The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust him. (Nahum 1:7)

For any magazine editor, attention to detail—even bordering on perfectionism—comes with the territory. But for some time, I had been abnormally anxious about my work. I questioned my competence and value in the eyes of my supervisors. I apologized needlessly to coworkers. Further, I had recently moved, and I was feeling some isolation and pressure to settle into my new place. But in my pride, I hadn’t told anyone that I was struggling. I thought I just needed to push through.

When I visited family over a holiday weekend, my body rebelled. I woke up early, ruminating about a recent phone call with my supervisor, and realized that something was very wrong. A panicky feeling started in my chest and migrated to my stomach. My appetite disappeared. I took my nephew to play outside in an effort to distract myself. When I tried to work I couldn’t focus. By Monday, my symptoms had not abated, so I called my supervisor. “I think I’m having a nervous breakdown!” I told her, sobbing. I was fearful of what she would think.

To my surprise, my supervisor was adamant that I focus on my health. “Don’t even think about work until you’ve gone to see a doctor, Kathryn,” she told me. I protested.

Comforting the Distressed
By Kathryn Elliott

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust him. (Nahum 1:7)

We're called to be Christ's coworkers and faithful stewards of what he has entrusted to us. Growing in that ability happens in the midst of real life.
Too High a Price  
By Jim Ganther

His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ (Matthew 25:23)

Early in my career as litigator in Washington, DC, I got involved in a major case against a large aerospace company. At stake was approximately $1 billion. I worked with a small team of attorneys who moved into one of our client’s many buildings in Howard County, Md. We worked long hours, seven days a week, for months against a hard deadline.

After the Court considered our motion, we won on summary judgment (a legal term for a “beat like a drum”). The issues I had been responsible for briefing resulted in two-thirds of our client’s monetary recovery. My billable hours for the year were through the roof.

This matter took place during the first year when associates of my class received merit-based, as opposed to lockstep, raises. And I earned the biggest raise of any attorney in my class.

I remember when the head of my department brought me into his office to share the good news. He congratulated me and said I had picked the perfect year to “hit it out of the park.” I was securely on the partnership track. After praise like that, I should be elated, right?

I felt sick to my stomach.

The cost of that praise was not seeing my son John’s first steps. It was ignoring my beautiful wife and her needs. It was the sacrifice of my regular prayer time. In short, too high a price.

A year later, I left the firm, packed up my wife and kids, and resettled in Florida. I began to practice law in a more humane manner that allowed time for a rich life (even if my income took a significant hit).

My career has taken many turns in the years since we moved to Tampa; I am no longer in full-time practice, but still find time to take on pro bono cases. This year I successfully concluded two cases for a total recovery of less than $4,000. Small potatoes, perhaps, yet the praise I received from grateful clients who couldn’t afford counsel was among the sweetest I have ever heard.

It’s not the praise that is important, though acknowledgement of work done well matters. Rather, it is from whom we receive the praise that matters most. When I read the opening scripture passage, I reflect on the truth that the praise is not so much for the results of the servant’s efforts, but for the choice of whom to serve.

Jim Ganther is an attorney/entrepreneur in Tampa and founding member of that city’s CIC chapter. He is married to a tolerant saint and father to their seven children. Jim can be reached at jganther@mosaic-compliance.com
REFLECTIONS WEEK 2

By God’s Design

By Alicia Cassell

With God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26)

As I consider my work as a real estate stager, color consultant, and designer, I am in awe of God’s hand in my life and the gifts that he has given me. Approximately eight years ago, I saw my love of art, design, and my fascination with homes and architecture converge when my husband supported me in an opportunity to follow my quest to become trained as a Real Estate Stager/designer.

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My personal history of listening to baseless fears and lies caused a discrepancy between my frame of reference as to what I thought my skill set to be, and the reality of what God had in mind for me.

In his infinite wisdom, the Lord used my husband to help me reject fear and embrace courage and true humility. This allowed me to see my gifts as from the Lord—and proceed forward. Additionally, a friend and sister in Christ introduced me to her world of design. I shadowed her on some jobs and through her encouragement the Lord was able to nudge me towards a realistic assessment of my strengths. Step-by-step, I became certified in ReDesign and Staging, attained a business license, and launched a small interior design business.

All of my life I was tempted into false humility. I still contend with discerning how to handle my shortcomings. The Lord has taught me to rely on his grace and providence. Through him, I can press on confidently to develop what I consider to be a weakness and to be a faithful steward of my natural gifts for his glory. I marvel that I am even in business. As the scripture says, with God all things are possible!

