



Joanna Meyer:

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

Hi, and welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, Denver Institute's Director of Public Engagement. And I'm joined today by my colleague, Jeff Hoffmeyer, our VP of Advancement, and Lisa Slayton, founder of Tamim Partners and a faithful partner in conversations about faith and work. How are the two of you doing on this fine spring day?

Lisa Slayton:

Well, pretty good today here in Pittsburgh. The sun is actually out, so we'll take that. That's a good spring day for Pittsburgh.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Spring is a great season in Colorado, Joanna. My mind starts turning from skiing toward fishing, and the trout will soon be rising.

Joanna Meyer:

I love it. I love it. Well, our topic today is not so springy. We're talking about disappointment in work. And there's so many ways that we can individually be disappointed. We can be disappointed at the organizational level. Maybe we've missed a promotion, we've experienced office politics turning against us. There are relational dynamics. Maybe you have ongoing conflict in a job that you hoped would be a really good one, or a mentor didn't turn out to be the advocate that you hoped that they would be for you.

Sometimes disappointment comes on a much larger scale when industries change. Maybe you trained for a job, for a role that no longer exists. There's a woman I follow on Twitter that has built a successful career in academia at a smaller school that doesn't offer tenure to faculty, and she may lose her job and have to leave academia, her lifelong pursuit, in the next few weeks.

And sometimes, it's just personal. You may have done your best work on a project and didn't achieve the results that you hoped for.

Really, disappointment is about being human. To hope and take risks is to open ourselves up to disappointment. I appreciate what the English poet Alexander Pope says. He said, "Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed." But who wants to live without hopefulness or expectation? That's just not a way to live. So our topic today is how do we navigate disappointment? And Lisa, I would like to start with you. This is a general question and then we'll get it a little more personal, but how have you seen professional disappointment affect people?



Lisa Slayton:

Well, I can certainly start at this question from my perspective. I coach people vocationally, right? That's a big part of what I spend my days doing. And what that means is that I'm often seeing them when they're in the midst of a disruption, a pretty significant disruption in their work life, in their broader vocational life. And that's usually fraught with disappointment.

And I would say it's a continuum, Joanna. Disappointments can be a little bit of a sort of blip on the screen, "How do I navigate this? It's not what I expected to happen. I need some tools and resources, and I think I can work my way through this" to utterly devastating, Right? The disappointment is so deep and so painful. It's rooted in a betrayal or a real loss of identity because of what's happened.

And so, it affects people in a whole myriad of ways. And I don't think we can just put it in a box and say, "Here's the way disappointment shows up." It's very broad and it can be extremely, extremely devastating. And I don't want us to minimize it at all, because I think it's really important to pay attention to that.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

First of all, Joanna, thanks for even raising this topic on the Faith & Work Podcast, and I'm just honored to be a part of it, particularly with Lisa. Lisa, I have a great deal of respect for you. And I remember the first time you and I met. We were on this highway in the mountains of Colorado. Everyone else was going hiking, but you and I, I loved it, we didn't go. We just sat in the back of this pickup truck and started to get to know each other. But you were really honest in those first moments of our friendship about your own disappointment at work, which I appreciated, and that gave me the ability to be honest about some of my disappointments. So anyway, Joanna, thanks for hosting the conversation, and Lisa, I'm glad to be a part of it with you.

Just to add to what Lisa, you said, I've seen severe depression come from dissatisfaction, disappointment at work in coworkers I've worked with, also just interpersonal damage. If things aren't going well at work, you can certainly bring that home, whatever home is for you or into your friendships. Certainly, the deterioration of physical health when there's a lot of stress at work, how we choose to deal with that physically, and often that can be in unhealthy ways. And then, I've also seen it have this ripple effect if one person in a particular working environment, and it doesn't have to be the leader, by the way, but one person is dissatisfied, experiencing disappointment, that has this ripple effect into the entire organization. So for any number of ways, that's why this is such an important topic.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. I've been amazed over the years, if I encounter someone that has experienced severe disappointment in work, that emotion often will linger with them. You could be talking to them years



later and they will still have either a hard heart or deep pain. It'll be part of their narrative if they haven't learned how to deal with it.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. We're recording in March, and earlier this year, in January, more than 50,000 people working in the tech industry were laid off, which is just a mind boggling thought. I think about all of the people who found their identity in working for Google or Zoom or Amazon, many of whom invested tremendous energy and risk in working with these growing tech companies. And in just a matter of a simple email, "Hey, there's no longer a spot for you at the company." Your hope, your identity, your sense of purpose, your sense of mission can evaporate in something that simple. So it's common and confusing and disorienting to be experiencing that kind of sudden disappointment.

