the raw materials God provides. This restores God's creation purposes in the world, and provides a foretaste of future glory. As God redeems us, he empowers us to reorient the world toward him. God is a worker (John 5:17) and we were made in his image, so we were made for work. Through the Holy Spirit, God has equipped us for work and called us to it; work takes up most of life because it serves God's purposes. Work is also essential to character and spiritual formation. How we work shapes us, steadily leading us either toward or away from God. The economic institutions that define the cultural meaning of our work provide the essential background for that journey.

Recommended Resources:

- *The Pastor's Guide to Fruitful Work & Economic Wisdom* | Made to Flourish
- *Stewardship Study Bible*
- *A Theology of Work* | Darrell Cosden
- *Work Matters* | Tom Nelson
- *Every Good Endeavor* | Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf
- *Flourishing Churches and Communities* | Charlie Self
- *God at Work* | Gene Edward Veith



VALUE CREATION

Just as God is a unity of diverse persons, we (made in His image) were created to live and act in relationship and community. So if we are made for work, we are made for the economy – the vast web of human relationships in which people exchange their work with one another by buying, selling, hiring, investing, etc. The purpose of work is to serve human needs in response to God’s creative and redemptive activity (Matthew 25:31-46). In economic terms, work that serves human needs creates value (Matthew 25:14-30). God creates from nothing; we (made in his image) use the raw materials God provides to do work that creates value. The three divine persons freely work together to serve one another, yet none of them loses his individual distinctiveness. In a similar way, work draws us into voluntary cooperation with others, creating value for one another in networks of interdependence (I Timothy 5:8, Proverbs 31:31). Through market exchange, we become coworkers with millions of people!

Through economic exchange, we work together and create value for one another.

ELEMENTS

4. Real economic success is about how much value you create, not how much money you make.
5. A productive economy comes from the value-creating work of free and virtuous people.
6. Economies generally flourish when policies and practices reward value creation.

Recommended Resources:

- *Business for the Glory of God* | Wayne Grudem
- *Work: The Meaning of Your Life* | Lester DeKoster
- *Why Business Matters to God* | Jeff Van Duzer
- *Economic Growth* | Edd Noell, Stephen Smith, Bruce Webb
- *The Good of Affluence* | John Schneider
- *Business for the Common Good* | Kenman Wong and Scott Rae
- *How God Makes the World a Better Place* | David Wright



PRODUCTIVITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Economic systems should be grounded in human dignity and moral character.

ELEMENTS

7. Households, businesses, communities, and nations should support themselves by producing more than they consume.
8. A productive economy lifts people out of poverty and generally helps people flourish.
9. The most effective way to turn around poverty, economic distress, and injustice is by expanding opportunity for people to develop and deploy their God-given productive potential in communities of exchange, especially through entrepreneurship.

The economy is a moral system. What kind of economy we have will depend on what kind of people we are; and what kind of people we are is also impacted by what kind of economy we have (Proverbs 28:20). The foundation of a flourishing economy is the work of free and virtuous people. Their virtue moves them to productivity and service to others; because they act freely, their social cooperation enhances their personal dignity rather than diminishing it. The Fall affects this social system at both the individual and structural levels, but the underlying pattern remains. An economy that prioritizes productive service and opportunity will help cultivate love, joy, and contentment (Psalm 112:3-5). An economy that prioritizes short-term gratification will tend to produce shallow, selfish people (Luke 12:15-21).

Recommended Resources:

- *Economic Shalom* | John Bolt
- *Flourishing Faith* | Chad Brand
- *The Mystery of Capital* | Hernando de Soto
- *The Virtues of Capitalism* | Austin Hill and Scott Rae
- *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* | Michael Novak
- *Wealth and Justice* | Peter Wehner and Arthur Brooks
- *The Divine Conspiracy Continued* | Dallas Willard and Gary Black Jr.



