BLENDED IDEOLOGIES: THE IMPACT OF CAPITALISM ON CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF WORK FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE WORKPLACE

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To Tricia, who effortlessly brings out the goodness in me and inspires me to share it with the world.

To Dave and Paula Kauffman, whose unwavering love and support empower others' dreams; your role as catalysts in my journey will always be remembered.

To my Green Bay Community Church family, thank you for embracing me and allowing me to live out my faith in our community. Your companionship has been invaluable as I've explored and deepened my understanding of our Father together.

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

—Luke 3:12-14

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ABBREVIATIONS

BGU	Bakke Graduate University
GBCC	Green Bay Community Church
CCDA	Christian Community Development Association
TL	Transformed Leader
IRB	Institutional Review Board for Research with Humans

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the complex intersection of American capitalism and biblical theology of work among Christians in the marketplace, revealing a troubling merger of capitalist values with limited understanding of God's vision for work. Through mixed methods research involving 129 survey respondents, 17 in-depth interviews, and analysis of 20 faith-led businesses in the Green Bay, Wisconsin area, this study employed grounded theory to identify and articulate the blended ideologies emerging from this syncretic fusion.

The findings reveal what I term "the Great Accommodation"—a form of Christianity that appears faithful on the surface but has been fundamentally reshaped by capitalist assumptions about human worth, success, and the purpose of work. Six distinct blended ideologies emerged from the data: prosperity discipleship, therapeutic stewardship, sanitized servant leadership, functional deism, aspirational Christianity, and individualized calling. A striking paradox was uncovered: while 68.2% of respondents believe faith is relevant to business success, only 24.8% cite the Bible as a primary influence on their work practices, indicating that capitalism has become a primary discipling force in American Christian life.

The research demonstrates that rather than Christianity transforming culture, American capitalism has systematically captured Christian imagination by privatizing faith, redefining biblical concepts to serve capitalist objectives, replacing justice-oriented language with therapeutic terminology, and adopting material success metrics as measures of divine blessing. This theological capture creates believers who exhibit personal kindness while unknowingly participating in systems that perpetuate inequality,

precisely because their faith has been reframed to support rather than prophetically challenge these structures.

The study concludes by proposing strategies to teach Christians in the marketplace a biblical theology of work that can flourish within the American capitalist context while maintaining authentic biblical values. These findings contribute to understanding how cultural syncretism operates in contemporary American Christianity and provide a framework for developing redemptive approaches to faith-work integration that honor God's original design for work as participation in His mission of justice and restoration.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Art has long been a profound passion of mine; showcasing the intricate expressions of the human soul. Throughout my life, I have found beauty in the world of watercolor painting, where the mixing of colors can convey various emotions and meanings. However, I often struggled with blending colors effectively; my lack of understanding about the interactions between different colors often led to outcomes that did not match my artistic vision. As Dr. Betty Edwards in the author *of Color: A Course in Mastering the Art of Mixing Colors* (Edwards, 2004) articulates, "Since language plays an important role in color, simply being able to use the vocabulary of color is immensely helpful in seeing, naming, and mixing colors" (p. 30). This principle not only applies to the art of painting but also parallels a significant issue I have observed among Christians in the workplace: a troubling merger of capitalist values with a limited understanding of God's vision for work—a biblical theology of work (see figure 1). This syncretism often results in a diluted expression of faith that falls short of reflecting the transformative power of the Gospel.

Over my forty years in church ministry, I have witnessed countless personal transformations driven by faith. Yet, I have also seen how both my life and the lives of many others have been subtly influenced by secular cultural norms, leading to a compromise in our faith that no longer aligns with the Gospel's vision. This blending of ideologies is evident as Christians engage with the marketplace, where economic success is often prioritized over spiritual faithfulness. The phenomenon of religious economic syncretism—defined as the "…fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices"

(Doniger, ed., 2006, p. 1048)—offers a lens which can be used to examine how these blended ideologies can lead to skewed practices in business.

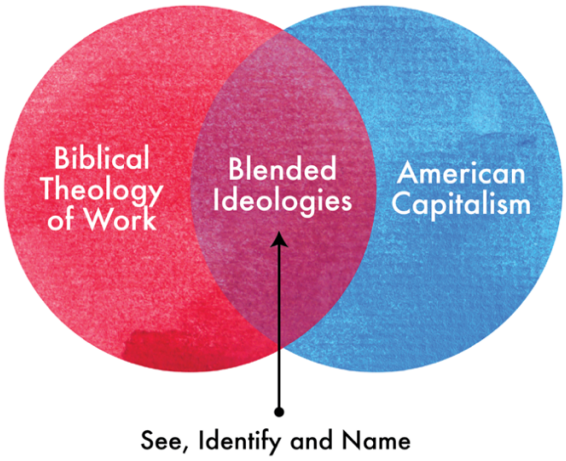


Figure 1

Biblical Work and American Capitalism

I believe that understanding how these influences interplay is essential to developing a robust biblical ideology of work that can flourish within the American capitalist context. This dissertation was designed to articulate and address the core ideologies emerging from this syncretic fusion, providing strategies to equip Christians in the workforce with a theology that honors God's design for their work. By examining American capitalism alongside biblical teachings on work, I have attempted to reveal the interconnected motivations guiding Christians toward success, discern God's intended purpose of work, and define success in ways that truly reflect His values.

This inquiry highlighted the difficulties Christians encounter when blending their beliefs with workplace realities. It aimed to clarify the differences between a theology of work and the principles of American capitalism, providing Christians with tools to connect their faith with their professional lives. The following sections summarize these

two topics, and the remainder of the dissertation is intended to encourage a more genuine and meaningful approach to work for Christians. Ultimately, this study seeks to empower believers to navigate the challenges of capitalism while maintaining their faith-driven values in the workplace.

American Capitalism

To explore the intricate relationship between American capitalism and a biblical perspective on work, it is crucial to establish a clear definition of American capitalism. We must understand and articulate what "American capitalism" entails (Edwards, 2004). While there are many influential thinkers on this topic, there is significant variation in how they each conceptualize American capitalism. At its core, capitalism can be characterized as an economic system where trade and industry are primarily controlled by private individuals or corporations, all aiming for maximum profits. This system is fundamentally amoral, as it can be employed for both constructive and destructive purposes.

A fundamental principle of capitalism is individual ownership, a view supported by influential thinkers like Karl Marx, who argued that capitalists generate profits by exploiting workers and extracting more value from their labor than they pay in wages (Marx & Engels, 2008). In a capitalist setting, many workers experience a sense of alienation due to limited work and environmental control, leading to a disconnect from the products they create. This disconnect creates significant conflict between the upper class and the working class, which Marx believed might one day incite a revolutionary movement aimed at dismantling capitalism (Marx & Engles, 2008). Ultimately, workers

without ownership often struggle to find purpose and meaning in their work, feeling like mere cogs in a machine designed for someone else's profit.

Wallerstein (2004) defines "capitalism" as "…a historical system defined by the priority of the endless accumulation of capital" (p. 128). He argues that the essence of capitalism lies in the drive for constant wealth accumulation, which influences economic activities and societal structures. This perspective emphasizes that capitalism is not merely an economic system, but a historical process focused on generating ever-increasing profits and wealth. Veblen (2006) shares this concept of "conspicuous consumption," highlighting how individuals seek to improve their social status through the acquisition of goods and services, often leading to excess and a perpetual desire for more.

Adam Smith, a pivotal figure in this discourse, is well-known for his concept of the "invisible hand," illustrating the self-regulating aspect of a free market (Smith, 1776/2013, p. 515). Smith posited that individuals pursuing their own interests inadvertently do not support society's overall welfare through their economic actions; "Every individual is continually exerting himself to find out the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command. It is his own advantage, indeed, and not that of society, which he has in view" (Smith, 1776/2013, p. 197). This seminal opinion from Smith highlights an essential characteristic of capitalism: It thrives on self-interest.

Weber (1904/2012) characterized the "spirit" of capitalism with four key value statements that illuminate its underlying economic principles. He asserted, "Remember, that time is money. Remember that credit is money. Remember, that money is of the

prolific, generating nature. Remember this saying, 'The good paymaster is lord of another man's purse'" (Weber, 1904/2012, p. 10). These statements convey the idea that efficiency and productivity are paramount. The first statement emphasizes the need for individuals and businesses to recognize the value of time, urging that every moment should be utilized effectively in pursuit of economic gain; wasted time equates to lost financial opportunities. The second statement underscores the importance of financial leverage in achieving business success, positing that access to credit can propel individuals and enterprises toward greater wealth accumulation. Furthermore, Weber's (2012) observation that money is of "prolific, generating nature" highlights capitalism's inherent drive for continuous growth and the relentless pursuit of profit, suggesting that capital begets more capital in a cycle of economic expansion. Finally, his quote about a "good paymaster" (p. 10) reflects the moral dimension of economic relationships, implying that an individual who manages resources prudently gains not only respect but also influence over the financial well-being of others. Collectively, these foundational perspectives illustrate how individual ambition, motivated by the desire for wealth and status, acts as a driving force in capitalism by creating a landscape where success is measured by material achievements and economic productivity.

A historical understanding of capitalism enhances the definition of "American capitalism." Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political thinker and historian, provides crucial insights into American version of capitalism. Turner (2008) encapsulates Tocqueville's perspective when he states, "Individualism is a recent expression arising out of a new idea" (p. 201). Tocqueville describes individualism as "…a reflective and

tranquil sentiment that disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men" (Turner, 2008, p. 200).

While theorists like Adam Smith (1776/2013) highlight the self-regulating benefits of free markets, Karl Marx (2010) underscores the inherent exploitation and alienation experienced by workers within this framework. The observations of Alexis de Tocqueville further illustrate the cultural implications of capitalism. Comer (2015) asserts,

> The mantra of our culture is that we work to live. The American dream—which started out as this brilliant idea that everybody should have a shot at a happy life—has devolved into a narcissistic desire to make as much money as possible, in as little time as possible, with as little effort as possible, so that we can get off work and go do something else. (p. 26)

American capitalism embodies a landscape characterized by tension between individual aspirations and broader social responsibilities. This present reality necessitates a critical examination of its impact on values, work, and community within a biblically informed theology of work. The complexities of this system underscore the need for Christians in the marketplace to navigate their faith alongside capitalistic influences, prompting a re-evaluation of what true success entails considering God's purposes for their work.

Biblical Theology of Work

To define a biblical theology of work, one must review Genesis' creation narrative and the various insights it has inspired. The Bible begins in Genesis 1 with "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and

empty." God then spends the next six days creating a workplace for man, and each day He finishes His work with "God saw it was good."

In Genesis 2:15, God created a perfect garden where the spiritual and physical realms existed together. He needed someone to "…work it and take care of it." God's very design of perfection included work. Work is a gift and part of our design. As Comer (2015) states, "Humanity isn't created as cheap slave labor to do his bidding, but rather as his co-creators, his partners" (p. 38). Biblical Christians can immediately establish that work was done by God, created for practicing followers of Jesus to do good with work and workplace given.

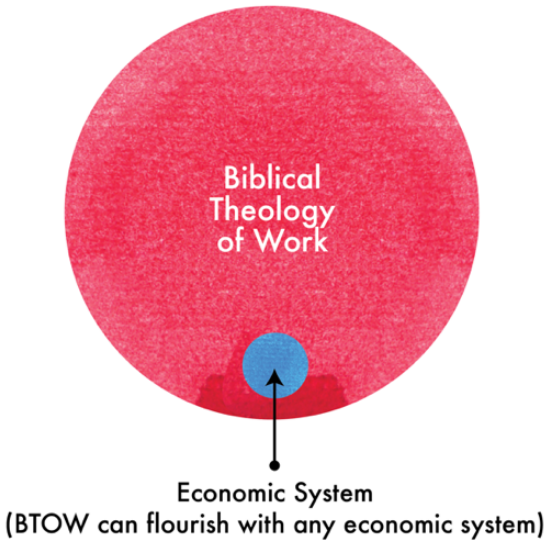
According to Keller and Alsdorf (2016), the theology of work is understood as an integral part of God's creation and purpose for humanity. The authors emphasize that work is not merely a means to earn a living, but rather a calling from God that reflects His character and contributes to the flourishing of society. Keller and Alsdorf (2016) articulate that the goal of work should be to serve others, promote justice, and cultivate the world in a way that aligns with God's mission. "Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for the soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness" (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016, p. 23). Another key truth of a biblical theology of work is that it brings good not only to Biblical believers but also to others.

Dennis Bakke (2010) presented a similar vision of work as a divine calling that holds intrinsic value and purpose. In his foundation book, *Joy at Work,* he challenges the cultures idea of success, "the meaning of success goes far beyond the bottom line. For them the crucial measure of success is the quality of their work lives" (Bakke, 2010, p.

13). Bakke (2010) reports that work should be viewed as an expression of faith and service to others and emphasizes the importance of finding joy and fulfillment in one's work as a means to life satisfaction. Bakke (2010) advocates for collaboration and community in the workplace, suggesting that work thrives best in environments where individuals come together with shared goals and a commitment to stewarding their talents responsibly. He envisions workplaces as agents of transformation that align with the broader purposes of God's Kingdom, encouraging a culture that nurtures individual potential and fosters joy. Ultimately, Bakke's (2010) theology of work challenges traditional notions by reimagining work as fulfilling and purposeful and that reflects God's character (see figure 2). A biblical theology of work in practice will bring good to the community.

Figure 2

Biblical Economic System



Crouch's (2023) main argument is that Christians need to advance beyond merely lamenting, analyzing, or engaging with cultural trends; Christians must actively create

culture. Crouch (2023) asserts, “We work for, indeed work in the life and power of, a gracious and infinitely resourceful Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer” (p. 12). Crouch (2023) defines “cultural power” as “…the ability to successfully propose a new cultural good” (p. 219) emphasizing the need for Christians to become influential cultural creators. A Christians understanding of a biblical theology of work will benefit both Christians and others, fostering a redemptive culture.

The New Testament discusses God’s purpose for a Christan’s work and how it should be done. Jesus declares that money is not evil, but that the love of money is (Luke 12:15). This counter-narrative challenges the capitalistic notion of pursuing profit aggressively at any cost, including exploiting others. John the Baptist himself, in Luke 3:10-14, baptizes tax collectors and Roman soldiers as they ask,

> “What should we do then?” John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “…what should we do?” and he replied, “Don’t collect any more than you are required to.” Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

The teachings found throughout Scripture consistently convey that God's gift of work was never intended primarily for the sake of profit.

In summary, a biblical theology of work invites Christians to view their labor as a sacred calling, intricately tied to God’s purpose for humanity with any economic system. By recognizing that Biblical Christians are co-creators with the Divine, work can be approached not merely as a means of survival but as a profound expression of faith that

serves others and enhances the common good. This perspective urges Christians to operate with a biblical theology of work as the driving worldview in an American capitalistic culture. Ultimately, Christians should seek joy and fulfillment in all endeavors and foster environments where collaboration and ethical stewardship thrive. A biblical theology of work ultimately affirms that work is an inherent and dignified part of human existence. This theology establishes that work finds its foundation in God's creation and image, marred by the Fall, redeemed through Christ, and meant to reflect God's values through service and cultural engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Throughout history, Christians have grappled with the challenge of cultural influences on their faith. Instances of religious cultural syncretism are prevalent, ranging from the Old Testament, where the Israelites worshiped false gods, to Ananias and Sapphira succumbing to the temptation to deceive, and the Ephesian Christians embracing sexual immorality accepted in their pagan culture. It is also evident that the German Church provided support to Hitler, while early American Christians exploited Black Africans, frequently justifying their actions through a distorted interpretation of faith. In many cases, it has been easier for Christians to adopt a lukewarm approach and conform to societal norms. I believe this blending of beliefs and practices is not a deliberate effort; rather, it has been gradual and unrecognized. The mix of religious beliefs influenced by different cultures and systems over time has shaped the way people see the world. Lately, the effect of faith and politics has shown how important it is to recognize that a Christian's blended ideas can distort and move away from a biblical worldview. As Vosburg (2021) notes, "While scholars studying Christianity and politics

have given due attention to political issues, largely overlooked is how Christianity engages with one of the most contentious and dominant aspects of American life: the economy." The silent syncretism emerging in America between capitalism and a biblical theology of work is particularly concerning.

This blend is often motivated by the path of least resistance. As Williams (2023) succinctly states, "Cultural religion created identity without demanding excessive personal commitment" (p. 22). The Bible is consistent in the Old Testament and New Testament in challenging the behaviors of people who claim to love God, so they do not participate in normative cultural sins (1 Pet. 2:9, Rom. 12:2, 6:13, Col. 3:2). Williams (2023) defines how this takes place, "…whenever Christians bypass God's standards to engage in certain culturally conditioned and approved behaviors" (p. 15). The problem for American Christians in the workplace is that living like Christ's followers with a theology of work is more costly and challenging than blending in with the cultural norms. Bonhoeffer (1995) poignantly articulates this struggle by stating, "It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life" (p. 28).

Williams (2023) defines cultural Christianity as "…the faith of those who confess Jesus with their words while conforming to the standards of the surrounding culture" (p. 15). The dominating effects of capitalism on Western culture and thinking can be seen in and out of the Church today. When this perspective becomes the primary way to measure success, the biblical call to both experience and extend shalom—often understood as wholeness, peace, and well-being—gets weakened or even overlooked. Keller and Alsdorf (2016) refer to this perspective as a dualistic faith, in which individuals adhere to biblical faith only while gathering with other Christians. My research focused on

Christian leaders in business; the hypothesis suggests that Christian churches and leadership are not modeling and training those in business with a Biblical theology of work. Many Christians have operated with a moral or ethical lens that is noble but lacks Jesus' sacrificial model. This research was intended to transform old, unhealthy, destructive, and deathly paradigms into a new life (Audéoud, 2023) by seeing, identifying and naming the differences between American capitalism and a theology of work. It confronted the mixture of faith and American capitalistic values that have led Christians in the marketplace to distort the essence of what God intended for a Christian at work, resulting in a surrender to cultural norms rather than staying true to God's principles.

The effects of an American capitalist mindset on the beliefs and practices of Christians in the workplace are evident. Research indicates that "…religion is likely to affect perceptions and behavior as well as the ability and motivation to perform work," but believers often struggle to connect their faith with their work in both thought and action (Lynn et al., 2011, p. 677). This issue can be traced back to how and where Christians were trained to practice a biblical theology of work and the decrease of Christian religiosity in America. Many Americans identify as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular," collectively referred to as religious "nones." This group, who identify as religious "nones, "nothing in particular," has seen significant growth since religious identity began in 2007, currently stabilizing around 28% (Hatfield, 2024). While it remains uncertain if this trend will continue, religious "nones" are now the second largest religious demographic in the U.S., second to Protestants (Hatfield, 2024). The American Christian community is decreasing, and many Christians simply lack a biblical theology of work.

Bobo and Jethani (2020) highlight a notable shift within the American church as: "…something remarkable happened to ministry in the 20th century – it moved inside" (p. 19). This change has led many pastors and congregants to perceive "spiritual work" as occurring solely within church buildings and campuses. As a result, a division has formed, labeling the church space as sacred while viewing the workplace as secular. This perspective undermines how Christians regard their roles at work, often seeing them as less spiritually significant. If one were to place a barista, a lawyer, a trash collector, and a pastor on stage on a Sunday morning and ask which role is more spiritual, it is likely that most attendees would point to the pastor. Today, the American approaches and programs have led Christians in the workplace to think that ministry is only for pastors and church staff, and that a Christian's ministry role is just to support what they do. This mindset goes against what the Bible asks of all believers. No matter what job they have, Christians are supposed to live out the great commandment to love God and love their neighbors (Mark 12:30–31). In John 17:15-17, Jesus prays for all believers:

> My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

Jesus clarifies that Christ followers are to be reflections of God Himself as they live and work in the world. Yet, a notable contrast emerges from Pew Research Center data, which shows that about one in four American workers report rarely or never receiving feedback from their managers (Horowitz, 2023). As Chapman and Sisodia (2015) state, "People give us the gift of their time for forty hours a week, and the way we

treat them, lead them, and inspire them (or not) profoundly affects their life" (p. 38). This perspective prompts professing Christians to consider how businesses influence the world, from the employees hired to the work environments affected. Why are Christians not experiencing God designed relational community in the workplace? The impact of faith in the workplace has waned in modern post-Christian culture, with Pew Research revealing that "nearly six-in-ten 'spiritual but not religious' Americans (58%) say they spend time looking inward or centering themselves at least a few times a month mainly for connection, including 43% who do so primarily to connect with their 'true self'" (Alper et al., 2023). Many Christians remain uninformed about a biblical theology of work, leaving them isolated and unprepared. Tragically, this situation represents one of the largest mission fields available considering the influence a Christian could have during their work week.

Research shows that Christians who apply a biblical perspective to their engagement with capitalism are influenced by several factors, including church attendance, denominational strictness, and the maturity of their faith (Lynn et al., 2011). Unfortunately, church attendance has been declining rapidly. "Both Protestantism and Catholicism are experiencing losses of population share. Currently, 43% of U.S. adults identify with Protestantism, down from 51% in 2009. And one-in-five adults (20%) are Catholic, down from 23% in 2009" (Mitchell, 2019). With church attendance dropping the number of Christians being trained in a biblical theology of work is shrinking. This trend indicates that the Church is struggling to effectively teach and equip Christians to understand and apply a biblical theology of work in their lives.

The disconnect between Christianity and economic needs can be understood through a careful examination of how cultural and economic paradigms have shaped Christians' engagement with their work. In an environment increasingly dominated by capitalist ideologies, many Christians find themselves navigating a dualistic existence, where their faith is compartmentalized away from their professional lives. This division creates an incongruence between the teachings of Christ—who calls for active engagement in the world and loving one's neighbor (Mark 12:30–31)—and the economic reality that prioritizes profit and personal advancement, often at the expense of genuine relational community. As Vosburg (2021) and Williams (2023) articulate, cultural religion allows Christians to profess faith without the necessary commitment to live out biblical values in their daily work. This praxis mirrors Marx's critique of religion as an opiate that distracts from the material realities of life, leading to a form of complacency that allows systemic injustices to persist unchallenged. When Christians fail to connect their faith with their work and succumb to prevailing capitalist values, they risk not only their spiritual integrity but also the mission to which they are called. Thus, the need for a robust biblical theology of work becomes paramount, urging believers to resist cultural syncretism and instead cultivate a faith that fully integrates their economic realities with their Christian identity. This study endeavored to highlight the problematic intertwining of these ideologies, aiming to redefine the workspace as a mission field where the principles of shalom can take root, thus fostering a more profound, holistic approach to living out one's faith within the economic landscape.

The issue is that earning a living, achieving financial stability, and pursuing the American Dream are intricately connected to the economy, shaping Christians' approach

to their work. This project aimed to address this issue by recognizing and defining the intertwined ideologies of American capitalism and a biblical theology of work. While prior research has explored the religious roots of early capitalism (e.g., Friedman & Adler, 2021), there has been limited investigation into how American capitalism influences the biblical theology of work. This study sought to illuminate the often-overlooked syncretic relationship between these ideologies and to clarify the beliefs and practices that arise from their integration. Additionally, it aspires to provide a biblical theological framework that empowers Christians to see the disparity of the economic systems impact on people and begin to live out and express a redemptive faith in their workplaces.

