

Corey asked me to speak tonight on my faith, business, and communities. These are three subjects that I have spent most of my adult life thinking about, working on, and investing in. So if I am sitting where you are now, and I heard a speaker say something like this, my first reaction would be, after working all day, “we could be here a long time.” And yes, we could be because I am very passionate about all three of these subjects.

But I promise, I will not be like in the book of Acts, where Eutychus was sitting on a window-sill listening to Paul speak at dinner, but at midnight, and to quote Luke in Acts, “ Paul kept on talking and talking, and Eutychus was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead.” The good news is that Paul healed the boy. The bad news is that after he did so, Paul kept talking until daybreak. Paul, as an inspired apostle may have been worth listening to for 12 hours, I am certain that my limit is not more than 30 minutes-so I’ll stick to that.

I want to begin by stretching your imaginations-to dream with me about what might be possible in our churches. Picture yourself in church on a Sunday morning and you are reading through the church bulletin and there is an announcement for a series to start this week that would be on Thursday nights. In the series, Corey is going to interview lay people and the conversation is going to be framed around 5 questions that are listed on the bulletin.

1. In the second century, a writer stated that there was a new group of people who lived “remarkably distinctive lives.” They defined themselves by their relationship to Jesus the Messiah, or Christ. They even took on his name. They called themselves Christians. When you leave your home to go to work, how would you say your life at work is defined by your relationship to Jesus Christ? If your relationship with Jesus Christ defines your identity, how does it define how you do your work?

2. In the Bible, Shalom is picture of creation flourishing as it was meant to be-and the five elements of shalom are goodness, truth, beauty, justice, and plenty.

How is what you do contributing to shalom in the world? Since we need profit to create wealth and wealth to create plenty and plenty to create shalom, how does the way you create profit enhance shalom?

3. In the Bible, we are called to demonstrate neighborly love to everyone we engage-to love your neighbor as yourself? How do you demonstrate this to your customers?

4. We are relational beings, meant to live in relationship with one another, honoring and respecting the inherent dignity of every person, regardless of their position or capacity to produce in life. How do you do this at work?

5. Jesus, in the parable of the Sower, wrote that we should be producers not extractors, givers not takers, that faithful living bears 100x fruit. How are you reinvesting in your community for another generation?

Tonight, I am going to outline in specific ways how I have tried to respond to these questions.-but others have their story to tell as well so I would want to encourage you to invite lay people to tell their story in this manner. I meet with young people on a regular basis and they want to know, is Christianity relevant to all of life and if so, how?

My story is that of a journey that began with my Young Life leader in high school who God used to change the trajectory of my life. He had invited me to Young Life and I told him that I didn't really believe in Christianity-but thanks anyway. He

asked me what I didn't believe in and I said, ' you know, Moses, Jesus, Noah, God, David, Angels." I explained to him how I dropped out of confirmation because I didn't believe it then either." Having clearly revealed how little I knew about what I said I didn't believe in, my Young Life leader did the exactly right thing for me, he challenged me: "Don, you don't even know what you don't believe in and if you are not going to believe it, at least you should know what you don't believe in-and the only way to learn about it is to actually read the Bible." He challenged me to read the Bible every day for one hour for a year, so that at the end of the year, I could at least know what I believed or didn't believe. So I said I would and I did. I can clearly remember going down to a bookstore, buying a Bible and after a couple days reading it, I couldn't make sense of it, he told me to go get a commentary of the book of John and to start there. It was great advice.

At the end of that year, I became a Christian and then my Young Life leader gave me two other life altering gifts. He gave me a book by C.S. Lewis and one by Francis Schaeffer and I devoured both of them. These two books propelled me into a life quest of trying to live a life that was defined and shaped by the lens of the gospel as experienced in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.. I have tried to live my adult life in the context of my Christian faith informing and forming who I am and what I do.

From high school I went to UVa. At UVa, I made some extraordinary friends who challenged me, encouraged me, and inspired me to seek to think and to live in a fully pluralistic setting. But the best thing that happened was that I met my wife Robbin at Virginia. After UVa I went to Regent College in Vancouver, B.C., which is a graduate school of theology and Biblical Studies. Its focus is not on training pastors but on equipping lay people with a more theological framework for life. Its purpose is to help non-ordained people in a variety of professions think deeply about what

Christianity has to do with the different spheres of life-and for me, that meant business.

