

# the313 • November - December 2021 • no. 20

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**THIS ISSUE: Forum:** Engineer Christian • **Insight:** In the Beginning God Designed & Built • **Reviews:** Money & Possessions • Civilized Engineer • Fusion• In His Steps • **Resources:** Faith and Work Journey

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***WELCOME TO "the313" from WorkPlace 313, a nondenominational, non-profit, educational organization whose mission is to equip and mobilize Christians to integrate their faith and values into their work lives (not just the 52 Sundays but the 313 "work days" each year). Check out our web site [www.wp313.org](http://www.wp313.org) for back issues of "the313," resources, and reviews for workers of all types.***

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Header Image | "First Frost" • TradigitalWorks

GATHERINGS...

A WorkPlace 313 Forum  
**Saturday, November 20, 2021 •**  
**9:00-10:30 a.m. Pacific Time**

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**Engineer Christian**

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with Alan Kropp

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**JOIN US ON** Saturday November 20, 2021, 9:00-10:30 a.m. (Pacific Time) for a conversation on Christianity and engineering. Engineers work at the heart of our technological civilization, addressing many of the challenges, problems, and opportunities of human existence—with creative design and construction, applying scientific methods to the natural world. Engineering has been defined as “the creative application of scientific principles to design or develop structures, machines, apparatus, or manufacturing processes.” Engineering methods are deployed widely from civil, to electrical, mechanical, aeronautical, nuclear, biological, and other arenas. Business leaders talk about “re-engineering the corporation.” Political thinkers talk about “social engineering.”

What might Christian faith and biblical truth and values mean for engineering practice? What would a “theology of engineering” look like? How has (and does) engineering serve God and the people? Does a Christian bring anything distinctive to engineering ethics and practices? Is there ever a time to say “No” to an engineering project (or company)? Are there arenas or aspects of human life that should resist the engineering mentality as inappropriate or ineffective?

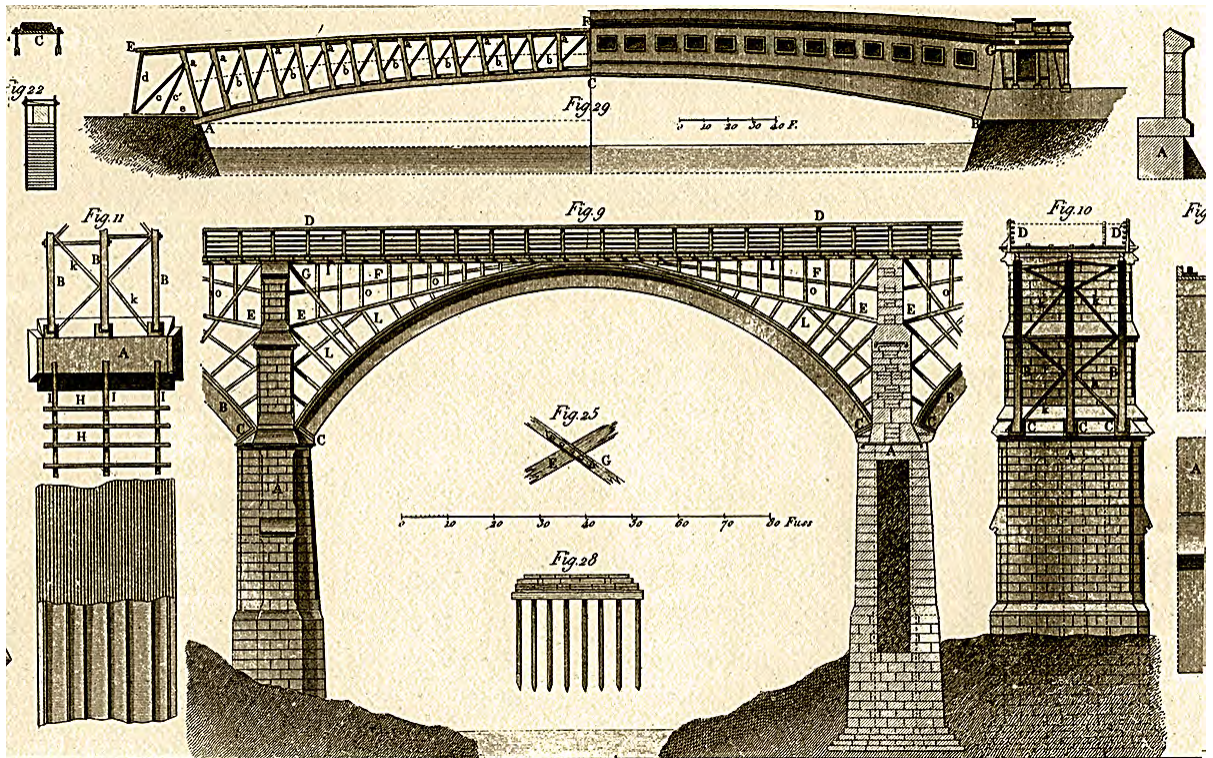
These ideas and questions (and the ones you share) will frame our WP313 Forum discussion with engineer **Alan Kropp** on November 20. Al studied at Cal Poly Pomona (BS) and UC Berkeley (MS). Since 1978 he has been President and Principal Engineer at **Alan Kropp & Associates**, a Berkeley-based firm that provides geohazard and seismic risk evaluation services to clients throughout the western USA. He is also active in a mission to rescue trafficked and vulnerable children in Nepal. Alan lives in Berkeley and is a member of Berkeley Covenant Church.