Statement of the Purpose

In my 16 years in Green Bay, Wisconsin, I have observed a significant lack of spiritual transformation beyond the church walls, which led to my desire to undertake this study. My frustration with both my leadership and the local Christian community arose from the absence of impactful movements in marketplace environments. I have witnessed a decline in church attendance and a scarcity mindset among nearby churches that yearn for greater influence but increasingly prioritize Church programs over genuine connections with people. We as church leaders have reduced our churches to asking marketplace Christians to serve our programs solely within our ministries. As such, I have witnessed Christians minimizing the missional work even when they have a biblical understanding of the theology of work. This study aimed to explore how Church ministry can offer a Biblical framework and equip Christians for the marketplace, empowering

them to become transformative agents who reflect God's love in their work and communities.

First, this study intended to uncover and clarify the issue of the blended ideologies of American capitalism and biblical theology of work. As previously mentioned, this combination of worldviews often occurs subtly, making it difficult to recognize. It is essential for churches, leaders, and Christians in Brown County to illuminate this important aspect of faith. Ephesians 5:13 states, "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light." The findings from this study will help future researchers understand the challenges faced by Christians in the marketplace and church leaders alike.

Secondly, this project involved surveying Christians in the marketplace across various denominations, genders, roles, and socioeconomic statuses to identify the blended ideologies that emerge. Participants included business owners, retirees, and manufacturing workers, among others, to gain insights into their beliefs and practices. By articulating these ideologies, my hope is that this study will help people to distinguish between American capitalistic values and the truths inherent in biblical theology of work in Brown County.

Thirdly, this study intended to develop equipping strategies that teach Christians in the marketplace a biblical theology of work that can be practiced within the American capitalist context in Brown County, Wisconsin. The findings will offer valuable content for church leaders to share with their members who are involved in the marketplace, ultimately planting the seeds for transformational movements to emerge in workplaces throughout our community.

Main Objective

The objective of this project was to understand the problem and name the ideologies of this syncretic fusion of American capitalism and the biblical theology of work and to design strategies to teach Christians in the marketplace a biblical theology of work that can flourish in the American capitalist context.

Secondary Objectives

1. to demonstrate the cultural impact of American capitalistic culture on Christian's workplace practices
2. to revive the importance of regular Bible teaching for a theology of work that can be practiced within the current economic system
3. to reinspire Christian's in the workplace of their callings and missional purposes at work
4. to develop a redemptive theology and framework for the workplace to practice and experience transformation

Context of the Project

My friend Steve, a cardiac thoracic surgeon at a local hospital in Green Bay, granted me a unique opportunity several years ago to witness and document open heart surgeries, fulfilling a long-standing item on my bucket list. After expressing my fascination with medical advancements, Steve approved me to be present during four heart procedures, where I captured the experience through videography and photography. Throughout these surgeries, which included bypass and pro-lapse repair, I could not help but reflect on the gradual progression of heart disease and how it is often overlooked until it significantly impacts a person's life. Despite the availability of advanced technology

for heart monitoring, the high costs typically hinder proactive measures from being taken until a significant event occurs. It is a silent killer that can be addressed through preventative habits.

As the Lead Pastor at Green Bay Community Church for over 16 years, I have observed numerous instances where Christians in business have faced abrupt and significant hardships that appear to arise unexpectedly in their places of work. However, upon deeper reflection, it becomes evident that these struggles often stem from a gradual shift in their worldviews and an adaptation of cultural norms, a spiritual heart disease. In other words, they have a mixture of biblical morality and an expectation for God to bless them in their work and lost the biblical view that they are working for God and to see their role as a ministry that they are to steward. I've observed that many Christians in Green Bay seem largely unaware of a biblical understanding of work. Instead, they often conform to the prevailing cultural norms of capitalism, which leads them to adopt a spiritually powerless, isolated ethical approach that keeps their faith confined to private life. They have gradually failed to address the underlying impact of capitalistic values that may exist within their beliefs and practices and, therefore, have little to no transformation impact on the culture around them.

Considering projected demographic shifts, it is crucial to examine the persistent patterns of neglect regarding the blended practices that permeate many job roles and workplaces. As cities continue to expand, driven by a growing economic engine, Christians must intentionally increase efforts to equip Christians in the workplace. Research predicts that by 2050, approximately 70% of the population will reside in urban

areas, leading to increased disparities and population density that will impact every individual and community, including Green Bay, Wisconsin (Van Eymeren et al., 2017).

Green Bay, a small urban area located at the confluence of the Fox River and Green Bay—about 110 miles north of Milwaukee—faces significant challenges. Historically inhabited by the Ho-Chunk Nation, Menominee, Fox, and Ojibwa tribes, the region was named La Baye Verte by French explorer Jean Nicolet in 1634 (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2012a). The city's rapid development began after the U.S. acquired Fort Howard in 1816, turning it into a hub for lumber and agriculture in the 1870s. Known for its beloved NFL team, the Green Bay Packers, the city reflects a strong sense of small-town values (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2012b). Brown County, with over 2,000 nonprofit organizations (*Green Bay Area Nonprofits*, n.d.) and approximately 7,300 employers, has built a diverse economy characterized by low unemployment. This historical and cultural context profoundly influences the faith mindset and leadership among Christians in the area, as Brown County has a significant religious presence, with 45% Catholic and 11% Lutheran among its 119 Christian churches, and about 68% of residents identifying as religious (*Green Bay, WI Religion*, n.d.).

I acknowledge the profound influence of Green Bay's culture and history on my worldview and leadership. I echo Castellanos's sentiment: "We would spend hours lamenting the state of American evangelical churches" (2015, p. 96). Reflecting on my journey, I have confronted the limitations of my own perspective, particularly regarding the Green Bay church. I have recognized that my blended ideologies of American capitalism and biblical theology of work often prioritized personal achievement over

empowering others, leading to misguided and harmful outcomes. The relentless pursuit of resource accumulation became my primary focus.

Understanding the mixed ideologies present in my leadership role is not enough; I must articulate these beliefs clearly and transition toward a biblical definition of success. As Volf and Croasmum (2021) wisely state, "Virtuous theologians work as God's stewards building God's home (1 Cor. 3:9), not masters building their own little empires" (2021, p. 164). This realization has prompted me to reevaluate my understanding of biblical theology of work and redefine my concept of success. I strive for a more authentic and biblically centered theology of work. This dissertation reflects a journey that I aim to share with fellow Christians in the workplace, fostering a more redemptive and flourishing community.

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative methodology using a grounded theory approach to examine the blended ideologies and beliefs of Christians in the workplace within the context of American capitalist culture. This approach allows for the systematic discovery of broad new theories and explanations based on narrative data gathered through individual interviews. Interviews provide an increased understanding of how individuals interpret their experiences, construct their worldviews, and attribute meaning to their beliefs. Qualitative data ultimately uncovered broad patterns and generalizations, including business practices and personal experiences, that shape the definition of success for Christians in the workplace. I also chose this method because of Creswell and Creswell (2023), who report that "…theory also appears as an endpoint of a qualitative study, a generated theory, a pattern, or a generalization that emerges inductively from

data collection and analysis" (p. 122). The research identified and differentiated common blended ideological patterns of American capitalism and Christian beliefs, enabling a re-prioritization of a redemptive framework.

Research Questions

Given the problem of mixed ideologies of American capitalism and a biblical theology of work for Christians in the workplace, this research focused on the following question to guide the primary objective. What are the blended ideologies of American capitalism and a biblical theology of work for Christians in the marketplace? The secondary supporting questions were as follows.

1. How does a Christian in the marketplace define work and workplace success?
2. How does biblical faith impact Christians in the marketplace?
3. What are the most important workplace values or practices for Christians in the marketplace?
4. What motivates Christians in the marketplace to come to work every day?
5. What are Christians' career goals and aspirations in the marketplace?

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the biblical theology of work with relevant literature of the prevailing American capitalistic worldview of success for Christians. The study integrated and synthesized various theoretical frameworks such as social cognitive theory, transformational leadership theory, transformative learning theory, theology of work, servant leadership, historical theory, and faith development theory. Listed in the following sections are the main theories used with sub-theories.

Social Cognitive Theory and Historical Theory

Social cognitive theory, developed by psychologist Albert Bandura, describes how individuals acquire behaviors through the interplay between cognition, behavior, and environment (Bandura & Cervone, 2023). Observational learning or modeling is central to this theory, as individuals observe and integrate others' behaviors into their cognitive processes, influencing their thoughts and actions. This framework can be applied to explore the influence of culture and environment on social behaviors, including those of Christian professionals in the business sector. A sub-theory is a historical theory, which explores past events and circumstances to understand their causes and consequences. As Mary Fulbrook notes, "…historical knowledge is an integral part of an ever-changing present; and of how historical consciousness affects the ways in which we engage with the present and help to shape the future" (Fulbrook, 2002, p. 24). This perspective is important for understanding modern issues, such as the challenges posed by an American capitalistic worldview.

Transformative Leadership and Learning Theory

Transformational leadership theory and transformative learning theory share some similarities. Both theories study personal growth and change by "…how one categorizes experiences, beliefs, people, events, and the self involves frames of references, which are structures of assumptions and expectations on which our thoughts, feelings, and habits are based" (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 46) Both theories can be aligned with Christians in the marketplace, as both can be utilized to empower individuals to align their practices with biblical principles. By promoting self-reflection, challenging traditional beliefs, and encouraging the development of a biblical theology of work, leaders can facilitate

transformation and growth both personally and within their organizations. Both theories also highlight the role of "mentorship-student relationship" (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 97) in facilitating this transformative process.

Theology of Work and Servant Leadership Theory

The theology of work theory and servant leadership theory share a commonality of integrating faith and values within the workplace, as well as prioritizing employee well-being. The theology of work theory views work as a calling with spiritual implications, while servant leadership theory embodies a philosophy that focuses on serving others, placing their needs first, and empowering them to achieve their full potential. The theory of servant leadership, introduced by Greenleaf (2008), emphasizes that true leaders prioritize service above all else. Greenleaf (2008) describes a servant leader as someone who has a natural inclination to serve first and then chooses to lead, as opposed to a leader driven by power or material gain. This distinction underscores the essence of servant leadership as a values-driven approach to leadership that fosters empathy, compassion, and the development of individuals within the organization. Both theories promote a holistic approach to leadership that values employee well-being, encourages personal growth, and contributes to the creation of ethical and fulfilling work environments.

Historical Theory

While I do not support communism, it is important to recognize that Marx identified flaws in capitalism that align with values contrary to God's design for work. He highlighted that capitalism tends to emphasize individual profit above communal well-being. Historical theory, or historical materialism, is a framework developed by

Marx (Marx & Engels, 2008) in the 19th century that aimed to understand societal development through the lens of historical processes, socio-economic structures, and class struggles. This theory argues that material conditions—such as modes of production and the distribution of wealth—are the primary drivers of historical change. It analyzes how economic systems and class relations influence the social, political, and cultural dynamics of a society over time. By examining historical patterns and uncovering the economic forces at play, historical theory seeks to identify the root causes of social inequality, conflict, and transformation. While Marxist thought provides a critical perspective on capitalist systems and class-based societies, it is essential to approach such critiques with discernment, recognizing that the ultimate goal should align with biblical principles of community and stewardship.

Faith Development Theory

Faith development theory, also referred to as spiritual development theory, is a psychological framework that aims to explain the evolution of individuals' faith, spirituality, and religious beliefs throughout their lives (Fowler, 1981). This theory explores how faith development shapes people's attitudes toward wealth accumulation, entrepreneurship, and profit-making. By examining these influences, researchers can better understand the values and priorities of Christian business leaders operating within a capitalist economy. Ultimately, this framework provides valuable insights into the intersection of faith and economic practices.

Definition of Key Words and Terms

American Capitalism: is an economic system that functions within the broader context of American identity and values. It is characterized by private ownership of trade and industry, where individuals and businesses operate for profit rather than state control. In this system, people have the freedom to own property, invest, and engage in market transactions with limited government interference. Reflecting the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of Americans, this form of capitalism emphasizes individual initiative and entrepreneurship, driving a mindset that concentrates on the pursuit of personal profit. As a result, it often prioritizes individual interests, which can sometimes overshadow collective well-being, shaping the economic landscape of the United States (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

Business, workplace, marketplace: (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023) These terms include activities related to work, producing, selling, or providing goods and services, whether for profit or nonprofit purposes. Companies can vary from small, independently owned businesses to large corporations with multiple locations and operations. This definition pertains to any workplace outside the confines of paid church positions. The workplace, therefore, is simply the environment where these activities take place (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

Christian: A Christian is an individual who asserts belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ as outlined in the Bible. Christians believe in one God, understood as the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. This definition does not consider the individual's church involvement or attendance (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

Success: *Success* is defined as the achievement of a desired outcome or goal. It can be measured in various ways, such as accomplishing personal or professional objectives, attaining wealth, receiving recognition or praise, or achieving a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Success can be subjective and can vary from person to person based on their individual goals, values, and aspirations. Ultimately, success is about reaching a state of accomplishment and contentment in one's endeavors (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

Worldview: Worldview refers to the comprehensive framework of beliefs, values, and assumptions through which an individual or society interprets and understands the world. It serves as a lens through which people perceive reality, make sense of their experiences, and respond to various issues and challenges. Worldview encompasses many aspects, including beliefs about the nature of existence, morality, spirituality, knowledge, and the purpose of human life (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

Redemptive: The concept of the redemptive way focuses on creative restoration achieved through sacrifice for the purpose of blessing others, renewing culture, and selflessness. Individuals who embody this redemptive mindset adopt an "I sacrifice, we win" philosophy, utilizing the resources and abilities they possess. The driving motivation behind this approach is a commitment to love and serve others. Redemptive actions involve a process of restoration through sacrifice that aims to uplift others and rejuvenate cultural values. Those who embrace a redemptive mindset set aside personal ambitions in favor of the greater good, dedicating their resources to benefit others (Praxis Labs, 2021).

Defining these terms ensures clarity and accuracy in analysis and discussion. Understanding their meanings contextualizes the research within relevant social, economic, and cultural frameworks, allowing for a deeper exploration of the topic. Additionally, clear definitions enable researchers to communicate their findings effectively, making the research accessible and impactful. Ultimately, these definitions provide a foundational framework that guides data analysis and interpretation, enhancing the overall quality and credibility of the study.

Transformational Significance

I resonate with Danley's (2012) sentiment that many faith leaders share. "We desire to see transformational leaders emerge out of our mission for our community, our city, our state, and for the world" (p. 6). At 60 years old and serving 40 years within a pastoral ministry, I understand the significance of a biblical theology of work, allowing me to recognize the blending "colors" of American capitalism that is a form of God's design, but lacks transformational power. Edwards's (2004) research on colors and their combined impact has been pivotal in this journey toward seeing things in a new light. Edwards (2004) states, "Now that you understand the structure and vocabulary of color and have used colors to depict things—you can expand your focus to include color's expressive power and meaning in everyday life" (p. 137, 2004). This research will empower Christians in the Green Bay area to recognize, articulate, and embrace the profound beauty of God's design for our work.

First, through this research involving Christians in the Green Bay marketplace, I will uncover and identify the various blended ideologies that Christians encounter in their work lives. By naming these differing perspectives, it will provide Christians a clearer

understanding of their beliefs and practices, facilitating the process of disentangling these two worldviews. This clarity will empower individuals to reflect on how these ideologies influence their actions and decisions in the workplace, ultimately living in alignment with their faith.

Secondly, this study will provide valuable research for programs aimed at teaching and training Christians in the marketplace to adopt a redemptive mindset and realign their definition of success in their work. This analysis will pinpoint specific areas for growth and development for working individuals at Green Bay Community Church and other local churches. This research sought to present adaptable programs that business and church leaders can use to reassess their blended ideologies and practices. Additionally, for pastors and church leaders, this study serves as a framework for assessing their programs and culture to foster transformational Christian leaders in the public sector.

This research aims to equip Christians in the marketplace with a biblical theology of work, emphasizing that work is an inherent and dignified aspect of human existence, grounded in God's creation and image, affected by the Fall but redeemed through Christ, and intended to showcase God's Kingdom values through service and cultural engagement. This project will serve as a valuable resource for pastors and teachers, helping them guide others on how to become transformational in the work God has called them to do. By promoting this understanding, Christians can approach their work with purpose and integrity, seeing it as an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to their communities. Additionally, embracing this theology can bring about deeper spiritual

fulfillment, as individuals align their professional lives with their faith, fostering a harmonious connection between their vocation and calling.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study has certain delimitations that need to be acknowledged. First, it specifically focuses on Christian business leaders in Brown County, Wisconsin, which has a population of 264,821 (Brown County, Wisconsin, n.d.) thus restricting this research to the Green Bay geographical area. Additionally, it targets only Christians as defined for this study, without considering their levels of spiritual maturity, theology, or church involvement. While this concentrated research offers valuable insights, it is important to recognize its limitations. A key limitation is the sample, as the data and results are derived solely from Christians in the Brown County marketplace. This narrow sample may not adequately represent the broader perspectives on success found in other cultural contexts, such as the differences between Wisconsin, the Midwest, and the larger American population. It is important to acknowledge these cultural gaps that remain unaddressed within this study.

Summary

This chapter outlined the significance and purpose of this research, which is to explore the fusion of American capitalism and biblical theology of work, while developing strategies to teach Christians in the marketplace how to thrive in this context. I define both American capitalism and biblical theology of work to uncover the blended ideologies driving Christians in their work. By identifying these blended practices, Christians can better understand and emphasize God's purpose and definition of success in and for work. The primary audience for this research is Christians in the workplace

who want to integrate their faith with their careers. By examining their experiences and perspectives, this study aims to provide insights and recommendations to help Christians in the Green Bay area live their faith in a biblically redemptive manner in any work environment. Additionally, church leaders in the Green Bay area will benefit indirectly, as this research will equip them with the information to disciple and support Christian's workplace complexities. By understanding the blended ideologies these Christians encounter, church leaders can offer more effective guidance, encouraging decisions that align with their faith and values. Ultimately, this research aims to nurture a new generation of Christian workers who honor God through their contributions in all aspects of work throughout the Green Bay area.

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of American capitalism and Christian faith has long been a topic of interest and contention among scholars and practitioners alike. In the business sector, this blended belief system manifests itself in how Christian's work. It is critical for Christians to move toward a transformational change in their theology and praxis of work. Mezirow and Taylor (2009) note, "This is why it is important early on to get students to distinguish between capitalism's ideology and functioning and their own role in the system" (p. 135). The American capitalistic worldview, emphasizing profit maximization and market competitiveness, presents a unique set of challenges for Christians who do not have a sound theology of work and who are trying to live their faith within their workplace. It is a dominating wave of influence that has shaped both Christians and those without faith, as Comer (2015) writes,

> The mantra of our culture is that we work to live. The American dream—which started out as this brilliant idea that everybody should have a shot at a happy life—has devolved over the years into a narcissistic desire to make as much money as possible, in as little time as possible, with as little effort as possible, so that we can get off work and go do something else. (2015, p. 11)

It is essential for Christians to understand the complexities of this intersection, and to also recognize and address the impact of capitalism on the understanding of God's design for a Christians work. By cultivating a biblical theology of work, Christians may honor their faith and promote genuine transformation within their workplaces and communities.

This dissertation sought to identify and articulate the ideologies stemming from the syncretic fusion of American capitalism and the biblical theology of work, as well as design strategies to teach Christians in the marketplace a biblical theology that thrives within the American capitalist context. The chapter provides a thorough analysis of the transformational theory perspectives that shape the blended values, beliefs, and practices of professing Christians in the workplace by reviewing existing literature on the topic. It drew on various fundamental theories, including those of capitalism, neuroscience, worldview, and culture, to explore the complexities and tensions at the intersection of these paradigms. Grounded in the Christian theology of work, this examination incorporates insights from key thinkers and writers who have researched these relevant theories. By integrating theological perspectives with theoretical frameworks, this chapter aims to elucidate how Christians navigate the capitalistic system while striving to uphold their faith-based values. Moreover, it will consider the blended beliefs that arise from these discussions, emphasizing the factors that shape Christian behavior and practice in the workplace. This study not only offers a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical research but also provides new insights into the intricacies and influences surrounding American capitalism and biblical theology of work. Through examining ethical dilemmas, moral considerations, and potential opportunities in the quest for success within American capitalism, this research aimed to illuminate the principal workplace beliefs that shape Christians' views on success, purpose, and work practices. Through this analysis, it highlights potential conflicts between biblical values and capitalistic ideals, emphasizing the necessity for Christians to critically evaluate their understanding of biblical success and its professional implications. Ultimately, this

research sought to guide Christians in their pursuit of success by identifying the mixed ideologies at play and helping them reconcile their practices with a biblical theology of work. This holistic approach aspires to cultivate a deeper understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the business world, integrating redemptive principles with practical wisdom in the business culture.

Theological Influence

A theological framework serves as the foundational concept for integrating theology of work, upside-down Kingdom theory, and faith development theory in this research. These frameworks emphasize the intersection of faith and practical everyday life, urging individuals to apply their beliefs and values to all aspects of work and daily living. It encourages a holistic understanding of faith development that involves personal growth, social change, and spiritual transformation, guiding individuals to live out their faith in alignment with their beliefs and values for a more just and compassionate society within the marketplace sector.

The Creation of Work

To effectively identify the blended ideologies of American capitalism and the theology of work, I first need to clarify what the theology of work entails. By establishing a clear reference point, I can better assess how various influences may distort its original intent. Understanding the essence of work requires exploration of its divine design and its intentions. The Genesis 1 narrative illustrates a purposeful order in God's creative process. He transforms chaos into order, infuses the world with beauty and meaning, invites humanity to participate in this work, and establishes a designated day of rest.

In the beginning, (see figure 3) God's first act was to bring order to the "formless and void" heavens and earth. The Hebrew phrase for this condition is *tohu va-bohu*, which translates to "…unproductive, uninhabited land or has the sense of futility and nonexistence" (Mathews, 1995). God utilizes the first three days to create and organize the earth, while days four through six are dedicated to filling it with beauty and benefits.

Figure 3

Seven Days

CREATE & ORDER	DAY 1	GENESIS 1:1-2	*"God created the heavens and the earth"* *"Let there be light"*	Day & Night
	DAY 2	GENESIS 1:3-8	*"Separated the water under the vault from the water above it"*	Water & Sky
	DAY 3	GENESIS 1:9-13	*"Let dry ground appear"* *"Let the land produce vegetation"*	Land, Sea & Vegetation
FILL WITH BEAUTY & BENEFIT	DAY 4	GENESIS 1:14-19	*"Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night"*	Sun, Moon & Stars
	DAY 5	GENESIS 1:20-23	*"Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky"*	Fish & Birds
	DAY 6	GENESIS 1:24-25	*"Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds"*	Land Animals
SHARE & EMPOWER		GENESIS 1:24-25	*"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, **so that** they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*	Man & Woman
REST	DAY 7	GENESIS 2:2-3	*"on the seventh day he rested from all his work"*	Holy seventh day of rest

Throughout this process, God declares His work "good" seven times. Here, the Hebrew word *tov* signifies "welfare, benefits, or good things" (Carpenter & Comfort, 2000 p. 75). Thus, God's creation is characterized by bringing order, beauty, and goodness to *tohu-va-bohu*. Importantly, God creates the earth to be the workplace for humankind and models the purpose of work of bringing order and beauty for all humanity.

