

# *LifeWork*

## Developing a Biblical Theology of Vocation

**BY DARROW L. MILLER**



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**LifeWork: Developing a Biblical Theology of Vocation**

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## **LIFEWOR**

If we look externally there is a difference betwixt the washing of dishes and preaching of the Word of God; but as touching to please God, in relation to His call, none at all.

***William Tyndale***

Let every Christian walk with God when he works at his calling, and act in his occupation with an eye to God, act as under the eye of God.

***Cotton Mather***

One effect of this was to give workers in all trades a genuine equality before God and genuine importance in the life of the community.... No menial work was in itself beneath the dignity of prophet, priest, or king. In fact, God chose an obscure shepherd boy as king and an unheralded carpenter as Messiah.

***Paul S. Minear***  
Author of *Work and Vocation*

*Laborare est Orare*, Work is worship... All true Work is sacred; in all true Work, were it but hand-labour, there is something of divines .... No man has work, or can work, except religiously; not even the poor day-laborer, the weaver of your coat, the sewer of your shoes....

***Thomas Carlyle***

We wait, pray and prepare ourselves as if the Lord would return tomorrow. Yet we plant, build and work on earth as if it would continue for another thousand years.

***Wilhelm Hofmann***  
Founder of the Brethren Church of Korntal, Germany

All is, if I have grace to

use it so,

As ever in my great  
Task-master's eye.

***John Milton***

Our whole life should be nothing but praise to God. Even if the Lord would return tomorrow, I would still plant a sapling today.

***Martin Luther***

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet will introduce the concept of *lifework* as well as give you a tool—Biblical Theology of Vocation—to help you, a follower of Christ, connect your vocation with God’s Transforming Story.<sup>1</sup>

First, you will find a narrative with a study guide to aid you in discovering the wonder of consciously relating your work to the Kingdom of God. Second, you will find twelve Bible studies (Basics) that illustrate how God’s Word informs twelve specific vocations. If this whets your appetite and you want to take the time to reflect more deeply, you may use the third section (Advanced) to help develop your own Biblical Theology of Vocation. There are two tools to choose from. Then you will find a series of readings that supplement this study. The Appendix has information on Journaling to help you with the Advanced exercises and a Bibliography for further reading.

God is not just Lord of the religious and spiritual realm. He is the Lord of all, including the Lord of our work. He is the Lord of communication; the Trinity spoke before the creation of the world. He is the Lord of agriculture; He created the system and planted the first garden. He is the master architect; He designed and built the universe, and now He is building the Kingdom of God. He is the Lord of health, the healer of individuals and the healer of nations.

This booklet will help you understand your work, not merely as a job or a means of support, but as a vocation, a calling. It is not intended for use in determining your vocation; it assumes that you already know your “occupation.” But rather, it is designed to help you connect your chosen vocation with the narrative of God’s unfolding story.

My prayer is that God might use this tool to help Christians around the world to relate their vocational life to the Kingdom of God, to the end that cultures are redeemed and nations discipled for the coming King.

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<sup>1</sup> The Transforming Story refers to the meta-story of the Bible which includes two components. First is redemption history. The story begins in a garden—Genesis 1—and ends in a city—the end of Revelation. It records Creation, the Fall, and God’s work to reconcile *all things* to Himself in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It concludes with the return of Christ with His Kingdom, the consummation of history. The second component of the meta-story is that the Bible reveals what has been called the Hebrew metaphysic or the Judeo-Christian worldview. For our work to flourish as vocation or “occupation,” it needs to be connected to both the redemption history and the Hebrew metaphysic of the biblical narrative.

# *Lifework:*

## Developing a Biblical Theology of Vocation

God is building His Kingdom. He has a purpose for history—history is going somewhere—and a purpose for man. For each of His children, God has given us a life purpose for a *lifework*.

God has a general calling for all of the redeemed, first to salvation—justification, and then to the Christian life—to be godly men and women, to be servants, to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness. He also has a particular calling for each follower of Christ, a place to work for His unfolding Kingdom. We shall call the former (general calling) *life* and the latter (particular calling) *work*. Together they are one's *lifework*.

