

Marketplace Ministry

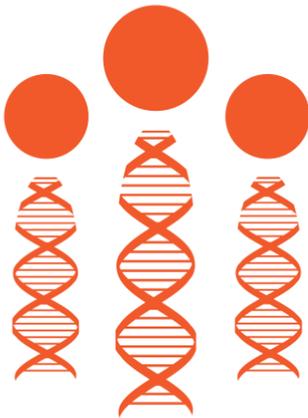


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Business as Mission

A Theology of Work

2013



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The 9 to 5 Window

The following are some comments from a sermon I recently preached on Workplace Ministry; I thought they'd interest you:

Once there was a man who loved to work. He loved creating value. He loved the way work made him grow. He managed people and felt it was what he was born to do. He loved watching people gain new skills and confidence. He valued the chance to spot each person's abilities and help them move toward becoming the best version of themselves. He enjoyed the feeling at the end of the day when he could look back at how he had been productive. Secretly, he felt the presence of God more at work than he did at church services.

His joy at work made him a better husband, father, friend, and volunteer. His children grew up believing that the chance to work was a gift. He looked up the word retire in the bible, but couldn't find it. When he was very old and ill he thought of all the joy and purpose that his work had given him over the years, and these were his final words: "I wish I could have spent more time at the office."

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work... for in six days the Lord made the Heavens and the earth." I have often heard sermons designed to make people feel guilty about not keeping the Sabbath, but I have never heard a sermon designed to make people feel guilty about not honoring the six-day work week. Just as God made and loves the Sabbath, He also made and loves work.¹

- The NT records that Jesus appeared publicly 132 x's - 122 were in the marketplace.
- Jesus told 52 parables - 45 had a workplace context.
- Acts recorded 40 divine interventions - 39 were in the marketplace.
- Jesus spent his adult life as a carpenter until the age of 30 when He began a public preaching ministry in the workplace.
- Jesus called 12 workplace individuals - not clergy - to build His Church.
- Work is worship. The Hebrew word עֲבוּדָה (avodah) is the root word for both work and worship.
- Work in it's different forms is mentioned more than 800 x's in the Bible - more than all the words used to express worship, music, praise, and singing combined.²

1. John Ortberg. "The Me I Want To Be"

2. Os Hillman. "Faith @ Work"



"I believe one of the next great moves of God is going to be through the believers in the workplace."³

"There is truly no division between sacred and secular except what we have created... and that is why the division of the legitimate roles and functions of human life into the sacred and secular does incalculable damage to our individual lives and the cause of Christ. Holy people must stop going into 'church work' as their natural course of action and take up holy orders in farming, industry, law, education, banking, and journalism with the same zeal previously given to evangelism or to pastoral and missionary work."⁴

"I believe the workplace movement has the potential to impact society as much as the reformation did."⁵

"God has begun an evangelistic movement in the workplace that has the potential to transform our society as we know it."⁶

3. Rev. Dr. Billy Graham.

4. Dallas Willard. "The Spirit of the Disciplines"

5. Dr. Peter Wagner.

6. Franklin Graham.



Is Work a Curse?⁷

What was the curse that God put on creation ([Gen. 3:17–19](#))? One of the most stubborn myths in Western culture is that God imposed work as a curse to punish Adam and Eve’s sin. As a result, some people view work as something evil. Scripture does not support that idea:

