

Christian Vocation: Antoine Claiborne, nonprofit/construction

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Preacher: Antoine Claiborne

[0:00] because we couldn't get the screen to work. Well, good morning everyone. Thanks for coming out this morning. The title of my presentation is going to be Competent Person Training, How to Serve the Human Community.

And kind of this part that I was going to talk about is being competent in your work and things of that nature. And if I would have did some proper planning this morning, I would have figured out that the stuff wasn't working and we would get here.

But I'm a construction manager. We think on our feet and we just kind of keep things moving. So in every good endeavor, Tim Keller gets into this section called Work as Ministry of Competence.

And he starts that off this way. One of the main ways you love others in your work is through the ministry of competence. If God's purpose for your job is that you serve the human community, then the way to serve God best is to do the job as well as it can be done.

So this section really, really struck me. And I feel like it really sums up how God has called me to serve in this job. And Keller in this section, he puts it a little bit differently than we would define, like competent person in construction.

[1:23] We kind of use that as it relates to like safety and having somebody with like the authority and the skill to identify like unsafe things on site and the ability to change those things.

But Keller defines it a little bit differently as he talks about doing work well and having this mindset of being competent in your work is something to satisfy you in a way to love others through your work.

And in my role, I don't always have the time to be on site and supervise every nail that's driven. But I do have the ability to kind of set the toll in the way that we build our homes and the way we treat our volunteers and the way we serve our homeowners.

And a little while ago, Hurricane Michael happened in Florida. And then this article came out in the Washington Post. There's this picture of these five houses in the middle of this picture still standing and the rest of the neighborhood is kind of demolished by the storm and they've stuffed with heavy damage.

But the five houses in the middle of this picture are five habitat homes that were built. You kind of see these five metal roofs in the middle of this kind of scene that you're going to kind of see when the handouts get here of these five houses still standing suffered only minor damage.

[2:43] I know a lot of people, when you put the word affordable in things, they think that it's cheap, but that's not really the way we operate a habitat. Cheap doesn't really factor into what we call affordable housing and affordable homes.

And those kind of go around. You kind of see that picture as well. And just kind of reading this book and thinking about work and the way I work, kind of a bit of my origin.

I started working at eight. I was put on the riding lawnmower. And I was mowing about six acres of grass a week at that point. So starting at a very young age, getting out and working and growing up on a farm.

I guess some of my aspirations were going up. Maybe I saw a movie once, like in elementary school, I said I wanted to be a stockbroker because I wanted to make a lot of money. And then I started kind of drawing a bit in middle school.

I wanted to be an artist or architect and going into high school and being kind of mechanically inclined, wanting to be either like an engineer or a custom car builder, those type of things.

[3:54] I really didn't consider construction until I got to college, which at that time is where I met Christ. And I was also considering full-time ministry as well.

And even along that process, kind of picking up some other jobs, I worked in the brake manufacturing plant one summer. I detailed boats another summer. I worked at Target for a couple years when I was in college, waking up at 3.30 in the morning to go stock shelves there and then go into class.

So just from that young age of like working and always having a job, I think it's kind of affected the way I kind of approach work now and the effort and ethic I put into that as well.

So yeah, so when I got to college, I started to seriously consider construction. I went there thinking I was going to be a civil engineer or some type of engineer, got put on the wait list, had time on my hands to kind of think about what I wanted to do, what major I wanted to end up in.

And as I talked to my advisor, she introduced me to the building construction program there. And as I just started to look through the courses, it seemed to kind of line up to where I wanted to be in life.

[5:18] And then also around that time is I met four guys who introduced me to Christ and seeing them live out their salvation also changed the way, started to change my worldview and changed the way I started to think about work during that time.

So over the course of my college career, like becoming a Christian and learning more about service and how that impacts our lives and the people around us and going to a college whose motto is ut prosum that I may serve.

So all those factors kind of feel like I've been being pushed along this journey into a life where I'm serving people through this nonprofit. So probably around my senior year, I really need to start considering some things, looking at a few other nonprofits, looking at Habitat.

