



Shundrawn Thomas: ([00:03](#))

Our work done well actually is an expression of our identity. Think about what God says. We can see God through His workmanship. And we're made in the image and likeness of God.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:15](#))

You're listening to the Faith & Work Podcast where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor and society through our daily work.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:26](#))

Hi and welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, the Director of Public Engagement at Denver Institute for Faith & Work. And I'm joined today by Dustin Moody, our Director of Communications. What's new in your world, Dustin?

Dustin Moody: ([00:38](#))

Oh, not too much, Joanna. Just trying to enjoy this relatively warm stretch of weather we have here in February in Colorado. What about you?

Joanna Meyer: ([00:46](#))

It's a beautiful sunny day in the Rockies so we're loving it. Today, we'll be talking about finding joy in our work, especially in those moments when work isn't enjoyable. I think about popular culture and we tend to laugh or cringe at the way work-life is portrayed through shows like The Office or movies like Office Space and the comic strip Dilbert.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:07](#))

Our workplaces can be environments where we share our God-given gifts with the world. Or they can be places of stress and disappointment. And our guest today, Shundrawn Thomas, acknowledges both realities and offers wisdom for navigating the contrast to help work become a place of both joy and purpose. I cannot wait to hear more about what he has to say. And Dustin, would you introduce us to Shundrawn?

Dustin Moody: ([01:32](#))

Yeah, I'd be happy to. Thanks, Joanna. Shundrawn serves as the president of a trillion-dollar global investment management business. His responsibilities include developing long-term strategy, cultivating client relationships, developing talented professionals and overseeing all aspects of business operations.



Dustin Moody: ([01:47](#))

In 2017, Black Enterprise defined Shundrawn as one of the most powerful Black executives in Corporate America. And he's the author of the recent book *Discovering Joy in Work: Transforming Your Occupation into your Vocation*.

Dustin Moody: ([02:00](#))

Shundrawn, thanks so much for joining us on the Faith & Work Podcast.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([02:04](#))

Well, Dustin, it's great to be here with you and Joanna.

Dustin Moody: ([02:08](#))

To get us started, tell us just a little bit about what you do and your background.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([02:11](#))

Sure. Well, I'll say this vocationally, I serve as President and Chief Executive of a global investment management business. And so, we have the privilege of managing over 1.3 trillion in assets for individuals and institutional clients around the globe. I also serve on the management group of the overall corporate enterprise and we're a publicly-traded company.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([02:34](#))

I also like to say vocationally, I serve as an associate and teaching pastor at my church. And I'm also an author, lecturer and speaker. So, I've had the opportunity to write four books.

Joanna Meyer: ([02:46](#))

Yeah. I was so encouraged to hear that for a season. I don't know if you're still on the board, but you were on the board of the Museum of Nature and Science. And as a Chicago native, that was one of the places that was near and dear in my life. It's so fun to think that you've served in developing that organization, too.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([03:02](#))

Well, it's always great. I think for all of us, there are a variety of ways we think in terms of how we can serve. And so, an important part particularly in like the last 15 years or so have been the time I've been able to spend working with various nonprofit organizations that have wonderful causes and missions.



Joanna Meyer: ([03:20](#))

So fun. Well, thanks from all the kids out there in Chicagoland for your service in that area. So, I'd like to know a little bit more about your professional journey because I think it's tied to who God has uniquely made you to be. Often, people's childhood interests reveal who they will become later in life like our first glimmers of calling are often revealed by who we are in our earliest days.

Joanna Meyer: ([03:41](#))

And I'm curious to know how your interest in business showed up early in your life.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([03:46](#))

Yeah. So, for many people as you suggest, these things are early and it's probably a combination of what people say nature and nurture. For perspective, I didn't grow up in a family that was involved, even remotely, in the kind of business or profession that I went into.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([04:05](#))

I grew up on the south side of Chicago. I would be making a conservative statement if I'd say I didn't come up from a lot of ways and means. But it starts with image. And this is the power of image. I remember being a young child and my mother asking me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And I would say, "I want to be a businessman."

