

NOVEMBER 2019

WE ASK “GOD, WHAT SHOULD I DO?” BUT IS THERE A BETTER QUESTION WE SHOULD BE ASKING?

BY SANDI TAYLOR

Often clients whom I counsel come to me with their questions regarding a decision they must make. Usually they are seeking counseling or spiritual guidance according to what Scripture says, which is a good practice.

What I have noticed, over the years, is that though we often ask good questions, there is a better question to ask, one that God is interested in helping us answer more than the question on our lips.

Remember the most common question people asked you the last year of high school? “So

where are you going to college?” Then about four years later the top question people asked was “What are you going to do after you graduate?”

Many of us may still remember the knot we felt in our stomachs when we did not have a clear or immediate answer, or we worried our answer was not impressive enough. We live in a world that values doing and achieving in a way that then assigns identity and worth. This pressure often leads many of us to feel deep anxiety that somehow, if we make the wrong choices, we are going to

be ‘less than,’ miss God’s will for our lives or even get left behind in some way.

When I face a particular decision in my life, ***I want a SPECIFIC ANSWER.***

That means that I treat the Bible as if it is primarily about *me*, whereas it is actually about God. After becoming a Christian twenty-five years ago, I knew I wanted God’s direction in my life. So, I found myself approaching my Bible almost as a magic book, hoping it would tell me *what to do* in any given situation.

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‘TIS THE SEASON TO SUPPORT HOPE FOR NEW YORK’S HIS TOY STORE

BY SHERRY HUANG, MANAGER OF COMMUNICATIONS, HFNY

In 1995 Hope for New York created and launched its Christmas outreach “His Toy Store” to provide toys and gifts for families in need across New York City. In recent years, HFNY has worked with affiliates and church partners who provide space to host pop-

up stores from Brooklyn to Harlem. Each pop-up store is “owned” by a HFNY partner church, and is planned by a volunteer committee from that church.

Every fall HFNY staff recruits volunteers, asks our affiliates for toy requests, and

identifies different toys for various ages and genders. This way, stores are stocked with toys that reflect the communities we serve. Toys are then delivered to each of the pop-up store and our volunteer committees help with decorating stores,

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CENTER FOR FAITH AND WORK EXPANDS

Over the past year the Center for Faith & Work (CFW) refocused its programming for the Redeemer family of churches to build out church-based expressions of faith and work ministry within and across each congregation.

As mentioned in the January *Redeemer Report*, Katherine Leary Alsdorf, CFW's founder and director for the first decade, agreed to step back into the leadership role of Redeemer's CFW last year to provide stability, direction, and high-level leadership. Katherine helped clarify the role and organizational structure of faith and work ministry for both Redeemer and Redeemer City to City, and led the effort to extend CFW's theological vision and programs to other churches and church plants around the globe.

One of the most significant expressions of CFW is the Gotham Fellows program. The Gotham Fellows class of 2020 is a solid group of mature vocational leaders seeking to grow in their callings. As we welcome this 12th class of Gotham Fellows into an exciting year of theological study and spiritual

formation for gospel-centered work in the world, we want to also acknowledge the leadership team supporting them as well as our faith and work classes, events and lectures throughout the year.

Scott Calgaro, in his role as Director of CFW, worked last year to provide leadership to the Gotham Fellowship, faith and work classes, as well as various events and lectures throughout the year. Over the past year we graduated 58 members in the Gotham class of 2019. We are pleased to announce the following pastoral leaders of Faith & Work ministry at each Redeemer church: Milla Nieminen, Redeemer West Side; Mark Ro, Redeemer East Side; Jeff White, Redeemer Downtown.

Over the last year Scott oriented these church leaders to the Gotham experience, and they now work together under Scott's coordination to deepen and grow this premier Redeemer discipleship and mobilization program. This year, Alan Charnock (2015 Gotham Alum and recent RTS NYC graduate) and Judson Bergman join the Gotham team as pastoral interns at Redeemer West

Side and Redeemer East Side to support the cohort leaders.

In addition, Scott is leading CFW's other Faith & Work courses and programs. He is supported by Laura Rogers in communications and program operations, and Cory Maxwell-Coghlan (2016 Gotham Alum and current RTS student), who is leading his third iteration of the 7-Week Faith & Work course this fall.