Lisa Slayton:

Well, I was just going to make a comment. I read an article this week by a Stanford Business School professor who expressed real concern about those layoffs, and particularly at those big four. I guess in Silicon Valley there, the acronym is FANG: Facebook, Apple.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Netflix.

Lisa Slayton:

Something, and Google, Netflix and Google, right. And they laid off enormous amounts of workers. And one of the things that I read that this particular, and I can send the article if we want to link it in the show notes, it was fascinating, was that most of these companies probably overhired in the 2020, 2021 period. And they all have buckets of cash. They don't really need to be doing these layoffs. But what happens is when one company decides to do it, they all think they have to do it, right?

So can you imagine, and his reflections are very thoughtful on why he thinks this happens and why he thinks it's really troubling, and he's right. Can you imagine being one of those people who lost your job and reading this gentleman's reflections and saying, "They're just toying with me," right? "They hired me and for a job that maybe they needed to hire me for, maybe they didn't, and now they get to hire me just because they've got to keep up with the other guys in the Valley." That feels very inhumane to me and very callous. And I read that and I went, "Oh my goodness, if that's for real, that we have a bigger problem out there, then we realize."

Joanna Meyer:

So when I think about disappointment, it really comes from this idea of unmet expectation.



Lisa Slayton:

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer:

You can't talk about it without acknowledging that part of our expectation gets disappointed, and that's where that emotion comes from. There's a common expression in therapeutic circles that says, "All disappointment is rooted in unmet expectations." And Lisa, based on the number of people that you've worked with, I am sure that you have seen unmet expectations derail people. Tell us how you see that play out in your client's lives.

Lisa Slayton:

Yeah. It's a great comment, and I think it's something we really have to pay attention to when we're talking about disappointment, for sure. And I don't want to minimize real valid disappointment, but I have often had someone say to me, "Well, I'm so disappointed that this didn't happen" or "I didn't get this promotion" or "This person got the job I really wanted and I worked so hard for it." And when I probe and ask a few questions, what I often find is that at no time did the person who's sitting in their own sort of pool of disappointment voice their expectations to anybody, right? And so, if we're not going to make our expectations known, and where the assumption is that our boss or our colleagues or the organization knows what our expectations are and what we're hoping for, just because they know us and they should just know what we're thinking, is really a very unhealthy posture for us to take as individuals, right?

There was research years and years ago that I found to be super fascinating. And the biggest issue with expectations is not when they're unmet as much as when they're unspoken, right? So if I'm in a relational dynamic, and I have the opportunity to at least speak what my expectations are, particularly to a person who is in a position of power or authority over me, and I can say, "Hey, I know we're doing an office move, and I'd really a cubicle closer to the window." Right? And my boss can say to me, "Hey, good to know. I'll do the best I can. I can't promise anything, but I'll take that under consideration." I will feel far more valued and heard, regardless of whether I get my cubicle in the other window or not, because I've spoken my expectation out, right?

What happens so often is the expectation is there, we have it, but we haven't told anybody. And then it doesn't get met, and we've got this kind of bitterness and resentment building in us, and it's never been communicated. And we can't expect people to be mind readers. It happens in interpersonal relationships all the time, in marriages. It's like, "Well, my husband should have known that's what I wanted." I'm like, "Well, how would he have known? Did you tell him?"

