

October 14th, 1996

Speech at Wheaton College Chapel

C. William Pollard

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/pollard_papers

 Part of the [Business Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pollard, C. William, "Speech at Wheaton College Chapel" (1996). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 227.
https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/pollard_papers/227

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Work and Faith at Digital Commons @ SPU. It has been accepted for inclusion in C. William Pollard Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ SPU.

WHEATON COLLEGE
 CHAPEL MESSAGE
 OCTOBER 14, 1996

C. WILLIAM POLLARD, CHAIRMAN
 THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY
 DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

I am delighted to be with you today and share some thoughts about our common faith and commitment to God and His Son Jesus Christ.

(ANSWERING MACHINE)

As you know, I do so not from the perspective of a professor or a minister, but simply as a business person who is spending most of my waking hours in the market place making money--and yes--seeking to be a witness of the Lord I love and to have a ministry among the people He loves.

Most of us here today share a common belief in Christ and we are interested in business. Do God and profit mix? Or is the world of profit and business simply a necessary evil that we must keep separate from the spiritual world and our life in Christ?

Listen to the words of Jesus as He asks this same fundamental question to His disciples over 2,000 years ago.

Mark 8:33

Then Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter. "Get behind me Satan," He said. "You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man. If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the Gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his own soul?"

To put the issue in a modern context--in fact, directly to you today--why are you business majors and not Bible majors? Why are you contemplating making money in the business world versus being a minister or a missionary? What is the life of a Christian all about? You are young, and you may think you have a lifetime to sort out the answer to this question. In fact, those of us who have lived a little longer know that life moves very rapidly, and it is never too early to ask this basic question; nor will it only be asked once.

Listen to this poem of two men looking back at life after 60 years and playing that "Midnight Game" of what's it all about.

MIDNIGHT GAMES

Last night at a late hour
 two men, unknown to each other,
 sat brooding over fifty-five years of life.
 There are those moments
 when the proper ingredients of mood--
 time, silence, fatigue, accomplishment
 of failure---
 cause minds to gaze
 across the sweep of existence,
 playing a strange and ruthless game called
 "What it's all about?"
 Such ingredients being at the critical stage
 forced my two acquaintances
 so to begin play.

One man sat at his desk
 amongst paneled royalty
 in his private den
 surrounded by quadraphonic noise.
 In such opulence, he thought.

The other rested callous hands
 on a scratched kitchen table.
 No sound afoot except
 for the deep breathing of sleeping children
 in the next room
 and a humming wife,
 preparing for bed.

"Tally the card,"
 that part of man's being
 which searches for accomplishment
 said.
 "Count the score," it cried; "make a report
 you two men,
 separated by railroad tracks,
 square footage, horsepower, and clout."
 And so the first of the two began.

For openers, I own a home, he said,
 with three garages, each filled with imported cars.
 (I might as well say it)
 the spread is lavish

nothing spared to make it the best
all around.

I own it all; it's paid for.
You could say that it's an estate.

I own a business, and
I own three hundred persons who work for me.
(I might as well own them)
I tell them when they must come to work;
I tell them when to eat,
How much they'll earn
How hard they'll strive
They call me "Mr.;" some call me "Sir;"
Yes, you could say that I own them.

I own a wife
(I might as well say it).
I've capped her teeth,
imported Paris' finest,
paid for weight reduction,
exercise lessons, club memberships.
I've purchased her cosmetic beauty.
Yes, you could say that I own her.

I own my kids
(I might as well say it)
I've paid for the college,
the car, the orthodontist,
their doctor.
I've set them in motion
with trust funds,
European vacations
and front page weddings.
Yes, you could say that I own them.

I own my investments:
my property, my stocks,
my directorships.
(I might as well say it)
I own my broker too.
Without me he'd go
from broker to broke
Yes, you could say that I've got
everything I own under control.

I own a reputation;
 some say hard-nosed, others shrewd.
 (I might as well say it)
 I am respected, if not loved.
 But I never started out to be loved;
 rather that men might tremble
 at my word and decision.
 I have my reputation;
 Yes, you could say that.

I guess I own just about everything.
 Why then am I so empty of spirit
 as I play this midnight game?
 Why do I sit here
 wondering:
 why my wife is not here
 why my children chose other things to do
 if my company will survive
 if my reputation is secure
 if anyone likes me.
 Why must I wonder
 when I own it all?

Second half of match;
 please leave that impressive scene;
 cross the tracks
 count the score,
 tally the card
 of a second man
 who plays the game.

My house is old; my car rusting out,
 and I wonder, he thinks,
 if the furnace will last the winter.
 But (I might as well admit it)
 This place owns me.
 It calls me to itself each evening
 As I walk three blocks
 from the bus stop.
 It beckons with memories
 of Christmases, crisis,
 giggles and prayers.
 I am gladly owned by its warmth.

My job...is a job, humbling;

its income modest
 But (I might as well admit it)
 It kind of owns me--
 its opportunities to serve others,
 to fix things,
 make them go and click
 to make something
 with these hands of mine
 some sense of accomplishment
 producing finished things from raw
 You could say I like what I'm doing.