The November 20 WP313 Forum is free but please register no later than November 18. We especially welcome engineers, technologists, and students in those fields to join in. Registrants will be sent the zoom link for the meeting during the week just before the Forum.



Schedule **November 20th** for another insightful **Workplace 313 Forum!**  
**REGISTER HERE** for this **free event**. A Zoom link will be sent a day before the event.  
If you have not yet, please download and install Zoom – <https://zoom.us/> – to the device of your choice. Zoom accounts are free.

Images | Alan Kropp & Assocs.







## THANK YOU

**Workplace 313** offers its services *free* so that anyone—employed, salaried, or not—can participate in our programs. We like it that way. But, of course, there are expenses, mostly related to our web site, e-zine, internet platforms we use, design, and production. We are right at 1000 subscribers to our **e-zine** now and our **FaceBook** (and soon **LinkedIn**) pages will be serving hundreds of workers as well. We have done thirty or forty online interviews and presentations this past year and material from our **e-zine** is regularly picked up and reprinted by other publications.

We keep our expenses low. Our Executive Compensation budget, for example, is zero. But the *minimum* cash need for our operation is roughly \$900 per month. Our annual budget is presently about \$10,800. Much appreciation for supporting the workplace discipleship cause with your donation(s) that empower us to carry on. You can still easily donate online at <https://wp313.org/donate> — or mail a check to “**Workplace313**,” P.O. Box 22515, Oakland CA 94609. **Thank you** again for your generosity. If you couldn't contribute this year, no pressure, no worries. Back at you next September . . .

INSIGHTS





## In the Beginning

### God Designed and Built

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by DAVID W. GILL

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**T** **SOMETIMES SEEMS** like the Bible must have begun “In the beginning God preached a sermon” or maybe “In the beginning God became a pastor.” I hate to say it but after going to church (several different churches) every week for over seventy years—the message is consistently implied if not overtly expressed: church turf and church work are what REALLY matter to God. No real surprise here: most pastors have little or no experience in the workplaces their people occupy during the week. And the vast majority of study time, reading and writing assignments, and practical training internships for seminary students have next to nothing to do with any workplace other than church. My own experience as a seminary professor is that I was loved and appreciated for my “workplace theology and ethics”—but as a sort of luxury “silo” outside the “really important stuff” my colleagues taught. Same with the churches I have been part of.

But Jesus and Scripture will have none of that distorted, anemic theology. “In the beginning God created.” God designed and built a beautiful, well-functioning, amazing planet and population. That’s what engineers do. That’s what techies do. They are on a mission from God, a mission in the image and likeness of God. If we ranged out a little wider, we would see that “Christian ministry” also includes farming, cooking, wine-making, raising children, teaching, health care, legal representation, music, plumbing, janitorial work, landscaping and hundreds of other work specialties. Pastors and church workers are commissioned by God to lead our gathered worship and to prepare us to carry out God’s mission in the neighborhood and the world—not just serve on a church committee.

None of our workplace discipleship is automatically on target, of course. Our world and we ourselves are “fallen,” mistake-ridden, sometimes deceived, creatures. Our shorthand word for the problem is “sin”—“falling short” or “missing the mark” of God’s plan. But that is where turning to Jesus and Scripture can give us the guidance our usual vocational study programs and books cannot.