David Wells, in his book *No Place for Truth*, describes how each of us as Christians has a theology on which we base our lives. It may not be good theology. It may not be well-thought out or consciously connected. Nevertheless, we are all theologians. Wells writes,

Let us not think, I said, that we really have a choice between having a theology and not having one. We all have our theologies, for we all have a way of putting things together in our minds that, if we are Christian, has a shape that arises from our knowledge of God and his Word. We might not be conscious of the process. Indeed, we frequently are not. But at the very least we will organize our perceptions into some sort of pattern that seems to make sense to us. The question at issue, then, is not *whether* we will have a theology but whether it will be a good or bad one, whether we will become conscious of our thinking processes or not, and, more particularly, whether we will learn to bring all of our thoughts into obedience to Christ or not. [*Jesus himself had a theology.*] *He explained himself in terms of biblical revelation, understood his **life** and **work** in relation to God, and viewed all of life from this perspective. He had a worldview that originated in the purposes and character of his Father and that informed everything he said and did.*<sup>2</sup> [emphasis mine]

### **The Nature of Work**

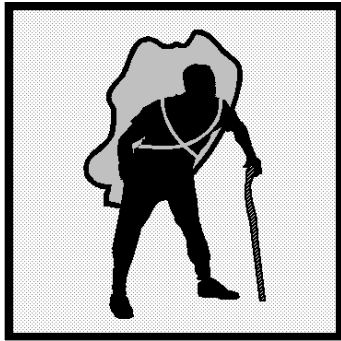
Different people have different concepts of work. The nature of work is usually defined by the majority culture of a society, and that, in turn, is derived from a culture's worldview. Some Christians see the necessity of work as part of the Fall, forgetting that God worked (Gen. 2:2), and that man was placed in the Garden before the Fall to work it (Gen. 2:15). When people see work as part of God's curse on creation, then it is something to be dreaded and to be avoided whenever possible. A friend of mine from West Africa once said that many of the young men in his country

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<sup>2</sup> David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, pp. 3,4.

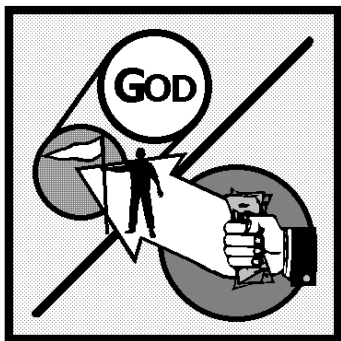
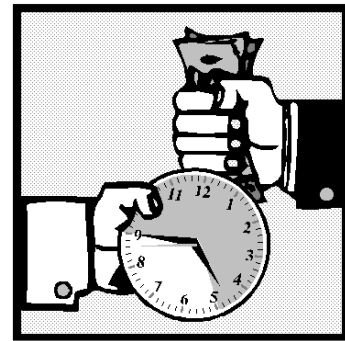
pursued college education so that they could get a “tie job.” A “tie job” is one in which you can spend your day in an air-conditioned office and not have to “work” (i.e., get your hands dirty).

Let’s look briefly at five different concepts of work.

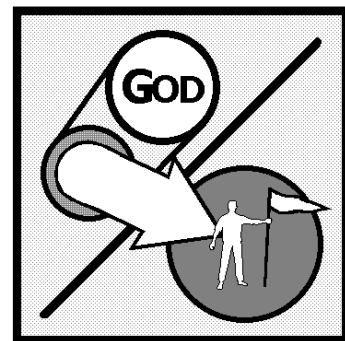


First, the animistic worldview sees work as what one does **to survive**. It is usually seen as a necessary evil. This concept is often found among peoples who live at or below the poverty line. It is a basic feature of most animistic cultures.

Second, the naturalistic or materialistic worldview sees work as a **career**, as the backbone of modern society. Work is viewed mainly in economic terms. It is what one does to have material things, “the good life.” Work in this sense is usually defined in terms of “success,” upward mobility, and affluence. The end result of work is consumption which is the natural purpose of a secular or hedonistic society.



