

Book Review – John Bloomer

Love:Work

Reflections and Prayers for a World at Work

By Phil Jump and John Weaver

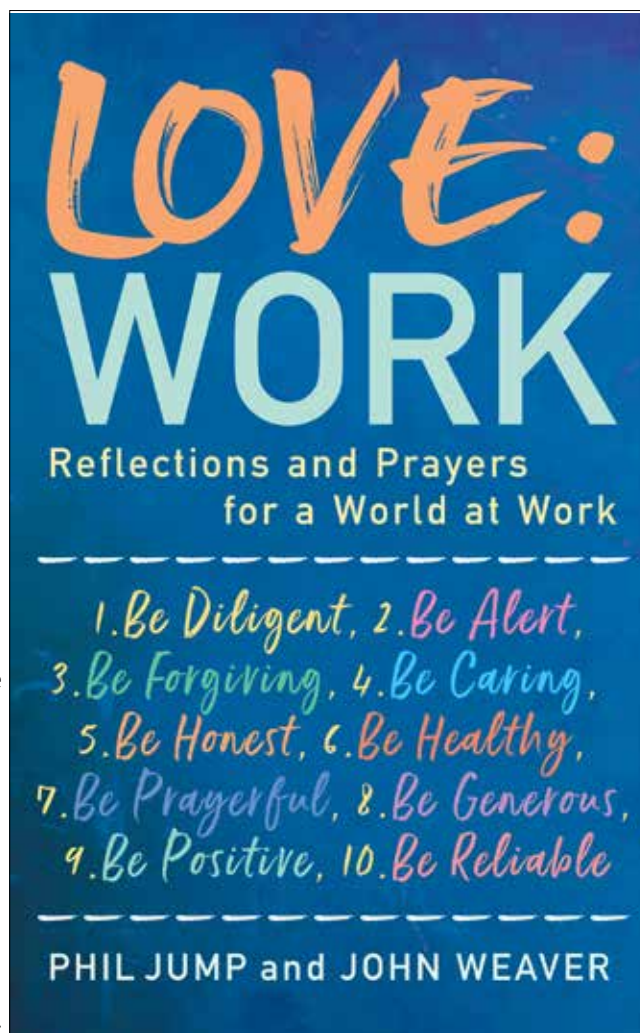
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For many, 'love' is not the first word that comes to mind as they reflect on their working world. However, Phil Jump and John Weaver call us to love work in response to the greatest commandment: to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Mt 22.37). As Chair and Vice-Chair of the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF) Phil and John have for many years wrestled with what it means to live out that commandment as disciples of Christ in our daily lives, lives in which for many people the greatest amount of their time is spent in some form of work. They point to the sad reality that the modern working world can feel more of a barrier to Christian discipleship than an opportunity through which to express it. The perception of work as a 'hostile environment' for people of faith provides a temptation for us as post-Enlightenment Christians to "live in two worlds: a private world of faith and a public world of work and daily life" (p. 9). The purpose of this book is to bring these two worlds together enabling Christians to fully live out their faith within the world of work, something the authors describe as a long-standing preoccupation for both themselves as individuals and for ICF as the organisation that they lead.

There is a clear theological underpinning for their enterprise: the

world is created by and held in being by God as a gift of love, and so God is at the centre of everything in the world and in our lives, including our work and working lives – "the earth is the Lord's

sector or in the home – are rich with relational potential. The authors rightly point out that "Christian discipleship is a full-time occupation, seven days a week" (p. 8).



The authors achieve their purpose by providing us with ten commandments for working people as a framework for how to express Christian love as practical discipleship within the workplace through "a deliberate attitude of mind that can be an expression of Christian discipleship in just about any context" (p. 9). The ten commandments are: be diligent, be alert, be forgiving, be caring, be honest, be healthy, be prayerful, be generous, be positive, and be reliable. In each chapter a 'commandment' is explained and explored, and then followed by a set of related prayers that are the fruit of many years' work by the authors: a well-known and much appreciated output from ICF.