Shundrawn Thomas: ([04:23](#))

And to be frank, Joanna, it started with just seeing business professionals on TV. And I would see these individuals and they were wearing suits and ties and carrying briefcases. And in my young mind, it just seemed like they were engaged in important things. Now, as it progressed, there's experience.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([04:42](#))

And so for me, in some ways by necessity and how things were in my house, I started working when I was relatively young. And it started out with odd jobs, mowing lawns and shoveling snow. But I was pretty commercial. So, I turned that into my little businesses. I remember having a business with one of my best friends. And I remember talking my father into buying a lawn mower with a bag on it, because we had a really small house and a huge backyard. But if you can appreciate this, we had a lawn mower with no bag.



Shundrawn Thomas: ([05:12](#))

And so that meant after doing all the mowing, you had to rake up all the clippings. So, I figured we could be much more efficient and do more business if we actually could get a mower with a bag. And then beyond that exposure, I had a tremendous opportunity to go to a magnet high school in Chicago. Now, I had a long commute each way every day, but it was an incredible program.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([05:34](#))

And some of the uniqueness of the courses that were available there that weren't available at other public schools were two courses I took, one in applied economics and an accounting course. And so, that and other opportunities I got to work while I was in high school, all those things led to really solidifying my interest first in business more broadly, and ultimately being more attracted to the investment or the capital market side of business.

Joanna Meyer: ([06:01](#))

So, executive leadership to me crosses industries. It's a unique role in and of itself. You could talk to someone that was an executive of a nonprofit and you would probably wrestle with some of the same challenges in your role. How is being an executive a reflection of God's call in your life? And what does that stewardship mean to you?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([06:21](#))

Yeah. So, it's interesting because people have in their minds a picture oftentimes of what being executive means. They think of this powerful role and you're in charge and you're telling people what to do. And it's in practice quite different. So, first of all, whatever business or profession that you're in, I know because you've talked to lots of executives, Joanna, you can appreciate so much of your time is about how you engage with invest in and motivate people.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([06:52](#))

And so, a lot of times, it starts with how you've matured and developed and grown as a person. And so, you have to be, first and foremost, very self-aware, comfortable in who you are and I like to say in whose you are, and it's a function I believe to be able to have the right kind of balance of, yes, having the confidence and the courage to do the job that you're called to do, but having the compassion and humility to do it well.



Shundrawn Thomas: ([07:24](#))

And so, that's a big part of it. So for me, one of the best preparations for me in terms of being an executive is my parents are also my pastors. So, they got involved in ministry very early. And there are so many, in a sense, comparisons I would say to, in a sense, being a pastor and investing in the lives of people and doing your job as an executive well and almost, in a sense, having a pastoral sort of role in the workplace. And so, seeing how they serve people and how they made people a priority in ministry had certain lessons that you could translate into my professional executive role.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([08:08](#))

The other thing is from early on, if you're one of these people who do things like Myers-Briggs or the like, none of those are perfect predictors. God tells us who we really are at our core. But I've done all those different things. So consistently, I come up as you know an ENTJ, so NT being irrational. And what you find is people who are referred to as those temperament types tend to be very independent thinkers.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([08:33](#))

And so, it's not that I'm conflict seeking but I'm not, by my orientation, very conflict averse. I'm willing to deal with difficult issues. I'm a natural strategic thinker and very much a problem solver. And I realized those things very early on in my youth. So again, back to the point that you've made, sometimes it's just the way that God has made you or wired you, in many respects, can prepare you for callings that you have in your life.

Dustin Moody: ([09:02](#))

Shundrawn, I'd love to talk a little bit more about your leadership work, particularly in the context of what we're seeing broadly in the US right now with what a lot of people are calling the Great Resignation. And I'm curious from both your perspective as believer, as Christian, and your perspective as a large organizational leader, what do you think this large shift that we're seeing reveals about our relationship with our work?

