



MAKE A MUNDANE JOB MEANINGFUL

After graduating with a degree in journalism, Aryanto Wijaya—full of “great expectations”—found a job editing articles. But his dream job soon soured. In his words, “Work became a routine and life became a bore. The only thing that kept me going was the weekends, when I could escape from boredom to pleasure by doing what I enjoyed.”

Although a Christ-follower, Aryanto had not yet seen the dots connecting his faith with his daily work. Sadly, countless Christian believers suffer from the same frustration with what they do every day. They read and agree with Paul’s words to the working people in the Colossian church: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart” (Col. 3:23). But how to do their own particular work wholeheartedly? Well . . . that just eludes them.

The title of this article apparently led you to download it. So perhaps you, like Aryanto, are finding your job tedious and pointless. You may sincerely want to “work at it with all you heart,” but how to do *this job* and do it *that way* (the Colossians 3:23 way) escapes you.

A Seeing Problem

Someone has said, “Don’t expect to get meaning out of your work; instead, bring meaning to your work.” The secret of bringing meaning to your work lies in *seeing*. Jesus spoke many times and in many ways about the importance of seeing. For example, when his disciples missed his meaning when he spoke about food not defiling people, he asked them, “Are you so dull?” Don’t you see . . .?” (Mark 7:18).

This article cannot make a dull job shine. But I hope what follows will point to seven purposes for work, purposes seeable through the eyes of faith. If any of these purposes still remains unseen and impossible to relate to your work, ask God, by his Spirit, to make the invisible visible to you.

See Your Work as Worship

People around the world typically see work as the way to pay their bills. The expected one-word answer to the “Why work?” question is . . . *money*. And, yes, earning one’s way is one biblical reason for working. But working to earn needs to be seen as a subset of working to worship God.

For many, work and worship don’t even belong in the same sentence. What does something so everyday and earthly have to do with something so holy and heavenly? The idea of work-as-worship has gotten smothered by centuries of traditions that have conditioned us to see a difference between “sacred” (or “spiritual”) work and “secular” work.

That way of seeing is downright unbiblical. Yet it persists. In *Work: Theological Foundations and Practical Implications*, Chris Armstrong writes: “American Christians of my generation have largely given up on finding any spiritual meaning in our work.” No wonder, then, that it may seem almost heretical to think of seeing work as worship.

Yet Paul—hardly a heretic!—tells the working Christians of his day that “the Master you are serving [in your work] is Christ” (Col. 3:24, NLT). To serve Christ is to worship him. And Paul tells the Romans to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Rom. 12:1). This makes our bodies, these earthly energy plants we live and work in, the very offerings we lay on the worship altar.

Are you seeing your work as . . . worship?

See Your Work as an Act of Obedience

The sacred-secular divide injures us by claiming church-related activities please God more than working at a job. How much better, we think, to go on a short-term mission across an ocean. Or to help out in the church program to feed the homeless. Or to serve as a church-camp counselor.

But that kind of seeing needs some vision-correction through biblical lenses. The Bible makes working an act of obedience. The very first task God assigned to human beings was “to work” the garden and “take care of it” (Gen. 2:15). And even after God had banished Adam from the Garden of Eden, God’s assignment for him was “to work the ground from which he had been taken” (Gen. 3:23).

The command to work, of course, shows up in the Ten Commandments as, “Six days you shall labor . . .” (Ex. 20:9; Deut. 5:13). God included only seven days in a week. Yet he commanded that his human creatures work 87 percent of those days.

Even in the New Testament, this basic command to work remains in force. Among the Thessalonian Christians, some had become work-shirkers. They leaned on others for financial support. Their attitude toward working threatened to give the Christian community a black eye among outsiders. So Paul went as far as to say that “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (II Thess. 3:10).

Are you seeing your work as an act of obedience?

