



# PRACTICAL HELP FOR WORKERS:

*Growth Group Studies on  
Work and Workplaces*

Mark Wormell

# **Practical Help for Workers: Growth Group Studies on Work and Workplaces**

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## Introduction

These studies are designed for use in small groups (e.g. growth groups). However, an individual will benefit from working through them on their own.

There is a logical flow in the studies, but you can pick the ones that best meet the needs of your group. Although they have wider application, they have been designed for people in paid or voluntary employment. Because each study stands on its own, some key theological points are repeated.

These studies have been prepared for people in all forms of paid employment. Issues to do with the purpose of work, working well, getting on with people at work and other challenges of work are common across all workplaces. However, obviously, some challenges are greater in some workplaces than others. Fear is one topic in these studies. It is likely that transport workers have greater cause to fear death and serious injury, than an office worker. While doctors fear causing death, and people in jobs that can be automated have greater cause to fear redundancy than people whose jobs can't be automated readily. Some of the questions focus more on the challenges of working in larger organisations, although the challenges of working in small organisations or alone can be just as intense. You will need to suit the questions to the specific workplaces you deal with.

Each study starts with a list of questions. In a small group setting you will often find there are more questions than you can expect to cover in one study. You will need to pick and adapt them for your circumstances.

Following some of the questions, I have provided some thoughts [in square brackets] on the range of answers you can expect. These answers are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive. There are study notes (of varying length and complexity) that follow the questions. These are designed to help you with the discussions around the questions.

The list of studies will be expanded. For example, we are working on a study of the issues that face a husband and wife, when both are in paid employment. If you would like studies on other work related topics, or have suggestions on how we can improve these studies, please contact [mark.wormell@barneys.org.au](mailto:mark.wormell@barneys.org.au)

A note about Mark Wormell: Mark worked his way through university as a plumber's labourer, working on building sites in the far western suburbs of Sydney. He then worked as a lawyer in an Australian based, international law firm from 1982-2009. He worked in its London office from 1984-86 and its Singapore office from 1987-1988. He was a partner for 21 years in Banking and Finance, and specialised in Capital Markets and Securitisation. His clients included the big 4 Australian banks, many international financial institutions and the Australian Government. He was also the staff partner for 4 years, having primary responsibility for recruitment, retention, remuneration, training and discipline. After graduating from Moore Theological College with a BD in 2013, he is now Minister for Workers and Workplaces at St Barnabas' Anglican Church, Broadway, Sydney.

The views expressed here are personal to Mark Wormell. He accepts responsibility for all errors.

## Study 1: A theology of work

Key idea:

How we live our lives as Christians is shaped fundamentally by our theology. Good ethical living, being effective disciples and living faithful lives, all flow from who we think God is, and how we let him lead and shape us. To be workers who please God, we need to understand where work fits into God's plans for us and his world. As God has made us in his image, and he is a worker, work is fundamental to who we are.

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Getting started

1. Ask each member of the group to briefly explain what paid work they do (e.g. employer, title, where they fit into the organisation, what they do each day, full-time/part-time, length of commute).
2. Ask each person one thing they like about their work, and one thing they don't like.
3. Ask each person why they work and what they expect to get out of work. [Please be careful with this question. Some people work for the primary reason of earning an income so they, and any of their dependants, can survive. Others will express views on personal satisfaction, contributing to society, or realising their God-given potential. Others may express deep ambivalence. Yet, each person is of equal, and infinite, value to God, so do not let this question establish barriers between people in your group.]

The building blocks of our theology

4. Reflecting on Genesis 1, in what ways can we say God is a worker?
5. What does God think about his work? [It is good. It reflects his character as the source of all good.]
6. What are the implications of Genesis 1:27 for us as workers? [God is a worker. We are made in his image, which means, in part, that we are made as workers. Work is essential to our identities. Also God is relational. He is love, the love shared between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And, as we bear his image, we are made for relationship with him and each other. The closer we image/reflect God through our work, the

more good we will do. No work is 'just a job'. Our work is important to God.]

7. What do you think is God's purpose for our work? [Genesis 1:28-30. Some translations will say we are made to 'subdue' the world. A better translation is 'steward' or 'care for' creation. We are made to care for God's creation and for relationship with him and our neighbours. Work is an important way that we fulfil God's purposes in us.]
8. What is the relationship between this very broad understanding of work, and paid employment? [Paid employment is a sub-set of work. It is an important part of work, but it is not the only form of work. Students work through their care for creation and other people. Stay-at home parents are clearly working, as are all carers (paid and unpaid)].
9. How would you describe the way your work fits in with this understanding of God's plans for work? [People in caring industries (e.g. doctors, nurses, teachers and aid workers) often find it easier to answer this questions than others. But make sure everyone has a go. 'I'm a cleaner. People like to live in clean safe places. So my work helps other people and takes care of God's creation'. 'I'm a real estate agent. I help people buy and sell homes so they can have a place to live'. 'I'm a used care salesperson. Transport and mobility are important to the way we live, work and socialise. I help people who can't afford a new car'. 'I'm a commercial lawyer. I help companies comply with the law and stay in business so they can produce goods and services that people need and keep people in jobs.' Etc.]
10. In what ways can we call work 'worship'? [The heart of worship is obedience to God's will. We worship God through our work by being obedient to him in the way we go about our work. So, work is a form of worship.]
11. Where does 'retirement' fit into God's plans for us? [As we will bear God's image until we die (and into eternity), we never cease to be workers. 'Retirement' is not a biblical concept. Whatever our age and capacity, we can always seek to do some good through how we use God's creation and relate to the people. 'Retirement' is a complex subject for Christians, as some seniors 'switch off', while others (rightly) resent the lack of opportunities available to them. Retirement from paid employment may be necessary so there is work for younger people, and a necessary redistribution of wealth to them. However, we are made to work, not to retire, so there is still scope to work beyond retirement from paid employment.]

12. What does 'rest' mean in Genesis 2:2? [God seems to enjoy the fruits of his work. 'Rest' is not synonymous with inactivity, but, in later studies, we will need to consider the interrelationship between strenuous mental, physical and emotional activity, recovery, restoration, leisure, and the way we use our time.]
13. How do these building blocks of a theology of work (e.g. we are made as workers to care for God's creation and each other, and our work is important to God) compare to other attitudes to work you have heard from Christians? [Have you ever confronted limited views of work that suggest that the primary purpose of secular employment is to fund gospel work, or that work is great place to do evangelism? Note: we will look at 'Conversion through the workplace' in study 8].
14. What do these building blocks of a theology of work mean for the way you think about and do your work? [Some people may feel more positive about their work. Others may think this is all too theoretical. That's OK. The purpose of this study is to provide building blocks that will help us with more practical issues.]

## End of Study

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### Study Notes: Some further reflections

God tells us that his plans for humanity include caring for his creation. As the story of the Bible unfolds we see this includes not just farming, but a great diversity of productive use of his creation, and, most importantly, caring for each other - loving our neighbours as God loves us.

Work became harder at the fall, and will be better in the age to come. But work is just how God has made us. When Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3 that a person who does not work does not eat, he did not have in mind people who are unable to work. But the fundamental link between work and humanity suggests that we should try hard to find ways to ensure that the limitations of our economy, our bodies and minds, **and the difficulties of work**, do not preclude us from the opportunity to care for this world and each other through our work.

So, way before you get to work being an opportunity to earn money to support Christian ministry or a place to do evangelism, we see that the work itself, working with our hands and minds, caring for the world and each other, are of fundamental importance to God and our place in his plans.

I mention 'supporting ministry and doing evangelism', because all too often these views of work seem to dominate, either explicitly or implicitly. There is important truth in both, but separately and together they are not the totality of our theology of work. They are usually championed by people who have never worked much in secular employment, and do not have the experience to understand both the challenges and opportunities Christians face in the workplace.

We serve God best at our work by working well (study 2), doing our jobs diligently, and caring for all the people we interact with. When we do that, we will both please God and proclaim Christ. I am not putting down word based ministries, but we do not all need to take up word based ministries, because our work is already valuable to God.

Additional reading: Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, and Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective of Work*.

## Study 2: How do we know we are working well?

Bible readings:

Genesis 1:26-31

1 Peter 2:11-17; and

1 John 1:5-10

Key idea:

Work is fundamental to who we are. We are made to work well. We need to ask ourselves regularly if we are working well. It is God we are seeking to please with our work. We can do that best with our Bibles open, and in community, recognising our weaknesses, but recognising God answers prayer and is able to make himself known to us. He can help us work well.

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Reminder of our theology of work:

God shows us that he is a worker. As he has made us in his image, we will always be workers. We never lose his image, and we will carry that into eternity.

Work is caring for God's creation and loving him and our neighbours. Paid employment is a subset of work. We are made to work well.

The whole of life is not 'work'. There are leisure and rest, and we will meet them in study 3.

Questions:

1. Make sure you all know, in broad terms, what work each of you do.
2. How does your employer define 'good work', or what is his/her/it's expectation of you working well? You will need to adapt this for self-employed people. [These measures may include customer/client/patient feedback, performance reviews, key performance indicators (KPIs), billable hours, contribution to profits, sales, 'creativity', salary and salary increases, promotion and verbal encouragement.]

3. What do you think of these measures of 'good work'? Is money (e.g. a pay rise or a high salary) a good measure of good work?
4. How do you think God might measure your work? [Our theology of work should shape our answers to this question. Are we stewarding the resources of the world well, caring for others, being obedient to God, behaving ethically, etc.]
5. Look at 1 Peter 2:11-17. What does this say about good work?
6. Do you ever think of passages like Romans 14:2, Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Peter 4:5, when assessing how you are working?
7. God assessed his work as 'good'. What might get in the way of us assessing our work as good? [Vanity, self-delusion, desperation. Note also, we may be working better than we think!]
8. What view of other people is essential to working well? [We should see them as God sees them: as people Christ died for and therefore of infinite value to God. We should not use them as stepping stones in our careers, consider them expendable or disregard their feelings.]
9. Are the views of other people good guides for how we are working? [Reviews by customers, clients, students and the like, offer one perspective, but they may be shaped by self-interest, or other less than objective considerations. Also, we may be working well despite criticism we receive.]
10. What place does job satisfaction play in assessing whether we are working well?
11. What place does the judgement and advice of Christian friends/mentors play in assessing whether we are working well? [It can be very helpful, but we can manipulate this advice by how we tell our stories.]
12. If we can't trust our self-assessment, and we can't trust our friends and mentors, should we rely only on the assessment of God? What are the risks of only having an 'audience of one' (i.e. God)? [We can project onto God things we would like him to say about us.]
13. How might a combination of meeting with other Christians, listening to God's word in the Bible and praying help us assess if we are working well?
14. How might working well help us proclaim Christ at work? [Other people will not respect us if we do not work well. We need to earn the right to speak about Jesus.]
15. What changes are you going to make to the way you go about your work to ensure you are working as well as you can?

## End of Study

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### Study Notes: Some further reflections

The essay included in the notes for study 7 contains many ideas you may find helpful in assessing how we might work well.

The core of our theology of work is that God has made us as workers and wants us to work well. While a number of people have picked up on the need to 'work well', it begs one essential question. How do we know if we are working well? Are you studying as well as you can - not just getting good marks, but making good use of your gifts and opportunities? Are you caring well? What measures should we use? Who can we trust?

Genesis 1 tells us that the perfect way God sees himself is that he created the world in six days, and then spent the seventh day enjoying it. This great worker tells us that he made humankind in his image. It's a multi-dimensional concept, but it must include that work is essential to our identity. To work is part of being human.

God assessed his work as good. While we bear God's image, our work and our ability to judge our work are not perfect. This is why we need help in assessing our work.

God expects us to take care with our work. For example, at Exodus 26 we read:

**30** "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain.**31** "Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim woven into it by a skilled worker. **32** Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases.

This isn't just for the architects and interior designers among us. Notice the great care God expects us to take with our work. Near enough isn't good enough.

In Genesis 3 we see work became harder at the fall. It should not surprise us that work can be hard and tedious. Work will be better in the age to come, but we will still work. Work is just how God has made us.

We need to be careful with Genesis 3:17-19. Just because God made work harder, does not mean that we have to make it harder for ourselves or others. Yet, it does act as a brake on those who emphasise job satisfaction as an essential ingredient of work.

This is because a key part of our theology of work is that we serve God best at our work by working well, doing our job diligently, and caring for all the people we interact with. When we do that, we will both please God and proclaim Christ. When we work well we earn the right to speak about Jesus.

Of course, when we are employed, we are employed to do our jobs well, and we should comply with our work contracts. But our work is how we steward and care for God's creation. So whether we love or hate our work, our aim is to work well.

Now we need to ask, how do we know if we are working well? Don't downplay answers like, 'if we are glorifying God' or if 'we are doing more good than harm', but they beg the question. How might we know?

In many industries there are objective performance tests. For example, if you are being promoted as quickly as others; if you are complying with your job description; if you are making more money than others.

Money is a major measure used by our culture. 'She's earning \$150,000 a year, she must be doing well'. However, in some professions it is hard not to make lots of money, once you get in. But there are two bigger problems with using money as a measure. First, Jesus teaches consistently against greed. Seeking to do well may quickly slip into seeking to make lots of money so we appear to be working well.

Second, making money can easily be done at the expense of good work. Corners get cut. Dodgy products get pushed. Employees get flogged to death. The environment gets trashed. People over trade. Stress gets pushed onto other people.

Of course, financial success can be a sign of good work. You are doing something that someone else values. But someone who makes a modest amount of money can still be working very well. My sister is a nurse who cares for people with dementia. She gets \$32,000 a year, but is brilliant at her job. And, of course, many workers are unpaid. So we can't rely on financial success, or the lack of it, as a test of working well.

I like the vision of good work in 1 Peter 2:11-17:

Abstain from sinful desires....Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. [God will use your good work to bring others to glorify himself. Praise be to God!] Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

They are some of the things we can do that contribute to working well, but there are great challenges with them. What do 'good deeds' look like if you work in a bank, or in IT? That is not to say there are jobs where we can't do 'good deeds', but we need to work out what they are. And how do we know if we are showing proper respect, or acting out of self interest? Ethical issues arise when we are pushed by our bosses towards cutting corners or breaking the law, or 'overtrading' (taking on more work than we can do well, or risking harm to others). The ethics of work is too big a subject to deal with here, though I will return to it in the study notes for study 7.

There are some tests we can apply. Do people like working **for** us or **with** us. Often this speaks well of competence and the way we treat others. However, some people work as well as they can without being great at inter-personal skills or winning popularity contests.

As a starting point, as Peter said in verse 13, we will know if we are working well if we see everyone as deserving our respect. Respect for others is an

essential building block of working well. We can't be working well if we depersonalise people or see them as means to an end.

When I was a lawyer I felt I started to do my job better when I stopped complaining about clients. Complaining seems to be a common feature among some professions. Architects, doctors, lawyers claim to have 'clients from hell'. Some teachers whinge about awful students and parents. Many workers complain about their bosses. We should ask ourselves, 'Am I working well if I let their difficult personalities, or their poor stress management, or their poor work, be the basis on which I treat them as people?'

