



- Jeff H.: [00:02](#) Hi and welcome to the Faith and Work Podcast, where we explore our every day work in God's world. The Faith and Work Podcast is produced and hosted by Denver Institute for Faith and Work. I'm Jeff Haanen, Founder and Executive Director of Denver Institute. Today, I'm joined by two special guests. Today we have Ben Reese and Missy Wallace.
- Jeff H.: [00:21](#) Ben serves as the Associate Dean for Vocational Formation and Director for the Center for Vocational Formation at Abilene Christian University in Dallas. He was a partner with Barna Research on a project we're going to be talking about today which is called Christians at Work. It was a research project that they did that we're going to be discussing along with our friend, Missy Wallace.
- Jeff H.: [00:42](#) Missy founded and leads the Nashville Institute for Faith and Work. Prior to starting her work in Nashville, she worked in Bank of America, Boston Consulting Group and in education for 10 years as well.
- Jeff H.: [00:54](#) All right, Ben, so why don't you tell us a little bit about the background of this project? Why were you interested in partnering with Barna Research and what were you guys hoping to learn?
- Ben R.: [01:03](#) We're interested in Barna because they're one of the leading, most well respected market research firms. They have wide reach and, as we began developing graduate and doctoral programs with adult learners along with a very robust residential campus and undergrad and graduate, we thought that this would be a pretty important partnership as we try to figure out how do people experience their work as meaningful, how they experience it as connected to some notion of faith and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
- Ben R.: [01:32](#) Through different connections, through a member of our board who's been connected with some other Barna Projects, we were able to make that relationship work and we were able to commission them to this project and then work together on analysis and development of it.
- Jeff H.: [01:45](#) Okay. Before we hop into some of the findings, tell us a little bit about the process. What does that look like to figure out what all the Christians think about work?

- Ben R.: [01:52](#) Yeah. It's more art than science. I believe in December 2017 and then January 2018, they came at it from a couple different approaches. They did quantitative surveys. Just under 1,500 people who identified themselves as Christians and who would say, to some degree, that faith matters. There was a wide range of professions that we tried to touch on with those surveyed. The survey itself was fairly in depth and robust that covered multiple things. Both details around the work that they did.
- Ben R.: [02:35](#) So we had from blue collar to tech industry to teachers, nurses, asking what is their work? How do they experience their work as meaningful? There are demographics around faith and religious expression. How many times they go to church. How do they understand prayer? What does their prayer life look like?
- Ben R.: [02:58](#) They also looked at ways that they understand their churches as resourcing them to understand their work as connected to the life with God. How many times in the last month have you heard a sermon on work? Rate that. How my church supports me in my profession on a rate scale of one to five.
- Ben R.: [03:21](#) The surveys really tried to get as comprehensive a picture around what it looks like for Christians in the workplace. From there, try to boil the data down to figure out what are some common threads between the people who seem to experience their work as meaningful and connected to a life with God as it pertains to their faith.
- Ben R.: [03:45](#) They also did 33 in depth qualitative interviews with people that they felt they can already identify as exemplars. These people, vast array of industries and work careers. These people expressed how important their faith was to the work that they did and to how they see the world and their work.
- Jeff H.: [04:07](#) That's wonderful. So let's hop into this. I have a couple questions for you, Missy. One of the findings it said that 42% report finding purpose and meaning in their work but 26% of Christians report seeing how the work they're doing is serving God or a higher purpose. Missy, in your work in Nashville, does that sound right? About a quarter of Christians see that their work is serving a higher purpose. 42% see purpose and meaning inside a paycheck. Tell me a little bit about your experience.
- Missy W.: [04:36](#) Sure. Honestly, that number sounds high to me.