RESPONSIBLE ACTION

Christians follow Christ in exercising the offices of prophet, priest, and king. Christ is the fulfillment of all three Old Testament offices, and under his headship the church carries forward all three into the New Testament era. The church is called to action by its prophetic and priestly imperatives; this action is made responsible by its kingly imperative. Prophetically, the church is uniquely shaped by the Word and Spirit, and must proclaim and practice accordingly. This includes witnessing against injustice, and a special care for the poor (Isaiah 58:6). In its priestly role, the church's message of redemption and the Kingdom restore the Christward orientation humans were created for (Jeremiah 29:7, Matthew 28:18-20). One way we work this out in practice is orienting economic activity toward its proper ends. Kingship calls upon the church to promote responsible stewardship within and over the creation order; this means being hopeful, but not indulging in wishful thinking. The church should respect the God-given integrity of natural and social systems (I Peter 2:13-3:7), and be realistic about the Fall (II Corinthians 4:3-4).

Recommended Resources:

- *Tight Fists or Open Hands?* | David Baker
- *Economics in Christian Perspective* | Victor Claar and Robin Klay
- *When Helping Hurts* | Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert
- *The Poverty of Nations* | Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus
- *Toxic Charity* | Robert Lupton
- *The Tragedy of American Compassion* | Marvin Olasky
- *Kingdom Calling* | Amy Sherman

Economic systems should practice and encourage a hopeful realism.

ELEMENTS

10. Programs aimed at economic problems need a fully rounded understanding of how people flourish.
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12. In general, economies flourish when goodwill is universal and global, but control is local, and personal knowledge guides decisions.

5

PATHWAYS
TO PASTORAL
APPLICATION

“CHRIST HIMSELF gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Ephesians 4:11-12

SO WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH PASTORS?

What do pastors have to do with the economy? In Ephesians 4, Paul calls upon the church to be a place where people learn to “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24) in contrast to a world where people “have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality,