As God forms humankind, He shares His work and commands to "rule and subdue" the earth. The Hebrew word for "*rule* is *radah*, which has been translated by some scholars as "…to actively partner with God in taking the world somewhere" (Comer, 2015, p. 41). Similarly, the term *subdue*, translated from *kabash*, means "…to bring under control" (Soanes & Stevenson, 2004). This charge, given in a pre-Fall context, implies a state of harmony without sin or exploitation. The account in Genesis 2 further affirms God's intent for humankind to continue this work,

> Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no one to work the ground. But streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:5-7),

As noted by Crouch (2023),

> …now the Creator graciously steps back just enough to allow humankind to begin to discover what it means to be a creator. Adam, like his Maker, will be both

> gardener and poet, both creator and cultivator. The Creator simply watches and listens, and it is good. (p. 42)

In this way, God exemplifies the purpose of work by forming the earth as a place of labor and illustrating how it should be nurtured.

On the seventh day, God rests from His "work," using the Hebrew word *melakhah*, which refers specifically to ordinary human labor (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016, p. 20). By doing so, God reveals Himself as the first worker and invites humanity to be co-workers with Him in bringing beauty, benefit, and goodness to the world.

In summary, the creation of work is rooted in God's intentional acts of bringing order, beauty, and goodness to the world, thereby inviting humanity to co-create and cultivate alongside Him. God's deliberate actions in creating work established a foundation for order, beauty, and goodness in the world, thus calling humanity to join Him in the co-creation and cultivation of His creation. The creation narrative outlines the original design and purpose for human work.

Kingdom Work on Earth

Hollywood has produced a vast array of science fiction films that delve into the concept of alternate realities, often termed the multiverse. The Oxford English Dictionary (2023) defines *multiverse* as "…a hypothetical space or realm of being consisting of several universes, of which our universe is only one." These narratives often depict worlds similar to e*arth* with divergent storylines. In contrast, the Bible presents a cohesive redemptive story that begins in a garden and culminates in a city, while grappling with the reality of sin, resulting in two distinct realms: the spiritual and the physical. This separation is often referred to as the sacred versus the secular. Throughout

scripture, God's primary goal is to restore and reconcile these two kingdoms (Revelation 21:1-4).

Unfortunately, some Christians view the physical realm as inherently evil and embrace an escapist theology, longing for God to remove them from this world (Wright, 2008). This attitude undermines the redemptive purpose of a Christian's work on earth. It contradicts the creation account in which God designed the earth for humanity to be co-workers with Him in bringing beauty, benefit, and order. The escapist mindset regards this world as corrupt and leads individuals to avoid making the best of their current circumstances while attempting to maintain moral standards. Wright (2011) addresses this concern by asserting, "We have reduced the kingdom of God to private piety, the victory of the cross to comfort for the conscience, and Easter itself to a happy, escapist ending after a sad, dark tale" (p. 12). This perspective notes that some Christians prioritize accumulating worldly success over all else.

Conversely, many Christians recognize that the Kingdom is already present, though not yet fully realized, and that Jesus teaches how his followers lives and actions contribute to the restoration of the physical world while integrating it with the spiritual. This view supports the understanding that all Christian work is a part of a larger Kingdom story God is writing through His creation to reunite the physical and spiritual kingdoms. In Mark 1:14-15 Jesus himself proclaims the Kingdom has now come to earth "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" This theme is repeated by Jesus the in Luke 10:9, Matthew 6:33, Luke 17:20-21. The biblical narrative reveals that God intended creation to

encompass both physical and spiritual realities, but sin introduced a division between the two (Genesis 3). Throughout scripture, the overarching story illustrates God's endeavors to unite these realms. Wright (2011) elaborates on the cultural challenges faced by Israel, who held onto their own interpretations of physical realities for comfort in the Old Testament. Wright (2011) notes,

> Again and again in the past, the way Israel had told its own story was different from the way God was planning things. The people, no doubt, hoped that the way they were telling their own story would fit in comfortably enough with the way God was seeing things, but again and again the prophets had to say that this was not so. (p. 17)

Christians should be aware of this revolutionary understanding of the purpose of their work in the world. Christians are not to choose jobs and conduct work for only personal fulfillment and the accruement of power but to know and believe every member of humankind is being called by God to do work that brings restoration. Christians are to see work as a way of service to God and neighbors, and so should both choose and conduct work in accordance with that purpose. The question regarding the choice of work is no longer "What will make me the most money and give me the most status?" The question must now be "How, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God's will and of human need" (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016, p. 24).

This perspective serves as a foundation for understanding how a secular worldview has complicated and blurred the theology of work and practices among those who claim to follow Christ, especially in the realm of the marketplace. When Christians

categorize physical reality and refer to work as secular, it disconnects from the very purpose of Jesus's incarnation. He came to redeem humankind from sin and instill the spirit of God within all who believe, establishing a new priesthood that engages in the sacred work of advancing His kingdom throughout every aspect of a Christan's life. As Wright (2016) states,

> To reflect the divine image means standing between heaven and earth, even in the present time, adoring the Creator and bringing his purposes into reality on earth, ahead of the time when God completes the task and makes all things new. The 'royal priesthood' is the company of rescued humans who, being part of 'earth,' worship the God of heaven and are thereby equipped, with the breath of heaven in their renewed lungs, to work for his kingdom on earth. The revolution of the cross sets us free to be in-between people, caught up in the rhythm of worship and mission. (p. 229)

In summary, separating Christian work from a spiritual context diminishes the calling to integrate faith into every part of life, including professional pursuits. Instead, Christians are invited to embody the role of royal priesthood, actively participating in God's mission and reflecting His image in the world through all actions and contributions. This holistic understanding of work recognizes Christian lives as an extension of worship, allowing Christ-centered believers to fulfill purpose in partnership with God.

Upside Down Kingdom

The concept of the "upside-down kingdom" largely stems from the teachings of Jesus within the Gospels of the New Testament. This idea emphasizes that the values of

God's Kingdom often sharply contrast with worldly standards, particularly regarding power, status, wealth, and social structure. The "upside-down kingdom" perspective is woven throughout the Bible, yet it has often been overshadowed by the prevailing influence of worldly kingdoms of domination and mammon. Jesus encapsulates this distinct Kingdom in His response to Pilate in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world." The Kingdom that Jesus introduces on earth directly opposes the world's systems of domination. Wink (2017) further elaborates, "Those who belong to the Domination System cannot comprehend the values displayed by Jesus, or understand why he is turning their world upside down" (2017, p. 79). Christians can then observe the Old Testament narrative and the numerous teachings of Jesus throughout the New Testament that He modeled and articulated, which others began to embody as the upside-down kingdom, providing valuable insights on how to apply these principles in workplaces.

God's purposes often contradict cultural norms, like in Genesis 11. The people of Babel are trying to unite by constructing a tower to elevate themselves to reach or become gods, ignoring the identity given to them by their Creator and failing to worship Him. In response, God steps in and confuses their language, causing them to scatter across the earth. This narrative highlights humanity's ongoing tendency to pursue power and act as gods for themselves and others. The themes of the Babel story resonate in Acts 2, where, after the resurrection of Jesus, God unites His people spiritually by sending the Holy Spirit. The focus of the people shifts to worshiping God rather than striving to become like Him. This gift enables them to connect and understand one another. Humanity is called to begin manifesting heaven on earth through the Holy Spirit living

within us. However, historically, people have often misused their gifts to boost their own egos. Wright (2016) highlights this frequent distortion, stating,

> The primary human failure is a failure of worship. In Romans 1:18–25, 'ungodliness' precedes 'injustice': those who worship that which is not God will inevitably produce distortions in the world. The point of 'injustice' is not just that it means 'wrong behavior' (for which the perpetrator would be culpable), but that it means introducing powerful rogue elements into God's world. (p. 21)

This struggle continues today, as the authentic vision of unity involves a community of individuals created by God to bring Him glory, a vision that will ultimately be fulfilled only in New Jerusalem. Until that future arrives, Jesus' disciples are encouraged to view the world through the lens of the Kingdom, striving to glorify God in every aspect of their lives, especially in their places of work regardless of occupation.

Another theological Kingdom principle in the Old Testament is that God first commands His people not to worship any other gods (Exod. 20:4–5). His follow-up is, "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them (Exod. 20:4–5)." Keller and Alsdorf (2016 p. 127) state that anything Christian's love or serve greater than God Himself is bowing and worshipping. The American capitalist culture has a drive, love, and worship of consumerism, profit, and an individualistic pursuit of wealth and comfort. Lehmann (2017) explores the influence of finance and economic practices on American culture, arguing that pursuing wealth has become a dominant force shaping society. Lehmann (2017) suggests that the obsession with money has distorted ideals of success, morality, and progress, leading to inequality,

greed, and a loss of community values. Keller and Alsdorf (2016) affirm this view of culture.

> Christians think of themselves as Christians only within church activity. Their Christian life is what they do on Sundays and weeknights when they engage in spiritual activities. The rest of the week, they cannot think circumspectly about the underlying values they are consuming and living out. (p. 200)

The gift of God's Son, Jesus, is for humanity to have a way to have a relationship with Him. Emmanuel, meaning "God with us," (*G1694 - Emmanouēl - Strong's Greek Lexicon (Niv)*, n.d.) is an important theological truth that must be considered by everyone who claims that Jesus was sacrificed for their sins. God fills Christians with the Holy Spirit to become a beacon for the Kingdom and to glorify His name. Raynor (2024) discusses that all types of work, not just religious professions, hold inherent value and significance. Jesus underscores this truth in Matthew 5:15–16.

> You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Willard and Black (2014) identify this as a Christian leader's reluctance to acknowledge the spiritual aspect of the business world. This resistance reveals a limited understanding of the holistic nature of God's involvement in human endeavors. It suggests a need for a broader perspective on integrating spirituality into all facets of life, especially business. Volf's (2001) emphasizes the sacredness and significance of all forms of labor. He argues that work is not just a means of earning a living but a way to

express human creativity, contribute to the common good, and glorify God. Volf (2001) stresses the importance of viewing work as a vocation and a calling, recognizing that everyone's contributions have inherent value and dignity. The disciple Peter includes all who follow Jesus in 1 Peter 4:10–11. "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." Peter never differentiates vocations that are included or exempt but assumes all Kingdom followers. Volf (2001) encourages a holistic approach to work, one that integrates faith, ethics, and a sense of purpose, emphasizing the potential for work to be a means of serving and loving others.

Throughout the Bible, a recurring theme is the mandate to care for the poor, widows, and marginalized individuals through practices such as gleaning and sacrificial offerings. The American capitalistic worldview is primarily an individualistic perspective for personal gain. This capitalistic tenet is in complete opposition of Old Testament laws. For example, the Old Testament (Lev. 23:42, Deut. 24:19-21) emphasizes the importance of giving part of the harvest to those in need, ensuring the hungry have access to food. Sacrificial offerings were also prescribed to show compassion and support for the less fortunate, underscoring the value of social justice and mercy. This biblical message starkly contrasts the capitalistic view of individualism and pursuing personal wealth above all else. Many passages speak to this contradiction.

- "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God" (Prov. 14:31).

- “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).
- “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land” (Deut. 15:11).
- “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).
- “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys” (Luke 12:33).
- “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work, we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).
- “Sow generously and reap generously” (2 Cor. 9:6).

Instead of prioritizing self-interest and material gain, the biblical mandate emphasizes a redemptive approach, including communal care, solidarity, and generosity towards those who are vulnerable and marginalized. *Shalom* is the word the Israelites used in the Old Testament to describe this sentiment. Linthicum (2003) writes, “It is important to recognize that shalom is a corporate word. It describes a community, not simply the interior well-being of an individual or a small group. Shalom captures the well-being of an entire society” (p. 37). My study draws attention to the pivotal role of business in shaping the modern world, as eloquently expressed by Chapman and Sisodia

(2015): “Business is a powerful instrument that we must use to serve the noble cause of greater human and planetary flourishing. Our greatest challenge is the widespread acceptance of a mercenary and apathetic approach to business” (p. 241). Christian business leaders are faced with a crucial decision: whether to prioritize their own interests, or the well-being of others.

As Christian leaders navigate the complexities of the business world, they must choose between two paths: a self-serving approach that prioritizes personal gain, or a biblical theology of work that puts the needs of others first. This research examined the implications of these choices, exploring the moral and ethical considerations that arise when Christians in the workplace seek to integrate their faith with their professional endeavors. By examining the tensions between individual interests and corporate social responsibility, this study aimed to provide insights that will empower Christians to make informed decisions that align with their values and priorities, ultimately contributing to a more just and compassionate business landscape.

In the Gospels, Christ’s clear message to believers is not to place their faith in mammon or any of the other idols of this world. Troeltsch (1992) discusses Christian theology’s complex relationship between God and money. Troeltsch (1992) explores how various Christian denominations have approached the issue of wealth and economic practices, highlighting different perspectives regarding moral implications and financial matters. Sanders (2016) argues that it is a merging of the two worldviews, “Corporate megachurches represent a species of American Christianity vital to strengthening the relationship between religion and capitalism in contemporary culture” (p. 74). In pursuing personal gain and power, Christians lose the core of their designed humanness,

which is to love God and others through the giving of oneself. Mark 8:36–37 states, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” This verse teaches that true success is in a relationship with God and living out His purposes.

Jesus used parables to teach Kingdom principles to a religious and seeking audience. Many speak directly to the tension between the culture and the Kingdom’s economics. In Mark 12:41–44, Jesus observes the temple treasury where the wealthy were throwing in large amounts of money, but a poor widow comes and throws two nearly worthless copper coins, and Jesus makes the point that this gift was greater. Kingdom economics are measured by the heart and not the amount. The widow gave out of love and trust, an action, which cost her more. Again, this ideology is a counterview to the Kingdom of God.

From Matthew 18:21–35, Bowyer (2020) makes the case that the Unmerciful Servant parable was specifically about the economics of forgiving debt. Bowyer (2020) claims this forgiveness had more to do with a nation returning from captivity. He continues to describe Luke 16:19–17:1, The Parable of the Rich Man, and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 serves as a powerful contrast between the religiously wealthy and the perception that poverty meant one was not of God. The story tells the tale of a wealthy man who lives a life of luxury, feasting sumptuously every day, while Lazarus, a beggar, suffers from disease and hunger, often begging for scraps at the rich man’s gate. Despite their vastly different circumstances, both men die, and in the afterlife, Lazarus is comforted by Abraham, while the rich man is tormented by a great chasm between them. This parable highlights the inherent inequality and injustice of a society where wealth and

poverty are deeply entrenched, and challenges the assumption that poverty is a sign of divine disfavor or lack of faith. Moreover, the parable underscores that wealth has never been a sign of righteousness before God. In fact, those who have wealth have a greater challenge to be dependent on God because of their ability to solve most of their problems with money. Wealth was the reason the rich man was reluctant to help Lazarus, reflecting his misguided trust in his wealth and material possessions, rather than God's provision and care. Bowyer (2020) offers a broader view of the New Testament, specifically the teachings of Jesus, as teachings in Kingdom economics are counter cultural.

John the Baptist, who played a crucial role in preparing the way for Jesus' ministry, provided Kingdom economic instructions to tax collectors, Roman soldiers, and to the crowd in Luke 3:7–14. John emphasized the importance of sharing resources with those in need and advocating for fair and humane treatment of others. The biblical perspective of money and wealth are encapsulated in Psalm 24:1, which asserts that "everything belongs to the Lord," and we are merely stewards of His gifts. The Apostle Paul further underscores this principle in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, prioritizing Christian love in action with fellow human beings above all else.

James 5:1-6 presented a stark contrast between the wealthy and the poor in their mindsets and practices. James, the half-brother of Jesus, warns the wealthy that their arrogance and exploitation of others will ultimately lead to their downfall. James describes the wealthy as being consumed by greed, living in luxury, and exploiting those who are poorer and more vulnerable. He likens their wealth to a corruption that destroys their lives from within, and their fine clothes and luxuries as a stench that is unbearable to God.

In contrast, James portrays the poor as crying out for justice and vengeance against those who have exploited them. He sees the groans of the oppressed as a roar in the ears of God, who will ultimately judge those who have taken advantage of others. I believe the passage suggests that the wealthy are murdering those who are less fortunate. They may appear to be living a life of luxury, but ultimately, they will be left with nothing but a larger corpse.

James' words challenge the reader to re-evaluate their priorities and practices, and to recognize that true riches come from living a life of generosity, compassion, and justice. This passage serves as a warning to the wealthy, to use their resources wisely and to prioritize relationships with others over the accumulation of wealth. Ultimately, it calls for a profound transformation of the heart, urging individuals to find fulfillment in God.

In summary, the theological and biblical frameworks presented in this discourse underscore the significance of viewing all facets of life, including business, through a Kingdom-centered perspective. The narrative of the Bible unfolds a redemptive trajectory marred by sin, delineating two contrasting worldviews - one centered on human ego and the other on the exaltation of God. The Bible provides a clear theology of work that everyone can practice. Jesus' teachings underscore the paramount importance of prioritizing faith in God over material wealth and personal accomplishments. The scriptural imperative to advocate for the marginalized and vulnerable reflects God's commitment to justice and compassion, underscoring the community's overall welfare over individual pursuits. Incorporating Christ-centered spirituality into all dimensions of life, particularly in business, is pivotal for a comprehensive comprehension of God's work and blessings in Christian lives. In a society influenced by consumerism and

individualism, Christians must prioritize God's principles of love, generosity, and solidarity above self-centered gain. Ultimately, genuine success is attained by fulfilling God's intentions and embodying Kingdom values that accentuate love, compassion, and justice for all.

Social Cognitive Theory and Historical Theory

Social cognitive theory and historical theory provide valuable frameworks for understanding how capitalism influences the work ethic and success perspectives of Christians in the workplace. This exploration focuses on how capitalism has shaped the mindset and behaviors of Christians at work, highlighting the significant impact of capitalist principles on societal norms and values. While social cognitive theory offers insights into behavior adoption through observation, modeling, and reinforcement, historical theory examines the evolution of capitalism and its consequences on Christian practices. Together, these frameworks allow for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between capitalism, the work ethic, and definitions of success among Christians in the business sector.

Overview of Capitalism

The origins of capitalism can be traced to the early colonial period in the United States, with significant development following the nation's independence in 1776. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/2013) is a foundational text in understanding capitalism, introducing the idea that individuals work out of self-interest. Smith (1776/2013) illustrates this individualistic mindset by comparing it to dogs seeking favor from those who feed them. In the early colonies, however, capitalism was less about self-serving motives, as community interdependence was essential for survival. Lehmann

(2017) notes that capitalism had not yet led to the self-centeredness observed today, largely due to the American Protestant population's commitment to biblical mandates of sharing and giving. Lehmann (2017) further argues that contemporary Protestants have increasingly embraced a capitalistic attitude toward success defined by material gain.

Werhane (1989) critiques Smith (1776/2013) by claiming that "…self-interest is, however, not to be identified with selfishness or greed" (p. 670). This argument is problematic, as it contradicts the biblical command to love others as Christians love themselves. The Oxford English Dictionary (2024) defines *selfish* as "…concerned chiefly with one's own advantage or welfare, to the exclusion of consideration for others" (2024). Such selfishness can lead to exploitation, placing profit or pleasure above others, which contradicts Philippians 2:3–5. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Werhane (1989) fails to incorporate a biblical worldview into her critique and relies solely on philosophy to assess Smith's (1776/2013) notions. However, Wallerstein (1992) argues that "…virtually everyone tends to see capitalism as the system in which humans seek to transform (or 'conquer') nature in an eternally expansive way and to amass ever larger residues of this expansion" (p. 567). Historically, capitalism has been influenced by culture and time, often clashing with Christian principles and promoting self-interest and profit maximization, which lead to exploitation and social injustice.

Hart (2016) critiques capitalism's reliance on a consumer culture driven by excessive desire, asserting,

> This system not only permits but depends on significant concentrations of private capital and the unrestricted use of that capital, free from heavy financial regulation. It allows for the exploitation of both material and human resources on an unprecedented scale, surpassing even governmental capabilities. (2016)

Hart (2015) further explains that capitalism must foster a societal habit of consuming beyond mere basic needs, which creates new desires driven by trends and persuasive advertising appealing to "the lust of the eyes."

The Role of Religion in Capitalism

Max Weber was a prominent sociologist, philosopher, and political economist in the late 19th early 20th centuries. He significantly contributed to modern social theory, especially in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905/2012). He investigates the relationship between Protestantism and the capitalist system's emergence, arguing that the Protestant work ethic—especially in Calvinism—highlighted hard work, frugality, and wealth accumulation as indications of God's favor. The combined ethics, along with the rationalization of capitalism, fostered a spirit driven by profit and economic success. Weber notes the fundamental role of religious beliefs in shaping financial behavior and economic development in modern capitalist societies.

Chapman and Sisodia (2015) state, "Early capitalism was rooted in Judeo-Christian morality, as most business founders and leaders were religious individuals who brought those values into their work" (p. 238). However, over time, this moral code has weakened. Chapman and Sisodia (2015) further observe that

> …as we moved into a more secular world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, economists and other academics increasingly started to define the

> purpose of business purely in terms of profit. Capitalism lost its ethical foundation and became strictly amoral (not immoral), making no reference to 'doing the right things for the right reasons.' (p. 96)

Weber (2012) asserts that wealth accumulation signifies God's favor, defining favor as financial gains, which questions the faithfulness of numerous impoverished Christians. Clark (2020) echoes this sentiment. "Despite the teachings of the poor in the Christian Bible, the poor in America are dehumanized, and even criminalized. Protestants also believed their salvation was distinctly tied to their success" (p. 1905).

Connolly (2008) explores the intricate relationship between capitalism and Christian values in American society, arguing that capitalist principles often intermingle with Christian ethics. He investigates how capitalist values, influenced by the Protestant work ethic, can at times conflict with teachings of compassion and community found in Christianity. Connolly's work illustrates how these two forces interact and shape American culture and politics, revealing the complexities of their coexistence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this examination of capitalism incorporates its historical roots, key principles, and the relationship between economic philosophies and religious beliefs. Praxis Labs (2021) provides a framework for Christian business leaders to navigate the complexities of capitalism, asserting,

> Our view is that capitalism, the markets that fund it, and the business practices based upon it, are both good and corruptible. We know of no other economic system in our imperfect world that can produce such prosperity, liberty, and satisfaction by allowing us to use our gifts, pursue our interests, collaborate

through self-organizing communities, and generate value for our fellow humans. (2012)

This viewpoint encourages Christians in business to strive for a more redemptive application of capitalism.