Alicia Cassell is a real estate stager, color consultant, and designer living in Fairfax, VA. She and her husband, Terry, have five grown children. Alicia can be reached at ajm.cassell@gmail.com

REFLECTIONS WEEK 3

To the Victor Goes the Crown

By Jim Ganther

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. (1 Cor. 9:24)

I recently had an opportunity to see Tony Bennett in concert. It was a night I will never forget. Bennett took the stage with the bounce in his step hobbled by advanced age and gravity. He couldn’t hit or sustain the high notes, nor hold long phrases. He forgot lyrics and, on occasion, his band members’ names.

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And yet, at every opportunity, the audience swooned before him. Mere applause was not enough. Cheers erupted. Women (and at least one man) shrieked “I love you Tony!” I’ve never seen anything like it.

Why the rapturous ovations? They certainly were not for the quality of that night’s performance. Rather, 2,000 people paid good money to see Tony Bennett in person and thank him—and cheer him—for everything he had done over the past 70 years.

It was an opportunity to not only be entertained by Tony Bennett, but to love Tony Bennett. His talent has not been great for some time, but he continues to give all he has to entertain his fans well into his 94th year. His fans, in turn, recognize not the greatness of his current talent but the greatness of the man who offers it.

Now when I think of Paul’s exhortation to earn the crown, I will always think of Tony Bennett, who did.

PRAY

Lord, give me the grace and faith to believe in your Spirit as he encourages me to embrace new and challenging situations.

REFLECT

Am I holding back from a new direction I have been asked to consider because of lack of confidence and experience?

DISCUSS

Consider situations when you have taken a risk and been pleasantly surprised at the outcome.
Give Your Cares to God
By Alicia Cassell

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1Peter 5:7)

When we interact with clients in the workplace, differences of opinions and misunderstandings can occur. Our best intentions can be misconstrued. As Christians we are called to be good and faithful stewards of the Lord’s teachings and called to love and forgive even those who seem to be our enemies.

Several years ago the Lord afforded me a perfect opportunity to practice forgiveness, understanding, kindness and love toward a client who I believe twisted my words for financial gain. Due to my lack of experience at the time, I used language that did not translate equally from my field to another trade. I needed to clarify my position to someone who was not interested in hearing the truth. With a limited business background, my further exchanges with this client only served to get me deeper into a predicament that caused me a great deal of angst.

I prayed daily for wisdom to know how to handle this seemingly impossible situation, and asked others to pray for me as well. I had to make a conscious decision to give my worries and cares to God. Believing in his love and care for me sustained me during that period of trial. I learned from my rookie mistakes. Hindsight, and God’s grace, enable me to thank the Lord for the fruit that came from that challenging time and encourage me to give all my worries and cares to God.

**PRAY**
Help me Lord, to bring your heart of love, patience and humility to my challenging relationships and times of difficulty.

**REFLECT**
How has the Lord used difficult relationships to help me mature as a Christian both in and outside of the workplace?

**DISCUSS**
Consider a time when you were in a challenging spot at work and what good the Lord brought out of it.
Last December, Dave Mazanowski and I had an opportunity to spend time with members of the Palm Desert and Greater Phoenix Area chapters. We had a great visit and came away knowing that there’s a lot to be excited about. The new WorkLight identity will better enable us to turn CIC’s mission into a full-on movement. We have the potential to impact tens of thousands of lives and we are excited by and deeply grateful for the news of a $160,000 matching gift that, if reached, will fund this growth effort over the next two years. Thanks to all the members who hosted us, fed us, and listened to us.

Some takeaways from our trip include:

- “WorkLight” is not at all what I was expecting from the name. The selection process started with 300 names that were narrowed down to two leading candidates. I wasn’t a huge fan of the WorkLight name initially, but the process was best-in-class and I trusted the process. Now that we’ve started to use the name, I’ve seen how good it is and have grown to love it.

- WorkLight isn’t about changing and replacing what current members love about this ministry. It’s about adding to it. WorkLight is about connecting with Christians in the workplace who wouldn’t otherwise join a chapter. We want all members, veterans and new, to receive all the goodness that they get from sharing Christ in their workplace with one another.

- We need to think of impact and success beyond chapter size and attendance. There will be a spectrum of impact and engagement with this new model—some of which we can measure, some of which is intangible. Regular participation in chapter life or a challenge group is ideal, but even if someone reads a Spark email reflection once a month and takes a nugget from it, that’s still a benefit.

- Dave talked about being willing to die for his kids, but for a long time he wasn’t willing to form a challenge group for their benefit. He has since done that and chosen to invest in this mission. Are you willing to do the same for your kids and grandkids?

I’m as excited and confident as I’ve ever been that this exponential growth will take place. Because of that, I’ve quadrupled my annual giving in 2020. Join us in supporting this effort to connect Christians in the workplace!
Tell me about your history with CIC.