"Well, no, he just should know. He knows me." It's an unfair expectation to put in any kind of a relationship, particularly in a work environment where things are often moving very quickly. If you have



an expectation around something, you have to take responsibility for yourself and at least voice it and say to your boss or whoever, to say, "Hey, there's something I'd like to talk to you about. I know there's this position opening up. I really would like to put my name in the ring for it. I don't know what's going to happen, but here's why I think I'd be a good candidate." And how they treat you around that remains to be seen, but at least you've voiced your expectation and your hope. If it doesn't happen, there's another conversation to be had for all the reasons why. But if we don't voice our expectations, then we really set ourselves up for disappointment that could have been avoided, and I would love to see more people do better at that.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. It's super important. In some of the research I've been doing around women and work, I think we find that women don't always stand up and self-promote at critical times when they need to.

Lisa Slayton:

Right.

Joanna Meyer:

And I think that goes into expectations that sense that, "If I just work hard enough, if I do a good job and excel in my role, I will be recognized and advancement will happen." But if you don't have the skill and the willingness to ask the tough questions of, "Why am I not getting promoted?" or "What steps would it take for me to get promoted?" Matched with the willingness to change jobs if it's very clear that that growth won't happen, that's where those unvoiced expectations can really get you in trouble.

Lisa Slayton:

Yeah, for sure.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, I would just add here, Joanna and Lisa, I agree that it's an important focus to talk about expectations in terms of disappointment at work. One thing that can happen is I myself, as the worker, can have way too many expectations for the position and how important it is, and, "This is my dream job. I can't wait to get into that dream job." For me, that was being the senior pastor of a large Presbyterian church. That's what I wanted to do forever. And I heard one pastor, another senior pastor at a Presbyterian church say, "You know what? I've been to the Promised Land, and the Promised Land is okay. It turns out it actually wasn't the greatest thing."

And this is part of what we try and build an awareness of through our work at Denver Institute. We want work to be deeply meaningful, but we don't want to extract all of our meaning and self-worth from our work. Work is one of those classic idols. One of the pastors in our network talks about idols as, it's when



a good thing becomes a God thing. So it's so easy with work, particularly in our culture, to put it up on a pedestal, to try and extract way too much meaning. Just think about what happens at a cocktail party. The first question is, "What do you do?" So to extract too much meaning from it is part of that expectation problem.

Lisa Slayton:

Yeah. I'd take that one step further even, Jeff, and say, as a follower of Jesus, my identity and meaning and purpose come first and foremost in my relationship with the Lord, and it's incumbent on me to bring my sense of meaning and purpose to my work.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah.

Lisa Slayton:

Right? Not assume that my work is going to be the place that gives me meaning and purpose. That said, I want to do purposeful work. I want to do work that's doing good in the world for sure, but that my work owes me my meaning and purpose is a very misguided notion, and I think it is the source of a lot of pain and disappointment in the workplace right now. We saw during the Great Resignation, right? We did a series of webinars last year with the Dupree Center over at CityGate, which is an initiative of the Denver Institute on the Great Resignation or the Big Quit.

And my case was, and I'll continue to make this case, it's not a crisis of work, it's a crisis of calling, right? People don't understand, they haven't done the deeper work of understanding who God made them to be and how they're to bring that into every role and aspect of their lives, including their work. So they're assuming the work is going to be the thing providing their sense of meaning and purpose. And that's not fair to the work, right? I don't know if that's quite the right way to say it, but it's putting a lot of burden on the work. And then, it's easy to become the victim and say, "Well, the work didn't do it for me, so I'm out." Right? Well, that may or may not... I don't think that's quite the right posture that we as Christians should be taking towards our work.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, indeed. Amen, so well said, Lisa.

Joanna Meyer:

I want to take a moment and speak specifically to younger workers, because I think the first five to seven years of a career are critical time for people to be disappointed. I've talked to younger workers who find work really boring and they get disillusioned because it isn't what they hoped it to be. I saw this article from John Kyle, he wrote for the Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation & Culture, and we'll link to it on



our show notes, but he cautioned younger employees in those early years. He said, "We have limited experience, so our expectations are primarily informed by imagination. Thus, the expectation versus reality gap is born." And I'm wondering what advice you two would have for people that are newer in their career that may be butting up against the hard reality of daily work?

