

Reformation 500 Series-- The Reformed Vission of Vocation: Everything Luther and Calvin
Taught Me About Work
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These notes will mainly be quotations, with a few book and article recommendations mixed in.

Vocation means your work is for the life of the world. It is not just about survival, or making ends meet. These are certainly by-products of work, but work goes far beyond self-serving ends. We work not just because we love ourselves, but because we love our neighbor. Our work, done rightly, will benefit our neighbor just as much as it benefits us. Work finds its glory not merely in what it does for our own lives, providing purpose, significance, and a means to survival, but especially in what it does for others, as God serves others through the work that we do.

The doctrine of vocation basically takes the division of labor according to giftedness in the church (described in passages like 1 Cor. 12) and applies it to society at large. Reed's famous essay "I, Pencil" makes just this point about a free economy. No one in the world knows how to make a pencil and even if they somehow had the knowledge, it would take many lifetimes for a solitary individual to make a pencil. But with the division of labor, with each of our vocations serving one another, you can buy several pencils for under a buck. Vocation shows us how God is "hidden" in our vocations so that we serve one another, according to his purposes.

While there were seeds of a free market economy planted in the medieval period, prices were usually set by guilds and nobility, and there was very little social mobility. Rather than appreciating the guifts each one had been given, folks were often shoe-horned into roles that did not suit them. The Reformation, as much as anything, was the Great Liberation.

The monasteries were not all bad (see, e.g., Rodne Stark, *How the West Won*). They served a useful role in the Constantinain period and during medieval serfdom. We owe the monks a great deal – and not just for the beer. The monasteries often served the common good by preserving learning and art, developing technology, maintaining peace, cultivating the earth, etc. There were many godly monks and nuns. But by the late medieval period, the whole monastic system had become largely corrupt. The monastaries were built on a false view of Spirituality that fed into a two-tiered system of church membership and rather than serving the common good, they were cesspools of iniquity (again, not always, but often). Luther was entirely justified in breaking away from the monastery, and everything that had been wrong with his experience of monastic life fed into his doctrine of vocation; in other words, his doctrine of vocation was formulated as a corrective, against the backdrop of a messed up social system that kept far too many in bondage.

In work, we take the raw material of creation and transform it into something better, some useful to us and to our neighbors, something that helps the human community thrive and flourish. In our work, we should strive to be of service more than we strive to be a success – although the two often go together. Henry Ford, "A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business." The point of vocation is that God loves and cares for the human community through our work. In other words, our work is done on behalf of one another – even if we fail to recognize this fact.

The gospel frees us from having to prove or justify ourselves through our work. It frees us from having to secure an identity and status through our work because it gives us these things freely.

Vocation helps us to understand that if “God loves you and has an *ordinary* plan for your life,” that’s ok! Indeed, if we are offended by being ordinary, it may be that we have made our own success an idol. Sure, some Christians have radical callings – to be martyred, or to have 15 kids. But most of us are called to live pretty ordinary, albeit faithful, lives (cf. 2 Thess.). God is never under any obligation to make us succeed, but neither does God call most of us to do something “radical.”

This means it is entirely acceptable to be quite pragmatic about our vocational choices. As Mike Rowe has put it, do not follow your passion (that field probably isn’t hiring anyway!), rather, follow opportunity, and bring your passion with you. Or perhaps we should paraphrase: Don’t follow your passion, follow God’s calling, and bring your passion with you! We should stop telling our kids “you can be whatever you want to be.” It’s a lie. We should tell them, ‘You can be whatever God calls you to be. And you can be whatever you have the skills and knowledge to be.’”

At the same time, we must recognize that the doctrine of vocation infuses the most ordinary and routine life events with an extraordinary, even radical, meaning. Lanier Ivester explains:

If I’m not mistaken, it was Martin Luther who recovered the sense of “vocation” for general Christian use. Broadening the idea beyond merely a religious calling to the church, he anchored the essence of a believer’s assignment squarely in the ordinary details of exquisitely unique lives.

“What would you do if Christ himself with all the angels were visibly to descend, and command you in your home to sweep your house and wash the pans and kettles?” he demanded, with characteristic no-nonsense. “How happy you would feel, and would not know how to act for joy—not for the work’s sake, but that you knew that thereby you were serving him, who is greater than heaven and earth.”

Like the stuff of fairytale, a vocation makes use of the workaday components of our lives, transforming them with a touch of heavenly “deep magic” into practical intersections with eternity. Every single one of us is carrying around a priceless dowry of affinities, talents, and inclinations: we can’t make the magic, any more than a pumpkin can turn itself into a gilded coach, but we do have to show up with our notebooks or guitars or mixing bowls or running shoes. A vocation is simply the point at which garden-variety faithfulness bears the grace of God to the world.

Further, Ivester goes on to share wisdom about how vocations fit us, even if imperfectly in a fallen world:

Ray Bradbury, when writing of the unique and individual creative call, said that we should look back to the earliest memories of our childhood, to the things that first made us intoxicated with life, for solid clues into our artistic destiny as adults. This is first-order fantastic advice. But sometimes—at least for me—it also helps to look at what a calling is *not* in order to recognize the genuine article. What it *doesn’t* look like, so that we may see more clearly what it *does*.

A calling is not . . .

Burdensome. It may be difficult—it most certainly will—but it won't cumber the life out of you. *His yoke is easy and His burden is light.*

Uncomfortable. It will certainly require uncomfortable things, moments in which we squirm beneath our own inadequacies. But discomfort does not define a calling, like cramming our feet into shoes that are too small or struggling to walk in pants that are too big.