Smith's (1776/2013) foundational work emphasizes the notion of self-interest in economic transactions, a concept that has evolved significantly in American society. Weber's (1905/2012) analysis of the Protestant work ethic highlights the powerful influence of religious beliefs on economic behavior. Connolly (2008) further dissects how capitalism and Christian values intersect and sometimes clash within American culture. While capitalism has demonstrated its effectiveness as an economic system, pressing questions arise regarding its alignment with Christian ethics, particularly in terms of compassion, community, and moral values. The call for moral capitalism, as discussed by Friedman and Adler (2011), underscores the necessity of integrating biblical principles for sustainable success. The ongoing dialogue regarding the nexus of religion, values, and economic growth remains critical, with scholars like Barro (2004) and Barker and Carman (2000) emphasizing the significant impact of religious beliefs on economic attitudes. Ultimately, the discourse surrounding capitalism prompts essential questions about how Christians engage with this economic system—whether for self-advancement or to champion the greater good of society.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory explores how individuals fundamentally change their worldviews and beliefs through critical reflection and new experiences (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Neuroscience is crucial in understanding this process by examining the

brain structures and neural pathways involved. Analyzing neural mechanisms related to critical reflection, self-awareness, and perspective transformation, allows neuroscience to provide insights into how human brains process new information and reshapes beliefs and values over time. The concepts of brain plasticity and neural connectivity highlight how the brain adapts in response to transformative learning experiences, ultimately affecting our perceptions and interactions with the world (2009).

Role of Neuroscience in Transformative Learning

Motivated perception is a neurological process that illustrates how human beliefs, desires, and goals influence the interpretation of information. Dunning and Balcetis (2013) explain, "…people believe they see the world as it is." In my opinion they frame their understanding through their established worldviews, which can be misleading. This perspective that motivations can skew perception, leading people to seek out information that confirms existing beliefs while dismissing conflicting evidence.

In daily life, motivated perception often shapes human decision-making. For example, individuals with strong religious beliefs may interpret ambiguous information in ways that reinforce their existing views. This tendency can result in confirmation bias, where a person only notices evidence that aligns with their beliefs. Charpentier et al. (2018) found that the desire to gain knowledge can sometimes lead to ignorance, as individuals avoid information that challenges their perspectives. The implications of motivated perception extend to various aspects of life, including health and financial decision-making.

In the context of American Christians integrating faith and capitalism, I believe motivated perception can lead to a focus on material gain, prioritizing financial success

over spiritual or social well-being. This narrow definition of *success* can limit one's ability to consider alternative perspectives or make objective assessments about what it means to lead a fulfilling life. Being aware of motivated perception enables individuals to recognize their biases, promoting a more balanced and nuanced understanding of reality.

Implications for Christians in the Workplace

In summary, motivated perception reveals how beliefs and emotions shape the interpretations of information. According to Dunning and Balcetis (2013), human motivations can distort reality, leading to confirmation bias. Awareness of these dynamics is crucial for American Christians in the workplace who seek to align their practices with biblical values. Recognizing capitalistic influences and realigning core values can facilitate clarity in business practices and guide individuals towards achieving redemptive success informed by a biblical theology of work.

Understanding Worldview

The psychology of worldview formation refers to the processes, influences, and factors that shape an individual's overall perspective on life, including their beliefs, attitudes, values, and interpreting the world around them. Worldview formation is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by various psychological, social, cultural, and cognitive factors. These influences may include upbringing, personal experiences, societal norms, education, religion, media, and exposure to different cultures and perspectives. Ferry (2011) analyzes the central philosophical ideas that have shaped human history. While his insights provide a foundational understanding of philosophy, my research diverges from Ferry's (2011) contemporary humanistic perspective on a fulfilled life. Ferry (2011) examines how individuals develop and sustain their

worldviews through cognitive biases, socialization, conditioning, and cognitive dissonance, noting that these processes can either reinforce existing beliefs or prompt shifts in worldview based on new information or experiences. In contrast, my dissertation argues that a biblical worldview offers a more comprehensive lens for achieving fulfillment in human life.

My research explored the psychological effects of worldview across time and culture, particularly for American Christians in the workplace. Additionally, Taylor's (2018) ground-breaking work, *A Secular Age,* delves into the historical and cultural transition toward secularism in Western society. Taylor (2018) traces the decline of religious belief from the medieval era, which was dominated by faith, to our modern age, where secularism increasingly prevails. Understanding this shift is crucial for examining how secular views of capitalism influence contemporary Christian perceptions of success. Together, these insights will illuminate the need for a biblical framework that can authentically guide American Christians in their professional pursuits.

Influential Theories on Worldview Formation

Taylor (2018) examined the complex interplay between religion, science, philosophy, and politics and how these forces have influenced the trajectory of Western civilization. He argues that the modern secular age is not simply a rejection of religious beliefs but a transformation of the social and cultural landscape that has created new ways of understanding and experiencing the world (Taylor, 2018).

Woodley (2022) identifies the beginnings of this distorted blended secular faith from the Roman period. He writes, "Christianity married empire with Emperor Constantine and has never been able to separate itself from empire" (p. 44). Woodley

notes that colonialism in America will continue its utopian American dream pursuit "…based on wealth where everybody can get wealthy, and it doesn't matter what you have to do to the people or the land to achieve this dream" (p. 61). This emphasizes that worldviews are shaped throughout history and passed on to generations.

Sire's (2020) definition of worldview is as follows.

> A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions that may be true, partially true, or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the fundamental constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being. (p. 6)

This definition encapsulates Sire's (2020) perspective on worldview as not merely a set of beliefs but as a fundamental framework through which individuals interpret and engage with the world around them. Sire promotes the importance of understanding and critically evaluating one's worldview and recognizing how differing worldviews can shape perspectives, values, and behaviors. Ames (2020) explains that worldviews "…influence how we see ourselves and others and how we form relationships. They keep our lives coherent by giving us a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection" (p. 19).

Cultural Influence on Worldview

Worldviews are deeply intertwined with culture, acting as lenses through which humans interpret their environment. Immersion in one's cultural surroundings shapes perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors significantly. Understanding these cultural

influences enables individuals to navigate complexities and make informed choices while fostering meaningful interactions.

Many Christians mistakenly believe that they are unaffected by cultural influences, viewing their faith as exclusively focused on moral and ethical behavior. Williams (2023) critiques this notion, describing it as cultural Christianity— "…a created identity that does not demand excessive personal commitment" (p. 22). This perspective highlights the tension for Christian business leaders who often prioritize capitalistic values over biblical principles, a dilemma documented throughout history.

Niebuhr (2001), a prominent theologian known for his critical examination of faith and society, explored various interactions between Christianity and culture. He provides a framework for understanding these relationships by delineating five models that illustrate how Christians engage with their surrounding cultural environment: Christ against Culture, Christ of Culture, Christ above Culture, Christ and Culture in Paradox, and Christ the Transformer of Culture. His analysis highlights the complex dynamics of faith in relation to the cultural, social, and moral challenges of different historical contexts.

Christ Against Culture (2001)

Niebuhr (2001) posits a clear separation between Christianity and secular culture. This perspective provides a critical understanding of how Christians may choose to disengage from the capitalist marketplace due to perceived contradictions between biblical values and commercial practices. It serves as a basis for exploring the implications of isolationist strategies in the workplace, emphasizing a distinct identity that may affect a Christian's ability to influence or engage with the broader culture. The

challenges and limitations of this model can inform strategies to teach Christians about the potential missed opportunities for witness and ethical practice within capitalist frameworks.

Christ of Culture (2001)

In contrast, Nieburh's (2001) approach embraces culture as an essential component of the Christian faith (2001). This approach invites an examination of how Christians might easily synthesize secular cultural values into their faith, potentially leading to a diluted or compromised theological perspective. In the context of capitalism, this model raises questions about how cultural practices—such as consumerism—can shape Christian identity and ethics in ways that might repurpose or overlook core biblical principles. Analyzing this perspective can illuminate the risks of uncritical acceptance of capitalist values and provide theologically grounded strategies for developing a robust Christian identity that actively resists cultural assimilation.

Christ Above Culture (2001)

Niebuhr's (2001) perspective recognizes the existence of both Christ and culture but asserts that Christ supersedes and transcends cultural influences (2001***)***. This viewpoint offers a framework for finding a balance between faith and culture, suggesting that Christians can uphold biblical truths while engaging with cultural achievements. In research, this perspective can highlight the potential for synthesizing faith and capitalism in a way that acknowledges both the strengths and weaknesses of cultural practices. It can inform strategies that empower Christians in the marketplace to interpret their work through a theological lens, promoting dignity and purpose in their professional lives.

Christ and Culture in Paradox (2001)

Niebuhr's (2001) acknowledges the inherent tensions between faith and culture, suggesting that Christians must navigate a complex relationship with the world around them (2001). This model is particularly relevant for understanding the complexities of living out faith in a diverse and often morally ambiguous world, such as the American capitalist landscape. It suggests a dual approach of recognizing both the sinful and redemptive aspects of cultural engagement. By acknowledging the tension and the potential for cooperation, this perspective can guide Christians in the marketplace to navigate ethical dilemmas, engage in dialogue, and advocate for transformative practices that align with their faith, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how to operate as faithful witnesses in a complex world.

Christ Transforming Culture (2001)

Niebuhr (2001) emphasizes an active engagement in cultural renewal and transformation through the power of Christ (2001). This perspective provides a proactive framework for Christians to actively engage in the transformation of cultural and economic systems. It reinforces the idea that faith can and should influence the marketplace, advocating for ethical business practices and social justice rooted in biblical theology. The Christ transforming model (2001) serves as a source of inspiration for developing educational strategies that empower Christians to view their work as a form of mission, cultivating a marketplace that reflects Kingdom values and actively seeks to address societal challenges, such as poverty and inequality. In his fivefold model, Niebuhr (2001) provides significant insights into how Christians engage with the cultural

challenges of American capitalism, revealing the complexities of maintaining faith within a diverse and often conflicting cultural landscape.

This section explored the interplay between transformative learning theory, neuroscience, and worldview formation, emphasizing how individuals reshape their beliefs and perspectives through critical reflection and new experiences. Neuroscience reveals how motivated perception influences interpretation of information, often leading to cognitive biases that can impact decision-making, especially for American Christians navigating the complexities of capitalism. Understanding how worldviews are formed through psychological, cultural, and social factors is crucial, as they serve as lenses through which individuals interpret their surroundings. Additionally, the tension between secular influences and Christian principles is highlighted, with Williams (2023) critiquing the diluted faith characterized by cultural Christianity.

Summary

The western cultural shift from communal values to individualism, cited by Gregory (2015), underscores the reformation's unintended consequences on societal transformations. This chapter has examined the intersection of American capitalism and Christian principles, highlighting the challenges faced by Christians in the workplace as they navigate divergent definitions of success influenced by blended values. The interactions between American capitalism and Christian work priorities, along with theological considerations emphasizing communal care and social justice, reveal critical tensions at play. By exploring insights from theology, psychology, neuroscience, and cultural contexts, this literature review sheds light on the dynamic interplay between capitalism, Christian beliefs, personal worldviews, and social values. Moving forward,

the methodology chapter will outline the research methods employed to investigate the impact of American capitalism on Christian principles, providing a roadmap for further exploration of these intersections.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents a comprehensive examination of the bifurcation of the biblical definition of *success* among Christians in the workplace. The primary objective of this study was to reveal previously overlooked or unacknowledged blended ideologies that shape the understanding of success within this demographic, particularly in relation to the influences of American culture and capitalist ideals. This research was intended to uncover insights through an in-depth exploration of workplace ethics, historical and ethical perspectives, moral quandaries faced by Christian professionals, and the theology of work in a capitalist environment. Additionally, this study addressed the critical inquiries established in Chapter 1, employing a grounded theory analysis to investigate the impact of the American capitalist paradigm on perceptions of success in the Christian business sector.

This research primarily examined how the capitalist worldview influences American Christians in their workplaces, specifically contrasting this perspective with a biblical understanding of work. The study explored the belief systems that emerge at the intersection of faith and capitalism among Christians. In this dissertation, I have attempted to tackle the existing issues while identifying further ideologies that arise from the merger of American capitalism with biblical theology regarding work. The study provided strategies to educate Christians in the marketplace on a biblical theology of work that flourishes amid American capitalism. My objective is to clearly define both American capitalism and the biblical theology of work to gain insight into the motivations that drive Christians to seek success in the marketplace. Identifying these

blended practices can provide better understanding by highlighting God's intended purpose and definition of success in one's work. The research methodology was intended to facilitate a thorough exploration and development of theoretical insights based on data gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Ultimately, this research was designed to critically evaluate the practices and beliefs associated with the capitalist worldview compared to biblical values, encouraging reflection and guiding Christian business leaders to align their practices with biblical principles of success.

Research Design

The dissertation investigated the ways in which the American capitalist worldview influences the understanding and practice of success among Christians in the business sector, particularly in relation to any conflicts that may arise with the biblical theology of work. This exploration was facilitated by developing a research design that offers insights into the effects of the capitalist worldview on Christians in the workplace while uncovering potential discrepancies between the values and principles of capitalism and those found in the Christian faith. Such an examination is intended to illuminate the complexities and challenges faced by individuals navigating these two distinct viewpoints within their professional lives, thereby revealing the blended worldview ideologies commonly held by Christians in their pursuit of success.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), research design refers to formal procedures for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, as seen in both quantitative experiments and qualitative case studies. This study analyzed how the capitalist perspective, which emphasizes individual achievement and profit generation, stands in contrast to the biblical theology of work, which upholds values such as humility, service,

integrity, sacrifice, compassion and stewardship. The goal is to discern how the capitalist worldview shapes the beliefs and behaviors of Christian leaders in the business sector while identifying any conflicts that may arise. Ultimately, the goal is to generate fresh insights and enhance understanding of how capitalist concepts influence Christians' perceptions of success in the workplace, encouraging a reevaluation of their worldview so that it aligns more closely with a biblical theology of work and God's intentions for their professional endeavors.

Creswell and Creswell (2023) describe qualitative research as an inductive method aimed at explaining behaviors and attitudes, incorporating variables, constructs, hypotheses, and themes. My study involved a qualitative research approach to investigate contemporary patterns in business practices, personal experiences, and existing literature on business success in America, seeking to uncover emerging theories and themes among Christians in the workplace. As noted by Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Urquhart, 2023), the grounded theory method was established to systematically discover new human behaviors and beliefs, rather than merely confirming existing ones (Urquhart, 2023).

I employed the grounded theory strategy as my qualitative research methodology, focusing on the systematic collection and analysis of data to develop new theories or concepts that are rooted in the data itself. This approach stands in contrast to starting with preconceived theories or hypotheses typically found in quantitative research. I believe that quantitative methods, which rely on quantifiable data, statistical analysis, and objective measurements, would not adequately reveal the evolving belief patterns of Christians within American capitalist culture. Grounded theory analysis is intended to yield new theoretical insights or explanations based on the data collected, rather than

testing established theories. Through this iterative process, my intent was to develop a coherent and well-supported theory that elucidates the blended ideologies and perceptions of success among Christians in the workplace (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

I believe the qualitative grounded theory methodology was the most suitable approach for gathering rich data through interviews to explore the underlying motivations and reasoning behind individuals' beliefs. An exemplar grounded theory analysis question pertinent to the stated dissertation inquiry into the influence of the American capitalist worldview on the conceptualization of success among Christians in the workplace might be the following. "How did you acquire and internalize your business principles and convictions? Why do they hold significance for you?" It is asserted that a quantitative research approach would be ill-suited for capturing the intricate nuances and subjective insights inherent in responses to such open-ended inquiries. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) state, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6).

For this study, data collection involved purposive sampling and conducting field interviews. This approach reflects the typical working Christian demographic in Brown County, Wisconsin (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants were selected based on predetermined criteria designed to ensure a representative sample. To reduce the Hawthorne Effect—where the interviewer's presence might influence how participants respond—we employed an independent third-party interviewer to conduct all interviews. The *Hawthorne Effect* is the phenomenon where individuals alter their behavior and responses, because they are aware they are being observed in an experimental setting

(Schwartz, Fischhoff, Krishnamurti, & Sowell, 2013). Given that I as the interviewer am a well-known spiritual figure in Brown County, it is possible that participants might tailor their responses to align with perceived expectations associated with a pastorate. To address this concern, two specific criteria were established to guide the purposeful selection of interview candidates, ensuring a diverse range of unbiased perspectives is captured.

Christian

To define the criteria for selecting interview participants who identify as Christians and engage in business activities in Brown County, Wisconsin, it was essential to recognize the diversity within the Christian faith. Participants were required to openly identify as Christians and have some connection to a church community, including attendance. This approach resulted in a wide range of individuals, capturing various beliefs and practices among Christians. By doing so, it is hoped that no group was excluded, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the Christian business community.

Business or Workplace

The criteria for identifying a working Christian encompassed individuals, regardless of gender, who hold a job outside of church and interact with others within their roles. This criterion is essential in examining the impact of a biblical worldview on interpersonal interactions within professional contexts. Engaging with individuals not involved with others would not adequately capture the nuances of human interaction and the influence of a biblical theology of work dynamics on individual belief systems. Workplace refers to the locations of work.

Data Collection

The grounded theory analysis aims to engender original theoretical insights or interpretations from the data instead of validating preexisting theories. By employing the grounded theory methodology, I anticipated that a coherent and well-substantiated theory elucidating the emergent phenomena concerning the culturally amalgamated perspective of success among Christians in business could be developed (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Utilizing the interview approach was pivotal in uncovering the essential patterns necessary to achieve data saturation, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the research context. Moreover, to enhance the robustness and credibility of the study findings, a triangulated method involving documentary analysis and surveys was employed to juxtapose different data collection methods.

In-Depth Interviews

Collecting qualitative data through the interview involves asking, watching, and reviewing the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Individual interviews allow the research data to consist of detailed and personal accounts of participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. I met with the third-party interviewer and described the problem and dissertation focus to understand the interview direction. I coached the interviewer on grounded theory and interview methods for obtaining quality data. I provided a series of interview questions to the interviewer to ensure that the session provided the data I wanted. To ensure a thorough and effective interview, I held a mock interview to increase the proficiency and test the effectiveness of the questions. I then invited several people from my city to brainstorm and discuss potential interview candidates who meet the qualifications for the interviews. I developed a list of forty potential participants and

interviewed 18 of those who met the requirements. After the first interview I met with the interviewer to review the questions and adjust as needed. The interviewer was equipped with a recording instrument to log the interviews. I had the interview sessions transcribed and inputted into Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1). Atlas.ti is a popular software program used by researchers involved in qualitative data analysis. It provides tools for organizing, coding, and analyzing qualitative research projects' textual, audio, video, and image data. I used the program to identify themes, patterns, and relationships within the data, aiding in interpreting and presenting qualitative findings.

Documentary Analysis

The data collection method entailed analyzing various documents, websites, photographs, awards, or materials relevant to the research topic of defining business. This approach involved gathering information to support the research, drawing upon my own expertise and knowledge of business organizations. I collected data from 20 business organizations and inputted it into Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1) for comprehensive analysis. This data collection process is designed to provide insights into the influence of the capitalist worldview on American Christians in business and explore potential conflicts that may arise between this worldview and the biblical theology of work. Additionally, there was a focus on examining the organizations' innovations to determine if they align with Kingdom values and priorities, as discussed in Vincent's (2017) *Innovation Theology*.

Surveys

This data collection method aimed to provide insights into the influence of the capitalist worldview on Christians in the business sector and analyze the potential

blended ideologies between this worldview and the biblical conception of success. Surveys were employed as a qualitative research method by designing open-ended questions that allowed participants to provide detailed responses that offered rich and nuanced insights into their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. These surveys were conducted with a select group of Christians in the business sector, enabling me to understand how their perspectives on success may be influenced by the capitalist worldview and how these beliefs align or conflict with biblical teachings. Through the qualitative analysis of survey responses, researchers can uncover the complexities of this dynamic and shed light on the nuanced interactions between faith, business practices, and cultural influences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). My plan was to have a minimum of one hundred surveys returned and I ended up with one hundred and thirty-five that I mined for patterns in Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1). I created a list of potential participants by brainstorming with a team to identify people who qualify for an online survey.

The research employed a triangulation approach by utilizing three data collection methods - in-depth interviews, documentary analysis, and surveys - to validate the study findings. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather detailed insights from participants, documenting their experiences and beliefs. Documentary analysis involved scrutinizing materials from 10 business organizations to analyze the impact of the capitalist worldview on Christians in the business sector. Surveys were used to gather nuanced insights into the influence of the capitalist worldview on Christians' perspectives on success, with open-ended questions facilitating rich responses. The data collected from these methods was analyzed using Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1) software to identify patterns and relationships, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interplay

between faith, business practices, and cultural influences. This triangulation strategy enriched the research findings by presenting a thorough and validated perspective on the research topic.

Data Analysis

As previously indicated, to examine the impact of the capitalist worldview on the biblical theology of work among Christians in the business sector, I employed the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1). I conducted a thematic analysis to uncover patterns and themes within the qualitative data gathered from interviews and surveys. This approach aligns with grounded theory methodology, which emphasizes theory development based on empirical data without preconceived hypotheses. As Charmaz (2007) outlined, grounded theory allows for generating rich insights and understanding from qualitative data analysis, making it a suitable method for exploring the complex interplay between the capitalist worldview and a Christians understanding of a biblical theology of work. By utilizing Atlas.ti within a grounded theory framework, this study provides a detailed and nuanced examination of how the capitalist worldview influences the perceptions of success among Christians in the business sector, supported by a rigorous and systematic analytical approach grounded in established research methodologies.

Evaluation

Reliability in qualitative studies relates to the consistency in conducting research activities such as administering questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups to ensure that the facilitator's subjectivity does not influence the findings. While the subjectivity of the facilitator can impact qualitative studies, it may be less critical in quantitative

research that utilizes standardized assessments. However, even in quantitative studies, how these assessments are presented to participants and by whom can affect the results. For example, Creswell and Creswell (2023) note that interviewers can create a "…potential power imbalance" (p. 150). The validity of this research project was ensured by the use of Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1) for data analysis and the triangulation of data sources. The accountability of the research was enhanced through strategies such as involving a third-party interviewer and seeking input from doctoral level readers, a business colleague for data collection, and an external auditor for review. By intentionally diversifying participant demographics in interviews and surveys, including ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background, the collected data represented the population under study. This research is informed by my personal experiences as a Christian navigating the influence of the capitalist worldview on their perceptions of success within their organizations.

Ethical and Procedures

Bakke Graduate University (BGU) and Federal policies mandate that any project involving studies of humans must undergo a thorough review process to ensure the protection of individual's rights and welfare, assess the appropriateness of methods used to obtain informed consent and evaluate the risks and potential benefits of the investigation. This research project was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator and approved. The overarching objective of this research endeavor was to adhere to the biblical principle of shalom in guiding the data collection process (Audéoud, 2023). The selection process for in-person interviews, surveys, and document

analysis was intended to ensure a diverse and equitable representation of Brown County Christians in business.

Selection Process

The selection process involved carefully reviewing the brainstorm list and handpicking individuals who align with the established criteria. I personally evaluated each potential participant to ensure they meet the requirements set forth for the study. This methodical approach was designed to gather a diverse range of perspectives while ensuring that each participant has a meaningful connection to the Christian faith and the local business community. By thoughtfully curating this selection, I believe the research was enriched with varied insights that represent the broader Christian business landscape in Brown County.