So what does theology have to do with business? For everyone in business, here is the good news. Commerce was embedded in the very essence of creation. In the book of Genesis, our original mission as humans was to go out into the world to cultivate it. But of course, unfortunately, we had this thing called sin enter the picture and darkness entered the land and nothing became as it was meant to be-including how commerce was meant to be conducted. But the Bible makes it clear that commerce will be part of the new heavens and earth- “for the wealth of the nations will come to you.” So, someday, pastors will be out of a job, (sorry Corey), doctors will be out of a job, lawyers will be out of a job, but business people will still have a job to do. And here is some additional good news, it will be without pain, struggle, and anxiety-because the curse will be reversed!

Since 1978, my life has been shaped by my attempts to imaginatively respond to two related questions: First, if business is not as it was meant to be, what does a redeemed view of business look like? Secondly, what does it mean for me to seek to realize this as a missional and vocational call upon my life? What is it and what does that have to do with me? These are the two questions that have animated my life for 36 years.

My starting point for answering these questions begins with Paul’s language that we are called to exercise faith, to live love, and to bring hope-pointing to redemptive work of Christ that is actually breaking into this world now-not just in theory or in abstract theology, but in reality. That is, the work of Christ is actually engaged in this world now.

When we hear faith, love, and hope it is very tempting to apply it like this: I will exercise faith in church and in my personal life, I will live love among my family and

friends, and I will bring hope to tragic broken places in the world. There is nothing inherently wrong with these specific areas-but they just don't reflect the fullness of the implications of the Christian faith. Rather, this approach falls prey to the trap of a spiritual/secular division-as if Christianity has nothing to say about life outside of the church.

Instead, I am suggesting that in the very way we live our lives in every sphere of life in every activity, we are called upon to exercise faith, live love, and to bring hope. Not just in the church, but in the very places we live and work-precisely in the places that God has placed us. There is no activity or place where we are not called to exercise faith, there is no activity or place where we are not called to live love, and there is no activity or place where we are not called to bring hope. When I finished at UVa, I went to Europe and while there I spent a day at Dachau, the horrendous concentration camp. I was escorted by a minister who had been a prisoner there and he told us of incredible stories of faith, hope, and love in the darkest days of Dachau, which greatly encouraged me that there is no place or activity where these three cannot be experienced.

These statements presuppose a few things. They are embedded in a theological framework. They make assumptions about how I understand the Christian faith: First, the redemptive work of Christ extends to the entire world and every dimension of life, not just to the religious sphere or the private moral sphere.. Secondly, this redemptive work in the world has begun but has not yet been finished-the fabric of the world is still torn and in need of mending. Thirdly, that we have a role to play in this work. We are called to be actors not spectators in this great story that is unfolding. Fourthly, as we engage the world, we are to be like Jesus, full of love and full of discontent. The world is not as it was meant to be and it is not as it will one day be and we have a role to play in the way it is meant to

become, but we are to do so in the way of Jesus, full of grace and truth. This is our distinctive public witness in the world..

And so I understand our calling as believers is to actually seek to live out this future pattern now, to be ambassadors for this future in this present world, to participate in the redemptive work of God in the world. To be a signpost of that which is to fully come one day. My focus has been trying live this out in a very real and practical way by how we engage our customers, our employees, our communities. My world is a very pluralistic setting but I have tried to do this in an integrated way that flows out of my understanding of how the gospel can be applied to all of life.

I seek to do this in 3 ways in my work life: 1. In my prayer life. 2. In my daily interactions as I exercise leadership in forming the culture of our company. 3. How this animates the way we engage our customers, our employees, and our communities. We might think of these as orientation (exercising faith), incarnation (living love), and transformation (bringing hope).

First, the starting point for how my faith engages my work begins with what cannot be seen-It involves the act of exercising faith, trusting that God is at work in our midst. This sounds simple if not simplistic, but I have found that it is actually quite difficult to consistently do this. Therefore, it is critical for me to orient my whole self on a daily basis around the reality of the gospel. There is a personal God who is actively engaged in the world today, who loves me, who can be known, and who can be trusted. This very statement is like the roots of a tree. The roots of a tree nourish the tree and determine the kind of tree that comes out of the ground. Affirming this every day is what nourishes my life. It is the living water of my life.