Lisa Slayton:

Well, there's a lot to say there. I think our culture has done our young people a really great disservice. And it sounds something like, "Pursue your passion and you'll never work another day in your life." And it's really bad advice, right? And I could wax on extensively about why it is. Our friend, Missy Wallace, wrote a really good piece about it several years back. But the reality is, passion is fickle, right? And the thing I'm passionate about today may change over time. And particularly, when you're earlier in your career, you have to build an experience bank. You have to learn and you have to build a set of skills and competencies. And some of those things are, quite frankly, pretty boring and mundane, but they will serve you well down the road.

Early in my career, I worked in retail merchandising. And that sounds very glamorous, but a good portion of it was running numbers and looking at stock inventories and understanding where we were going to be and projecting and all of that. And basically, what it was, was running a mini P&L, right, a mini profit and loss, because every merchant's area was a small business, essentially, and we were responsible for bottom lines. It was wonderful experience for the things that I did later in my career. It was boring as all get out when I was doing it, and I thought it was going to drive me bonkers. But I had never forgotten it. And this was long before there were spreadsheets to aid and support all of this. We were running them manually back in those days. It tells you how old I am.

But those were tools and resources that I developed that helped me understand, developed my business mind, that helped me to understand how to think about revenue and income and profit and loss, and read a balance sheet and understand an income statement. And at the time, I was miserable and cranky about it, but I look back and I'm grateful for that time.

And so, I think the expectation that work is going to be one big, glamorous, exciting journey from the day you graduate from college is just not realistic. And I think we have created these expectations, back to expectations, for our young people that aren't fair to them. It's not fair to the work world. It's not fair to the jobs they're going into, and it's just not realistic, right? There is a part of work that's hard and repetitive, but it's a learning curve that you've got to go through.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

I think that's a really wise word. Just to that, I'll add this. There is a certain measure of influence that you cannot have, say at the top or in an executive leadership position, that you can have when you're more in the trenches. And I've only learned that and known that coming out on the other side when I've been in some of those classic trying to lead from the second chair positions. And I'm frustrated maybe



because I feel like I'm not using the full breadth of my skillset, I'm not in my vocational wheel set. And those frustrations are real just like Lisa has been saying.

But there's this also hopeful note that if you can rise above that a little bit and kind of look around you, you realize, "Oh, I can have influence from this particular position in the organization that I can't when I'm at the top," because you're actually more relationally connected to the heart of the organization in a way that it's often hard to be when you're in one of those executive level positions.

Hi, I'm Jeff Hoffmeyer, Vice President of Advancement here at Denver Institute for Faith & Work. And I would like to invite you to become a part of our new Monthly Partner Community. Whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you as a Monthly Partner, you will receive a welcome box. You'll have exclusive access to private digital content, personalized vocational coaching, and discounts for Denver Institute content and experiences. To become a Monthly Partner, simply visit denverinstitute.org/give or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah I'd point to our episode on Leading Up, that's a couple of years old. We'll link to it in our show notes that talks a lot about the potential and the power of those early years of a career, of knowing how to lead up wisely and also the great potential that's there. Hoff, I have another question for you, because as we were preparing for this interview, you stressed the importance of understanding your own past experiences and the role that they can play in shaping our current experience of disappointment. And I know that you've walked through extreme seasons of vocational stress. To the degree that you're comfortable sharing, how has understanding your past helped you understand the way that you experience disappointment?

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think what this podcast episode is not, is it's not Lisa and I and you, Joanna, telling our really sad, hard stories. One of my favorite movies is Jerry McGuire. It's a little bit dated now, but you remember the scene where the Renee Zellweger character, they're out to dinner with Tom Cruise, and they're both divorcees. And then she says, "Let's not tell each other our sad stories." And then they don't, right?

So we're not actually telling our sad stories or all the details, but I have learned this, Joanna. And part of this is just doing the hard work of therapy, and I hope our listeners are connected to a good therapist, but you do have to do some hard mining of your past. And all of us, of course, have wounds. In some ways, we might have one or two key wounds, and they normally come from our family of origin. So as we get to know that story, we can start to realize, "Why am I so upset by this thing that just happened at



work?" or "I didn't get this job that I really wanted to," which that's happened to me a lot. It's funny. I know people who have never not gotten a job, and that is not me. I've not gotten positions often.