I had a friend on the Gulf Coast who was doing AmeriCorps year after Katrina with another nonprofit. He's like, hey, you should check out this program. Like around that time, things weren't so well for the construction industry, 2009, 2010.

There weren't a lot of jobs out there. And I think that's another thing God kind of used to force me into this path. But I was still considering for-profit opportunities. There was a few companies I was talking to.

[6:33] And I was pretty deep into talks with this one company that I thought I was going to be working for. And kind of through the interview process, I kind of emailed them saying like, it wasn't the right fit.

It wasn't going to work out. And at that point, I really hadn't applied for anything else. So I was just kind of being a bum, working at Target, hanging out in Blacksburg with my friends.

But yeah, through that, God still remained faithful. I applied for this AmeriCorps position to come up here and work with Habitat. Came up in July.

I think I emailed Greg or something like that. And we kind of met. I met a few other people around the church at that time. And then a few months later, when I was moving up here, I was called Greg.

I was like, I don't have a place to stay. And luckily, Susan and Ivor had an extra room that they so graciously let me stay there until I found a place.

[7:34] So that's how I kind of got to New Haven, got involved with Habitat, got involved with Trinity. So kind of seeing like all these things kind of come together to bring me to where I'm at today.

So I'm a construction manager. What is that? What do we do? This definition, organizing, scheduling, mobilizing, and directing equipment, materials, and personnel in performance of a construction contract.

And that word contract is very big in construction. All things hinge upon that word and everything that exists in it. But that's a talk for another time.

So what I'm doing on an everyday basis is organizing, scheduling, mobilizing, and directing. How those things play out, organizing. Do I have plans?

Do I have permits? Do I have subs, materials? Do I have those things lined up for the project? Scheduling. What do I need to do? What do I need?

[8:38] Do I need? When do I need this tub? When do I need the electrician to show up? When do I need the plumber to show up? When do I need the roof on the house? Trying to coordinate all those things and get those together. Mobilizing the site is when is the portage on showing up?

That's always the first question that everybody asks, especially my excavator, since he's the first one on site. Temporary power, getting all those things set up so the guys can work and not listen to the generator run all day.

And directing, delegating tasks, coordinating volunteers, all those things that kind of go into my job. And I'll kind of elaborate on some of that as we kind of move along.

So the thing, I guess, the main thing with construction is we're just trying to, construction management, we're trying to make the project run smoothly from start to finish. In our world, we call that mitigating risks, trying to think of everything that can go wrong and mitigate those things so the project can go smoothly.

And then that kind of next slide with Bob the Builder in the middle there in that house, that's kind of a representation of kind of how my mind works. Like I have to take all these hundreds of tasks and materials and things and I have to boil that down into one cohesive project in the end.

[9:59] which takes quite a bit of work. I think on an average project, I probably manage about 3,000 man hours worth of work. And we probably have anywhere from probably 50 to 80 volunteers out a week on a regular basis.

Some of the bigger days, I've had 18 or 20 people out. So it's quite a job some days. So what is construction?

There's many different avenues that I can fall into. It could be transportation, petroleum, buildings, power plants, water management, manufacturing, sewer and waste, telecom.

All these things are different parts of construction and where you can fall as a construction manager. construction in America employs about 10 million people.

There's a lot of different sectors. There's a lot of different places you can fall and as construction managers, we make up about 6% of that fill. And as a habitat construction manager, there's maybe five or six of us in the whole state.

[11:15] So the group of people that do what I do gets even smaller as you kind of dig deeper into it. And non-profits, coming across a lot of people, a lot of people have a lot of different ideas of what non-profits do or what non-profits look like.

I'll put a definition there for you. Pretty much, non-profits, they're dedicated to a mission. All the revenue and all the money comes in, we usually try and push out into the programs or the missions that we're aiming towards.

So trying to keep staff overhead low, trying to keep all that other miscellaneous stuff low so we can put all the money that people are donating towards these programs, into these programs, so that we're supporting that mission and vision.

