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Haanen, Jeff. **Working from the Inside Out: A Brief Guide to Inner Work That Transforms Our Outer World.** Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023.

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Book Review



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Working from the Inside Out integrates faith, work, and personal identity development in a way that emphasizes our truest identity as children of God. Jeff Haanen, founder of the Denver Institute for Faith & Work, provides a valuable tool and framework for conversation and reflection on how our work is central to our calling to love God and our neighbors.

Through a combination of storytelling, research, and theological discourse, Haanen emphasizes the longing for meaning in our modern society and how difficult this quest for a meaningful life has become within modern crises and daily challenges. Though our culture may tell us a story of work that involves striving for personal gain, financial advantage, and individual success, Haanen points toward our calling as Christians to live and work for something bigger than ourselves. Rather than work being something that drains and depletes us, it can be a means through which we create as our Creator made us to in his image, and a means through which we love him and our neighbors well. Thus, Haanen reminds us of the Christian story of work and its purpose within God's economy. Though on its own, work can feel like toil and be "meaningless, a chasing after the wind"¹, it can also "feel creative, impactful, and important" (10).

Through emphasizing the importance of transforming the stories we tell ourselves about work from the inside out, Hannan acknowledges the way that our work is intimately tied to our identity. When our identity is based in the wrong thing, this impacts the work that we do; and when we work for a purpose other than the one for which we were made, this affects our emotional and spiritual well-being. He specifically offers five principles through which faith lived out in our working lives can be built: "seek deep spiritual health, think theologically, embrace relationships, create good work, and serve others sacrificially" (18). The book provides personal stories and discussion on each of these points in its middle section. When we live out our faith in our lives and work in these ways, it's possible for us to "bear good fruit"²; but in order to do so, we must "allow inner transformation to affect our core relationships and our work" as "God is healing the world first through our interior life" (27).

¹ Ecclesiastes 2:17 (NIV).

² Luke 6:43 (NIV).

The third section of the book—“Change”—provides effective action steps for readers to take, enabling readers to easily apply the content to their own lives. Importantly, Haanen describes change as a process that happens over time through engagement with ideas and concepts, relationships, work, self-awareness, and spiritual disciplines. The author’s own stories and examples are again helpful in making the content come alive in this final section. The vulnerability of the author throughout the book is part of what makes it powerful and effective. Time is also spent on providing ideas—and again, example stories—of how to translate faith into a secular workplace, providing a framework for faith-work integration even in non-Christian settings. After all, the work that we do—whether for a secular employer or for a Christian one—is a part of our purpose and our mission to love God and our neighbor well. Through contextualizing that work within the context of the Gospel story, Haanen provides an encouraging and valuable framework for reshaping readers’ understandings of what it means to work in the world as followers of Jesus. After all, for our work to be transformative to our communities, economies, places of employment, etc., we first have to be transformed ourselves—indeed, we are called to work “from the inside out” through the help of the Holy Spirit and through an understanding of who we were created to be.

Reviewer

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