My wife, listen to her hum off key,
 was not a cheer leader,
 and Wellesley is not her background.

But (I might as well admit it)
 she owns me; I belong to her.
 so compelling her affection
 so deep her insight
 so broad her perspective
 so eternal her values
 so compassionate her caring.

I gladly give myself to her
 You could say that I am possessed,
 nothing held back.

My children; hear them toss in troubled sleep,
 average students,
 reasonable competitors.

They (I might as well be frank about it)
 own me.

I cannot withhold my time from them,
 my unrestrained enjoyment as
 they discover life and allow me
 to join them as both
 player and spectator.

The birth certificates say they are mine
 But my heart says they own me.

As to my assets,
 I own nothing Wall Street admires.

(I might as well admit it)
 A few things perhaps,
 but largely unredeemable.

All my holdings are in love,

in friendship,
in memories and discoveries
about life.

You could say that I am glad to be alive,
even if
my estate
is pure sentimentality.

Reputation?

No man knows me or fears me
Unless, you count my friends
And (I might as well lay it on the table)
they own me.
Why I'd jump to their side
should occasion arise.
I'd laugh,
I'd cry,
I'd give,
I'd die,
I'd hold nothing back from them.
You could say my friends own me;
I have no regrets.

Tally the card; count the score
the souls of two men cry out.
One owns, the other is owned.

Who is winner?
Are you as confused as I,
As we watch two men
extinguish the lights
and go to bed?
One face is smiling,
and humming off key.
The other is frightened,
listening to silence.

Perhaps we counted wrongly?
Perhaps we didn't know soon enough,
it was a different game
with different rules
and a different judge,
mounting to different and
very high stakes.

By Gordon MacDonald

What will be your reflections on life 30 years from now? As you think of this poignant story about two people playing midnight games, don't get lost in the fact that one had made a lot of money and the other had not. The issue goes deeper, I think, than simply the question of money, wealth, riches, and profit. It speaks to that fundamental issue raised by Christ: Who owns you?

During the last several years, I have had the opportunity to meet with young people all over the world and listened to them talk about what they expect out of life - their hopes and their Jesus. What do you expect out of life?

During 1989 when the Wall was coming down in Berlin and freedom was in the hearts and hopes of many people in Eastern Europe, I had the opportunity to travel on a train with a group of young people from East Germany as it was en route from Leningrad to Warsaw, Poland. These young people were eager to learn about the West and the free market system, but they were fearful of the future. They were fearful of the choices before them and concerned about the security of their employment. A few years later, I was with a group of Russian young people. Their desire was simply to have a society where truth was more common than deceit. By then they had learned some of the lies of the past and how it affected their future, their hopes, and their dreams. The young people in Japan were very materialistic in their views. They measured their desires for the future by the cars they could own and an ability to travel. The young people in China wanted to make money and have the opportunity to buy more Western clothes. Those in Africa were continuing to seek the opportunities of a better education.

Now most of these young people did not claim to be followers of Jesus Christ or to be owned by Him. What would the average young person from America say today to this question? What would you say? Should those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ have a different answer?

Several weeks ago I attended a memorial service for one of my colleagues in ServiceMaster. Bob Brondyke had come to that point of life where the question of "what's it all about" was a reality. At the relatively young age of 44 he learned he had terminal cancer. He died six months later. Bob was an officer of ServiceMaster responsible for a five state region. He spent a good bit of his time during the week on the road away from home and a wife and two lovely children, Rob 20, a sophomore in college, and Matt 18, a senior in high school. His memorial service was unique. It was conducted primarily by his friends in ServiceMaster, who not only talked about Bob's faith in God, but also how that affected the way he treated people. Bob's young son also participated in the memorial service and made a very significant statement when he said as he looked back at his father's life for the past 20 years that there was nothing more he could ask of his father than what his father gave.

What was it all about for Bob? Who owned him - the God he loved. What was the result - the story was told by his family, his friends, and the people he touched. Yes, he spent most of

his time in business, participating in the process of making profit. But the meaning and ministry of his work was in the lives of people he lived with and he worked with.

So is it good or bad to spend your time making money? Money is not evil, nor does it have a dark side. It is amoral. It is a resource to be used and invested or abused, wasted, and discarded. If it becomes an end goal in your life, it will bankrupt your soul. On the other hand, if you use it as a resource goal, you can fulfill your responsibility of being a faithful steward.

For me the market place has provided a wonderful opportunity to witness, share my faith and to live my faith. It has been a full time ministry as I have sought to nurture the soul of the firm.

My market place environment is ServiceMaster. We are a fast growing service company that has doubled in size every three years for the past 25 years. We are employing and managing over 230,000 people, and our services stretch from Karachi, Pakistan to Tokyo, Japan. We are a public company listed on the New York Stock Exchange with over 50,000 shareholders. And yes, I live in one of those pressure-cooker environments where revenue and profits must be reported quarter by quarter and where revenue and profits have been up every quarter for the past 25 years. The shareholders to whom I am responsible as a leader simply vote every day on my leadership. They have the choice to buy, hold, or sell.