"But why am I so upset by that? Well, maybe it goes back to this thing that happened in my past or this dynamic that was going on in my family." That's a little bit of what therapists called family systems theory. So I come from a certain family system and my family of origin. I bring wounds out of that. And then, when I step into a new organization, that organization, of course, also has a family system with its own woundedness and its own dysfunction.

So I need to bring a high degree of awareness, "Okay, what's my own hurt? How am, I as an individual, dysfunctional? And how does that dysfunction marry with this dysfunction that's in the system?" So this is hard work and this kind of mining, it's not really fun whether it's in therapy or in conversation with good friends, but it's really important if we're not going to be consumed by the disappointments that are just myriad at our work lives.

Joanna Meyer:

Oh, yeah. I think about a situation I was in, in a meeting not related to Denver Institute, but I was in a meeting, and something was said that echoed language that I had heard from 20 years before. And thankfully, I had self-control, but I reacted inside, because I was like, "This is the same way. I'm going to be treated the same way I was 20 years ago." And it was really helpful a couple of hours later to be able to say, "Oh, I know why this struck me so personally. Thankfully, it's not the same scenario, so I need to choose a different response in dealing with this disappointment." Lisa, what thoughts would you have on how our past shapes are experience of disappointment?

Lisa Slayton:

Yeah. Again, we're not going to tell our sad stories, so thank you for the reminder, Hoff. But to Hoff's point, we do bring our family systems, kind of the junk from our family systems kind of goes with us unless we've done some hard work in a therapeutic setting, and there are lots of ways to work through some of that. I had a real wake-up call, gosh, it's probably going on 15 years now, and there was a very difficult situation going on in terms of my relationship with the board of my organization. And one of my board members was a pastor and also a family systems therapist, and he came into my office one day and he said, "We're not going to get out of this mess unless you stop allowing this system to define you."

And I knew he loved me, so he was calling me out, but he wasn't calling me out in a way that was intended to be harmful to me. He actually did me a huge favor. He was right, right? My tendency in systems is to kind of rescue the system. I want to rescue, right? I want to kind of make it all right and I'll take way too much on myself. And he said, "You're over-functioning and you need to do some work."

And I did. And that was part of a big shift that happened and took a while to get through. But it was very, very helpful for me to really learn and understand what it means to stand very well-defined to the



systems that I am engaged with, not in a sort of enmeshed toxic way that I'm all kind of entangled, but not detached and removed either, right? Because we want to be in healthy relationships.

And I think that was a game changer for me, really understanding, one, what he meant, and then doing the work of self-definition. It's a journey I've been on ever since, right? You continue to do that work. So what does it mean to know how to play a healthy role in the systems that you're a part of, particularly if you have some family history that's dysfunctional or you've been part of dysfunctional systems in the past. That's how I would add to what Hoff said, which was super helpful.

Joanna Meyer:

So in researching this topic, I did a little bit of Googling and I was astonished at how disappointing... It's interesting that I use that word to describe a conversation about disappointment, but how disappointing a lot of the resources on disappointment are, because the solution is often to turn to the power of positive thinking. It was driving me nuts. If I see another LinkedIn blog post about, "Just believe and things will be better," I'm going to gag, because I don't actually think that's a practical solution for getting us out of disappointment.

I think we can see some biblical models that really help us see how the heroes of the faith dealt with their own disappointment. So I want to pivot the conversation towards that biblical framework, so that we actually have a solid rock on which we can deal with disappointment. So let's talk about what we see in scripture. Who are some of the people that we have seen deal with disappointment and how can they be a lasting model for us? Lisa, why don't we start with you?