- *God Himself is a worker.* The fact that God works shows that work is not evil, since by definition God cannot do evil. On the contrary, work is an activity that God carries out. See “[God: The Original Worker](#)” at [John 5:17](#).
- *God created people in His image to be His coworkers.* He gives us ability and authority to manage His creation.
- *God established work before the fall.* [Genesis 1–2](#) record how God created the world. The account tells how He placed the first humans in a garden “to tend and keep it” ([Gen. 2:15](#)). This work assignment was given *before* sin entered the world and God pronounced the curse ([Gen. 3](#)). Obviously, then, work cannot be a result of the fall since people were working before the fall.
- *God commends work even after the fall.* If work were evil in and of itself, God would never encourage people to engage in it. But He does. For example, He told Noah and his family the same thing He told Adam and Eve—to have dominion over the earth ([Gen. 9:1–7](#)). In the New Testament, Christians are commanded to work ([Col. 3:23](#); [1 Thess. 4:11](#)).
- *Work itself was not cursed in the fall.* A careful reading of [Gen. 3:17–19](#) shows that God cursed the ground as a result of Adam’s sin—but not work: “Cursed is the *ground* for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it” (emphasis added).

Notice three ways that the curse affected work: (1) Work had been a joy, but now it would be “toil.” People would feel burdened down by it, and even come to hate it. (2) “Thorns and thistles” would hamper people’s efforts to exercise dominion. In other words, the earth would not be as cooperative as it had been. (3) People would have to “sweat” to accomplish their tasks. Work would require enormous effort and energy.

Most of us know all too well how burdensome work can be. Workplace stresses and pressures, occupational hazards, the daily grind, office politics, crushing boredom, endless routine, disappointments, setbacks, catastrophes, frustration, cutthroat competition, fraud, deception, injustice—there is no end of evils connected with work. But work itself is not evil. Far from calling it a curse, the Bible calls work and its fruit a gift from God ([Eccl. 3:13](#); [5:18–19](#)).

Do you know that your job is actually an extension of Christ’s rule over the world? See “[People at Work](#)” at [Heb. 2:7](#).

7. Word in Life Study Bible.



Look at All the Talent!

The world has never lacked for talented people. God has placed among humans a marvelous diversity of gifts and skills to accomplish meaningful work in the world. The experience of Israel in the wilderness is a testimony to this fact.

First, God gave Moses to Israel as a gifted leader. However, when it came time to construct the tabernacle, Moses did not have the skills required. He was not a craftsman in the building trades.

But God had already provided among the people migrating from Egypt skilled workers such as Bezalel, Aholiab ([Ex. 36:1](#)), and countless unnamed others such as the women who wove yarns and fine linen ([35:25–26](#) and those who gave freely and worked hard ([35:10](#), [21](#), [29](#); [36:3–7](#)). All of these worked according to the abilities that the Spirit had given them.

In looking over God’s instructions to Moses concerning these workers, one notices that he was to ([1](#) identify them as skilled people, ([2](#) affirm them in their responsibilities in the task, and ([3](#) free them to do their jobs under the supervision of others who knew the trades. In carrying out this delegation of the work, Moses had a good example to follow in God, who delegated responsibility to people at the beginning of creation. He declared, “I have given it to you,” and “It shall be yours” ([Gen. 1:29](#); [9:2–3](#); [12:7](#); [13:15–17](#)).

The Value of Human Resources

Hiram of Tyre’s letter to Solomon ([2 Chr. 2:11–16](#)) offers strong evidence that *people*, not plans, cause things to happen. Plans can help people initiate, guide, and evaluate their work, but it is human beings who must use their God-given skills and abilities to actually get things done.

Hiram the master craftsman ([2:13](#)) became a key resource in Solomon’s project to build the temple. Working from plans largely developed by David ([1 Chr. 28:11–19](#)), he led an army of skilled workers ([2 Chr. 2:14](#)) in creating an architectural masterpiece.

This example of Hiram provides a case study for managers today. It shows that an effective plan is one that makes the best use of people’s talents and capacities, one that encourages people to do what they do best. It suggests that plans and job descriptions have no value in and of themselves, but rather derive their value from the extent to which they empower workers to do constructive work.



Theology for the Marketplace

The Bible has a great deal to say to people in the marketplace. Here in Leviticus, Israel’s manual for worship, we find that the way God’s people conducted their business was directly related to the character of the God they served ([Lev. 19:35–36](#)).