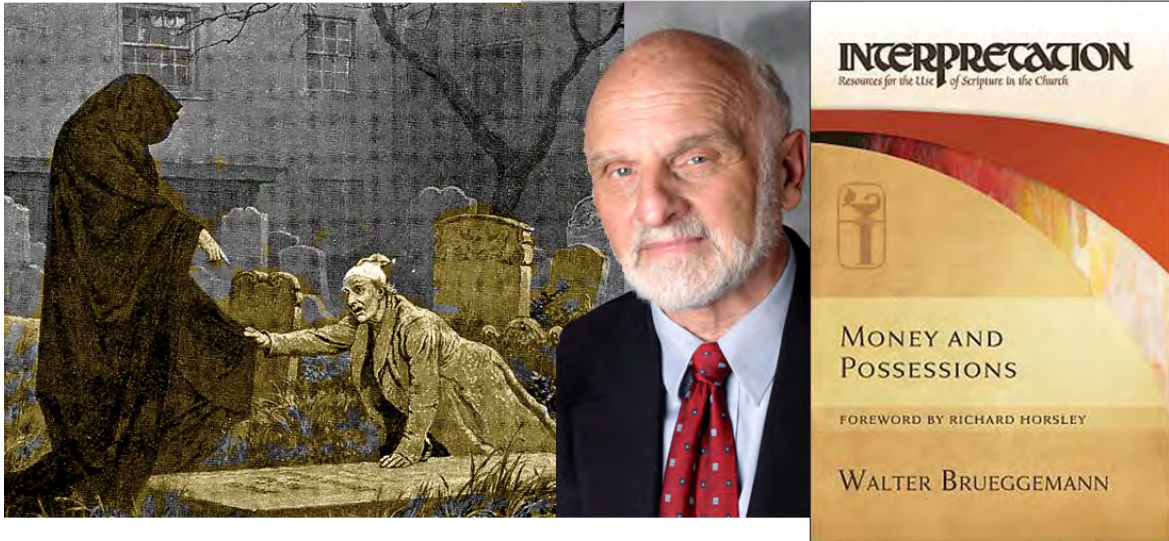
In the case of engineering—designing and building—the Genesis chapters all by themselves already teach us that what God designs and builds, he does (1) in a collaborative, team (not individualistic) way (“Let us make man in our image”—not “I think I’ll make a man in my image”; “It’s not good for one to dwell alone, I will make a helper”). All of God’s engineering works are also (2) useful, effective (“good for”), (3) beautiful or aesthetic (“pleasing to the eye”), (4) set free (“having the seed in them”—

not forever dependent on their creator), and (5) ethical and good in the eyes of the God of all (not just some tribal god's opinion). Good work in those first two chapters of Genesis respects (6) a spatial boundary (there is a tree that could be harvested but should not be) and (7) a temporal boundary (there is a time, a day, when work could be done but should not be).

With these seven guidelines, engineering (and technology and, for that matter, all work) can be (and often has been) a spectacular gift to people and planet. Without these guidelines, an engineering that operates by “if it can be done it will be done”—or as a “gun for hire” available to whoever will purchase—or as a simplistic, reductionist formula for addressing all of life's challenges and problems—such an engineering become a threat. And these seven are only the beginning of an unbelievably rich biblical theology of engineering. We need more and more faithful Christian engineers and techies to enter the profession and being in some creative, redemptive salt and light!

Image | *Winter Patterns* — Keith W. Criss TradigitalWorks

REVIEWS...



### ***Money and Possessions***

by **Walter Brueggemann** (WKJ Press, 2009)

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**ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL** Bible interpreters of our time, **Walter Brueggemann** (b. 1933) is the author of over one hundred books and numerous scholarly articles. He served on the faculties of **Eden Theological Seminary** (1961-1986) and **Columbia Theological Seminary** (1986-2003) where he is McPheeters Professor Emeritus of Old Testament. His magnum opus, ***Theology of the Old Testament*** (1997), is a look at the Old Testament through the lenses of “testimony, dispute, and advocacy.” Among his best-known works are ***The Prophetic Imagination*** (1978), ***Message of the Psalms*** (1984), and ***Sabbath as Resistance*** (2014).