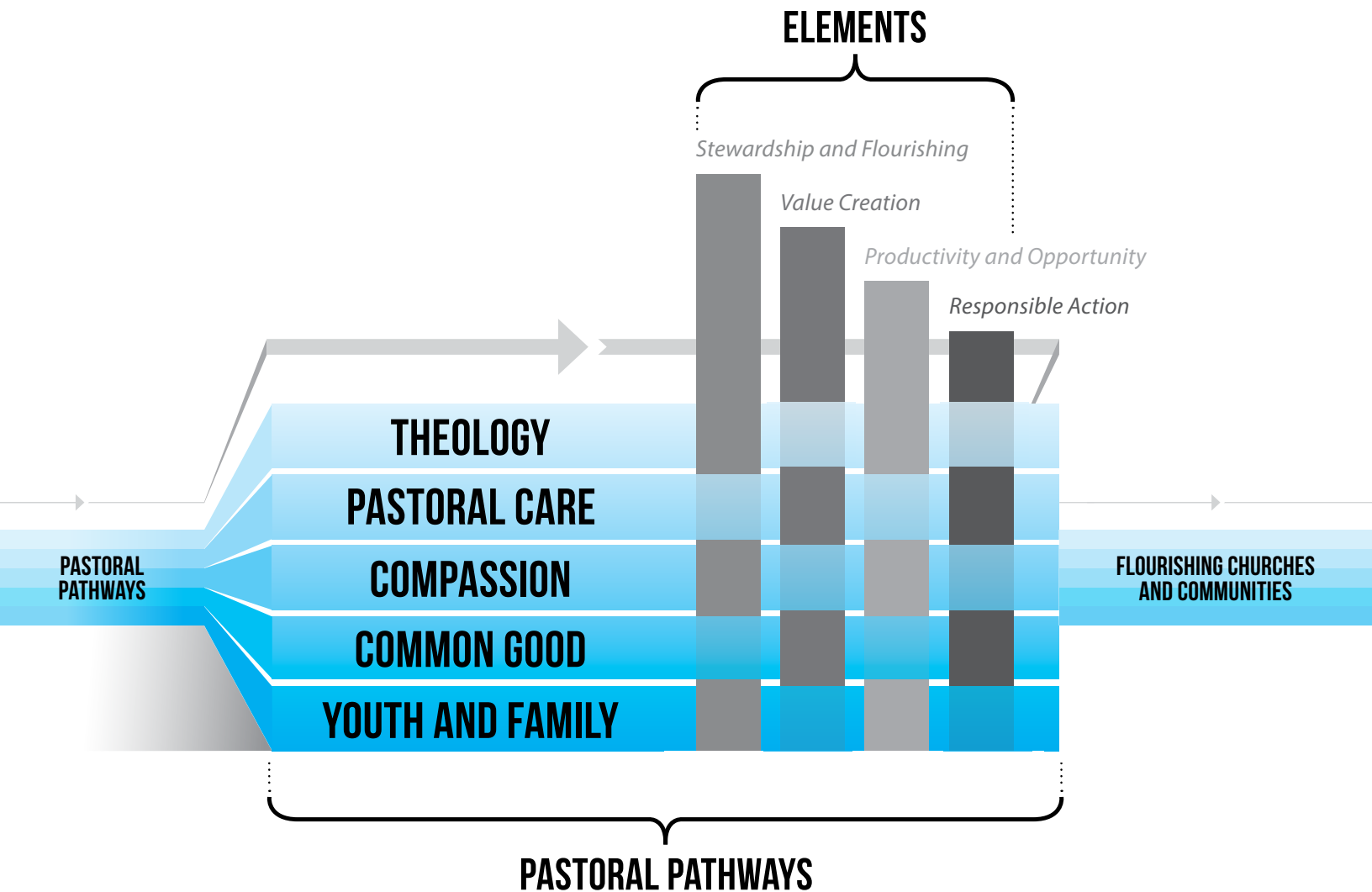
greedy to practice every kind of impurity” (4:19). When he lists some of the key ingredients for living into the likeness of God, he emphasizes that “doing honest work” is how we support our households and provide for human needs more broadly (4:28). And why did God give us the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers? Paul’s answer begins: “To equip his people for works of service” (4:12).



Pastoral Pathways

If we explore the reasons why work is central to the pastoral task of helping people live into “the likeness of God,” we discover that the way pastors describe economic systems is a critical part of that task. This can be explained in four steps. Work is central to the pastoral

task because in the Bible, “the likeness of God” refers primarily to how we behave as responsible agents who can order the raw materials God gives us in creation. We were given stewardship over the world with a mission to make it flourish for God’s glory (**stewardship and flourishing**).



