



Work as Ministry - Study 1

Aim of study:

In this study we examine the dualism that many Christians and churches accept and teach: a separation between secular and sacred, work and ministry. We suggest that God does not see our lives or our work that way. We briefly look at the way the Bible talks about work in the Old and New Testaments.

A Personal Perspective:

I wonder if you are like me, always feeling a little inferior because I have chosen to work in a "secular" job rather than in ministry. In church it seems that those who choose full-time ministry are those who are prayed for, celebrated and esteemed. Those of us in "secular" jobs are always challenged to show our faith by answering the call, and leaving our jobs to take up ministry.

I accepted my inferiority until I was challenged in a lecture by Australian theologian Robert Banks. His simple question was: "How does God see your work? Does he see it as secular or ministry?"

In fact I realised that I subconsciously made the same distinction in lots of areas:

- Monday versus Sunday
- Spiritual/sacred versus secular
- Outer versus inner
- Calling versus work choice
- Vocation versus job
- Living by faith versus living by work

However, Jesus never made such distinctions. He saw having conversations, having a meal with people, healing people, travelling from place to place, and probably all his work as a carpenter, as just as important in his Father's eyes, as the times when he was preaching and teaching.

Most of the examples of his parables have as their context the world of work: shepherds, vineyard owners, managers, farmers, fishers...

So maybe my work is important to God, the actual work I do, not just the way that I do it. Maybe I can partner God in my working, and pray that he will achieve his purposes through my working.

Let's explore those ideas more.

Thought Starter Questions:

- Were Jesus' years of working as a carpenter less important than his "public ministry" years?
- Have you ever seen your "secular" work as less important than ministry work? How does this impact on the way you see your work and how you value it as a Christian?

A Bible passage to reflect on:

1 Corinthians 9:1-23

- What distinction is made between secular work and ministry?
- How significant is working for income an aspect of Paul's ministry work?
- In light of this passage, comment on the idea that all work is Gospel work?

Going Deeper:

- Read Luke 6:1-5 and John 5:17: what is the essential message from Jesus about work?
- Look through Matthew 13: Outline the different work scenarios used here. What is the message about the importance of work?
- Colossians 3:12-17: What are some principles for the way we should work? Does God value our work even if the product has no eternal value?
- Job 28: How are mining and wisdom linked?



Reflect and Respond:

- How have you been challenged by what you have read? What will you change? Stop doing? Start doing?
- How does God see the work you do?
- How does what you have learnt change the way **you** see your work?
- How would you describe what you have learned to someone else?

Prayer:

Thank you Father God for challenging the assumptions we make about work and ministry. Help us to see our work as ministry. Help us to see our work the way you do. Help us, like Jesus, to see that the work is always before us, your work, which is good. Help us to respond to what we have read and learnt. Help us not to learn and forget, but to pray, reflect and act on what we have read.

AMEN