But to measure my success as a leader is not on the value of our shares or the profit we produce. Instead, if I am to take up my cross and follow Jesus Christ, to be owned by Him, the measure must go beyond the bottom line. It must relate to the lives of the people I touch and influence, work and live with.

The objectives of our company are simply stated: To Honor God In All We Do; To Help People Develop; To Pursue Excellence; and To Grow Profitably. The first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. They do not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes. But because of a stated standard or reason for that standard, we can't hide our mistakes. They are flushed out in the open for correction and, in some cases, for forgiveness. In a pluralistic environment, not everyone will understand the purpose and meaning of our objective.

Listen to a letter I recently received from one of our shareholders:

“While I firmly support the right of an individual to his religious convictions and pursuits, I totally fail to appreciate the concept that ServiceMaster is in fact a vehicle for the work of God. The multiple references to this effect, in my opinion, do not belong in an annual business report. To interpret a service for profit, which is what ServiceMaster does, as a work of God is an incredible presumption. Furthermore, to make a profit is not a sin. I urge that next year's business report be confined to just that: business.”

How would you answer this shareholder? What would you say in response to the question what is there in common between God and profit? The link, I believe, is people--not just Christian, but all people created in God's image. We are not a Christian company. Many of our officers are Christian, but we also have officers who are Muslim, Jewish, or of no professed faith. We are sometimes criticized, as this shareholder did, for our mixing of God and profit, but seldom for our performance. These objectives set the standard for those of us who profess faith in Christ, to do what is right as we seek to walk the talk. Yes, not only to integrate our faith with our learning, but to integrate our faith with what we do with our actions as we work with others. It provides a wonderful opportunity for a Christian to lead--to lead by example and service. It has been an environment that for me is a constant reminder of who owns me; that my hope extends beyond myself.

Who are you and what do you want? The market place today needs Christian young people. Young people who are competent. Who are striving for excellence. Who are seeking to achieve high marks in serving the customer. But also young people who know who they are, who care about the people they work with, who care about them as eternal beings, with a soul that must be saved. It is that side of us that C. S. Lewis referred to when he said:

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations--these are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit."

As I conclude, I would like you to listen to this letter I recently received from one of our employees. She is someone I am working with. She is a seeker. She was raised and educated in China, indoctrinated in communism, and now works for ServiceMaster.

Shu Zhang

4107 W. Northgate #723

Irving, Tx

May 8, 1996

Dear Bill:

I have felt so much need to talk with you since I came back from the seminar.

When I grew up in China, religions were forbidden and the Communist taught us religion was superstition. Mao's book became our bible. When I was five or six years old, I could recite Mao's quotations and even used them to judge and lecture the kids in the neighborhood. Mao said: Serve The People; The Leaders Should Be Public Servants. It coincides with some of ServiceMaster's moral standards. When I think deeply and I see the difference which makes one work so successfully and another collapse fatally. That's the start point of ServiceMaster: Every individual has been created in God's image with dignity and worth. Ten years ago in China people were not allowed to think and speak freely. Those who held different opinions and views with the government were treated as enemy and enemy were not human being anymore. When people found out Mao was just another Chinese empire we lost

our believing. This is the generation who had been brainwashed since we were born. When I went to Beijing last March with Ralph, I met with my high school classmates, they talked a lot about the current material oriented Chinese young people. We had a lot of excitement for the big change in Chinese economy which brought tremendous opportunities for us but also worried about the generation with beliefs and moral standards.

Another big reward from the seminar is I got a breakthrough in understanding the way ServiceMaster's business is organized. My roommate is a dietary director in a Birmingham hospital. She told me a lot of details about her work and the way her division was organized. When M.L. Hillard talked about the different types of modern organizations, I was amazed! I had heard this kind of saying: a fine organization is a piece of art work, I began to understand the meaning of this saying. ServiceMaster is designed to be a big and tall tree with strong roots which penetrate extensively to almost every corner of people's daily life. It's still growing.

I was so impressed with the variety of ServiceMaster executives. They have very different personalities and styles which was reflected in the way they were teaching and talking. They gave me an impression: this is a collective that has tremendous energy and vitality. I really enjoyed their lectures!

I won't forget the class you taught. The only thing I could see is the wisdom of a great thinker, it's this kind of wisdom that makes the world we live so amazing. I kept asking myself: can you imagine how fast you could grow if you could work with a mentor like Mr. Pollard?

Thank you for offering the opportunity to attend such a good seminar. It's a very valuable experience for me and I feel another window is open for my mind. I appreciate your arrangement for my meeting with Bob Ericson, he is a very nice man, I enjoyed talking to him.

Take care and enjoy the sunny May.

Sincerely,

Shu Zhang

I hope these words have encouraged you to look at the market place and your role of making money as a ministry, as a service to the Lord you love.

10/8/96