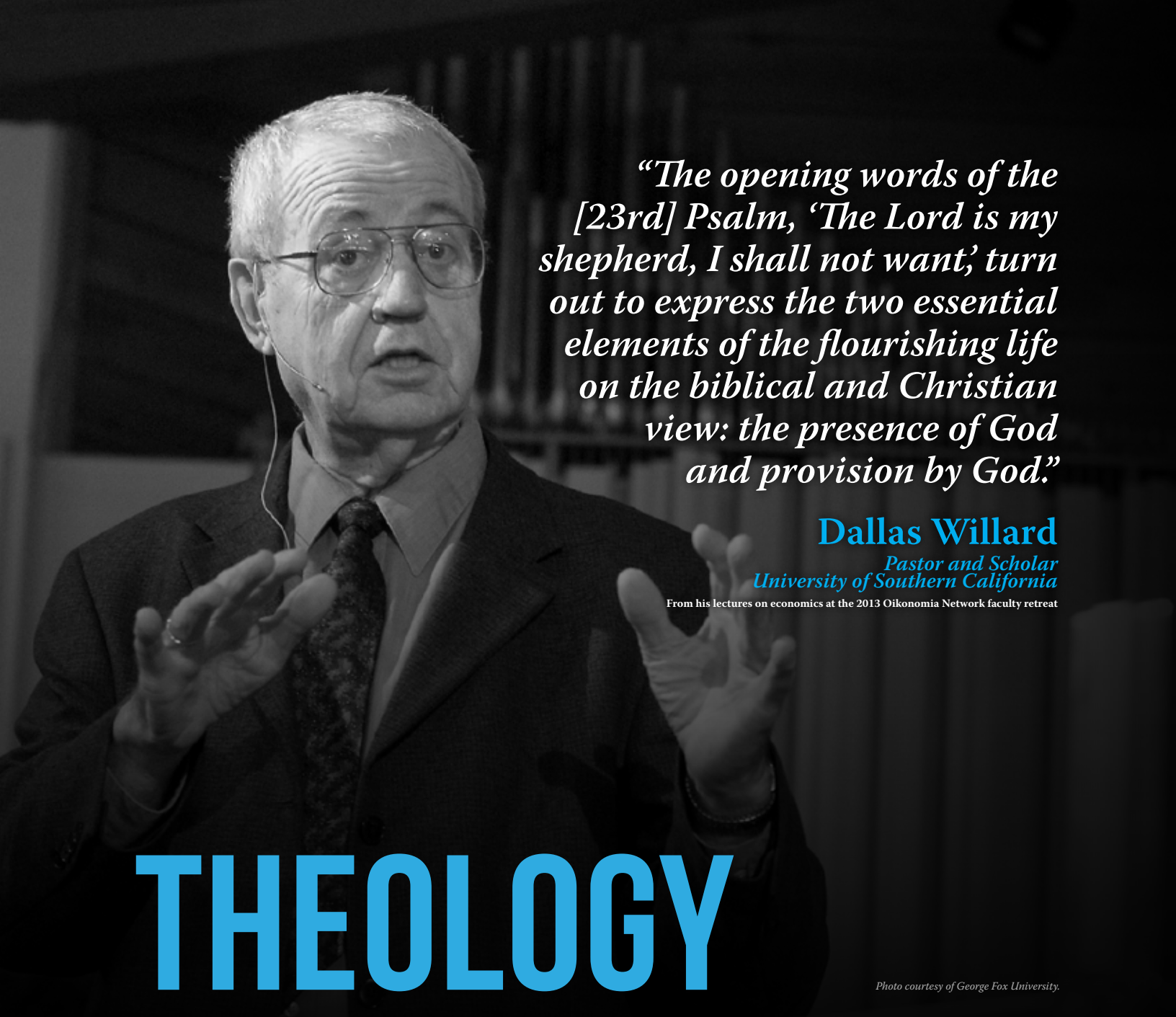
Pastoral Pathways

Through economic exchange – buying, selling, hiring, investing, entrepreneurship, etc. – we work together to create value for one another (**value creation**).

But in the fallen world, greed and sensuality lead people to value material goods more than these relationships of interdependence and mutual service. The economy is described and treated as a machine with levers and buttons that someone can manipulate to give us the material goods we want. People easily lose sight of the need to be earnest and industrious, but still expect to enjoy the benefits of a thriving economy. Unless some social force resists this tendency, the human person is reduced to a mere bundle of selfish desires, dependent upon, and controlled by, those who manipulate the economic machine. Pastors can restore human dignity and cultivate moral character by describing and treating the economy as a moral, relational, and cultural system of human work in which people are responsible to serve one

another voluntarily (**productivity and opportunity**). This, in turn, requires them to call their congregants to a hopeful realism about economic systems (**responsible action**).

In a rough sense, the five types of leaders Paul names in verse 12 might suggest five ways the task of the pastor intersects with economics. The apostles defined the message that pastors are sent to preach, contextualize, and practice (**theology**). As shepherds, pastors carry out the command to “feed my lambs” (John 21:15) (**pastoral care**). The prophetic witness of the church is bound up with its special care for the needy and marginalized (**compassion**). Evangelism rests most centrally on verbal proclamation of the Gospel, but the credibility of the message depends upon the church manifesting the work of the Spirit in how we treat our neighbors and become a positive force in the community (**common good**). And as teachers, pastors are called to join with parents in raising children in the way of the Lord (**youth and family**).