Dustin Moody: ([09:24](#))

For instance in 2021, we saw a record number of people leave their jobs. That seems to be continuing in the spring of 2022 as well. What can we take away from this as people who are dedicated to our work, want to put in good work what does this mean for the ways that we're relating to our workplaces, our colleagues and all of that?



Shundrawn Thomas: ([09:44](#))

Well, especially as believers, one of the things that we know, we know that we live in a fallen world when we think about all the wisdom that comes from the Bible talking about being in the world but not of the world. And we know while God is working in the world, all of creation hasn't come into his full redemption. We are not to the place of the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our God when we get to the end of the book as I like to say.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([10:12](#))

And so, one of the things I share with people is this, in many respects, should come as no surprise. I'll use an example. Gallup has been tracking what they call employee engagement for over two decades. And employee engagement in very simple terms is people who are fully committed to their work and their workplace. So, if you think about this in the US which has the highest ratings, on average, if you look at all 20-plus years they've been doing it, about a third of workers would be characterized as being actually engaged. That number falls to the mid to low teens when you look at it globally.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([10:50](#))

So, just if you pause and think about this, it means by their own admission, the majority of workers are not engaged, the majority of workers would not define themselves as being committed to their work and their workplace. As a matter of fact, a meaningful percentage of those workers are actively disengaged and a great majority of workers are actively looking for other jobs. This is all before we get to the pandemic.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([11:15](#))

So, what I share with people is the pandemic was simply a tipping point. It exposed fissures and brokenness in terms of people's relationship with their work that were already there in plain sight. And so, what you're seeing at the individual level is a crisis. And again, the etymology of crisis is just a decision point. And you're seeing at the organizational level, because organizations have professed certain things about their values or cultures, and what we're realizing is they're not really, in many instances, ringing true with the employees.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([11:52](#))

And so, I think it is a call to arms for individuals for us to challenge our own beliefs. And I think it's a call to organizations and organizational leaders for us to represent what we claim for what we profess.



Joanna Meyer: ([12:09](#))

So, your book suggests that we can find joy in work, but I have kind of two questions. In light of what we're seeing, do you think we're putting to a pressure on work to fulfill us that it's not intended to bear? And on the other hand, how can Scripture frame the way we should be thinking about the role of workplace in our lives?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([12:32](#))

Right. So, work can and should be joyful? But it's not the case if we place inappropriate expectations on the workplace or the people we work with. And so, one of the things that where it's a subtle but it's a dangerous thing is our work done well actually is an expression of our identity. Think about what God says. We can see God through His workmanship. And we're made in the image and likeness of God so you can see us. You can see Dustin, you can see Joanna, you can see Shundrawn through their workmanship.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([13:06](#))

But here's the difference, our workmanship or our work does not determine our identity. It's actually, in the sense, the other way around. Our work or our workmanship doesn't determine our value. Now, one of the fundamental problems we have is what you've alluded to. For many people, they are determining their value by their work directly or indirectly. The prestige associated with it, the level of compensation with it. Almost more importantly sometimes is the opinions of other people that they work with. And so, that sense of actually looking for identity in the wrong space, in the wrong place.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([13:45](#))

And so work, in a sense, if you wanted to sort of be spiritual about it has become an idol. And I love what one writer once wrote and said, and you can appreciate this, that all idols fail you. And so, what it really is is that if we're honest with ourselves, we often have the wrong relationship with work. And going back to the inference in your question, those wrong expectations about work and those we work with literally set us up to be disappointed. It literally, in a sense, robs us from the joy that the work we do is intended to afford us.

Dustin Moody: ([14:34](#))

Shundrawn, talk to me a little bit more about Scripture in the way that it frames work because in your book, you kind of situate the Genesis and creation account and the Garden of Eden example as the ideal. We all know, living in a fallen world, we're not going to experience that ideal. So, as people of Scripture, how can we reframe our thinking around work?