In-Person Interviewer

To ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the research, I selected a trained, retired journalist to conduct the interviews. This experienced reporter has a strong background in gathering information and conducting in-depth conversations, having previously worked as a columnist for the Green Bay Press-Gazette and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's Packer Plus. To guarantee that the researcher adheres to the highest standards of professionalism and ethics, I hired and trained them to comply with both the Bakke Graduate University (BGU) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. Additionally, a consent form was signed by all participants in the study which ensured their confidentiality, privacy, and rights.

Interviews

All interviews took place in private settings, away from any church environments. I established a consistent list of optional locations where the interviewer was able to comfortably listen to and record the interviewee. The intention was to maintain a high level of privacy, fostering an atmosphere of trust and openness. This approach was to encourage interviewees to share their thoughts and experiences vulnerably.

Data Collection

All data collected was held in confidentiality, and discriminatory content was not to be used. Any content that diminished the humanity and dignity of a person, even though they are confidential, was not to be used. To ensure confidentiality, surveys and document sources will continue to be kept private. Any research records and recordings will be kept private and destroyed after completing the analysis. No vulnerable populations were involved in this study, and any sensitive information, including financial status, religious and political beliefs, and familial matters, will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Triangulation

As previously indicated, data triangulation provided three angles to garner a more comprehensive interpretation of the findings. By combining multiple data sources, one-on-one interviews, surveys, and document analysis, I was able to gain deeper insights and validated the accuracy of their conclusions. This method allows for a more robust and nuanced understanding of the research topic as the diverse perspectives provided by the various data sources enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings.

Transformational Strategy

My calling and mission have centered on fostering the prosperity of my city. One of the strategies I have adopted was empowering church members to extend peace and well-being (shalom) to the world while personally engaging with and influencing Christians in the workplace to seek spiritual transformation through knowing Jesus. My transformative approach involved developing a teaching and training program to guide Christians in business to identify and name these blended ideologies and forma biblical theology of work. Additionally, I envision providing pastors with instructional content to facilitate similar transformations within their congregations. Willard and Black (2014) reveal that many religious leaders often resist the idea that the entire business arena is a place of divine action, a testament to a lack of understanding of God's big view of city transformation. By unveiling the predominant capitalistic worldview's influence on success, I aspire to instigate a desire for change, leading to multiple churches and pastors equipping their business leaders with a renewed perspective and approach.

Summary

This chapter explored the complex question of how the definition of *success* among Christians in the workplace is shaped by American culture and capitalist ideals. By conducting a thorough examination of workplace ethics, historical and ethical contexts, and the challenges faced by Christian professionals, the research sought to uncover new insights into how the capitalist mindset influences success perceptions and creates blended ideologies within this group. A grounded theory approach was utilized to analyze how the American capitalist framework affects Christians' views of success in their work. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation methods, including in-

depth interviews, documentary reviews, and surveys, were employed to provide a well-rounded understanding of the relationship between faith, business practices, and cultural factors. This comprehensive study was conducted in a manner to prioritize participant confidentiality, adhere to ethical standards, and implement a transformational strategy aimed at redefining Christians' theology of work and their vision of success in alignment with Kingdom principles.

CHAPTER 4.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This chapter reviews the results of the mixed methods research framework used to investigate the intersection of capitalism and Christian theology in today's workplace. Using a triangulated mixed method approach, I collected quantitative data from 129 survey questionnaires and qualitative data through 17 in-depth interviews. Additionally, I analyzed documents from 20 businesses led by Christian leaders to further support the qualitative analysis. Guided by grounded theory, my research was to uncover and name the blended ideologies surrounding American capitalism and biblical teachings on work. The findings aim to inform strategies for teaching Christians in the marketplace a biblical view of work that stands out and thrives within the American capitalist environment.

Data Collection Process

The demographic characteristics of research respondents provided essential context for interpreting the study's findings. The sample is comprised of individuals from diverse age groups, genders, and racial backgrounds in a specific region, ensuring a broad representation of the target population of the greater Green Bay area. Clearly detailing these characteristics promotes transparency, allowing assessment of how accurately the sample reflects the larger Green Bay community. Recognizing demographic differences enables a more nuanced analysis of responses and experiences across groups, thereby strengthening the validity and applicability of the results. Reporting these specifics also upholds ethical research standards and helps determine the extent to which the findings can be generalized to similar populations.

The online survey was conducted at the Global Leadership Summit, attended by approximately 500 organizational leaders representing various city sectors of Green Bay, Wisconsin. This annual conference is broadcast from Willow Creek Community Church to hundreds of sites worldwide and features some of the top leadership presenters globally. The survey took place at the Green Bay site, held at Green Bay Community Church. Using Typeform software, attendees were prompted to scan a QR code that linked them to an introduction page where they answered 16 questions (Figure 4). Out of all attendees, 361 viewed the survey, 184 started it, and 135 completed it, resulting in a 73.37% completion rate compared to those who started the survey. Of the research participants, 129 responses were included in the study. The quantitative data were reviewed by an expert in research data analysis, who served as an external auditor. He examined the results, findings, and the overall direction for drawing conclusions.

Figure 4

Prompt

The survey questions were designed to reduce survey fatigue, reduce bias, and increase validity and reliability, with the aim to capture more valid data. The 16 questions and their answer formats were as follows.

1. "What denomination do you identify with?" Multiple choice answer options were "Catholic," "Lutheran," "Non-Denominational," "Methodists," and "Other."
2. "What City sector are you in?" Multiple choice answer options were "Business," "Arts & Culture," "Non-Profit, Education," "Healthcare," "Government," "Family & Household," and "Faith."
3. "Number of employees you supervise." Multiple choice answer options were "1 person," "2–5 people," "5–10 people," "10+ people," and "none."
4. "How old are you?" Multiple choice answer options were "0–20," "20–30," "30–40," "40–50," and "50+."
5. "What is your ethnicity?" Multiple choice answer options were "Non-Hispanic White," "Hispanic or Latino," "African American or Black," "Asian," "Native American or Alaskan Native," "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander," and "Other (please specify)."
6. "What is your gender?" Multiple choice answer options were "Male," "Female," and "Other."
7. "What are the essential tools/values for daily success?" Respondents were instructed to select five from among "Meaning and Purpose," "Physical and Mental Health," "Happiness and Life Satisfaction," "Close Social Relationships," "Efficiency," "Adaptability," "Character and Virtue,"

"Growth," "Accountability," "Ethics," "Strategic Decision-Making," "Customer Satisfaction," "Transparency," "Innovation," "Entrepreneurial Spirit," "Profit," "Risk Management," "Competition," and "Cost-Consciousness."

8. "What drives you to succeed at work?" Respondents were instructed to select two from among "A sense of purpose and meaning," "Interesting, challenging, or fulfilling," "A belief your effort will lead to desired outcomes," "Obedience, humility, and compassion," "A sense of spiritual self-identity," "Autonomy, competence, and relatedness," "Rewards, recognition, or social pressure," and "Food, shelter, and purchasing power."
9. "What is the core purpose of your organization or place of work?" Respondents were instructed to select two from among "To contribute to societal welfare and give back to the community," "To deliver high-quality products or services," "To build strong relationships with customers and employees," "To promote a positive work culture and employee well-being," "To foster continuous growth and learning opportunities," "To deliver excellent customer service," "To drive innovation and progress," "To maximize shareholder value," and "Other."
10. "How do you define success for your organization or place of work?" Respondents were instructed to rate their top three from among "Customer satisfaction and loyalty," "Financial performance (e.g., revenue, profits)," "Empowerment Culture," "Employee engagement and retention,"

"Stewardship," "Servant Leadership—Compassion," "Social responsibility—Justice," "Innovation and market leadership," and "Long-term sustainability."

11. "In 50 characters or less write what your definition of success is at work." Respondents were instructed to write in a description of their definition of success.
12. "What drives your daily routine and influences your enthusiasm and engagement at work?" Respondents were instructed to select three from among "Meaning & purpose," "Physical health and Emotional health," "Social connectedness," "Financial security," "Develop character strengths," "Compensation and benefits," "Efficiency," "Carrier Success," and "Job security."
13. "Do you identify as a Christian?" Multiple choice answer options were "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neutral," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree."
14. "How often do you go to religious events each month?" Multiple choice answer options were "1–2 times per month," "2–3 times per month," "3–4 times per month," and "4+ times per month."
15. "What are your top influences for being successful for business?" Respondents were instructed to select two from among "Work Experience," "Mentorship," "Training/certifications," "The Bible," "Schooling," and "Books or podcasts."

16. “Is your faith relevant for being successful in business?” Multiple choice answer options were “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Neutral,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.”

The questions were carefully selected to guard against skewing data toward an overly idealized religious view or eliciting socially desirable answers. Also, because of the familiarity in the Green Bay region of my role as pastor, the questions were phrased to not be religious in nature to minimize bias. Using indirect questions helped to obtain more authentic and nuanced insights into how Christians perceive and practice their faith in an American capitalistic culture. The questions were categorized to capture responses into four categories.

Demographic Context (Questions 1–6)

Demographics are important in a survey because they give essential context about the respondents. This information helped me, the researcher, to understand who the participants were and whether the results reflect the broader group I was studying. By looking at demographics of faith, denomination, city sector, age, ethnicity, and gender, I could validate the respondents as the target group being analyzed and better interpret their perspectives. These data allowed a more focused analysis of how cultural, regional, or demographic factors influence how individuals integrate faith and work in their lives.

Personal Values and Motivation (Questions 7–8, 12, and 15)

Asking about essential tools/values, what drives them, and top influences helped identify the personal priorities and spiritual principles that shaped respondents’ decisions and behaviors at work. The motivations revealed what inspires a respondent to action within the workplace. Together, values and motivation provided insight into a person’s

character and passions and the underlying reasons behind their choices and actions. These questions revealed the role of faith-based inspiration and values in respondents' places of work.

Organizational Purpose and Success (Questions 9–11)

I wanted to understand how a person views their organization's purpose and what they believe their organization's definition of success is. This line of questioning was important because it showed how they define the organization's purpose and achievement, and whether those views align with or differ from their personal values and motivations. A misalignment could then point to tension points regarding how a Christian practices their beliefs within a contrasting view of purpose and success. The data could point to a faith-work dissonance that drives or encourages the respondents toward a blended ideology of work and faith.

Religious Practices and the Role of Faith (Questions 13–16)

Questions 13–16 were important because they helped me understand how deeply a person's faith influences their approach to work and success within a capitalist environment. I needed to make sure the respondents met the criteria for this research to ensure the data were relevant. The questions about their faith, religious attendance, and beliefs about faith and success directly explored how their spiritual life impacts their professional identity, decision making, and views on integrating faith with business. These questions revealed how individuals balance their faith in a competitive, profit-driven capitalistic setting and whether their spiritual values shape their ideas of success and faith integration at work.

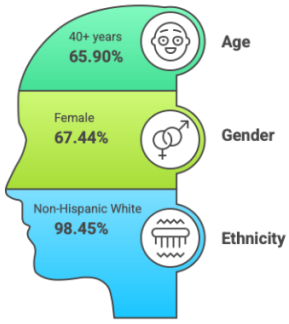
Quantitative Survey Findings

Age, Gender, and Ethnicity Demographics

Significant differences in age, gender, and ethnicity were observed in how respondents perceive the core purpose of their organizations (Figure 5). In terms

Figure 5

Age, Gender, and Ethnicity



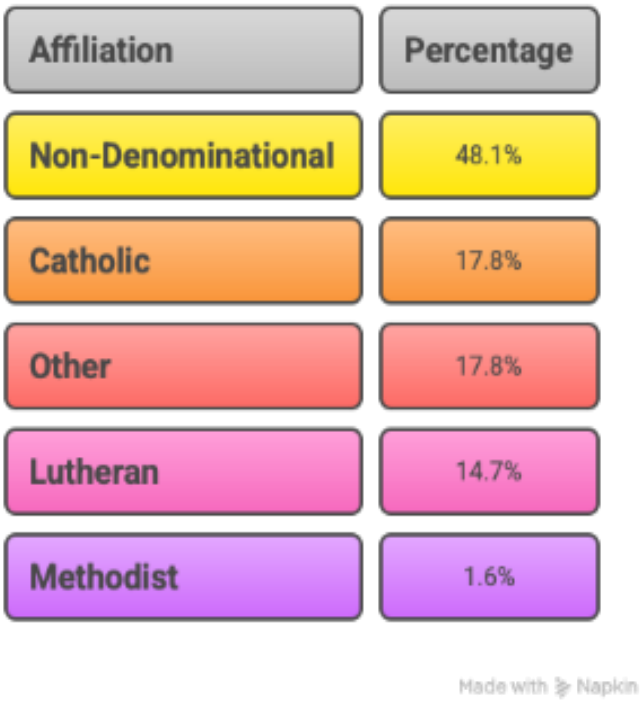
of demographics, 67.44% of participants identified as female, 92.25% identified as non-Hispanic White, and 65.90% reported being 40 years of age or older. The greater Green Bay region has very low cultural diversity, which, while discouraging from a multicultural perspective, accurately reflects the area's demographic makeup. The age distribution of the respondents showed that the majority are over 50 years old, with 36.4% (47 respondents) in this age group. The next largest group consisted of those aged 40–50 years, comprising 29.5% (38 respondents). Participants aged 30–40 years made up 21.7% (28 respondents), while those aged 20–30 accounted for 10.9% (14 respondents). The smallest group is individuals aged 0–20 years, representing only 1.6% (2 respondents). Overall, the sample skews toward an older demographic, with most respondents being over 40 years of age.

Religious Affiliations and Church Attendance Demographics

The survey showed that out of 129 respondents, 109 identified as Christians, 20 did not identify as a Christian, and 14 were neutral. It was critical to have data from those who identify as Christians. Figures 6 highlights that a significant portion of these respondents identify as nondenominational Christians (48.06%), with 51.9% identifying with other denominations, resulting in a total of 84.50% identifying as Christians overall.

Figure 6

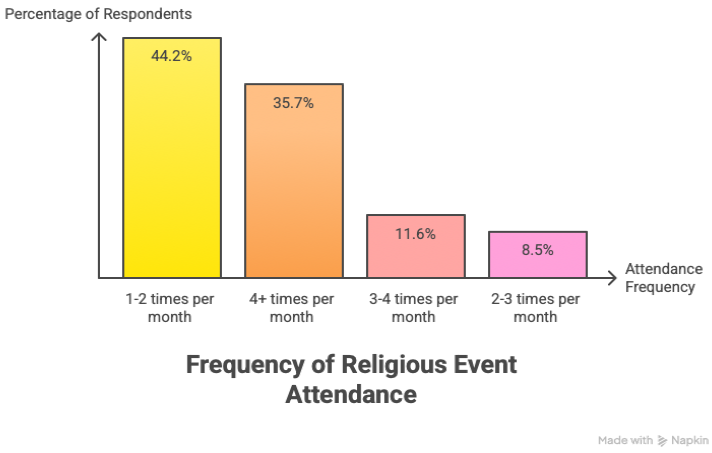
Religious Affiliation



Faith is deeply embedded in most respondents' lives, with most identifying as Christians and regularly attending religious services. This strong religious commitment underscores the importance of faith in how they approach their work. The data showed that many respondents attend religious events at least once a month, with the largest group attending one to two times per month, indicating a moderate level of religious engagement. This regular church attendance suggests they are receiving biblical teachings that influence their beliefs and workplace practices (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Frequency of Religious Event Attendance



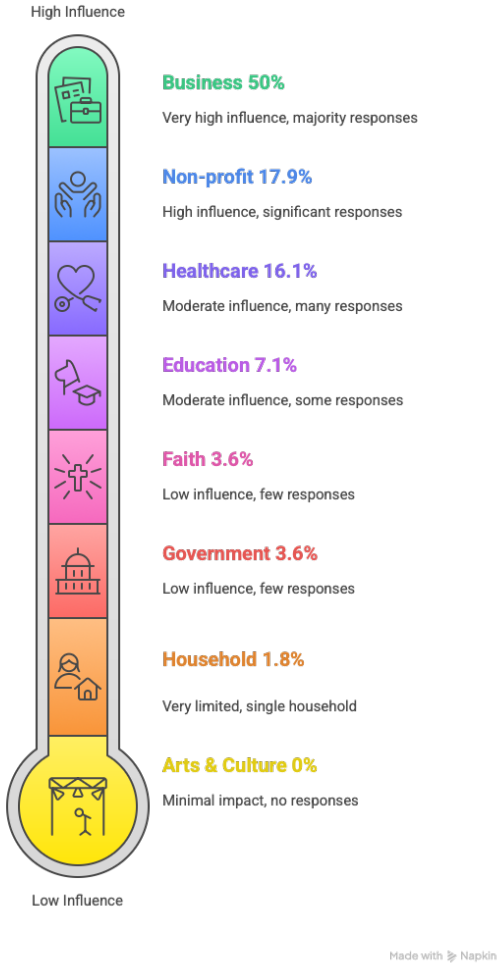
Additionally, a notable number attend religious events very frequently (four or more times per month), reflecting a high level of religious involvement. It is very encouraging that most who identify as Christian are attending a church that exposes them to teaching, but this response also places in question what teaching is focused on having and practicing a biblical theology of work.

City Sector Demographics

The survey respondents represented a range of city sectors reflecting a diverse professional background (Figure 8). The business sector had the highest participation,

Figure 8

City Sector Breakdown



comprising 50% of the respondents. The nonprofit sector made up 17.9%, and health care accounted for 16.1%. Smaller but still meaningful contributions came from the education, faith, and government sectors. The household category included retired individuals, single-family homes, and nonworking persons, but there was no representation from the

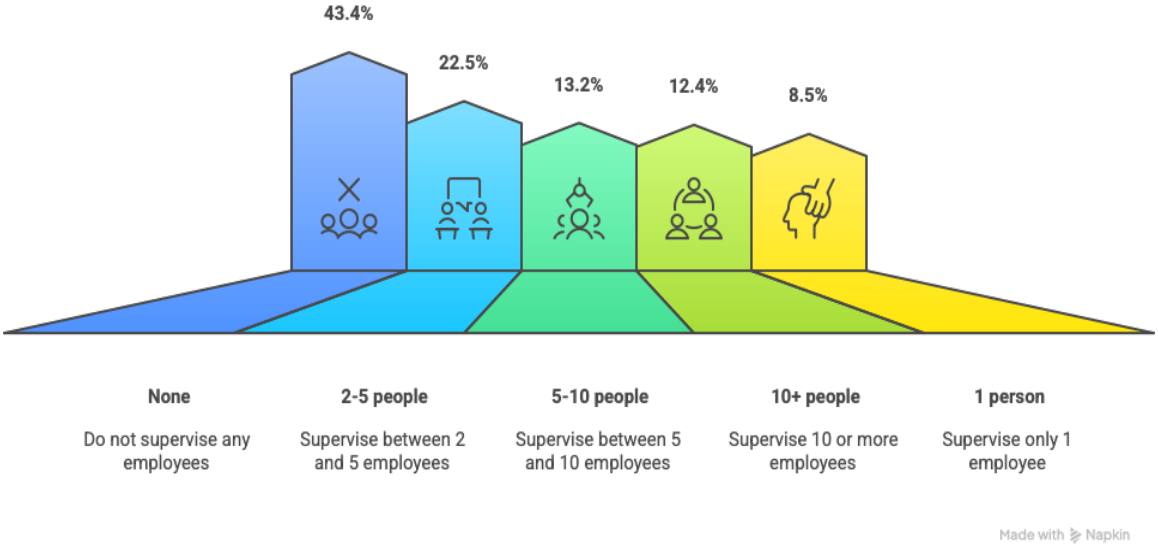
arts and culture sector in the data. Aside from the arts and culture sector, the respondents contributed to the validity of the research because they are actively involved in the working culture of the greater Green Bay region, which influences how they think about and practice a biblical view of the workplace.

Management Demographics

The purpose of asking how many people each respondent manages was to better gauge the possible level of relational impact within their position. This question is also important for validating the quality of the data collected from the targeted group. The survey results showed a range of supervisory responsibilities among the participants (Figure 9). The largest portion, 56.6%, supervise at least one employee, indicating that more than half of the respondents hold roles that enable them to influence the organization through management of others. The quality and purpose of their management can significantly affect employee engagement and morale, and even employees' faith journeys.

Figure 9

Number of Employees Supervised

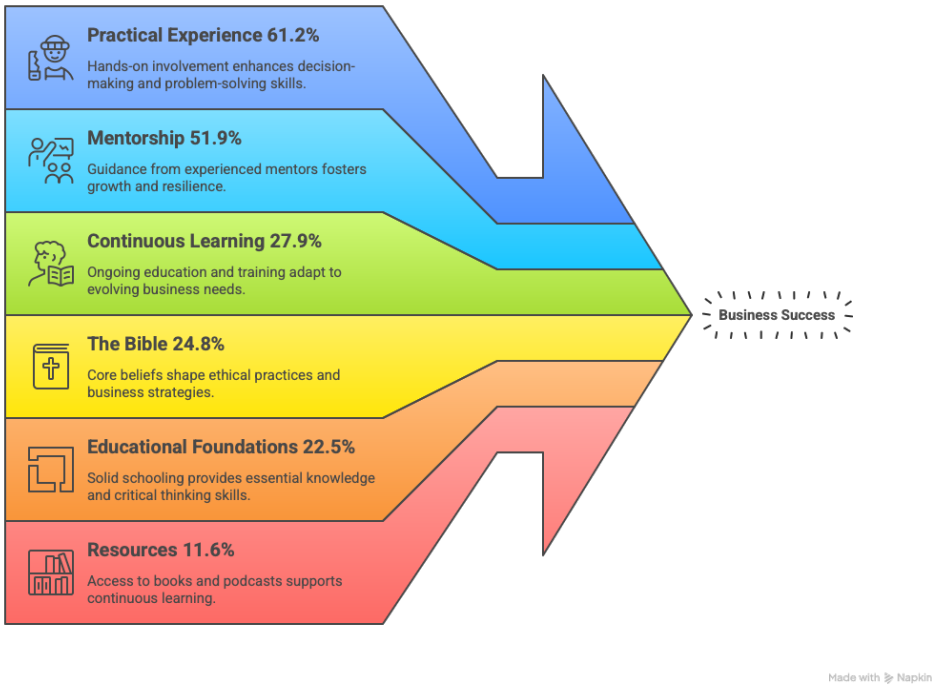


Top Influences for Business Success

The survey data reveal that people of faith primarily develop their business success through practical, hands-on experience, which ranks highest at 61.2% (Figure 10). These results suggest that they value real-world application over purely theoretical knowledge, favoring a pragmatic approach to professional growth. Mentorship follows closely behind at 51.9%, highlighting the importance of relational connections in their understanding of success. These respondents see business development as fundamentally relational, emphasizing the significance of relationships and guidance from others in their professional journeys.

Figure 10

Top Influences for Being Successful in Business



Biblical principles played a modest role, with 24.8% of respondents actively drawing business wisdom from Scripture. While these results are significant, this factor ranks ahead of formal education, which accounted for 22.5%. The data may indicate that many faith-based professionals incorporate some biblical insights into their work but do not rely on the Bible as their primary guide for business success. Interestingly, traditional schooling ranks relatively low, at 22.5%, suggesting a preference for experiential and relational learning over institutional education. Books and podcasts were the least influential, with only 11.6%, implying that secular business literature and thought leadership are less favored sources of insight among this group.

