

Work and the Meaning of Life

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By Jordan J. Ballor

In his classic book *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer asks the critical question for the Christian life in today's world: "What could the call to follow Jesus mean today for the worker, the businessman, the farmer, or the soldier?" This question is a corollary of another, more basic, question: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" If Christ is Lord, then what does his lordship mean for the lives of his followers?

In a worthwhile post over at Out of Ur¹, Skye Jethani explores the implications of Christ's call to discipleship for our work, "where most adults (young and old) spend most of their time and what occupies most of their identity. Without the ability to connect faith to either family or work, there is little remaining to engage young adults other than entertaining gatherings or a celebrity in the pulpit."

Jethani updates and sharpens questions related to Bonhoeffer's famous discipleship question:

What does it mean to be in business to glorify God and bless others?

How does Christ want me to engage the health care sector?

Does being an artist matter to God?

How do I serve in the public school system as a follower of Christ?

Apart from not being dishonest, does it matter how I run my business?

I've been offered two jobs, how do I discern which one to take? Does it matter?

Can I be a soldier and be a Christian?

Does my work have any meaning apart from the money I earn and give to the church?

One of the consistent refrains from established denominations nowadays is concern over how to connect with younger generations of believers, to keep them from leaving the church, and show that the Christian faith is relevant to a contemporary world. A good place to start is to ask and begin to answer the questions that Bonhoeffer and Jethani have posed.

But as Jethani warns, such efforts must be undertaken not just as a rearguard stratagem: "Developing a theology of work and vocation-based-discipleship is not a silver bullet to slow the exodus of young adults from the church. But I am increasingly convinced that it is a significant blind spot for much of the Western church that must be remedied."

In his treasure of a book on the subject², Lester De Koster goes so far as to call work "the meaning of your life." It is of central importance for followers of Christ to understand, articulate, and live out the way in which the Gospel shapes and determines the meaning of life "to the full."