Shundrawn Thomas: ([14:55](#))

It's interesting because while we know we are in a fallen world, it's the same thing like we know we're not perfect but the reason that we follow Christ is we're in the process of being disciplined or being perfected. So, while we know that the workplace, is in a sense, not perfect, we can look to Scripture to have a very clear sense of work, what work is intended to be, and how we can pursue it in a way that not only is honoring to God but joyful.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([15:25](#))

But what I'd like to start with the Scripture, I said like, "I don't think God does anything by accident." I think God is incredibly intentional. He does all things on purpose. And so, I don't think it is by accident that the opening narrative of the Bible ... I always ask people this basic question. I said, "How do we find God?" And they say, "Well, what do you mean?" I said, "We find God at work. He's not at rest. And God is very busy."

Shundrawn Thomas: ([15:51](#))

And the thing is it's not this overly-stylized view because it's the work of depending on how people want to say a creation or recreation, but it says, "Look, the earth is dark and void, stuff is out of order, and all these things." So, it's not like He's working with this pressing thing, but He's bringing it to the place of the vision that He intended. And I love, and it's kind of my perspective of it, I love how the narrative goes, because what you see is Him being purposeful and intentional. And in each day, He's reflecting.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([16:21](#))

And I like to say to people, "If you were to pick a word and you were to describe God's attitude as you read it," so just read it and personalize a narrative of Scripture. And I said, "How could you describe it but being joyful?" And he pauses at different times and he says, "The work is good," or "It is very good." And if I just pause there, think about how little we do that as people. I mean, we'll work and do something really great and beat ourselves up about. We'll let a miscellaneous comment by a person rob us of the joy, of the value of the creation that we do.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([16:57](#))

And I tell people, I said, "You know what I think one of the worst things to happen to workplaces and we do it every year in our job, I would totally change it if I could, the annual performance review process." I mean, it really is a well-intended terrible thing. Now, here's the thing, we absolutely should give people feedback and we should help them in terms of working on their



development. If I could wave a wand in every organization, you know what I would remove of it? Ratings.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([17:26](#))

It's actually been proven even by people, not even scripturally braced, that ratings really have no positive impact from employees. What it does most times is it just stops them from listening to the feedback. And so, what I always say to people is when we're honest with ourselves, nobody has to tell you, Joanna, nobody has to tell you, Dustin, when you do good work. You know it. You look at it and you know it's good. And so, we would do well actually to create the kind of circumstances where people can flourish and just to help them do the good work.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([18:01](#))

And I would like to say, "Isn't that what God did in the Garden of Eden?" He purposely places humankind in the space or in the place, I like to say, the first workplace where they can flourish. And so, I think that the takeaways from that, Dustin, are, one, how are we looking at our work? God didn't have to ask somebody else if he did a good work. So, there's a mindset or an attitude that we have. What is the place, let's pick the Garden of Eden as a place, where we can most flourish? I think far too few people think about that.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([18:31](#))

So, I think part of the frustration is people are just misplanning. And so, conscious things like that have significant impact on our ability, not only to have joy in our work, but just to be productive.

Jeff Hannen: ([18:47](#))

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Jeff Hannen: ([19:20](#))

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Joanna Meyer: ([19:33](#))

Shundrawn, as I was reading your book, I have to confess I've been in the workforce 25 years. I'm not new at this thing. And yet, as I was reading your book, there are some very practical principles about self-management that lead to joy that frankly, they really convicted me. I was so surprised. It isn't rocket science and yet it shows such an intentionality about managing ourselves.

Joanna Meyer: ([19:58](#))

And I just want to share a quote that you had included that really stuck out to me. It's from Henry Nouwen. He said, "The greatest joy as well as the greatest pain of living comes not only from what we live but even more from how we think and feel about what we are living." And that stood out to me so profoundly that the attitude that we have that we bring to work every day is a key determinant of what our experience will be.

