

Business As Ministry

January 28, 2013

by Andre Yee

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/business-as-ministry>



Anyone working in a “secular” job will be tempted to think of work as less significant or less God honoring than that of, say, a pastor. I have struggled here, and over the years I have met many others who struggle with a sense of purpose in their daily work — wondering if they need instead to give themselves to pastoral work or Christian ministry in order to truly “do God’s will.”

Done rightly and in the fear of God, ministry is an excellent God-honoring vocation, but ministry is not the only work that can be God-honoring. So often businessmen like me think this way because we fail to really take hold of the doctrine of vocation. To put it simply, vocation is the specific work that God has called each of us to. And vocation is not limited to those who serve in Christian ministry.

In fact, God calls the vast majority of Christians to “common” spheres of work such as business, or academia, or carpentry, or law, or healthcare, or homemaking. As we faithfully give ourselves to this calling, we are God’s agents to love others and to even accomplish his will on earth.

Assuming your work is honorable and honest, assuming it is a means to serve the needs of others, that work is ministerial in nature. In that sense, your work is no different from that of a pastor or missionary.

Here are three reasons that our work is ministerial.

First, our work is ministerial when our labors are first and foremost an avenue of faith in God and worship of God, not in self-reliance and personal glory.

In short, our work really isn’t about us. Paul spells this out in Ephesians 1:11–12:

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

For the Christian, life and work is not primarily about the self — self-achievement, self-accolades, or even self-wealth, or a surplus of monetary rewards. A Christian’s labour is foremost about working in a way that expresses faith in God and worship to God. It is in the way we conduct our work and the substance of our work that provides us with a means to proclaim his excellencies.

So what does this look like? It will appear differently for each of us. For one, working to the glory of God might mean celebrating God’s kindness in the outcome of a successful project. To another, it may involve trusting God in the midst of difficulty and even failure. In my career, I have experienced both (but the latter being more challenging). Yet, it is trusting God during those challenging circumstances that speak most loudly of the rich sufficiency of knowing Christ.

Second, our work is ministerial when it serves other people rather than mere projects or profits.

People, made in the image of God, matter more to him than profits. Our take-home commission is not as important as Christ’s commission to love our neighbors in the workplace. And that means we must seek the interests of our coworkers, our customers, and our business partners.

For me, this is a simple, but too easily forgotten truth. In the urgency of my day, I frequently forget the people around me, viewing my day as nothing more than a series of tasks to check off. When I adopt that task-oriented mindset, I easily overlook the people that God has placed in my path. In my thoughtlessness, the people in my workplace quickly become incidental to my day, or they get misused as either resources for my personal gain or hindrances to my personal productivity.

As a Christian, I am called to love my neighbor, and God has given me a workplace where he intends for this to happen. So in this setting, taking the time to encourage a co-worker is ministerial. Going the extra mile to help a customer is ministerial. Serving your manager by providing an update report is ministerial. When we accomplish tasks, even the most mundane tasks, with a heart of serving and loving our neighbors at work, we are instruments of God's kindness to them.

Third, our work is ministerial because we are ambassadors of Christ to the specific realm of work he's called us to.

We love our neighbors best when we bring the good news to them. Like Paul, we must see ourselves as ambassadors, bearing the message of reconciliation to an unbelieving world (2 Corinthians 5:20).

For many years, I viewed my career in the software industry as incompatible to "Christian ministry." During those years, I failed to appreciate the privilege of representing Jesus to my co-workers and my customers. I wasted my vocation, and I overlooked the fact that God has called me to represent him in the business realm.

You are not in your present career by accident. It may have felt like you landed there due to random circumstances, but God has been sovereignly guiding you. Your line of work is no accident. Your workplace is no accident. Your vocational ship has sailed to where it is thus far because God has been guiding you. He has placed you where you are because he has need of you — or, better, as Luther puts it — your neighbor has need of you. May we joyfully and faithfully pursue this high calling of God.

Related resources —

- Patrick Lai, *Theology Refresh* podcast, "The Doctrine of Vocation"
- John Piper, sermon, "Your Job As Ministry"
- John Piper, sermon, "'Tentmakers' in Minneapolis"

Andre Yee is a husband, dad of three children, and an experienced technology executive living in the Washington D.C. area. He is the founder of Gospel Translations, a ministry dedicated to translating and spreading free gospel content globally.