What of other tests?

Although the judgement of other people may be helpful and accurate, they can be delusional or corrupt.

Reviews by superiors can be useful, but they can also be motivated by self interest. Negative reviews can be shaped by jealousy, fear or misunderstanding. In times of full employment, positive reviews can be motivated by the fear an employee may leave, rather than a view that the employee is really working well. I have heard companies give poor reviews in tough economic times so they don't have to give pay rises.

Reviews by customers, clients, students and the like, offer one perspective, but they may be shaped by self-interest, or other less than objective considerations. We may be working well despite criticism we receive.

Our workplaces have devised many forms of performance appraisal. There are 360 degree reviews, customer and client surveys, key performance indicators and many others. Some work places value the number of billable hours, others 'creativity'.

But none of them look at our work from God's perspective. Are we caring for the creation and each other?

Today, great emphasis is placed on job satisfaction. Perhaps that should be part of our test? If you find your work satisfying, great! But just because we are happy with our work does not mean others are. I have employed lawyers

who loved their jobs and thought they were working well, but frankly they did not have much of a clue and were not cut out for the work we needed them to do. We also need to recognise that sometimes the only work we can get is dull, and all jobs have their periods of tedium. Whatever our work, we can still make life better for others!

What about Christian mentors, pastors or growth groups? Surely it makes sense to seek their input? Well, yes, and no. I'm quite good at manipulating people. If I tell someone only half the truth, in many cases I can get the answer I want. 'Mark, they are pushing you too hard' or 'Mark, you deserve better than that'.

'OK', you say, 'but I can't fool God'. Surely if I seek his assessment of my work, I will truly know how well I'm working? Yes, we can't fool God, but we can fool ourselves that we have heard the voice of God.

You may have heard it said that ultimately we have an audience of one. God is our ultimate judge, and our purpose is to seek his glory.

Some people say that to seek to please others is to give into vanity, so it is better to focus on pleasing God, who cannot be deceived. Yet in human hands this concept can be distorted. It seems pastors are quite good at distorting this. Distortion is seen in preachers who feel they must preach for 40 minutes, when the congregation switches off after 20 minutes. Distortion is seen in leaders who have a vision of what their church should do, and ignore advice and criticism until things crash down around them.

So, there are problems with money, our customers and our employers being our judges. We can manipulate our friends and there are problems with an audience of one. What can we do? We are at the bottom of a hole with no apparent way out.

It should not surprise you to hear that it is God who lifts us out of that hole. And it's not with a single stranded rope but one with at least three strands. 1 John 1 starts us on the way. We need to know and work within our limitations.

The first thing we need to do is recognise we sin. In verse 8 John says, 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.' This echoes the truth in Jeremiah 17:9, 'The heart is deceitful above all things.' We

need to recognise that we can deceive ourselves, and we are happy to let other people flatter and bribe us.

In verse 5, John says, 'God is light, in him there is no darkness at all'. So if we can get into God, his truth will illuminate our lives and take the darkness out of our hearts. But how do we do that? Verse 7 helps: 'But if we walk in his light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin'.

I take it the light is God's revelation of himself in Jesus. We need to walk, and work, in the clear light that Jesus shines on our lives. But why does John put 'we have fellowship with one another' in this sentence? It makes sense without it: 'if we walk in his light, as he is in the light, ... the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin'.

God has made us as social being. It's not just vertical - me and God. It is good that it is not just vertical, because I can choose to mishear God. I can close my ears to his rebuke.

John says that when we are in the light we don't walk alone. The knowledge that Jesus died for us brings us into the light, and brings us together as we share together in the benefits of his death. We walk in fellowship in the light. God gives us each other, and together we can help each other stay out of sin, and stop deceiving ourselves.

So, despite what I said earlier about our ability to deceive other Christians, our fellowship with other Christians is essential to evaluating our work. It's the first strand. We can't live in the light if we try to do it on our own. But we need people, who mean so much to us, that we will not want to betray them. And we need people who know us well enough to know when we are not being entirely frank about our work.

A great place to start is growth groups, where we share and are prepared to be accountable. We need to build trust and long term relationships in these groups so we can help each other work out how we are going.

Our passage says that when we walk in the light with our fellow Christians Jesus keeps on purifying us. This is a continuous action. This side of death we don't stop being sinners, but we can help each other over time to work out

how we are caring for this world and how we are caring for the people we work with and serve. We can work out whether we are using our gifts and opportunities as well as we can.

So the first strand is fellowship.

The second strand is reading and meditating on the word of God. We need to be careful to not just go to our favourite bits, the bits we know will give us the answers we want. I can read a psalm of lament about the way that my enemies conspire against me, when really I'm just not being diligent at my job or I am lazy. We need to read broadly, because we will find that God jogs us when we least expect it. We need to read the whole Bible. We need to read it with our souls open. God will constantly pull us up, make us explore things we did not have in our minds but which are strangely helpful.

The Bible is full of stories of how people deal with each other, and it's full of ethics. We should let those stories shape us. We will find ourselves thinking, 'is God speaking to me?' The scriptures prick our consciences into action. Sometimes they scorch us.

And the third strand is prayer: prayer alone with God, and prayer with others.

At the end of each day, take your day's work to God in prayer. What went well? Thank God. What could have gone better? Ask God for his help. What do you want to achieve tomorrow? What relationships are giving you grief? Ask for help. What do you need to discuss with others? Ask God to ensure you have those conversations.

So fellowship, the Bible and prayer; and this three stranded rope will get us out of the hole.

My advice is, read your Bibles and make sure you are close enough to other Christians so you can help them and they can help you, and pray.

### Study 3: Work, leisure and rest.

Key idea:

When we consider that God has made us to work, worship and enjoy leisure and rest, there is almost a theological imperative that they not be in conflict. This fits with the idea that they are integral to our wholeness. Each is an opportunity for good, and for us to do good. A wise use of time fits in here, but not legalistically. We should seek to work, and rest and play with the subjective sense that we are being who God wants us to be, and the objective corrective that neither work, nor rest nor leisure need be self-indulgent.

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1. Do you ever feel your life is out of balance? How?
2. What might a balanced life look like? What Christian values underpin your view of a balanced life? [For example, love, peace, contentment]
3. Do you think a 'balanced life' is a goal within the Christian life? Why? What Bible passages support your view? [Genesis 1: God worked and then rested. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, but seemed to enjoy long times of prayer, and eating with friends (as well as strangers). Paul seems to have had many close friends: Romans 16.]
4. How can we distinguish 'work' from 'leisure' and 'rest'? Miroslav Volf defines work as, 'honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or their co-creatures'. Is there more to it than this? [Darrell Cosden sees work as having eternal consequences and eternal value, as it both shapes us and our world. While both we and the world will be remade when Christ returns, our uniqueness, the 'who we were intended to be and the people we are becoming in Christ', will continue. Work then is an occasion for grace, for humble obedience, and an act of worship. Leisure can be seen as 'not work', but, more positively, it is an end in itself. 'Leisure is freedom, opportunity and possibility. In Calvinist terms, it is the mandate to extend the Lordship, in terms of freedom in Christ, to everything'.]
5. Is it better to talk of a 'work/life balance' or a 'work/rest of life balance'? What do we lose if we talk only of a 'work/life balance'? [We devalue the God-giveness of work, and his purposes for it.]

6. Where does 'fun' fit in your life? [Some people find work is fun. Others find most fun outside work. Try to find out what people really like doing. You may like to explore the ways that God seems to have fun. ]
7. Are we slaves to counting time? How might our knowledge that our lives are eternal affect the way we think about time? [One view of eternal life is that we cease to use time to measure our enjoyment of God and his recreation. 'Eternal' is qualitative more so than quantitative. Perhaps the way to put together the theologies of work and leisure is to think of them together rather than as opposites, and not use time to keep them apart.]
8. Do you think leisure is a means to an end (e.g. recovery so we can work better) or an end in itself? Why? [I am not using 'end' here in the sense of 'ultimate end', as everything we do should glorify God. Rather, assuming that our choices of leisure activities are pleasing to God, can we just enjoy our leisure, or should it have another purpose. I think it's an end in itself!]
9. What do you think of the Sabbath rest? How hard do you try to have a day of rest each week? [We need to avoid being legalistic about this. Sometimes we have to work on our 'rest' day, because other people need us.]
10. Do you think that the 'laziness of sloth' has given way to the 'laziness of busyness', where we have become too busy to love, and rest and simply be as God made us to be? What can we do to fight the idolatry of busyness?
11. How might your life be different if you stopped seeing work and leisure as opposites, but two essential parts of the way God has made us?

## End of Study

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### Study Notes: Some further reflections

The task of these notes is to draw on what the Bible has to say about work, leisure, play, and rest, and what Barth, Volf, Moltmann, Cosden, Oswalt and others have written on the theologies of work, leisure and rest, and piece together a workable picture of the life God wants us to live before Christ returns. The catalyst has been reflecting on the dangers of workaholicism, and yet the sense that work is very important in the God-giveness of human life. Work preceded the fall, and will be part of the new heavens and earth. However, where does it fit into the current eschatological age? The main

focus of these notes will be on the theologies of work and leisure, and how we may fit them together to form a life worth living.<sup>1</sup>

We are made to work. God is a worker. He created and sustains the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1, Ps 104). Not only are we made as workers in his image (Genesis 1:27), but our task as co-workers is spelt out in Genesis 1:28. We are made to serve (Colossians 3:23-24), and are reminded that, 'anyone unwilling to work should not eat' (2 Thessalonians 3:10-13). Yet we are not hard wired for workaholism.<sup>2</sup> In theological terms, work is not an end in itself (Col 3:17, Rom 14:6). The glory of God is the ultimate end.

So, work is important, but how important? Despite God resting on the seventh day and enjoying his creation (Genesis 2:1-3), Christians have at times struggled to see how rest and leisure relate to work. Luther thought that, 'Man was created not for leisure but for work, even in the state of innocence'.<sup>3</sup> Work and leisure have been seen as opposites.<sup>4</sup> Leisure is said to be what we do when we don't work.<sup>5</sup> Theologians who consider the theology of work recognise that rest forms part of the created order, and there is more to the Sabbath rest than command. There is an ethical dimension.<sup>6</sup> Leisure allows us to see that, 'life is a gift as well as a task'.<sup>7</sup> As Barth argues, 'The aim of the Sabbath commandment is that man (and woman) give and allow the omnipotent grace of God to have the first and last word at every point'.<sup>8</sup> The place of festivals in the life of Israel should not be seen as a point of discontinuity, now that we no longer need the 'Law' where they were prescribed, but a point of continuity with our God-given need for fun and play. Hospitality is undoubtedly a significant aspect of Christian life, and enjoyment

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<sup>1</sup> It is recognised that 'leisure', 'play' and 'rest' overlap but are not synonyms. There is no space here to explore the implications of this. While definitions of 'work' and 'leisure' are discussed below, definitions of 'play' and 'rest' will not be considered. But see Robert K. Johnston, 'Work and Play: A Biblical Perspective', pp. 7-16 in *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society*, (eds. Paul Heintzman, Glen E. Van Andel and Thomas L. Visker, Toronto: Dordt Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Ken Costa, *God at Work: Living every day with purpose*, (London: Continuum, 2007), 111. The term 'workaholism' was coined by W.E. Oates in 1968 to identify a psychological obsession, or an addiction, to work. its meaning has shifted from a pathology to almost a compliment or boast: Christopher Clausen, 'Against Work', *American Scholar*. Autumn 2004, Vol. 73 Issue 4, pp.133-138 at 134. Clausen offers some interesting insights into the 'grim pseudo-religion' that work has become in America, and probably many other places.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, quoted from Ewald M. Plass (ed.), *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, (St. Louise: Concordia, 1959), cited by Leland Ryken in 'The Puritan Work Ethic and Christian Leisure Today', pp. 35-50 in Heintzman *Christianity*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Dahl, 'Whatever Happened to the Leisure Revolution', pp.81-91 in Heintzman, *Christianity*, 83.

<sup>6</sup> Johnston, 'Work and Play', 12.

<sup>7</sup> Johnston, 'Work and Play', 12.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III.4, (trans. G. W. Bromely and others, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 552.

as well as sustenance appear to be on view.<sup>9</sup> Qoheleth taught that our 'lot' in life is to enjoy our work and play (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10).

Yet work is often presented as more serious and substantial, if not more essential.<sup>10</sup> Volf defines work as, 'honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or their co-creatures'.<sup>11</sup> He recognises something we see confirmed in our daily lives, that, 'to a large extent, we also are what we do'.<sup>12</sup> Work shapes our self-identity and what we think of each other. He also observes that work changes over time, and industrialisation, urbanisation and communication have radically altered how we work and its impact on us. Work in biblical times was very different to work today. We need to be alive to the challenges this brings. Moltmann explains the dangers thus, 'anyone who inquires about the work ethos of the Bible runs up against the cultural history of past societies'.<sup>13</sup>

Yet there is great value in exploring the theology of work, as Cosden shows. After a very detailed study he concludes that work is not only instrumental, undertaken to achieve secondary purposes of 'survival, self-fulfilment, spiritual growth and building society' (as Volf largely sees it), but ontologically.<sup>14</sup> This is crucial, as he shows how work is a 'fundamental facet of human and created existence'.<sup>15</sup> He sees work transcending its secondary purposes (its 'use value'). It becomes a transformative activity where workers 'express, explore and develop their humanness'.<sup>16</sup>

Like others, Cosden sees work having eternal consequences and eternal value, as it both shapes us and our world.<sup>17</sup> While both we and the world will be remade when Christ returns, our uniqueness, the 'who we were intended

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<sup>9</sup> Robert K. Johnston, 'Work and Play: A Biblical Perspective', pp. 7-16 in Heintzman et al, *Christianity*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> See the quote above from Luther.

<sup>11</sup> Volf, *Work*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Volf, *Work*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Moltmann 'The Right to Work' in *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 44, quoted in Volf, *Work*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*, (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2004), 177-79. Cosden interacts in detail with the ground breaking work of Moltmann, and his work can be seen to a large part as an expansion of Moltmann's work.

<sup>15</sup> Cosden, *Theology*, 177.

<sup>16</sup> Cosden, *Theology*, 179. c.f., Barth who sees work 'as an active affirmation of existence', *Dogmatics*, III.4, 546.

<sup>17</sup> Cosden, *Theology*, 185.

to be and the people we are becoming in Christ', will continue.<sup>18</sup> Work then is an occasion for grace, for humble obedience, and an act of worship.<sup>19</sup> Our challenge is to see how this can be translated to our lives.