Overwhelming. We will absolutely *feel* overwhelmed (I do on a daily basis!), but we will never *be* overwhelmed. The waters of a calling will not go over our heads—God will not lay upon us the full weight of the world's need, but rather portions His tender concern into bundles, laying a part upon each of us.

I've searched the Scriptures time and again seeking validation for my desires, like some kind of heavenly check mark over my calling. I've camped out on verses like "neglect not the gift that is in you," and "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life." These passages bear great wisdom, and they make me feel good about seeking to live in harmony with the unique way God has wired me.

But the real quickening word within the Word, the verses that sting me awake like the flash of a brandished sword, are those Jesus spoke in Matthew 25: The Parable of the Talents. There is absolutely nothing "feel good" to me about this story. Truthfully, I find it one of the scariest in the Bible. There are three examples of servants given, but only two types: good and faithful, and wicked and slothful. And here's the rub: the only difference stated between them was *fear*. In *The Message*, the master calls this latter servant a "play-it-safe."

And, of course, we all know there's nothing safe about the Kingdom.

So that is the last thing a calling is not: it's not *safe*.

In opening our hands to vocation, we are signing up for misunderstanding, exhaustion, criticism, occasional failure, even despair. There's no way around it. But we're all slated to a bit of this magnificent canvas God has unfurled over His history with humanity, and if any one of us leaves our part blank, the world will go on parched and hungering for that glimpse of grace only we can provide. It's inconceivable, really—that things like preparing a meal or penning a sonnet could carry such weight. Ludicrous like pumpkin coaches and mice-made-footmen. Crazy in the way that only God could dare to be.

And deeply, soul-gladdeningly good, in only the way that He is good.

If you find that you hate your job, it may be that God is using a "holy discontent" to get you to a place where you can more fully use your gifts in serving others. Or it may be that you are expecting from your work something it was not designed to give, and cannot give, in a fallen world. Ecclesiastes is a wonderful book for understanding work, in that brings all of these themes together – how we are to enjoy our work and especially the fruits of our labors, and yet how the fall keeps getting in the way (cf. Ecc. 9:9-10 vs. 2:1-11).

I wish I could have done a little more exegesis of the readings used in the service, in particular Colossians 3:22-26. Note several features of this text:

- While Paul acknowledges that we do work for human master, he shows that we ultimately have an Audience of One. All our work is really done for Christ. He is our True Master, our Boss, and the one to whom we are accountable. You work for the Lord, not for men.
- It is not enough to get through the work in an outward kind of way. Our hearts must be in it. We are to work with sincerity of heart and in the fear of God. These are heavily packed phrases that need to be unpacked if we are to really understand the quality of work God calls us to.
- The Lord's call on our lives is all encompassing: "Whatever you do." And again, the demand that we pour ourselves into our work: "work heartily."
- Our work will be rewarded. This is not a paycheck, given because our work has merit. It is called an inheritance. But this is interesting because Paul is actually addressing slaves, who did not get inheritances. Paul is releasing us here from being overly worried about the kind of profit our work returns. In the heavenly economy, our work will be greatly rewarded in the end. Why? "Because you are serving the Lord Christ." And he is a gracious Master. The wrongdoer (e.g., the lazy person or the abuse master) will get what is coming to him (v. 25); he too will be paid, but with a different kind of wage. You just keep working away, knowing God will take care of you. God is not partial to the wealthy or powerful; he sees all, and he rewards those who work hard and sincerely, even if they are at the bottom of the social ladder.

On how God rewards our work by perfecting and glorifying it, as he weaves it into the tapestry of the new creation, see the immensely clever story by Tolkien, *Leaf by Niggle*.

On how vocation and virtue go together, see N. T. Wright's use of the Captain Sullenberger story in *After You Believe*, pages 18ff. Virtue is a moral skill, analogous to other skills we learn in the course of our life's work. We maximize our usefulness when moral virtue (righteousness and wisdom) and vocation virtue (skill and know-how) come together. A good person must be a good worker and vice versa. Or to look at it another way: There is a moral and vocational

Gene Veith has done more to articulate Luther's doctrine of vocation than anyone in the contemporary church. I really like his book *Working for our Neighbor*. Among other things, he blows apart the Weber Thesis with regard to the Protestant work ethic. Protestants did not work hard because they believed that their prosperity proved they were elect; they worked hard out of gratitude, love, and a deep sense of vocation. He also shows how the "priesthood of the baptized" (or the priesthood of the plebs, as Peter Leithart has called it) was socially revolutionary, leading to free markets and free societies (free men always demand other forms of freedom eventually!). This doctrine produced the division of labor as we know it today; it gave us free and republican forms of government; and it helped get modern science and technology off the ground (by, e.g., ennobling work with one's hands and emphasizing the importance of doing work that makes our neighbors' lives better). It is a really wonderful book about Christian vocation.

For an eschatological perspective on how God weaves our work into the tapestry of the new creation and establishes the works of our hands forever, see the writings of Darrell Cosden, *The*

Heavenly Good of Earthly Work and *A Theology of Work*. These are excellent studies, well worth your time, and cover a lot of ground I did not even attempt to touch on in the sermon.

Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of societies in the world today:

1. First world nations, which are the wealthiest and most prosperous. These are nations that embraced the Reformation or were heavily influenced by nations that did (e.g., Japan).
2. Second world nations, which tend to be Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox (Peru, Russia, etc.).
3. Third world nations, which are generally Muslim and pagan.