A black and white photograph of Dallas Willard, an older man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, speaking into a microphone. He has his hands raised in a gesture of emphasis. The background is dark and out of focus.

“The opening words of the [23rd] Psalm, ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,’ turn out to express the two essential elements of the flourishing life on the biblical and Christian view: the presence of God and provision by God.”

Dallas Willard

*Pastor and Scholar
University of Southern California*

From his lectures on economics at the 2013 Oikonomia Network faculty retreat

THEOLOGY

Photo courtesy of George Fox University.

01

Pastoral Pathways

In January 2013, Dallas Willard told the faculty retreat of the Oikonomia Network that it was imperative for pastors and theological educators to lead the way in helping people understand the economy:

“Flourishing without God and flourishing with God...yield two very different versions of success against which human arrangements and activities, including those which make up our economy, might be evaluated. One might think that Christian spokespersons, out of mere love of God and neighbor, should be deeply involved in understanding these two versions of human

flourishing, and in communicating with their world about the wisdom or foolishness of various economic plans and practices, or of socially prevailing attitudes and institutions...Surely that is the case. That was the enduring stance of the biblical prophet.”

Every major element of Christian theology has profound application to work and the economy. In the Trinity, three persons work together – by choice, out of loving goodwill, rather than out of coercion or utilitarian necessity. Yet the persons do not lose their individual identity or integrity. In a similar way, we are made in the image of this triune God to work together freely, out of loving goodwill. The harmony we create through the cooperation of our work is the ground of community and civilization. Yet this weaving together of the social fabric ought to be free and virtuous, so no individual loses their identity or integrity.


The incarnation is also reflected in work and the economy. Human ideology tends toward dualisms – to separate history from eternity, matter from meaning, etc. – designed to keep God and his traumatic holiness safely contained in rigid boxes. The Old Testament always challenged these dualisms, but in the New Testament this challenge is radically sharpened by the

01

incarnation. God not only became a man, but orders his relationship to the human race and the entire created order through actions he accomplished within time and space. Today, the old dualisms are returning: between work and faith, between piety and productivity, between profit and goodwill. God has once again been confined to a box – the box of the church building and missions and charitable giving. The incarnation demands that God’s kingdom be lived out in all of life.

Creation in the image of God means we were created to cultivate and care for the world. Because of the Fall, toil and frustration are a crucible of character. The Holy Spirit equips us and empowers us; Pentecost (Acts 2) reverses the limitations imposed at Babel (Genesis 11) upon the potential of human work. And when Christians do good work and promote economic flourishing, they provide a foretaste of the greater feast to come.

Theologians before the modern era applied biblical teaching to the working lives and economic structures of their times. If we care about passing on the teachings of the Bible, and especially if we care about the cause of justice in the world, reconnecting theology to work and the economy is an urgent need.



“Waking up on Monday with purpose is so important for discipleship, for personal thriving, and for community flourishing.”

Charlie Self

*Historian, Pastor, and Church/City Network Builder
Made to Flourish*

From his Economic Wisdom talk “Faithful Churches Create Flourishing Communities”

PASTORAL CARE

02

Pastoral Pathways

Decades of pastoral ministry have taught Charlie Self that you can't be a good shepherd if you don't care about what your sheep do all day:

“Pastors have a great role to play in commissioning their people to create value through all of their work, and commissioning entrepreneurship and creativity. They have great value also in letting us know that we're more than our job, and yet waking up on Monday with purpose is so important for discipleship, for personal thriving, and for community flourishing...Faithful churches create flourishing communities, bringing the joy, peace, and justice of Jesus Christ in everyday life.”



02

Today, leading people to follow Jesus in all of life takes place against a backdrop of growing cultural confusion and lack of moral structure. Economic insecurity and uncertainty are here to stay. The world is starved for the joy, peace and justice that only Christ-followers can bring it.