Notice in the table below how practical the Law was about a number of marketplace issues. To the right are some possible applications to the marketplace today:

LAWS AND MODERN APPLICATIONS	
The Law	What Might This Say About. . .
Prohibited theft and robbery (19:11 , 13).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilfering of supplies and equipment? • “Time theft” through extended lunch breaks, loafing, and “sick” days?
Prohibited fraud (dealing “falsely,” 19:11).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • False advertising? • Deceptive trade practices?
Prohibited deception (19:11).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lying to a customer or vendor?
Prohibited false oaths (19:12).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lying on a résumé? • Writing a “hot check”?
Prohibited “profaning” the name of the Lord (19:12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swearing and cursing? • Causing unbelievers to sneer at Christ because of hypocrisy?
Prohibited cheating one’s neighbor (19:13).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoddy workmanship? • Overcharging?
Demanded timely payment of wages (19:13).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payments that are overdue? • Using bureaucratic procedure as a stall tactic?
Prohibited spreading rumors and lies (19:16).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Blacklisting”? • Incorrect credit reports?
Demanded accurate measurements and honest scales (19:35–36).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dishonest accounting procedures? • Inaccurate test scores and the unfair use of results?

We live in a complex society, and there are no easy answers for the issues on the right. Still, the commands on the left, even though given to Israel, give rise to important principles for marketplace Christians today. How would they apply in your workplace?



People at Work

Do you know that your job is an extension of God’s rule over the world? That’s what [Psalm 8](#) means when it says that God has given people “dominion,” or authority, over His works ([Ps. 8:6](#)). The psalmist is looking back to the Creation account ([Gen. 1:26–30](#)), where God made people in His image to be His coworkers in overseeing the creation. Consider what that means:

- You bear the very image of God. Like Him, you are a person, which means you have dignity and value. You matter. Who you are and what you do are significant. God has created you for a reason, which gives your life ultimate meaning and purpose.
- You are created to be a worker. God is a worker, and since you are made in His image, your work expresses something of who He is and what He wants done in the world. Work (activity that advances your own well-being or that of someone else, or that manages the creation in a godly way) reflects the work that God does. That means your work has dignity and value. It matters to God.
- You are God’s coworker. [Gen. 1:26–30](#) makes it clear that God wants people to manage the world. He gives us authority to “subdue” the earth—to cultivate and develop it, bring it under our control, use it to meet our needs, explore its wonders, and learn to cooperate with its natural laws. He also gives us “dominion” over every plant and animal for similar purposes.

Your job can help accomplish that mandate, as you use your God-given skills and opportunities. He views your work as having not only dignity, but purpose and direction as well. He wants you to accomplish meaningful tasks as you labor with a godly work ethic. Ultimately, He wants you to bring Him glory as a faithful manager of the resources and responsibilities He has placed under your control. By approaching work from this perspective, you can find fulfillment and motivation as a partner with God Himself.

Our work isn’t exactly the same as God’s work, is it? See “[Creation: ‘Very Good,’ But Not Sacred!](#)” at [Heb. 11:3](#).

Isn’t work a part of the curse put on Adam and Eve? See [Rom. 8:20–22](#).

Work has value in and of itself; it is something that God Himself does. See “[God: The Original Worker](#)” at [John 5:17](#).

As God’s coworker, you have a responsibility to demonstrate Christlike character and conduct on the job. See “[Your ‘Workstyle’](#)” at [Titus 2:9–10](#).



The Spirit of God in the Workplace?

Do you think of the Holy Spirit as present in your workplace? Do you think that He is even concerned about your work? As the people of Israel began to build the tabernacle, the Spirit was actively involved with the workers and their project ([Ex. 35:31–36:1](#))—as He was in the Bible’s first “construction project,” the creation of the world ([Gen. 1:2](#)).

