

## PREFACE

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The coronavirus pandemic has caused a radical shake-up in the world of work. Many people who thought their jobs were secure, especially in the hospitality, leisure and travel sectors, have suddenly found themselves without employment, and therefore unable to pay their bills and support their homes and families. Many other people, particularly those in the health and care sectors, have found themselves worked into the ground, and developing all kinds of mental health symptoms under the relentless pressure they are under, to help the desperately ill and dying. The ethos of work has changed with a mass movement to work at home, or to be furloughed for considerable periods of time, with no guarantee of a job to go back to. The pandemic also brought another issue to the fore: the need to rethink the proximity of workers in their workspace, in order to preserve a healthy degree of social distancing.

Not only that, but Russia's invasion of Ukraine has disrupted energy supplies particularly in Western Europe, and the price of energy, fuel and many other things, has skyrocketed with millions struggling for the first time to make ends meet. Fear and uncertainty stalk many homes, as work and income stability have been lost.

Even more, all the time there is the relentless advance of technology, with robotics and artificial intelligence taking

over many jobs that were once thought secure – in logistics, transport, manufacturing, marketing, banking, law, medicine, education, and a host of other areas, so that scenarios, not only of unemployment, but also of unemployability, are increasingly being discussed. The jobs most at risk from automation are those that involve routine tasks, such as bookkeeping, secretarial work, and work on the factory floor. Their highly repetitive and predictable activities are nowadays easily programmed into efficient machines that can work 24/7, and do not need to be paid once they have been purchased.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle saw the problem centuries ago. In 350 BC he wrote:

‘For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, which, says the poet, “of their own accord entered the assembly of the Gods”; if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters’ slaves.’<sup>2</sup>

In the 2016 film *The Future of Work and Death*, Gray Scott, a futurist and techno-philosopher, said that up to a third of jobs in America could be replaced by robots or automated systems by 2025. Dr Stuart Armstrong of the Future of Humanity Institute added that the least vulnerable are those with people skills and creativity like choreographers, managers and social workers. His study estimated that up to 47 percent of all American jobs could be replaced by 2036.

In light of this, it is not surprising that the topic of the future of work has moved into mainstream academia, as societies wrestle with the task of ensuring employment for their citizens, realising that in certain areas, things will never return to the pre-pandemic state. For instance, according to globally wide-ranging McKinsey Consumer Pulse surveys, around three-quarters of people who used digital channels for the very first time during the pandemic say they will continue to do so if and when things return to some kind of normality. This means that digital skills are at a premium, a

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Artificial Intelligence see my *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, (London, Penguin 1992), 1:iv.

circumstance that creates difficulty in countries where there is little educational or technical infrastructure to equip people with those skills.

It is far from an easy time for a great number of people. Each worldview has its own approach to work. As such it is important that those of us who espouse the Christian worldview, are acquainted with what it teaches about work, which, above all, is dignified by the fact that God Himself ordained it for human beings to do.

I am acutely aware that there are many books on the biblical perspective on work. Nevertheless, almost every time I have given a talk on these issues, someone has suggested that I should put the material into a book. After long hesitation, I have taken that encouragement to heart. One source of that hesitation is that our work experiences are varied. I have been a university teacher and research mathematician most of my life, with special interest in philosophy and ethics. At the same time, I have been engaged in Bible teaching, in the public defence of the Christian faith, as well as having an active family life. Hence, I think on the plus side that I have some understanding of the pressures of holding together lecturing; research; organisational, pastoral and family commitments – specialised though some of these activities necessarily are.

However, you, the reader, may therefore feel with some justification that I have little direct idea of the sort of work pressures that you may face if you are, say: a farmer, lawyer, surgeon, plumber, builder, accountant, miner, cook, sailor, homemaker, single mum, airline pilot, investment banker, police officer, civil servant – or any one of ten thousand other things that you might be, including unemployed. That said, experience has taught me that the actual issues we face as Christians in the workplace, whether in the home, factory, or office, have a great deal in common. I intend, therefore, to discuss the biblical principles that I have found helpful in my own work, in the hope that you can tweak them to apply to your own situation.

A further motivation for writing has been the fact that over the years I have met all too many Christians who are disappointed that their churches express little or no interest

in what they as faithful members do in their workplace – the arena where they may well spend most of their time, whether in their home or outside it. Worse still, some committed churchgoers are made to feel like second-class Christians, trailing behind those who are in so-called ‘full-time’ Christian work. On the other hand, the fact that salvation is by God’s grace, and does not depend on our merit or achievement, may lead yet others to draw the erroneous view that our work is of very little eternal significance.

