

How does human work connect to God's work?

When it comes to answering the question, 'Does our work matter to God?' most churches say yes. But they give different answers when it comes to explaining 'How does our work matter to God?' For some, work is just about people earning money to support themselves and the work of the church. Others prioritise the importance of evangelism in the workplace. Neither of these approaches sees work as being a spiritual exercise and having intrinsic value. For these people work has only instrumental value, work matters only for what it means in terms of making money and opportunities for evangelism. Others expand on this to include work as a context for serving other people. For example, Christians involved in what are sometimes called 'helping professions' (doctors, nurses, social workers, counsellors and teachers) sense that their work matters to God in a way that people involved in most other professions don't. Most churches seem to affirm the worth of more direct, person-to-person service kinds of work, and words like 'ministry' and 'service' are often applied to this work. Christians involved in other industries also look for opportunities to help people in their workplaces, but fewer churches affirm the intrinsic value of work outside the helping professions. Perhaps, the term 'helping professions' is part of the problem, as it suggests that the other professions—such as business, law, engineering, finance and all the rest—do not help anyone. In reality, all good work is a helping profession. A biblical understanding asserts that all work matters to God and provides an opportunity for people to participate in God's ongoing creative work, as called for in Genesis 1:26-28.

A more complete understanding of the meaning of work can be visualised as a three legged stool. Each of the legs represents one of the three great callings we read about in the Bible; the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-38) and the creation calling—or "Cultural Mandate," as it is often called (Genesis 1:26-28). The Great Commission emphasises the importance of Christians being involved in sharing their faith and making disciples. The Great Commandment emphasises the importance of Christian service, demonstrating love in action. The Cultural Mandate emphasises that our work in itself can be an act of worship and participation in God's work. It is actually the first of all commandments, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,' (Genesis 1:28), and the others complement, but do not supersede it. Hence, just as a stool requires all three legs to stand, so an integrated theology of work needs to affirm the importance of witness, service and intrinsic worth, although particular people according to their different giftings or circumstances may emphasise one more than the others. See *Theological Foundations* and *Vocation in Historical-Theological Perspective* at www.theologyofwork.org for more on a biblical theology of work.