There is a very clear connection between religion/worldview and cultural maturation. The more consistently Christian a society is, the more prosperous it is in the long run. The West has been more advanced for the last 500 years, not for racial or ethnic or evolutionary reasons but for religious reasons. Protestantism is simply more biblical and more faithful than any other form the church has taken to date. This is one of the reasons we should not be ashamed of the Reformation, whatever shortcomings we might still want to point out: It is directly responsible for the greatest prosperity and advancement in human history. There really is such a thing as "the Protestant work ethic," and that ethic grew out of the doctrine of vocation taught by Luther and Calvin. The superior prosperity of Protestant societies is an outworking of the principles of Proverbs, which were embodied in the Reformation in a greater way than ever before. While there is much to appreciate about medieval Christendom, the Reformation was a quantum leap forward in maturation and glory.

The "business as mission" movement has been hugely successful. These are businesses that are self-consciously Christian and seek to leverage their business for kingdom purposes (e.g., creating jobs for the poor, which is the only way to lift them out of their poverty). The book *God and Guinness* by Stephen Mansfield is a good historical study. There are several studies of more contemporary businesses (e.g., Chick-fil-A) that are also doing very good work. Christian entrepreneurs should take note.

Tim Keller on the dangers of work idolatry:

When work is your identity, success goes to your head and failure to your heart.

Lesslie Newbigin:

The primary action of the Church in the world is the action of its members in their daily work.

Martin Luther King, Jr.:

If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music ... Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived

a great street sweeper who swept his job well.

Dorothy Sayers:

What is the Christian understanding of work?...It is that work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties...**the medium in which he offers himself to God...**

John Calvin on 1 Cor. 7:17:

...the Lord commands every one of us, in all actions of life to regard his vocation.... to prevent universal confusion being produced by our folly and temerity, he has appointed to all their particular duties in different spheres of life. And that no one might rashly transgress the limits prescribed, he has styled such spheres of life vocations, or callings....

It will also be no small alleviation of his cares, labours, troubles, and other burdens, when a man knows that in all these things he has God for his guide. The magistrate will execute his office with greater pleasure, the father of a family will confine himself to his duty with more satisfaction, and all, in their respective spheres of life, will bear and surmount the inconveniences, cares, disappointments, and anxieties which befall them, when they shall be persuaded that every individual has his burden laid upon him by God. Hence also will arise peculiar consolation, since there will be no employment so mean and sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God.

Tim Keller echoes the point on 1 Cor. 7:

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul counsels readers that when they become Christians it is unnecessary to change what they are currently doing in life-their marital status, job, or social station-in order to live their lives before God in a way that pleases him. In verse 17, Paul directs, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches." Here Paul uses two religiously freighted words to describe ordinary work. Elsewhere, Paul has spoken of God calling people into a saving relationship with him, and assigning them spiritual gifts to do ministry and build up the Christian community (Romans 12:3 and 2 Corinthians 10:13). Paul uses these same two words here when he says that every Christian should remain in the work God has "assigned to him, and to which God has called him." Yet Paul is not referring in this case to church ministries, but to common social and economic tasks- "secular jobs", we might say-and naming them God's callings and assignments

Martin Luther:

... When you pray for 'daily bread' you are praying for everything that contributes to you having and enjoying your daily bread... You must open up and expand your thinking, so that it reaches not only as far as the flower bin and baking oven but also out over the broad fields, the farmlands, and the entire country that produces, processes, and conveys to us our daily bread in all kinds of nourishment... God could easily give you grain and fruit without your plowing and planting, but he does not want to do so...

What else is all our work to God – whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in the government – but just such a child's performance, by which He wants to give his gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are masks of God, behind which he wants to remain concealed and do all things...

God milks the cows through the vocation of the milkmaids.

Dick Lucas:

In the long term I think being a preacher, missionary, or leading a Bible study group in many ways is easier. There is a certain spiritual glamour in doing it, and what we should be doing each day is easier to discern more black and white, not so gray. It is often hard to get Christians to see that God is willing not just to use men and women in ministry, but in law, in medicine, in business, in the arts. This is the great shortfall today.

Van Duzer:

Food that nourishes, roofs that hold out the rain, shade that protects from the heat of the sun... the satisfaction of material needs and desires of men and women... when businesses produce material things that enhance the welfare of the community, they are engaged in work that matters to God.

Tim Keller:

Work is so foundational to our make-up, in fact, that is one of the few things we can take in significant doses without harm. Indeed, the Bible does not say we should work one day and rest six, or that work and rest should be balanced evenly – but direct us to the opposite ratio. Leisure and pleasure are great goods, but we can take only so much of them... According to the Bible, we don't merely need the money from work to survive; we need the work itself to survive and live fully human lives....

Remember that something can be a vocation or calling only if some other party calls you to do it, and you do it for their sake rather than for your own. Our daily work can be a calling only if it is reconceived as God's assignment to serve others....

We are not to choose jobs and conduct our work to fulfill ourselves and accrue power, for being called by God to do something is empowering enough. We are to see work as a way of service to God and our neighbor, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose. The question regarding our choice of work is no longer 'What will make me the most money and give me the most status?' The question must now be 'How, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God's will and human need?

...There may be no better way to love your neighbor, whether you are writing parking tickets, software, or books, than to simply do your work. But only skillful, competent work will do...

The story presented in the Bible is that while God blessed work to be a glorious use of our gifts and his resources to prosper the world, it is now also cursed because of mankind's fall. Work exists now any world sustained by God but disordered by sin. Only if we have some understanding of how to sin distorts work can we hope to counteract its effects and salvage some of the satisfaction of God plan for our work....

Sin leads to the disintegration of every area of life: spiritual, physical, social, cultural, psychological, temporal, eternal. This is important to remember, for many Christians tend to divide the world into 'worldly' and 'sacred' spaces and activities, as if sin affects only things out in the world; yet absolutely every part of human life – soul and body, private and public, praying and laboring – is affected by sin....