- Jeff H.: [04:38](#) Yeah.
- Missy W.: [04:39](#) But maybe it's because the people that make it to me are the people saying, "I'm clamoring to find meaning and purpose." I do think that people in the helping processes and people in the non-profit world do tend to find a more direct link their mindset about what their work means in the context of serving God. I think it's really the people in corporate America that struggle a bit more and, perhaps, in the fields of the arts. They're struggling a bit more.
- Missy W.: [05:09](#) Maybe between 5% if you account for all the folks in the helping professions. Maybe that does sound about right. But the folks in the corporate and art world, that would be extremely high, I think.
- Jeff H.: [05:21](#) Yeah. I was going to say same thing is that does seem high to me, Ben, and I want to hear your thoughts on this. I think it was an online survey and, so, that was principally people that are online. Then the qualitative were more people in professional leading. One of the interests I have is thinking about working class America, too, and what some of these stats might be because those sounded high to me as well.
- Jeff H.: [05:42](#) Actually, this stat here, Ben, now, I thought was stunning. Half of church adults have a church supports them in their career. Tell me more about that. That seems stunningly high but I'd love to hear your thoughts.
- Ben R.: [05:54](#) Yeah. First, the other one, it is good to point out that 10% of those were in education, child development, family services. 9% in health science, medical technology. So I think there's a large percentage of people who are in the helping professions. I also wondered about that 25%. That felt pretty high. I think that was the one that kind of baffled us. Both Barna and the [inaudible 00:06:20] folks who were connected to it. I don't have a good answer, honestly, a response. That just feels really, really high.
- Jeff H.: [06:26](#) Yeah. Yeah.
- Missy W.: [06:27](#) I have a hypothesis about it. Which is I think we all probably work with people who have a version of faith and work theology that maybe is a truncated version of what the entirety of Faith and Work theology would perhaps be. If your version of my church helps me in my job means my church teaches me to evangelize, you might be willing to say, "If that's you're version

of a faith and work theology, yes, my church helps me evangelize."

- Missy W.: [07:00](#) A lot of people in the south believe that faith and work means evangelism or means ethics. But if you have a more wholistic understanding of faith and work theology to mean my work matters to God. The actual spreadsheets that I'm doing are part of his larger unfolding story. For my city of Nashville, I would think that the number would be drastically lower.
- Ben R.: [07:23](#) Yeah. I think that's well said, Missy. I also wonder about support is manifested as I know my church would pray for me in whatever struggle I might be going through at work. That there's a sense of support in prayer. But I think you're right as far as people understanding that the actual work that they do contributes to God's longing for human flourishing. It would feel a lot, lot lower, I would say.
- Jeff H.: [07:44](#) Yeah. Because we work with churches and we're continually trying to do a handful of practices. For instance, do you visit people in their workplace as a pastoral visit like you would in a hospital. For instance, do you do prayers that somehow touch people's daily lives, their vocations, their volunteer work. Right? That's a pretty small pool of churches, I think, in our city that are doing that. I'd love to see that grow.
- Jeff H.: [08:08](#) But a part of me, it didn't make me think though that among some aspects of the evangelism, in the last 10 years, we've seen a pretty big uptake of people engaging the conversation about vocation in America. I'd like to hear from both you, Missy, as well as you, Ben, do you see the same thing in terms of we're getting some traction? And could this study be a part of that?
- Missy W.: [08:29](#) This might not be the answer you want to put on the podcast but whether or not we're getting traction is really hard for me to measure because I feel like I'm getting an anecdotal piece of the pie through the people that I'm touching. This data suggests we're getting some traction and, certainly, the amount of attention and energy and Christian industry, if you want to call it, as a whole, and if you think about writings and articles and conferences, seems like there's getting some traction.
- Missy W.: [09:08](#) But it still feels like, to me, that 99% of the people I interact with have a very truncated understanding of what faith could mean in the workplace and, really, there's just-