I’ve been involved with CIC for over four years. I felt compelled to act on a prompting that had been gnawing at me for a long time. I wanted to meet and know other professionals with whom I could develop genuine friendship in Christ. I realized that others, like me, want the same—to gather, to talk about the Lord, and to build friendship. CIC provides a platform to do this through my Challenge Group.

Can you tell me about your Challenge Group?

I got it started by just reaching out. I called about 40 people—and I’m always inviting and asking. People know I stand rooted in my Christian life. They know I desire Christian friendship. Currently, there are 10-12 men that contribute and attend regularly. What I love about it is the variety—the oldest member is 80 and the youngest is 21, so there’s a wide diversity of experiences.

What would you say makes your group run well?

My Challenge Group enables the Holy Spirit to drip on me. Gathering with people rooted in humility and sharing a willingness to learn from one another is huge. Authenticity and transparency are key. The younger guys bring a different perspective of the world. The more seasoned members share from triumphs and mistakes, or their realities of difficult issues or challenges that they overcome. It’s personal and professional. Everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher depending on the situation.

Revealing yourself to one another weekly keeps the fire burning. I won’t lie, often I can be hesitant to go to another meeting or go in half-heartedly, but I never regret the weekly dripping.

Can you give me examples of how this works?

The tools of CIC are wonderful catalysts. Intentional fellowship is essential. We meet for only an hour but we make it count. We ask: What did the Lord do this week? What did you do?

Recently we talked about engagement. Do we smile at everyone? We practiced intentionally smiling and looking at others. It’s amazing! Particularly looking at those people from whom you might normally look away. So much good is generated from acting on, “Jesus looked at him with love.” How do we take the appearance of indifference off of our faces?

We exchange lots of texts and sometimes meet for breakfast or lunch. The more involved we get in one another’s lives, the more it influences how we relate generally—both professionally and personally.

One guy shared about a confrontation with his boss that ended in tremendous reconciliation. Without the group’s call to action, he might not have moved towards reconciliation, and the boss would not have had the opportunity to admit some personal difficulties that impacted his response.

Another guy shared how he took the opportunity to share the Lord by “wasting my time for him and his purposes,” and serving a gym owner who needed help. We are inspired to be available to the Lord’s work. It can look pretty insignificant but it matters—holding one another to Christian intentionality really matters.

Continued from page 1

that I needed to work. “No one is questioning your work ethic,” she said. “Treating anxiety is just as important as treating a broken arm. Take as much time as you need.” I was stunned to realize that my supervisor didn’t just care about my work. She cared about me.

As I opened up to friends and family, they also wanted to support me. I had feared judgment, but instead I found deeper community. My need was an invitation to draw closer. This may not always be the case, but it is in hearts where Jesus reigns. Christ has tender compassion toward each person who turns to him. He meets us where we are, particularly when we are low. As Christians in the workplace, we do this for one another. We can show mercy to struggling coworkers and turn to fellow Christians for support. We are not meant to go it alone, but to be one another’s refuge.

Kathryn Elliott is a journalism professional based in Indianapolis. She has worked for newspapers, magazines, and television. She can be reached at kat.elliott90@gmail.com.
NEW BOARD MEMBER

CIC is pleased to announce that Dave Mazanowski has joined the board of directors. Dave started his first business while a student at Ball State University. He later cofounded Mainscape Inc., a commercial landscape maintenance firm that operates in 15 states. His vision: “How would God run a company?”

“The opportunity to be on the CIC board is a great gift,” says Dave. “I am especially excited about WorkLight and the future of the movement of the Holy Spirit via small groups. Challenge groups inspire members to be led daily by God and to grow in authentic Christian friendships, which is key. CIC has the foundation, talent and vision to make this movement work. I am honored and will give it my energy and passion.”

Dave and his wife, Donna, have been married since 1987 and have seven grown children.


Get something going.
Meet up regularly as a Challenge Group.

Our newsletter reflections and other resources will help you launch meaningful conversations.

To learn more go to CICINTL.ORG/CGROUP
“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

Galatians 2:20

CHRISTIANS IN COMMERCE PRAYER

Father,
You are my Lord and Creator.
You entrust me with a place of stewardship in your creation.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit:
That he may teach me to pray and live in Christ and as Christ;
That he may teach me love for family, friends and all people.
    A love that is selfless, humble, and wise;
That he may teach me stewardship of the talents, time, money and possessions you have given me.
A stewardship that serves, is generous, and brings honor to your name;
    That he may teach me faithfulness to your call to Christians in Commerce.
A call that unites us and builds your Kingdom in the marketplace.
Through Jesus Christ who is Lord.

Amen