Where then do leisure and rest fit in? Recent work demythologising Puritan attitudes to work and leisure, and deconstructing Weber's theories on the contribution of the 'Protestant work ethic' to capitalism, are helpfully clearing the field to see leisure as part of God's plans for humanity.<sup>20</sup> This goes beyond the Sabbath rest, although Barth is correct that the biblical picture is that this is fundamental to humanity.<sup>21</sup> Like others, he saw leisure as a divine command.<sup>22</sup> However, why is leisure good for us? Oswald argues persuasively that leisure is an end in itself.<sup>23</sup> He argues against utilitarian justifications for leisure.<sup>24</sup> Leisure exists not just as a command, or as a means to survival and greater productivity at work. Rather, we are made to rest and enjoy it as part of our identities as image bearers and being united in Christ. Hence, leisure is fundamental to our humanity. Dahl argues, 'leisure is freedom, opportunity and possibility. In Calvinist terms, it is the mandate to extend the Lordship, in terms of freedom in Christ, to everything.'<sup>25</sup>

A practical problem in seeing God as the author of leisure can be legalism. The Puritans recognised God's hand in leisure (contrary to popular myth), but Baxter suggested 18 rules that should govern a Christian's choice of leisure.<sup>26</sup> He equated 'pastimes' with 'time wasting'.<sup>27</sup> Some Puritans became fastidious about time counting, and were so good at filling up the day with worthy devotional things that the modern 'time famine' among Christians was born.<sup>28</sup> Good things to do gave way to things we 'ought' to do.<sup>29</sup> We had less time for fun and play, and with economic and demographic changes (e.g. industrialisation, urbanisation and the need to travel). Lives became busier and more segmented. The laziness of sloth was complimented by the

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<sup>18</sup> Volf provides an excellent summary of the eschatological transformation we will experience. He says that 'human work leaves a permanent imprint on natural and social environments': *Theology* 94-97.

<sup>19</sup> Cosden, *Theology*, 179.

<sup>20</sup> Discussed in Ryken, 'Puritan', 35

<sup>21</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics*, III.4, 552.

<sup>22</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics*, 555

<sup>23</sup> John Oswald, *The Leisure Crisis*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Oswald, *Leisure*, 38, also Dahl, *Whatever*, 87.

<sup>25</sup> Dahl, 'Happened', 90. See also Oswald, *Crisis*, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Hans-Peter Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes Towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth Century New England*, (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1982), 48-49, cited in Ryken, *Puritan*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Ryken, 'Puritan', 42.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Gibbs, 'How America Has Run Out of Time', *Time*, April 24, 1989, 58-67, cited in Ryken, *Puritan*, 44.

<sup>29</sup> Oswald, *Crisis*, 22.

laziness of busyness,<sup>30</sup> where we became too busy to love, and rest and simply be as God made us to be.

Our relationship to time is a large subject, and can only be touched on here. Discussions about 'work-life' balance often land on the need to 'repossess time', and to be very intentional about how we think about, prioritise and schedule time.<sup>31</sup> Time is part of the created order (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1), and therefore a gift of God to be used wisely. Yet there is the risk of becoming slaves to time if we let scheduling and time-allocation dominate. One view of eternal life is that we cease to use time to measure our enjoyment of God and his recreation. 'Eternal' is qualitative more so than quantitative. Perhaps the way to put together the theologies of work and leisure is to think of them together rather than as opposites and not use time to keep them apart.

One of the fascinating things in analysing all this material is how people with markedly different approaches (e.g. Barth, Cosden and Oswalt) all somehow come around to expressing views that life is some form of continuum. It is not helpful to see work and leisure as opposites, nor to see our task as to allocate the 'right' amount of time to both. Barth sought a non segmented life.<sup>32</sup> Cosden looks for an 'ethical equilibrium' and 'harmonious balance'.<sup>33</sup> His solution is not based on how we allocate time, but how we understand work as part of God's plan for us. Leisure needs to be given similar treatment.

The following suggests where assimilating theologies of work and leisure could take us:

*Working, recreating and worshipping are all different aspects of the same thing. The same person is doing the same thing in an ideal and optimal state. When I can experience wholeness, the integration, the interrelationships, the continuum between my work (the things I have to do), recreation (the things I do because I don't have to) and worship (the things I do because*

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<sup>30</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics*, III.4, 555.

<sup>31</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: Volume One, The Pastoral Life*, (Nutley, N.J. : Presbyterian and Reformed Publ., 1975-76), 39 and Costa, *God at Work*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics*, III.4, 520.

<sup>33</sup> Cosden, *Theology*, 181.

*of my relationship with God), then I am at leisure and I can experience the freedom I have as a Christian.*<sup>34</sup>

We cannot escape time, and time must be measured to avoid sloth and to manage other sins, yet in need not be our master.

In conclusion, there is much that the separate theologies of work and leisure have to contribute to our understanding of who God has made us to be. However, when we consider that God has made us to work, worship and enjoy leisure and rest, there is almost a theological imperative that they not be in conflict. This fits with the idea that they are integral to our wholeness. Each is an opportunity for God's good to envelope us, and for us to do good. A wise use of time fits in here somewhere, but not legalistically. When we can work, and rest and play with the subjective sense that we are being who God wants us to be, and the objective corrective that neither work, nor rest nor leisure is self-indulgent, we may appreciate Oswald's wise reflection that, 'grace is an opportunity to not take things so seriously'.<sup>35</sup> God's grace allows us to do all for his glory, and the more that is our focus, the more we are who God wants us to be.

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<sup>34</sup> Dahl, *Whatever*, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Oswald, *Leisure*, 101.

## Study 4: Fear at work

Bible texts you could consider: Matthew 6:19-34 and 10:26-33.

Key idea:

Fear can destroy our lives and our our faith. Jesus knows this, and will help us overcome our fears when we keep him in the centre of our lives.

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1. Have you ever feared someone or something at work? What? What effect did it have on you?
2. How did you deal with it? [depending on the level of sharing and trust in your group, you could ask if people have self-medicated with alcohol or drugs to try to deal with fear or sought professional help.]
3. This may have been covered in 1 above, but what do we fear at work? [embarrassment, personal failure, not succeeding, doing things that harm others (losing money, causing injury or death), missing out, losing our job, losing our way, bullying, harassment, being asked to do something we can't do, being made to work when we don't want to (e.g. late nights, weekends, when we have another commitment), boredom]
4. Do you ever work later than you want/need for fear of being seen to be lazy or less committed?
5. Do you think fear, perhaps only in part, drives our use of smart phones, home computers etc, so we always stay in touch with work, and do not miss that important email etc? Does fear stop us switching off from work?
6. How would you define fear? [An unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm.]
7. As we are emotional beings, isn't fear just natural? If someone is trying to harm you, isn't it natural/reasonable to be afraid? Is fear just a preservation instinct that is a natural consequence of the fall? [Possible places to go are 'fear came into the world when humans rejected God'. In Genesis 3:8-13, Adam and Eve appear to try to hide. Adam blames Eve. However, even if fear is part of the fallen world, Jesus has some things to say about it.]
8. Have you ever heard a sermon on fear? e.g. on Matthew 6:19-34 and 10:26-33. What do you remember of it? Did it help you?

9. When you are afraid, how do you feel when you are told you should not fear or worry? [It may help some people, but often it doesn't.]
10. [Repeating 2 above] Have you learnt to deal with fear? If so, how? What works? [Try to be specific. What prayers? What patterns of prayer and/or Bible reading? What help from professionals, pastors, friends and mentors? How often?]
11. Do you think it is realistic to never feel fear/worry at work?
12. If there are things that should make us fearful (e.g. making a mistake that hurts other people), how do we understand the command/advice to not fear or be worried?
13. Do you think the command/advice to not fear means we are to have no fear, or we are not to be overwhelmed/shaped/limited by fear? [See notes below, but it does seem that the point of passages like Matthew 6:19-34 and 10:26-33 is that, if we worship only God, and keep him at the centre of our life (e.g. seek his kingdom first), we will not be consumed or consistently distracted by our fears and anxiety.]

Spend some time praying for each other and your fears.

## **End of Study**

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### **Study Notes: Some further reflections**

#### **Introductory comments**

Fear can be one of the most debilitating and destructive forces at work. It does not affect all workers the same. Many people learn to live with the challenges and disappointments they meet at work in ways that do not unduly detract from their enjoyment of work and life generally. However, for others it is crippling.

Even some apparently very successful people (CEOs, national leaders etc) are overcome by doubts and fear. People talk of being 'paralysed by fear'. They hate being at work, but hate being away from work, lest they not be there to deal with problems that arise.

As mentioned in the essay that form the notes for study 7, in my experience, many senior executives oscillate between hubris and paralysing fear. Both are manifestations of excessive self regard, which is the opposite of love. Hubris and fear take a devastating toll on the people who work around these people, not to mention the people themselves and their families. Yet love, being totally outward looking, is the cure to both. In these circumstances love can take many forms, such as accepting and laughing at one's own mistakes, accepting that others make mistakes, not claiming responsibility for success that is attributable to others, supporting colleagues when they are struggling personally, etc. But we need to help each other identify our fears and overcome them by prayer and practical acts of love.

Fear is a common, but not universal, emotion in the early stages of work ('how do I do this job?', 'what do people think of me?', 'will I ever get on top of this job?', 'what happens if I make a mistake?'). But it can continue throughout our working lives.

I have known successful professionals who do not plan anything for the weekend, or anything on weekday evenings, in case they have to work. Some avoid taking holidays, in case they are not around to manage things, or in case problems arise. For some it is worse. They always want to be around at work to cover-up or hide mistakes (real or perceived).

I do not know if there is technical difference between anxiety and fear. Someone who suffers from the clinical condition of 'anxiety' may be more prone to 'fear in the workplace' than others. However, I know many people who seem quite capable of managing personal relationships, families, leisure, sport, and many other aspects of 'normal life', and yet suffer from fear at work.

Changed circumstances can provoke fear. A takeover of our employer, a restructure, and a 'downsizing' can all affect our sense of stability at work. Fear of being sacked or squeezed out is common. Fear of not being able to get another job affects many, especially some women (due to lingering discrimination) and older people.

Fear manifests itself in many different ways, although it often goes undetected by others. It can result in poor sleep, poor diet, too much or too

little exercise, strained and broken relationships, chronic illness and death (from suicide or lack of care).

Fear can arise from a lack of effective supervision, a blame shifting culture, unreasonable expectations, the nature of some industries, or placing our trust in people who prove to be unreliable or give wrong advice. Sales people cannot effectively control their customers. Medical science is not exact. Doctors can not be sure if they have diagnosed properly or if their patient will respond as expected to a treatment/medicine. New products/shows/presentations can 'bomb'. Predicting the behaviour of others is notoriously difficult. We don't know how government departments, administrative bodies, courts, police etc will behave. Our concepts of rational thought, justice, and 'the right thing to do', may not be shared by others. Much fear comes from being unable to control things beyond oneself. This can be made worse by our sense of our own limitations ('human finitude'). We know we are not perfect, and we make mistakes. Many workplaces and bosses are very unforgiving.

### **Thinking theologically**

No doubt some fear can be attributed to our vanity. We want to appear successful, in control etc., whereas God tells us this is not where our true value lies. We are sinners, but loved and saved sinners.

We are told we will face persecution and suffering in this world (Matthew 16:21, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 12:26, Philippians 1:29 etc). We should expect that to sometimes come at work. However, we are not left to suffer alone.

I think it is likely Jesus did not mean, 'don't think of the consequences', or 'take risks, nothing can go wrong'. He no doubt had in mind that we should remember our true value and our sure hope. We are made in the image of God, and nothing can take that away from us (Romans 8:37-39). We are of inestimable value because Christ died for each one of us. In an ultimate sense we need not fear set-backs and failures in this world, because God still loves us and our futures are as glorious as they are certain. And perhaps it is these thoughts, and others drawn from the Bible, that should crowd out our fears. There may still be a struggle between our dark thoughts and our hopes, but fear need not overwhelm us.

Leisure (see study 3 notes on this) can help. But fear can impinge on leisure. We may be going for a walk or cycle, watching TV or a movie etc, and our mind wanders to the problem(s) we are dealing with at work. Taking a weekend/long weekend/holiday/sabbatical may help, but not if we can't relax and leave our worries at work. For some, it takes many years to be able to 'switch off' from work.

One thing that may help is to think how Christian virtues can help e.g. hope and love. Can our sense of the hopes we have in Jesus dull the impact of our fears, or replace them? Can focussing on the love that Jesus, our family and close friends, have for us reshape the value we see in ourselves, so the things we fear seem smaller?

There are some disciplines that can help us manage fear. No doubt our fears can crowd out our prayers, but our prayers have two significant ways of helping us. First, when we pray, we get help from the most powerful and effective person in the universe. Things that seem insurmountable to us are small to him. Second, the act of praying itself can crowd out our fears. I find that when I pray about something, I can move on. I've done the best thing I can do to deal with a problem.

We need short, memorable prayers to help us deal with fear. I pray at least at the beginning and end of each day. I have found these helpful:

1. Loving Father, you know what is on my mind and what lies ahead of me today. I can't see a way through. Please help me stay calm, work effectively, and be gracious. Please help me with each step I take today. Amen.
2. Dear Father, please help me through the next hour. Amen.
3. Heavenly Father, you know I am worried about x [name it]. It seems beyond me. Please could you look after it while I sleep. I will take it back up in the morning. Amen.

Being a lawyer is an odd job. You spend most of your time thinking about things that could go wrong. The more complicated and innovative the work you do, the more things that can go wrong. I lived with a level of fear for 27 years. It was worse in the early years, both because I was inexperienced and because I was not a Christian. Even though my responsibilities increased

substantially in the later years, often 'signing-off' on deals worth many billions of dollars, I was never again paralysed by fear. This is because I learned to (mostly) leave work at work, and because I often prayed regularly through the day. I started the day reading the Bible and praying, and that set me up for the day. I knew I would face challenges through the day, but I knew Jesus would be with me.

We can also share our fears with each other. Sometimes we fear the consequences our actions, or other circumstances, will have on people we love, and bottle up those fears. When we talk about our fears, they can lose their potency. After I had been a partner for a few years, just bought a family sized house (with Sydney sized mortgage) and my wife was pregnant, I got a phone call. It was just before Christmas. I was told one of my partners had lost or stolen about \$30 million. As I would be liable for that loss, I faced personal bankruptcy, and the loss of my house and income. It was not the happiest of Christmases, as I worried about the impact on my wife, child and other dependents. My initial thought was to keep it to myself, and see how things worked out. However, the weight of these problems was eventually too much, and I confided my fears to my wife. Her reaction was that she never expected to be well off, and 'The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' A wave of relief washed over me. We prayed. I relaxed. Life moved on.<sup>36</sup>

## **Biblical material**

It is helpful to do a word search of 'afraid', 'fear', and 'worry', particularly in the New Testament. Often the reason to not be afraid is because Jesus is present.

In Matthew 14:27 the disciples are afraid because they think they see a ghost (which would make most of us afraid!). Perhaps their fear dissipated because they realised they saw their friend Jesus, rather than a ghost. They could take heart and put their fear aside because Jesus was with them.