Joanna Meyer: ([20:20](#))

And I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about that? How should we be setting our attitude towards work? And how is it a reflection of Christian belief, not just the power of positive thinking?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([20:32](#))

Right. And so first of all, isn't that quote by Henry Nouwen so profound? And I read all the time so I'm biased, but like for those, if you haven't read any of his work, I encourage it. But here's what I would say. If you really listen to what I'm seeking to communicate there, and I talked about this in the very first chapter of the book because it focuses on attitude. This is not about positive thinking. Albeit it does, again, speak to attitude.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([21:04](#))

And Scripture actually comprehensively addresses all kinds of manner of issues referring to our attitude and our character. But here's what I would say, Joanna, the quote is actually about right belief. So, what I always tell people is we actually don't act on what we intellectually or cognitively know, we act on what we believe. And that's why all the time, you can see people who intellectually or cognitively know the right thing to do. But they do absolutely the wrong thing.



Shundrawn Thomas: ([21:35](#))

And so, if it were just about intellectual assent, people would think and behave very differently every day. But what the reality is, and I say this and no judgment away, it is just true. When we are acting, we are acting fully based on what we believe at that point in time. And so, when it talks about this attitude, attitude is not about telling somebody, "Just go think differently," or, "Be positive," or, "Think that thoughts." Actually, what the Bible says is actually, study the deep things of your heart, discover those places where we've taken in wrong beliefs that lead to wrong attitudes or wrong thinking that lead to wrong actions.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([22:19](#))

And another reason it's very difficult is oftentimes what people are doing is they're trying to get people to "change their actions." And what they're missing is that that's a wasted cause if they haven't changed what they believe. And so, the book actually is built around three really fundamental beliefs that I think are all born out in Scripture. The first one is work is inherently good. And you're actually designed to flourish in your workplace.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([22:46](#))

Now, pause there. If you believe that, you think and act in a certain way. If you don't believe that, don't pass go, don't collect 200, so to speak. The next thing I say is work is intended to be joyful. Now, here's the thing. I can go through a lot of practical advice to give you. But if your starting point is that you don't believe work as intended to be joyful, then it's a waste of time. Don't pass go, don't collect 200.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([23:10](#))

The last one is the most important thing and it gets to setting you up for all the practical things we talked about in the book. In order to discover the kind of joy that I'm talking about, I realized this for myself, you have to transform your mindset. And doesn't the Bible talk to us about that all the time? It says what we are transformed literally by the renewing of our mind. It's telling you if you want to experience life differently, any part of life including your work, it starts with a literal transformation of our mindset or our thinking.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([23:43](#))

The Bible, in a sense, is telling us, "Look, a little secret for you. Part of the issue or the fundamental part of the issue is you have wrong beliefs." And so, when you internalize the truth and you have right beliefs, that begins the transformation of how you experience every component of your life.



Dustin Moody: ([24:01](#))

I found myself really convicted when I came to that section of your book that Joanna referenced in and I'll share a quote, but I realized the stressors that I preemptively bring into the office are often self-inflicted. I'm ascribing motives ... Not my current colleagues, obviously we're all great. But hypothetically, I'm ascribing motives to people that are not true. That I've made up in my head.

Dustin Moody: ([24:24](#))

I get to the Sunday night Skerries and I'm preemptively dreading what I have to do Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. So, I'm already setting myself up for failure. And you're right, starting the day with a healthy attitude toward work is not about positive/negative per se, instead it's about having an affirmative plan for tackling the triumphant challenges to be expected within each day. It is also trusting that whatever challenges the new day brings, the opportunity to do meaningful work is an instance of grace.