My capacity to live out my calling in Christ is directly related to the spiritual intimacy that comes from these times where my heart, my mind, and my vision are being molded in the deepest moments of prayer in my life. In our prayer life, we

wrestle with what we love, what we trust in, and what provides our source of identity. The exercising of faith requires action on our part, it is not static or passive. I have learned that if we neglect this deep intimacy we will find ourselves striving and exhausted and we will not produce the fruit that we so desire to do.

The act of praying reorients our lives in three ways- What we desire, what we trust, and to whom we belong. Desire, Belief, and Identity are the most foundational elements of the human experience and it is this which gives shape and defines our lives. Said differently, disordered desire, disconnected belief, and disoriented identities, result in a diminished human life. The Christian life can be understood as reordering our desire, reconnecting our trust to God, reorienting our identities around Christ. How do we know these 3 areas are so important?

Desire, trust, and identity are the three areas that Satan tempted Jesus with in the wilderness. Are your personal desires greater than your desire for God? Who do you really trust? and where do you find your identity-what defines who you are? If Satan attacked Jesus in these three areas we can be assured that if we do not set aside time in our lives to pray, then we will become disordered, disconnected, and disoriented. These are the roots to our tree and the only place for them to be nourished and rightly oriented is in our personal prayer life and in corporate worship.

The prayers that I offer as relates to my work are that our company will be a place that is a signpost for the kingdom of God, that He might be seen as we relate to customers, work together, and engage our communities-that we might be rightly related to each other. I pray for specific people at work, their specific struggles and challenges, for broken relationships, for wisdom and guidance in decisions that I face, I give thanks for the gift of grace and for God's providence and provision, I

pray with the Psalmist that God, will “confirm the work of our hands,” and then I turn my day over to our Lord: “Not my will but your will be done.”

It is critical to my day that I begin with this rhythm. When I fail to do this, it is the same as me going out the door without being dressed-I am naked before the world. If the roots of my life have not been nourished, then what emerges out of the roots will not be consistent with my vocation to live love and to bring hope. Without reorientation, incarnation, and transformation are not possible-that is, it is not possible to live love or to bring hope without exercising faith.

Secondly, in my daily interactions as I exercise leadership, Paul says that we are to be people whose faith expresses itself through love. We are meant to be living examples of the reality of Christ-in everything we do. Nothing is beyond the scope of his call upon our life. Peter says that we are called to “walk in his steps.” Paul says we are to become like him. C.S. Lewis wrote that we are to become “little Christ’s” in the world. St. Teresa of Avila wrote these wonderful words:

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours; No hands but yours; No feet but yours; Yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ’s compassion to the world; Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which he is to bless now.”

This is a profound and radical calling –it has nothing to do with being a little nicer and kinder than the average person. It is a life patterned after the life of Christ lived through the power of Spirit of Christ because He is both the author and perfecter of our faith. This is a life lived in, through, and for Christ in the places where he has called you-which means in His world. This is not Southern cultural Christianity.

I have invested much of my life in the people with whom I work-I try to personalize my work by demonstrating a profound respect for every person. There are two

themes that are central to my leadership today: Every person deserves to be shown respect regardless of his/her position or capacity because they are made in the image of God. Respect is not earned, it is given. It is given because each person made in the image of God carries an inherent dignity beyond our imagination. C.S. Lewis wrote that if we could see people as they will one day be we would be tempted to bow down and worship them now. Every person carries within them a “weight of glory.” Secondly, that work is always personal and to love the person means that you have to know the full person-their family, their story, their loves, their hopes, their fears, and their struggles. We don’t love people in the abstract, we love them in the concrete, and love in the work place means being committed to their fully flourishing as people. It means living incarnation-ally- it means moving into their “neighborhood.”

Being committed to the well being of others-living love, means that I am called to put the needs of others before my own. I am called to move from seeking my own good to seeking the good of others. Paul describes this as our call to “bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ,” I am called to come along beside people, not just exercise authority over them. Celebrating people, sharing their struggles, caring about their personal lives, going to funerals, weddings, baby showers, visiting them in the hospital, going the extra mile to help them, challenging them to reach the potential of their gifts, and learning to pray for the people I work with every day-that is what it means for me to live love in the work place. This is more demanding and it requires me to be much more vulnerable but it is the way of Jesus and Peter tells us that it is our calling to follow in His steps.