Redeemer has always recognized the importance of the church to equip and mobilize its people to live out the gospel in their everyday work — from the highest level of leadership to the most entry-level job. CFW has long been a critical part of Redeemer's vision and a model to other churches around the world. Scott, Laura and the church's leaders multiply their impact through the development of congregational leaders who come alongside the Gotham fellows, teach CFW classes and create new materials, in addition to living out their faith in their workplace.

We're grateful to Katherine Alsdorf for stepping in this last year to help us work through a
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REDEEMER REPORT

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Redeemer East Side

Temple Israel Sanctuary
112 E. 75th St.
(btw Park & Lexington)
Services: 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m.
& 5 p.m.

Redeemer West Side

W83rd Ministry Center
150 W. 83rd St.
(btw Columbus & Amsterdam)
Services: 9:30 a.m.,
11:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

Redeemer Lincoln Square

New York Society for
Ethical Culture
2 W. 64th St.
(at Central Park West)
Service: 10:30 a.m.

Redeemer Downtown

Salvation Army Auditorium
120 W. 14th St.
(btw 6th & 7th Aves.)
Services: 9:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

AMBITION IS AN ARROW — AND A WHEEL

BY NANA EKUA BREW-HAMMOND

Everyone's life is an arrow on a taut string.

– Dr. James K.A. Smith

On Thursday October 3, 2019, Redeemer's Center for Faith & Work hosted theologian, philosopher, and author Dr. James K.A. Smith for an evening conversation on ambition and desire. Smith reminded attendees at his evening talk that we didn't invent ambition. Long before we dreamed about who we wanted to be, he told the audience gathered in the auditorium of at Manhattan's W83rd Street Ministry Center, before we began making moves to make our dreams real, before our failures confirmed our insecurities and our successes heightened them, there were people who sought to win at life, too. His point? We should learn from them.

"I want to commend to you a kind of axiom for the Christian life," Smith opened. "As a general principle for spiritual growth and professional creativity, apprentice yourself to an ancient friend." Why? "It debunks the snobbery that we are smarter than the ones who came before," he explained. "To go back to these ancient sources who existed before CNN, before Trump, lets us know that we are on a continuum. It's not about nostalgia, but about moving forward armed with the wisdom of the past."

Having apprenticed him-

self to the titular subject of his newest book *On the Road with Saint Augustine*, Smith held up his 4th Century AD mentor as a way to understand what he called "the perennial challenge of ambition." To do so he laid out the particulars of Augustine's life.

Born to a Berber Christian mother and a Roman pagan father in a small province of the Roman Empire in what is present-day Algeria, Augustine had a personal experience with cultural hybridity. He attended university in Carthage, then took a job in Rome, and was later hired as a rhetor in the imperial court in Milan. "In other words," Smith notes, "Augustine was a 'Manhattanite' fifteen centuries ago — he came to the city to make his mark."

But at the height of his career, Augustine came to feel a cosmic "meh" about his achievements. If, as Augustine's friend Pontitian (a fellow North African and officer in the imperial court) helped him to see, all of his labors had been about gaining friendship with the emperor, then the weight of his life's work rested on the fragility and caprice of the emperor's whim. Augustine began to question the point of his ambitions, specifically where, and to whom, they were pointing.

"I aspired to honors, money, marriage," he wrote in his *Confessions*, "and you [God]

laughed at me."

The problem was not that Augustine was ambitious, Smith made clear.

"I'm not here to demonize ambition; I'm here to analyze it," he said. "The opposite of ambition is not humility — it's sloth, timidity, lack of courage. Playing it safe isn't humble." The direction of our ambition is the point, Smith emphasized.

If, as Smith paraphrased Augustine's description, the point is to win and be seen winning, as Augustine put it, fulfillment will always elude us. Accolades and human attention weren't built for eternity.

Smith recounted Augustine's description of his existential crisis of ambition as the "bitterest difficulties," adding, "This disappointment caused Augustine to set his sights on something eternal" — friendship with God. Augustine didn't stop being ambitious, Smith makes clear, he changed the direction of his ambition.

"What is the arc of a life whose aspiration is to be a friend of God?" Smith asked.

"To be a friend of God is to attain something you can never lose." He elaborated: "Human attention is both temporal and temperamental. God's attention is not predicated on your performance. You don't have to catch God's notice with your display. God's attention is a place where you can find rest."