Overall, these patterns show that people of faith often aim for success by developing their business skills through practical experience, relational mentorship, and

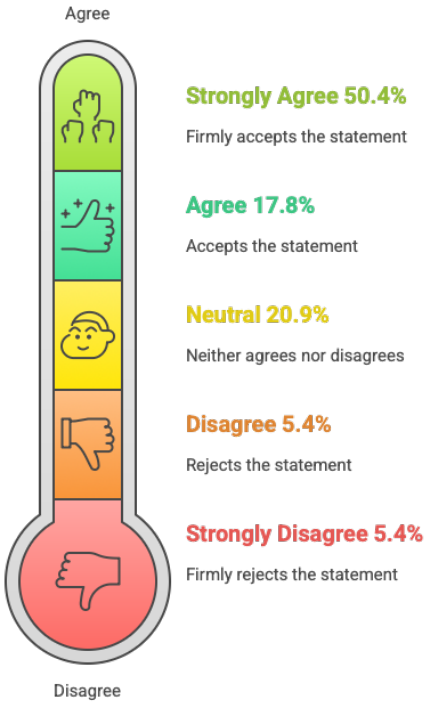
application of some biblical principles. They tend to rely less on systematic theological reflection on work, which may explain why their faith and work are implicitly, rather than explicitly, integrated into their professional lives. Despite the influence of faith, American capitalism remains the dominant economic system at work. Many individuals seemed to apply broad biblical principles they've learned through relationships and experience, instead of developing a detailed theology of work. These findings point to a more relational and pragmatic approach to success. Additionally, it is revealing to consider what biblical teachings they are receiving, especially since the largest portion of respondents attend church regularly (as shown previously in Figure 7), which suggests significant exposure to biblical teaching.

The Faith Relevance Paradox

While 68.2% of respondents agree or strongly agree that faith is relevant for business success (Figure 11), only 24.8% cite the Bible as a top influence on their business success (previously in Figure 10). The findings reveal a significant gap between their perceived importance of faith and their actual sources of wisdom and definition of *success*. The data show that people of faith conceptually believe their faith should matter in business, but when it comes to practical sources of guidance, they rely more on

Figure 11

Faith's Relevance to Success in Business



secular influences—such as work experience (61.2%) and mentorship (51.9%)—than on explicitly faith-based resources. This pattern suggests that, although they affirm the importance of faith in theory, they may be missing the practical relevance and frameworks needed to apply biblical principles in their professional lives. They recognize that faith should matter—44.2% attend church at least one or two times per month—and they may hear and believe in biblical teachings, but the data revealed they often do not know how to make these principles practically relevant in their workplaces or may not be receiving direct teaching on the biblical theology of the Christian design of work.

Underdeveloped Faith–Work Theology

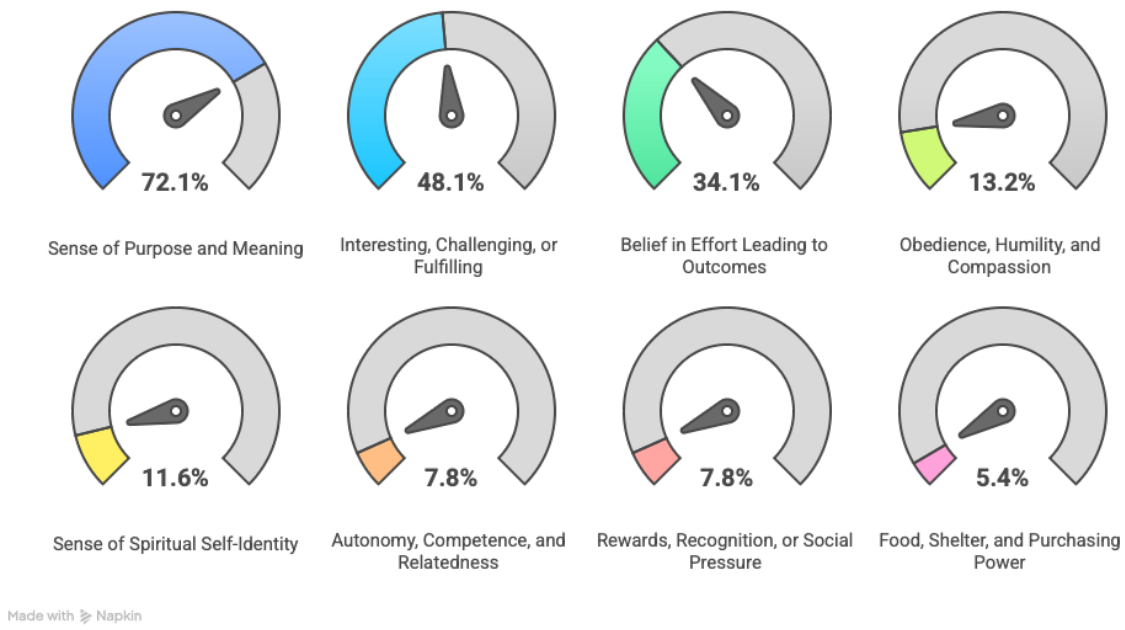
The survey data showed that 20.9% of respondents selected a neutral response regarding the relevance of faith in their work, which, combined with the low ranking of biblical influence at 24.8%, indicates that many people of faith may not have fully developed a clear understanding of how their beliefs should practically guide their business decisions and actions. The data suggests a potential underdevelopment of faith-based work theology so that individual's sense that their faith should matter in their professional lives but lack the tools, confidence, or guidance needed to make those connections explicit. Cultural pressures to keep faith and work separate might contribute to this disconnect, leading many to feel their beliefs are relevant but not knowing how to apply them directly in their business practices. The data highlighted that despite a strong belief that faith should influence success, many people of faith struggle to translate that belief into concrete, faith-based business wisdom.

What Drives Work Success

The survey results in Figure 12 provide important insights into the different motivations that drive individuals to succeed at work. The findings emphasize the significance of intrinsic motivation, especially a sense of purpose and meaning, along with the enjoyment that comes from engaging in interesting and challenging work. While extrinsic factors like rewards and recognition can influence motivation, they are generally less impactful than intrinsic ones. The most prominent motivator by far is "a sense of purpose and meaning," which accounts for 72% of the responses. This data indicates that people are strongly motivated by activities and goals that give them a sense of significance and direction. The question that is not answered relates to where that

Figure 12

Motivators for Success at Work



meaning is and where that purpose comes from. “Interesting, challenging, or fulfilling” tasks motivate nearly half of the respondents (48%), indicating that engagement and a sense of accomplishment are important drivers. Additionally, 34% of responses emphasized the significance of believing that their effort will lead to desired outcomes, highlighting the role of perceived efficacy in motivation. While the findings are encouraging in terms of valuing hard work, it also reveals an individualistic mindset focused on personal reward rather than communal impact.

Most concerning is that “a sense of spiritual self-identity” only appears in 12% of the responses. This low figure suggests that, for many individuals, motivation is not strongly connected to their spiritual beliefs or their understanding of themselves as spiritual beings. This data is arguably the most critical point because, if success is to be genuinely rooted in a biblical theology of work, a strong sense of spiritual identity should

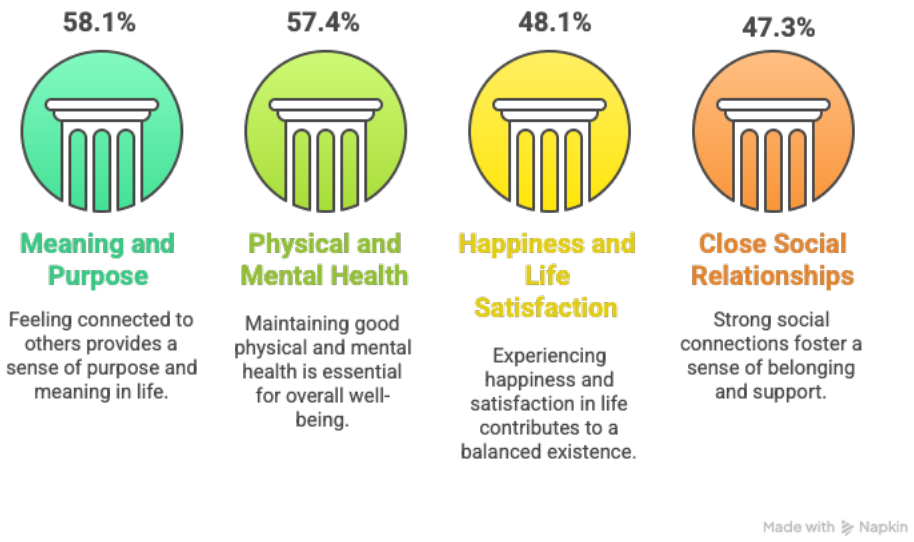
be a fundamental driver. Without it, the motivation for work may lack the depth and purpose that biblical principles advocate, making it less likely for individuals to work in a way that aligns with biblical values and calling.

Key Tools and Values for Daily Success: The Four Pillars of Well-Being

The survey results revealed that Christians in the workplace identify several essential tools and values for daily success, which emerge as four pillars of well-being (Figure 13). The respondents were asked to select 5 essential tools out of 19

Figure 13

Foundations of Well-Being



choices (“Meaning and Purpose,” “Physical and Mental Health,” “Happiness and Life Satisfaction,” “Close Social Relationships,” “Efficiency,” “Adaptability,” “Character and Virtue,” “Growth,” “Accountability,” “Ethics,” “Strategic Decision-Making,” “Customer Satisfaction,” “Transparency,” “Innovation,” “Entrepreneurial Spirit,” “Profit,” “Risk Management,” “Competition,” and “Cost-Consciousness”). The most prominent was

meaning and purpose (58.1%), reflecting respondents' desire to find significance in their work that affirms their roles in a larger, meaningful mission beyond material gain. Many seek activities and endeavors that contribute to a greater good, driven by a deep desire to understand their places in the world and make a positive impact. Alongside desires, values such as physical and mental health (57.4%), happiness and life satisfaction (48.1%), and close social relationships (47.3%) emphasize a holistic approach to well-being—integrating spiritual, emotional, and relational health. These priorities demonstrate an effort to balance pragmatic success with caring for oneself and others, fostering community and personal growth as vital components of sustainable achievement.

However, the low ranking of spiritual self-identity as a driver (previously in Figure 12) highlights a significant gap. While many individuals pursue meaning and purpose through health, happiness, and relationships, they often lack a strong spiritual foundation that can provide a deeper sense of calling and direction within their work. Without cultivating this spiritual self-identity, they may be missing a vital connection to their divine purpose, which could elevate their everyday efforts from mere individual happiness and health to a called purpose in vocation.

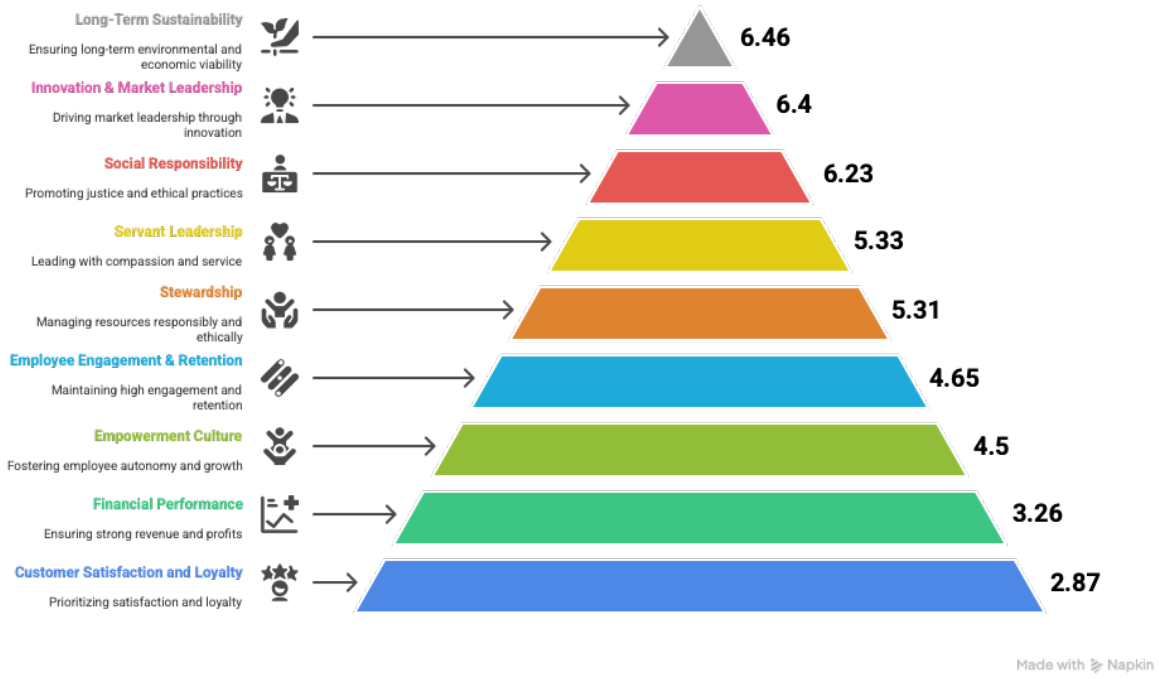
Ranking the Definitions of Success of Organizations

It was important to collect data on how people view success, not only for themselves but also for the organizations they work for (Figure 14). Out of nine choices, over 50% of respondents place these factors in their top three priorities, from highest to lowest priority: customer satisfaction (2.87 average ranking), financial performance

(3.26), and empowerment culture (4.50). The top two ranking purposes underscore the continued importance of conventional capitalistic business success

Figure 14

Definitions of Success of Organizations (Average Ranking)



indicators. However, the data also highlight a shift toward broader, more people- and culture-nuanced perspectives, with factors such as employee engagement and empowerment culture occupying middle ground in rankings, indicating they are valued but not considered primary drivers of success.

The survey showed that future-focused and values-based metrics such as innovation, long-term sustainability, and social responsibility are often ranked lower, suggesting a potential gap between current organizational priorities and emerging social and environmental expectations. For example, innovation and market leadership were notably deprioritized, with an average ranking of 6.40, placing that core purpose in the

bottom three positions, despite widespread acknowledgment of its importance for long-term competitiveness. Similarly, sustainability and social responsibility were predominantly viewed as less immediate priorities. An outlier in the data is servant leadership, especially compassion, which exhibits a bimodal distribution: it is either ranked as most important or not valued at all, reflecting a significant divide in organizational attitudes toward compassionate leadership. Overall, while traditional metrics still dominate, there is a clear recognition of the importance of broader factors such as customer relationships, employee engagement, and ethical practices, suggesting a shifting landscape regarding how success is defined and pursued.

Motivations and Core Purposes of Organizations

The data in Figure 15 reveal what Christians believe are the core purposes of their

Figure 15

Core Purposes of Organizations

places of work. The most common core purpose identified by respondents was contributing to societal welfare and giving back to the community, at 44.2%, reflecting a strong emphasis on social responsibility. Close behind was that many organizations aim to deliver high-quality products or services, at 35.7%; this purpose highlights their commitment to meeting customer expectations. Additionally, building strong relationships with customers and employees, as well as fostering a positive and supportive work environment, were also key priorities, indicating that organizations value connection, trust, and employee well-being as essential to their success.

The survey showed a low percentage focusing on shareholder value, 6.2%, with fewer organizations citing maximizing profits as a core purpose. Instead, there was a broader focus on holistic goals such as promoting a positive work culture, encouraging continuous learning, and driving innovation. These findings suggest that respondents believe their organizations are increasingly adopting values that prioritize societal impact, stakeholder relationships, and sustainable growth over traditional profit-driven motives. The data revealed a trend toward more purpose-driven organizations that aim to balance

Contradictions: Organizational Purpose and Success Metrics

Comparison revealed an intriguing paradox with respect to how respondents understand their organizations' purposes (as seen previously in Figure 15) versus how they define success (as seen previously in Figure 14). According to the data, 44.2% of organizations prioritize societal welfare and contributing to the community, highlighting a strong emphasis on social responsibility and community impact. Conversely, only 6.2% cited maximizing shareholder value as their primary purpose, indicating a shift away from traditional profit-driven motives. When it comes to defining success (as seen previously in Figure 14), financial performance and customer satisfaction dominated, with these factors ranking highest among organizational priorities. Meanwhile, social responsibility consistently ranked among the lowest priorities, often in the bottom three, and long-term sustainability was deprioritized. Despite 13.2% of organizations citing innovation as a core purpose, it remains undervalued in success metrics, reflecting a disconnect between their stated missions and how they measure achievement. Overall, these statistics illustrate a notable gap. Organizations publicly endorse socially

responsible purposes but tend to prioritize financial outcomes and customer satisfaction when evaluating success.

Emerging Themes

Aspirational Versus Operational Thinking

Christians appear to have idealistic views of their organizations' purposes but revert to traditional business metrics when defining success.

Mission Statements Versus Reality

There is likely a gap between stated organizational values and actual business practices. Respondents may believe in biblical values and ethics but do not have the tools or framework to practically apply them in the workplace.

Measurement Challenges

Christians may struggle to quantify purpose-driven outcomes from a biblical theology of work and so default to easier financial metrics.

The Relationship-Building Contradiction

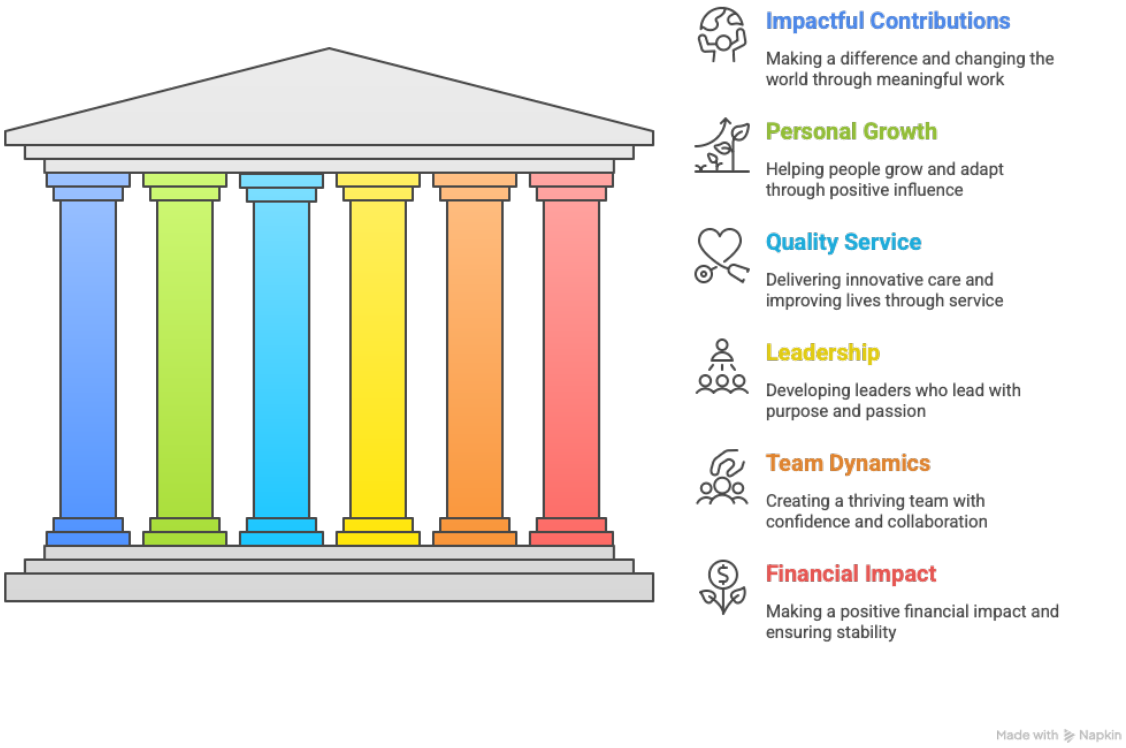
In the survey, 31.8% of respondents cited building strong relationships as a core purpose, yet employee engagement ranked middle-to-low in success metrics, and customer satisfaction, while ranked higher, didn't dominate as expected.

Defining Success in the Respondents' Words

When asked to describe what success means in 50 words or less (Figure 16),

Figure 16

Definitions of Success in Respondents' Words



respondents consistently emphasized core principles such as relationships, meaningful work, and making a positive impact. These themes underscore a holistic view of success that integrates meaningful work, community impact, leadership, and personal satisfaction, all rooted in faith and purpose.

A predominant theme across responses was the desire to make a meaningful impact and change lives. Many highlighted the importance of contributing to the community, fostering positive change, and helping others grow both personally and professionally. Respondents frequently expressed their motivation to serve others—whether through delivering quality care, empowering team members, or guiding individuals toward success—often with a focus on aligning their work with spiritual or faith-based values, such as pointing people toward Jesus and living out their purposes.

These insights reveal that success is defined not solely by material accomplishments but also by living out core values, making a difference, and nurturing relationships rooted in faith.

Another prominent theme centered around personal and team growth, emphasizing leadership development, collaboration, and creating a positive work environment. Respondents valued opportunities for continuous improvement, building confidence within teams, and fostering a culture of happiness and fulfillment. Success, in their view, encompasses achieving goals and financial stability while cultivating a supportive, engaging, and purpose-driven workplace where individuals feel valued, validated, and motivated to thrive. Overall, their responses reflected a holistic understanding of success—one that combines meaningful work, community impact, spiritual purpose, leadership, and personal satisfaction. To better understand these perspectives, responses to this question can be categorized into five key areas (as seen previously in Figure 16): impactful contributions, personal growth, community engagement, financial stability, and positive culture.

Impactful Contributions

The overwhelming majority of respondents defined success through their ability to serve others and create positive impact. Phrases such as “making a difference,” “helping others,” and “serving the community” are frequently mentioned. These desires indicates that people of faith view their work primarily as contributing to others’ well-being, emphasizing service and impact over personal gain.

Personal Growth

A key theme that repeatedly emerged is the significance of personal growth, leadership development, and empowerment. Respondents often used phrases such as "empowering team members," "building confidence," "leadership," "learning opportunities," and "personal fulfillment" to highlight their focus on ongoing improvement. They see growth as an essential part of their professional purpose and success. Overall, personal development and empowering others are central to how they understand their work and calling.

Community Engagement

Relational success and community building were key themes for respondents. They focused on fostering strong relationships, team cohesion, and a positive work environment. Statements like "seeing those I lead succeed" and "building a positive work culture" show their view that work is fundamentally relational. They believe that serving and strengthening the community are essential parts of their professional purpose.

Financial Stability

Relational success and community building are core themes among respondents. They prioritize relationships, team cohesion, and fostering a positive work environment. Phrases like "seeing those I lead succeed" and "building a positive work culture" show their belief that work is fundamentally relational. They view their efforts as rooted in serving and strengthening their community.

Positive Culture

Many respondents emphasized the importance of creating a happy and supportive work environment. They believe that success is closely tied to happiness, fulfillment, and

maintaining a healthy work–life balance. Building a positive, purpose-driven workplace where individuals feel valued and recognized was seen as essential for overall success. This perspective shows how personal well-being and professional purpose are interconnected in their approach to work.

Contrasts and Nuances

Material Success Versus Spiritual Purpose. While some responses mentioned "financial stability," "achieving goals," and "growth," the responses were often framed as means to support the broader mission of service rather than ends in themselves. There is a contrast between material or traditional success indicators and spiritual, relational, and impact-driven values, with the latter clearly taking precedence.

