

# Faithful



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In the Daily  
Grind **with God**  
**and for Others**



InterVarsity Press  
ivpress.com

Taken from *Faithful Work* by  
Ross Chapman and Ryan Tafilowski.  
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Published by InterVarsity Press,  
Downers Grove, IL. [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)



## The Importance of Work

*If we can accept [a] broader concept of mission as Christian service in the world comprising both evangelism and social action—a concept which is laid upon us by the model of our Saviour’s mission in the world—then Christians could under God make a far greater impact on society.*

**JOHN STOTT**

**TODAY, MANY OF US** are less than satisfied when it comes to our work lives. Beyond our jobs providing us with a paycheck, we don’t really see any meaning or purpose in

what we do day after day. We feel isolated from our colleagues at work, uncertain when it comes to understanding our calling, and conflicted when it comes to our personal faith and our public commitments in fields such as business, education, law, and health care. Finding answers to these dilemmas is essential if we want to live integrated, vital Christian lives—not just on Sundays but on the other six days too.

After all, we spend one-third of our adult lives at work, possibly more than ninety thousand hours. Life isn't all about work, but it's certainly a huge part of it. And if we don't approach our work with an understanding of *why* we do *what* we do—in a context that is greater than ourselves—our daily lives can easily feel disconnected from our faith. It's not intentional, of course, but our lack of coherence leads to us living in two separate and often disconnected worlds: church and work, private and public, values and facts.

There is no poverty worse than that which takes away work and the dignity of work. In a genuinely developed society, work is an essential dimension of social life, for it is not only a means of earning one's daily bread but also an avenue of personal growth, self-expression, the building of

healthy relationships, and the exchange of gifts. Work gives us a sense of shared responsibility for the development of the world and, ultimately, for our life as a people.<sup>1</sup>

### **Was It Always Like This?**

There was a time, according to the German sociologist Max Weber, when the world was like a “great enchanted garden”—when people understood the ordinary elements of their world and experience to be integrated into one great cosmic tapestry. Human work was thought to somehow participate in a greater, transcendent spiritual reality: there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular.

These days, most of us don’t think about our work this way. According to Weber, starting with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, rapid modernization, a trend toward secularization, and the bureaucratization of work converged in what he called the “disenchantment of the world.” No longer is the world viewed as an “enchanted garden” but instead as a barren, sterile environment where we feel alienated from one another and from the nature of our work.<sup>2</sup> As a result, for most of us in Western cultures, work has become thoroughly secular, divorced from any transcendent framework of ultimate meaning,

stripped of any intrinsic value, and reduced to a means to an end—which is almost always the accumulation of material wealth. Faith is divorced from reason and forced out of the public square and into our private lives.

The net result has been a thoroughly dualistic worldview to which almost all modern Westerners subscribe without a second thought, many Christians included. Think of it this way: religious commitments have been confined to the private space and are considered inappropriate in the public square—such that if you were hosting a house party, you would expect to find guests in your living room but would be alarmed and offended to find them in your bedroom. Religious values, we might say, have been banished from the living room: what someone believes privately is their own business, so the thinking goes, but religious beliefs have no place in conversations of common concern. Thus Christianity went from being a public good to a private good, and now, in the minds of many, to a private ill.

For the Christian, an activity that is not sinful or displeasing to God is neither sacred nor secular in itself. But much Christian thinking is unwittingly shaped by dualistic assumptions, especially when it comes to work. For example, we may initially consider traditional ministry

work—such as that of pastors, missionaries, or relief workers—to be more sacred than ordinary, secular work like practicing law, fitting pipes, or teaching eighth grade science. Indeed, dualism is still alive and well among Christians. According to a recent survey, 70 percent of American churchgoers don't see how their work serves God's purposes, and 78 percent see their work as less important than the work of a pastor or priest.<sup>3</sup>

This sacred/secular divide is a concept totally foreign to the New Testament, which teaches that all things done in and through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit are sacred.

We have gotten ourselves on the horns of a dilemma, true enough, but the dilemma is not real. It is a creature of misunderstanding. The sacred/secular antithesis has no foundation in the Old Testament or New Testament. Without doubt, a more perfect understanding of Christian truth will deliver us from it. As A. W. Tozer has written, "One of the greatest hindrances to internal peace which the Christian encounters is the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas—the sacred and the secular."<sup>4</sup>

We can turn to the Bible to dissolve this false sacred/secular divide and find a way to reintegrate faith and work:

- All things (including all industries and social systems) are being redeemed (Colossians 1:17-20).
- Sacred and secular are not just external realities but also include the public *and* private spheres (Luke 6:43-45).
- All activity can be done sacredly or secularly (Colossians 3:17, 23-24).