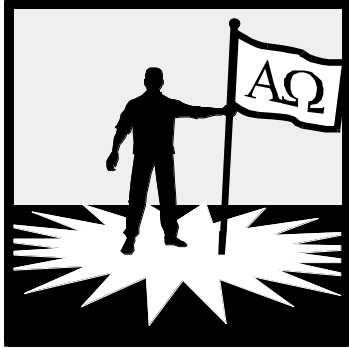
Third, the evangelical Gnostic paradigm provides us with two views of work. The first is work in the “spiritual” sense of “**full-time ministry**.” This is a reaction among certain groups of Christians to a “profane” secular concept of work. If the world and secular jobs are seen as evil or bad, and one wants to be more spiritual, then he or she goes into “full-time Christian service.” This is defined as pastoring, missions, and other “spiritual work.”



The second evangelical Gnostic<sup>3</sup> view sees work as a **place to do spiritual ministry**. Some Christians who do not want to go into “full-time Christian work,” seek to invest spiritual activity *into* their

<sup>3</sup> Evangelical Gnosticism: The Greek dichotomy between the spiritual realm, considered sacred, and the physical realm, considered profane. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Valentinus led the early Gnostic sect within the church. One of the

workplace. They see their job site as a place to do spiritual ministry—conduct Bible studies and share the Gospel. Both the third and fourth concepts of work stem from a Gnostic view of Christianity.



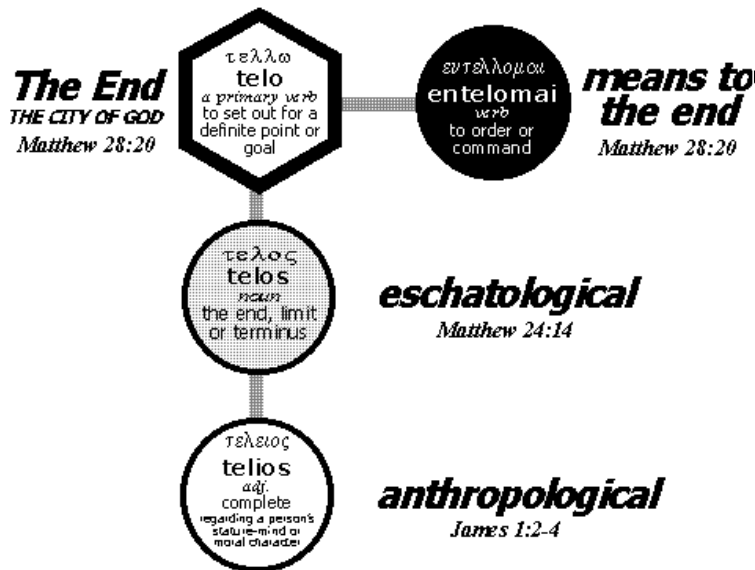
Fourth, the biblical worldview provides a framework for work being sacred, for labor having dignity. This concept of work is that it is a **vocation**—one’s calling. Work is a call of God upon an individual’s life. It becomes the sphere **through** which, not merely *in* which, a Christian serves Christ and His Kingdom. It is the occupation—the principle business of one’s life—through which one occupies territory or a sphere of influence (Luke 19:13) *for* Jesus Christ.

This biblical concept understands that God is at work in the world building His Kingdom, and that, among other things, He calls us to participate in the building of His Kingdom through our work. I have called this concept one’s *lifework*. One’s *lifework* establishes one’s place in God’s unfolding story. Just as all of history is moving towards God’s ultimate purpose, so one’s individual life is intentionally moving towards its *destiny*, to fulfill its purpose in God’s plan. Both modern secular culture and animistic cultures have an inadequate view of time, a view in which there is no future. Among other things, a biblical worldview acknowledges that God is working in history to fulfill His *telos*—eschatological purpose for all of history, and His *telios*—anthropological purpose for each individual life.