Pastors need to understand the crisis of moral character that lies behind the spiritual challenges of today's workplaces and communities. When developed nations could take their global economic dominance for granted, they adopted lifestyles and policies detrimental to spiritual and economic well-being: seeking satisfaction in consumption rather than in fruitful service, letting the family break down and schools stagnate, financing comfortable lifestyles with personal and national debt, trusting elites in New York and Washington to take care of them without requiring them to work hard and save.

Today, virtually every nation in the world has joined the modern economy. This challenge has revealed the bitter fruit of developed nations' complacency: economies under attack by fear, greed, injustice, sloth, and materialism. As people live this reality every day, the universe begins to feel arbitrary and meaningless.

Where will people turn for hope? Praise God that he has not left the world without

a witness to his loving and providential care for his creation! When people go through crisis, they turn to pastors. In a world of shifting sands, pastors will always be there to lead people to the solid rock of meaning and purpose – the rock so strong that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church built upon it (Matthew 16:18).

Pastors don't need to become economists, plotting supply and demand curves. However, pastors do need to help people see the meaning and purpose of their lives. If most of human life is economic work, pastors need to know how to describe today's dramatically changing economy in moral and spiritual terms.

Pastors can help people in the modern workplace rediscover the real source of both personal and societal economic flourishing: contentment with God's presence and provision, and sound moral character put into action in the lives of both individuals and society at large. In general, when people manifest love, joy, honesty, diligence, self-control and other virtues in work and business – and when the economy as a whole is understood as a moral system that exists to nurture such work – both individuals and the nation as a whole will flourish.



“He promises that he will cause rivers to flow even in desert conditions. We’re called to bring an oasis to those who live in the desert.”

Christopher Brooks

*Pastor and Theological Educator
Moody Bible Institute*

From his Economic Wisdom talk “Rethinking Urban Poverty”

COMPASSION

03

Pastoral Pathways

Detroit pastor Christopher Brooks is leading an effort to bring local churches together in support of economic revival in their city. He comments that poverty is more than a lack of resources or even a lack of strong family and work relationships, important as those are. Poverty is also a deep sense of insecurity and fear:

“These feelings of fear and vulnerability, and feeling overwhelmed, is exactly what the poor feel on a daily basis. They live in a desert and they know it. It’s caused many of them to feel that, ‘I have to get me and my family out of this community, or we might just die in the desert.’”



03

“This presents a unique challenge to us as Christians, because we preach a gospel that tells people that they don’t have to relocate in order to experience the blessing and flourishing that comes from being in Christ. In other words, you shouldn’t have to change ZIP codes for the gospel to work for you. This makes me believe that as Christians, we’re called and responsible for casting a different vision for the desert.”

The church is not being the church if it is not helping those in need. However, too many churches have come to measure “help” by how much money and resources we spend, not by whether our efforts are providing a path out of poverty. An increasing number of voices are challenging the predominant model of how we help people – through both public social programs and the church’s own ministries.


If the poor are made in the image of God, they have been gifted with productive capacities. We can help them grow into their calling to use those capacities to make a contribution and serve human needs. Eventually they can become economic self-supporters and even join us in providing support to those who cannot work. By contrast, indiscriminate giving sends the

implicit message: “You have nothing to contribute; I expect nothing from you.”

If the poor are made in the image of God, they are made to be in relationship and in community. We can help them grow toward interdependence, with people serving and supporting one another in families, businesses and communities. By contrast, indiscriminate giving sends the implicit message: “What matters is money, not relationships of mutual service.”

Underneath all these efforts lie the call to rest securely and confidently in God’s presence and provision for his children. Only this gospel call, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, can root out the fear and vulnerability at the heart of poverty.

Initiatives like Brooks’ in Detroit and authors like Brian Fikkert are leading the way to a new model of how we help those in need. Relief of immediate needs continues to play a role, but the focus is transitioning people to jobs in profitable, self-sustaining businesses. A long and growing list of stories shows that it can be done; the continued failure of the old model shows that it must be done.