In a famous lecture entitled *Why Work?* given during the war in 1942, and still well worth reading, Dorothy L. Sayers forcibly addressed the first of these issues:

‘In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world’s intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion.’

‘But is it astonishing? How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.’<sup>3</sup>

I wish to encourage such people who have experienced such negativity by showing them that God Himself shows a great deal of interest in our work precisely because it really is of eternal significance. The Bible contains principles that can help us resolve many of the misunderstandings that surround the topic of work, even among Christians.

I imagine that all of us will readily understand the following reaction to a work situation.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://malyonworkplace.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Why-Work-Dorothy-Sayers-Essay.pdf>

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We Christians say that God is everywhere, and He is Lord of everything but for the majority the honest reality is that our work and marketplaces seem so devoid of God and His purpose. We march off to work valiantly and come home despondently. What is the place and purpose of work? Is there anything sacred about secular work? Is there meaning in the marketplace? Is our great destiny simply to eat, drink and leave behind an empty dish?

That was an honest, heartfelt statement by a Christian living and working in Singapore. It could be echoed by Christians in many parts of the world. We all understand it. 'Just think about it: if you start at 20 and retire at 65 having worked 40 hours a week for 48 weeks a year you will have done nearly 90,000 hours of work. That adds up to just over 10 years of your life.' Is God relevant to any of this, or do we simply have to accept that most of us need to work to live, so that we should simply get on with it?

Many years ago, during the time of the Cold War, I was on the eastern side of the infamous Berlin wall, chatting to young people. One young man expressed his envy of my possession of a passport that allowed me to travel both East and West. Somehow, we got to discussing the Christian faith, and he told me that he was not impressed. He said that communism was clearly far superior to Christianity, in that it was an ideology that had something to say about all of life. It had a philosophy of history, of politics, of literature, of art, of education, and of work. It seemed to him that Christianity, by contrast, occupied very little space and time in a person's life – an hour or so on a Sunday and perhaps, if you were very committed, another hour midweek. 'Your Christianity,' he said, 'is far less than an ideology. It is unimpressive and worthless. Why would anyone take it seriously when it demands so little?'

I have never forgotten him. For, I realised that, when it comes to actual practice, some people professing Christianity give the impression that their faith in God is area-restricted, time-limited, undemanding, and has little or nothing to say about daily life as a whole. What that young East German said to me was, and remains, a challenge to me, and to all Christian believers, to get our act together and wake up to the fact that Christianity, even more than communism, offers us guidance

for all aspects of life. In particular, it has much to instruct us about that large expanse of life that is taken up with work.

In her lecture *Why Work?* cited above, Dorothy Sayers, referred to an earlier talk she had given:

‘What I urged then was a thoroughgoing revolution in our whole attitude to work. I asked that it should be looked upon, not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight, and so fulfil itself to the glory of God.’

This is a thoroughly biblical view. In Genesis we read: ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it’ (Gen. 2:15). The Hebrew term used here for *work* is *avodah*. This is the very same term as is used by Moses: ‘Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord, “Let my people go, that they may *serve* me”’ (Ex. 8:1). This means that the concepts of work in the ordinary sense and service to God are so closely related in the Hebrew mind that the same word is used for both. The same idea is repeated in the New Testament. Paul writes: ‘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’ (Col. 3:23-24). Here the word for *serving* is related to the Greek word, *doulos*, for a *slave* or *servant*. It is this close link between God and work that we wish to examine in detail.

I scarcely need to mention that what I have to say will not necessarily enhance your job prospects. Nor will you find the answers to all of your questions and solutions to all of your problems in these pages. When I was younger, like many others, I imagined that I would solve most of life’s problems by the age of thirty and then I would begin to live. I explained this to someone older and wiser, who told me that I had it all wrong – wrestling with life’s problems, and solving them, is living. I have found that perspective both enlightening and liberating ever since. The Bible is not a manual full of solutions to every conceivable problem that any of us will ever meet. It mainly gives us principles that can shape our lives in developing our character, and helping us mature

and become more experienced in tackling life's challenges. I shall, therefore, discuss the biblical teaching on the purpose and meaning of work in the hope of helpfully mapping out a Christian perspective and some principles on how work fits into a bigger, integrated picture of life. I have added an Appendix on biblical principles for the support of the gospel.

