

**Life @ work**  
**God, you and the work you do**  
**How to connect the worlds of faith and work**

**Introduction**

A Baptist Pastor was sat on a plane journey next to a man who said that his wife was a Christian, but he although he went to church, he wasn't. The man was asked what he thought when he did attend church. The man replied, "You really want to know? I often sit there in church after a hard week at work handling all kinds of pressures, and I sit there thinking this is completely irrelevant to my life. This preacher simply hasn't got a clue about living in my world."

A Christian sales manager put it. 'In the thirty years of my professional career, my church has never once suggested that there be any type of accounting of my on the job ministry to others. My church has never once offered to improve my skills which could make me a better Christian at work, nor has it ever asked if I need any support in what I am doing. There has never once been an enquiry into the types of ethical decisions I must face, or whether I seek to communicate the faith to my co-workers. I have never been in a congregation where there has been any type of public affirmation of the ministry in my career. In short I must conclude that my church does not have the least interest in whether, or how I minister in my daily life'.

There is a story related to Martin Luther King Jr, the Baptist preacher and Human rights Activist, which summaries what this study is about. He was once asked to speak to a group of teenagers, who were just about to leave School to go to sixth form College. He said 'If it falls to you to be a road sweeper, then sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say; Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job so well.'

The truth is that whatever our work it give us an opportunity to be significant.

So what is work? The Christians writer John Stott defines work as 'the expenditure of energy [manual or mental or both] in the service of others, which brings fulfilment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God.' It sounds good but could be a little to idealized to match most people's expectations. A good description might be 'a useful

activity undertaken with a sense of obligation.' This contrasts with the sense of freedom we associate with leisure. We may have an element of choice about the activity we undertake, but once we have made the choice we feel obliged to those we are serving to continue that activity as long as the contract or agreement is understood to be operating. This I think holds good for those in paid employment as well as the student and the housewife/ husband.

## Study 1

### Curse or blessing - working life

#### Introduction

A Farmer decided it would be nice to invite the local Vicar to have a look around his newly developed farm with state of the art milking parlour. On a walk around the farm the Vicar happened to mention about the panoramic views, the beautifully well kept hedges, the geometric patches of varying shades of green. The Vicar spoke up 'O Look, God is so wonderful, how beautiful are the works of his hands.' The farmer looked at the Vicar quizzically and replied. 'I'm sure you are right, but you should have seen this place when God had it all to himself, before I got my hands on it.'

The overall picture, as I read it in the story of creation, is that God completes his creative work, and then stands back from it to let us be his partners.

#### Wide view

1. Of all the work you've ever done [careers, jobs, chores] when has work for you been more of a blessing, more of a hi-ho,hi-ho, it's off to work I go than a curse?
2. Of all the work you've done [career, job, chores] when has work for you been more of a curse I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go, than a blessing?
3. What seems to make the difference in how you viewed the work in each instance?

#### Biblical view

Read Genesis Ch 1 v 26-31

4. What does the creation story say about the kind of God that we are like, v 26-27?
5. According to these verses, v 26-31, why do we work?
6. On those occasions when work feels like something we must do, what change in perspective on work does this creation account offer us?

7. What is the relationship each of us has towards God and his creation, as taught in Gen Ch 1 v 26-31? [Think about the Vicar and the farmer in the introduction]
8. Give an example, from a work setting of what it might mean to
  - a. be fruitful and increase in number?
  - b. fill the earth and subdue it
  - c. rule over the animal kingdom

### **Our view**

9. Our work is usually so familiar and routine to us that we don't stand back, as an artist does from the painting, or as God did on the seventh day, and contemplate a finished product. How is the work you do somehow fulfilling your call to be like God, to be fruitful, to increase, to fill, to subdue and to rule over creation?
10. If question 9 is true for you. What would it take to begin seeing the work you do as somehow fulfilling your call to be God's representative in exercising loving authority over creation?
11. Many of us just count the days till the next payday, holiday, retirement. Thus we see work as a curse, and not a blessing. What kind of work can you imagine yourself doing for the sheer joy of it, and not for the paycheck or the benefits?
12. For the married only  
There is more to marriage than personal fulfilment, or filling the void of loneliness. Married couples have a work to do together, for the glory of God, as co-managers of creation. What is that work you do together?
13. For singles only  
What is that work that a suitable helper [Gen. 2 v 20] might better help you do?

## Study 2

### I hate my job

#### **Introduction**

Writer Studs Terkel a few years ago produced a book called *Working*. The conclusion he reached was that, 'this book being about work is by its very nature about violence. To the spirit as well to the body. It is above all, about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph for the walking wounded among the great many of us.' From this view, and the fact that most British workers would like to tell their bosses to shove their jobs, something has gone wrong with the idea of work. From the opening pages of the Bible God gave man work as a gift and a blessing, and essential ingredient in what it means to be human. So something has gone wrong. The Bible offers an answer called sin.

