

WORK AS WORSHIP

Sometimes bivo/covo leaders can compartmentalize the idea of work. They often say something like, “I do my secular job to create the financial margin to do ministry at the church.” This leads us to value our ministry work over the work we do in the marketplace. But instead, we need to recognize that there should be no sacred-secular divide when it comes to work. If God reigns over all things (and He does!) then all work can be sacred. In other words, *all work matters*.

Work as Worship

Another reason all work matters is because of the connection Scripture makes between work and worship. The language of work in Genesis 2:15 (“*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*”) is rooted in the Hebrew word *avodah*, which in English is translated “to cultivate.”

In the Old Testament, the word *avodah* is translated in several different ways. In some cases, it is rendered as “work,” “service,” or “craftsmanship.” But other times it is translated as “worship.” *Avodah* is used to describe the hard work of God’s covenant people making bricks as slaves in Egypt (Ex. 1:14), the artists building the tabernacle (Ex. 35:24), and the fine craftsmanship of linen workers (1 Chron. 4:21).

Avodah also appears in the context of Solomon dedicating the temple. Solomon employs this word as he instructs the priests and Levites regarding their service in leading corporate worship and praise of the one true God (2 Chron. 8:14).

Tom Nelson, in his book *Work Matters*, summarizes this important connection between work and worship when he writes:

Whether it is making bricks, crafting fine linen, or leading others in corporate praise and worship, the Old Testament writers present a seamless understanding of work and worship. Though there are distinct nuances to avodah, a common thread of meaning emerges where work, worship, and service are inextricably linked and intricately connected. The various usages of this Hebrew word found first in Genesis 2:15 tell us that God’s original design and desire is that our work and our worship would be a seamless way of living. Properly understood, our work is to be thoughtfully woven into the integral fabric of Christian vocation, for God designed and intended our work, our vocational calling, to be an act of God-honoring worship.

However, too often we think of worship as something we do on Sunday and work as something we do on Monday. This dichotomy is clearly not what God designed, or what he desires for our lives. God designed work to have both a vertical and horizontal dimension. We work to the glory of God (vertical) and for the furtherance of His mission and the common good (horizontal).

God is at Work – at Our Work

Building on the idea that all work is a sacred calling, the second key aspect of understanding our work is to realize that God is active in our workplaces. As Christians, we need to see that our work is not primarily about economic exchange. It is not about climbing the corporate ladder. It is not about achieving the American Dream. Instead, it is about contributing *to* and participating *in* God’s mission.

In a fascinating angle on vocation, Luther says that vocation is a mask of God. That is, God hides himself in the workplace. To speak of God being hidden is a way of describing His presence, as when a child hiding in the room is there, just not seen. To realize that the mundane activities that take up most of our lives—going to work, taking the kids to baseball practice, picking up a few things at the store, and going to church—are hiding places for God can be a revelation. Most people seek God in mystical experiences, spectacular miracles, and extraordinary acts. But to find Him in vocation brings Him, literally, down to earth. It makes us see how close He really is to each of us and transforms everyday life. In the simplest terms, Luther is reminding us that God is at work—at our work. God is active *in* and *through* our places of work, we just need to find Him there.

So, the next time you start to feel overwhelmed, or even guilty, by the time you must spend working your “day job,” over the time you spend at church, remember we were created to work. Work is good. It is good for us, but we are also contributing to the common good.

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