From the moment of the fall, humankind has suffered from moral schizophrenia: neither able to deny sinfulness nor acknowledge it for what it is...

The effects of sin touch all of creation; no created thing is in principle untouched by the corrosive effects of the fall. Whether we look at societal structures such as the state or family, or cultural pursuits such as art or technology, or bodily functions such as sexuality or eating, or anything at all with in the wide scope of creation, we discover that the good handiwork of God has been drawn into the sphere of mutiny against God....

When you see how much you are loved [by God], your work will become far less selfish. Suddenly all the other things in your work life – your influence, your resume, and the benefits they bring you – become just things. You can risk them, spend them, and even lose them. You are free....

It could be argued that everything we do wrong – every cruel action, dishonest word, broken promise, self-centered attitude – stems from a conviction deep in our souls that there is something more crucial to our happiness and meaning than the love of God....

If every culture has its idols, how do they influence how we do our work? Keeping in mind that an idol is a good thing turned into an ultimate thing, then a corporate idol is an over emphasis and absolutizing of an admirable cultural traits. We should expect, then, that each culture's emphases have some beneficial influence on work and yet at the same time harmfully distorted. Christians seeking to work faithfully and well must discern the shape of the idols functioning in their professions and industries so as to both affirm the beneficial aspects and offset the excesses and distortions....

But because Christians have a deeper understanding of human well-being, we will often find ourselves swimming against a very strong currents of the corporate idols of our culture...

All forms of work are participation in God's work. God made the created world by his Spirit (Gen. 1:1-3) and continues to care for and sustain it by his Spirit (Ps. 104:30), watering and enriching it (Ps. 65:9-13) and feeding and meeting the needs of every living thing (Pss. 145:15-16 and 147:15-20). Indeed, the very purpose of redemption is to massively and finally restore the material creation (Rev. 21-22). God loves this created world so much that he sent his Son to redeem it. This world is a good in and of itself; it is not just a temporary theater for individual salvation. If the Holy Spirit is not only a preacher that convicts people of sin and grace (John 16:8-11; 1 Thess. 1:5) but also a gardener, an artist, and an investor in creation who renews the material world, it cannot be more spiritual and God-honoring to be a preacher than to be a farmer, artist, or banker. To give just one example, evangelism is temporary work, while musicianship is permanent work. In the new heavens and new earth, preachers will be out of a job! Ultimately the purpose of evangelism is to bring about a world in which musicians will be

able to do their work perfectly...

Mark Noll:

For a Christian, the mind is important because God is important. Who, after all, made the world of nature, and then made possible the development of sciences through which we find out more about nature? Who formed the universe of human interactions, and so provided the raw material of politics, economics, sociology, and history? Who is the source of harmony, form, and narrative pattern, and so lies behind all artistic and literary possibilities? Who created the human mind in such a way that it could grasp the realities of nature, of human interactions, of beauty, and so made possible the theories on such matters by philosophers and psychologists? Who, moment by moment, sustains the natural world, the world of human interactions, and the harmonies of existence? Who, moment by moment, maintains the connections between what is in our minds and what is in the world beyond our minds? The answer in every case is the same. God did it, and God does it.

Luther:

It is pure invention that Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the “spiritual estate” while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the “temporal estate.” This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and that for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except by office... We are all consecrated priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: “You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm” (1 Pet.2:9).

One of the best books on work/vocation is Tim Keller’s *Every Good Endeavor*. Keller builds off the complementary views of Luther and Calvin to a distinctively biblical and Reformational view of work. On Luther’s view of “secular” work as worship, see especially p. 72ff. Keller says, “Even though, as Luther argues, all work is objectively valuable to others, it will not be subjectively fulfilling unless you consciously see and understand your work as a calling to love your neighbor” (p. 80).

More from Keller:

A job is a vocation only if someone calls you to do it and you do it for them rather than for yourself. And so our work can be a calling only if it is reimagined as a mission of service to something beyond merely our own interests... (19)

If the God of the Bible exists, and there is a true reality beneath and behind this one, and this life is not the only life, then every good endeavor, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God’s calling, can matter forever (29)...

In the beginning, God worked. Work was not a necessary evil that came into the picture later, or something human beings were created to do but that was beneath the great God himself. No, God worked for the sheer joy of it. Work could not have a more exalted inauguration... The book of Genesis leaves us with a striking truth—work was part of paradise (35-36)...

Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness. People who are cut off from work because of physical or other reasons quickly discover how much they need work to thrive emotionally, physically, and spiritually....According to the Bible, we don't merely need the money from work to survive; we need the work itself to survive and to live fully human lives. (37-38)....

In short, work – and lots of it – is an indispensable component in a meaningful human life. It is a supreme gift from God and one of the main things that gives our lives purpose. But it must play its proper role, subservient to God. It must regularly give way not just to work stoppage for bodily repair but also to joyful reception of the world and of ordinary life...But in Genesis we see God as a gardener, and in the New Testament we see him as a carpenter. No task is too small a vessel to hold the immense dignity of work given by God." (42, 49)...

The current economic era has given us fresh impulses and new ways to stigmatize work such as farming and caring for children-jobs that are supposedly not "knowledge" jobs and therefore do not pay very well. But in Genesis we see God as a gardener, and in the New Testament, we see him as a carpenter. No task is too small a vessel to hold the immense dignity of work given by God. (49)...