#### **Wide view**

1. As you listen to the people where you work, or your spouse, what would you say is the number 1 complaint about their work?
  - The money
  - The boss
  - Poor working condition
  - Boring thankless tasks
  - The system [rules and regulations]
  - Other
  
2. What one job have you had where you felt like saying, 'Take this job and shove it'?
  
3. What really frustrates you in your current work position?

#### **Biblical view**

Read Genesis Ch 3 v 17-24

4. These words are God's words after Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. What has changed for them?
  
5. What words and phrases reveal the change that has taken place?
  
6. Who seems to be responsible for this change?

7. If God knew that mankind could not be fully trusted with the big issues of life and death, good and evil, as embodied in the two extraordinary trees [Gen. 2 v9, 16-17 & Ch 3 v 17], why do you suppose God took such a great risk with humanity?
8. What would be some modern equivalent of these trees that held knowledge of good and evil?
9. What evidence in the world do you see which testifies to the deadening [cursed] impact of work?
10.
  - a. What efforts do you see that society is doing to reduce the futility, anxiety, struggles and stresses of work?
  - b. How successful do you think these human efforts have been to eliminate the deadening impact of work?
11. Judging from what went wrong with work after the fall, and reading between the lines from Genesis Ch 3 v 17-24, what can you imagine was right with work before the fall?

**Our view**

12. How can you make your work situation less stressful and more fulfilling?
13. In what area[s] do you need God's support?

## Study 3

### Working for our daily bread

#### Introduction

Bill Russell is a retired professional basketball player; he is also a gold medal Olympian. There is great story about him. He was once playing in a basketball game when he suddenly and uncontrollably burst out laughing. His then coach, called for a stop in the play, to find out what had happened to Russell. The coach demanded to know why Russell had burst out laughing, and stopped playing. Russell responded that he had suddenly realised that here he as running around in what seemed like his underwear, in front of thousands of people, trying to throw a ball through a hoop, and being paid thousands of pounds to do it.

The work we do for a living isn't ridiculous, but it can attempt to make a claim on our life by telling us that it is the only thing, which is standing before us and poverty, worthlessness and oblivion. We just need to put our work back into perspective, when it speaks to us like this.

#### Wide view

1. What is one worry free job that you have held where you felt like saying, 'I can't believe that someone is actually paying me to do this, I love it so much'?
  
2. By contrast think back to the point in your career when you worried the most about making ends meet. When was that?
  - a. early on, when you were free as a bird
  - b. later on when.....
  - c. before children
  - d. whenever you look forward to retirement
  
3. Do you tend to worry more about finances when you are really 'making it', or when you are 'just getting by'? Why is that?

#### Biblical view

Read Luke Ch 12 v2-34

4. Go through the passage and look closely at its sentence structure. Underline or identify each complete verb once and any repeated verbs twice [e.g. worry v 22,26] Identify the subject and object of the verb [e.g. you and life v 22, life and food v23] Now identify the conjunctions, or hinge words, linking two or more clauses [e.g. since v 26, if v28]. Then answer the following questions.

- a. Which key verb and nouns do you see repeated here?
  - b. What would you say is the main, or dominant, or often repeated subject of the sermon?
  - c. What is Jesus saying about that subject?
  - d. among the many positive declarations of Jesus here, which one do you regard as the main central thrust of the passage?
5. The way that *God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies* is the way he wants to care for us [v 24, 27-28]. How might that analogy of the birds and the lilies apply to the Christian believer?
  6. Farmers probably have the best advantage of seeing how *God provides for their daily needs*. Can you think of other careers that are analogous to seed- planting farmers?
  7. If *God is taking the primary responsibility to feed and clothe you and your family*, then what is your responsibility?

#### **Our view**

8. Our most carefree days were likely to be those when parents were paying all the bills. Now our heavenly father wants to be that kind of daily provider for us. What do you find the most difficult about trusting *God for daily bread*, or heeding the words of Jesus' *do not worry* and *'do not be afraid'*?
9. How can we reduce the amount of worrying we do?
10. What *'purse'* or *'treasure'* [v 33,34] rivals *God and his kingdom* for first place in our lives?
11. If *God is low on the list of your priorities*, what things have supplanted him? [consider. *Affections, relationships, hobbies, recreational pursuits, home, business interests, weekly appointments, and emotional investments*] be specific
12. Jesus encourages us to place our hope and emotional investments in kingdom priorities, which will last for eternity. What then are some of those kingdom values, which you are investing in, which will outlive you?

## Study 4

### Vocation verses Occupation

#### Introduction

John Wanamaker was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century American businessman, he was also active in politics, civic society, and he was a Christian. He was at one time the Postmaster general for the United States. He was also involved in running the Sunday school programme for his local church. He was once asked how he found the time to run the Post Office and a Sunday school. He answered 'The Sunday School and the Staff is my business. All the other things are just things. Forty-five years ago I decided that God's promise was sure. 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.' He is an example of how it means to get our ambitions in the right order, [primary and secondary] and understand the difference between a vocation and an occupation.

#### Wide view

1. What are some of the different jobs or occupations you have had?
2. Describe the process involved in the decision to enter the general field of work you are in now, or the particular job you have now?
3. If you are not in the field of work where you think God has gifted you, what do you think that field is?