See Yourself as a Self-Supporting Agent of God's Kingdom on Earth

From my youngest years I began hearing appeals to give money to missionaries working in lands and cultures across oceans. God had sent those Christians to serve him in far-distant places. They—like all of us back home—needed to pay their grocery

bills, to buy clothing, to purchase cars and gasoline. So I saw that supporting them pleased God.

But self-support? I never saw *that* as something that delighted him. Anyone opting for a so-called “secular” job was sometimes suspected of giving in to the all-too-common selfish desire for a cushy way to make money.

Thankfully, seeing through the lens of Scripture provided the kind of vision correction I needed for the work world where most Christians spend their best hours. As Paul urged the believers in Thessalonica, “Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your handsThen people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others” (I Thess. 4:11, 12,NLT). That sounds as if Paul considers supporting oneself to be an honorable, God-pleasing way of life.

Paul himself practiced self-support. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, he wrote, “we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this . . . to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.” (II Thess. 3:8-9).

Amazingly, even non-Christian employers are willing to compensate Christ-followers to go exactly where Jesus sends us—into the world. And by means of our wages or salaries, we Christians in the workplace can pay our own way as we serve King Jesus.

Are you seeing yourself as a self-supporting agent of God's Kingdom?

See Every Person in Your Work Circle as Made in God's Image

Any job can become more meaningful if you see that you are surrounded by people made in the image of God. If you believe you are encircled by those created in God's likeness, your reason for being there becomes far more interesting and significant.

C. S. Lewis said, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. . . . it is immortals whom we joke with, work with” Or, as an old children's song had it, “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight.”

But how do we Christ-followers come across to non-Christians? Sometimes the answer is not pretty. In a YouTube video, Sean McDowell (Biola University) interviews Adam Davidson, a self-described “atheist, New York, media elite.” Davidson has written for NPR, the New York Times, the Atlantic, MSNBC, and other media.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHwJ8Z09Cqw>)

In the hour-plus interview, Davidson says, “If you asked almost all the adults I grew up with, ‘What’s an evangelical Christian?’ they would say ‘that’s a judgmental, homophobic person who just wants to take away our rights.’” Davidson himself has a more nuanced understanding of evangelicals, but only because he has made an effort to do so.

Perhaps those adults Davidson speaks about would have a different take if the Christians they worked with were actually to love them as those Christians love themselves. Real love is not rude, pushy, or unkind. It always protects, never dishonors, others. If non-Christians ask them to explain the hope they have in Christ, loving Christians will answer with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15).

Some in your workplace will not be so easy to love. The challenge of knowing how to show them love through the ways that you work and interact with them may be difficult—but never boring. With prayer and persistence, love will find the way.

Are you seeing every person in your work circle as made in God’s image?

See It as Your Role to Find, Encourage, and Pray for Other Christians in Your Work Circle

In the typical workplace, Christ-followers are a minority group. On the job, believers—like Elijah—often face the I-am-the-only-one-left complex (1 Kings 19:10, 14). Yes, everyone is created in the image of God. But unbelievers cannot relate to your life of faith.

Seeing workplace isolation not just as a problem but as an opportunity will open up yet another way to make a mundane job meaningful. The New Testament offers many calls to encourage fellow believers. For example, the writer of Hebrews urges Christians to “encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (3:13).

Does that verse apply only to those in your church group on Sundays? If so, it will prove impossible to carry out “daily.” Even once-a-week encouragement won’t happen, because there are too many people—most of whom you’ve never met. But if you apply the verse in your workplace context, “daily” encouragement becomes far more doable.

But suppose you’re not aware of any other Christians in your on-the-job network. Begin asking the Lord, “How can I discover other Christians in my workplace?” Normal conversations with those you meet on the job can help you recognize fellow believers. Listen for words often used by Christians. For example, if someone says, “That was really a blessing,” take it as a possible sign of faith.

Think of three or four open-ended questions you can ask. “What books are you reading these days?” “What are your plans for the weekend?” “What are you hoping for?” Now and then a response may provide a hint that the person may know Jesus or be seeking him. Following up will help to clarify the situation.