All work has dignity because it reflects God's image in us, and also because the material creation we are called to care for is good... (51)

We were built for work and the dignity it gives us as human beings, regardless of its status or pay. The practical implications of this principle are far-reaching. We have the freedom to seek work that suits our gifts and passions. We can be open to greater opportunities for work when the economy is weak and jobs are less plentiful. We no longer have any basis for condescension or superiority; nor is there any basis for envy or feelings of inferiority. And every Christian should be able to identify, with conviction and satisfaction, the ways in which his or her work participates with God and his creativity and cultivation....Human beings 'filling the earth' means something far more than plants and animals filling the earth. It means civilization, not just procreation. We get the sense that God does not want merely more individuals of the human species; he also wants the world to be filled with a human society. He could have just spoken the word and created millions of people in thousands of human settlements, but he didn't. He made it our job to develop and build this society. (53, 56)

A biblical understanding of work energizes our desire to create value from the resources available to us. Recognizing the God who supplies our resources, and who gives us the privilege of joining as co-cultivators, helps us enter into our work with the relentless spirit of creativity (60)...

Christians should be aware of this revolutionary understanding of the purpose of their work in the world. We are not to choose jobs and conduct our work to fulfill ourselves and accrue power, for being called by God to do something is empowering enough. We are to see work as a way of service to God and our neighbor, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose. The question regarding our choice of work is no longer, "What will make me the most money and give me the most status?" The question must now be "How with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God's will and of human need?" (67)

Research into the properties of the atom become the basis for the atomic bomb. In other words, work, even when it bears fruit, is always painful, often miscarries, and sometimes kills us (89)...

Just because you cannot realize your highest aspirations in work does not mean that you have chosen wrongly, or are not called to your profession, or that you should spend your life looking for the perfect career that is devoid of frustration. You should expect to be regularly frustrated in your work even though you may be in exactly the right vocation (94)....

Without the gospel of Jesus, we will have to toil not for the joy of serving others, nor the satisfaction of a job well done, but to make a name for ourselves (112)...

While from the outside there might not be immediately noticeable differences between a well-run company reflecting a gospel world-view and one reflecting primarily the world-story of the marketplace, inside the differences could be very noticeable. The gospel-centered business would have a discernible vision for serving the customer in a unique way, a lack of adversarial relationships and exploitation, and extremely strong emphasis on excellence and product quality, and an ethical environment that goes "all the way down" to the bottom of the organizational chart and to all the realities of daily behavior, even when high ethics mean a loss of margin. In the business animated by the gospel worldview, profit is simply one of many important bottom lines. (168)

...So when we say that Christians work from a gospel worldview, it does not mean that they are constantly speaking about Christian teaching in their work. Some people think of the gospel as something we are principally to "look at" in our work. This would mean that Christian musicians should play Christian music, Christian writers should write stories about conversion, and Christian businessmen and-women should work for companies that make Christian-themed products and services for Christian customers. Yes, some Christians in those fields would do well to do those things, but it is a mistake to think that the Christian worldview is operating only when we are doing such overtly Christian activities. Instead, think of the gospel as a set of glasses through which you "look" at everything else in the world. Christian artists, when they do this faithfully, will not be completely beholden either to profit or to naked self-expression; and they will tell the widest variety of stories. Christians in business will see profit as one of only several bottom lines; and they will work passionately for any kind of enterprise that serves the common good. The Christian writer can constantly be showing the destructiveness of making something besides God into the central thing, even without mentioning God directly. (179-180)

God is creator of the world, and our work mirrors his creative work when we create culture that conforms to his will and vision for human beings-when it matches up with the biblical story-line (184)...

...But indeed, as Bible scholar Bruce Waltke points out, the Bible says that the very definition of righteous people is that they disadvantage themselves to advantage others, while "the wicked...are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves." (203)

Without something bigger than yourself to work for, then all of your work energy is actually fueled by one of the other six deadly sins. You may work exceptionally hard because of envy to get ahead of somebody, or because of pride to prove yourself, or because of greed or even gluttony for pleasure (230)....

Martin Luther:

If you ask an insignificant maid-servant why she scours a dish or milks the cow, she can say: I know that the thing I do pleases God, for I have God's Word and commandment...God does not look at the insignificance of the acts but at the heart that serves Him in such little things.

...

What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God.

.....

It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the "spiritual estate"; princes, lords, artisans and farmers the "temporal estate." That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy. . . . All Christians are truly of the "spiritual estate," and there is among them no difference at all but that of office. . . . To make it still clearer. If a little group of pious Christian laymen were taken captive and set down in a wilderness, and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if there in the wilderness they were to agree in choosing one of themselves, married or unmarried, and were to charge him with the office of baptizing, saying mass, absolving and preaching, such a man would be as truly a priest as though all bishops and popes had consecrated him. . . . There is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, "spirituals" and "temporals," as they call them, except that of office and work. . . . A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.

....

To serve God simply means to do what God has commanded and not to do what God has forbidden. And if only we would accustom ourselves properly to this view, the entire world would be full of service to God [German: "gottesdienst"], not only the churches but also the home, the kitchen, the cellar, the workshop, and the field of townsfolk and farmers. For it is certain that God would have not only the church and world order but also the house order established and upheld. All, therefore, who serve the latter purpose—father and mother first, then the children, and finally the servants and neighbors—are jointly serving God; for so He wills and commands.

In the light of this view of the matter a poor maid should have the joy in her heart of being able to say: Now I am cooking, making the bed, sweeping the house. Who has commanded me to do these things? My master and mistress have. What has given them authority over me? God has. Very well, then it must be true that I am serving not them alone but also God in heaven and that God must be pleased with my service. How could I not possibly be more blessed? Why, my service is equal to cooking for God in heaven!