Dustin Moody: ([24:48](#))

And I thought, "How often do I not see work as an instance of grace?" And I feel like there are seasons when we all have like starting a new job and there's an excitement and there's a momentum or finishing a project. But in general, we sort of lose that luster at some point. Like seeing work as an instance of grace that we were created to do was a really convicting point for me of reframing my thinking about how I approach what we're doing.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([25:11](#))

Yeah. So, for me, I believe in transparency. And you know that what you quote, it's woven around personal narratives where I share experiences I've had. And again, I don't know that you ever get to a point where you totally perfect these things. So, we're constantly growing and being perfected. We're constantly being convicted, and hopefully moving to deeper levels and higher levels of faith and trust.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([25:38](#))

But the point is I tell people all the time, oftentimes when I'm helping some of my leaders work through conflict providing coaching, what I ask people is I said, "You don't even have to tell me if you don't want to. But here's what I know is true about you because I know it's true about all of us. There's a story you've told yourself in your head about the situation. So, what I want you to do is pause and ask yourself, do you know that story to be true? Could it be incomplete? And



the reason I can say this because I've listened to what you've told me and in that, you stated a few facts. And you've given me a lot where you've ascribed intent, motive and all these different things. What if some of that were not true? What if much of it or most of it were not true?"

Shundrawn Thomas: ([26:29](#))

And then I share with people, "I'm saying this to you because I know that I can have a tendency to do that and one of the things I do first is I try to catch myself, and try to think about, how do I tell myself a different narrative?" And here's the most powerful part, Dustin. Say for even if I've gotten the narrative mostly right, then that's where the grace comes in. Because I say, when have I been on the other side of that? When have I made that mistake? When have I spoken too preemptively or abruptly? How many times could they even be counted had God extended to me grace?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([27:08](#))

And so, even in the moment where I think I have got it right, what is the call to me as a believer if I really do believe in terms of how I should respond or engage in that situation?

Joanna Meyer: ([27:21](#))

So, here's a question I want to know, Shundrawn, that you alluded to it is that we often experience conflict in the workplace. I think about my early days in corporate life and I have a memory of hearing the voices of executives echoing down the hall as they yelled at each other across a boardroom or seeing someone stomped out of a meeting because they were so upset. And in an ideal world, that isn't the way professionals would behave, and yet I'm guessing you may have seen that over the years. How have you learned as a believer to navigate those moments of tremendous conflict?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([27:57](#))

They can be difficult. And so, one of the things I tell, and you've read the book so you know, I make it very clear to people, I don't have a Pollyanna view of the world. And I want to be very clear while I'm talking about joy, that doesn't mean like every day is peaches and cream or every interaction. And quite frankly, joy is often most represented by how you actually respond, your internal attitude when you do experience sometimes those challenges and difficult circumstances.



Shundrawn Thomas: ([28:26](#))

One of the things I would say is to use a line from Joe. We are really challenged as believers many times to keep our integrity. I can think in my early career when I was working in the capital markets and I was more on the institutional sell-side. I'm a person of deep faith and convictions. I don't believe in shouting and raising your voice. And I don't use profanity.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([28:51](#))

And I inherited one of the most challenging clients. As a matter of fact, they put me on the account. I mean, he'd run two other people off the account and they said, "You're good at dealing with difficult people." And he can be difficult but by the grace of God, I wound up working productively with him. And we were doing lots of business with that account. It happened to be one of the largest accounts at the time.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([29:16](#))

And I remember walking into the situation and he treated me in a situation so ungraciously. I was traveling with the management team, put me out of the meeting and he was demanding me to go get coffee for the group in a meeting where we're supposed to all be in. And when I respectfully declined to do that and I had to talk to him later, even though I was very clear with him that I respected him and there was a way I wanted to engage, he went on a profanity-laced tirade.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([29:46](#))

And so, there are a lot of ways you can respond in that situation. But I did two things. And the balance is important. I didn't respond with fire. I didn't disrespect him or discredit him. I also though made sure he knew what I believed how I was with people and that this wasn't the right way for us to engage and if he couldn't figure out a more productive way to engage, that we weren't going to be able to have a conversation. The one thing I remember thinking about then is seating next to a client, a colleague rather, and they were so concerned because they were saying, "Well, you just basically said you're not going to speak to one of the most important clients." \

