

WHY WORK MATTERS

FAITH & WORK

The Bible begins talking about work right up front, as soon as it begins talking about anything.

In the opening chapters of Genesis, we read that God was at work, creating the heavens and the earth. The Hebrew word that's used in this account to describe God's creative work is "m lâ'kâ"; it's the same word that is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe farm work, employment, business, and property that has been built up as a result of labour. The writer is making clear that God's creation work has a close parallel to the human work that will follow.

What's more, the process of working is described as "good" six times throughout Genesis chapter one. When God had finished, he stood back to take a look at His work and described everything as "very good". So work was right there at the beginning, in paradise, and work was good...

God created man in His image, or likeness, which means that the drive and ability to create and work has been imprinted into our DNA by our Creator. We also learn from the accounts in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 that the creative process is one that God intends us to continue in partnership with Him. Adam and Eve were assigned work in the garden. From the beginning, God made us to be engaged in work that is creative and meaningful. He set a process in motion. He didn't create a static world, but rather one that grows and develops, and in which He remains engaged. He could have brought all sorts of aspects of human civilisation into existence at that initial creation stage, but instead he turns it over to the man and the woman to develop further. God intends us to continue that creative work, being fruitful, subduing and having dominion over things that would otherwise run wild.

In the New Testament, we see this mandate explained further, expressed in terms of Christians becoming God's heirs and fellow workers in the family business of sustaining creation and bringing about God's Kingdom. In the parable of the tenants in Matthew 21, Mark 12 and Luke 20, Jesus is likened to the son and heir to the family business; and in Galatians 4:4-7 Paul explains that those who have been baptized into Christ become God's adopted heirs. Paul develops this theme in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, where the gardening metaphor provides an echo of Genesis chapter 2, and where it is made clear that God works with and through us to bring about change, with Paul describing us as God's

"fellow workers". So God continues to work today, and his chosen method is to partner with us, as if we are the heirs to the family business, working alongside him to build His Kingdom. In the New Testament, the early Christians took their ministry out of the temple and into the marketplace. Kingdom building today should happen outside of church, in the work place, on the front line – wherever we naturally encounter people who do not know Jesus.

This has always been true. However, in the 21st century we are seeing a number of phenomena that make it even more important for Christians to understand how their daily work contributes to building God's Kingdom. That dreaded disease, "SSD" (sacred secular divide), has never been more prevalent as faith is increasingly side-lined as "personal" and "private". Western societies no longer acknowledge faith as having a valid role to play in the workplace, in politics, in education, in healthcare, or in the creative arts. Yet following the financial crisis of 2007/8 the world was left shaken and looking for fresh answers. The divide between rich and poor is increasing at a dramatic rate. War has broken out in the name of religion across the Islamic world and in Israel. In a quest to be "at the cutting edge", some creative arts are becoming ever more shocking, challenging morality and human decency. At this time, it's vital for Christians to provide real answers: by modelling Godly character; by working well at our jobs; ministering grace and love wherever we work; beginning to mould the culture in which we operate to a different set of values; becoming a mouthpiece for truth and justice. In bringing these concepts to our daily work, we can be good news to the people around us. By being good news, we will increasingly earn the right to speak about the good news of Jesus.

We want the church to equip Christians for their Monday to Saturday lives, and not just to be relevant to their Sundays. This website is part of that initiative.