Again, the disciples were afraid when they thought they would be destroyed at sea (Mark 4:40). Their fear dissipated when Jesus acted in power to

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<sup>36</sup> I ended up losing a lot of money, but I did not go broke.

quieten the storm. Jesus can do that for us when we call on him for help. If Jesus can calm a storm, he can calm a bully, or help us with our work.

We read the disciples were afraid when the resurrected Jesus appeared to them (Mark 14:8). Who would not be? Yet, when they realised what Jesus had done, their fear subsided and they went on to do the most astonishing work, because the Spirit was with them (see the Book of Acts).

The references to fear above are to specific situations. Matthew 10:26-33 is about more general fear. Verse 26 can be paraphrased as, 'Do not fear things you do not understand, because all will be revealed'. Verse 28 says, 'do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell'. Much has been written on this enigmatic passage. Some think we should fear Satan, the great deceiver. But we know he was defeated on the cross. So it seems more likely we should fear our mighty and awesome judge. We need not read this to mean that people are obliterated in hell. Rather, we should fear the final judgement we all face. God feeds the sparrows and knows the number of hairs on our head. And because he knows us, we have nothing to fear in an ultimate sense. The only thing we need fear are the consequences of rejecting God.

Hence, in our work, we should be careful to not ignore God, or let work take over our lives. We can be concerned about making mistakes, but letting go of God is the only thing we should really fear.

It would be simplistic to say, 'God says, "don't be afraid", therefore we should not be afraid'. I have heard some preachers say this, and I have wondered if they have thought enough on the subject. We are complicated, emotional beings. We understand cause and effect. A more comprehensive response is required. May I suggest the following:

1. Admit fear to yourself.
2. Discuss it with good Christian friends, and ask for their prayers for you (both the circumstances that cause you fear and your emotional response to that cause).
3. See if sin is involved, and, if it is, repent of that sin and seek God's help to avoid that sin in the future. The most obvious sin is vanity: 'I am afraid to fail because I will not look good'. Yet not all concern for success or reputation is sin. Our concerns for failure may be for the consequences

our failure may have for our parents who supported us through our studies, or the financial impact on our dependents. In many workplaces we need a good reputation to be able to work and work well. So, some balance is required here. Good Christian friends, or your pastor, may be able to help find that balance.

4. Consider if you are worshipping God, or wealth or your reputation, and, if you are worshipping something other than God, try to seek first God's kingship over your life.
5. Consider if there are ways to manage the causes of your fear. (Note how far into the list this comes. So often the our first response is, to try and fix the problem on our own, or to hide a mistake, or to blame someone else. One of the hardest things to learn is to take responsibility for our mistakes.)
6. Pray, and more specifically, invite Jesus to walk with you each day. We saw in the passage from Matthew 14:27 that the reason the disciples could take heart and not be afraid was because Jesus was with them. There is no point leaving Jesus at home in the morning. Take him to work with you.

## Study 5: Good relations at work - gossip

Key idea:

We are sent into the world, but are not to be of it. We want good relations with people at work, but we want to be constructive in what we say, and not encourage destructive behaviour in others.

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### Bible passages:

Proverbs 11:13: A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.

Proverbs 16:28: A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.

Proverbs 18:8: The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.

Proverbs 20:19: A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.

Proverbs 26:20: Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.

2 Corinthians 12:20: For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

### Questions:

1. Based on these passages, how should we define 'gossip'? [See notes below for help with this.]
2. We are to avoid gossip but we are to be in the world! Consider John 17:14-18:

*You have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My*

*prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.' So we are 'not of this world, but sent into it.*

How does this fit with the command to avoid gossip? Can we be in the world but not be part of a gossip culture?

3. What is the gossip culture like at your work?
4. Do you find yourself being drawn into it?
5. How do you avoid it?
6. What risks do you face when you do not participate in gossip? [You may miss out on legitimate information that can help you in your job. You may lose friends.]
7. How can we judge our contributions to discussions? [Would we want to be spoken about like this? Does the person being spoken about have a value to God that is not reflected in the way we speak about them?]
8. What Christian virtues may help us avoid gossip? [Justice, courage, temperance, prudence, faith, hope and love (from Aquinas)].
9. What outcomes do we want? [God has made us as 'lovers', that is, as people who seek the good of other people. In our speech we should do good. If we are not sure if either our listening or our speaking will achieve some good purpose, and fear that harm may actually come from it, it may be best to keep quiet.]

## **End of Study**

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### **Study notes:**

A dictionary definition of gossip is 'casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details which are not confirmed as true'. For me this is not sufficiently negative in connotation.

Another way to see it is as, 'talk about others when we are neither the problem nor the solution'. I think this can be useful at a practical level. If

you feel you are being drawn into gossip, you can think, ‘do I need to participate because I’m the problem, or I have a useful solution?’ However, this definition is a bit narrow. It does not reflect the fact that talking about other people is simply part of being human and being social beings. We are story tellers, and stories usually involve people.

The Hebrew word translated ‘gossip’ in the Old Testament is defined as ‘one who reveals secrets, one who goes about as a talebearer or scandal-monger’.

Two related words are used in the New Testament. In Romans 1:29 the best greek dictionary (lectionary), BDAG, defines the word translated as ‘gossip’ as as ‘rumourmonger or tale-bearer’. In 2 Corinthians 12:20 the word translated as ‘gossip’ is defined by BDAG as ‘derogatory information about someone that is offered in a tone of confidentiality, (secret) gossip, tale-bearing’. It is often associated with ‘speaking badly’ (as in 2 Corinthians 12:20), which is ‘the act of speaking ill of another, evil speech, slander, defamation’.

From this we could say that a gossip is a person who has privileged information about people and proceeds to reveal that information to those who have no business knowing it. Gossip is distinguished from sharing information in two ways:

- (a) *Intent*. Gossipers often have the goal of building themselves up by making others look bad and exalting themselves as some kind of repositories of knowledge.
- (b) *The type of information shared*. Gossipers speak of the faults and failings of others, or reveal potentially embarrassing or shameful details regarding the lives of others without their knowledge or approval. Even if they mean no harm, it is still gossip.

### **Other observations.**

When I first started work as a lawyer, an old, crusty and very practical senior partner told me, ‘there are more people in jail for saying too much and not enough’. This was a strong and threatening image. It was used too convey the idea that some people let their tongues run away with them, give too much information, express unformed or untested ideas or

opinions, and bitterly regret it later. How many times have we thought, 'I wish I hadn't said that!' or 'if only I had stopped earlier'. Some people speak a lot so they can be the centre of attention. Others do it out of nervousness, 'I want to speak so I belong'. We don't want to be scared to speak, or overly taciturn, but some discipline is needed. A good practical guide is to ask yourself, 'what good am I hoping will come from saying this?' or 'is this likely to do more harm than good?'. If you are unsure, take greater care.

As usual, the Book of Proverbs has things to say that help us with day-to-day living:

13:3, Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.

20:15, Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.

22:11, One who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the king for a friend.

23:9, Do not speak to fools, for they will scorn your prudent words.

23:16, my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.

29:20, Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them.

None of us will go through life without making awful mistakes with what comes out of our mouths. But a wise person will learn from their mistakes.

Finally, we should want to see people in the best light that God sees them. We know there are fools and idolators, and that we are all sinners. But we also know that every person bears God's image and is of great value to him. So, when we speak of other people, we could concentrate on the good we see in them. If we do that, we will not be gossiping.

## Study 6: Getting on with people at work - Common Grace

Bible passage: Matthew 5:43-48

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. **He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.** 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Key idea:

Understanding Common Grace can help us work better with people at work.

We have far more in common with the people we work with than a ‘them v us’ approach may permit. Common Grace can help bridge the gap with our work colleagues who are not Christians, help us get closer to them, and bring other benefits of good relations.

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1. Where does ‘getting on with other people’ rank in terms of the hardest things at work? [By people, I include, bosses, colleagues, people who work for you, customers, clients, suppliers, etc. For most of us it ranks at or about the hardest thing we do. If it’s not the hardest thing, it’s often the thing that causes the most stress]
  2. Why is it so hard to get on with other people? [Reasons can include bullying, sexism, misunderstandings, irritations, unfairness, selfishness, poor communication, different priorities, indifference, etc.]
  3. What are the benefits of getting on with people at work? [Work is more pleasant. It allows us to have friends at work (see study 8 for the importance of this in conversion at work). It helps with recognition and promotion.]
  4. How might our theology of work help us get on with other people at work? [To start with, we know why we work (its fundamental to how God has made us and his purposes for us). We know we must seek to do

good, work well and care for other people. Having a low view of, or using, other people is not an option for us. We are to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We do that through obedience to God's purposes for our lives which includes seeking the good of other people.]

5. Is there any reason we would not want to get on with people at work? [There is obvious self-interest in getting on with people, as your life is easier and they may help you, rather than resist or fight against you. However, I do not see this as a good reason to not respect and care for other people.]
6. What do you have in common with the people at work? [You have an extraordinary number of things in common with the people you work with, e.g. our humanity, purpose, and finitude (we all make mistakes). We all bear the image of God. We all have a sense of good and bad, truth and lie, even if some people are very good at hiding this. We all have the capacity and need for relationship. We are all sinners.]
7. What do you take from this? [We have a lot in common with everyone at work, even if we have different ways of thinking about God, big questions and the world.]
8. What is good about the people you work with? What good do they do? Do you ever think they work better than you?
9. Where do they say that 'good' comes from?
10. Where do you think it comes from?
11. Read Romans 1:18-20 and 2:14-15. Explore the idea of common grace. ['Common grace' is a term we give to the idea that God shares many things with all people. We live in his world. We all bear his image. He loves us all. He gives us all a sense of good and bad. His rain falls on all of us. The passages from Romans are discussed more in the notes below.]
12. How does this help us think about the people we work with? What does it mean to be 'common'? Why is it 'grace'? [It is underserved. Augustine's response to Pelagius, who thought we could do good on our own, was, 'All good is either God or from God'.]
13. How does the good they do make you feel about the way you work and lead your life? [I often find it a way that God pricks me into being a better witness.]
14. Do the people at work expect more from you because you are a Christian?
15. How do we hold together their 'goodness' and 'truth' and their rejection of God? [We all have some imprint of God in us. The doctrine of sin means

we are never as good as we should be, and the doctrine of grace means non-believers are never as messed-up as they should be, given their worldview.]

16. What practical steps can we take to get on better with people at work? [Simply being nice too people is a great place to start. Say, 'hello'. Don't ignore people who may not be important to you or your job. See the notes on this below.]
17. How does Common Grace help us understand why some people do their jobs better than we do, and display other qualities we value better than we often/sometimes manage (e.g. kindness, generosity, patience, friendship, warmth)? [We can aim for humbler cooperation and respectful differences.]

## **End of Study**

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### **Study notes**

#### **Theology**

Your theology shapes who you are and the way you do your work. The way you interact with work colleagues will reflect your theology, even if you don't think of yourself as a theologian. 'Theology' is the things you know about God.

#### **Common Grace**

I have included the references to Romans 1:18-20 and 2:14-15 for the purpose of showing that we have some biblical basis for thinking about the things Christians share with non-Christians. These passages help us understand better why non-Christians are capable of being truthful, kind, hard working etc. Everyone has an imprint of God on them, and some sense of his 'invisible attributes'. We can all recognise beauty. We all have some sense of right and wrong. God has made and touched us all. However, I suggest you be careful how you use this truth with non-Christians.

Many people will not appreciate being told that they have always been able to see the divine nature and eternal power of God. I was an atheist for the first 30 years of my life, and can say truthfully that, for as long as I can remember, until I was 30 I had no sense of the existence of God. Not when I was dumped at Nowra Anglican Sunday School when I was 4. Not when I was

forced to sit-stand-sit etc through school assemblies. Not when I idled away my time in school scripture classes. And not when we started to discuss the big questions of life in my early teens. The words of Paul in Romans 1 and 2 are true, but I had no sense of God. I genuinely, if mistakenly, believed all matter and life, even beautiful sunsets and perfect waves, were random accidents. So there would have been no point in telling me, 'you must see God's hand in creation', or, 'your sense of good must come from God', or, 'the Bible says you have a sense of God's power and divine nature'. It would have only annoyed and alienated me.

Therefore, until you become friends with people you work with (see notes for study 8), it may be better to act like you believe you have a lot in common with them, and appreciate the good things you see in them. Save the explanation until they are interested in finding out more about Jesus, and the way he made the world and us.

### **Some implications that Common Grace has for the way we think about other people**

Theologically, getting on at work starts with recognising what we have in common. We may say it starts with the command to love our neighbours as ourselves. That is very important. However, if we start with the view that we are the goodies, we are the lovers, and they are the baddies who need us, then that will shape the friendships and other relationships we form.

Love, and an understanding of common grace, allow us to treat all people the same. We show respect through:

- Punctuality - being punctual shows that we value a person because we value the limited time they have in this life. If we keep people waiting for long, we are saying they do not matter to us. (I know some cultures do not share this view of punctuality, and believe 'westerners' are obsessed by time. However, at the least, I suggest we do not assume that our casual approach to punctuality is shared by everyone. I would rather err on the side of cautious respect.)
- Reliability - flakiness is neither a good witness nor a good work habit
- Not gossiping about them (see study 5).

## Dealing with conflict:

Conflict at work is a bigger subject that can be dealt with adequately in this study. However, an understanding of common grace can help avoid conflict. At times Christians face persecution at work because of their beliefs, and because they have a strong sense of right and wrong. This persecution can take many forms, from constant ridicule, snide comments, being made to work when you have growth group or church service, or always been made to feel like an outsider. It's easy to say, 'don't rise to the bait' or 'don't let it get to you'. It's much harder to do that consistently. There are, of course, laws against religious persecution, but resort to the law is stressful and often not very satisfactory. Yet we can sometimes find allies within human resources departments, or managers who want to improve the workplace culture or minimise compliance risks. So, resort to complaint processes should not be ignored.

Before we get to formal complaints, two good places to start are:

- Thinking about the things we have in common with all people at work (not matter differences in racial or religious background, politics, sexual preference etc).
- Not being drawn into an 'us v them' view of life at work.

A few others suggestions are:

- Don't pick fights. I have been amazed at how self-righteous, belligerent and thin-skinned some Christians can be.
- Try to avoid fights, and, if conflict is necessary, fight clean.
- Pray for yourself and for God to change the heart and behaviour of those you conflict with.
- Never cease to try to see others as God sees them.
- Ask for your Christian friends or pastor for help.

To this list some people would add, 'winning isn't everything'. That is true, and we can think of teachings, such as being prepared to 'turn the other cheek' (Matthew 5:39), that support this view. However, I would want to urge some balance in this. We need Christians in all lawful workplaces (and Christians to unwind, and rehabilitate those in, unlawful or immoral businesses). This will not happen if Christians are not prepared to stand up to persecution, including low-level discrimination. We can remember the

baptismal prayer to, 'fight bravely under [Christ's] banner against sin, the world and the devil'. We do not want Christians retreating into Christian ghettos. Therefore, we need to learn to deal with conflict. We should stop before reaching a 'win at all costs' position, but survival is the first step towards thriving. We need to be prepared to help each other with the conflicts we face at work.