Shundrawn Thomas: ([30:23](#))

And they were wondering whether or not that there would have been support there by the executive management. The long story short is that there was. So, it was a painful situation to deal with this particular client. But I also saw a lot of things that were positive. I saw management that didn't necessarily share my same religious beliefs come behind me and



support me in a really difficult situation. I saw the need sometimes even when things don't go our way to just hold our peace and to maintain our integrity.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([30:55](#))

And so, there are so many examples of situations that I have throughout the course of my career that speak to the difficulty that you're talking about. And so, it's not to suggest that, again, it's all going to be easy because we're believers or because we're saved. But I do think it's working a greater good in us.

Joanna Meyer: ([31:13](#))

That's encouraging for me to hear, Shundrawn. I'm curious what should our approach to work be if we would like to experience more joy?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([31:22](#))

Yeah. It's interesting, if I had to sum up our approach in one word, I would say purposeful. The Bible tells us that tomorrow is not a promise. So, all we know for sure is we have this day. And so, I encourage people, when you're starting every day, ask yourself certain questions that get to your intentionality. How will you purposefully advance the mission of the organization?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([31:51](#))

And I know that sounds like, in a sense, a big question but it actually is relevant because I always tell people, "When you join any organization, small or large, you're committing to the mission of that organization and you want to be in tune with it to actually not only be productive, but to feel fulfilled. How will you purposely and actually positively impact the lives of other people?"

Shundrawn Thomas: ([32:14](#))

So, think about it. Our work is always involving people, our coworkers, our clients. We have all kinds of stakeholders, maybe the communities that we work in. But do people really think purposefully about how they'll do that? And this is important too, how do we purposely advance our professional and personal development? If you think about it, we spend the majority of our waking hours at work. So, to the extent we are going to be protected, how can it not happen at work?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([32:38](#))

But what's interesting if we're honest, a lot of times, we're, in a sense, letting work happen to us. But we're expecting other people to take responsibility for our professional and personal



development. But you can decide every day in the context of your work what kind of person you are becoming. You can do that on purpose. And so, that's how I think about really being intentional in terms of how you approach that.

Dustin Moody: ([33:05](#))

Shundrawn, before you wrap up, I'd love to talk a little bit more about leadership and organizational life particularly for people who find themselves sort of in the middle and this idea of leading from the middle. Particularly, we hear a lot from our fellow participants or people who are sort of early to midlevel in their careers. They feel stuck in this spot of like they're not a decision-maker, they're not necessarily an organizational leader, but they still want to affect positive change in their organizations and their departments. What advice would you give to them about leading well from where they sit right now?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([33:40](#))

Right. So, this is a great question because I think what it reflects also is one of the strong perceptions or I believe untruths or mysteries that has been perpetrated. Now, let's be clear, if you have positional leadership in your organization, you certainly have a platform from which you can have significant influence if you choose. But even your positional leadership, in and of itself, does not make you a leader. Maybe you're an executive or a manager and have the capacity or opportunity to lead in a significant way.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([34:20](#))

So, what I like to say to people is leadership is not about position per se, because you can actually lead from whatever position you're in. Because leadership ultimately, at its essence, is about influence. And so, everyone has a sphere of influence, some of us larger than others, but we all have a sphere of influence. But I like what Theodore Roosevelt said. In one quote, he said, "Do what you can with what you have where you are."

Shundrawn Thomas: ([34:45](#))

And so I encourage people just start, what is it that you have, what is your bag of tools? Where are you? What's the media group you're in? How can you expand that sphere of influence? One of the things I say to people, when I've done this at every stage of my career, I said, "Being a leader is also the same way you get promoted to even greater leadership. And it's a simple rule. My rule is provide more service than you get paid for."