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church fathers, Eusebius (~260-340), Bishop of Carthage, contributed to the branch of Gnostic thinking in the church when he distinguished between the “perfect life” of spiritual pursuit and the “permitted life” of secular pursuit. Christians who view “religious” or “spiritual” activities as superior to “secular” or “worldly” activities are most often operating from a Gnostic worldview.

## Word Family: telos



I once heard a story of a reporter who was visiting a construction site in a classical city in Europe where a group of workers was building a beautiful stone edifice. The reporter asked three different men what they were doing. The first one responded gruffly, “Can’t you see, stupid? I’m carrying these stones.” The second one with some pride in his voice said, “I am building a monument for my generation.” The third said, “I am helping to build the Kingdom of God.” Three different men doing the same task had radically different understandings of what they were doing.

One’s culture and cultural worldview will determine, consciously or unconsciously, one’s concept of work. As followers of Christ, we must consciously attach our work—*lifework*—to God’s Transforming Story.

### The Call of God

In Genesis 1:26-27 we find the Creation Mandate for development. Here God blesses Adam and Eve and gives them a task. As His image bearer, man is to steward creation, to be God’s Vice-Regent over the created order. In Genesis 12:2-4 we find again that God blesses Abraham. As in Genesis 1:28, the blessing is for a purpose: that Abraham and his descendants would be a blessing to **all** the nations of the earth. In Matthew 28:18-20 the theme continues as the victorious Christ, the King, blesses His emissaries with His Holy Spirit and commands them to make disciples of all nations—*ethnos*. Finally, in Revelation 21:24-26, we find that the King returns with His Kingdom. With the nations having been blessed and discipled, the kings of the nations bring the glory of their nations

into the Kingdom of God. Within the context of this unfolding history, we find that He has a call upon our individual lives—*telios*.

In Psalm 139:13-16 we find that we are “beautifully and wonderfully made” for a purpose by the Creator from our mother’s womb. The apostle Paul understood this and wrote of it in Galatians 1:15 when he said that from his mother’s womb he was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles. The same was expressed of Paul at the time of his conversion when the Lord said to Him, “Get up and go into Damascus. There you will be told *all that you have been assigned to do*” (Acts 22:10). Paul had an assignment from the King, “to be an apostle to the Gentiles.”

We see this same theme reflected in the life of our Savior. In John 4:34 He said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to *finish his work*.” The Father had a work for Christ to do and the basis of His life was to finish that work. Towards the end of the Gospel, as Jesus was with the disciples at the Passover supper, He prayed, “I have brought you glory on earth by *completing the work you gave me to do*” (John 17:4). Christ was conscious that He was born for a particular purpose in the unfolding of God’s plan. Each of us also has been beautifully and wonderfully made for a purpose within the unfolding Kingdom.

### **Three Major Aspects of the Call of God**

What is the call of God? What is the nature of the call of God? It is a double call on the believer. The call has both a general nature for all Christians and a particular call for each individual Christian. It is a call to Christ and His Kingdom for all believers, and it is a call for each believer to be an instrument of the Kingdom in the world. The call has both a general and a particular nature.

The general call is God’s call to salvation, a call to justification (conversion) and sanctification (to live a holy life in all relationships). This is a common call on all Christians to be saved. It is a call out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light.

Justification—This is an ordinary calling from Scripture to repent and be saved. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to me (II Cor. 5:21). We are declared holy and just. It reflects our position in Christ. We stand in the shadow of the cross of Christ.

Sanctification—This is a call to all Christians to become what we have been declared to be in Christ. We have been declared holy and just; now we are to live holy and just lives. This second aspect of our calling includes all of man and all of his relationships. We are to worship the King, serve our fellow man, and steward creation.