“When marketplace Christians actually capture the understanding of living into their work as mission, their work as neighbor love... churches and communities will be much better off.”

Amy Sherman

*Author and Servant Leader
Sagamore Institute*

From her lectures on theological education at the 2016 Oikonomia Network faculty retreat

COMMON GOOD

Pastoral Pathways

04

Summarizing her research on new initiatives in theological education connecting the mission of the church to the world of work, Amy Sherman observed:

“Such initiatives...are nurturing a better kind of future pastor...future leaders who are creative, who see the need to emphasize whole-life discipleship and who have seen the fruit of what happens when marketplace Christians actually capture the understanding of living into their work as mission, their work as neighbor love. The practical training and equipping...is helping them to become future pastors who will lead churches that will put a high value on...serving their communities and affirming the strategic vocational stewardship of the scattered church,



04

as they labor in the various cultural influencing sectors of society. Because of partnerships like this, churches and communities will be much better off."

Sherman's many years of work in this field, especially her book *Kingdom Calling*, have highlighted the important new questions being asked today about the role of churches in promoting the common good.

Christians have always wrestled with the relationship between the church and society. However, this struggle has rarely been as acute as it is today. There is more and more need for a Christian contribution to the public good, yet the church – concerned about subordinating its mission to partisan agendas – is more wary than ever of seeking public influence.

Work and the economy offer a promising path out of this dilemma. Economic work is what makes civilization run, and most Christians spend most of their lives doing exactly this kind of work. When Christians integrate faith with the economic sphere of life, not only do they live out their callings to full-time discipleship, but they have the potential for an enormous transformative impact on civilization.

Recently, many Christian leaders have turned to the periods of exile in the Old Testament to provide a helpful model

for the post-Christendom social context. When believers are in exile, they see that their faith cannot be reduced to a cultural

agenda. However, they also know that they are called to love their neighbors and manifest the Spirit through their daily lives. Where faith flourishes, it ought to impact the flourishing of civilization as well.

In the New Testament era, the calling to manifest our faith in public life is only intensified by the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Our mission is not to make converts of every nation, but to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). The difference between a superficial "convert" and a fully formed "disciple" is the transformation of daily life through apprenticeship to Jesus. The Old Testament community was sent into exile with an admonition to bless Babylon, but it was not sent there for that purpose. By contrast, the New Testament church has been sent out to the nations on a mission to change how people understand and live their lives within every human civilization. Teaching people to live in a way that serves the common good is as central to the Great Commission as it is to the Great Commandment.



“We want our teens to know that they were made to make culture, to shape culture. Conversely, we also want them to know that culture shapes them.”

Jay Slocum

*Pastor
Jonah's Call*

Describing his church's vocational instruction for youth

YOUTH AND FAMILY

Pastoral Pathways

05

Pittsburgh pastor Jay Slocum has spent years developing new approaches to instilling vocational faithfulness in his church, Jonah's Call. One of the church's most innovative initiatives is a group outing designed to help teenagers discover the joys and challenges of workplace calling:

“We want our teens to know that they were made to make culture, to shape culture. Conversely, we also want them to know that culture shapes them. So, we gather them into groups, with adult chaperones, and have them observe local businesses, pointing out how each business orders the way they deliver a product (Cold Stone Creamery/Baskin Robbins creates all kinds



05

of discussion). We then take them to a very high-end French pastry shop, order delicacies, and then take them back to a member’s home just down the block from the business district to eat wonderful cultural artifacts and discuss their findings.”

Youth today wrestle with huge transitions, often struggling to make sense of it all: major changes in social institutions, family structures, educational models, economic systems, political dynamics and cultural cohesion. The rising generation is passionate, caring, interested in justice, and often optimistic. They want to raise good families, and they value community. Yet contemporary American culture can also leave young people self-absorbed and narcissistic, lacking serious moral foundations. In general, they are woefully unprepared for the massive shifts that will take place in their lifetimes.