The Spirit of God is said to be the source of the many skills and abilities required for the design and construction of the tabernacle—metalwork, jewelry making, carpentry, engraving, weaving, and other related talents. Notice some of the characteristics of these Spirit-driven workers:

- They were men and women ([Ex. 35:20–22, 25](#)).
- Their hearts were “willing” or “stirred” ([35:5, 21–22, 26](#)), meaning that they were motivated to accomplish the task.
- They were skilled or “gifted” by God to carry out their various assignments ([35:10, 25, 34–35; 36:1–2](#)).
- They were generous with their skills, as well as their possessions, in order to get the job done ([35:5, 22, 29; 36:3–7](#)), which suggests that they were hard and loyal workers.
- The finished product shows that excellence was a hallmark of their work.

We see that the Spirit gives talents, and also character. How can you demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your workplace ([Gal. 5:16–26](#))? Carefully consider your character, relationships, skills, and productivity in light of these qualities (for help with this, see “[Work World Codes](#)” at [Col. 3:22–4:1](#)). The same Spirit who was available to the ancient Israelite workers is ready to help you carry out your work to the the glory of God!

One of the most significant ways in which the Spirit helps you accomplish your work is through the talents and motivations that He has designed you with. To find out more about this important aspect of your design, see “[You Are Unique](#)” at [Ps. 33:15](#).



Government Employees in the Bible

Much of Daniel's career was spent in the highest levels of the Babylonian government, where he served as the chief advisor to King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. [5:11–12](#); compare [1:18–21](#)). The Bible tells of several other people who served God while working in government positions. Some of them came to believe in Him while so employed. The table below lists some of the more noteworthy.

Joseph (Gen. 39–50)	After being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, he was taken to Egypt, where God arranged matters for him to eventually become the chief executive officer of the nation.
Caleb (Num. 13–14)	He served as a spy for Moses when the Israelites initially prepared to enter Canaan. Years later, he served as a leader to help divide the land.
Joshua (Num. 13–14 ; Josh. 1:1–3:17)	He served as a spy with Caleb, and later was called to succeed Moses as Israel's leader.
Deborah (Judg. 4–5)	She is the only female judge over Israel mentioned in the Bible. After her military commander was victorious in battle with her help, she led her people in a victory song.
David (1 Sam. 16–31 ; 2 Sam. 1–24)	He rose from obscurity as a shepherd to become the preeminent king of Israel.
Solomon (1 Kin. 3–11)	Successor to David, he was best known for his wisdom, but also excelled in international trade, building projects which included the temple, amassing great wealth, and writing much of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and probably the Song of Solomon.
Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18–20 ; 2 Chr. 29–32)	Born to the family of wicked King Ahaz, he ruled Judah with unexpected righteousness. He is remembered for building a strategic water supply system for Jerusalem.
Nehemiah (Neh. 1–6)	As a Hebrew captive in Babylon, he served as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I, a high-level position. After hearing about the destruction of Jerusalem, he appealed to the king for help and negotiated a letter of commission to return to Jerusalem and lead its redevelopment.
Esther (the Book of Esther)	An orphan in the care of an older cousin, she was recruited into the harem of the Persian king Ahasuerus, from which she was selected to be queen. In this role, she was able to foil a plot of genocide against her people.
Matthew (Matt. 9:9)	He served as a tax collector for the Roman government, and as a result was rejected by his own people the Jews. Jesus called him to leave his position and follow Him.
Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–9)	The chief tax collector of Jericho, he sought out Jesus, and, after having dined with Him, repaid everyone he had cheated and gave half his wealth to the poor.
A Roman Centurion (Matt. 27:54)	He oversaw the crucifixion of Jesus, but came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God after witnessing the events of His death.
The Treasurer of Ethiopia (Acts 8:26–40)	This official under the Ethiopian queen was traveling home from a trip to Jerusalem when he encountered the evangelist Philip, who explained to him the way of salvation in Christ.
Cornelius (Acts 10)	A Roman military commander stationed in Caesarea, he obeyed God by inviting Peter to come to his home. After Peter explained the gospel, he and his household became the first known Gentile converts in the early church.
The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:20–36)	Working the night shift at the jail in Philippi, he was panic-stricken after an earthquake opened the doors of the cells. But Paul and Silas brought him lasting peace by presenting the gospel, which he and his family believed.