- Jeff H.: [09:21](#) Yeah.
- Missy W.: [09:22](#) ... unbridled opportunity to help people figure out what a shining light on darkness look like in the context of my role.
- Jeff H.: [09:29](#) Yeah. Good. What do you think, Ben?
- Ben R.: [09:31](#) Yeah. I think what traction we're seeing and finding, contrary to the 50% number we just looked at, with the traction we're seeing on this is more out of people's curiosity and longing for some connection and deeper meaning than necessarily what they're getting in church. Similar to Missy, some of this is just anecdotal, it's interesting. We've been to different conferences or had different study groups around this.
- Ben R.: [09:56](#) For the most part, people really, really want this and aren't getting this in their churches and, as Missy just indicated, this is opening up new capacities and imagination for their work that it didn't previously have. I think it does hold the potential to really open up some, I think, fruitful conversations and giving space for people to have a new capacity-
- Jeff H.: [10:20](#) Yeah.
- Ben R.: [10:20](#) ... for how they see their work. But it's just really fascinating how little it seems to be getting traction among pastors. I don't know if this would be appropriate for the podcast but I've talked with a number of leaders at Barna and it's just fascinating how we can't get pastors to really engage this work much.
- Jeff H.: [10:38](#) Let's start there.
- Ben R.: [10:39](#) Yeah.
- Jeff H.: [10:40](#) We should go on the record that we love the local church and that we love-
- Ben R.: [10:43](#) Oh yeah. Absolutely.
- Jeff H.: [10:44](#) That's all on the record. But it's fine. As brothers and sisters in faith, tell me your thoughts on that. Why do you think we're not getting more traction in local churches? At least in America.
- Ben R.: [10:53](#) I think one is just lack of experience and awareness of what the workplace is like. You mentioned, Jeff, trying to get pastors to go to places of work and see what it's like. I think a part of the

reason that some may be less interested is the fear of stepping into space that they're not terribly familiar with. Which I think might grow out of a good instinct. I don't want to say something about people I don't actually have any experience in. But that disconnect, I think, is there.

- Ben R.: [11:25](#) I think it's also people don't see the connection between their work and faith and, so, pastors don't want to spend time convincing people to understand the connection where it isn't previously there. I'd probably agree with Missy that I just don't think people have the kind of imagination. That it's not as robust as we might think. I think pastors and churches will spend time, perhaps, engaging the imagination that already takes place.
- Ben R.: [11:53](#) I could be wrong but I think it's those two things. That there's a lack of awareness and familiarity with what's actually happening in the workplace. What that experience is like. Also that energy's going to be put in places where people already have a bit of imagination.
- Missy W.: [12:08](#) I have a related comment to that. I am with a church that has three different site locations. One of the site pastors will occasionally call me and be working to put a locational example into a sermon to try to bring an expression of a sermon point in the context of an actual workplace scenario.
- Missy W.: [12:32](#) He will express that he's worried he's going to get it wrong. That he hasn't necessarily been in a negotiating room before and, so, if he tries to give an example of negotiations, he'll give the nuance slightly wrong. I think that would support the maybe slight insecurity about not having enough really close understanding to what industries are like and how nuanced and varied they are.
- Missy W.: [13:00](#) But I also think the dynamics of many churches are set up so that the things that the church is getting measured on by the ruling elders or various formats that particular churches are being governed, this is not part of what's being measured. Right? What's being measured maybe are things like attendance and giving and some proxies like that. Perhaps missional money going out the door. Money coming in the door. It's very hard to measure what is the direct impact of doing some workplace visits and learning more about particular industries.

- Missy W.: [13:41](#) So on a priority list, it might be something that feels super important to a pastor but continually doesn't rise to the level he needs to be done today.
- Ben R.: [13:53](#) Yeah. I'll really just echo your thoughts on this in a couple levels. One is that I think, actually, a lot of pastors, 90% of churches in America, are under 100 people. So they're hustling to keep things together. You're doing weddings and funerals and pastoral care and sermons. I think it's difficult to add one more thing. I think that could be a challenge.
- Ben R.: [14:10](#) Then I think, potentially, on the larger churches, you're right. You're measured by the big three. Bucks, bodies, buildings. Right? Those tend to be the things that still say, "This is what success looks like." But Faith and Work really is about embodying the gospel outside of the church and moving out into our communities and that is tougher to measure.
- Ben R.: [14:26](#) I also say, too, to pastors' defense, they have enormously hard roles and they have to be knowing everything from philosophy to theology to counseling to what? I have to know the intricacies of the financial services industry to pastor somebody in that industry too? It's just hard. I think that is really tough.
- Missy W.: [14:45](#) One more quick thing on that topic is we've been encouraging pastors to... Every time a congregant says, "Hey, I need to meet with you to offer. How about I come to your office?" And one pastor does that all the time but a couple of the others have said, "Missy, if you're reaching out to meet with me, they probably have something important on their mind. Maybe it's very sensitive. Maybe it's very emotional. They don't want to have that meeting in their office."
- Ben R.: [15:10](#) Yeah.
- Jeff H.: [15:11](#) I also wonder, I'd be interested to hear both of your feedback on this, if something that might be connected to the way in which we separate and bifurcate life. I think we're getting better as a Christian community but church does the soul, does salvation in the penal substitutionary way where it gets you into Heaven. Sort of Monday through Friday work is separate from our spiritual life.
- Jeff H.: [15:36](#) Even though we're getting better in the church, I think about understanding all of life as space where God might break in. I wonder if a part of the reason it's hard or difficult to find