And the fact that I've learned through kind of doing some research on this, non-profits employ 11 million people, which is higher than construction these days, which I found surprising. And Habitat, the specific non-profit that I work for, we're an international organization in over 70 countries and there's 400 affiliates around the United States, each focusing on its own geographical area.

and that's mainly to kind of get the people in that community, the businesses in that community to feel like they're investing in their community. So we have several sponsor groups, one called Sleeping Giant, which is businesses, churches, and individuals from the Cheshire, North Haven, Hamden area that raise \$50,000, \$50,000 or \$60,000 for us per house.

[13:04] There's another one on the shoreline called Raise the Roof. They raise around the same amount and that's Madison, Branford, and all those towns out that way. They kind of come together to support and raise a house and I guess raise money for the house.

And we also have some bigger sponsors as well like Yoling Haven Hospital who donates property. They donate \$75,000 per house and we've had a pretty good run with them as being one of our sponsors.

And since Habitat was formed in 1976, we've served around 13 million people and not all that is home building.

There's other programs that Habitat does to get behind people and get behind having people have decent housing through microfinancing in certain countries and haven't really dug much into that.

I'm not sure how that looks but helping people with financing, financial education. We do disaster response, neighborhood revitalization which involves small projects and fixer uppers at different people's houses, a brush with kindness program where they were painting people's houses from time to time and all these things are kind of catered to the community where that Habitat chapter is.

[14:23] So they're specifically like pinpointing the needs of that community and going about learning how to serve those. So Habitat in New Haven.

We haven't done any microfinancing or neighborhood revitalization. We stick to purely home building. Over the past decade most of our construction has been new construction.

A couple rehabs in there but we've been buying vacant lots from the city at a pretty good price and building new homes from the ground up. been around since 1986.

Over 100 homes. Like I said before, 50 to 80 volunteers a week and this year we're on track to do about four homes because we do a rehab in there of an 1830s captain's house that we had to do some extensive work on which only has three foundation walls right now.

But yeah, we're getting there on that one. So our motto is a hand up not a handout. We look to partner. Our main goal is to partner with these families not to just build a house for them but to partner with them.

[15:40] So we do that through the 400 hours worth of sweat equity that they do. They come out, they work on projects on houses leading up to theirs and on their house. So they're like connecting with the other homeowners and other volunteers and you're kind of building all these relationships through that process and kind of seeing them kind of grow and their construction knowledge and they're kind of out there framing their house, they're tiling their floors, they're painting the walls, they're kind of doing all these things along the process as well.

And they also have a mortgage. It's zero interest over 25 years so it's a pretty good mortgage I'd say. And all that money from that mortgage kind of goes back into the program and building more homes as well.

Any questions at this point? How much does the average house cost? Our average house is about \$95,000. And that's a three bedroom?

Three bedroom, bath and a half, full basement. Yeah. Anybody else? So after that overview of kind of what construction management is and what it looks like for Habitat here in New Haven, I'll just come back to this section from Tim Keller.

thinking about what does it mean to be competent in your work? What does it mean to work well and to serve others? So I'll read this section one more time.

[17:26] It says, One of the main ways you love others in your work is through the ministry of competence. If God's purpose for your job is to serve the human community, then the way to serve God best is to do the job well as it can be done.

And thinking about examples of that, we have a lot of figures in the Bible of people who served and worked well.

And I think we tend to put them on pedestals and kind of idolize that. But these were real people doing real work. people and the first example that came to mind when I thought about that was Joseph.

So we'll go to Genesis 41. So in Genesis 41, this is where Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream.

He tells him about the years of plenty and the years of famine. And then Pharaoh kind of sets them up to kind of handle all of this.

[18:43] So if I could get maybe a couple people to read this. We'll read verses 41 through the end of the chapter.

Somebody maybe wants to start reading and kind of somebody else picks up after that. Somebody can read the whole thing. I can start. Cool. Let's read all of it.

Cool. 41. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand.