## **Be nice to everyone**

I can hear some readers saying, 'Argh, do we always have to be nice because we are Christians?' Church history is full of weird, belligerent, combative, Christians, including heroes like Athanasius of Alexandria, and Luther. However, I am not giving them advice on how to get on well at work.

At a fundamental level, we should show kindness and respect to everyone, because of their value to God. Showing respect and kindness to everyone at work is a great way of proclaiming Christ. The person who influenced me most to consider the claims of Jesus was my Christian boss. I knew he was a Christian, because he did work for the church, but he never mentioned Jesus. However, he was kind and respectful to support staff and lowly junior lawyers like me. It was clear he 'marched to the beat of a different drum', and had a certainty of purpose and ethical framework that sustained him to be an outstanding lawyer. Yet, when he came into my office to correct my work, he would ask if he could borrow my pen. He didn't need to ask. He owned the pen! But he still asked. Why? Because God had made him the man he was. Often the first place some people meet God is in the people they work with.

We often are critical of self-interest as a motivating force. Far better to do things out of love. That is true. Yet, being kind and respectful to others brings benefits we may not consider when we are busy, stressed or tired. The person in the next office may end up as the CEO. The junior colleague who irritates you may end up in a significant position at one of your clients. When you have to work late, and there are few junior or support staff about, you will find the ones you have been kind and respectful to, the ones who you have taken the time to find out about them and their families, will be the people who are more willing to help you than people who have ignored them. So, Christian virtues do have their own rewards. Don't despise them.

## Study 7: Are there jobs Christians should not do?

Key idea:

We have great freedoms as Christians. However, we are not free to do anything. We should seek to do good. We should not harm other people and we should care for God's creation (which includes other people).

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1. Why do you think we may need to ask if there are jobs Christians should not do? [Answers would flow from our theology of work and the study of working well. Jobs that work against the principle of caring for God's creation, and loving God and neighbour, may be problematic.]
2. Should we only do jobs we can expect to be able to do well? Why/why not?
3. Quickly, which jobs do you think Christians should not do? Why?
4. Read: 1 Corinthians 10:23-33. What principles for work can we take out of this passage?
  - (a) Do we really have the right to do anything? [no, we must seek the good of others]
  - (b) Do we seek the most 'good', or will any 'good' do?
  - (c) What level of separation from harm does the analogy with 'food offered to idols' afford us? Can we work for a bank that lends money to businesses we would not want to work for? Can we put our money in a bank but not own shares?
  - (d) What level of knowledge of the good/harm our employer does do we need to have? What level of engagement?
  - (e) Can I say that 'thankfulnesses' (and prayerfulness) allow us to avoid doing the most good in our work? Can our private lives mask what we do at work?
  - (f) In what ways does your work glorify God? Are you serving society or other people?
  - (g) Are there any parts of your work that are incompatible with Christ?
  - (h) What are the 'idols' of your workplace? What are the fears and the hopes?

- (i) Does your work cause others to stumble?
- (j) 'Salvation' was a particular concern for those concerned about idol worship. Must we seek the salvation of others to do 'good'?
5. In what circumstances, if any, do you think Christians can work in:
- the armed forces [e.g. Australia, ISIS, the Kurds]
  - the tobacco industry (e.g. growing tobacco, working for cigarette manufacturers, selling tobacco products (e.g. specialist shops, or petrol stations, or convenience stores))
  - the sex industry (e.g. prostitution, pornography)
  - gambling (is there a difference between a casino and a club or pub that has pokies; can you work selling drinks or as a cleaner?; what happens if it's the only job you can get?; can you work in a newsagency and sell Lotto tickets?)
  - munitions manufacturers (is there a difference between companies that only provide arms to legitimate governments, and companies that provide arms to anyone?)
  - oil/coal/gas companies
  - companies that are major polluters
  - professional services firms (e.g. law or accountancy firms, management consultancies, banks, insurance companies, PR firms, lobbyists, etc) that provide services to tobacco companies, major polluters, etc
  - hospitals or clinics that perform abortions or euthanasia
  - Sydney Theatre Company
6. Can you work for a company that does some good and some bad, if you try to only do the good stuff?
7. How do you respond to the suggestion that Christians should not 'climb the greasy poll to success'? [Personally, I object to this very strongly! Most companies do not have a 'greasy poll'. You do not have to compromise your principles to get to the top. We want Christians in positions of power and influence. We want Christian prime minister, premiers, CEOs, partners in professional firms, entrepreneurs, etc. The only way Christians can get to the top is by working very hard and very well. This may mean they cannot always make it to growth group or church, and they may not have time to run the children's program. But they need our support, not our condemnation, if we want to see our fellow Christians make this world a better place.]
8. What principles can you distill from your discussion of this subject?
9. How can we help each other with our job choices?

These are not easy issues to discuss, as our work is very personal to us. Spend some time praying for each other.

## **End of Study**

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### **Study notes**

Choosing our first job (or taking what we can get), and changing jobs, raise the important question of whether there are jobs Christians should not do, and the related question, for those fortunate enough to have a choice of jobs, how should we decide the best job to do?

The world has changed greatly since the days of early church. There are of course still doctors (cf Luke), tent makers (cf Paul), farmers, fishers, builders, labourers, teachers, soldiers, financiers, church workers etc, but the complexity and variety of paid employment has grown greatly in the last 200 years.

In the Bible there are not lists of permitted jobs, but lists of vices (which should not be seen as comprehensive) e.g. Romans 1:24-32, Galatians 5:19-21. Perhaps one way to think about jobs we should not do is jobs which lead or force us into prohibited behaviour.

One area where Christians disagree is whether Christians can or should serve in the military. Some people from pacifist or Baptist backgrounds say they should not. In what ways are bombing places, or killing people, love? Other people follow the long line of Christians, going back at least to Augustine, in holding to the doctrine of 'just war'. Augustine argued that a Christian could be a soldier and serve God and country honourably. He claimed that, while individuals should not resort immediately to violence, God has given the sword to government for good reason (based upon Romans 13:4). Christians as part of government should not be ashamed to protect peace and punish wickedness. My view is that there is unlikely to be peace on earth until Jesus returns. For so long as there is war, or the threat of war, there will be military forces (whether or not you think that there are more wars because there are armies). I would prefer there to be Christians in our military forces so they can bring Christian love and ethics to these workplaces.

One of the key issues in this area is 'moral responsibility'. The following is an article I wrote on the question, 'Can a corporation be good? How could Christians make a corporation better?'. It may provide you with some useful ideas, but it is not essential reading for this study.

Based on a biblical understanding of 'good', personhood and moral responsibility, it will be argued that a corporation can be neither good nor bad. As this view runs so counter to a number of waves of popular thought, one stressing the major contribution corporations make to economic progress and another demonising them, the biblical base for this view will be argued first. This will take the form of a principled deconstruction or demystification of the corporation.<sup>37</sup> However, having said 'no' to the common view that corporations are either good or bad, we must recognise that they are so integral to our societies that Christian ethics needs to look for a 'yes' to corporations.<sup>38</sup> This will take the form of some pragmatic suggestions on how corporations can be better.<sup>39</sup> Again these will be based on this deconstruction of the corporation, as otherwise we will not get beyond the aspirational altruism of books such as David Batstone's, *Saving the Corporate Soul*.<sup>40</sup> It will be shown that corporations can be good only as conduits or instruments of humans fulfilling their God given purposes, and corporations can be better primarily as a result of humans striving to achieve those purposes.

There are a number of claims for a preferred concept of 'good'. Two widely accepted options proposed by secular ethics are the maximisation of happiness and the maximisation of choice.<sup>41</sup> The corporation plays a significant role in achieving both these 'goods'.

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<sup>37</sup> This may be seen as part of the 'demystification' of the reified economy, advocated by Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 64. It has parallels with Brian Brock's argument that we need to 'desacralize' technological rationality which he links to the 'rationality of the boardroom', *Christian Ethics in a Technological Age*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 22-23, 225.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew J.B. Cameron, 'How to Say YES to the World: Towards a New Way Forward in Evangelical Social Ethics', *Reformed Theological Review* 66:1 (April, 2007), 23-36.

<sup>39</sup> The focus will be narrowed below to 'large corporations', but the principles discussed apply equally to governments, large trading trusts, large schools and hospitals, large professional partnerships (e.g. transnational law and accounting firms) and large unincorporated associations. The essential features are large size and a fragmentation of interest, risk, responsibility and task which result in abstracted relationships.

<sup>40</sup> David Batstone, *Saving the Corporate Soul: And (Who Knows) Maybe Your Own*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

<sup>41</sup> Jeremy Bentham and the Utilitarians are the champions of 'happiness' while Peter Singer is a leading champion of 'choice'.

The corporation's ability to combine and manage capital, manage risk, employ large numbers of workers and develop and reach new markets, has played a substantial role in raising the living standards of all developed and developing economies. If 'good' is equated with living standards, the contribution of the corporation is ubiquitous. Equally, the same features of the corporation have provided a huge range of products, services, employment opportunities and investment structures. So, if 'good' is equated with choice, the contribution of the corporation is again both large and apparently essential.

There is no doubt that 'abundance' features in a biblical sense of 'good' (Isaiah 66:11; Joel 2:26; Matthew 8:11 and Luke 15:23), but the biblical portrait of 'good' is far more comprehensive. 'Good' is what God recognises as good (Genesis 1:3-31).<sup>42</sup> 'Good' seems to exist when God sees something of his own character in creation. 'Good' is linked with wisdom, which may be seen as people living appropriately before the holy and perfect God. Andrew Cameron suggests 'good' includes godlike characteristics like truth, honest labour, building others up, compassion and forgiveness.<sup>43</sup> We can see examples of these characteristics in some corporations, particularly charities.<sup>44</sup> Yet to follow this path is to too quickly look for instances of 'good' without going to its essence.<sup>45</sup> The essence of 'good' appears to be linked to God's purposes. Something or someone is 'good' if it realises God's purpose for it. Humans are designed to do good (Psalm 37:3) and are to do 'good' (Gal 6:9, Romans 12:21, 1 Peter 2:12-15). In the Bible, doing good is synonymous with loving. Hence, the purpose, or telos, of humans is to love God and to love neighbour (Matthew 22:37-39).<sup>46</sup>

There is not time here to explore the depth of the biblical picture of love. However, based on John 3:16, it can be seen as passionate

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew J.B. Cameron, *Joined-up Life: A Christian Account of How Ethics Works*, (Nottingham: IVP, 2001), 152.

<sup>43</sup> Cameron, *Joined*, 144.

<sup>44</sup> Most charities are now corporations, e.g. Church Missionary Society - Australia Limited.

<sup>45</sup> This could lead down the path trodden by consequentialists, who seek to balance benefits and harms, without looking to ultimate purpose, see Brock, *Christian*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Hill, sees it as the total commitment to the good of another, and includes graciousness and humility. *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics*, (Kingsford, NSW: Mathias Media, 2002), 121-138.

and sacrificial commitment and action for the benefit on another person.<sup>47</sup> We will need to explore whether a corporation can be wise and love to see if a corporation can be 'good'.

Before that a little definitional work is necessary. First, I will use 'good' in its biblical sense, and refer to secular concepts of 'good' as the 'common good'.<sup>48</sup> Second, with a teleological understanding of 'good', there is not much difference between 'being' good (as in the first part of the question) and 'doing' good. For humans, and other moral agents (if they exist), to 'be' good means to fulfil God's purpose, which is to 'do' good.

Now to the nature of corporations.<sup>49</sup> A corporation is a human construct. It is a legal fiction.<sup>50</sup> Without human laws that confer legal personality, a corporation would not exist.<sup>51</sup> It would not have standing before a court, or be able to assert any legal right. It would be, and could do, nothing. Corporations are distinct from their shareholders, directors, managers, employees, agents, customers and suppliers. The law recognises corporations as 'legal persons', and requires them to pay taxes and conform with a large number of legal standards that we associate with the common good. With this legal framework, it is no surprise that there is a widespread view that corporations should be 'good corporate citizens'.<sup>52</sup>

When we overlay the concepts of moral agency and moral responsibility on this understanding of a corporation we see that a corporation is not a person in the eyes of God, and cannot be 'good'.<sup>53</sup> A corporation can do nothing unless its human agents do something to or for it. It can acquire property, assert a right, make

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<sup>47</sup> Hill, *How*, 80, 129.

<sup>48</sup> They are obviously not mutually exclusive!

<sup>49</sup> The approach here builds on the work of Brian Brock, who advocates an approach to Christian ethics that is 'ontologically realist, antireductionist and epistemologically antifoundational' and looks for gospel based ways of life that are full of hope: *Christian*, 4-5

<sup>50</sup> Stewart W. Herman refers to it as 'an instrument or artifice for coordinating human action', 'The Modern Business Corporation and an Ethics of Trust', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2001, 111-148, at 115.

<sup>51</sup> Corporations Act 2001 (Cmth.), particularly Division 7. mention more collier 331?

<sup>52</sup> See the bibliography at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate\\_citizenship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_citizenship), also Forbes Corporate Citizenship Awards [http://www.forbes.com/fdc/welcome\\_mjx.shtml](http://www.forbes.com/fdc/welcome_mjx.shtml) and Simon Longstaff, 'Good Corporate Citizenship?' at <http://www.ethics.org.au/living-ethics/good-corporate-citizenship>

<sup>53</sup> Brock correctly notes that, 'the political norm in Christian theology is a person', by which he means 'human person' not a convenient fiction, *Christian*, 147.

something and provide a service only if humans act.<sup>54</sup> A corporation cannot think. It cannot be wise, because it does not live, and to be wise is to live appropriately before God. A corporation cannot suffer as humans suffer. If a corporation was to give its annual profit to the poor, its human stakeholders would suffer the loss, not the corporation. As a corporation cannot experience suffering, it cannot make a sacrifice. Liquidation is not death in a biblical sense, because there is life after death (1 Corinthians 15:42) but not after liquidation.

Therefore, fundamentally, outside the thoughts and actions of its human agents, a corporation cannot love. It can only be the context in which humans love other humans and God, or the conduit through which humans love. Those loving humans may be shareholders who are happy to see their corporation act philanthropically, or directors who foster honest labour and compassion in the corporation's workplaces, or humans who procure supplies ethically and for reasonable prices, or the human sales team that acts honestly towards customers, or the 'human resources' department that treats humans as image bearers of God and not as 'resources'. However, none of these acts or love are anything but the acts of the humans that conceive and implement them. It is dangerous and false to attribute these human acts to the corporation because this type of attribution shifts the responsibility for loving from human persons to non-human persons who cannot love.