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A BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS: DRAWING PEOPLE TOGETHER THROUGH ART

BY RACHEL MARTIN

People surprised me. My photographic portraits of the American working class are being shown this fall at Redeemer West Side's Gallery at W83, which hosts collections of fine art in the gallery space. The show was titled "Noble Work," and runs from September 19 to November 6. But it took me years to create the images that were shown there, and I learned a great deal along the way.

I grew up living a dual life, caught between classes. My summers were spent hanging around in a welding shop in my 3,000 person hometown in rural south Texas. During the school year, I would hang out with my private school friends in the mini-mansions of suburbia, surrounded by the children of surgeons and NBA players.

I did not realize until much later in life that my unique childhood, caught between two very different cultures, had enabled me to be both adaptable and a natural connector: a bridge between different worlds. That is true of my photographic subject matter as well. I am drawn to projects that aim to draw people together.

The photographic series "Noble Work" addresses the American class divide by bringing the working class into focus. It recognizes those in working-class positions across the United States, showing

their inherent worth, as both humans and workers.

I photographed my subjects on a large-format view camera that was built around 1950 and captures images on 4x5" sheets of film. The process of taking each image is time-consuming and expensive. The camera is also not something you typically see, so it causes the subject to be more stately and composed when posing for the photo. I intentionally photographed my subjects in this way to connect the reality of their everyday work environment to the formality and grandeur of 18th-century paintings and through the process, honor the subject and their work.

I enjoyed getting to know some of my subjects, hearing their stories and hopes and dreams for the future. For some of them, I learned, this is just a season in their lives. They are working hard to make it in America, doing all they can to "move up" in the world. They see their work as a means to an end.

Others are in love with what they do. They see the value and importance of their role and feel blessed that they get the opportunity to wake up and do their job. I have come to see that both are admirable. I have also grown extremely thankful for the work that my subjects do. Without them, kids would never get to school,

the trash at the beach would be overflowing and the gallery itself would be falling apart.

This project changed the way I view New York City. I spend most of my days working out of an office in midtown. I would get to work and complain about the terrible commute or the broken sidewalks without actually thinking about all that goes into making a city work.

One of my favorite experiences was photographing the men that were fixing the sidewalk outside my apartment. They were so kind to take a break from their work to let me take their portraits. Now every day when I step out of my apartment, instead of complaining about everything that needs to be fixed, I start the day being thankful for Balwinder and his crew of sidewalk repairmen.

Rachel Martin is a photographer based in Brooklyn, NY. Rachel grew up in South Texas straddling the urban/rural divide. This experience helped form her desire to explore issues that divide this country. She is also currently working on a photographic series addressing the racial divides that are present in the American Protestant church. You can see more of her work at rachelannmartin.com or on Instagram [@rachelmartinphotography](https://www.instagram.com/rachelmartinphotography).

SOUTH ASIA: THE FIRST CHURCH IN 1500 YEARS

BY [NAME WITHHELD]

“What do you mean I’m not preaching Christ?” I had just preached a sermon and was feeling good. I applied the principles I learned in seminary — a seminary in the U.S. known for its preaching — and had no idea what this person was talking about. It was an Old Testament text. There was no Christ in the passage.

This individual’s final words to me — “You’ve got to preach Christ” — both bothered and confused me. But in God’s providence, after my wife and I returned to South Asia to plant a church, I learned about CTC. I attended the Asia Pacific Intensive in 2014 and started hearing a lot that was new to me. And I struggled through it at first. I knew theology. I knew the Bible, but pointing to Christ from every passage and applying the gospel to my own heart was new. But God put me on a journey of understanding the gospel that changed my own relationship with him and the way I minister to others.

Then in 2017, my wife and I felt God calling us to start a new church in a particular neighborhood in our city. It is a very busy area known for its restaurants and late-night party scene. This area has been around for 1500 years, but never had a Christ-worshiping community.

So we gathered a core team

and started meeting with anybody who wanted to hear about the gospel. We held parties and Bible studies at our apartment. We thought we’d continue to meet there after we launched,



but thirty people expressed interest in attending! This was overwhelming. Our apartment can’t hold thirty people, and we didn’t have the money to rent a space.