Since Jesus was full of grace and truth and we are called to be conformed to him, I am called to be a person of truth, who is trustworthy, and is not self-seeking, but who is also full of grace, who demonstrates compassion as I exercise the authority inherent in my position. Power exercised redemptively enhances community and

the flourishing of life and this is the first mark of distinctive Christian leadership. It reverses the curse of sin, it creates space for transparency and vulnerability, which is the first step in community.

I once asked a prominent Athletic Director what was the one thing that he had learned over the years: His response was that no team is better than the head coach. At the end of the day, organizations do not outperform the leadership provided. This means that leaders are the constraint on the organization. The organization will not be more truthful or more graceful than the leadership I provide.

The bad news is that I fail every day- but the good news is that I can experience the grace of his forgiveness and His mercies are new every morning.

Thirdly, to bring hope begins with the culture of our company and how we engage the world. Leaders have the power to create organizations that are toxic or organizations that are life-enhancing. The culture of an organization is a powerful current that shapes the lives of everyone in it-it defines reality for all of those living in it. The character of a culture is greatly determined by deeply held beliefs and these beliefs are interwoven in the language, the practices the symbols, the rewards and recognition programs of the organization.

It is my responsibility to insure that the underlying ethos that animates these is consistent with and flows from Jesus' admonition to love our neighbors, to seek their good before we seek our own. A culture grounded in demonstrating neighborly love is at the heart of a distinctive Christian ethos. Said differently, a culture animated by a Christian ethos will put neighborly love as its controlling normative framework-a deep commitment to the well being of the other, and an entire culture that is shaped by truth and grace. This is central to my calling as

Christian in a position of leadership and I am committed to making this a reality in a fully pluralistic setting.

This points us to the potential of the redemptive power of a business-as expressed in its commitment to the flourishing of all those it serves, its commitment to the wellbeing of all the people who work to do this, and how its work participates in the reweaving of the broken fabric of this world.

In our company, we translate this mission into three foundational commitments: Covenant with our Customers, Community with one another, and Commitment to the Common Good of our cities. Everything we do in our company is animated by trying to make these foundational commitments a living reality.

We define covenant as a personal commitment, an unbreakable promise. It is a pledge that a person can absolutely count on. It does not depend on the circumstances or the situation. This relationship is demonstrated through words and actions, not through intentions. There are three basic components of this covenant with our customers: Always telling the truth, always doing the right thing for the customer, and always keeping our promises-regardless of the cost to us. We have tried to apply this to every aspect of our business.

In the book of Proverbs, the righteous are those who never advantage themselves to the disadvantage of another and they pay particular attention to the vulnerable. Given this, we rethought the entire process of selling cars, appraising cars, and financing cars- we focused on transparency in the relationship and eliminating any dimension that could disadvantage a customer. We made every process align with our covenant. We intentionally limit our profit on transactions, regardless of what customers who are unknowledgeable would be willing to pay, because we believe that doing this is consistent with our commitment to our customers to be a place

they can always trust-to being a place that is committed to serving their best interests.

In our service departments, we promise to repair the vehicle correctly the first time or the customer never pays for the additional repair. If we don't repair it correctly the first time, we will pick up the customer's vehicle, leave a loaner vehicle, repair it correctly at no charge, detail the vehicle, and return it fully fueled as an apology for not completing the work properly the first time. We believe this is what it means to be a place that keeps its promises.

We have been chosen the most ethical company by the Better Business Bureau and the Financial Services Association in our communities. , And like most people, it probably seems remarkable to you that car dealerships could even be considered in this category. But this reality is a reflection of the profound commitment by so many people in our company to realize this vision of business.

Our second foundational commitment, Community with one another, means creating a culture that is inclusive, that invites participation from everyone, and that gives space for all voices to be heard. We do this first by thinking of our employees as members of a body, where every person's contribution matters. There are not little people and there is no inconsequential work.