This process of deconstruction or demystification needs to go further. If we are to understand 'good' only in relation with God, then moral responsibility (e.g. for 'good' or 'bad') must also be understood from God's perspective. We see in the Bible that God judges humans, and there will be a day of judgement when all humans will be judged (Matthew 12:36; Revelation 20:11-15). Sin will be judged, but only humans' sin (Matthew 18:19). On this basis, Union Carbide,<sup>55</sup> BHP Billiton<sup>56</sup> and BP<sup>57</sup> have the same moral

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<sup>54</sup> Even with the rapid advance of computers, automation and so-called 'intelligent machines', all machines and their actions can be traced back to humans.

<sup>55</sup> Infamous for its association with the deaths of thousands of people in a pesticide factory disaster in Bhopal, India in 1984,

<sup>56</sup> A large mining company.

<sup>57</sup> An energy company associated with the Deepwater Horizon oil rig disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.

responsibility as Mickey Mouse. None! They will not be judged on judgement day. They are not known by God in the way humans are known, nor can they know God as Lord and Saviour, because they can neither know nor enjoy eschatological salvation.<sup>58</sup>

There is a substantial, but quite different, debate in legal, business and philosophical circles about whether corporations are moral agents. While the arguments of Velasquez against corporate moral agency are generally sound,<sup>59</sup> and those of French and his followers seriously flawed because they confuse metaphysical, moral and legal personhood,<sup>60</sup> both schools are based on logic and social need. A large part of the debate is directed at establishing a basis for attributing legal liability to corporations as part of the redistributive justice system. However, getting access to the deep pockets of corporations can be achieved without needing to attribute moral agency to corporations and still punish the stakeholders who benefit from culpable behaviour (even if indirectly and often inadequately<sup>61</sup>). Therefore, we need not be distracted by these issues and can proceed on the basis that moral agency is best understood from God's perspective. God judges only human agents. He sets the test of 'good' and judges everything.<sup>62</sup>

It could be argued that, as a corporation is part of creation, and, as creation is purposed by God, *the corporation* must in some way be

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<sup>58</sup> Cameron argues that to know 'connotes experiential knowledge', *Joined*, 152. A corporation cannot experience anything itself, and the experience of its agents is only ever the experience of those agents.

<sup>59</sup> Velasquez's argument adopts the methodological individualism I have advocated above, and includes that a corporation cannot perform acts itself, and is reliant on its agents to perform acts, M.G. Velasquez, 'Why Corporations are Not Morally Responsible for Anything They Do' in J.R. Desjardine and J.J. McCall, *Contemporary Issues in Business Ethics*, (Wadsworth, California: Nova, 1985), at 114-25.

<sup>60</sup> For example, J. Collier argues that, 'legal personhood must imply metaphysical personhood, since it is impossible to create anything in law which does not exist in some prior sense: 'The Virtuous Organisation', *Business Ethics - A European Review* 4(3), 1995, 143-149, at 146, quoted in Geoff More, 'Corporate Moral Agency: Review and Implications', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 21, 329-343, 199. However, the reason for corporations law is precisely because, without it, a corporation would not exist. The *idea* that it would be good to have something like a corporation is not a prior person. The arguments of French are summarised in this article by More.

<sup>61</sup> For example, the people who benefitted most from James Hardie's manufacture of asbestos products from 1910 were the shareholders, directors, suppliers and employees (or, at least those who did not die of asbestosis!) before asbestos products were stopped in the mid 1980s. They got dividends, capital gains, salaries, fees etc as a result of the production of deadly products. Yet all compensation is ultimately a cost of shareholders who held shares post the 1980s, who, ironically, held shares in companies that themselves did not produce asbestos products.

<sup>62</sup> No alternative judge is compelling: see G.J. Clarke, Andrew J.B. Cameron and Michael P. Jensen, 'Towards a Christian Understanding of the concept of human "Community", with special reference to the praxis of a non-governmental human services delivery organisation', *ERSP* 3.2(2009), 22-40 at 32.

capable of 'good'. Yet its capacity for good is like that of a spade: that is, solely as an instrument of humans. The fact that a corporation is not a moral agent is determinative. It follows that a corporation cannot itself be 'better', if that is understood as being a moral agent that better achieves its telos. Yet it can be used better by humans, and it is in that context that I will explore the shape of a Christian 'yes' to corporations.

As we switch from principle to pragmatics, the target must be refined. I will focus on large corporations. Of the approximately 1,200,000 corporations in Australia,<sup>63</sup> only a few thousand are 'large'.<sup>64</sup> By defining a 'large' corporation we will see where many of the problems lie. A large corporation will be taken to be a corporation which is listed, or large enough to be listed, the majority of whose board is not involved in the day to day business of the corporation and which typically operates in a number of different places. Typically in such a corporation, a large number of shareholders will not know the directors, employees or customers, and will have no real power individually over the corporation's activities. The directors will not know most of the employees, or the corporation's customers. There will be extensive management, very specific jobs and generally very limited communication, understanding, relationship or empathy between the humans involved with and within the corporation. Often shareholders will be institutional investors, and the ultimate beneficial owner of a share may be several steps away (e.g. through multiple investment vehicles like pension funds) and have a very small stake (e.g. a few hundred dollars in a corporation with assets over \$100 billion). It is noteworthy that many of the corporations lauded by Batstone do not satisfy this test of 'large corporation' primarily because one person owns or effectively controls it and can therefore ameliorate some of the problems of large corporations.<sup>65</sup> This refinement of our target is

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<sup>63</sup> The Australian Securities and Investments Commission records 1,251,927 current corporations <http://www.asic.gov.au/asic/asic.nsf/byheadline/New+company+registrations+statistics?openDocument> sourced on 21/3/2103.

<sup>64</sup> Over 2,000 corporations are listed on the ASX <http://www.asx.com.au/professionals/companies.htm> sourced on 21/3/2103. A company with one shareholder, one director and a bank account as its only assets raises very different ethical issues (e.g. tax laws) than a large corporation.

<sup>65</sup> For example, 'Cliff's Bar', Timberland, Hanna Andersson, Dorset Capital. Further, where reference is made to large corporations, often the target of his acclaim is very small, and the overall corporation is substantially unchanged, e.g. the community investment initiatives of General Motors, *Saving*, 88.

essential. Christian social ethics will be most effective if it avoids generalisations (e.g. about all corporations) which can be quickly ridiculed as 'other worldly'.

My approach to the pragmatics of improving corporations is based in part on my experience of working as a corporate lawyer for and against international and Australian banks and large corporations for 27 years, from middle management right the way up to the boards of directors. This experience makes me skeptical about legislative or policy based change, such as changing management structures, being 'transparent', improving 'communication', changing remuneration structures etc.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes they work, and I am not opposed to them. However, they don't often change the way people think and behave towards each other. They can paper over the underlying dysfunction caused by greed, selfishness, relational abstraction and a lack of comprehension of our God-given purpose in life.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, in my view the best way to make corporations better is for Christians to show what 'good' looks and feels like. This will influence 'outputs' such as products and services, but also the working environment.

Using 'love' to make a corporation better needs to start with people ceasing to see 'the Corporation' as an entity, and rather seeing it as an endless opportunity for mutual love relationships. Just as O'Donovan criticises the dehumanising phrase, 'this is a purely commercial transaction',<sup>68</sup> we can use a paradigm of love to subvert statements like, 'I am just a passive investor', or 'I am only doing my job' or 'it's company policy', as if any of these excuse us of moral responsibility, or is an acceptable expression of love. It is a remarkable irony of the present age, that so much emphasis is placed on individual rights, and self determination, but when it comes to accepting personal responsibility we hide behind the anonymity of corporations. We claim we are following company policy, as if that absolves us from personal responsibility. Love uncovers this conceit.

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<sup>66</sup> Batstone advocates many of these legislative and policy initiatives in his 'eight principles for preserving integrity and profitability', *Saving*.

<sup>67</sup> It is for similar reasons that I think the 'ethics of trust' advocated by Herman, 'Modern', building on the work of H. Richard Niebhuur, is too idealistic and will not work.

<sup>68</sup> O'Donovan, *Ways*, 248.

Therefore, a significant way that Christians can express their love and thereby make corporations better is to cease referring to them as if they were moral agents. Misleading anthropomorphisms like corporations having ‘souls’ should be both avoided and criticised.<sup>69</sup> Whatever a ‘soul’ is,<sup>70</sup> only humans have them (Jeremiah 6:16, Matthew 11:29, James 1:21 and 1 Peter 1:9). Christians should focus attention on human acts. For example, rather than fulminate against ‘Big Tobacco’, criticism should be made of the directors and shareholders of each tobacco company who profit from the death and suffering of tobacco addicts.<sup>71</sup> This may be similar to the approach advocated by Oliver O’Donovan. Just as the church dealt with slavery by replacing the master-slave relationship with fraternity, we could insist on giving a true description of a corporation, so that the ‘legal construct’ can ‘lose its credibility’, in our case as a substitute moral agent.<sup>72</sup> Just as ‘the fundamental social reality’ of the market is not exchange ‘but the sharing of common space to move around in, a neighbourhood’, so, likewise, a corporation is a set of relationships between neighbours who need to love and be loved.

Accepting responsibility for our actions involves sacrifice. When I was a corporate lawyer, if one of the solicitors working for me made a mistake, I would accept it as my mistake. I would deal with the unhappy client, or compensate the loss. For, either I had given the solicitor a task that was beyond him/her, or I had not supervised him/her sufficiently. Similarly, for moral reasons I turned down work from tobacco companies and companies associated with Kerry Packer.<sup>73</sup> I refused to do the legal work on retail collateralised debt obligations (CDOs), because I believed that understanding the risk

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<sup>69</sup> Batstone says, ‘I will show that a corporation has the potential to act with soul when it puts its resources at the service of people it employs and the public it serves’, 4.

<sup>70</sup> On the subject of the ‘soul’ I find attractive the writings of Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2002) and Walter Brueggeman, *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> E.g. British America Tobacco, Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, Imperial Tobacco. This obfuscation and misdirection of criticism applies equally with ‘the Banks’, the ‘Mining Companies’, ‘the Pharmaceutical Companies’, the ‘Oil Industry’, the ‘Liquor Industry’, the ‘Arms Industry’ and many others.

<sup>72</sup> O’Donovan, *Ways*, 248

<sup>73</sup> At various times the wealthiest man in Australia, and a person I had observed at first hand brutalise people.

inherent in such structured finance products was beyond the comprehension of retail investors. Each of these actions is love.

Yet it is better for these sort of actions to be seen as 'Christian' or even just 'the right thing to do', than to try to legislate or otherwise infuse the Christian concept of 'love' into the formal and informal workings of corporations. This is in part because we have already seen the concepts of 'vision' and 'values' devalued by corporate strategists and marketing people exploiting and misusing them. For the Christian in the workforce it is better to 'do' love than to talk about 'love' as an abstract concept.

In my experience, many senior executives oscillate between hubris and paralysing fear. Both are manifestations of excessive self regard, which is the opposite of love. Hubris and fear take a devastating toll on the people who work around these people, not to mention the people themselves and their families. Yet love, being totally outward looking, is the cure to both. In these circumstances love can take many forms, such as accepting and laughing at one's own mistakes, accepting that others make mistakes, not claiming responsibility for success that is attributable to others, supporting colleagues when they are struggling personally, etc.

It is not easy to accept responsibility given the abstraction achieved in large corporations by the assignment of very specific technical tasks, which may be apparently harmless, but essential in avoiding tax, misleading customers, compromising health or contributing to some other wrong.<sup>74</sup> The expression of love in three specific ways may ameliorate this. First, Christians need to acquire positions of power and influence (as directors, and heads of finance, marketing, sales etc) so that good objectives are sought and they can model love. Second, Christian workers need to express love in their curiosity about how the larger organisation works.<sup>75</sup> Third, churches need to understand the challenges leaders and workers face, and hold them accountable to love within, and from, the corporation. I will now explore some of the implications of these suggestions.

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<sup>74</sup> Brock explores the effect of common management techniques *Christian*, 133-45, particularly in relations to the armaments industry.

<sup>75</sup> Like Karl Barth's views on work generally, work within corporations must be communally attuned and reflective, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, (trans. G. W. Bromely and others, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 522-6.

Christians do not make corporations better by withdrawing from them.<sup>76</sup> We need Christians to be in positions in corporations where they can exercise the judgement that Jesus did with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11).<sup>77</sup> We must encourage Christians to not see full-time vocational Christian work as the best or only way to fulfil their purpose.<sup>78</sup> Struggling to be a Christian in the workforce, and to assume and exercise power, thereby making corporations better, are God-like actions.

It follows that corporations would be better if the church understood them better, and ministers directed some of their teaching towards the type of problems people face at work. To start with, ministers could visit their members' workplaces, and spend many days in factories, offices, trading floors etc, meeting and talking with Christians and non-Christians alike about the ethical and relational issues that confront them daily.<sup>79</sup> Given that the parish/local church model has largely broken down because of urbanisation and better transport, 'local' churches could focus more of their energies to serving the businesses in their neighbourhood.<sup>80</sup>

Large corporations are often criticised for being impersonal and de-humanising.<sup>81</sup> Fundamentally Christians will make these corporations better if each day when interacting with a corporation, in whatever capacity, they ask themselves, 'what does love look like here?' This question 'includes ongoing and repentant self-criticism that is simultaneously and by definition cultural criticism'.<sup>82</sup> It can find expression in the question, "How can I be responsible for what I

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<sup>76</sup> There is not space here to explore the ethical implications of Christian aid and activity in the form of missionary work, micro finance, fair trade, environmentalism etc. There may be 'good' in each of them, but they alone will not make all large corporations better, while Christians loving will.

<sup>77</sup> O'Donovan, *Ways*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> The development of theologies of work in the following works suggest a good way forward: V.A. Cosden, V, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*, (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2004), Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>79</sup> One can imagine other workers looking on and saying, 'I wish someone looked after me like your pastor looks after you'.

<sup>80</sup> For example, they could adapt the practices of the City Bible Forum with the finance industry in Sydney and other capitals, and apply it to the large businesses in their parishes.

<sup>81</sup> Brock, *Christian*, 307.

<sup>82</sup> Brock, *Christian*, 22.

know?”<sup>83</sup> Can a director use his/her power and influence to shape the attitudes and decisions of the other directors? Can an employee make a boring, frustrating job marginally better for another employee? Can a marketing executive sell products without using sex as the bait? Can someone in middle management shape those with more power than themselves to make the operations of the corporation more environmentally sustainable?

Batstone has suggested a number of ways to improve the workings of corporations, including more communication, transparency and better remuneration policies. The approaches I have suggested may compliment some of these, but are fundamentally different for a number of reasons. Batstone does not account for the finitude of humans, or sin. ‘More communication’ may be helpful, but does not recognise that most human communication only ever approximates the intended purpose, and can be used to obfuscate. ‘Transparency’ means different things to different people.<sup>84</sup> Changed remuneration policies redirect but do not overcome greed.<sup>85</sup> Fundamentally, his principles amount to fiddling at the edges. Christians pursuing mutual love relationships will ultimately be far more subversive, and achieve the God-given purpose of humanity, because they are focussed on loving God and others, even if this love at times coincides with some of Batstone’s suggested remedies.