The *general* nature of God’s call is found throughout Scripture. The prophet Micah described the call of the believer as “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” —the Micah Mandate (Micah 6:8). In Matthew 6:31-33 Jesus stated that our call is to “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness [general will], and all these things [particular will] will be given to you as well.” Likewise, Jesus described the Kingdom as a harvest waiting to be picked and said that He was looking for laborers for the harvest (Matthew 9:37, 38). He was looking for His disciples to be servants of the King (Mark 10:43, 44). As was mentioned earlier, Jesus issued the charter of the

Kingdom of God in Matthew 28, “As you go, make disciples of all nations.” In John 20:21 Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” All of these speak of God’s general call for the Christian life.

God gives spiritual gifts through the outworking of the Holy Spirit to complement the natural giftings, talents, temperaments, and interests imputed at birth and gained in life. These gifts are to be employed in the moral framework of our primary call as Christians to serve within the context of the body of Christ. We read in Ephesians 4:11-13 that spiritual gifts were given for the building up of the body of Christ. In Romans 12:6-8 Paul writes, “We have different gifts according to the grace given to us.” In I Corinthians 12:4-6 he writes, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” Some of these gifts are pastoring, teaching, prophesying, working of miracles, healing, helping, and administrating. They help to establish one’s *purpose* within the body of Christ.

The general call to salvation, to enter the Kingdom of God, is foundational to the particular call, and takes precedence over and defines in moral and spiritual terms the framework for the particular call.

The particular call is a unique call on each individual Christian. This is a special calling by the Holy Spirit to particular stations, places of deployment and tasks. This is one’s personal assignment. Each believer has a variety of stations, deployments and tasks that make up the uniqueness of their place in the unfolding of the Kingdom.

The third area of calling is that of *vocation*<sup>4</sup> or *occupation*<sup>5</sup>. Within the context of the biblical worldview, there is **no separation between the spiritual and the physical** as there is in the evangelical Gnostic worldview. Work is clearly more than an economic activity as secularism would hold, and more than merely a survival activity as found in cultures of poverty. Work is transferred to vocation within the framework of God’s *telos*.

The Reformation called all believers to live before the face of God—*coram Deo*, and only for the glory of God—*solī Deo Gloria*! All of life is to be lived only for the glory of God. All of life, including work, is to be under the lordship of Christ (I Cor. 10:31; Rom. 11:36).

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<sup>4</sup> Note that vocation is related to God’s grace and call upon a person’s life. (from *Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*)  
1. Among divines, a calling by the will of God; or the bestowment of God’s distinguishing grace upon a person or nation, by which that person or nation is put in the way of salvation; 2. Summons; call; inducement; 3. Designation or destination to a particular state or profession; 4. Employment; calling; occupation; trade; a word that includes professions as well as mechanical occupations. Let every divine, every physician, every lawyer, and every mechanic, be faithful and diligent in his vocation.

<sup>5</sup> Note the relationship between “occupation” (one’s *lifework*) and “occupying,” in this case occupying for Christ’s return. 1. The act of taking possession. 2. Possession; a holding or keeping; tenure; use; 3. That which engages the time and attention; employment; business. 4. The principal business of one’s life; vocation; calling; trade; Occupier, n. 1. One that occupies or takes possession. 2. One who holds possession. 3. One who follows an employment. Ezek. 27.

Occupy, v.t. [L. *occupō*; ob and *capiō*, to seize or take] 1. To take possession. 2. To keep in possession; to possess; to hold or keep for use. 3. To take up; to possess; to cover or fill.

Occupy: To follow business; to negotiate. Occupy till I come. Luke 19.

Work itself is a holy activity. God is a working God. We see this in His work of creation (Genesis 2:2-3) and sustaining providence (Hebrews 1:3b). We are made like Him. We gain dignity by working. We fulfill our destiny through our work. God wants to use our occupations to occupy territory for Christ and His Kingdom (Luke 19:13).

