

Faith at Work – Taster Session

Setting up

This session is for people in paid employment, people seeking work and anyone who is interested in supporting people in their work, whether it is family members, fellow church members, or as part of a ministry of a local church to people at work.

You can make a PowerPoint presentation give the participants a set of notes. Each participant will certainly need the three column sheet for “theological reflection” (landscape). Each will need a pen, so make sure you have some spares.

The session requires at least an hour. I suggest you spend a minimum of 25 minutes on “Introduction”, 25 minutes on “Theological Reflection” and a final 10 minutes on “What can Churches do.”

Introduction

Ask the group to introduce themselves by first name and briefly what they will be doing on the next weekday morning, at, say 11.00. Try to note them down as they speak, maybe elucidating a little detail. Some will be in paid employment, others not. Summarise the sort of occupations you have heard about. For example, you may notice that few people are involved in manufacturing, and most are in people centred occupations (e.g. health care, social services or education). Some may be seeking work, and you will need to be sensitive to the stories that they share. Retired folk might speak about their career or any voluntary work they do.

Take the group through a list of motives for doing work. This can be on a PowerPoint or in the set of notes. People can raise their hands to indicate which motives guide (or guided) them.

Why do I work? (Why did I work? Why would I like to work?)

- To earn money to support my family
- To earn money to enjoy life
- For success and personal satisfaction
- To be creative and make things
- To earn money so that I can be involved in church work
- To do something socially useful
- It gives an interest in life
- It provides opportunities for evangelism
- To enjoy the company of colleagues
- Because God has called me to do this
- other...

If you were to ask the people you work(ed) with, what would they say?

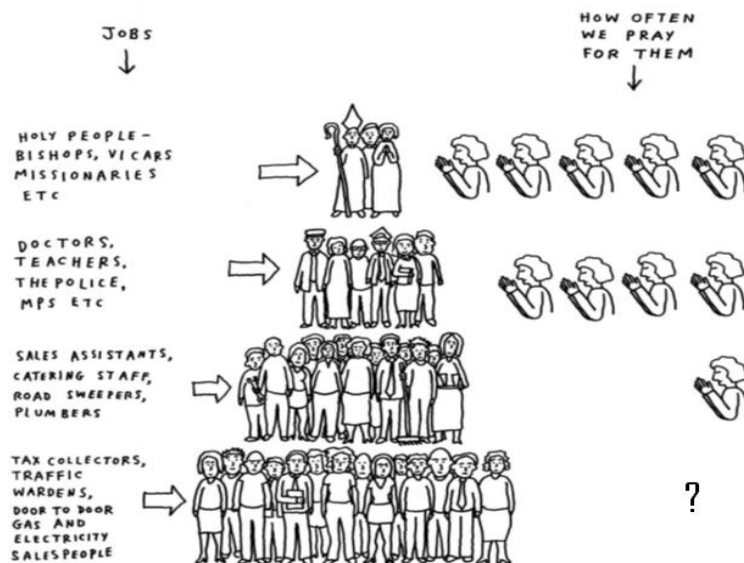
Some people have a very negative view of work. It is even in the Bible:

Ecclesiastes 2: 22, 23: **“What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labour under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest.”**

Point out that that this is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It may be like that, but it doesn't have to be!

Refer briefly to the resurrection appearance to the disciples in Galilee. They have travelled there to meet with Jesus. When he doesn't show up, Peter says, "I am going fishing." That night they caught nothing. Most biblical commentators will say that their lack of success was because they made a decision on a whim: they didn't have a prayer meeting first! One lone voice states, "These men needed to eat!" Doesn't this betray a low view of (especially manual) work in the church? It is OK to work, but the highest calling is to ministry and the most important things we do are for the church.

Think about prayers in your church on Sundays. This picture shows how often we generally pray for people in different walks of life (makes a good PowerPoint slide):



Do people recognise this?

It is an example of what one author (Mark Greene, London Institute for Contemporary Christianity) calls the "Sacred / Secular Divide".

How does our view of work, and our motives for doing it, compare with the Bible's view of work? Do we do justice to the Bible's view of work?

But what is the Bible's view?