And put a gold chain up. They made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out for him, bowed to knee. Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.

Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without your consent, no one shall lift up hand or put it all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zephaniah.

[19:46] And he gave him in marriage a son, the daughter of a priest of mom. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph was 30 years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plentiful years, the earth produced abundantly.

And he gathered up all the food of the three seven years which turned in Egypt and put the fruit in the cities. He put in every city the fruit and the fruit of the mountains. And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance like the sand of the sea until he ceased to measure it for it could not be measured.

Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asaneth, the daughter of Potipha, priest of An, bore them to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh.

For even poor, he said, God has made me forget all my hardship in all my father's house. The name of the second he called Ephraim. God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.

[20:47] The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end. And the seven years of famine began to come. As Joseph had said, there was famine in all lands.

In all the land of Egypt, there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.

So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened up all the storehouses and sold the Egyptians. For the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all of Egypt.

So here, what do we see as Joseph's work? He's an administrator, basically, right?

I guess today you call him bureaucrat. In some sense, yeah.

[21:58] He's like measuring grain, but he couldn't do it anymore. Storing it competently. Yeah. Making the spoil. manager.

Yeah, he was a bit of a project manager here. He has a lot of authority, but he has a lot of responsibility.

Yeah. Yeah, so as we look at this, as we see, like, Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dream, like, that was only part of the work that God sent him there to do.

And as we see him after that, like, he gets all that responsibility. He has to administrate and manage all these things. We see him, he has to organize, he has to schedule, he has to mobilize, he has to direct, he has to do all these things to make this happen.

Like, he's, it says like several times here, he's like over all Israel. So, so not only did God send him there and put him before Pharaoh for this dream, but for the people as well.

[23:20] Because when he comes to that verse 55, when all of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread, and Pharaoh said to all of Egypt, go to Joseph, what he says to you, do.

So we see here, and Tim Keller says in this section about competence, it's a form of love. Joseph had to love his people, love the people of Egypt enough to think about their well-being, not only in the years of plenty, where they could have ate up all the grain they had, they could have neglected storing as much as they needed, but through that, through his competent work, he was able to save for them for these next seven years that are going to be very hard, and we see here at the end of that, because the famine was severe over all the earth, all these people started coming, and all these people were taken care of, because Joseph, he was competent in the work he did.

It was more, and in the book, in this section, there's this example of this pilot who has to land this badly damaged plane, and in that we can really kind of grasp, like, oh, he needs to be confident, he needs to think about these things to land this plane, and to make sure these people get down safely, that's like this immediate impending doom, but we see Joseph as more of a longer view of things, 14 years of him having to plan and care for and think about the needs of the people around here.

So with that, as I think about how that applies to me, how am I competent at my job, how am I displaying this ministry of competence, how am I being faithful in the small things of my work, and how am I doing those things on a larger scale as well to make sure and ensure that we're building the best home that we can, we're serving our families in the best way that we can.

And one of those comes through our mission statement, decent and affordable housing, making sure our housings are sized properly for our families, like not some big monstrosity, not something too small and cramped, but this three-bedroom bathroom half-house seems to have worked for us over this past decade or so, and it's allowed us to house a lot of families.

[26:04] Since I've been there, I've built over 20 or 30 homes in the last seven or so years. to think about the type of materials that we use in our home and thinking about our homeowners and how will they maintain those things, how will they be able to take care of their homes.

A lot of our homeowners who qualify for the program, their income is 50 to 80 percent of the area meeting income, so they're not at the top of the income spectrum, but they're not at the lowest level either.

They're usually in a point where they need some help afford a home and that's where we come in with this zero interest mortgage. Also, our volunteers plan it as well.

All the free labor that we get goes into keeping those homes down and allows us to build in places around New Haven where a for-profit builder would lose their shirt on a lot of these houses and redeveloping a lot of these vacant lots that have been around New Haven.

We also do that through energy efficiency. When I came on we were doing a bit of that, but over the past few years we've been able to beef up our energy efficiency, apply for our Energy Star certification, so giving our homeowners a home that they can afford utility-wise as well.