***Money and Possessions*** is an extraordinary tour through the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation, stopping to explore its message about money, possessions, and related topics. The first lesson here is how frequently, regularly the Bible addresses these topics. It is not a secondary concern. The righteousness and redemption to which both Israel and the Church are called is in no way simply a spiritualized, interior, or futuristic matter. The ways money and possessions factor into our lives are a central concern of the Scriptures from cover to cover. The contest between God and Mammon for our affection and loyalty is recurring. The contrast between God’s economics of stewardship and sharing and the world’s economy of extraction and selfishness is vivid and urgent. While Brueggemann sticks close to the biblical text, he periodically wonders about the absence of these biblical lessons from today’s preaching and Christian business practices. This is not just an instructive but a challenging, timely book.

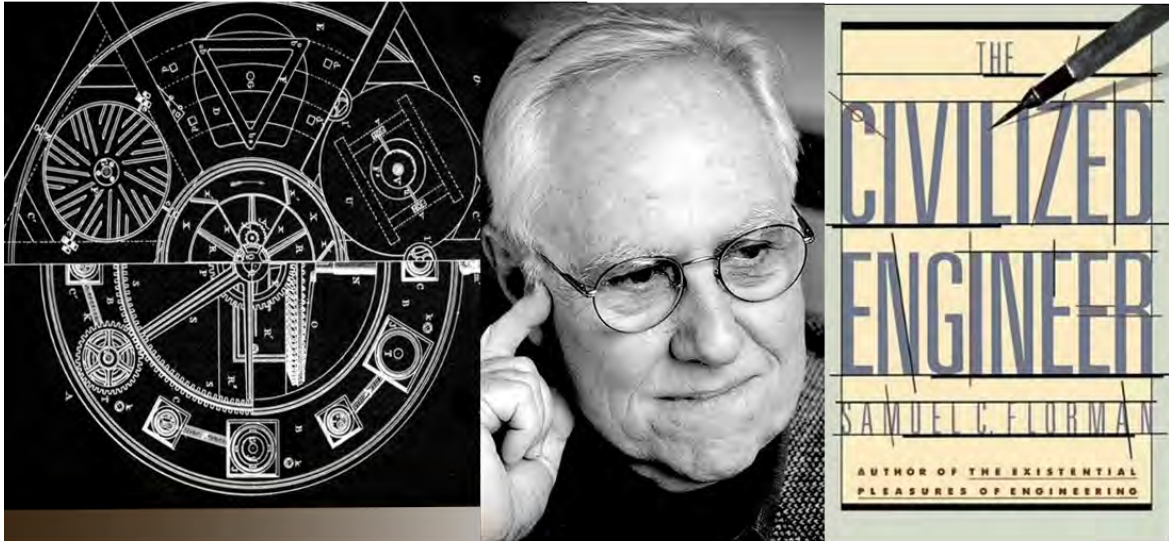


Brueggemann summarizes up front six “theses” he finds in the Scriptures: **(1)** money and possessions are a gift from God, for which we should be grateful. **(2)** Money and possessions are received as reward for obedience. A life in sync with the purposes of God will (typically) flourish. **(3)** Money and possessions belong to God and are held in trust by people in community. It’s all about faithful stewardship. **(4)** Money and possessions are sources of social injustice. Remembering that God is the owner leads to neighborly justice. **(5)** Money and possessions are to be shared in a neighborly way, ordered to the common good. **(6)** Money and possessions are seductions that lead to idolatry. They evoke lust, greed, and servitude. Brueggemann does a masterful job showing the power and prominence of the tenth command against covetousness.

Against each of these six summary biblical theses stand the contradictory values and practices of our age, sadly including most Christians. We have been poorly or wrongly taught, with horrible consequences for our world. Time to wake up and Brueggemann’s study will help those who take the time to read it. The biblical accounts of Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, Job, Ahab, Jesus, Paul and so many others, better or lesser-known, are fascinating and instructive. The lessons of Israel’s laws regarding interest, loans, debt cancellation, property restoration, and wages deeply challenge our institutions and practices. The wisdom of the Writers, the fire of the Prophets, the radical Good News of Jesus and the New Testament writers, and the stark conclusions and judgments of Revelation—the biblical teaching on money and possessions is rich, deep, revolutionary, non-optional, and full of promise.

This great book is not just for biblical scholars and theologians. It is for pastors willing to grow and for all the rest of us workers and managers in all fields of endeavor. It is what ought to be our economic theory and practice.