Work-World Stories Describe the Kingdom

Jesus captivated His listeners by presenting truth in terms that they could understand. Here in [Matt. 13](#) less than eight different images from the work world. Clearly, Jesus knew how to relate to the world in everyday people lived and worked.

No wonder: Jesus probably spent most of His life working in His family's carpentry business. We know nothing of His youth from adolescence until He began His public ministry at about age 30. But we know His father was a carpenter ([Matt. 13:55](#)) and that Jesus also practiced the trade ([Mark 6:3](#)). Carpenters work with wood, metal, and stone to produce furniture and farm implements, and constructed houses and public buildings.

Jesus may have continued His occupation even after He began to teach and travel. Rabbis (or teachers) commonly spent anywhere from one-third to one-half of their time working (most likely with the trades) to provide for themselves. And while Jesus' opponents, many of them rabbis, attacked Him on numerous occasions, they never accused Him of laziness or freeloading. Indeed, He was known to them as a carpenter.

That reputation passed on to the early church. One writer described Jesus as "working as a carpenter among men, making ploughs and yokes, by which He taught the symbols of righteousness and an act of righteousness."

Little wonder, then, that Jesus' teaching was filled with workplace images and analogies such as those found here. Using parables—brief tales illustrating moral principles—He frequently spoke about the nature of the kingdom. [Matthew 13](#) collects eight of these as listed below (with possible interpretations):

- (1) *The parable of the soils* ([13:1–23](#)) addresses the receptivity of those who hear about the kingdom.
- (2) *The parable of the wheat and the weeds* ([13:24–30](#)) warns that people who pretend to be part of the kingdom may be able to fool others, but they can't fool God.
- (3) *The parable of the mustard seed* ([13:31–32](#)) is a promise that the kingdom would become a force to be reckoned with. Do not despise small beginnings!
- (4) *The parable of the leaven* ([13:33](#)) describes the influence of the kingdom: it quietly but effectively works among people and accomplishes significant results.
- (5) *The parable of the hidden treasure* ([13:44](#)) puts a value on the kingdom: it's the most important thing one can possess.
- (6) *The parable of the pearl of great price* ([13:45–46](#)) also describes the kingdom's value: it's worth sacrificing everything in order to possess it.
- (7) *The parable of the dragnet* ([13:47–50](#)) warns that a day of reckoning is coming, when those who accept the kingdom will be separated from those who reject it.



(8) *The parable of the householder* ([13:51–52](#)) places a responsibility on those who understand about the kingdom to share their insight with others.

Jesus' stories connected with the real world of agriculture (sowing, harvesting, growing), the food industry (baking, fishing), real estate (land purchasing, home ownership), and retailing (the sale of pearls). His images and language helped bring His message alive to common people. It showed clearly that God takes an interest in the workplace and desires people to serve Him in the "secular" arena.

Jesus was a master storyteller. So were His forerunners, the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. See the series "[Parables of the Prophets](#)" at [Jer. 18:1–10](#), [Ezek. 15:1–8](#), and [Zech. 5:1–4](#).

Work is one of the most important means that believers today have to accomplish God's purposes. See "[Faith Impacts the World](#)" at [Mark 16:15–16](#).

Like Jesus, Paul was able to support himself through a "secular" occupation. See "[Paul's 'Real' Job](#)" at [Acts 18:1–3](#).

If Jesus might have supported Himself while carrying out His ministry, is there any reason why modern Christian leaders shouldn't at least consider that as an option today? See "[Paying Vocational Christian Workers](#)" at [1 Cor. 9:1–23](#).