As Pope John Paul II has written:

...the Holy Spirit of God writes in the heart and life of every baptised person a **project of love and grace, which is the only way to give full meaning to existence, opening the way to the freedom of the children of God and enabling the offering of one's personal and irreplaceable contribution to the progress of humanity on the path of justice and truth.** The Spirit does not only help to place oneself sincerely before the great questions of the heart—Where do I come from? Where am I going? Who am I? What is the purpose of life? How should I spend my time?—but opens up **the prospect of courageous responses. The discovery that each man and woman has his own place in God's heart and in the history of humanity constitutes the point of departure for a new culture of vocations.**<sup>6</sup>

What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness within the context of my vocation? When work is viewed as a calling, not only do we see God's hand of providence directing us toward our work, but we have opportunity to manifest the moral and metaphysical values of the Kingdom of God *through* our work into the institution and society that we are serving. To put it differently, we have the opportunity to connect the Kingdom of God to our vocation, and through that to impact our world.

In the 1930s the humanist educator, John Dewey, debated the classical educator and president of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins over the purpose of education. Dewey argued that the purpose of education was to prepare people for *jobs*; Hutchins said that it was to prepare people for *life*. Dewey won the argument, and his secular humanistic moral and metaphysical underpinnings have permeated the education establishment of nation after nation since that time. Unfortunately, there were no Christians engaged in the debate to argue that education is to prepare people to worship God, to serve their fellow man, and to steward creation. Christian educators were not involved in this very important discussion because they had given up a biblical worldview which influences all areas of life for an increasingly narrow spiritual worldview (Gnostic) in which they failed to bring their moral and metaphysical foundations into the work arena to be used for God's purposes. They were Christians in church but secularists in the workplace.

Christ has called His people to *disciple nations*; discipling a nation is more comprehensive than discipling individuals to be spiritual or merely saving souls for heaven. What this means is that as His disciples we are to infuse God's moral and metaphysical order into our spheres of influence, particularly into the institutions where we work. As salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16) we are to

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<sup>6</sup> Joannes Paulus II, from Castel Gandolfo, 24 September 1997. (Message of the Holy Father for the XXXV World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 3 May 1998, IV Sunday of Easter.)

infuse Kingdom culture (*ethos*) into institutional (*ethne*) settings. As Christians we are to consciously see ourselves as shapers of the workplace and builders of nations.

The sum of our general call to life and our particular call to work is our *lifework*.

### **Connecting the Kingdom of God to Vocation**

How might one connect the Kingdom of God to one's vocation? One may be an agriculturalist helping people in a developing country have a sustainable food supply for the first time in their lives. This is a good thing to do! But are we consciously connecting that work and the people with whom we are working to the First Farmer, the Creator of the first garden, and His unfolding Kingdom? True sustainability will come only as people are connected to the Transforming Story. To do this, one must understand his work as an agriculturalist within the context of the Kingdom of God.

Once when I was visiting the Altiplano in Bolivia, I had the privilege of worshiping one Sunday morning with a group of believers in the town of Huarina, 14,000 feet above sea level. The church is mainly composed of farmers and their families. Economically these people are desperately poor. As the cultural story in Bolivia is similar to that in other cultures around the world, farmers are given very little respect. They are among the lowest members of Bolivian society. After greeting the congregation, I wanted to bring a message of encouragement, so I turned to Genesis 2:8 "Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed." After reading the verse, I paused, then read the first part again—"The Lord God had PLANTED A GARDEN." Then I paused again and said, "And God ... PLANTED ... a garden." Then again, "GOD planted a garden." Then I asked the question, "What did God do?" HE PLANTED A GARDEN! I could begin to see dignity coming to the eyes of these beautiful people. For generations they had been told that their work was insignificant and that they were low because they worked in the soil. All of a sudden they came to see that God was a *gardener*, and their work had dignity because the God of the universe was a farmer.

The great missionary statesman William Carey understood that God is the Lord of agriculture.

Carey brought the English daisy to India and introduced the Linnaean system to gardening. He also published the first books on science and natural history in India, such as William Roxburgh's *Flora Indica*, because he believed the biblical view that, 'All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord.' Carey believed that nature is declared 'good' by its Creator; it is not *maya* (illusion), to be shunned, but a subject worthy of human study. He frequently lectured on science and tried to show that even lowly insects are not souls in bondage, but creatures worthy of our attention.<sup>7</sup>

Three things are required to connect our work to the Kingdom of God: being *motivated* by Christ, using the *methods* of Christ, and having the *mind* of Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Vishal & Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), p. 17.