We shall see that developing a Christian mind on work is intimately connected with growing a Christian character, and that, in itself, is an attribute that will certainly prove helpful, both in job applications and, of course, in doing the work itself.

The book need not necessarily be read in linear fashion: the reader may go directly to a topic of particular interest and catch up with the rest later.

### **Questions**

1. How have the pandemic and the energy crisis affected your attitude to work?
2. Has the rise of technology made you concerned about your work, or do you think technology will supply a new range of jobs? Would you think of changing your job because of the technology revolution?
3. Is your church interested in what you do during the week? If not, why do you think that is, and what might you do to improve the situation?
4. Do you 'march off to work valiantly and come home despondently'? If so, what might help you mitigate this?
5. Discuss Dorothy Sayers' statement that our 'work should be looked upon – not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life, in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight, and so fulfil itself to the glory of God'.

## **Summary of Book**

### *Chapter 1*

#### *Creation and Sabbath*

The first reference to work, in the biblical narrative, is God's original work of creating the heavens and earth, in a sequence of day-stages, followed by rest that become a model for the human workweek. We discuss the work-rest cycle – in particular the meaning and relevance of sabbath in the contemporary world. We conclude by thinking about the status of the sabbath for the Christian, and the importance of the theological doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, and not by works of personal merit.

### *Chapter 2*

#### *Motivation for Work and Life*

In this chapter, we unpack Jesus' main teaching on motivation for work and life that is to be found in His Sermon on the Mount. We start with three key questions: where do we invest; how do we see the world; and which master do we serve? The first and third are about money, the middle one is about perception, and in connection with these we draw on some fascinating recent work on the structure and function of the human brain.

How we answer those questions will affect our levels of anxiety in life in general, and work in particular. Jesus issues a radical command and, in the context of supplying our daily needs, instructs us to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and we shall find that the needs are met. We explore what this means by differentiating, using examples, between the goal of work, and its by-products or outcomes.

### *Chapter 3*

#### *Seeking God's Kingdom in Work*

We start the chapter by further exploring the meaning of seeking the kingdom of God in daily work, by studying the experience of Peter's miraculous catch of fish recorded in Luke 5. We then move on to what the Bible has to say about morality, money, power, and sex in the workplace. We look in particular

at the examples of Joseph and Nehemiah to highlight the pressures that work can put upon us.

*Chapter 4*

*Secular or Sacred?*

The account of Peter's transition, in the previous chapter, from a fisherman to a fisher of men and women, now leads us to look at the widespread notion that there are two classes of Christians: those who earn their keep in secular employment, and those who are employed full-time by the church – and that the latter are superior to the former. We therefore investigate this whole idea and find it to be erroneous and unhelpful by contrast with the biblical idea of work as calling.

*Chapter 5*

*Gospel Patrons*

From the very beginning, the progress of the gospel in the world has depended in large part on the generosity of believers. Jesus and His disciples were supported in their itinerant ministry by a group of women believers, and Paul's mission to Europe was facilitated by a businesswoman, Lydia. Throughout the centuries, gospel patronage, by both wealthy and poor Christians, has been practised as a Christian grace of giving. We give examples of this and look at some of the principles involved.

However, there are different kinds of wealth, even more important than monetary wealth – think of Paul's intellectual and spiritual wealth. We look at the way in which various kinds of wealth have been brought together to maintain the momentum of the gospel.

*Chapter 6*

*Wealth Management*

Although there are many different kinds of wealth, the Bible nevertheless has a great deal to say about how believers are to relate to material wealth. Jesus Himself taught about it in a number of memorable parables that we discuss in order to discover the principles that they illustrate: the rich fool, the lost son, the dishonest steward, and the rich man and Lazarus.

We conclude the chapter by looking at the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, the tax collector.

### *Chapter 7*

#### *Eternal Rewards*

Jesus constantly emphasised that there is a connection between what we do in this life, and our experience in the world to come. Though entrance to heaven cannot be merited by our work, both Jesus and His apostles taught that there are to be rewards of various kinds, not only for the work we have done for the Lord, but also in connection with the character we have developed. We look at the principles that will operate at what is called the judgement seat of Christ, and spell out its implications for the way in which we order our lives on earth.

### *Appendix A*

#### *Principles of Gospel Support*

In this section we examine in more detail the biblical principles governing the support of the gospel – principles for both giver and recipient.

### *Appendix B*

#### *Insights from Neuroscience*

Here we develop further the important ideas of Iain McGilchrist, outlined in Chapter 2, on the functioning of the two cerebral hemispheres that constitute the human brain.