Lisa Slayton:

Sure. I did a retreat last summer, and the basis for the retreat, theologically, was the story of Jonah. And I would not put Jonah forth as a model for a hero of the faith who modeled this well, because Jonah was... It's a little book, and I went back and read it again yesterday and today in preparation for this. Jonah was not... He was kind of a pain in the butt, right? He didn't do what God asked him to do. He went the other way. He went out and he disobeyed. God said, "Go to Nineveh." He is like, "No, I don't want to go to Nineveh." And he got in the boat, caused all kinds of pain and suffering for the sailors on the boat. And then, he goes to Nineveh and God tells him what to do and he does it. But then, he does more than what he's asked to do, and he gets angry when God doesn't sort of respond to his extra effort.

And I think part of what we see in scripture in the heroes that we want to emulate, obviously, and particularly Jesus, but others, is how obedient they are to God's call and how clear they are in what is theirs to do and what isn't. And they stay in their lane. They have an understanding, and they don't layer a lot of other things on top of it, "Well, this is mine to do, but I could do this and I could do this, and I could do this, too." They're very focused and they kind of stay within the guardrails of who God made them to be and how He's calling them to move in a particular situation. And I think that just takes time and maturity to see and understand.



Jonah would be the anti-example of that, right? Because he was... And then he complained. Every time God kind of corrected him, he complained about it. He was a griper and a whiner, but he couldn't just be obedient to the call of God. He had to always add in his own stuff.

And how often, I know I'm guilty of it all the time, right? "Oh, well, I can do the thing, but then I can do five other things, too." And I get out over my own skis, and that's where we always kind of get ourselves in trouble. So I do think some of it is being obedient to the call and staying in our lane and understanding what that is. And that's part of the long journey of discerning calling and really understanding clearly, "What is mine to do?" is the question I ask myself all the time, or "Is this mine to do?" when an opportunity comes my way.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. I was thinking about the Exodus narrative too, of how the Israelites dealt with disappointment in the desert. God had worked miraculously, incredible miracles on their behalf, to free them from slavery in Egypt. And then, they get out in the desert and there are a lot of disappointments out there. "At least in Egypt, we had vegetables," they could say, or "Every day manna, God?" Just great examples of how we can, in our own expectation of how life will be, overlook the faithfulness of God.

Hoff, I know that this theme of disappointment in scripture is close to your heart as you think about the upcoming Easter holiday. Tell us a little bit more about how you see God ministering to us through Christ's death and resurrection.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah. I'd love to answer that. Before I answer that particular question, Joanna, I think in an overarching way, what we see in scripture is just this continual reminder, "You're not alone." Of course, that means God is with us, but also to avoid isolation in whatever work environment we're in. Because if we're avoiding isolation, then we have people, like Lisa was talking about, that board member who spoke truth to you of love when he said that thing to you. So we need truth tellers in our lives, in our vocational lives, who speak the truth in love.

And then, the other thing that can happen when we're in close community, and this is something that I learned from my mentor and a really great author, Todd Bolsinger. We've had him on our podcast. We can probably link to that too as well, Joanna, and reference his books as well. But he was always telling me, he was my coach in this role I was in, to get curious when someone was responding in a way which was deeply hurtful for me. And this is really hard to do, but just to get curious about why they're responding in that way. So just a couple more tidbits in terms of how to deal with disappointment.

But yeah, Joanna, when I think about what scripture has to say about this topic, it's not necessarily who's the individual leader that we can look to, but to ask what I think is a really important question whenever we're looking at scripture, which is, "What time is it in the current realm we're in?"



And since this is Lent, you might be listening to this a couple weeks before Easter, maybe it's after Easter, but just to go back to the days of Holy Days and particularly Good Friday, Holy Saturday, which is what the day in between is called, and then Easter Sunday. And I would just say, and this is going to sound kind of somber and very lengthy, but there's actually a lot of hope in this, "Ours is a Holy Saturday world. That's what time it is. We are in between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. So we have the longing and the hope for resurrection and the New Heaven and a New Earth, but we are mired in a Holy Saturday world. And one of the primary places we experience that is at work, with all these kind of disappointments that we've been talking about."