In conclusion, it has been argued that working with biblical ideas of ‘good’, ‘person’ and ‘moral responsibility’, corporations cannot themselves be ‘good’. Yet these biblical understandings show the best way corporations can be made better. Love may not conquer all until Jesus returns, but in the meantime it can do a lot at a practical level to make corporations better. Love subverts the sins that are otherwise hard to control within large corporations, such as selfishness, often manifested in indifference towards other people within and affected by the corporation, and greed (for money and

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<sup>83</sup> Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 1977), 48, quoted in Brock, *Christian*, at 312.

<sup>84</sup> The accounts of a corporation are supposed to give a ‘true and fair’ summary of the corporation’s financial position, but are, for all but a few highly trained accountants, long, convoluted and opaque.

<sup>85</sup> The business model of Macquarie Bank, mimicked by Allco Finance and Babcock & Brown, was meant to align employee’s returns with the long term interests of the institution, but ended up favouring short term gain based on speculative projects and products. Both Allco Finance and Babcock & Brown ended in disaster for employees and shareholders alike.

power). Love also subverts the ideas that corporations are moral agents and responsibility lies with 'them', and refocusses our attention on our responsibilities for telling the truth and loving others. The corporation thus offers an unimaginable number of opportunities for humans to achieve their God-given purpose of loving others. In time our fixation on the corporation as an entity may give way to seeing a wonderful complex intertwining of mutual love relationships realised as directors, shareholders, managers, employees etc live lives sacrificially for the good of others.

## Study 8: Evangelism at Work: Conversion through the workplace

Key idea:

Many of us spend long hours at work. People come to faith, in part, through the relations they form and develop at work, and the things they learn from Christians at work. Workplaces bring special challenges. We need to prepare for them

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While this study is called 'Evangelism at work', I think it is better to think of our aim as 'Conversion at work'. We know that conversion is always an act of God (the Holy Spirit), but we have an important part to play in the conversion of the people we meet at and through work. 'Evangelism' (the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness) is one of the tools.

You may want to start by asking people what their experience of sharing Jesus at work has been, but take care with this question. Some people get burnt off early, and resolve to never speak about Jesus at work again. Others bash on with little self-reflection on whether they are doing more good than harm. As you may not want to colour the discussion too deeply with personal stories of 'failures' and 'successes', it may be best to dive into the questions.

1. What are the steps a non-Christian worker has to take before they become a Christian? (A worker may not need to take every step, and they may be taken in a different order, but what are the steps?) In answering this, make sure you think of emotional steps. [See the study notes for my suggested steps.]
2. Who can help people with these steps? [Yes, of course, we can but the three agents in most conversions are the Holy Spirit, us and the Church (either a Church or, at least, some other Christians). We know that conversion is only a work of the Holy Spirit, but he graciously involves us in his work. God can save, despite our mistakes. Nevertheless, we want to do what we can to help.]
3. What can we do to help? [See the detailed notes below. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of friendship.]
4. Do you think you are prepared to talk about Jesus at work? If not, what knowledge, skills, confidence etc do you need to acquire?

5. How prepared are you to give an account of your faith? (1 Peter 3:15)
6. Where does 'working well' fit into effective evangelism/witness? [See the notes below.]
7. When a person first goes to church what are the key questions in their mind? [I believe, most people have three questions in mind, IN THIS ORDER: Will I make friends? What do I have to do/believe to belong here? Is it true? A lot of our effort is often directed to this third question. While it is ultimately essential, it does not need to be rushed.]
8. What can we do to help with these things?

## End of Study

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### Study Notes

#### The steps

I think the steps a person may need to take to become a Christian may include the following.

1. They must overcome (or put to one side) any initial barrier to even thinking about Christianity or Jesus. For example, these barriers may include, 'All religions are the same', 'Christians hate gays/same sex marriage', 'the subordination of women', 'the church is hypocritical and abusive', 'all religions promote violence', 'the historical baggage of the church is too great e.g. the crusades'.<sup>86</sup>
2. They have, or develop, a willingness to compare world-views (where do values come from? why are we here? is there any point to existence?)
3. They recognise that not all Christians are weird.
4. They recognise that not all religions are the same, either in theology or internal relationships.
5. They must meet at least one Christian who is happy in his/her Christianity, does not force it, but is prepared to talk about it openly, without being defensive or judgmental.
6. They need to become intrigued about Jesus and what Christians believe.
7. They need to be interested in finding out more.
8. Some people may need to make the emotional step of giving up the way they used to think of themselves, or the way that other people think of

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<sup>86</sup> I take this idea from the teaching of John Dickson at a training day he ran at St Barnabas Broadway.

them. (Put more brutally, they will need to give up the 'vanity of independence'.)

9. They must understand Christianity is about one person, Jesus Christ.
10. They must be prepared to go to the Bible to find out about Jesus. (At this stage I don't think it is essential to believe the Bible is the word of God etc, just that it is the best place to find out about Jesus).
11. They must recognise that Jesus' claims on our lives will require some adjustment in outlook, relationships and lifestyle (e.g. political views shaped by Christian love for neighbour, one's attitudes to sex and money, etc.)
12. They must be prepared to make those changes.
13. They must come to accept the 'idea' that there is a God who creates and sustains everything, and this opens the door to the possibility of the incarnation, resurrection and miracles. (Note: often people work backwards from the historical evidence for the resurrection to the possibility of miracles and God as we know him, but, one way or the other, belief in the works of God are necessary for faith.)
14. They must come to faith, which we understand as both believing the claims of Jesus are true, and trusting him.

NB This list is not exhaustive. Each person may have their own issues to deal with. But this list shows that conversion is not just about having a 'good talk' at work.

## **What we can do**

Make friends. Make friends. Make friends. Take your time. Do not think you have to bring up the subject of faith. At work you can afford to be reactive.

Don't hide that you are a Christian. Paul tells us in Romans 1 that he is not ashamed of the gospel, and neither should we be. If you are asked what you did on the weekend, say you went to church, a weekend away, hung out with Christian friends etc. But let that sink in. Don't think you have to then go on and push Jesus. Be intriguing. Get them thinking why a nice/normal/smart/cool person like you would be a Christian.

The 'do not be ashamed' example may also take us into discussions that arise when God is being blasphemed, or Christianity is being attacked.

Should we step in to 'defend Jesus'? Judgement is required here. Not all fights are worth fighting. If a drunken workmate is sounding off, perhaps little good will come from launching into a full-blown defence of the gospel. However, we know we can expect to suffer for the gospel, so there will come times when we have to say we are Christians and give a good defence.

When you are asked questions about your faith/Jesus/church, do not feel you need to give comprehensive answers? Leave room for more questions, or for your answers to sink in.

We do not all have the gift of an evangelist (see Ephesians 4:11). But we are all called to give an account of our faith (1 Peter 3:15). God will use our honourable conduct to save others (1 Peter 2:12). We are called to love our neighbours. One way to do this is to share the good news of Jesus. However, the thing we want is not a feeling that we have spoken well, but that God does his work of conversion, which, as we saw above in the suggested steps of conversion, involve a lot more than a good conversation about Jesus.

Know why you are a Christian. Be able to give a short explanation of when, how and why you became a Christian. Be able to adapt it to different situations. Be able to explain what Jesus means to you (the difference he makes in your life). Be able to explain the help Jesus is to you at work (e.g. you know why you work, how to work and where work fits into the rest of your life).

In practical terms the two best things we can do is work well and make friends. Fellow workers will not admire us or be attracted to us or Jesus if we do not work well. Friendship is the best (and usually the only) context in which to share our faith.

Become friends before you invite them to church. Make sure they trust you to still be their friend, even if they do not respond well to church. And be prepared to be their friend for a number of years. I think it is usually best to invite them to a meal, or something else social, before we invite them to church. We want them to know we care about them as a friend, not as a 'conquest'.

Don't be defensive. There is much in the history of the church that is indefensible. But know its successes (Western morality, human rights,

hospitals, schools, charities etc). Don't try and answer questions you don't know the answer to, for example, questions outside your knowledge or things God reserves to himself (e.g. why some people suffer more than others).

Ideally be able to deal with issues around human suffering, e.g. why does an all powerful, all loving God allow sickness, suffering, loss and death? I find the best way to deal with this is to focus on how God understands these issues **and suffers with us**, and helps us through our suffering. There is no humanly satisfactory explanation of why some people suffer more than others (see John 9:1-12, Luke 13:1-5). There are some things which only God can handle, and we are not God. But Jesus knows what suffering is. He came to bring an end to suffering. Jesus cries with us (John 11:35).

Do not be overly dogmatic on contested areas (e.g. the historicity of Adam and Eve) and areas which some people take to be literal truths and others understand as symbolic or allegorical (e.g. Genesis 1-3). The aim is to leave room for further conversation, not to close-off discussion.

As far as I know, no-one has ever been argued into the kingdom. Many people end up finding the evidence for God overwhelming, but we want them to be overwhelmed by the love and person of Jesus, not by our arguments.

We need to live the gospel. There is little point claiming to be Christians if we do not live like Christians. This includes in personal ethics and Christian hope (we know who is in control and we know where we are going). Treat people with respect. Do not join work mates in denigrating clients, competitors, bosses etc. If asked why you try to see the good in other people, consider an answer like, 'I believe everyone is important to God' (i.e. be enigmatic, leave the door open for them to ask other questions).

Think through answers to some confronting questions. 'What do you think of me? What does your God think of me? Do you think I'm going to hell? Why does God send people to hell? Why are you Christians always telling people what to do? Why does your God let this happen?' You may never face these questions, but it is better to know the answers in case you are confronted with them. If in doubt, discuss them with your pastor.

Ask if they would like to read the Bible with you or someone else. Don't be offended if they would prefer to read it with someone else. We need to

recognise that work relations may make some people awkward about sharing deeply.

Note: I have not reproduced or critiqued the old cliché of 'proclaim the gospel: use words if you have to.' I think 'words v action' is a false dichotomy, which does not take into account our different gifts and opportunities. Some people appear to be able to speak winsomely about Jesus in any situation. Yet many people overcome their initial reservations about anything Christian because of the example Christians set. We must, however, recognise that, sooner or later, people will need to hear words about Jesus. We need to be prepared to speak those words. I have also not chosen to say anything about the different approaches introverted or extraverted people may take. We all need to work out how best we can share Christ, and the suggestions above should not be limited by personality or giftedness.

## Study 9: Alcohol in the workplace

Key idea:

Alcohol is a good gift from God, but it must not be abused. To avoid problems with alcohol, we need to think ahead, be prepared and be consistent.

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1. How would you describe the drinking culture at your work? Are there office parties or work drinks? Is drinking after work a regular activity? Do any of your workmates regularly get drunk? Do you come under pressure to drink more than you want?
2. Have you ever felt pressured to drink at some event that is work related? How did you handle that?
3. What does the Bible say about alcohol? [See notes below.]
4. How realistic is it to say, 'no', to alcohol at work, or only drink in moderation? [Take care with this. Some people find it easy to say 'no' while others find it very hard. We are not meeting to judge each other, but to help each other.]
5. What tactics have you developed to avoid excessive drinking? [See notes below for suggestions.]
6. If we are called to be 'in this world, but not of it' (John 17), can we avoid all work related social events?
7. Have you had to deal with drunken work colleagues, or alcohol affected amorous attention? How should we deal with people in these situations?
8. Have you ever 'self medicated' with alcohol? Have you got over this?
9. How should we deal with drugs at work, or invitations to join in sleazy activities?
10. How can we change bad alcohol cultures at work? [Consider some of the tactics below. See the comments on common grace and workplace safety.]
11. What will help you in the future? [Think ahead, be prepared and be consistent. Seek help from God (in prayer) and from Christian friends.]

Pray for each other, and give an opportunity for general (or even specific) repentance.

**End of Study**

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## **Study Notes: Some further reflections**

### **Introduction**

Alcohol and work is a big subject. It spans both the use of alcohol in work related situations and 'self-medication' with alcohol to deal with the pressures of work. The main focus of these notes will be on the former, but some things will be said on the latter.

Many Christians work in jobs where alcohol is part of the culture. The purpose of these notes is to explore some of the practical problems workers face and suggest ways to deal with them. Abstinence is an option. It takes determination or practice to say, 'no', and many Christians find that the best course. Others would like to drink, but only in moderation. So the focus of this paper will be on people who enjoy alcohol in moderation and want to engage socially with their workmates in a way consistent with the Gospel, and not damage their ability to work well or succeed at work.

I will look at the context of alcohol at work, then look at what the Bible says specifically about alcohol, and then consider some implications of that and some strategies for dealing with often met situations.

### **Alcohol and the work context**

The first thing to recognise is that each work place is different, and the role that alcohol consumption plays in each workplace is different. The next thing to recognise is that our appreciation and tolerance for alcohol varies greatly, and changes over time. So, as usual in things to do with humans, one size does not fit all. Some people enjoy an occasional social drink with their colleagues, some would rather avoid them. Some work in hard-drinking or hard-partying environments where there is a great deal of pressure to join in to fit in. For others, alcohol is absent or not a problem.

Before discussing some advice for managing the pressure to drink alcohol at work I will make a few things very clear:

1. Alcohol is addictive and Christians become alcoholics. The very first thing you must do is ensure you do not become dependent, either socially or physically, on alcohol. If in doubt, seek advice. Most people working in this area suggest at least 2 alcohol free days a week, and occasional longer periods with no alcohol (e.g give it up for Lent, or do 'Dry July'). Ask yourself how you feel without alcohol? Do you still enjoy dinners, social occasions etc with no alcohol? How hard is it to say, 'no'? How do you feel when you are the designated driver? If you find it the least bit hard to not drink, you have an issue that needs to be dealt with. If in doubt, cut alcohol out altogether, or seek professional help. (The implications for this at work are discussed below.)
2. If you become too talkative or silly or uninhibited when you drink alcohol, don't drink at work or with workmates. If alcohol makes you violent, angry, sullen or otherwise anti-social, cut back or don't drink alcohol at all. It is better to not drink than make a fool of yourself or bring dishonour to God. You will work better, and succeed at work to a greater extent, with no alcohol than not managing your alcohol consumption well.

## **The Challenges**

The challenges of alcohol in the workplace vary greatly:

1. In many organisations the owners or senior managers will see alcohol assisted social activities as having a role to play in morale and cohesion. There will be celebrations for successes, farewells, Christmas parties, annual dinners, and regular office drinks. Some organisations appear to come up with an endless array of excuses to party.
2. Some workplaces have more informal, and often more difficult, drinking cultures. Some workers invite others to join them for a drink most days of the week. While it is not expected you will be available every night, can you always say, 'no'? And when you do say, 'yes', will they want to catch up for all the times you say 'no', or otherwise test you out?
3. Although entertaining clients has changed greatly over the last 30 years, some clients still like to be 'wined and dined', and you may be expected

to play a role in this. This can be awkward if either your boss or your clients like to drink and party more than you. Do you go along with excessive alcohol consumption to win the deal, keep the client, or keep your boss happy?