Traditional Metrics Versus Values-Driven Success. Few responses focus on recognition, promotions, or salary—common markers of success in secular workplaces. Instead, phrases like "making a difference," "helping others," "serving," and "living out purpose" dominated, reflecting a values-driven perspective that contrasts with conventional corporate success metrics.

Individual Achievement Versus Community and Team Success. Some responses emphasized individual growth ("feeling confident" and "personal achievement"), whereas others highlighted team success ("seeing those I lead succeed" and "building a positive culture"). The data presents a nuanced view that success involves both personal development and contributing to a thriving community.

Survey Research Summary

In summary, the survey findings revealed that Christian professionals in the Green Bay area prioritize values such as relationships, community, and meaningfulness of work

over purely material metrics of success. The demographic data show a predominantly older, White, and church-attending population, with most respondents viewing faith as relevant to their professional lives, though many rely more on practical experience and mentorship than on biblical principles for success. A notable gap exists between the perceived importance of faith and its practical influence, suggesting that many lack a clear framework for applying biblical principles in their work. Their understanding of success is holistic, emphasizing impact, personal growth, community engagement, and a positive work environment, often contrasting with traditional capitalist indicators and highlighting the desire for work rooted in purpose and faith-driven values.

Qualitative Interview Research

To carry out the mixed methods approach for this research, I worked with a hired interviewer to develop the interview questions (Appendix C). I brought in a retired sports journalist from the area to handle respondent recruitment and conduct the interviews using a predetermined set of questions. To reduce bias and avoid the Hawthorne effect, I instructed the interviewer to keep my name and any faith-based affiliation out of the process. We created a list of local businesses with owners who identify as Christian, and I sent out interview invitations through a generic email account from our Together Green Bay Department at Green Bay Community Church. Throughout the process, my name and church affiliation were not mentioned; the invitations simply stated that it was a research project organized through Together Green Bay. Each interview appointment was confirmed via email (Figure 17).

Figure 17

Invitation

For the analysis of the qualitative interview data, I hired a consultant experienced with Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1) to support me. They reviewed the interview content, guided me through the coding process, and provided weekly coaching—one hour each week for five weeks—to ensure I analyzed the data properly. The consultant also acted as an external reviewer to help maintain objectivity and uphold the integrity of the analysis.

Interview Findings

This research employed a qualitative grounded theory approach to explore the complex intersection of American capitalism and the biblical theology of work among Christians in the marketplace. Through 17 in-depth interviews, I captured participants' lived experiences and perspectives, providing rich, descriptive data that serve as the foundation for developing a grounded theory. Based on this interview data and background research on capitalism and Christian theology of work, I have made several key observations relevant to my primary research question. In what ways have American

Christians in business been impacted by the capitalist worldview regarding their theology of work?

These observations come from analyzing emerging themes in the interviews, which reveal a complex hybrid ideology where biblical values are both preserved and distorted within capitalist frameworks. This blend created a dynamic tension—on one hand, fostering positive ethical constraints rooted in faith; on the other, providing problematic theological justifications for economic inequality. Overall, the research highlights how American Christian faith intersects with, and is shaped by, the dominant work culture, often blending biblical principles with capitalist ideals in ways that both empower and challenge believers' understanding of their work and faith.

Spectrum of Integration

The research revealed that Christians approach faith–work integration along a complex spectrum, ranging from highly integrated approaches to compartmentalized struggles. At one end of this spectrum, some participants demonstrate complete integration of faith and work identity. Interviewee 4 explicitly stated that his motivation is to "honor God" and that he views his work as a form of ministry, while Interviewee 10 articulated this holistic approach by declaring, "You were designed to be one person." Similarly, Interviewee 9 described faith as having "no separation between the two. They are so integrated together," and Interviewee 16 provided theological justification by stating, "Work was God's idea from the beginning. God commissions people to participate in his work."

In the middle of this spectrum, many participants used faith as practical ethical guidance while maintaining some professional boundaries. Interviewee 7 described how

faith “keeps me calm” and offers perspective by reminding them that “this is just passing through,” while Interviewee 1 described faith as guiding “every decision” with an emphasis that “it’s not all about me” but about serving something larger. Interviewee 8 demonstrated this practical integration by speaking of letting God “be in control” and viewing work skills as gifts “he’s given me for his glory.”

However, at the other end of the spectrum, several participants struggle with what they describe as the “Sunday–Monday divide.” Interviewee 3, a teacher, and Interviewee 9, an academic advisor, expressed significant tension in openly expressing their faith within secular workplaces while still trying to let their spiritual values guide their actions and decisions. Interviewee 11 particularly illustrated this challenge, describing the difficulty of expressing faith in environments where colleagues use vulgar language, making it hard to live out Christian values openly. This compartmentalization represents a broader Christian challenge of integrating faith, which is often seen as private and personal, with an increasingly secularized workplace; many find it difficult to reconcile their faith with work cultures that may not always support or reflect their spiritual beliefs.

Competing Value Systems

The intersection of Christian faith and American capitalism creates a fascinating tension between competing value systems that participants navigate with varying degrees of success and self-awareness. On one side, several participants have clearly adopted capitalist values and metrics for success. Interviewee 9 admitted to “chasing titles” as a measure of success, while Interviewees 2 and 12 defined success using metrics that align closely with capitalist values, such as revenue generation and business growth. Interviewees 12 and 13 highlighted the importance of gaining competitive advantage and

strong market positioning. Even Interviewee 8 acknowledged being motivated by financial necessity, stating, “Between my wife and myself, I’m the breadwinner,” while simultaneously maintaining spiritual justifications for work choices.

Conversely, many participants demonstrated countercultural Christian values that directly challenge traditional capitalist focus on profit maximization. Interviewee 5 explicitly rejected capitalist excess by refusing to be a “whore for money” and by choosing to walk away from profitable but ethically questionable clients. Interviewee 6 demonstrated similar values by opting for extension work instead of higher paying roles in the private sector, prioritizing meaningful service over financial gain. Interviewee 3 also exemplified this countercultural approach by choosing a lower paying position that would prioritize “making a difference” over earning a higher salary. Interviewee 14, involved in prayer ministry, highlighted “nonmonetary forms of value creation,” emphasizing spiritual and community impact over financial gain, while Interviewee 7 stressed the importance of “serving something bigger than yourself.” Interviewee 12 further illustrated this tension by emphasizing “quality over quantity,” suggesting a preference for meaningful, well-crafted work over simply expanding output or profits.

The interview research revealed that many participants attempt to redefine success through faith metrics while often retaining elements of capitalist measurement. Interviewee 6 described success as “the relationships that I get to build with students,” while Interviewee 10 characterized success as people being “free to be the person that God designed them to be.” However, this redefinition often coexists uneasily with clear financial motivations and traditional business metrics, creating an internal contradiction that many participants struggle to resolve satisfactorily.

Theological Complexity

The theological landscape revealed in these interviews demonstrates significant complexity, particularly with respect to how participants navigate prosperity theology alongside more nuanced stewardship approaches. Elements of prosperity gospel thinking appeared throughout several interviews, where business achievement was perceived as divine blessing or faithful stewardship. Interviewee 1 spoke of God "entrusting me with some additional opportunities" because of faithful stewardship, suggesting a direct correlation between spiritual faithfulness and material blessing. Interviewee 15 described retirement planning and financial provision as stewardship, stating, "We made a lot of sacrifices early on in my life about. I'm going to continue to be a faithful giver," implying that financial success results from faithful giving and sacrifice.

However, most participants demonstrated more nuanced theological understanding that challenges simple prosperity formulae. The concept of servant leadership emerged repeatedly as participants attempt to Christianize management practices. Interviewee 12 explicitly referenced servant leadership and emphasized treating people with "dignity, [and] perspective" and being guided by "ethics, dignity, [and] perspective." Interviewee 15 described Jesus as an "easy-to-see model [of] servant leadership," using this framework to justify management approaches. While the data appears to offer a Christian alternative to secular management, it can serve to legitimize capitalist hierarchies through religious language while appearing to subvert them.

The theological complexity becomes particularly evident in how participants handle the relationship between divine calling and work productivity. Interviewee 8 spoke of letting God "be in control" and viewing work skills as gifts "he's given me for

his glory," which transforms secular labor into religious duty. This theological framework risks creating what could be seen as a distortion of biblical theology that elevates work productivity to spiritual virtue, conflating business success with spiritual faithfulness. The Christian work ethic influence is evident throughout many interviews; individual achievement is highly valued even when balanced with service-oriented mindsets, creating an ongoing tension between personal advancement and communal responsibility.

Structural Versus Individual Approaches

Perhaps the most significant finding concerns how faith-based approaches to work both challenge and inadvertently legitimize capitalist structures through religious language and individualized responses to systemic issues. When facing ethical conflicts at work, participants consistently turned to individualized spiritual frameworks rather than addressing structural problems. Interviewee 9 described asking "What do you want me to do in this moment? And how do you want me to respond?" when facing workplace challenges, while Interviewee 15 referenced the principle that it is best to "err on the side of mercy" when dealing with employee issues. While the statements provide moral guidance for individual decision making, it can privatize systemic workplace issues by treating them as individual spiritual challenges rather than structural problems requiring collective action.

The servant leadership philosophy exemplifies this structural legitimization through religious language. Multiple interviewees referenced this concept as a management approach that appears to challenge traditional hierarchies while maintaining them. Interviewee 12 emphasized treating people with "dignity, [and] perspective," and

Interviewee 15 used Jesus as a model for servant leadership, but these approaches often represent a Christianization of management practices that serves to legitimize capitalist hierarchies while appearing to subvert them through religious terminology. These perspectives create a hybrid ideology that appears to honor biblical values while often serving primarily economic ends.

The research revealed how this individualized approach can lead to problematic outcomes, including the justification of economic inequality through theological frameworks. Prosperity theology elements suggest that financial success indicates divine favor, while, conversely, financial struggles can be interpreted as indicative of lack faith or poor stewardship, creating a theology that justifies economic disparities as spiritual failings rather than systemic inequities. Interviewee 14's emphasis on stewardship and Interviewee 7's focus on "serving something bigger than yourself" represent attempts to challenge purely capitalist values, but these remain largely individual responses rather than structural critiques.

These responses represent a significant departure from biblical work theology, which emphasizes human dignity, communal responsibility, and work as participation in God's care for creation rather than individual advancement within capitalist systems. The challenge revealed in these interviews is that while faith provides important ethical constraints and relational focus, it often fails to address the systemic nature of workplace exploitation and economic inequality, channeling critique into individual spiritual development rather than structural transformation.

Summary

The integrated analysis revealed that American capitalism and Christian faith have created a complex hybrid ideology where authentic biblical values coexist uneasily with capitalist structures and prosperity theology influences. While faith provides crucial ethical guardrails and emphasizes human dignity and relationships, it often legitimizes existing economic systems through religious language rather than offering prophetic challenge to structural inequalities. The most promising approaches appear among those participants who maintain both practical integration of faith values and critical distance from uncritical embrace of capitalist metrics, though even these individuals struggle with the inherent tensions between Christian community-oriented values and individualistic capitalist structures.

Document Research Findings

Findings

In applying a mixed methods grounded theory approach, I analyzed 20 businesses (Appendix D) operating in the greater Green Bay area, each led by owners or top executives who claimed to have a Christian faith. I examined their website content to understand how these organizations communicate their values and beliefs publicly. While previous survey research indicated that many Christian professionals tend to compartmentalize their faith and work lives, this study reveals a more nuanced reality among faith-driven business owners. These leaders demonstrated varying levels of self-presentation of their spiritual convictions and their businesses, as reflected in the messages they share online. The analysis focused on three primary modes of faith expression: explicit Christian language and symbolism, implicit Christian values

embedded in their business practices, and holistic approaches that frame their work as ministry or calling. It is important to note that this focus on website messaging may not fully reflect the actual practices or daily implementation of these values within their organizations.

This research highlighted how many of these businesses incorporate faith and values into their digital identities, often blending explicit and implicit expressions. Only a few explicitly use traditional religious language, with some emphasizing principles like "God, family, service" or referencing biblical concepts such as "covenant" or "stewardship." Most organizations, however, express Christian values indirectly, focusing on themes like family ownership, serving others, community impact, and on qualities such as excellence and integrity. These core values typically underpin their missions, emphasizing the importance of building trust and fostering genuine relationships with clients and the broader community. A common thread among many was a strong service-oriented philosophy centered on community engagement, with numerous organizations actively contributing to local nonprofits and emphasizing giving back. They often described their work as more than just transactions, viewing clients and community members as part of a larger family. Additionally, a focus on quality and craftsmanship was evident, with companies dedicated to producing durable, high-quality products or providing exceptional service from a long-term perspective. Many operate with a holistic, people-first mindset, prioritizing employee development with character-building and purpose-driven work aimed at fostering personal growth and organizational success that extends beyond immediate results.

Document Research Summary

This research revealed that faith-driven businesses in the Green Bay area often embody a nuanced integration of Christian values into their organizational identities. While explicit religious language is used by some, many emphasize implicit principles such as service, integrity, community engagement, and excellence. These organizations tend to prioritize long-term relationships, community impact, and a holistic, people-centered approach that aligns with biblical concepts of stewardship and character development. While their website messages might not completely reflect how they practice their faith daily, the results indicated that highlighting their faith is important for shaping their purpose, building trust, and aiming to serve others. The data reveals a genuine link between their faith and how they see and digitally present their organizations in the marketplace.

Research Conclusion Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive analysis of the research findings on the intersection of Christianity and capitalism in the workplace, specifically among Christian business leaders in the Green Bay area. Utilizing a mixed methods approach—combining surveys, in-depth interviews, and document analysis—the study uncovered a nuanced landscape where faith and economic success coexist in complex ways. Many organizations incorporate Christian values implicitly or explicitly into their identities, emphasizing principles like service, integrity, and community engagement, often framing their work as a calling or ministry. However, the research also revealed significant tensions, such as a gap between the strong belief in faith's relevance to business success and the reliance on secular, capitalist metrics like revenue and market growth. Interviews

highlighted a spectrum of faith–work integration, from full immersion to compartmentalization, often influenced by cultural and systemic pressures. Theologically, participants navigated a mix of prosperity gospel influences and stewardship concepts, sometimes conflating spiritual calling with material achievement. There was a tendency to address systemic issues through individual spiritual practices rather than structural critique, which may limit the transformative potential of faith-based approaches to work. The findings suggest that while Christian leaders strive to align their faith with their economic activities, they often grapple with balancing biblical values against the realities of a capitalist system, revealing both promising pathways and ongoing challenges of blended ideologies that reduce the impact of a biblical theology of work in today's marketplace.

CHAPTER 5.

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings obtained from the research, focusing on how these results address each of the primary and secondary research questions. The project aimed to explore the complex interplay between American capitalism and biblical theology of work, seeking to identify blended ideologies and develop strategies for teaching Christians to thrive within this cultural context.

Grounded theory using mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) were employed to examine various variables, such as the influence of capitalist ideologies on Christian workplace practices and the effectiveness of biblical teaching in fostering a redemptive theology of work. The results of hypothesis testing provided insights into these relationships, highlighting significant correlations and areas where further exploration is needed.

However, the methodology faced certain limitations, including potential biases in sample selection and challenges in measuring theological and cultural impacts comprehensively. These weaknesses may have affected the depth of understanding in some areas, particularly with respect to fully capturing the nuanced ways in which cultural and theological factors intersect in the workplace.

Overall, the findings contribute to a clearer understanding of how American capitalism influences Christian practices at work and underscore the importance of biblical teaching in cultivating a theology of work that aligns with divine purposes. They support the project's main objective of designing strategies for Christians to navigate and

flourish within the economic system, while also addressing the secondary aims of emphasizing biblical education, inspiring a renewed sense of calling, and developing a redemptive framework for workplace transformation. This analysis affirms that a biblically grounded approach can foster meaningful change and renewal in the marketplace, aligning economic practices with spiritual values. Figure 18 summarizes the objectives, questions, concepts, and theories.

Figure 18

Objectives, Questions, and Concepts/Theories

GENERAL OBJECTIVE	GENERAL QUESTION	CONCEPT / THEORY
To provide insight into the American capitalist worldview impact on Christian Leaders' definition of success in the business sector.	In what ways have American Christian leaders in business been impacted by the capitalist worldview in conflict with the biblical definition of success?	• Social Cognitive Theory • Theological Theory • Transformative Learning Theory
SECONDARY OBJECTIVES	**SECONDARY QUESTIONS**	
To demonstrate the historical impact of culture on Christian practice.	How has culture historically impacted the Christian worldview regarding Christian success?	• Transformative Learning Theory • Theology of Work • Historical Theory
2. To reveal the blended ideologies that drive the actions of Christians in business.	How does a Christian in business leadership work toward a biblical definition of success in a capitalist system?	• Transformative Leadership Theory • Faith Development Theory • Theology of Work • Servant Leadership
3. To differentiate the Biblical and capitalistic definitions of success.	What theological truths derived from the Bible guide Christians in understanding the concept of success?	• Social Cognitive Theory • Historical Theory
4. To develop a redemptive theology and framework for Christian business leaders to integrate and experience transformation.	4. What practical transformational insights exist in the Bible that can mitigate this problem?	• Transformative Learning Theory • Theology of Work • Servant Leadership Theory

Similarities and Differences of the Survey and Document Research

The qualitative document research and quantitative survey data share several key themes that highlight how Christian-led businesses publicly position their faith and values, as well as how they perceive success and integrate faith into their work. Both sets of data emphasize the importance of relationships, service, community engagement, and a holistic view of success that balances purpose, well-being, and spiritual calling. The digital document analysis aligns with the survey findings that many respondents view their work as a form of ministry or calling, and they often communicate values such as trust, stewardship, and relational leadership. Both data sources also reflect a tendency among these organizations to focus on serving others and fostering genuine connections with their community, often framing their work as more than just a transaction—viewing clients and community members as part of a larger family or mission.

However, differences emerged in the depth and explicitness of faith expression. The quantitative data revealed that while 68.2% of respondents agree faith is relevant to success, only 24.8% cited the Bible as a primary influence, indicating a tendency to rely more on secular or experiential sources of success—such as mentorship (51.9%) and practical experience (61.2%). In contrast, the website content often explicitly or implicitly emphasizes Christian principles, with some organizations openly referencing biblical concepts or Christian symbolism. This information suggests a possible gap between the public (faith-positioned) messaging and the internal (often pragmatic or secular) influences shaping their actual business practices. Additionally, the quantitative data indicated a reliance on traditional success metrics—financial performance (57.3%) and customer satisfaction (68.9%)—which are often prioritized over broader purpose-

driven indicators like innovation or sustainability. The qualitative data, however, showed that many organizations actively promote values like community service, stewardship, and purpose, even if these are not always reflected directly in measurable success outcomes. This highlights a nuanced distinction: Publicly, these organizations often frame their work as faith-based and service-oriented, but operationally and in success metrics they still tend to prioritize traditional business indicators shaped by secular capitalism.

Areas of Silence in the Interviews

Lack of Direct Engagement With Capitalism

While interviewees spoke extensively about their personal values and ethical practices, there was a notable silence regarding the structural and systemic aspects of capitalism. No one mentioned the need to address or reform the capitalist system that may promote unethical business practices. It is as if they are unaware of the impact of capitalistic values, and guiding rules have blinded them to a pure biblical theology of work. There was also no direct biblical theology expressed to address changing the systemic capitalistic culture that is in opposition to biblical teachings about work. This avoidance and individualism signal a reluctance or inability to connect individual actions to broader economic systems.

Limited Emphasis on Organizational Change

Interviewees focused on personal integrity and ethical conduct. However, there was minimal discussion of initiating, or advocating for, organizational policies that reflect their values. The results suggest a tendency to operate within existing structures

instead of seeking transformative change at a systemic level, which aligns with individualistic rather than collective approaches to faith integration.

Absence of Practical Strategies for Navigating Challenges

Many participants expressed the tension between their faith and the competitive nature of capitalism but did not articulate specific biblical strategies or frameworks they use to navigate these challenges. This silence may reflect a struggle to reconcile personal beliefs with industry standards, revealing a fundamental concern that goes unaddressed.

Ignoring Broader Social Responsibility

Interviewees emphasized personal and relational measures of success. By not discussing the broader implications of their work-related choices (e.g., environmental stewardship and community engagement), they forfeit opportunities to link their faith deeper to social justice and ethical capitalism.

Neglect of Generosity and Sacrifice

The interviewees' silence about generosity and sacrifice in their professional roles is striking. These key Christian values are often foundational to faith-based discussions, yet their absence suggests either discomfort with these topics in a business context or a retreat to individualism when discussing the intersections of faith and work.

Implications of These Silences

Reinforcement of Individualism

The emphasis on personal ethics and individual moral conduct can serve to reinforce an individualistic view of faith that is less likely to challenge systemic injustices present within capitalism.

Potential for Misalignment With Christian Teachings

The lack of a collective or communal focus may misalign with many biblical teachings that emphasize community, social justice, and the call to love and serve others beyond individual interactions.

Challenge to Transformational Leadership

The absence of conversations about broader organizational or community impact limits the capacity for interviewees to lead transformative change consistently from a Christian perspective in their respective industries.

Conclusion

The interview data provide valuable insights into how faith influences individual practices in a capitalist framework. However, significant areas of silence regarding systemic issues, organizational change, broader social responsibility, and essential Christian values like generosity suggest that while these professionals may embody ethical principles, they are often constrained by a limited understanding of how to fuse their faith with a transformative approach to capitalism. Addressing these silences could lead to further discussions about how to make Christians aware of these responsibilities within marketplaces, ultimately fostering a more holistic integration of faith and work.

Quantitative Survey Summary of Key Findings: How American Capitalism Shapes Christian Work Ideologies

This research revealed a complex, often contradictory, landscape where American capitalism influences how Christians perceive and practice their faith in the workplace. Quantitative data show that a significant majority (68.2%) believe faith is relevant to success, yet only 24.8% cite the Bible as a primary influence, highlighting a gap between

perceived importance and practical application. Many rely heavily on experiential learning (61.2%) and mentorship (51.9%) over biblical principles, suggesting that faith influences their work more implicitly than explicitly.

Organizationally, respondents prioritized traditional capitalistic success metrics like financial performance (57.3%) and customer satisfaction (68.9%), while broader, purpose-driven indicators such as innovation and sustainability were ranked lower, often in the bottom third of indicators. Interestingly, despite 44.2% of organizations emphasizing societal welfare and community contribution as their purpose, success metrics still revolved around financial and customer outcomes, revealing a disconnect between stated values and actual measurement practices.

Furthermore, a notable paradox emerged; 68.2% agreed faith is relevant for success, yet only 24.8% drew biblical influence for success, indicating that many Christians operate within a blended ideology that mixes faith-based values with secular capitalist principles. This blended reality is reinforced by survey responses emphasizing service, relationships, and purpose as core markers of success, often over material rewards like salary or promotions. Themes such as service over personal gain, relational community, divine purpose, stewardship, and holistic well-being dominated personal definitions of success, reflecting an underlying attempt to integrate faith with pragmatic business practices.