Workplace Myths

Paul called himself one of God's "fellow workers" ([1 Cor. 3:9](#)). In a similar way, every one of us is a coworker with God (see "People at Word") at [Ps. 8:6](#)). Yet certain distorted views of work have taken on mythical proportions in Western culture. They've had devastating effect on both the people and the message of Christ. Here's a sampling of these pernicious myths, along with a few points of rebuttal"

Myth: Church work is the only work that has any real spiritual value

In other words, everyday work in the "secular world" counts for nothing of lasting value. Only "sacred" work matters to God.

Fact: Christianity makes no distinction between the "sacred" and the "secular."

all of life is to be lived under Christ's lordship. So when it comes to work, all work has essential value to God, and workers will answer to Him for how they have carried out the work He has given to them ([1 Cor. 3:13](#)).



Myth: The heroes of the faith are ministers and missionaries. “Lay” workers remain second-class.

This follows from the previous idea. If “sacred” work is the only work with eternal value, then “sacred workers” (clergy) are the most valuable workers. The best that “laypeople” can do is to support the clergy and engage in “ministry” during their spare hours.

Fact: God has delegated His work to everybody, not just clergy.

Among the main characters of Scripture are ranchers, farmers, fishermen, vintners, ironworkers, carpenters, tentmakers, textile manufacturers, public officials, construction supervisors and workers, military personnel, financiers, physicians, judges, tax collectors, musicians, sculptors, dancers, poets, and writers, among others. Nowhere does God view these people or their work as “second class” or “secular.” Rather, their work accomplishes God’s work in the world. As we do our work each day, we reflect the very image of God, who is a working God (see “God—The Original Worker” at John 5:17). He spent six days working on the creation (Gen. 1:31–2:3), so we merely follow God’s example when we work five or six days out of the week.

Myth: Work is a part of the Curse

According to this belief, God punished Adam and Eve for their sin by laying the burden of work on them: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground (Gen. 3:19). That’s why work is so often drudgery, and why the workplace is driven by greed and selfishness.

Fact: Work is a gift from God

The Bible never calls work a curse, but rather a gift from God (Ecc. 3:13; 5:18–19). God gave Adam and Eve work to do long before they ever sinned (Gen. 2:15), and He commends and commands work long after the Fall (9:1–7; Col. 3:23; 1 Thess. 4:11; see “Is Work a Curse?” at Gen. 3:17–19).

Myth: God is no longer involved in His creation.

For many, if not most, modern-day workers, God is irrelevant in the workplace. He may exist, but He has little to do with everyday matters of the work world. These people don’t care much about what God does, and they assume He doesn’t care much about what they do, either.

Fact: God remains intimately connected with both His world and its workers.

Scripture knows nothing of a detached Creator. He actively holds the creation together (Col. 1:16–17) and works toward its ultimate restoration from sin (John 5:17; Rom. 8:18–25). He uses the work of people to accomplish many of His purposes. Indeed, believers ultimately work for Christ as their Boss (see “Who’s the Boss?” at Col. 3:22–24). He takes an active interest in how they do their work (Titus 2:9–10).



Myth: You only go around once in life—so you better make the best of it!

This is the “heaven can wait” perspective. Here-and-now is what matters; it’s where the excitement is. Heaven is just a make-believe world of gold-paved streets and never-ending choir. Boring! Why not enjoy your reward right now? Go for it!

Fact: God is saving the greatest rewards for eternity—and work will be among them.