4. You may feel comfortable joining workmates for dinner or 'a quiet drink', but what happens when the pressure comes to 'kick-on'?
5. You may feel you have to stick around, drinking later than you would like, to make sure you are not talked about behind your back.
6. You may feel you have to drink to keep your job. A common perception is that for someone who has worked so hard to get a particular job (years of study, interviews, etc), fitting in with the drinking culture is a price that needs to be paid to keep the job, or keep open the prospect of promotion. This is particularly the case if there are no comparable jobs or there are simply no other job. Some workplaces do little to discourage the perception that drinking is just part of the job.

One of the hardest things in starting work is to translate your training into effective work. You have been taught how to do something. Now you have to persuade people to pay you to do that. This means you need to win their confidence and respect. You will generally find this works best if these people come to like you, whether these people are people higher up in your organisation, clients, customers or other people whose support you need. There may be an expectation in your job that socialising with these people will build the personal relationships that will complement their appreciation of your work. I have seen young professionals, people in sales, bank officers, managers etc praised for client development activities that may include lunches, dinners and going to bars. So you may feel pressure to do likewise. You don't want to be seen to be a killjoy or one-dimensional. But you may find the entertainment activities of your competitors praised because they always seem to end up drunk or having a great party.

## **The Bible**

On the surface it may appear the Bible sends mixed messages about alcohol. It is both a good gift of God (e.g. Genesis 27:28; Judges 9:13; Proverbs 3:10; Isaiah 25:6; John 2) and something that makes fools of us (Genesis 9:21 and 33; Proverbs 20:1 and 21:17). It is associated with good health (1 Timothy 5:23) and debauchery or dissolution (Proverbs 4:17 and 31:16; Isaiah 5:11; Hosea 4:11; Acts 2:13; Ephesians 5:18).

The Bible is clear that drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom of God. First Corinthians 6:9-10 says, 'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortionists will inherit the kingdom of God.' Romans 13:13 has another warning about drunkenness: 'Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.'

Not only should we not drink so much we get drunk, we should not drink to get drunk. Both are an abuse of God-given good things. We should remain in control of ourselves. So drunkenness is clearly sinful, but alcohol in moderation is permissible, and can be associated with appropriate hospitality and enjoying God's goodness towards us.

Paul's teaching on not tempting weaker brothers should inform our approach to drinking in all situations, including work (Romans 14:1-4 and 15:1 and I Corinthians 8:9-13). The 'weaker brother' approach has a number of good applications, but can be overdone. Good applications include not encouraging people with drinking problems to drink, not drinking if it compromises safety or productivity, and not drinking if it offends someone. For example, many African churches associate any alcohol consumption with drunkenness and sin. They say either, 'no pastor should drink' or 'no Christian should drink'. If I worked with these churches I would not drink alcohol when with them. But I do not think this 'no stumbling block' or 'weaker brother' argument justifies universal prohibition. I am happy to have grape juice ('pre-fermented wine') at the Lord's Supper in case anyone who comes to the table has a drinking problem. I do not think this needs to be expanded to every situation.

Some may feel that God has not sent us into the world (John 17:15) to cut ourselves off from a significant part of our culture. Jesus' prayer was that we be in the world but protected from the evil one. The 'evil one' is not alcohol itself, but the temptation to abuse it and allow ourselves to be deceived. So even though we may choose not to drink, we should not cut ourselves off totally from social activities associated with work. Jesus clearly drank alcohol with his friends and work-mates (the implication is there in John 2 and clearly there in the institution of the Lord's supper: Matthew 26:27-29; 1 Corinthians 11:25). I would never say, 'Jesus drank alcohol, so should we'. However, we need not see alcohol consumption as limited to the days of the early church.

### **Common Grace**

We need to be careful to not turn alcohol at work into a 'them and us' debate between Christians and non-Christians. Concern over the misuse of alcohol is not limited to Christians. We should expect this common concern because all humans are made in the image of God and therefore have the potential to recognise the difference between good and bad. This is one aspect of the grace of God that we have in common with all humans. Therefore, we should not feel isolated by concerns about the appropriate use of alcohol in work related situations. We can expect understanding and support from some non-Christians. We don't need to turn it into a specifically Christian issue, as the physical, mental and relational good of others are issues that shape and motivate a range of people. So, look wide for support for responsible drinking (or abstinence). For example, if there is a difficult drinking culture at your workplace, you may find support in your human resources or risk management departments.

### **Work place safety**

There is a fair bit written on the responsibility of workplaces to have safe practices with alcohol at work related events. I won't go into these here, because for all the laws and company policies, you will still find many employers throwing unlimited amounts of alcohol at staff at business functions. You will also find employees flouting these policies. You work in the real world of non-compliance, so that is what I will discuss.

## Abstinence

It seems to me that simply saying, 'no thanks, I don't drink alcohol', is far more acceptable in many work places (and social settings) than it was even ten years ago. I have heard many reasons for why people don't drink, and rarely have I heard the reason questioned. These include, 'I don't like the taste', 'I don't like the effect', 'I am allergic to/can't metabolise alcohol', and 'I'm not drinking this month/year etc'. I have also heard, 'I don't drink because I used to have a drinking problem' and 'I don't drink during the week'. The response I have often heard is 'good for you'. But it pays to pitch it right. If you simply want your decision to be accepted or respected, be positive but not judgemental.<sup>87</sup> Some 'workmates' are keen to pick on perceived weaknesses, so be careful to not give the impression that you are unsure or hesitant about your desire to not drink. There is no need to be defensive.

But whatever you say, it's better to be both honest and consistent. Don't say you don't like the taste if your Facebook page shows you spending weekends wine tastings.

If you find yourself at a workplace that has a difficult drinking or partying culture, and you would simply prefer to not drink, adopt a 'thanks, but I don't drink alcohol' approach. This might mean that you don't stay as late as some, or you don't 'kick on'. That's OK. Just stick to your guns. Don't act superior to those who drink. Don't despise drink. Even in the booze filled 1980s I had a number of colleagues who simply did not drink any or much alcohol, and they succeeded in their work.

The idea that your willingness to drink or party will affect your progress or the way you are perceived at work is massively overstated. In fact, I have never heard of anyone miss out on a promotion because they didn't drink! Not once in over 30 years! I have heard people miss out on promotions because of the perception that their excessive alcohol consumption impaired their work. So

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<sup>87</sup> Of course, you may want to have a different conversation with a workmate who appears to have a drinking problem. My point is, unless you think alcohol in work situations is always a 'work of the devil', you will not help yourself by implying or saying that is your view.

my view is that the 'pressure to drink' is more apparent than real. If you do your job well, your company will generally want to keep you and push you to use your gifts and aptitudes as much as you can. Companies generally cannot afford to lose good, hard workers.

I think the pressure we feel can be largely self-imposed. However, this does not help with the situation when you like a few drinks, but want to pull out of situations where workmates or clients want to drink excessively. I will look at this below.

### **You can be different persons**

Before getting to that, I should say that we can have different personae. We often say we value consistency in ourselves and in other people. However, we can afford to be different in some respects in different contexts. When I give a presentation to the board of a bank I adopt a different attitude than when I host a BBQ for old friends. A senior executive may be 'Mr/Ms Smith' in some situations, 'Robert/Susan' on others and 'Bob/ Sue' on others. So the fact that you may enjoy a beer or glass of wine with friends, but choose not to drink alcohol in any work situations is OK. Just be consistent with those boundaries. It may be best to just have two modes, e.g. I may drink at home or in non-work situations, but I never drink at work functions.

### **Think it through and think ahead**

Be clear about what you do. Once my legal practice was well established, and I had enough work to do, my 'client entertainment' fell away. Frankly, I was too busy to be taking clients to lunch, shows, sport etc. Some clients complained that I did not show enough hospitality (or flatter them enough with my attention and entertainment budget). I would then make an effort to take them to lunch or dinner. However, I always made it clear that I thought it should be the quality of my work that kept them as a client, rather than anything else. My point is that, if you want to take this approach, you have to be clear about it and make sure the quality of your work justifies this approach. My experience was that being responsive, returning calls promptly, keeping deadlines, keeping to fee quotes, and admitting (rather than covering

up) mistakes, were far more effective at winning and keeping clients, and meeting the expectations of my partners, than always being out drinking with clients.

## **Tactics to avoid heavy drinking**

For those who want to drink, but not get dragged into drinking too much or for too long, here are a few tips:

1. Set a limit and keep to it. Limits may include both the number of drinks you have in a day, and the number of days in week that you drink. I can't suggest a limit that works for you. It may be one drink. It may be four. It may be more. Drinking more than 5 times a week is criticised by many health professionals. However, the daily limits you set will depend on how alcohol affects you and considerations that are personal to you. I once heard a pastor say you should not drink such that you could not drive legally (i.e. keep your blood alcohol below 0.05%). But that may be too much for some while others can drink more with no adverse effect in their behaviour. There are a number of definitions of 'binge drinking', including 5 standard drinks for men or 4 for women, or a blood alcohol level above 0.08%. There are at least two issues at play here. The first is that too much alcohol has negative health effects. The second is that alcohol affects our behaviour. Whatever limit you set, you want to set it at a level that avoids health and behavioural problems, and the way you think about yourself.
2. The second tip is to be prepared to leave early. If your colleagues start getting into the groove to keep drinking beyond a level you feel comfortable with, just leave. In crowded bars, or big work functions, you may simply be able to slip away. The people you are with may assume you are talking to other people, but if you are questioned later about your unexpected departure, you can say you had had enough and you didn't want to end their evening. In smaller groups you may need to explain your decision to leave. Being tired, having a busy day tomorrow, expected problems with transport home, are among the many reasons that can be given. But be truthful, e.g. if you don't have to work tomorrow, don't give that as an excuse. A confident, 'thanks, it's been a good evening, but I've had enough. See you later,' is fine in many situations.

3. Mix your drinks. Every drink you have does not have to be alcoholic. Have water or a soft drink. Try not to get into 'rounds' or 'shouts', but if you do, get yourself a soft drink when it's your shout.
4. Drink slowly. Miss a round.
5. Have a big glass of water before you start, so you are not drinking to quench a thirst.
6. Unless you set yourself a low limit of one or two drinks, learn your limits. It's best to do this with friends, just in case you have 'one or two drinks' too many. Don't try and work out your limit at a work party. If you are happy and coherent with 3 drinks but not four, don't drink beyond three.
7. Anticipate people encouraging you forcefully to keep drinking and have a strategy to deal with it. It's best to avoid these conversations, but sometimes you can't, so be prepared. It's best to put a positive spin on it. So, 'I don't want to get as drunk as you', or 'this is boring', or 'can't you have fun without getting legless drunk?' are not as effective as 'its been a good evening, but I've had enough'. Try to engineer it so your antagonist is forced into thinking they would spoil your night by pushing you further. But some people are just obnoxious, so be prepared to be firm, or just get up and leave with a cheerful, 'thanks, have a good evening'.

### **The 'hard cases'**

For all my advocacy of abstinence and moderation, there do appear to be some workplaces where heavy or 'binge' drinking are deeply ingrained. They often involve workplaces which pride themselves on working hard, long hours, under a lot of pressure. Alcohol can be seen as a release or a reward. While we want Christians to be in practically all legal workplaces (see study 7), there may come a time when you simply want to resign. Be prepared to resign. Better to leave than get sucked into alcohol abuse or feeling forever under pressure for not drinking.

### **'Self-medication'**

Work for many people is hard and unrelenting. It may be very stressful, either through boredom, the lack of satisfaction, or the large responsibility you carry.

Some people live in a state of fear all their working lives (see study 6). You are never in total control. You are never sure what might happen, and you are constantly aware that bad things may happen.

I do not accept that these pressures can always be avoided, redirected or accommodated. Nor do I think that walking away is always the best answer. You may be very good at a job that needs to be done, and high pressure is just part of the job. We learn to live with these pressures, and prayer and church membership are the two best ways to deal with them. But some of us try to address these problems by drinking alcohol, and this can lead to alcohol dependence. It may start with a beer, or a glass of wine or a scotch at the end of the day, but it may lead to more. You may say you like it, or need it to 'relax'. It's hard to distinguish between 'likes' and 'needs'. However, it is clear that 'one to relax' both hides the underlying problem and may lead to many more than one. The prophet Jeremiah has some words of warning for us: 'The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?' (Jeremiah 17:9) Having a drink because you enjoy it is one thing. Drinking to deal with stress is quite another thing. Self-medication is inherently deceitful.

I have a few practical suggestions on how to steer clear of deceitfulness. First, ensure you have at least 2 alcohol free days a week. This can be hard when you are travelling and there are constant social engagements, but stick to it. Second, don't hide your drinking. Some people say, 'don't ever drink alone'. That is harder for single people or a person whose spouse does not drink. I have known a number of couples who comply with this 'no drinking alone' by mutually self medicating to excess. However, if you find yourself hiding your drinking, having a quick drink before going out, 'pre-loading', having a quiet drink while you do the washing up, dropping into the pub on the way home for an undisclosed drink, or forever trying to line up social occasions so you can drink with others, you know you have an issue that needs to be dealt with.

## **Sleaze**

The consumption of alcohol at work functions can be associated with sleaze. This can take the form of invitations to 'kick-on' to sleazy bars, strip clubs, brothels etc. Or it can take the form of reputable companies organising functions where nudity, eroticism and homo-eroticism are cloaked in the image of being 'fun' or 'artistic'. In my limited experience, lawyers and bankers who kicked-on to sleazy places, developed reputations which blocked promotion. In relation to sleazy functions organised at work, I simply stopped going to our Christmas parties because I thought, and said, they were tasteless and offensive to me. You may 'want to be seen' to be doing the right thing by attending work functions. However, if they are not to your taste, I suggest you don't go, or leave early.

### **'Let's go to the casino'**

Christians take different views on gambling. Many reject it totally because it causes so much damage and implies greed and the idolatry of money. Whatever your view on gambling, work out beforehand your attitude to going to a casino. I once went to a casino with some law partners as part of a 'getting to know you' evening. I enjoyed their company, but regret going to the casino. I never went again. I suggest you don't. (Besides anything else, they are really miserable places).

### **Drugs**

I have not discussed the place of illegal drugs in work and client development activities. This is partly because I have no direct experience of this, and partly because I take it that Christians should simply not take or encourage the use of any illegal or damaging substances. So, 'just say no'. If that makes working there too unpleasant, seek advice and be prepared to leave. While we want Christians in all lawful workplaces, there are limits.

### **Conclusion**

For some, alcohol at work is no issue at all. For others it arises occasionally, but is easily dealt with. For others it's a regular problem to be in this world but not of it. Some end up with serious drinking problems. My prayer is that we all

honour God in the way we interact with people at work and do not abuse his gifts.