

Does our work really matter?

Robin Scurlock explores.



Christ, for his glory and in his power. That's hardly insignificant.

God's Workplace Sovereignty

When we first meet God in the Bible he is doing the work of creation. Then he rests. The world was perfect and human beings had not yet sinned. Eden was not a playground, but a place of work. Following the same principle of creation, the cycle of work and rest implies that we too are expected to work and rest. Six days on, one day off.

Our workplaces are under the same authority of God. It may not seem like it. They may seem like anywhere but Eden at times. But there is no getting away from Colossians 3:22-23:

Some of us love our work. Many of us don't. But for most people, enjoying their work is ultimately less important than feeling that their work is meaningful. You can put up with the grind, the frustration, the setbacks, and the criticism if you think your work really matters.

Consider these two statements from Linda Holbeche's *In Search of Meaning in the Workplace*:

'The search for meaning appears to be part of a fundamental human need to feel important and to make a difference... It is evident in profound questions that people are increasingly asking, such as 'Who am I? What do I offer? Why am I doing what I am doing?'

'People need and want to belong to communities in which they can make meaningful contributions... Work for many people provides a source of identity'

Should those of us who have already 'found God' in Christ be at all surprised by these findings? After all, the Gospel addresses all these questions: the question of identity, the question of the difference we can make, and the question of purpose. Furthermore, as Christians we no doubt know very well the benefits of living in dynamic fellowship with other Christians – even if right now we may not be in a church community or a small group where we're experiencing those benefits.

Identity in Christ

'Who am I?' 'Who are you?' The Bible teaches that we have a unique identity, that we are uniquely made. Psalm 139 describes a process of our being knit together in the

womb by God, of our being fearfully and wonderfully made by God. As we grow, we learn to discover God's calling for us by exploring the abilities and interests he's created in us and the gifts he's given us. We begin to discover which instrument he wants us to play in his orchestra, not only by engaging with a local body of believers, but also through our interaction in the wider world. The truth is that:

Meaningless, meaningless...

- Our particular position in God's kingdom has never been occupied before.
- Our identity is not dependent on material success, status or achievements.
- We are designed to operate in community with others.
- God is interested primarily in our heart, not

merely our actions. What is our orientation towards Him – love, indifference, dependence, independence?

If then we know that we are uniquely made, that our identity and our usefulness to God are not

dependent primarily on our success but on our faithfulness to him, then we can see a divine purpose even in the most unpromising work.

What does it take to really be one of Jesus' disciples? Jesus said in John 8, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." Our lives are more than just a set of daily tasks and challenges, they are a set of daily tasks and challenges which we are called to respond to as servants of

'Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything ...Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord not for men...'

We are all slaves to something, but the instruction here is to offer our service to Christ, irrespective of what we do. This can be hugely liberating if we know, through prayerful reflection, that we are in the 'right place'. If we are, then we are there as his servants and his ambassadors. And if we are not sure, then while we are seeking God's guidance, we are still serving God. By his grace, he has a purpose for us where we are now. And that purpose includes our work.

What we know is that:

- God created work as part of his design for humankind. (cf Genesis 2:15)
- We are to engage in purposeful activity for the majority of our time – six days shall we labour. (cf Exodus 20:8)
- We are called to be yeast in all circumstances.

In sum, work is significant. Work is not a sideline. And the call to be yeast applies to the whole of life, including our work. However, fulfilling that divine purpose requires divine perspective and divine power. We can't do

“Your position in God's kingdom has never been occupied before.”

it on our own. Our workplaces are mission fields requiring prayer.

Fulfilling Purpose

Prayer sustains the people of God working in a particular place, and changes the spiritual dynamic. What about seeking an insight from God for the latest customer service review? Or asking for His wisdom when selecting the next investment project? Imagine the impact on our sales targets if we heeded the advice from Isaiah 55:8: ‘...for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.’ Try selecting candidates for an interview, following the instruction from Proverbs 3:5... ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.’

Knowledge of who we are in Christ enables

creator or not. How do we value people at work? Well, Jesus’ teaching has much to say about forging relationships based on mutual respect, friendship, trust, honesty and concern for personal growth. And as we live that out, we clearly have an opportunity to make a difference, whether the company we work for is one of the best places to work, or one of the worst.

Purposeful Influence

How can we make a difference? First, we earn the right to be influential by demonstrating credibility in the work we do. Only when we have done this consistently will we be trusted

“Since we have divine tools at our disposal, why are we slow to use them?”

- Speak openly about your faith in work situations with colleagues.
- Offer to pray for personal issues your colleagues are facing.

- Find out when your senior management meet for board meetings (or the equivalent) and pray before, during, and after. Ask for a list of agenda items in advance in order to pray specifically. Let the team know you are doing it.

- Write to the head of the company/organisation

asking them for any issues that they would like prayer for. Mention that this is common practice in some schools as well as in those companies and clubs with chaplains.

As Christians, our lives brim with purpose and have eternal significance. We are not created by accident, we have not been redeemed by chance and we have not been left without a job to do in the service of God, or without resources to do it. ‘Meaningful, meaningful, all is meaningful,’ says the Christian worker.

Robin Scurlock works in Telecoms & IT, is the co-author of I Love My Work (see www.ilovemywork.co.uk), an LICC Associate Workplace Speaker and part of the leadership team at Wokingham Baptist Church. If you would like to invite Robin to speak you can contact him at robin.scurlock@lineone.net

or meaningful, meaningful?

us to seek his help in confidence. Since we have divine tools at our disposal, given us by Jesus, why are we slow to use them in the places where we spend most of our time?

Purposeful Transformation

A workplace survey from the *Financial Times* asked, ‘What makes the best employers so good to work for?’ Not surprisingly, it concluded that the most attractive companies are those that put people alongside profits, even in tough economic times. The top five characteristics that employees were looking for were:

- 1) Finding friends at work;
- 2) Company or organisational consideration of personal circumstances;
- 3) Good communication – knowing what is going on;
- 4) Trust – being able to believe what the business/organisation says;
- 5) Attention to personal development.

People who are uniquely created, want to be treated in ways that acknowledge their unique value, whether they know their

to give opinions on other matters. Let’s pray for integrity and success in what we do – and believe that God is involved.

Next, being influential demands that we learn how to take risks. Our true identity in Christ may force us to put other sources of personal identity at risk – status, career advancement opportunities, material benefits, social involvement.

Some risk-taking initiatives might include:

- Seek to be a peace-maker if you notice conflict between people you work with.
- Challenge habitual backbiting and gossip.
- Seek solutions to poor business practice.
- Find ways to foster trust and good relationships – even if you’re not a team-leader or manager. Chocolate biscuits can be a good start.
- Ask work colleagues or team members if you can pray for the success of their projects.