- God as a worker (from Genesis onwards)
- There is nothing better for people than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot (a better verse from Ecclesiastes 3: 22)
- Jesus as a worker (Mark 6: 3, see also John 5: 17). He mixed with workers, met them at their workplace and used examples in his teaching.
- Epistles move from doctrine to its practical outworking, often in the context of masters and slaves – the employer and employees of their times.

We need to see our work – or the work of other people (family, friends, church members, people employed in our parishes) as inherently valuable.

How do we hear the "Still Small Voice" in this context? We may need a little help.

Theological Reflection

This requires the three column sheet "Ministry in the World."

After filling in the headings, ask people to put in the first column

- Events in my workplace –
 - Affecting me or others
 - Regular or one off
 - Changes or the usual round

Cut your coat according to your cloth as regards time. People should be asked to enter at least two "events". After a couple of minutes, ask people to tell the group what they have written. With 6 or less people you should be able to have them all given an example: 7 or more will require a sample – those willing to speak up.

Examples:

- A There is an impending/on-going reorganisation in my office
- B I spent all week catching up on emails
- C I met with a Trades Union Officer about a workplace problem

Next, ask them to write in the middle column some Biblical verse (doesn't need reference – just the sense of it) or concept that relates to that event. They can use theological words if they can explain them to the group!

Examples:

- A People generally feel threatened and become defensive at the thought of reorganisation. They look to comfort verses (Proverbs 3: 5, "Trust in the Lord... Matthew 6: 25, "Do not be anxious...") But what about Isaiah 43: 19, "See I am doing a new thing..."?
- B "Not in the earthquake, wind and fire, but in the still small voice..." The ordinary and quiet routine is important.. It isn't just the dramatic and the sudden.
- C Concepts of justice, reconciliation and care

Then, after asking for comments, move on to column 3:

- How is this my ministry?
 - How am I building the Kingdom of God?
 - Is there a challenge for me?
 - Something new to do or something to stop

Examples:

- A I need to remain calm when everyone (including me) feels under threat, or perhaps I can share something of the vision for new opportunities the reorganisation can bring
- B Much of our work is quiet simple service, possibly unnoticed (Bible – the widow's mite?), which helps others to do their jobs. Be careful not to moan about the routine, draw alongside people who feel similarly crushed or used.

- C Affirm the value of each person in the workplace, understanding their aspirations, histories and problems

What can churches do?

Prepare a list with the words in bold as bullet points:

- **Courses** – some good short courses are available through BCUIM (bcuim@btconnect.com) & LICC
- **“TTT” - This Time Tomorrow** – invite someone to stand up at church on Sunday and ask what they will be doing at the same time on Monday. What decisions might they need to make? Who will they meet? What will they be making? You could ask someone who is applying for jobs – maybe they will be filling in a form or going for an interview
- **Prayer** – see the “pyramid chart” above – be broad in your scope
- **Commissioning** – we commission people going off to do missionary work. What about someone starting a new job (you could celebrate it with tea and cake or wine according to taste!) or a child moving up to a new school?
- **Take a vicar to work** – needs permission, but could be transforming as people see that the church leader is interested in the world of work.
- **Chaplaincy** – do you have someone with a bit of time and an interest in people? There could be a ministry for them, say in your local High Street. BCUIM can help with training.
- **Specific meetings** – these work well in a local pub. Get someone with an interesting job to speak about how they relate it to their faith. Arrange a light buffet and open it up to questions. A great evangelistic opportunity!
- **Get involved** – Local Chambers of Commerce, Business Partnerships, Rotary Clubs will often welcome new members and appreciate a Christian input.
- **“Selfies”** – have a board at the back of church, with pictures of people at work and a map showing where they are (just like the missionary boards many churches have)
- **?** - Does your group have any other ideas? Send them on a postcard to BCUIM (an email would do)

Finally:

- When we do our job to the best of our ability and with the utmost Christian integrity, then many other opportunities (such as evangelism) will probably follow.
- If you are not working, you almost certainly know people who are. Take an interest in your family, friends and fellow church members, asking what joys and problems they face, the decisions they make and the decisions that are made about them at work. At the very least chat cheerfully to the person on the checkout in your local supermarket!

(The three column sheet “Ministry in the World” is best printed in landscape)

Ministry in the World

What I do each week: Where I do it:	Name:	
Events in the workplace / Things I have done in my work /What I do day by day.	So where is God in all this?"	How is this my ministry?

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