So it's astounding to me and really important that the biblical narrative makes actually a prominent point about Holy Saturday in a strange way, because very little is said about the day in scripture, including in the Gospels and in other portions of the New Testament. But we're very aware that Jesus does not immediately rise from the dead. It doesn't go from Good Friday to resurrection. If you've seen the musical Jesus Christ Superstar, that's what happens. Jesus dies and then all of a sudden, cue the happy music. That is not the gospel story. There is this pause, this durative pause, in which the Son of God is really dead. His heart has stopped, His body is starting to decompose in the tomb. And we have to carry that part of the awareness of the narrative to really understand the hope of Easter.

So a note of encouragement, whatever disappointment you're facing at work, just be encouraged. That's a mark of this Holy Saturday world in which we're in. But the Son of God went into death, really was dead, and then rose from the dead, so that's where that true hope of resurrection comes from. And the redeeming work that God wants to do in us through our work, that's one of the values of thinking about faith and work, is God wants to transform us in whatever the hard thing is we're going through at work, and to realize God's going to use us to do that kind of resurrection, redemption throughout the world. So I think that's extremely hopeful to realize, "Well, actually what time is it? We're in that Holy Saturday moment at work."

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. And realizing too, that God-sanctifying work takes time. The arc of Scripture does not lean towards instant gratification, which means we have plenty of opportunities to sit with the disappointment or to sit in the tomb. I've been thinking about the Apostle Paul. In Second Corinthians, he writes about God allowing him to experience a physical infirmity, a thorn in his flesh, he calls it. And he says, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it would leave me. And it didn't." Talk about disappointment. You're going all out for the Lord, facing great physical and personal risk in the work of the Gospel, and God won't answer that prayer of, "Lord, just make this easier. Take this away from me."

But here's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12. He said, "But God said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." And I like this part, "For the sake of Christ then, I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak,



then I am strong." And I think there's a model there of leaning into the Lord in that long, long stretch of time that disappointment can last.

Okay. Before we end the conversation, I want to make sure we end on both a practical and a positive note. We wanted to make sure that this is a hopeful conversation in the midst of talking about disappointment. So I'm wondering, for the two of you, what practical either tools or principles would you recommend to a listener that may be dealing with deep disappointment?

Lisa Slayton:

Well, I think we've talked already about learning to make our expectations around things at work appropriately explicit, like, "Here are the things that I hope for." Whether it's a promotion you might be interested in or a different role, being able to communicate them really matters. And don't go on an assumption that someone just sort of somehow can read your mind or figure out what you're thinking. And so, you have to advocate for yourself. You have to be able to speak for, "Hey, you've asked me to do this thing, which I'm happy to do. And where I really have a lot of energy is for this other kind of thing over here. Next time there's an opportunity, could I be considered for?" So how do you advocate for yourself and begin to set expectations in a healthy way for what's possible? You'll learn very quickly if those opportunities are possible, because either they'll come your way or they won't, and then you have different decisions to make. But you won't know unless you communicate those expectations.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, I would just add this, Joanna. Health at work is not at all isolated from health in all the other areas of my life.

Lisa Slayton:

Yeah.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

So Lisa, you were talking earlier about how that board member kind of pulled you aside and shared that encouraging but convicting word with you. Really, what that board member was encouraging you towards was what's called differentiation.

Lisa Slayton:

That's right.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:



Not getting sucked into the thing, although I'm so close to the thing and an integral part of what our organization is trying to do, but I'm not going to be defined by whatever the toxicity is or the lack of health. Okay. That sounds great, and man, I've been trying to learn that for a long time. This is not a workshop kind of thing that you just pick up and then start practicing it. For me, it has to do with, "What are my rhythms of spiritual health, of prayer and worship and Sabbath? What are my rhythms of exercise? What am I eating and drinking?" All of those things, all those kinds of habits, that's the platform or the foundation which plants my feet firmly in that being in Christ, as you were saying, Lisa, so that I can actually differentiate myself from the toxicity or the dysfunction or just the hard things that are happening in my work environment.

Lisa Slayton:

Yeah. And along with that, Hoff, I would say we need the right people in our lives. We can't navigate any of this without a community. And I don't mean 25 people that you are constantly sharing everything with, but I have come to have a sort of firm belief that I think everybody needs a coach, a spiritual director, and a therapist.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yes.