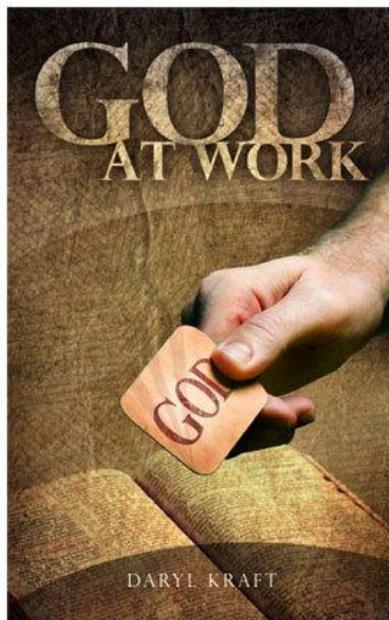
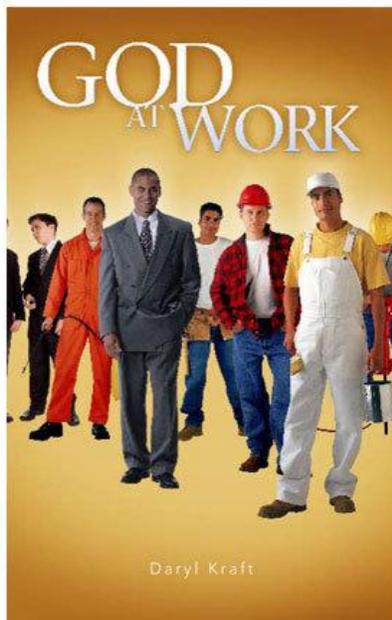
Scripture doesn’t offer much detail about life after death, but it does promise a future society remade by God where work goes on—without the sweat, toil, pain, or futility of the Curse (Is. 65:17–25; Rev. 22:2–5). As for the question of rewards, God plans to hand out rewards for how believers have spent their lives—including their work (1 Cor. 3:9–15).

Myth: The most important day of the week is Friday

“Thank God it’s Friday!” the secular work ethic cries. Because work is drudgery, weekends are for escapin—and catching up. There’s not idea of a Sabbath, just of couple of days of respite from the grinding routine.

Fact: God wants us to pusue cycles of meaningful work and restorative rest.

A biblical view of work places a high value on rest. God never intended us to work seven days a week. He still invites us to join Him in a day of rest, renewal, and clebration. Taht resotres us to go back to ur work with a sense of purpose and mission. “Thank God it’s Monday!” we can begin to say.



Work—A Platform for Evangelism?

Our jobs put us in touch with people like no other activity. For 40 or more hours a week we toil, laugh, struggle, and interact with others to accomplish tasks. For that reason, many Christians view their workplace as a primary platform for spreading the gospel. Is that legitimate?

It is certainly legitimate to treat our workplace as an opportunity for unbelievers to see Christianity by looking at us. Indeed, Paul challenges us to display a godly workstyle for that reason ([Titus 2:9–10](#)). However, we must never emphasize verbal witness to the detriment of our work, as if God sends us into the work world only to use it as a platform for evangelism.

Employers rightly look down on workers who are intruders, deceivers, or sluggards. In [Eph. 6:5–9](#), Paul challenges us to work with “sincerity of heart” and to pay close attention to the work itself, which he calls “doing the will of God.” That’s what impresses one’s employer, as well as God.

The Spirituality of Everyday Work

What does [Col. 3:1–2](#) imply about everyday work? Is it possible to hold a “secular” job and still “seek those things which are above” rather than “things on the earth”? Or would it be better to quit one’s job and go into the ministry?

The issue here is spirituality, the capacity to know, experience, and respond to God. How is it possible to bring spirituality into “secular” work? Consider:

If Christ is Lord over all of life, then He must be Lord over work, too. [Colossians 3](#) does not distinguish between the sacred and the secular, but between the life that Christ offers, (the “things above”) and its alternative—spiritual death apart from Him (the “things on the earth”). This is clear from the preceding context ([2:20](#)) and the rest of chapter [3](#): “earthly” things include fornication, uncleanness, passion, etc. ([3:5, 8](#)); the “things above” include tender mercies, kindness, humility, etc. ([3:12–15](#)). Spirituality has to do with conduct and character, not just vocation.

It also has to do with the lordship of Christ. Christ is Lord over all of creation ([1:15–18](#)). Therefore, He is Lord over work. Whatever we do for work, we should do it “in the name of the Lord Jesus” ([3:17](#)), that is, with a concern for His approval and in a manner that honors Him. In fact, Paul specifically addresses two categories of workers—slaves ([3:22–25](#)) and masters ([4:1](#))—in this manner.

