

WHAT ARE YOU CALLED TO DO? A THEOLOGY OF WORK

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<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-are-you-called-to-do-a-theology-of-work>

A friend of mine left a well-paying job to join the staff of a Christian ministry. She described her decision something like this: "Working a *normal* job, I had to spend 40 or 50 hours a week doing what my employer wants. Ministry had to come second. But now, I'll be free to devote *all* my time to God and to ministry."

I understand what my friend is trying to say. When I first heard her say it in a room full of Christian friends, I nodded along with everyone else. After all, it sounds so . . . spiritual.

And that's the problem. Behind this perspective lay some deeply rooted misconceptions about work and spirituality. Without disrespecting my friend and others like her, I'd like to try and right the ship. I'd like to help us think more deeply and biblically about how the gospel informs our work.

WHAT TO DO?

When I was a senior in college, I spent a lot of time thinking and praying about what to do next. One of the words my mentors threw around a lot was the word *calling*. As in, "What is God *calling* you to do?"

I had a love-hate relationship with this idea of calling. On the one hand, God is a relational being, so he must call people into certain things. On the other hand, there seemed to be two classes of Christians: those who do regular work, and those who are *called* into ministry.

After I joined the world of full-time ministry, this classism was reiterated. One of my mentors in campus ministry said that ministers have a special calling from God that other people don't. I immediately put this idea to work in raising support, telling people, "Since *you* haven't been called into vocational ministry, you should support people like me, who *have* been!"

It wasn't until a few years later that someone pointed out to me an interesting fact: the root of the English word *vocation* is the Latin verb *voca*, which means "to call." The linguistic evidence shows that at some point in history, people thought of *every* type of work as a "calling." Whether you are a minister or a mechanic, you do not work because it pays the bills, or because it's personally fulfilling, or because it justifies the money you spent on college tuition. You work because it glorifies God.

TRANSFORMING OUR VIEW OF WORK ITSELF

If we are to live all of life for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), then we need a God-centered view of work. It's not enough that we try to honor God in how we *do* our work, or that we try to be Christlike to people *at* work, or that we support God's kingdom with the money we make *from* work. The glory of God must inform and transform *our view of work itself*.

Here's what I mean: most non-Christians see work simply as a means to an end. Work provides beer money or a fat retirement pension or a better life for their kids. Unfortunately, many Christians see work in exactly the same way. We may be pursuing more Christlike ends: money to tithe or an opportunity to witness to a co-worker, for instance. But our view of work *itself* is still fundamentally unchanged. We

still see work as a means to an end. We are *using* work. We're in it for what we get out of it. God may be honored in the *results* of our work, but he is not supreme in our view of work itself.

And that's a problem.

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