Lisa Slayton:

Right? And maybe you don't need all three all at the same time, but you need those resources in your life. And who are your go-to people when you're in this time of sort of crisis, who you really know care deeply about your wellbeing holistically, not just in the thing that's happening at work, and who will share with you.

This pastor who came into my office, I knew he cared about me. We had that kind of relationship. And he would not... If he had said that outside of the context of that kind of relationship, it would not have been helpful to me. But he said, "You're not in a healthy place and I don't want that for you. And here's what I think needs to happen." And my journey since then has been with therapeutic help and spiritual direction and my own executive coach. I can't do for others without having that same kind of input into my own life. And we need those people in our lives. We are not meant to do this work in isolation. We are meant to do it, God designed us to do it in community.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Absolutely.

Lisa Slayton:

And we can't do it apart from the right people around us.



Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah. Amen to that.

Joanna Meyer:

My practical tip would be, this is a learned skill. This is a life skill that you don't accidentally stumble into knowing how to deal with disappointment. If you've ever met somebody who's stuck or nursing a grievance, you realize that person has not learned the adult behavior of being able to grieve or being able to move through disappointment. And so, my exhortation would be, "Do the work. This will happen in everyone's life, and now might be the time to really press in and learn how to navigate a situation like this."

Lisa Slayton:

I would echo, so make one more comment there, Jo, before I know we have to bring this to a close. I would say, I would observe that the church, particularly the Western Evangelical Church, has not done a particularly good job of discipling people well around grief, and we need to do better. We need real tools and resources to help people grieve both what I would call the ambiguous losses and the unambiguous losses. And we don't have them. We don't have the rituals, we don't have the resources. And we've all experienced a lot of loss over the last several years that makes the losses at work, the disappointments at work, seem that much more profound and we don't have the tools to know how to grieve them well.

And there's a lot more I could say about that, but I think we could do better helping people learn how to grieve well and what that looks like. And by the way, it doesn't mean that you're bringing your grief to a point of closure, because that's kind of a myth. Grief is something that we learn to integrate, but it doesn't disappear, right? And so, how do we learn to live with it in a way that sort of integrates it into who we are and that we can move forward and not get stuck, but also recognizing that there are some pains that stay with us.

Joanna Meyer:

Jeff, for our final word, I'd like to call on your pastoral skills, if you would offer a blessing for us. I found a beautiful prayer from the theologian, Kate Bowler, her new book, *The Lives We Actually Have*, which by the title alone makes me think that she may have dealt with disappointment in her life. But she offered a blessing for lives that we didn't choose, and I'm wondering if you would read that for us.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Yeah, I'd be glad to, Joanna. "A blessing for the lives we didn't choose. Blessed are we in the tender place between curiosity and dread. We, who wonder how to be whole when dreams have disappeared and part of us with them, where mastery, control, determination, bootstrapping, and grit are consigned to



the realm of before, where most of the world lives, in the fever dream that promises infinite choices, unlimited progress, best life now. Blessed are we in the after, forced into stories we never would have written, far outside of answers to questions we even know to ask. God, show us a glimmer of possibility in this new constraint, that small truths will be given back to us. You are held, you are safe, you are loved."

Joanna Meyer:

A couple quick call to actions for the members of our community that are listening. We will have an abundance of links in our show notes today. We'll link to the article that Jeff Hoffmeyer wrote on how Holy Saturday shapes our work. I'll also link to an article from the Washington Institute that we mentioned. It's Dealing With Disappointment at Work by John Kyle. And we'll link to the new Kate Bowler book. And I have a feeling that this episode could really minister to people beyond our current circle of listeners, so we encourage you to share it with a friend or leave a review. Help other people find out about this important conversation.

If you've enjoyed this episode or the Faith and Work podcast, please subscribe, leave a review, or share it with a friend. Your support is critical to helping other listeners discover this vital resource. The Faith & Work Podcast is produced by Denver Institute for Faith & Work, where we believe that work is a way to love God and serve our neighbors. To learn more or to make a financial contribution, visit denverinstitute.org.