The Spirit empowers us to live and work with Christlikeness. Spirituality has to do with character and conduct, regardless of where we work. Christ gives the Holy Spirit to help us live in a way that pleases Him ([Gal. 5:16–25](#)). That has enormous implications for how we do our jobs, our “workstyle” (see [Titus 2:9–10](#)).



Furthermore, Scripture calls us “temples” of the Holy Spirit ([1 Cor. 6:19](#)). An intriguing image: The Spirit enabled Hebrew workers to use their skills in stonecutting, carpentry, lapidary arts, and so on to construct a beautiful, functional house of worship ([Ex. 31, 35](#)). In an even greater way, we can expect the Spirit to enable us to use our God-given skills and abilities to bring glory to God.

God values our work even when the product has no eternal value. A common measure of the significance of a job is its perceived value from the eternal perspective. Will the work “last”? Will it “really count” for eternity? The assumption is that God values work for eternity, but not work for the here and now.

By this measure, the work of ministers and missionaries has eternal value because it deals with the spiritual, eternal needs of people. By contrast, the work of the shoe salesman, bank teller, or typist has only limited value, because it meets only earthly needs. Implication: that kind of work doesn’t really “count” to God.

But this way of thinking overlooks several important truths:

- (1) God Himself has created a world which is time-bound and temporary ([2 Pet. 3:10–11](#)). Yet He values His work, declaring it to be “very good,” good by its very nature ([Gen. 1:31](#); [Ps. 119:68](#); [Acts 14:17](#)).
- (2) God promises rewards to people in everyday jobs, based on their attitude and conduct ([Eph. 6:7–9](#); [Col. 3:23–4:1](#)).
- (3) God cares about the everyday needs of people as well as their spiritual needs. He cares whether people have food, clothing, shelter, and so forth.
- (4) God cares about people, who will enter eternity. To the extent that a job serves the needs of people, He values it because He values people.



Workers for the Kingdom

Do you ever wonder what your life contributes to the work of God in the world? If you are in a “secular” occupation, you may conclude that the only way to further the kingdom is to pray for and contribute financially to those who are in “full-time” Christian work. But are those your only options?

Paul described Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus as “fellow workers for the kingdom” ([Col. 4:11](#)), indicating that they may have been vocational Christian workers. However, there is no way to say whether they were employed in that work as a full-time occupation. In fact, if they followed Paul’s example, they probably had other jobs through which they made their living (see [“Paul’s `Real’ Job”](#) at [Acts 18:1–3](#)).

The point is that drawing a paycheck for doing “ministry” is not the criterion by which to judge whether someone is a worker for God’s kingdom. Kingdom work involves promoting the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of the kingdom. That may involve professional employment such as pastoring a church or serving on a mission field. But kingdom workers are also found among doctors, accountants, engineers, painters, salespeople, auto mechanics, and homemakers. Wherever believers are furthering the goals and objectives of Christ, they are working for His kingdom.

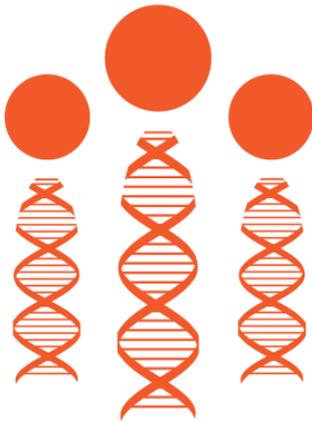
How does your life promote the purposes of God? Do you use your skills and abilities toward that end, whether or not pay is involved? Or have you given up and concluded that because you are not a vocational Christian worker, you aren’t really serving the Lord with your life and career? If so, you’ll want to reconsider what it means to be a worker for Christ’s kingdom!



Notes



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