One day, I was driving and saw a phone number for a building for rent in the neighborhood. This space was right in the middle of our target neighborhood, right in the middle of the hub of activity. Real estate there is not cheap and often not available. But this building had been empty for six years. Typically landlords don’t rent to churches, but when the owner — a Hindu businessman — found out we were a church, he said, “A lot of people need what you’re doing. You’re going to grow.” He then lowered the rent by 50 percent. I’ve never seen anything like this.

But we still didn’t have enough money. We were near-

ing the deadline to sign the lease and praying about what to do when I received a call from a man that I’ve still never met. (I have invited him to church, but he hasn’t come — yet .) When I told him about the lease, he said, “That’s a great place for a church, I want to pay for one year’s rent.”

When I hung up, I was so nervous. Did he understand what I just said? Did he mean one month? One year? But he called back the day before we signed the lease and said, “Don’t worry about the money. You sign the lease. I’ll provide the first year’s rent.”

We’ve now grown from 30 to 120 attendants, and we recently baptized six people. We don’t advertise (except for the nightclub bouncers down the street who point everyone our way!) and are not on social media. We want people to grow in the gospel as a community. Those who attend are experiencing something beautiful, and they invite their friends because they want them to experience this too.

So far, we have used the space for different community events like stand-up comedy and music nights. We have a co-working space to connect with young professionals. We also host CTC meetings and trainings.

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The problem with this approach is that the Bible was never meant to be used this way. It is not a magic book you shake, open and point to a verse that gives you instant direction. Coming to the Word of God this way misunderstands how the Bible is organized and intended to be read, misconstrues the way the Holy Spirit works in and through Scripture, and puts the Bible under *our* authority rather than putting us under *its* authority.

We come to Scripture wanting an answer, but we are meant to come to Scripture wanting an encounter with a person — the living God, the Lord Jesus. Jesus is far more interested in revealing *himself* to us in our given circumstances, than He is in being treated like our spiritual GPS.

If the Bible is not meant to magically give us answers to daily or life decisions, what IS it meant to tell us? Rather than tell us *what to do*, God fills the pages of scripture telling us *who to become*.

God's will for us *is* all throughout the Bible and we will not miss it as we seek to know Him through scripture. His will comes to us on His terms because His terms are always good and always for our very best. He tells us that primarily His will is for us to become like Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified." *Sanctified* simply means "holy, set apart." Once we receive Christ by faith we are 'sanctified' or 'made holy' because now we are "in Christ" and have His record of perfection. Paul here is telling the Thessalonians (and us today) that now that we belong to Christ we must allow the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out, the goal being to come to resemble and act more like Jesus than like our old selves (Ephesians 4:22).

In other words, Paul is teaching us that the same grace that saves us and makes us free from the sentence of His justice is the same grace that will progressively change us to become the image-bearers we are meant to be. Moreover, Romans 12:1-2 tells us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. As we do this "spiritual act of worship" and are transformed by the renewing of our minds, we now can discern what is the will of God (v2).

What does this mean practically? As followers of Christ we no longer mold ourselves to look like everyone around us in the world but now — with changed hearts — we allow our minds to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit so that again, we start to re-

semble our beautiful Savior. So, by God's grace we spend a lifetime (actually) growing into the people we (already) are in Christ.

God cares deeply about seeing us transformed into a holy people who reflect His grace and mercy to a world in desperate need of Him. We come to him with felt needs (give me answers) and He meets our REAL need (to become the people we are meant to be — not perfect, but a people saved and changed by the grace of a good and merciful God).

As we grow to know, trust and become like the One who gave up everything for our greatest need — to rescue us from our sin — we can rely on Him to lovingly guide and direct our lives for His glory and our good, no matter what the decision or circumstance.

So maybe we will not hear that audible whisper we so desperately want that says, "go to this school, take this job, marry this person, or make this choice, not that one." We can, however, be confident that when we ask perhaps the better question "Lord, will you make me more like you?" His answer is already "Yes!"

Sandi Taylor (MA) is a former counselor at Redeemer Counseling Services and is currently a student at RTS-NYC

AMBITION IS AN ARROW ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 3)

This said, Smith is careful to clarify that an ambition that points to God doesn't mean instant divorce from the human desire to win the approval and attention of our emperors, personal and public. Nor does it mean abandonment of secular vocation for pastoral work unless you are specifically called to do so.