In this way a man could be happy and of good cheer in all his trouble and labor; and if he accustomed himself to look at his service and calling in this way, nothing would be distasteful to him. But the devil opposes this point of view tooth and nail, to keep one from coming to this joy and to cause everybody to have a special dislike for what he should do and is commanded to do. So the devil operates in order to make sure that people do not love their work and no service be rendered to God.

...

All our work in the field, in the garden, in the city, in the home, in struggle, in government-to-what does it all amount before God except child's play, by means of which God is pleased to give his gifts in the field, at home, and everywhere? These are the masks of our Lord God, behind which he wants to be hidden and to do all things...

But the true holy orders and pious foundations established by God are these three: the priestly office, the family and the civil government...

All those who are engaged in the pastoral office or the ministry of the Word, are in a good, honest, holy order and station, that is well pleasing to God, as they preach, administer the Sacraments, preside over the poor funds and direct the sextons and other servants who assist in such labors, etc. These are all holy works in God's sight....

Likewise, those who are fathers or mothers, who rule their households well and who beget children for the service of God are also in a truly holy estate, doing a holy work, and members of a holy order. In the same way when children or servants are obedient to their parents or masters, this also is true holiness and those living in such estate are true saints on earth...

Similarly princes and overlords, judges, officials and chancellors, clerks, men servants and maids, and all other retainers, as well as all who render the service that is their due, are all in a state of holiness and are living holy lives before God, because these three estates or orders are all included in God's Word and commandment. Whatever is included in God's order must be holy, for God's Word is holy and hallows all it touches and all it includes.

Above these three estates and orders is the common order of Christian love, by which we minister not only to those of these three orders but in general to everyone who is in need, as when we feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, etc., forgive enemies, pray for all men on earth, suffer all kinds of evil in our earthly life, etc.

....

Luther on "give us this day our daily bread":

Here, now, we consider the poor bread basket, the necessaries of our body and of the temporal life. It is a brief and simple word, but it has a very wide scope. For when you mention and pray for daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread and, on the other hand, against everything which interferes with it. Therefore you must open wide and extend your thoughts not only to the oven or the flour-bin, but to the distant field and the entire land, which bears and brings to us daily bread and every sort of sustenance. For if God did not cause it to grow, and bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take bread from the oven or have any to set upon the table.

[73](#) To comprise it briefly, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in the world, because on that account alone do we need daily bread. Now for our life it is not only necessary that our body have food and covering and other necessaries, but also that we spend our days in peace and quiet among the people with whom we live and have intercourse in daily business and conversation and all sorts of doings, in short, whatever pertains both to the domestic and to the neighborly or civil relation and government. For where these two things are hindered [intercepted and disturbed] that they do not prosper as they ought, the necessaries of life also are impeded, so that ultimately life cannot be maintained. [74](#) And there is, indeed, the greatest need to pray for temporal authority and government, as that by which most of all God preserves to us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. For though we have received of God all good things in abundance, we are not able to retain any of them or use them in security and happiness, if He did not give us a permanent and peaceful government. For where there are dissension, strife, and war, there the daily bread is already taken away, or at least checked.

[75](#) Therefore it would be very proper to place in the coat-of-arms of every pious prince a loaf of bread instead of a lion, or a wreath of rue, or to stamp it upon the coin, to remind both them and

their subjects that by their office we have protection and peace, and that without them we could not eat and retain our daily bread. Therefore they are also worthy of all honor, that we give to them for their office what we ought and can, as to those through whom we enjoy in peace and quietness what we have, because otherwise we would not keep a farthing; and that, in addition, we also pray for them that through them God may bestow on us the more blessing and good. [76](#) Let this be a very brief explanation and sketch, showing how far this petition extends through all conditions on earth. Of this any one might indeed make a long prayer, and with many words enumerate all the things that are included therein, as that we pray God to give us food and drink, clothing, house, and home, and health of body; also that He cause the grain and fruits of the field to grow and mature well; furthermore, that He help us at home towards good housekeeping, that He give and preserve to us a godly wife, children, and servants, that He cause our work, trade, or whatever we are engaged in to prosper and succeed, favor us with faithful neighbors and good friends, etc. [77](#) Likewise, that He give to emperors, kings, and all estates, and especially to the rulers of our country and to all counselors, magistrates, and officers, wisdom, strength, and success that they may govern well and vanquish the Turks and all enemies; to subjects and the common people, obedience, peace, and harmony in their life with one another; [78](#) and on the other hand, that He would preserve us from all sorts of calamity to body and livelihood, as lightning, hail, fire, flood, poison, pestilence, cattle-plague, war and bloodshed, famine, destructive beasts, wicked men, etc. [79](#) All this it is well to impress upon the simple, namely, that these things come from God, and must be prayed for by us. [80](#) But this petition is especially directed also against our chief enemy, the devil. For all his thought and desire is to deprive us of all that we have from God, or to hinder it; and he is not satisfied to obstruct and destroy spiritual government in leading souls astray by his lies and bringing them under his power, but he also prevents and hinders the stability of all government and honorable, peaceable relations on earth. There he causes so much contention, murder, sedition, and war, also lightning and hail to destroy grain and cattle, to poison the air, etc. [81](#) In short, he is sorry that any one has a morsel of bread from God and eats it in peace; and if it were in his power, and our prayer (next to God) did not prevent him, we would not keep a straw in the field, a farthing in the house, yea, not even our life for an hour, especially those who have the Word of God and would like to be Christians. [82](#) Behold, thus God wishes to indicate to us how He cares for us in all our need, and faithfully provides also for our temporal support. [83](#) And although He abundantly grants and preserves these things even to the wicked and knaves, yet He wishes that we pray for them, in order that we may recognize that we receive them from His hand, and may feel His paternal goodness toward us therein. For when He withdraws His hand, nothing can prosper nor be maintained in the end, as, indeed, we daily see and experience. [84](#) How much trouble there is now in the world only on account of bad coin, yea, on account of daily oppression and raising of prices in common trade, bargaining and labor on the part of those who wantonly oppress the poor and deprive them of their daily bread! This we must suffer indeed; but let them take care that they do not lose the common intercession, and beware lest this petition in the Lord's Prayer be against them.