First, our work must be *motivated* by Christ. We are to serve Him because He first served us. We are to love others because He first loved us. Our occupation, to serve Christ and His Kingdom, stems from a thankful heart for who God is, for the free grace that He has given, and because He is working in the world to advance His Kingdom.

It's not enough simply to be motivated by Christ. Our *methods* should also reflect His methods. Sometimes one might think that this means we are merely to do what we do professionally. While it is good to do excellent and professional work, we can do the *wrong* things professionally. As Francis Schaeffer has said, "We are to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way, and not the Lord's work in the world's way." We need to do the *right* things well.

Third, we are to have the *mind* of Christ establish the context for our work. Paul has reminded us to bring every thought captive to Christ (II Cor. 10:5). This means more than bringing all of our religious or ethical thoughts captive to Christ. We are to bring **all** thoughts captive to Christ. Our work is to be done within the moral and metaphysical framework of a biblical worldview, within the context of the Kingdom of God.

As an example, Food for the Hungry International, the organization which I work for, is a Christian relief and development organization. For years we have described ourselves as motivated by Christ, but often we find ourselves analyzing the problems of hunger and poverty from a secular paradigm; we've "baptized" our industry's methods with "God words" and assumed that they were thus Christian. As an organization, we have come to repent—*metanoeo* (Greek)—to "change the mind," to "be re-minded." We have come to realize that we must not only be motivated by Christ, but that we need to analyze the issues of hunger and poverty from a distinctly biblical point of view. After all, the way you define a problem will determine how you solve the problem.

When I was facilitating a workshop for our management team in La Paz, Bolivia, a couple of the middle managers came up to me after one session and said, "Darrow, because we are a Christian organization, we want to do our work excellently, but we've realized today that we can do the wrong things with excellence. You have called us to make sure that we consciously evaluate our methods to make sure that we do the *right things right*."

Our vocation is to be connected to the Kingdom of God, to the Transforming Story. Within this Transforming Story, there are a number of elements. *God* is the King. The *world* is His Kingdom. We are *stewards* of the Kingdom for the King. The King has established fundamental principles—a Kingdom ethic or *ethos*—for governing His Kingdom. The *task* of the stewards is to have dominion over creation (Genesis 1:26-28); the goal is to extend the blessing of Abraham to all nations (Genesis 12:2-4) and to fulfill Christ's mandate to disciple the nations (Matthew 28:19, 20), so that the glory of the nations will be prepared for Christ's return (Rev. 21:23-26). We are to do this as Christians, not *outside* the context of our work, and not merely *in* our work. We are to manifest the Kingdom of God *through* our work into a broken world.

## The King and His Work

Let us look at the King and His work. We know that Jesus is a servant-king. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, yet as it says in Mark 10:45, “[He] did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The full image of God was revealed in Christ through His service; while Christ’s primary work was for our salvation, He carried out that work in the context of human life 2,000 years ago, through a number of vocational avenues. He was a carpenter who built furniture and framed doors and windows. He was a teacher who taught both children and adults. He was a “public health worker” who brought both emotional and physical healing.

As we look at Christ during His 33 years on earth, as well as the working of God in history, we find that God reveals Himself in His work. The life of one of the heroes of our faith, the missionary stateswoman to India, Amy Carmichael, expresses this well. Below you will find excerpts from the book entitled *Amma: The Life and Words of Amy Carmichael*.

*“There they dwelt with the King for His work.*

“What is your work? Whatever it be, the Lord, the King, has done that kind of work

Himself, and you dwell with Him here for His work.

“Is your work with the little children, carrying them about, loving them?

“In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went.

“Is your work in the sewing-room?

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skin, and clothed them.

“He has done the work that you are doing. You dwell here with the King for His work.

“Is your work cooking, lighting fires in the kitchen in the early morning, getting food ready for others?

“When the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Come this way and have breakfast. (John 21.12. Weymouth.)