In my view, the book has three key strengths. Firstly, it has a pleasing and practical structure.

and everything in it" (Ps 24.1). Also, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3.16). Furthermore, our trinitarian God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, puts relationality at the centre of our faith, and our work lives – whether in business, the public

Each chapter includes an opening paragraph that provides an 'executive summary' for the commandment under consideration, alongside a short piece of scripture that anchors the commandment. This is followed by 4–6 pages of further reflection on how

to live out that commandment at work. One can engage with the content if one has only a few moments for reflection or can spare five or ten minutes for deeper contemplation. There follows 12–15 pages of prayers, each introduced with a few sentences that provide brief but enlightening context and background to each individual prayer.

Secondly, the authors provide us with effectively two books in one. The ten commandments offer a “daily checklist” (p. 9) for those who wish to live out their faith in the workplace, developed through consultation with a number of Christian workplace groups, thereby providing an overarching framework and guide on how to practice Christian love in the workplace. It is also a ‘prayer-book’ for those in the world of work, or encountering those in it, a daily companion providing an accessible workplace resource for both individual prayer and acts of workplace worship.

Thirdly, the reflection provided for each commandment is both rich and compelling. For example, the second commandment, to be alert, not only suggests that we should be open to signs of God’s presence in our workplaces and the lives of our co-workers. It also suggests that we should be willing to question and challenge and thereby “influence our workplaces to achieve the good that lies within their potential” (p. 42). Furthermore, the third commandment, to be forgiving, points out that peace-making and reconciling is an expression of our love for God and neighbour. However, it


also recommends that we “cultivate an instinct of grace at work” (p. 63), ever mindful that true reconciliation requires not judgement but forgiveness and repentance, with a healthy dose of humility and self-reflection. Finally, they conclude with the important point that “whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (p. 221) rather than for our own glory.

The authors have been careful to ensure that their exposition of the ten commandments is appealing to workers in all contexts and to those who interact with people at work. However, ensuring this universality means that the vivid edge from examples of application in, and perhaps testimony from, today’s many and varied real working contexts is missing. What does it mean in practice to be caring if you are a Deliveroo delivery driver, and equally what does it mean to be caring when you encounter such workers? What does it mean to be forgiving if you are an NHS nurse and when being cared for by an NHS nurse, to be generous if you are an entrepreneur in a tech start-up and when you do business with one, or to be alert as a carer at home and when you yourself are cared for or support a carer?

Furthermore, as already described, prayer resources are a particularly strong output from the authors and ICF as the organisation that they lead. The authors allude to a secondary purpose of the book to “combine these into published form” (p. 9). However, some of the prayer resources, while rich in themselves, have a less clear connection

to the commandment under which they have been assembled.

In *Love:Work*, Phil and John have fulfilled both of their expressed purposes: to provide us with an invaluable resource that supports workers of all types to live out their faith in their workplaces, and to curate some of their excellent and extensive prayer resources for workers. I share their hopes that this book may contribute to changing the prevailing narrative of work as a place to be endured into one in which people can flourish and grow spiritually, and that it may help churches and individual Christians to become more outward looking and “appreciate the working lives of congregations and those of the wider communities that they serve” (p. 10).

As a final reflection, I wonder how the authors would respond to the question: which is the greatest of these commandments? As Christ told us, the commandment to love God and neighbour, i.e. those in need, are the greatest of the Ten Commandments (Mt 22.36–40). Therefore, while all the authors’ commandments are intended to show how love is expressed in the workplace, perhaps the authors’ fourth commandment, to be caring, to show Christian *caritas* at work, is the greatest. We are called to participate in God’s wisdom and compassion and act as people of love both when at work and when we encounter those who are working. As the first and greatest of Christian goods, love should be central to all aspects of our lives, including work. 



John Bloomer spent nearly 25 years as a business leader and intrapreneur in the international agrochemical, biotechnology and seeds industry before setting up his own company. He is now an adviser and Non-Executive Director in the agri-tech industry and works extensively with entrepreneurs. John is a Trustee of Faith in Business and recently studied and trained for ordained ministry at Westcott House in Cambridge alongside his business activities. He is now NSM at Writtle with Highwood and Roxwell in Chelmsford diocese.