

The Sacredness of Secular Work: 4 Ways Your Job Matters for Eternity (Even When You're Not Sharing the Gospel)

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How does secular work matter for eternity? Jordan Raynor sets out to answer this question in his book, *The Sacredness of Secular Work: 4 Ways Your Job Matters for Eternity (Even When You're Not Sharing the Gospel)*. Raynor writes his book to expand upon established biblical concepts of work and missions to encourage his audience to spread the gospel through their actions, not just via evangelism. The insights shared by the author allow readers to view their work as worthwhile as they continue working with a renewed perspective on the grace of God upon their lives and professions. Raynor argues that a Christian's secular work maintains eternal value when performed for God's glory, which calls Christians to view their work as essential to God's perfect plan.

Raynor establishes his target audience as Christians involved in secular work, apart from full-time missionary and ministry work. He notes that he only writes concerning jobs that do not contradict Christian doctrines or cause others to stumble in sin through exploitation or temptations. These specifications allow Raynor to engage under the assumption that his reader is a Christian involved in work that does not directly incorporate a pronouncement of the gospel. Thus, he employs a direct writing style that appeals to everyday Christians not involved in full-time ministry. He primarily writes regarding work that is for monetary gain. However, he presents an expansive view of work, stating, "[T]he most biblical way to define work, then, is this: 'to expend energy in an effort to achieve a desired result' the opposite of leisure and rest" (p. x). Raynor utilizes this broad definition to include various demographics, such as but not limited to, college students studying for an exam or a spouse who maintains the household work. According to the author, work maintains value for eternity.

The author's primary concern lies in the misconceptions of The Great Commission, which he states "isn't part of the inerrant word of God. It's simply the catchiest marketing slogan of the modern missions movement" (p. xiii). Subsequently, Raynor stresses the importance of the Great Commission throughout his book. However, he notes that this is not the only commission for Christians. He writes his book within the scope of the full Protestant view of the biblical narrative. Analyzing the Genesis story before the fall, Raynor notes how the first commission to humanity displays as the command to "[b]e fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (p. 10). Raynor looks to theologian Wayne Grudem, who indicates that subduing the earth entails making the earth useful and beneficial for humanity.

Raynor divides the biblical narrative into five distinct acts: creation, the fall, redemption through the cross, renewal offered by Jesus, and finally, the consummation of the "marriage between God's dimension and ours" (p. 31). Despite Raynor's willingness to analyze the entire biblical narrative, there appears to be a confirmation bias as his work falls short of interacting with difficult passages that seemingly contradict his work, such as Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 and 2:11, where the biblical author calls the work of his hands meaningless. Raynor's work would greatly benefit from an engagement with these challenging passages if he wishes to examine the entirety of the biblical narrative. The biblical integration throughout Raynor's work remains essential for his study, and his bias to prove that work matters for eternity does not take away from the theological significance of his work.

Furthermore, the book holds an expanded view of heaven. Raynor suggests that heaven "is simply 'where what God wants done is done'" (p. 39). This statement encourages the audience to see value in their work, as he

shows that heaven “is a place and a state of affairs” that believers can experience by working for God’s glory and doing everything unto him (p. 39). In line with his expanded view, Raynor optimistically suggests that the readers’ work could “physically last forever” (p. 96). Unfortunately, this may appear as wishful thinking that lacks thorough biblical support. Regardless, Raynor masterfully builds upon this view by presenting his readers with seven practical steps to allow their work to impact their eternal rewards. These steps include working with love and obedience to God’s commands, working hard, enduring workplace persecution for their faith, giving to the poor, praying, doing good for their enemies, and remaining hospitable even when someone cannot offer repayment.

This book’s structure allows readers to follow a logical flow that elevates the author’s work. By dividing his book into two sections, Raynor effectively provides a foundation in part one that propels part two into a proclamation on how his readers’ work matters for eternity. The book’s first part comprises the first two chapters that engage with overgeneralizations about the gospel and heaven. One of these overgeneralizations displays what the author calls “The Abridged Gospel: The Gospel is the good news that Jesus came to save people from their sins” (p. 5). While the author recognizes the truth of this statement, his argument lies in the overgeneralization that neglects certain elements Raynor wishes to expand in his work. The second part engages the pragmatic side of his subject matter as he presents four ways his audience’s jobs matter. Each chapter ends with a section charging the reader to consider their contributions to God’s eternal pleasure, maximizing their eternal rewards, contemplating how they can bring a part of heaven to earth, and considering how they can make disciples in the workplace. The practical implications of the book appear throughout as the author makes several propositions focused on the intrinsic value of the readers’ work.

Engagement with various resources and the inclusion of pop culture references appear throughout Raynor’s book. The pop culture references work to draw analogies for the reader. However, at times, these references can appear cumbersome for scholars reading his work as these references can take away from the theological significance of his assertions. On the other hand, the author begins each chapter with a historical story that allows the reader to observe the practical significance of Raynor’s work. Raynor excels at integrating biblical scholars and theologians, such as N. T. Wright and Grudem, and

biblical resources, such as concordances, when engaging with the primary text of the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament.

This book presents a valuable resource for Christians involved in secular work. The book has various collateral elements that allow readers to consider practical steps to integrate faith into their workplace while offering reflective questions for readers to contemplate. By including the collateral element of pop culture references, the author appeals to his target audience by drawing analogies for them to understand and recognize biblical implications. Some biblical scholars may have trouble accepting the author’s use of Scripture, such as his suggestion that Isaiah 60:4-9 and Revelation 21:24-26 support God welcoming “the glory and honor of the nations’ (ships, incense, and other human culture) into the New Jerusalem” (p. 97). These scholars may present counterarguments based on Scriptures like 2 Peter 3:10, which suggests that works within the earth will burn up on the day of the Lord. In contrast, business scholars could see the invaluable ideas Raynor’s work provides for the secular aspect of a Christian’s life. Specifically, this book is valuable for pastors’ sermon preparation and Christian higher education to equip students with a renewed view of the intrinsic value of their work apart from ministry. Therefore, the book remains exceedingly beneficial for young adult Christians as they may gravitate towards Raynor’s analogies and the overall easy readability of his work. At the same time, more senior Christians can receive a new passion for their work that will ultimately glorify God.

I highly recommend this book to young adult laypeople involved in full-time work or college students seeking to better understand how their work will have eternal significance, value, and spiritual meaning. I also recommend this book for those involved in teaching and pastoring who wish to empower the younger generation. By empowering the younger generation to see the intrinsic value of their work, they will grow God’s kingdom on earth by showing God’s love and compassion through their work devoted unto God. Ultimately, this will further the Great Commission as the younger generation initiates workplace conversations that lead others to wonder about the glory of God and how they can also take part in this valuable work for eternity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Trevor Hodges is a doctoral student at Regent University pursuing a PhD in renewal theology with a concentration in biblical studies. His research interests include Marcan scholarship and applying Mark 12:30-31, loving one's neighbor as oneself, in everyday Christian life. Trevor earned his AS in social science from Tidewater Community College and later obtained a BA in biblical studies and an MDiv with a concentration in the New Testament from Regent University. He volunteers as the ministry coordinator for Bethel Assembly of God in Chesapeake, Virginia.