We are constantly experimenting, trying to improve our work environment so that it is a life-enhancing place- with wellness programs, fitness centers, and flex work schedules. We are in the midst of rolling out a comprehensive new approach called Thrive at Flow. This involves providing personal counseling programs, onsite nurse practitioners a medical clinic, health coaches, nutritional and physio training, and financial planning. We recognize that we may be the only institutional relationship they may have today and so we are they major access to resources beyond the work place. We provide \$3000 college tuition per year per child of any employee of our

company. We also have a company personal emergency fund. Anyone in the company who has a personal emergency can apply confidentially for a grant. This is a grant, not a loan and its purpose is to assist in a time of tragedy or unexpected need. We celebrate people's lives in our workplace, not just their work, but also their avocations and places of service in the world. People love to learn about the whole person, not just who they are at work.

Our leadership model is built around the acronym SERVE-show respect, earn trust, reach for perfection, value input, energize others. This model is an attempt to translate a biblical framework about human nature, the appropriate use of power, the importance of vision, and the distinctive calling of a leader to bring flourishing to those he or she leads. It also represents our belief that leadership flows out of who we are and is not just measured by what we do. Our goal was to translate this language for a pluralistic setting but to have it be completely consistent with a biblical theology since Jesus said, "I gave you an example that you also should do as I do to you" and Peter says that we are "to follow in his steps." We are very intentional about this being the basis of how authority is exercised and all of the leadership of our company participates in surveys regarding how we live this out

Our last foundational commitment is to the common good of our communities. To use the language of Jesus in the parable of the Sower, we want to be a 100X company. We want our presence to be one that enhances the communities we are in. We recognize that we are successful because of the investments made by prior generation in our communities and we want to be a company that produces fruit for the future. We think of this in terms of investing in goodness, truth, beauty, justice, and plenty-which in the Bible are the conditions of shalom or when God, humankind, and creation are rightly aligned. In capitalism, we translate these words, we call them social capital, intellectual capital, aesthetic capital, political capital, and economic capital. Everyone of these conditions are necessary for

shalom to flourish in a community. We systematically invest in each of these areas in every community we are in.

Additionally, each dealership takes on projects in their communities: from serving a 1000 meals on Thanksgiving day to senior adults, to bringing Christmas to 50 families, to building Habitat homes, to leading food drives-there is some project going on nearly every month in every dealership-all led by a diversity of members of the organization. When a member of our company volunteers for a non-profit organization in the community during work hours, we pay them as if they are working for our company, because in essence they are, as we seek to fulfill this foundational commitment.

In summary:

Work is a place that Christ has called me to exercise faith, to live love, and to bring hope. To live in spiritual intimacy with Him, to have that faith expressed in love, and to use the authority implicit in my position to strive to create a culture and an organization that reflects and participates in the redemptive work of Christ in the world. My hope is that through these efforts we might in some small way participate in reweaving the frayed fabric of this world into the beautiful tapestry of what it was meant to be, and one day will be.

So let me end with where I began-with our imagination. Imagine what it would be like if every week we were sent out into the world by our church to exercise faith, to live love, to bring hope-with truth and grace, with boldness and meekness, with confidence and humility, with resolution and imagination, in a specific place (beginning right where you are), with specific people (beginning with the people you are presently in relationship with) for a specific purpose (beginning with the tasks that confront you today). I am absolutely convinced that our organizations, our communities, and our lives would be different.

How different?

I once read an article in a Catholic journal about a vocation and a woman who bagged groceries for her work. When we think about vocation and work, most of us in this room would not think of bagging groceries as the place where God has called us. But for this woman, it was the place that God gave her and she lived in her space with extraordinary faithfulness. When people came through her line, she would always greet them by name with a smile, and she would ask how everyone was doing. People found themselves sharing personal things with her. “My son is not doing well.” “My daughter is not happy.” The bag lady would always say she was praying for them and would encourage the customers as she bagged the groceries. People loved talking with her so much that it messed up the check out lines. They would gladly stand in line just to say hello to her. This woman was living faithfully for Christ in the 6 feet that God gave her in life. She exercised faith, she lived love, and she brought hope to everyone she encountered.

She came to work with the idea that these 6 feet were to be a sanctuary that would bring life to everyone who walked into this space. Time passed, she retired, and then she passed away. At the funeral of the bag lady, you would not expect a big crowd. But you know what is coming-the small church was full from people she had encountered as the bag lady and they wanted to stand up and to tell how she had blessed their lives. Most of us in this room have been given more than 6 feet in which to exercise faith, to live love, and to bring hope.

May we be as faithful to our calling as she was to hers. .