Once you’ve found one or two other Christians, ask them if they know others. Over time, as your network of believers grow, make it a point to find ways to encourage and build each other up in your faith-walk. And you can pray for one another, your coworkers, and for your employer.

Are you seeing it as your role to find, encourage, and pray for other Christians in your work circle?

See Your Work as Helping Carry Out God's Purposes for His Creation

Many of us think God’s purpose is simply for us and others is to trust Jesus to forgive our sins so we can go to heaven when we die. But that shrinks and distorts God’s goal for us and his earth. Jesus came to give us life both now and in the age to come. And—in the here and now—he has important things for us to do on planet earth.

“Fill the earth,” God says both to Adam and Eve and to Noah and his sons (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). And in Acts 17:26, Luke says God “made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth.” So the Bible makes it clear that God wants people to be living all around the globe. An earth filled with people requires a whole lot of work—providing food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, protection, and so on.

Could God furnish all of these services himself? Yes. After all, he rained manna from the sky and sent quail for his people to eat. He made leather clothes for Adam and Eve. Jesus healed people. But normally, God chooses to provide these necessities for living through human beings made in his image. Priscilla and Aquila made tents. Gideon grew wheat. Luke worked as a doctor. Joseph protected people by working in government.

This means that your job—assuming it is honorable work—contributes to the well-being of people on God’s earth. And, in that way, your work is carrying out God’s purposes. Seeing what you do that way gives it dignity and meaning. As you do your earth-work day in and day out, “it is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col. 3:24).

Are you seeing your work as helping carry out God’s purposes for his creation?

See How God is Using the Job to Form Christ in You

The thorns and thistles in Adam’s workplace pierced and stung as he worked his crops. In other words, they caused him to suffer. Those hurtful “thorns and thistles” in your workplace show up in more contemporary forms:

- Your boss keeps saddling you with impossible deadlines.
- Several people in your company, doing far less work, are paid a lot more than what you receive.
- The cheap, employer-supplied monitors keep breaking down, but the company refuses to replace them.

These and countless other workplace woes still cause suffering. But for those with eyes to see, Jesus has repurposed the suffering. He himself—sinless though he was—“learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). And for us? We “glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4). James echoes Paul by saying, “the testing of your faith produces perseverance” (James 1:3).

One survey of 7,000 workers found that 97 percent of them were frustrated at work. This often leads to job-hopping, expecting the grass will be greener in some other pasture. But if we, as Christ-followers, are set on growing into Christlikeness, few conditions are more favorable to our doing so than the inevitable suffering in the workplace.

Eugene Peterson, in *Christ Plays in Ten-Thousand Places*, writes, "I'm prepared to contend that the primary location for spiritual formation is the workplace" (p. 127). Notice that Peterson does not say the working environment is "a" primary location but "the" primary location for spiritual formation.

Are you seeing how God is using the job to form Christ in you?

Utterly bored with his job, Aryanto Wijaya desperately "cried out to God, 'Lord, I don't know what I should do. I am bored. I am stressed. I don't like my job, but I don't want to lose my job. Please help me.' God heard my cry. One day, when I was taking the train, I opened my 2015 journal. In it was a quote from American author Mark Galli's article 'Insignificant is Beautiful': *'The search for significance, especially if connected with changing the world, can blind us to the everyday tasks, the mundane duties, and the dirty work that is part and parcel of the life of discipleship.'*"

Wijaya finally saw his problem: "I had yearned for a life of significance where I could do spectacular things and make my dreams come true. Yet I did not realize that this excessive obsession was precisely what made my daily routines feel meaningless. I could not enjoy the many simple things that I actually had because I was constantly dreaming of something else. As a result, I took my job lightly and underestimated the worth of all that I was doing."

He is now able to say, "God radically transformed my perspective of the work I do."

For more: *God Loves Your Work: Discover Why He Sends You to Do What You Do*
www.larrypeabody.com