One of the most important reasons young people are leaving the church in significant numbers is because they aren’t getting enough tangible, practical help in their search for meaning – especially when it comes to their future careers. They spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about “what they will do with their lives,” but few hear very much from the church on this subject other than exhortations to consider becoming pastors, missionaries or

parachurch workers.

Our culture depicts “ordinary” work and adult responsibility in general as burdens. They are the opposite of “finding yourself,” “following your heart,” and helping create justice and flourishing for the community. Economic uncertainty and the decline of cross-generational community building (including in churches) has produced a youth culture that celebrates delayed adulthood – choosing not to grow up, be responsible, get a job, etc., until absolutely necessary.

In contrast, a biblical perspective on calling and stewardship leads us to see “ordinary” work and adult responsibility as the primary place where most of our young people will find the identity, meaning, and purpose they’re looking for. Work is the main way we serve God by serving our neighbors and making the world a better place. The pursuit of justice and flourishing will also be hindered until we connect them to work.

Throughout history the church has helped people see youth as a time of preparation for work that follows God’s call. Two noteworthy examples are the Puritans and John Wesley’s Methodists, who fostered social movements based on rethinking the meaning and purpose of work, business, money, and economics. A similarly fresh vision is needed today to make our kids’ faith stick. What an opportunity!

THE ELEMENTS

of Economic Wisdom

1

We have a stewardship responsibility to flourish in our own lives, to help our neighbors flourish as fellow stewards, and to pass on a flourishing economy to future generations.

2

Economies flourish when people have integrity and trust each other.

3

In general, people flourish when they take responsibility for their own economic success by doing work that serves others and makes the world better.

4

Real economic success is about how much value you create, not how much money you make.

5

A productive economy comes from the value-creating work of free and virtuous people.

6

Economies generally flourish when policies and practices reward value creation.

7

Households, businesses, communities, and nations should support themselves by producing more than they consume.

8

A productive economy lifts people out of poverty and generally helps people flourish.

9

The most effective way to turn around poverty, economic distress, and injustice is by expanding opportunity for people to develop and deploy their God-given productive potential in communities of exchange, especially through entrepreneurship.

10


Programs aimed at economic problems need a fully rounded understanding of how people flourish.

11

Economic thinking must account for long-term effects and unintended consequences.

12

In general, economies flourish when goodwill is universal and global, but control is local, and personal knowledge guides decisions.



*“Give me now wisdom and knowledge
to go out and come in before this
people, for who can govern this people
of yours, which is so great?”*

II Chronicles 1:10

We are theological educators committed to the Oikonomia Network’s vision of integrating whole-life discipleship, fruitful work and economic wisdom into a cohesive understanding of Christian life and mission. We are actively participating in ON ventures with our colleagues, students, and ecclesial publics. The Economic Wisdom Project is important – for our churches and educational organizations, local communities, nation, and the world. We are stewards of fresh and focused thinking that builds on the work of many past and present leaders. We believe these are incisive insights for our moment in history, as we experience profound economic and social changes unparalleled in the past five centuries. This is not the final word on economics and work, nor is it a comprehensive or constructive work of theology. The Economic Wisdom Project is the beginning of a new conversation that we pray will lead to biblically sound and contextually relevant praxis in the 21st century. As a new community of theological educators, we welcome insights that will enhance our mission of integration as we prepare leaders to equip congregants for robust 24/7 Christian living.

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Paul Anderson	Professor of Quaker and biblical studies	George Fox University
Bruce Ashford	Professor of theology and culture	Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Kenneth Barnes	Mocker-Phillips Associate Professor of Workplace Theology and Business Ethics	Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Dean Blevins	Professor of practical theology and Christian discipleship	Nazarene Theological Seminary
Darrell Bock	Senior research professor of New Testament studies	Dallas Theological Seminary
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