Shundrawn Thomas: ([35:11](#))



So, one thing that you can do as a leader, if you're only fulfilling the strict responsibilities as laid out in "the job responsibility document" that you got when you started your jobs, you're not maximizing your leadership opportunity, because leadership is sacrificial. So, you got to provide more service than you get paid for. Here's another important point I realized about being a leader and this is in the middle and it's especially important when you're at the top. You should set an example.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([35:39](#))

So, be quick to admit your failings or your mistakes. Be transparent. That's leadership because it will allow other people to be more transparent and authentic. There are things you can do from either "lower positions" that can change the nature of the culture or the subculture that you're working with if you choose to leave.

Joanna Meyer: ([36:02](#))

Such an encouraging and challenging thought. Shundrawn, we like to end our interviews by giving our guest a chance to speak directly to our listeners. And I know that you're a pastor's kid. So, I'm going to ask you to channel your father's voice as you think about this. Would you call our listeners to either greater godliness or service in their work or as unique to your message towards find a greater joy in their work?

Shundrawn Thomas: ([36:26](#))

So, there's a concept that I really came up with prior to the book and really crystallized it more in the book, but I refer to it as work-life synergy. And what do I mean by that? I would often hear people talk about this thing called work-life balance. And I understood the intent of what they were suggesting. But it always didn't quite register to me because it kind of assumed that like you had your work on one hand and maybe your life on the other. And there was some mythical balance that you were trying to find.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([36:58](#))

And practically speaking, it really doesn't work like that. You only have one life. Your work is one with your life. And I find that people that are at most at peace, that are most fulfilled and most joyful, they find out how to find their life's calling and carry that out in the context of everything they do inclusive of their work. So, they have what I call this work-life synergy. And in the very last chapter of the book, the third segment of the book talks about these seven principles that help you create this work-life synergy.



Shundrawn Thomas: ([37:29](#))

But the last one, Joanna, speaks to your question which is this. It's very simple. Work glorifies God. Work glorifies God. And there's this quote from Mother Teresa. I love this quote. She says, "There's always this danger that we may just do the work for the work's sake." And she says, "This is where the respect and the love and the devotion come in, that we do it to God and we do it to Christ, that's why we try to do," as she said, "as beautifully as we can."

Shundrawn Thomas: ([38:01](#))

And so, when I believe that when people view their work in the context of this greater or more transcendent purpose that they have, they actually discover a joy that money can't provide. And to me, this is in line with what Mother Teresa meant when she said, "To do the work as beautifully as possible." This is what she was encouraging us. This is what I think you're referring to in terms of finding this greater sense of godliness in our work. As the word of God says, "We do our work as unto the Lord." That's one of my mother's favorite quotes.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([38:39](#))

And so, to do this, we got to do some simple things. Well, first of all, if we're going to glorify God, we must love God. And we must love our neighbors. What did he tell us? He said, "How can you say you love me if you don't love your neighbors who you can see?" So, our neighbors and our coworkers. And here's the thing, we got to continually remind ourselves that work is a wonderful gift, one of the most wonderful gifts. And every time we have the opportunity to do good work, it is an instance of grace.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([39:09](#))

And so, recognizing that through purposeful intent, we can and do discover not just joy but I think great joy in our work.

Joanna Meyer: ([39:19](#))

Beautiful words. Thanks for joining us today, sir. What an honor to learn from you and with you.

Shundrawn Thomas: ([39:24](#))

It is my pleasure. Thank you, Joanna. Thank you, Dustin.

Joanna Meyer: ([39:30](#))

What an encouraging conversation with Shundrawn Thomas. If you'd like to see his book, Discover Joy in Your Work, we will link to it in our show-notes. And I also want to remind you



that applications for the 5280 Fellowship are now open. You can find more information about the fellowship at 5280fellows.com. It's an in-person opportunity for people in the Metro Denver area. It's for emerging leaders, a nine-month intensive fellowship focused on integrating faith and work in your influencing culture. It's amazing so I encourage you to check it out.

Joanna Meyer: ([39:59](#))

And our prayer for you today is that you would experience more joy in your work as a result of this conversation.

Speaker 2: ([40:07](#))

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