Doing our secular jobs in a spiritual way is a deeply Christian way of being in the world. As Lesslie Newbigin writes in his book *Truth to Tell*:

A serious commitment to evangelism, to the telling of the story which the Church is sent to tell, means a radical questioning of the reigning assumptions of public life. It is to affirm the gospel not only as an invitation to a private and personal decision but as public truth which ought to be acknowledged as true for the whole of the life of society.<sup>5</sup>

### **Making All Work Sacred**

Work is our chance to participate in God's great plan to reconcile the world to himself in Christ. Work is our



chance to participate in the redemption of all things. Work is where we shape our one small corner of the world. It doesn't matter if you are a lawyer, a factory worker, a plumber, a teacher, a stay-at-home parent, a full-time volunteer, a small business owner, or an entrepreneur, work is where you get the opportunity to form human civilization in all its specificity and beauty.

And let's be clear: when we talk about work, we are not talking only about paid positions or income-producing endeavors. The work of a stay-at-home parent who tirelessly cares for home and children is just as valuable as having a career in the corporate world. Work, whether paid or unpaid, is an opportunity for being involved spiritually in the world today.

As Christians, we have an amazing opportunity to engage with the culture during our normal, ordinary days. Faith and work should not be separate; instead, the heart of our faith is meant to be lived out during the day-to-day work of home and business.

In John Stott's classic little book *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, he asks a question that clarifies why the connection between our faith and our work is so important and relevant: *What exactly is the Christian*

*mission? What has God sent the Church into the world to do?*

Knowing the answer to this question will help us to clearly answer two other important questions: What exactly are we as individuals sent to accomplish, and how does that relate to our work?<sup>6</sup> Jesus made it clear that his mission consisted of both words and deeds—and the Christian mission is meant to include both evangelistic and social responsibility. Therefore Stott concludes that work is at the heart of the Christian mission:

Some are indeed called to be missionaries, evangelists or pastors, and others to the great professions of law, education, medicine and the social sciences. But others are called to commerce, to industry and farming, to accountancy and banking, to local government or parliament, and to the mass media. . . . In all these spheres, and many others besides, it is possible for Christians to interpret their lifework Christianly, and to see it . . . as their Christian vocation, as the way Christ has called them to spend their lives in his service.<sup>7</sup>

We can draw two major conclusions about the nature of work in light of Christian mission:

- Work is the greatest vehicle many of us have for loving our neighbors as ourselves. It's at work that we find our most frequent opportunities to serve the public good by using our talents and skills to serve others.
- Work is the context for discipling and the verbal proclamation of the gospel of grace. Not all work activities will provide opportunities for sharing the good news, but most can be used by God to make us more Christ-like. And as God's Word shapes our motivation for our work, it will move out from our hearts to our mouths like a cup overflowing with living water.

Let's look at the way these two conclusions provide solutions to two very important questions.

**Question:** How can we address the fact that the majority of the world doesn't know Christ, and knowledge of his truth is not found in the industries of our modern Western culture?

**Solution:** We can understand our work in light of the Christian faith. This involves learning and changing our thinking so we as Christians can witness to the

gospel of grace and the universal lordship of Christ in a way that reaches those in our industry and culture.

**Question:** How can we help alleviate the suffering of a world filled with desperate social, environmental, spiritual, and cultural problems, ranging from jobs and justice to idols and empty hearts?

**Solution:** We can become servants of Christ through our daily work. We can learn to better serve others in our organizations, communities, and professions. As the body of Christ, we can help one another prepare for works of service in our daily work (see Ephesians 4:12).

Our hope is that this little book will increase the understanding of what it means for our faith to intersect with our work, and that through this understanding, our cities will be filled with disciples of Jesus—good citizens who will live out the implications of the gospel, not just in church on Sundays but every day in all of life. When our faith is integrated with our work, it transforms us to become passionate about finding the true, good, and beautiful in the work God has called us to do.

Our work is important because it represents God to the world. By adding our unique, creative input, we

offer our work as a redemptive contribution to the culture and present our work in the world back to God as our gift to him.

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