The findings suggest that American capitalism has fostered a hybrid ideology among Christians—one that values some biblical principles but often supports practice of a pragmatic, relational approach rooted in experience and secular metrics. This blending results in a faith–work paradigm characterized by aspirational values but with operational

realities that favor traditional success indicators, revealing both the influence of capitalism on Christian workplace ethics and the limitations of that influence.

Pragmatic Faith Integration

The data indicate a moderate connection between faith and success among Christians. Only 68.2% believe their faith is relevant to their work—50.4% strongly agree and 17.8% agree—while nearly one third (31.8%) remain neutral or disagree. The Bible ranks fourth as an influence on success at 24.8%, behind practical experience (61.2%) and mentorship (51.9%). This data suggests that many Christians tend to operate their faith in a workplace setting in a pragmatic, experience-based manner, where faith influences success implicitly rather than explicitly guiding their decisions. The individualistic nature of American capitalism encourages believers to balance biblical principles with practical approaches, often leading to a fragmented integration of faith into their professional lives.

Capitalist-Driven Values

Traditional capitalist success metrics continued to dominate organizational priorities. Financial performance was ranked the highest at 27.9%, with customer satisfaction and loyalty combined accounting for 52.7%. Conversely, "Servant Leadership—Compassion" ranked at the bottom, with 37.2% of respondents considering it least important. This reveals a tendency to prioritize conventional business indicators like profit and operational efficiency, with faith serving primarily as a moral backdrop rather than a guiding framework. Despite their Christian identity, many operate within a success paradigm shaped by individualism and capitalism, emphasizing material and operational metrics over relational or spiritual virtues.

Relationships and Purpose Orientation

Many respondents emphasized relationships, community, and divine calling in their definitions of success. While 88.4% said that meaning and purpose drive their daily routines, only 24.8% cited the Bible as an influence on their work. Success is often defined by service, impact, and spiritual purpose—such as pointing people to Jesus or building positive work culture. Traditional virtues like obedience, humility, and compassion motivated only a small portion of respondents (13.2%), and their spiritual self-identity influences their work even less (11.6%). This discovery indicates that many Christians focus on relational and purpose-driven success, but often within a framework influenced by individualism—applying their faith in a way that emphasizes service and community over explicit biblical integration.

Holistic Success Model

Overall, the data show a shift toward a more holistic view of success that incorporates well-being and personal fulfillment alongside traditional metrics. Meaning and purpose (58.1%), physical and mental health (57.4%), and work–life balance were highly valued, indicating that respondents see success as multifaceted. While they prioritized operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, there was also a desire to integrate spiritual and emotional well-being into their success criteria. This broader view reflects an attempt to balance faith with personal fulfillment, emphasizing that success involves not just material achievement but also holistic health and purpose—though often still operating within a success framework shaped by individualism and capitalism.

These blended ideologies demonstrate how American capitalism influences Christians to develop a fragmented approach where faith is integrated pragmatically and

implicitly. Success is driven by traditional metrics. Relationships and purpose are emphasized, and well-being is recognized as part of a broader success model. Despite strong Christian identities, many operate within a success paradigm that prioritizes operational and material gains, often at the expense of a fully integrated biblical worldview.

Blended Ideologies From the Research

Prosperity Discipleship

Prosperity discipleship answers one of my secondary research questions. How has the American capitalistic culture historically impacted the Christian worldview of success? According to this ideology, God desires Christians to succeed, but that success is measured solely by capitalist standards—such as profit, growth, and efficiency—rather than biblical values like justice, caring for the poor, and faithful stewardship. Faith is often seen as a tool to attain secular success rather than a framework that challenges or redefines what true success should be. In this context, some may engage in impression management or self-presentation, emphasizing a moral or upright image to align with societal expectations of success. The data showed a strong desire among respondents to live a morally and ethically upright life in the workplace, but their mindset tends to be individualistic—reflecting the claim that "as long as I am good, God will bless me"—without much movement toward sacrificial, redemptive efforts that benefit the whole community.

Therapeutic Stewardship

The ideology of therapeutic stewardship uses the language of biblical stewardship, which gets redefined from "managing God's resources for Kingdom

purposes" to "finding personal meaning and fulfillment through work." Like prosperity discipleship, it encompasses an individualistic approach that reflects the capitalist focus on self-profit, but with a spiritual twist—that God is blessing me with resources, and I need to steward them for my own well-being. The emphasis shifts away from prophetic responsibility toward personal wellness, turning work into a means of self-actualization rather than serving others.

Sanitized Servant Leadership

The ideology of sanitized servant leadership transforms Jesus's radical model of servant leadership—one that challenged power and prioritized the marginalized—into "kinder capitalism." Leaders may use compassionate language, but they still uphold the same hierarchical structures and profit-focused goals. This ideology is the belief that should serve only up to the point where it doesn't hurt or create any real personal sacrifice, often adding a layer of religious pressure to perform without truly lowering oneself. This version of servant leadership is more about appearances than genuine humility or systemic change.

Functional Deism

The ideology of functional deism explains how many Christians act as if God cares about their overall well-being but isn't involved in their daily work decisions. Faith becomes a private source of comfort that doesn't challenge the way the economy operates, allowing believers to separate their spiritual and professional lives. Essentially, this belief shifts their roles to that of a capitalist who uses faith as a tool rather than fully living as a person of faith within a capitalist system. As a result, people of faith tend to be

passive and hidden, working alongside capitalist values and blending into the system without actively challenging or embodying their faith in their work.

Aspirational Christianity

The ideology of aspirational Christianity explains how Christians often use Jesus-like language about serving society and caring for others, but their actual actions and decisions are still primarily driven by financial results and market success. This approach has little real spiritual impact on the workplace because it doesn't model and reflect the behaviors it talks about. Such Christians speak as if they are disciples, but their measuring sticks are still rooted in capitalist values. It is more about sounding Christian than truly living out those teachings. They talk like disciples but measure like capitalists.

Individualized Calling

The ideology of individualized calling reduces the biblical idea of calling to personal purpose and career fulfillment, focusing on "what God wants for me" rather than participating in his mission of justice and restoration. Work becomes primarily about individual success—climbing in role, income, or influence—measured by capitalist standards of achievement. It is about personal advancement rather than how God might want to transform the world through their work. The concept of calling rarely, if ever, involves taking a step down, making sacrifices, or serving others in a way that challenges personal comfort or status.

Conclusion: The Great Accommodation

These six blended ideologies create the Great Accommodation—a form of Christianity that appears faithful but has been fundamentally shaped by capitalist assumptions about human worth, success, and the purpose of work. It represents a

profound theological shift where American Christianity has fundamentally restructured itself to align with capitalist values, creating what amounts to a new religious framework. This accommodation operates through four key mechanisms: the privatization of faith that removes Christianity from challenging public economic structures, redefinition of core biblical concepts like servant leadership and stewardship to serve capitalist objectives rather than prophetic witness, replacement of justice-oriented theological language with therapeutic terminology focused on individual fulfillment, and adoption of capitalist success metrics as measures of divine blessing. Rather than Christianity transforming culture, culture systematically reshapes Christian thought and practice to serve economic ends.

The consequences of this accommodation extend far beyond mere cultural influence. These findings represent what can only be described as theological capture, where capitalism has become the primary discipling force in American Christian life. While individual believers may exhibit greater personal kindness and therapeutic well-being, they simultaneously participate in and legitimize economic systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice, precisely because their faith has been reframed to support rather than challenge these structures. These accommodations create the ideal religious citizen for a capitalist society: one who provides moral legitimacy and personal comfort while remaining systemically passive. The tragedy is that churches, meant to be centers of prophetic formation, have been outpaced by market forces in shaping Christian imagination, leading believers to unconsciously measure God's favor through the very material metrics that Jesus explicitly warned would corrupt spiritual vision and communal solidarity.

Secondary Research Questions

How Has the American Capitalistic Culture Historically Impacted the Christian Worldview of Success?

Historically, American capitalism has shaped a blended ideology among Christians, where success is often equated with material prosperity, growth, and operational efficiency—metrics rooted in secular, capitalist values rather than biblical standards of justice, humility, and service. These measurements of success have led to a prosperity discipleship, where faith is used as a tool to attain worldly success, and biblical concepts like servant leadership are sanitized or reinterpreted to fit market-driven goals. The result is a theological shift that privileges individual achievement and material wealth over communal well-being and justice.

What Biblical Truths Guide Christians in Understanding Success at Work?

Biblical truths such as stewardship, humility, justice, and service serve as foundational guides for Christians seeking a biblical understanding of success. Scriptures like Matthew 25:21 emphasize "faithful stewardship", while Mark 10:45 highlights "servant leadership" modeled by Jesus. Proverbs 3:5–6 encourages reliance on divine guidance rather than solely on "human understanding." These truths call believers to pursue work that reflects divine justice, humility, and service—values often overshadowed by secular success metrics in the capitalist context.

What Are the Cultural and Societal Pressures Challenging Christians in the Workplace to Conform to Capitalistic Values?

Cultural pressures include the emphasis on individual achievement, material success, and operational metrics like profitability and growth—values reinforced by

societal narratives about success and personal worth. Societal expectations for competitive excellence and the desire for social mobility further pressure Christians to adopt secular standards. Additionally, the normalization of consumerism and the tendency to equate work with self-fulfillment create a climate where conformity to capitalist values is almost inevitable, often at the expense of biblical virtues like justice, humility, and sacrificial service.

Theological Significance

God is actively at work in this space, and recent gatherings like the Lausanne conference in Seoul, Korea—where nearly 2,000 global leaders spent a week focusing on God's presence in the marketplace—highlight this movement. There is a growing recognition among churches of the deep disconnect between faith and economics, especially considering that the largest unreached mission field in America is within local communities. The opportunity to engage and reimagine how faith intersects with work is more urgent than ever.

However, these blended ideologies—what I call "the Great Accommodation"—have shaped a version of Christianity that appears faithful on the surface but is fundamentally influenced by capitalist assumptions about human worth, success, and the purpose of work. These blended perspectives have led to a significant theological shift, where American Christianity aligns more with economic systems than prophetic truth, creating a new, distorted religious framework. This accommodation operates in four main ways: privatizing faith so it no longer challenges public economic structures; redefining biblical concepts like servant leadership and stewardship to serve capitalist goals instead of prophetic justice; replacing justice-focused theological language with therapeutic

language centered on individual fulfillment; and adopting capitalist metrics of success as signs of divine blessing. Instead of Christianity transforming culture, culture is reshaping Christian thought to serve economic interests.

The consequences go far beyond cultural influence, which is a form of theological capture, where capitalism has become the dominant discipling force in American Christian life. While many believers may show kindness and seek personal well-being, they often unknowingly participate in and legitimize economic systems that sustain inequality and injustice because their faith has been reframed to support these structures rather than challenge them. These ideologies create the ideal religious citizen for capitalism: one who provides moral legitimacy and personal comfort but remains passive in systemic change. The tragic reality is that churches, which should be centers of prophetic formation, have been overtaken by market forces, shaping Christian imagination and causing believers to unconsciously measure God's favor through material success—precisely what Jesus warned would distort spiritual vision and weaken community solidarity.

Validity and Trustworthiness of the Project

The validity of this research is expected to be strong, primarily because of the use of Atlas.ti (Version 24.0.1) for thorough data analysis and mixed methods with multiple data sources. To increase accountability and reduce bias, the study involved a third-party interviewer, input from doctoral-level reviewers, a business colleague for data collection, and an external auditor for review. Additionally, efforts have been made to diversify participant demographics—covering ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background—to ensure the data accurately reflect the population being studied. The research is also

shaped by my personal experience as a Christian navigating how the capitalist worldview influences perceptions of success within their organization. Throughout the process, participant confidentiality and ethical standards were maintained, with a focus on transforming Christian theology of work and success to align more closely with Kingdom principles.

Summary of the Effectiveness of the Transformational Strategy

The strength of my transformational strategy lies in its comprehensive approach, using a combination of teaching and training programs for Christians in business to help them identify and name these blended ideologies and providing pastors with resources to facilitate similar transformation within their congregations. The mixed methods approach, including numerous surveys, helped validate the findings and added depth to the research. However, a weakness was that some of my survey and interview questions could have been more specific to better guide the data collection process. One key learning was that with a grounded theory approach, I did not fully know what I would discover, which made some questions less targeted. If I had the chance to do it all again, I would conduct second interviews with some survey respondents and interviewees to deepen the understanding and validation of the findings.

Project Insights and Lessons Learned

Through this project, I learned that struggles and challenges are not wasted. The challenges are often the times which are dependent on new learning from the Holy Spirit yielding deep understanding and growth. Putting in the effort to find time to do research, and making sacrifices, was truly worthwhile, especially when I heard Dr. Kit Danley and Dr. Eric Swanson's words about slowing down and appreciating the process. This work is

meaningful and worth the patience. Martine Audéoud's dissertation (2023) was a powerful reframe that this effort is not my idea, but a stewardship of what God has entrusted to me, which gave me endurance and a sense of purpose. With that mindset, I found myself reflecting on my own guilt in discovering these ideologies and how they are present in my own life. I've blended parts of my faith with the culture I live in and realizing that through my research was enough to make it worthwhile.

I also realized that, despite all the research and exploration in this field, nothing is truly new under the sun. This project introduced me to a community of researchers, writers, and explorers who are also seeking to understand faith and work. Most of the people I surveyed, interviewed, or studied shared a sincere desire to do right in God's eyes at work, which reinforced how important this work is. If I could do things differently next time, I would probably include more iterative feedback—like conducting follow-up interviews with some participants—to deepen my insights and gain a richer understanding of their perspectives.

Communication Strategies Discovered

Through this project, I discovered several crucial communication strategies that proved essential for gathering authentic data and building trust with participants. Most significantly, using a third-party interviewer while keeping my pastoral identity hidden was transformative. It created a safe space where participants could share honestly without feeling pressure to provide spiritually correct answers. I learned that framing questions in neutral, business-focused language initially, rather than using explicitly religious terminology, allowed respondents to reveal their genuine beliefs and practices without triggering defensive responses. The mixed methods triangulation approach also

served as a powerful communication tool, as participants seemed more willing to engage when they understood the research had multiple validation points and wasn't simply seeking to confirm predetermined conclusions. Additionally, I found that positioning the research through the Together Green Bay initiatives rather than directly through the church created an environment where business leaders felt they were contributing to community understanding rather than being evaluated spiritually.

For future endeavors, these strategies will be invaluable in developing the 7-week course, Get to Work: God's Gift of the Workplace, and my planned book on blended ideologies. I have learned that approaching Christians with curiosity rather than correction, using secular business language before introducing theological concepts, and creating psychologically safe environments are essential for facilitating genuine self-reflection about faith–work integration. The discovery that many respondents were eager to discuss these topics once they felt safe suggests that there's tremendous hunger for this conversation in Christian communities. Moving forward, I will employ these same nonthreatening, exploratory approaches when training pastors and developing resources, ensuring that believers can recognize these blended ideologies in themselves without shame or defensiveness, ultimately creating space for authentic transformation rather than mere behavioral modification.

Replicability of the Transformational Model Implemented

I believe the transformational approach developed through this research—drawing from surveys, interviews, and document analysis—can be effectively applied in various contexts beyond my immediate setting. The process can reveal the specific ways that American capitalistic tenets have blended with Christian faith in different workplaces,

helping to identify unique contextual nuances. By examining how various factors such as capitalism, neuroscience, worldview, and culture influence Christian beliefs and practices, this approach can illuminate the complexities and tensions that Christians face in diverse environments. Grounded in Christian theology of work and enriched by insights from key thinkers, this methodology can help others explore how faith navigates the challenges of capitalism and becoming transformational Christan leaders within the workplace.

This approach is highly adaptable because it combines theological perspectives with existing theoretical frameworks, making it relevant across different cultural and economic settings. My calling to foster prosperity and peace in the city of Green Bay, Wisconsin has shown me the importance of empowering church members and Christian leaders to extend shalom into their workplaces. Developing teaching and training programs that help Christians identify and name these blended ideologies, and form a biblical theology of work, can be a powerful tool for transformation. Additionally, providing pastors with instructional content can facilitate similar shifts within their congregations.

Involvement of the Personal Learning Community

My personal learning community played a vital role in supporting me throughout this project. It consisted of 11 diverse voices who generously contributed feedback, critique, and encouragement over the course of 18 months. Each member allocated significant time and resources to assist with clarifying my conceptual framework, refining my methodological approach, and formulating interview questions consistent with my research criteria. They also supported me in the process of designing and launching the

survey, ensuring that my methods were sound and impactful. Their insights and diverse perspectives helped me develop a clearer understanding of my research focus and challenged to think more critically about the work. Some members—like Dr. Dave Kauffman (a neurologist), Paula Kauffman, Dr. Steven Gerndt (a cardiothoracic surgeon), Cheryl Williams, Tricia Murphy, the Together Green Bay team, Mike Vandermause (a retired sports journalist), Dr. Kit Danley, and Dr. Eric Swanson—provided not only feedback but also potential networking opportunities with key individuals in their fields. Their ongoing support, discussions, readings, critiques, and assistance during interviews were instrumental in shaping and advancing my project.

Recommendations and Future Action Steps

Based on what I have learned through this project, I am committed to taking specific next steps to continue addressing the issues I've uncovered. First, I plan to develop and write a 7-week course titled Get to Work: God's Gift of the Workplace. This course will focus on unpacking the six blended ideologies I identified—what I refer to as "the Great Accommodation"—and will teach a biblical theology of work. My aim is to inspire believers to answer their personal calling considering God's purpose for their lives, helping them understand how these ideologies influence their faith and work, and challenging them to pursue a more authentic, biblically grounded approach to success and service in their workplaces.

My second step is to continue engaging with this research by fostering conversations and networking with leaders and organizations committed to prophetic, justice-driven faith practices in the marketplace. I want to create opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and mentorship that will help shift the current narrative and equip

believers to resist the Great Accommodation. These efforts aim to build a community of faithful practitioners who are willing to challenge systemic issues and promote a theology of work rooted in justice, humility, and divine stewardship. Through these actions, I hope to contribute to a movement that recenters biblical truth in how Christians understand and live out their vocations.

Finally, I plan to write a book exploring these blended ideologies, encouraging readers to research their own local contexts and church communities. The goal is to equip and train believers to recognize and resist the Great Accommodation and to see work as a gift from God through a biblical lens. I want to inspire churches and individuals to reclaim a theology of work that aligns with God's original design, empowering them to live out their calling with integrity and purpose.

Summary

Based on this comprehensive doctoral research examining the intersection of American capitalism and Christian theology of work, several profound conclusions emerge that illuminate the complex reality facing Christians in today's marketplace. This study revealed that American Christians have unconsciously developed what I term "the Great Accommodation"—a form of faith that appears biblically faithful on the surface but has been fundamentally reshaped by capitalist assumptions about human worth, success, and the purpose of work. Through mixed methods research involving 129 survey respondents, 17 in-depth interviews, and analysis of 20 faith-led businesses in the Green Bay area, the research uncovered 6 distinct blended ideologies: prosperity discipleship, therapeutic stewardship, sanitized servant leadership, functional deism, aspirational Christianity, and individualized calling. The data expose a striking paradox. While 68.2%

of respondents believe faith is relevant to business success, only 24.8% cited the Bible as a primary influence on their work practices, revealing how capitalism has become a primary discipling force in American Christian life, often outpacing biblical formation in shaping believers' understanding of work and success.

Perhaps most significantly, this research demonstrates that rather than Christianity transforming culture, American capitalism has systematically captured and reshaped Christian imagination by privatizing faith, redefining biblical concepts to serve capitalist objectives, replacing justice-oriented language with therapeutic terminology, and adopting material success metrics as measures of divine blessing. This theological capture creates believers who exhibit personal kindness while unknowingly participating in systems that perpetuate inequality—precisely because their faith has been reframed to support rather than prophetically challenge these structures. The ultimate tragedy is that churches, meant to be centers of prophetic formation, have been outpaced by market forces in shaping Christian consciousness, producing what capitalism requires: religious citizens who provide moral legitimacy while remaining structurally compliant. However, the research also points toward hope. Participants who maintained both practical integration of faith values and critical distance from uncritical embrace of capitalist metrics, there emerged glimpses of authentic biblical theology of work, suggesting the possibility for developing comprehensive strategies to help Christians reclaim a prophetic understanding of work as participation in God's mission of justice and restoration.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY PROMPT

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

To be sent to those in business that claim to have a Christian faith and oversees at least one person in their place of business.

1. How many people do you lead or manage in your place of work?

1 person

2-5 people

5-10 people

10+ people

2. How old are you?

0–20

20–30

30–40

40–50

3. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

4. Select the top 5 tools/values you need daily to be successful?

Efficiency

Competition

Physical and Mental Health

Innovation

Close Social Relationships

Growth

Customer Satisfaction

Risk Management

Meaning and Purpose

Accountability

Strategic Decision-Making

Cost-Consciousness

Character and Virtue

Profit

Adaptability

Entrepreneurial Spirit

Transparency

Ethics

Happiness and Life Satisfaction

5. What are your top 2 motivations in striving to be successful at work?

Interesting, challenging, or fulfilling - Intrinsic Motivation

Rewards, recognition, or social pressure - Extrinsic Motivation

Obedience, humility, and compassion - Religious Values

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness - Self-Determination Theory

A sense of purpose and meaning - Meaningful Work, Theistic Purpose Theory

Food, shelter, and purchasing power - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A belief your effort will lead to desired outcomes - Expectancy Theory

A sense of spiritual self-identity - Spiritual Self-Identity

6. **What is the core purpose of your organization?**

To deliver high-quality products or services

To build strong relationships with customers and employees

To drive innovation and progress

To maximize shareholder value

Other (please specify)

7. How do you define success for your organization?

Financial performance (e.g., revenue, profits)

Customer satisfaction and loyalty

Employee engagement and retention

Innovation and market leadership

8. Prioritize what drives your motivation for work each day

Physical health and Emotional health

Meaning & purpose

Develop character strengths

Social connectedness

Financial security

Carrier Success

9. Do you identify as a Christian?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

10. Approximately how many times per month do you attend a religious gathering?

1 -2 times per month

2-3 times per month

3-4 times per month

4+ times per month

11. Is your faith relevant for being successful in business?

YES/NO

12. What are your top 2 influences for being successful for business?

Schooling

Mentorship

Books, podcasts

The Bible

Training, certifications

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To be selected out of the survey pool.

Section 1: Background and Context

Can you tell me a little bit about your current role and responsibilities?

How did you get to where you are today in your career?

What motivates you to come to work every day?

Section 2: Success and Motivation

What does success mean to you in your business or profession?

What motivates you to strive for success? Is it internal or external factors?

Section 3: Faith and Business

How do you see your faith impacting your business or profession?

Do you believe there is a conflict between your faith and your work? If so, how do you navigate this tension?

Do you believe your faith helps you in your work? If so, how? If not, why not?

Section 4: Values and Principles

What values do you think are most important for a business leader to have?

How do you incorporate your faith into your decision-making process at work?

Can you give me an example of a time when your faith influenced your business decisions?

Section 5: Future Aspirations

Where do you see yourself in five years? What are your goals and aspirations for your career?

How do you plan to achieve these goals? Are there any specific strategies or habits that will help you get there?