Reviewed by David W. Gill



### ***The Civilized Engineer***

by **Samuel C. Florman** (St. Marin's Press, 1987)

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**AMUEL FLORMAN** (b. 1925) is a New York City-based civil engineer, general contractor, and author. He is best known for his writings and speeches about engineering, technology and the general culture. The most widely distributed of his seven books is ***The Existential Pleasures of Engineering*** (1976). His most recently published book is ***Good Guys, Wiseguys and Putting Up Buildings: A Life in Construction*** (2012). ***The Civilized Engineer*** came out in 1987. Florman earned his BS degree from Dartmouth in 1944 while also serving in the Navy. He took graduate courses at Dartmouth's Thayer School of Engineering until 1945 when he was commissioned as an ensign and assigned to supervise construction work in the Philippines. Returning to civilian life in the fall of 1946 he entered graduate school and earned an MA degree in English Literature at Columbia University (1947). He started work as a construction engineer in the summer of 1947 while taking graduate engineering courses at night at New York University.

Florman's earlier "classic," ***The Existential Pleasures of Engineering*** was written in an activist period (late Sixties, early Seventies) when the early environmental movement, the counterculture, and a general questioning of technology by writers like Theodore Roszak, Charles Reich and others, put engineers on the defensive. Florman came to the defense of his profession—with eloquent praise of the joys of engineering practice and projects. He was rather less successful in his critique of technology critics like Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, and Theodore Roszak—who he clearly did not understand (some of that fault is with a lack of clarity by the tech critics of course). Still, ***Existential Pleasures*** is a fun and challenging book worth reading 45 years later.

But better still is Florman's *Civilized Engineer*. Florman provides a good summary of the history of engineering and its maturity into a "profession" in the 19th century. A "civilized engineer" should know the roots and the history of the field! Perhaps the only jarring elements in Florman's 1987 perspective are when he writes "so far, people show no signs of being satisfied with seeing each other only on glowing screens" (p. 138) and "People have expressed concern lest high technology bring about despotism by making it possible for the few to dominate the many. But the evidence indicates that this is not happening and will not happen" (pp. 74-75). I'm afraid the "glowing screen" addiction and the monopoly power of Google, FaceBook, and Amazon argue otherwise in our time.

Florman is pretty negative about the standard approaches to engineering ethics (professional codes) and doubts that appeals to engineers' personal values and consciences can adequately resolve the controversial issues of our time. Instead he seems to want to trust the markets and, even more, government regulations to establish acceptable levels of risk and matters of responsibility and liability. I would agree that government regulations are critically important (get rid of the bad or outdated ones, put in place good ones) but I also think company and professional ethics are a better remedy than just relying on government regulations and legal recourse. And personal conscience and values is a critical element not just for Christians but everyone. Refuse to be a tool or an enabler of evil in engineering, education, or whatever your field.

The final quarter of Florman's book is devoted to his unpacking and promoting the concept of the "civilized engineer." In short, he is urging engineers to fill in a humanities and liberal arts education around their technical engineering studies (their "STEM" training). He bemoans the reduction in humanities breadth requirements in engineering curricula and the reductionist turn in college programs to a focus just on marketable job skills. Why is this important to Florman? First it is important so that engineers have a fuller life experience than just machine-like technical problem-solving! Second, as engineers inevitable get drawn into management and leadership positions not just in their firms but in society, this broader, deeper perspective rises in importance. It's about wisdom, not just information. For workplace disciples, this is a welcome, even essential, emphasis. Our broader texture for engineering includes history, literature, language, culture, the arts—and, above all, biblical theology.

Reviewed by David W. Gill





***Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*** by Denise Lee Yohn (Nicholas Brealey/Hachette, 2018)

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**ENISE LEE YOHN** is a San Francisco-based corporate branding guru and consultant. With more than twenty years of in-the-trenches experience working with companies including Burger King, Land Rover, Spiegel, Sony Electronics, and Target, she authored *What Great Brands Do* (2014) and articles in *Harvard Business Review*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company* and other publications, and has appeared on **CNBC**, **NPR**, and other media seeking her expertise. Whew! Busy person. And as her side gig" she has developed a great faith at work training program called "**Faith and Work Journey**" ([www.faithandworkjourney.com](http://www.faithandworkjourney.com)) (see "**Resource**" description below).

***Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*** is not an "in-your-face" theological book—but it is, in my opinion, deeply and richly grounded in a biblical understanding of life, business, and work. At the most basic level, Yohn's point is that our words ought to be congruent with our deeds. "Brand" sounds so much like "image," but here it is about the words or symbols we choose to represent our company. Brand must not be a fluid, manipulable, baseless "image" but a true representation of who we are. ***Fusion*** is an incredibly rich, thoughtful, practical guidebook for building or re-building a company culture that is in complete alignment with one's brand. It is about aligning cultural/institutional structures, policies, values and practices with mission and vision.

In **Part One** of ***Fusion***, Yohn insists that the starting point is to clarify the core mission and purpose of the organization: what is the impact we want to make, the change we bring, the ultimate goal we pursue, the answer to why we are in business? Next, the

existing brand/culture fusion (alignment) must be carefully, honestly assessed. Finally, adequate leadership must step forward, organize, and commit. In Part Two, Yohn breaks down the fusion challenge into five strategies: (1) **“Organize and operate on-brand.”** This is about shaping/reshaping organizational design, structure, and processes to “operationalize” the brand-fused culture. (2) **“Create culture-changing employee experiences.”** Every aspect of every employee’s experience needs to exhibit company core values. (3) **“Sweat the small stuff.”** Details, rituals, physical environment, celebrations . . . everything matters. (4) **“Ignite your transformation.”** Now it is mainly about the “customer experience.” Assess every customer interaction and, if need be, recast to exhibit brand-related core values. (5) **“Build your brand from the inside out.”** This is a kind of caveat to the argument, saying that if a powerful company culture already exists, you may need to leverage aspects of what already exists to move the culture toward better fusion.

Yohn’s book is liberally illustrated with vignettes and stories from various companies and individuals. It is also replete with lists, charts, and analytical tools to use in leadership. All too often, management books present a few good (and some bad) ideas—but come up short on the specifics of how to apply the proposals on the ground. Fusion is one of those books that has both great insights and abundant, detailed application help. And as I said earlier, all of this is core biblical truth and wisdom for those pursuing a business/work mission in alignment with our Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer: build it out into a team, an organization, a movement where our policies, structures, and daily practices are fully aligned with our mission and “brand.” Not just businesses and non-profits but churches could benefit from **Fusion**.

Reviewed by David W. Gill



***In His Steps: "What Would Jesus Do?"***

by **Charles M. Sheldon** (New York: Books Inc., 1896)

**I HAVE TO CONFESS**

that I just read this little classic for the first time. Would you believe it first came out 125 years ago? Would you also believe that it has sold fifty million copies? It is quite extraordinary, especially after you see what the story calls for. This is, after all, pretty close to what fires "Workplace Discipleship 101" and the larger faith at work movement.

**Charles M. Sheldon** (1857-1946) was a Congregationalist minister in Topeka, Kansas. ***In His Steps*** began as a sermon series but was turned into a novel. The fictional minister Henry Maxwell has a disturbing encounter with a down-and-out guy who he initially refuses to help when he knocks on his door. The guy shows up in Maxwell's church on Sunday and makes a bit of a scene asking preacher and congregation what all the Christian rhetoric means when they can't help a guy like him in real need. Deeply convicted, Maxwell decides to commit himself—and invite his congregational members to commit—to twelve months of daily asking "what would Jesus do?" in every aspect of their lives, work, politics, personal stuff, everything. ***In His Steps*** is the story of what various characters did as they asked that question and followed through. The experiment had major impacts on Maxwell's church but also on its small town. Then it impacted a megachurch in Chicago and the story closes with Rev. Maxwell wondering how amazing it would be if this WWJD movement would spread nation-wide.



When the story begins the first target seems to be the town saloon. I immediately worried that *In His Steps* was going to be little more than a prohibition/temperance tract against drinking, dancing, make-up and the like. But no, even the campaign to close the saloon (and demonizing all alcohol) starts to make sense as the stories of alcoholism-caused family and personal breakdowns appear. As the story unfolds, here are some of the kinds of things that happen: **(1)** the local newspaper editor Edward Norman decides not to cover boxing, local blood and gore, or gossip, reject advertising from questionable businesses, and cease the Sunday edition—against all advice that his paper will die; **(2)** beautiful Rachel turns down an entertainment contract to use her spectacular singing voice in support of the local mission—and rebuffs her handsome suitor because of his shallow commitment to Christ; **(3)** Alexander Powers decides to blow the whistle on his employer’s illegal business practices and lose his wealthy lifestyle; **(4)** Rev. Maxwell chooses a simpler more frugal lifestyle and more vital contact with the poor in town; **(5)** store owner Milton Wright decides to treat his employees with more respect, pay them livable wages, and invite their perspectives into how to run the business; **(6)** Donald Marsh, college president, decides to run for local office on anti-corruption, non-partisan basis, rather than continue to hide out in his comfortable ivory tower discussing theory; **(7)** wealthy young heiress Virginia decides to give her money in support of socially constructive causes.