#### Biblical view

Read 1 Corinthians Ch 7 v 17-24

4. In this reading what situation or calling [v 17,20,24] was Paul alluding to?
5. In what sense is the word 'slave' used in verses 21-22?
6. In what sense is the word 'slave' used in verses 22-23?
7. Who then is a 'slave' today?
8. In either sense of the word, do you consider yourself a slave?
9. What reasons does Paul cite for believers not leaving the economic, social or religious station in life to which they were first called?

10. Is this an absolute ruling [v 17] or does Paul allow for exceptions that provide for upwards mobility [v 21]? Please explain your thinking.

**Our view**

11. If you were to stay put in the situation in which you now find yourself, what would this mean for you?
  
12. The word vocation should refer to a Christians calling to be God's people, his servants/ priests in the world. We need the additional word occupation to refer to work. So it is possible for a Christian to have many occupations, but just one vocation. How are you doing at making the distinction between these parts of your life?
  
13. How else might you show your Lord that you embrace the primacy of vocation over occupation?

## Study 5 Putting faith into work

### Introduction

A man volunteered for a short placement with a Missionary Society to an African country. He had expertise in carpentry. When he arrived he was allocated to a remote medical missions hospital. His first e-mail back home was informative. He wrote about how on his first day he realised that the three flushing toilets were not adequate for the over 1,000 patients and relatives who came to the hospital. So he decided to build, and install more toilet blocks. He then realised that the 3 existing toilet pits were also inadequate, and that the mechanism for pumping the human waste away constantly overloaded and therefore shut down. He modernised the machinery and built a new block of toilets. He spoke of the joy and the satisfaction he found in doing all this work, and realised just how great a difference he was making to the running of the hospital. He finished by thanking God for the privilege of doing the thing God wants him to do at this time in his life. He wrote 'this is what it means to be truly successful'

### Wide view

1. If Christians were suddenly barred from their line of work, would there be enough evidence on you that you would lose your present job?
2. Why or why not?
3. What difference, if any, has it made to others, the company, colleagues, customers, now that you are not what you once were, but are becoming what God wants you to be?

### Biblical view

Read 1 Peter Ch 1 v 13-25

4. How does Peter want his readers to prepare their minds for action? [What does he want people to 'be' and 'do']
5. What incentives or reasons does Peter provide for putting your faith into action?
6. According to these verses, what is meant by 'calling' [see also 1 Peter 2 v9]?
7. By this definition when were you called- and to what [or whom]?

8. By what standard does God judge our work?
9. How does God's perspective on work differ from how you generally think of yourself as a worker?
10. With what gifts and graces does God enable you to fulfil your calling and pass on God's standards?
11. If you can give an example of what it means to live in 'reverent fear' v 17 and 'obeying the truth' v 22?
12. How is this related to your calling v 15?

### **Our View**

13. The fact that our occupation is but one of several callings, not to be confused with the ultimate calling to Christ. Does your vocation rule your occupation, or is it the other way around?
14. Knowing we are called first of all to please Jesus Christ, urges us to cultivate the secret of contentment in our occupation. When have you succeeded in doing this?
15. What other aspects of your work attitudes, work habits, or work product does this sense of calling bring to mind for you?

## Study 6

### One good reason for work

#### Introduction

An elderly Christian ladies memory was starting to slip, where before she had been able to accurately recall verses from the Bible, she was now finding it difficult. Little by little the verse she had used as a guide for the whole of her life began to fade. The verses were ' I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day' 2 Timothy Ch. 1 v 12. Finally all she could recall of this verse was a one simple word, 'him'. So she would say over and over again ' him, him, him'. She had nothing left in the Bible but that one words, but that one word was enough. For in the one word she had the whole of the Christian faith. It is all about a relationship with Jesus Christ. Union with Christ is the root of our Christian work ethic. It begins with a comprehensive change in the way we think about life.

#### Wide view

1. What are some of the reasons that you go to work?
  
2. What value-laden slogan best characterises what you were taught about why you should go to work  
'Hi, ho, hi ho it's off to work we go  
I owe I owe it's off to work I go  
Aim your sights high, the sky is the limit  
If it's worth doing at all, it's worth doing right  
Make your parents proud of you  
If at first you don't succeed, try, try again  
Other
  
3. What values about work do you think your family will pick up from you by observing your attitude towards your job?

#### Biblical view

Read Colossians Ch 3 v 1-4 & 22-25

4. According to these verses what is to be the Christians motivation for work?
5. According to verses 2& 22, what should not be the Christians motivation for doing good work?

6. If we do all our work as we would do it for the Lord, what will our work be like?
7. How does the Christians promised inheritance form the Lord contrast with what we receive for our 'earthly masters'?
8. When is it difficult to trust in the principles of verse 25 and not 'take matters into your own hands? [Thinking of the work situation]

**Our view**

9. Think again about what it means to work for the Lord. How would you like to change your work habits?
10. What would help you change your work habits?
11. If you dedicated yourself to the credo 'Every piece of work we do must be good enough for God'. How would that affect your current work ethic?