[27:33] We had one homeowner, I want to say this was four years ago, during the winter, one winter he was paying \$800 a month in utilities, which he was living in some apartment that was very drafty, terrible landlord, ridiculous rent as well, that's where all their money was going.

So once he moved into his home, we got that down to under \$200 or so, it was him and his wife, and three kids, and since then he's been able to take some of that money that he's been saving, he's been sending things back to his home country.

He's either from Sierra Leone or the Ivory Coast, he's a part of a group that came over the early 90s, around that time, so think like blood diamonds and all that stuff, so him and a few of his friends have been able to get into habitat homes, and we have been able to serve them in that way, and that's allowed them to serve their family and friends that they've left back home as well.

And kind of talked about site selection, like where we build. We have homeowners who come from some of these neighborhoods, they have family in these neighborhoods, and they want to kind of stay there and build there and continue to live there, so I'm thinking about that through the way we select our sites and where we build and how many houses we're able to build in the area.

There's one neighborhood where we built eight houses on one street, so it kind of helped turn those things around, having those homeowners there who are invested in their homes and able to kind of relate to one another, keep their yards clean, and that kind of reflects on the other neighbors as well.

[29:21] when we move into the neighborhood you see them kind of painting their houses or planting flowers in the front yard because they see this nice house next to them and they don't want to be outdone.

What I referred to earlier, the piece about resilient building in those houses after Hurricane Michael, we were able to kind of get in on a pallet program with this about three years ago with the Institute for Business and Home Safety and Travelers Insurance to build these, I guess this program is called Fortify to build homes that are like high wind and hurricane resistant.

So learning from that program and kind of taking some of those techniques and putting them in our home and kind of help them to resist these storms and weather conditions a lot better and add that value for our home, knowing they're going to have a home that lasts as well.

Question back there? Yeah, I was going to say you talk about making the neighborhood homes, I've done construction on the family. We had a vinyl siding, a window door, and gutters, and roof roof business.

We noticed every time we went to a nice table room, we'd do a house. These three or four other people come to us and do a house, and that's where we got a lot of our work. So doing like that, I remember doing five houses in a row off the neighborhood, you know, when they do good.

[30:41] But you're right about that, because people start working, someone puts on the side it's a facial, beautiful house now, and now the neighbors see that, and they start going fixing something, but we used to laugh about them, and we were like, watch, and that used to happen all the time, when things were good, in the early 80s.

Yeah, I know. Yeah, so you kind of, yeah, like one new house in the neighborhood could change the whole neighborhood. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, so, kind of thinking about these ways in which that, as a construction manager and kind of leading this process, I can kind of affect the direction that we're going, and the way that we do this, kind of feeling like Joseph as well, like I have the ability to kind of steward this, and shepherd this, and care for people, not just kind of getting them into the home, but trying to think about them over the life of the home.

Well, we have an amazing selection committee, it's made up of volunteers as well, so, when we have property that we have coming up, we usually have an application meeting, the last one, it wasn't, I think it was last summer or spring, there was about 150 people that came out to that meeting, 80 or so submitted applications, they narrowed that down to 18, and they selected seven families out of that group, so they're checking like credit history, work history, like these families, like community involvement, and all those things as well, they're trying to make sure that they're in a place to actually afford the home and afford the mortgage, as well as be a positive impact on their community.

We had one lady who, she was an older lady, she was single, and her goal was to foster kids, so once she moved in, she was able to foster a few kids while she was living there as well, but yeah, it's a pretty extensive process that they go through, there's a first application, a second application, and then as a part of the application process, they come out and volunteer for 400 hours as well.

I mean, 14 hours with the application, then they do their 400 hours. Are they free to sell their home at some point? The equity works out up to a certain point, like some of the equity comes back to Habitat up until whatever year that's kind of dictated in their closing documents, but after that, they're kind of free and clear too.

[33:53] do a state, please. Any other questions? All right, thanks, guys.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.