There are some tragic events in the novel and some failures though overall things turn out pretty well in all directions. You never get any sense that individual repentance, faith, salvation, and spirituality have lost their importance—it’s just that daily, costly, discipleship in all the affairs of life is now incredibly important. There is a recurring challenge to be willing to bear the cross and suffer. There is also a frequent insistence that one is not to sit in judgment of others and their discipleship decisions.

*In His Steps* is a pretty progressive book when it comes to economics and justice. Charles Sheldon was seen as an exemplar of what was called the “Social Gospel” and was even labeled a “Christian socialist” though I wonder if that is strictly true or helpful. I see his commitments as to a “holistic Gospel.” He was an early welcomer of Blacks and women into fellowship and leadership, a defender of Jews and Catholics, and a vegetarian who opposed animal cruelty in any form. Workplace disciples could organize valuable discussion groups around *In His Steps*, asking what would be today’s workplace implications of the question “What would Jesus do?”

Reviewed by David W. Gill

RESOURCE...

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# FAITH & WORK JOURNEY

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Denise Lee Yohn

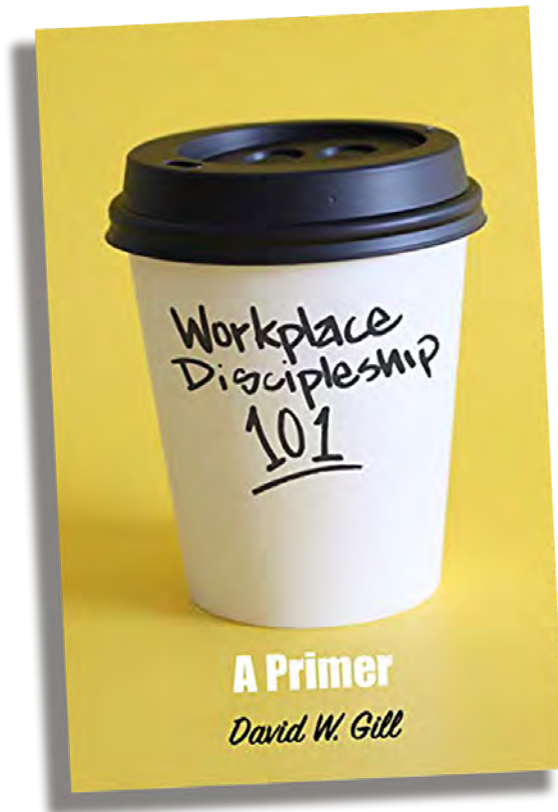
[www.faithandworkjourney.com](http://www.faithandworkjourney.com)

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**he PURPOSE OF** Denise Lee Yohn’s “**Faith and Work Journey**” is “To equip and empower Christ-following businesspeople to steward faithfully their professional vocation.” The leading questions to be addressed include: Does my work matter to God? What does the bible say about my work? How can I glorify God in my work? As a Christ-follower, how should I handle problems and difficult decisions at work? How can I stop overworking and get the rest I so long for? Those who complete the various **Faith and Work Journey** study programs should be able to **(1) Think differently** – understand God’s vision for work in general and for your work specifically. **(2) Feel inspired** – feel called and commissioned by God and empowered by the Gospel, His Spirit, and a community of people who share your values to think and act differently in your work. **(3) Be equipped** – have the tools, resources, and support to work in a distinctively Christian way. Above all, the Journey helps you stop living a compartmentalized life and cultivate a life-giving integration of your faith and work. “Spot on” in the opinion of **Workplace 313**.

**Faith and Work Journey** offers multiple formats—shorter and longer, in person and online—to acquire its education and training. Visit the web site for more details, testimonials from satisfied customers, and upcoming schedules.



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new book—

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