Gustav Wingren on Luther's doctrine of vocation:

In his vocation man does works which effect the well-being of others; for so God has made all offices. Through this work in man's offices, God's creative work goes forward, and that creative work is love, a profusion of good gifts. With persons as his "hands" or "coworkers," God gives his gifts through the earthly vocations, toward man's life on earth (food through farmers, fishermen and hunters; external peace through princes, judges, and orderly powers; knowledge and education through teachers and parents, etc., etc.). Through the preacher's vocation, God gives the forgiveness of sins. Thus love comes from God, flowing down to

human beings on earth through all vocations, through both spiritual and earthly governments.

If you find yourself in a work by which you accomplish something good for God, or the holy, or yourself, but not for your neighbor alone, then you should know that that work is not a good work. For each one ought to live, speak, act, hear, suffer, and die in love and service for another, even for one's enemies, a husband for his wife and children, a wife for her husband, children for their parents, servants for their masters, masters for their servants, rulers for their subjects and subjects for their rulers, so that one's hand, mouth, eye, foot, heart and desire is for others; these are Christian works, good in nature...

God does not need our works. But our neighbor does.

Gene Veith summarizes Luther's view:

When I go into a restaurant, the waitress who brings me my meal, the cook in the back who prepared it, the delivery men, the wholesalers, the workers in the food-processing factories, the butchers, the farmers, the ranchers, and everyone else in the economic food chain are all being used by God to "give me this day my daily bread." This is the doctrine of vocation. God works through people, in their ordinary stations of life to which He has called them, to care for His creation. In this way, He cares for everyone Christian and non-Christian whom He has given life. [As Luther puts it,] vocations are "masks of God." On the surface, we see an ordinary human face, our mother, the doctor, the teacher, the waitress, our pastor, but, beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them. God is hidden in human vocations. The other side of the coin is that God is hidden in us. When we live out our callings as spouses, parents, children, employers, employees, citizens, and the rest, God is working through us. Even when we do not realize it, when we fulfill our callings, we too are masks of God.

Again, Veith on Luther:

Vocation is nothing less than the theology of the Christian life. It provides the blueprint for how Christians are to live in the world and to influence their cultures. It is the key to strong marriages and effective parenting. According to the classic Protestant theologians, our multiple vocations—in the family, the culture, and the workplace—are where sanctification and discipleship happen.

Today many Christians have become disillusioned with political involvement and are floundering for ways to engage the culture. Christians struggle as much as non-Christians with broken marriages and troubled families. The stumbling economy and the pursuit of prosperity seem like materialistic treadmills.

Rediscovering the doctrine of vocation could energize contemporary Christianity and show Christians how once again they can be the world's salt and light....

Perhaps the best summation of the concept is in 1 Corinthians 7:17: "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him."

God "assigns" different kinds and places of service for each Christian and then "calls" each Christian to that assignment. The Reformation theologians fleshed out this concept with other biblical teachings about God's workings in society and the Christian's life in the world (e.g., Ephesians 5-6, Romans 12-13, 1 Corinthians 7).

The great theologian of vocation was Martin Luther, who developed the teaching in his battles with monasticism—the view that the spiritual life requires withdrawal from secular life—and in defining “the priesthood of all believers.”

For Luther, vocation, like justification, is ultimately God’s work. God gives us our daily bread through the vocations of the farmer, the miller, and the baker. God creates new human beings through the vocations of fathers and mothers. God protects us through lawful magistrates.

Vocation is, first of all, about how God works through human beings. In His providential care and governing of His creation, God chooses to distribute His gifts by means of ordinary people exercising their talents, which themselves are gifts of God.

Thus, God heals by means of doctors, nurses, and other medical vocations. He makes our lives easier by means of inventors, scientists, and engineers. He creates beauty by means of artists, authors, and musicians. He gives us clothing, shelter, and other things we need by means of factory workers, construction contractors, and others who work with their hands. He cleans up after us by means of janitors and garbage collectors.

God thus looms behind everyone who provides us with the goods or services that we need. In one of Luther’s many memorable lines, God milks the cows through the hands of the milkmaid. This means that all work and all workers deserve honor. Whereas the world might look down on milkmaids and garbage collectors, they actually bear the sacred presence of God, who works in and through them.

God created us to be dependent on others—meat processors, manufacturers, journalists, lawyers, bankers, teachers, parents—and, through them, we are ultimately dependent upon God Himself.

Just as God is working through the vocation of others to bless us, He is working through us to bless others. In our vocations, we work side-by-side with God, as it were, taking part in His ceaseless creative activity and laboring with Him as He providentially cares for His creation.

Today the word vocation has become no more than a synonym for “job.” The theological term includes the work that we do, but it includes much more than that. God calls us to many different tasks and relationships. The unemployed still have vocations from God. Every Christian has multiple vocations.

Luther sorted them out into four “estates,” or spheres of life that God has established: the church, the household, the state, and what he called “the common order of Christian love.”