traction is that we still continue to live fairly separate, bifurcated lives in the different pockets that we experience.

- Missy W.: [15:53](#) Well, that, of course, gets into eschatological differences. Right?
- Jeff H.: [15:57](#) Right. Yeah.
- Missy W.: [15:58](#) If you believe new Heaven and new Earth includes all these things, you might have a much different view of work than if you believe new Heaven and Earth don't include these types of things.
- Jeff H.: [16:08](#) Yeah. All right. Ben, one interesting thing about the study as well. I want to read a conclusion here. It said this: Christian men and women have similar experiences of calling a career, just not at the same time. While working fathers and single women thrive, working mothers and single men struggle for vocational fulfillment by comparison. Ben, can you just briefly comment on that? Then I want to hear from Missy on that as well.
- Ben R.: [16:30](#) Yeah. Quite frankly, the single men struggling is shocking and I'm not sure what to make of it. The working women, I think makes a little bit more sense given the long standing cultural expectations. Particularly within the church that we're moving away from, hopefully, around issues of glass ceiling and sexism. But there's still a sense of discomfort or not sure where they fit in. Particularly for women who are part of faith communities where their gifts are affirmed in businesses but might not be affirmed in the churches that they serve in the same way. I think there's probably a tension that lies there.
- Missy W.: [17:10](#) I would agree. There's for sure a tension. For instance, in a different Barna study, the one called Battle of the Sexes, there's a question that says: Are you comfortable with a female CEO? 94% of all adults say yes. 97% of women say yes. 90% of men say yes. But only 77% of evangelical Christians say yes.
- Jeff H.: [17:35](#) Wow.
- Missy W.: [17:37](#) Women are getting, in the church, capital C, may be getting some mixed messages about is there a role as a leader in a corporate community? Not only is it affirmed at my church but is it okay? It's interesting, the point you had about the single women thriving.



- Missy W.: [17:59](#) I tend to get a pocket in our year long intensive every year of 32 to 40 year old women who come to the year long Faith and Work intensive and are pretty overt about their motivation and being there by saying, "I'll be honest. I expected by now to perhaps have found a life long mate and be married and maybe moving towards family being part of my story too and that hasn't happened and, so, I need to double down on my work. I need my work to become more. I didn't know my work needed to be so much of my life because I had a plan A that included a different area of my life being fulfilling to."
- Missy W.: [18:41](#) I think that maybe the single women has to do with women saying, "Okay. Work is what I'm called to with this time, exclusively. This for-pay kind of work rather than parenting and not working any kind of work."
- Jeff H.: [18:58](#) Yeah. That's a good insight. We've had very similar responses in our fellowship program as well, Missy, from women who are sort of in that. It's not like you're going to focus on kids and family when you don't have any kids and you're not married. Right? If you don't work then you're not going... Work is life. That really makes sense in many different ways when you're single.
- Jeff H.: [19:16](#) What's interesting about that single men struggling I think is interesting, too, Ben. Several books have come out. Nicholas Eberstadt a book called Men Without Work. There's a new book by a guy named Tim Carney. He's written a book called Alienated America about sort of the stresses on the American working class.
- Jeff H.: [19:35](#) It's interesting that, typically, male work like blue collar, sometimes physically difficult work, has really been stressed. It's not only in kind of manufacturing towns but there's a lot of different kinds of work that where you're seeing things like the healthcare industry in the last 50 years has enormously exploded, yet, manufacturing, for instance, has contracted. It's come back a little bit in the last decade.
- Jeff H.: [19:56](#) They're just different working realities. More opportunities for women and, yet, there are certainly some, I think even in the Christian subculture, some real strong stereotypes of who should and who shouldn't be in leadership that we really need to press on. What do you think the biggest area for action on that point?