“He has done the work that you are doing. You dwell here with the King for His work.

“Is your work tending people, washing patients?

“Jesus riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

“He has done the work that you are doing. You dwell here with the King for His work.

“Is your work nursing, bandaging sores?

“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

“He has done the work that you are doing. You dwell here with the King for His work.

“Is your work writing—writing on a blackboard in school, writing in the office, answering letters?

“He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone. The Lord shall count when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there. God says, I have written to him the great things of My law. Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground. They are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

“He has done the work that you are doing. You dwell here with the King for His work.

“Is your work account-keeping, teaching or learning arithmetic, or the names of things hard to remember?

“He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names. Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

“He has done the work that you are doing. You dwell here with the King for His work.

“Is your work in the farm with the animals?

“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.

“Is your work in the engine-room, or the carpentering shops? Is it making things or mending things?

“O give thanks unto the Lord that made great lights.

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God. (The verb is the same as that used in Matt. 4.21, *mending* their nets.) Is not this the Carpenter? and they were offended at Him.

“He has done the work that you are doing. You dwell here with the King for His work.”<sup>8</sup>

God’s nature is modeled and manifest in Christ through the Scriptures. He is the vocational prototype/archetype. He is the communicator, the agriculturalist, the construction worker, the healer, the businessman. His Word—the written word—is the *owner’s manual* or *instruction manual*, not just for the spiritual life, but for **all** of life, including the life of vocation.

We are called to disciple nations. We are identified as “salt” and “light” in a dying culture. We are commanded to occupy territory for Christ’s return. Ours is a life of passion and not apathy, of work

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth R. Skoglund, *Amma: The Life and Words of Amy Carmichael* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), pp. 110-112.

and not of ease. There is a war going on for the hearts and souls of individuals, communities, and nations. When we are called to Christ, we are called into His Kingdom and into Kingdom work. In fact, we are to “Kingdomize” our work. If I am a doctor, I am to be a doctor first for Christ and His Kingdom. If I am a teacher, I am a teacher for Christ. If a farmer, I farm for Christ and His Kingdom, not for money. That work continues not until retirement (there is no retirement in the Kingdom), but until we die! Are we engaged in the battle? Martin Luther’s challenge is for us today:

If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the Devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved...<sup>9</sup>

The war is to be fought within the context of our *lifework*. We will end with these encouraging words from John Paul II:

I wish, finally, to address you, dear young people, and to repeat these words to you with affection: be generous in giving your life to the Lord. Do not be afraid! You have nothing to fear, because God is the Lord of history and of the universe. Let grow in you the desire for great and noble projects. Nourish a sense of solidarity: these are the sign of the divine action in your hearts. Place at the use of your communities the talents which Providence has lavished on you. The more ready you are to give yourselves to God and to others, the more you will discover the authentic meaning of life. God expects much of you!<sup>10</sup>

To begin to apply the concept of *lifework* in your own life, you may want to develop a Biblical Theology of Vocation (BTV). In the following section you will find further readings and both Basic and Advanced plans of BTV to begin the adventure.

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, cited in George Grant and Mark Horne, *Legislating Immorality* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1993), pp. 239-240.

<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II, *To all I send with affection a special Apostolic Blessing*, Castel Gandolfo, 15 August 1995.

# ***Lifework:***

## **Developing a Biblical Theology of Vocation**

### ***STUDY GUIDE***

1. Before reading the monograph on *Lifework*, take a moment to answer this first question:  
“Why work? What is the ultimate purpose of work?”

2. What does David Wells mean by “Everyone is a theologian”?

Do you agree or disagree with Wells? Why?

3. Briefly describe the five different concepts of work.

Which one most closely resembles your concept in #1 above?

4. What is the difference between the general nature and particular nature of God's call?

5. What are the three major aspects of the call of God?

6. Which one of these takes precedence over the others? Why?

7. What three things are essential for connecting one's work with the Kingdom of God?

Evaluate, in relation to each of these, your strengths and weaknesses.

8. What is meant by the term *lifework*?