

What Does the Bible Say About Work?

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<http://www.christchurchcentralsheffield.co.uk/tough-questions/what-does-the-bible-say-about-work/>

I used to dread the question – you know how it goes – you meet someone new and they ask “So what do you do?” Not “What do you believe?” but “What is your job?”

In our modern culture we all fall into the trap of pigeonholing people according to their work, and I guess we all have a scale that ranges from the top brain surgeon to the lady who cleans the public toilets or even a housewife. We tend to relate to people and value them by what we think about their work. I dreaded the question because I didn't have a job. When we moved to Sheffield ten years ago I gave up a management job where I had my own office and secretary, and lots of status but had no new role – I couldn't even say I'm a mother because I didn't have any kids then. And what I realised is that I felt valueless in the eyes of others and my own self esteem hit rock bottom. I kept replying to the dreaded question by telling others about the job I used to do.

The Bible says very clearly that we are each individuals created and loved by God. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.”

If God has loved us enough to send His Son to die for us and chooses to send His Spirit to dwell in us – what does that say about our value? He paid the highest price for us regardless of our role in the world. We need to remember this in relation to how we view ourselves and others – so if you are heading for the heights of the Royal College of Surgeons don't allow others to put you on a pedestal or even be tempted to climb up yourself – and if you are struggling with unemployment or a boring job dead end job and feel that because of that you are worth nothing – think again – you are worth no less in God's eyes than anyone else. Remember: We are NOT what we DO.

Work: Part of God's Creative Plan

And what is work anyway? For many of us it is the office where we spend much of our time doing a lot of mundane tasks in order to pay the bills and support our families – or pay for the next holiday. For others of us it is hours spent studying with the aim of launching a good career. For mothers like me it can involve standing at the till in Tesco's or at the school gate in the pouring rain or cleaning up vomit – for which no one pays me anything – but it's a job nonetheless! The fact is that most of us for much of life have to perform certain tasks with boring regularity whether paid or unpaid. Does it serve any purpose in the grander scheme of things?

Well from the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 2 we learn that work was part of God's creative plan – He did not create man to be idle but to work to support himself and his family. God worked hard to create the world and then He set Adam to work in the garden – Genesis 2:15:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it”

So notice that work was a good and positive part of daily activity BEFORE Adam and Eve sinned. God created us to be active and useful and we will therefore be most happy doing what our creator intended. Not working because we can't be bothered is not an option. In the New Testament, Paul writes in Thessalonians 3:10-12:

“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their own work quietly and to earn their own living.”

So Paul commends hard work -and condemns laziness. Christians are called to work hard – whatever that work might be.

Work: Remember Who Is Boss !

But what about our motivation? How can we work up any enthusiasm for a seemingly pointless task carried out for a nagging and unsympathetic boss? We read in Colossians 3:22-24:

“Slaves obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service as people-pleasers but with sincerity of heart fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward You are serving the Lord Christ.”

The key for the Christian is to remember who is ultimately our Boss. Whatever we are doing – and the slave in this passage was probably doing the really menial jobs – it is Christ we are serving. We are called to work hard at everything because our ultimate reward is in Heaven not on Earth. What if we hate it? What if we struggle? Remember – it is Christ we are serving and our reward is in Heaven.