- Missy W.: [20:14](#) Well, I'd love to throw something in here which is I did a study recently on women in America. It was a very western American-centric study. By study, I don't mean statistically proven but I researched the role of women in America and work. It's really a post World War II time. Not post World War II. Post industrialization time that this stereotyping began.
- Missy W.: [20:43](#) If you go back to the pioneer days, you just imagine a woman trying to get the farm harvested while also having a child on her back and maybe next to her. There was no delineation between am I working mom? Am I stay at home mom? Am I doing both? It was all in on everything. I got to work from dawn to dusk to get the crops done and also take care of these children and get food on the table.
- Missy W.: [21:11](#) It wasn't until World War I when the men went off to war that there was a big government campaign. Let's get women into the factories so that we can make things so that we can win the war. Then the men came back and, so, another ad campaign came out that really glorified women working in the home. The Betty Crocker creed came out that said homemaking is very well respected job.
- Missy W.: [21:38](#) It's very interesting to see how the media has actually played a part in what's now become thought of as the Christian role for women when it has to do with work. It's very confusing. What's biblical? What's Christianity? What's traditionalism? What comes from the media?
- Jeff H.: [21:55](#) Okay. Ben and Missy, thank you so much for your thoughts on this study. Let's leave our listeners with a takeaway. Something that they can apply to their daily work today. Ben, based on what you learned from this study, what's something that you want most Christians to hear about their daily work?
- Ben R.: [22:10](#) I think for those people who saw a deep connection between their faith and their work, one of the consistent characteristics were people of curiosity. That they enter the workplace, they enter tasks, they enter conversations, they enter meetings, with a sense of openness and curiosity that something might come from it that is both good for the world and, perhaps, good for them.
- Ben R.: [22:30](#) I think connected to that, we found people who saw that life was worth risk and that it wasn't linear. So they're open to change. They're open to new possibilities. Out of that, I'd want

to say I think learning how to be more present and expect that God might show up through really ordinary, simple, mundane, even boring parts of our work could open up new avenues of connection and meaning and participation in life with God.

- Jeff H.: [22:58](#) Wonderful. Thanks, Ben. Missy?
- Missy W.: [22:59](#) That's awesome, Ben. I would say helping people reframe the narrative. Dorothy Sayers says, "How about you serve the work instead of the work serve you?" To think about how is this work part of God's larger unfolding story instead of do I like the work? Does the work pay me enough? Is my commute convenient? But, rather, just a reframe of how is this part of a larger unfolding story?
- Missy W.: [23:26](#) I think Ben's study uses the words compartmentalizer, onlooker, and integrator. A compartmentalizer being someone who doesn't connect their faith to their work at all. An onlooker kind of passive, someone in the middle. The integrators is who I feel like has connected it to the point that, as Ben said, every single interaction throughout the day is on mission for Christ as part of a larger unfolding story and understanding that the spreadsheet matters, sweeping the floor matters, the negotiation in the conference room matters. It all is creating potential for more human and societal flourishing. That is, I think, the goal.
- Missy W.: [24:11](#) If you're listening and you feel like, "Oh, I don't understand how what I'm doing from 9:00 to 5:00 matters at all." I think that's a great place to start. Is how might this matter to God? How might this show his character? How might this be like the Genesis account of taking chaos and bringing structure and trying to call it good? What qualities does my industry reflect of God? I think that's a great starting point.
- Jeff H.: [24:35](#) Wonderful. Ben and Missy, I really want to thank you for being on the Faith and Work Podcast today.
- Missy W.: [24:38](#) Thanks, Jeff.
- Ben R.: [24:40](#) Thanks for having us.
- Jeff H.: [24:41](#) Thanks again for listening to the Faith and Work Podcast. This is Jeff Haanen, the Executive Director of Denver Institute for Faith and Work. If you found anything helpful on the Faith and Work Podcast today, I want you to consider being a monthly donor to Denver Institute for Faith and Work. Through the podcast,



through scatter.org, our online learning platform, through public events, throughout the metropolitan area and more broadly than that.

Jeff H.:

[25:04](#)

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