In theory, Christians know we are to humbly answer God's call, but how do we actually do it? "What happened in Augustine's life that enabled him to make this shift?" Pastor David Lee asked as he began the Q&A portion of the evening. Smith believes Augustine's answer would be "Learning to love God and pursue our vocations in this way takes practice." He elaborated, "We have to embed ourselves in a community of practice because this isn't just learning the right ideas or learning to think the right things about our work or our calling, it's also about learning to love the right things and want the right things, and that's really about the formation of spiritual habits."

Emphasizing Augustine's

circle of mentors and peers, which included Ambrose, the Archbishop of Milan, Pontician, the friend who helped Augustine question his aim for imperial praise, and Alipius, Augustine's closest lifelong friend, Smith stressed, "Friendship is absolutely crucial and non-negotiable in Augustine's vision of what a whole and full and meaningful life looks like."

It's also about confession, Smith asserts. "It's important to not be afraid of the dark corners of your heart."

He expounded, "In Augustine's *Confessions*, Books I-IX are about his past; Book X, he is in the present, admitting his disordered loves, his 'secular ambition.' He admits ambition is still playing me because I want to be excellent. Excellence garners the praise of men. His conundrum, his Achilles heel, is the praise of men. He wants to do it for God, but he confesses, he's doing it for both."

So how do we navigate our fleshly ambition for human validation — especially in the age of "likes" — and our

deeper desire for acceptance independent of our achievements or other calculations of social capital?

Smith thinks it's about accepting the possibility of loss. "Faithful ambition is taking your gifts deadly serious — but open-handed so that loss doesn't devastate you."

"But how can we accept loss when we are called to be 'deadly serious' about our God-given gifts?" I asked when the Q&A opened up. "Augustine is not a prosperity preacher," he answered, "In a broken and fallen world, we have to be prepared for the tragic. Learning to lament is vital to living in a world where the Kingdom is yet to come."

The ambitions of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are powerful but not arrogant ... they are ambitious for us. Our friend Augustine would agree.

Our arrow may change direction, but God's is always pointing at us.

Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond is a co-leader of the Redeemer CFW Writers Group

SUPPORT HIS TOY STORE ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

setting up gift tables, and wrapping gifts.

On the day of His Toy Store, parents arrive to rest and shop for toys while their kids are entertained separately with crafts and activities. This year, HFNY's goal is to purchase over

4300 toys for close to 1800 families. And pop-up stores will be stocked for two Saturdays, December 7 and December 14.

To support His Toy Store, our goal is to raise \$95,000 by November 30. So help us stock pop-up stores by giving at

hfny.org/hts. The money we raise will go toward supporting families in need during this Christmas season. Extend the joy of giving, which will last beyond Christmas and into the new year!



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CFW EXPANDS ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 2)

challenging transition. Over the months ahead she will continue to work with Redeemer City to City to help launch CTC's Global Faith & Work

Initiatives, to grow the exciting opportunities to train and mobilize faith and work ministries throughout our global church networks. Fifteen cities are now

running their own Faith & Work fellows programs, based on the Gotham Fellowship, and CTC looks to expand that to 50 cities in the next 4-5 years.

FIRST CHURCH IN 1500 YEARS ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 5)

But there are challenges. My wife and I have experienced significant health issues. I've been in and out of the hospital. We also have three kids who need our time and attention. We're praying that God will provide more leaders. We're also asking God how we can use our building strategically to be a gospel influence in the community.

This neighborhood has been here for more than a millennium, but for the first time in its history, there is a community coming together to praise our Creator. God has provided the physical space, and he really prepared us in the gos-

pel through CTC's trainings. There's no way we could have orchestrated this. It has clearly been God all along.

Prayer Requests, South Asia:

For health. Both my wife and I deal with some chronic physical issues which flare up when there's a lot of stress.

For more leaders and people who will open their home. We always have people staying in our home, and we often have an extra 20-25 people eating at our house every week. Our home is really a

base for a lot of church activities. And with our health and the needs of our children, we could use more help.

For wisdom for the use of our space. We cannot say publicly that we are a church, but we want our space to be used in strategic ways in the city. We're asking God how we can leverage our space for the sake of the gospel.

This article was originally published in the City to City Fall Snapshot (ctcsnapshot.com). Names and location have been withheld for security reasons.