Every Christian has been “called” through the gospel into the life of faith (Romans 8:30), becoming a member of Christ’s body, the church. While God providentially works through nonbelievers as well as believers in their labors, “vocation,” strictly speaking, applies to Christians, those who hear themselves addressed in God’s Word. In response to that Word, Christians recognize their other callings as works of faith. But God also calls people to tasks in His church. Pastors speak rightly of being “called” into the ministry, whereupon God works through them to teach His Word, preside at His sacraments, and give spiritual care to His people. Laypeople too are called to do tasks in the local congregation, singing in the choir, serving on committees, serving meals, and in other ways blessing their fellow members.

Being in a family is also a calling. God established marriage, and being a husband or a wife is a vocation. Being a father or a mother is also a vocation. So is being a son or a daughter. So are being a brother or sister, a nephew or uncle, a grandmother or grandfather. (Notice how one person holds multiple vocations within a family: A woman may be the wife of her husband, the mother of her children, the daughter of her mother, the sister of her brother, and more, with each vocation having its particular dimensions of service.)

For Luther the estate of the “household” includes both the family and the activities by which it supports itself. He had in mind the concept expressed in the Greek word *oikonomia*, the laws of the household, from which we derive our word economy. For Luther, in his day of family-based labor, economic life is connected with family life.

We also have vocations in the state. We were each born into a particular time, place, and society. The cultural context in which we find ourselves is thus part of the life that God has assigned us.

We thus have responsibilities to our government and to our culture as a whole. Some Christians are called to positions of authority in the government. Americans have the unusual calling of being both subjects and rulers at the same time, since our democratic republic places the governing authorities themselves under the authority of the people who elect them. Christians thus have the vocation of citizenship, which means that politics, civic involvement, and cultural engagement are all realms of Christian service.

Our formal positions in the family, the workplace, the church, and the culture are not the only spheres of service to which God assigns us and to which He calls us. Journalists like to refer to themselves as “the fourth estate,” but Luther’s fourth estate is the “common order of Christian love.” This is the realm where people of different vocations interact informally. In Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite were on the way to serve in their vocations, but they ignored the man bleeding by the side of the road. In the ordinary course of everyday life and in our relationships with our friends and neighbors, God also calls us to service.

In stressing the spiritual significance of these so-called “secular” estates, Luther was challenging the Roman Catholic practice of reserving the terms vocation and calling for religious orders, to an individual’s calling from God to become a priest, a monk, or a nun. To enter into these “spiritual” offices required taking a vow of celibacy (thereby rejecting marriage and parenthood), poverty (thereby rejecting full participation in the economic life of the workplace), and obedience (which involved substituting the authority of the church for that of the state).

The Reformers insisted that the Christian life requires not withdrawal from the world but rather engagement in the world. The Christian faith is to be lived out not primarily in “church work” but in vocation.

What this meant in practice is that the “spiritual disciplines” moved out of the monastery into secular life. Celibacy became faithfulness in marriage. Poverty became thrift and hard work. Obedience became submission to the law. Most importantly, prayer, meditation, and worship—while still central to every Christian’s vocation in the church—also moved into the family and the workplace.

Today even Protestant Christians have often slipped into the assumption that serving God is a matter of “church work” or spiritual exercises. Churches set up programs that can take up every night of the week. Some Christians are so busy doing church activities, making evangelism calls, or going to Bible studies that they neglect their spouses and children. Some Christians are preoccupied with “the Lord’s work” while letting their marriages fall apart, ignoring the needs of their children, and otherwise sinning against the actual responsibilities to which God has called them.

But according to the doctrine of vocation, the church is the place where Christians meet every week to find the forgiveness of Christ, feed on God’s Word, and grow in their faith. Whereupon they are sent out into their vocations—to their spouses, children, jobs, and culture—for that faith to bear fruit. Faith bears fruit in love (Galatians 5:6; 1 Timothy 1:5). **The purpose of every vocation is to love and serve our neighbors. God doesn’t need our good works, Luther said, but our neighbor does. Our relationship with Him is based completely on His work for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. But just as God is hidden in vocation, Christ is hidden in our neighbors. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers”—feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and imprisoned—“you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). We love and serve God in our vocations by loving and serving the actual human beings He places into our lives.**

Every vocation has its particular neighbors. Members of a congregation are called to love and serve each other. In marriage, husbands are to love and serve their wives, and wives are to love and serve their husbands. Parents love and serve their children, who, in turn, love and serve their parents. Rulers love and serve their subjects. Workers love and serve their customers.

Certain vocations exercise authority. But authority itself is not just a matter of exercising power over others. "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them," said Jesus. "But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. . . . For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

Of course, we often sin in and against vocation. Instead of serving, we want to be served. Instead of loving our neighbor, we often use our neighbor for our own selfish purposes.

Vocation clarifies moral issues. Mothers are called to love and serve their children, not abort them or abuse them. Doctors are called to heal their patients, not kill them. Leaders are called to love and serve those under their authority, not exploit and tyrannize them.

Some actions are sinful when done outside of vocation but good works when done within vocation. We have no calling from God that would authorize having sex with someone to whom we are not married. But within the vocation of marriage, sex is not only authorized, it becomes the means by which God creates a one-flesh union, engenders new life, and builds a family.

Vocation has to do with the priesthood of all believers. A priest is someone who performs a sacrifice. We no longer need sacrifices for our sins, since Christ, our great High Priest, offered Himself as our sacrifice once and for all (Hebrews 9:26). But, in light of that sacrifice, God calls us "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Loving and serving involves an act of self-denial for the sake of someone else. That is, it involves a sacrifice. Again, Mark 10 says that rulers are to serve as Christ did, giving His life as a ransom. Today's "Gentiles" not only seek to "lord it over" others, they are obsessed with self-fulfillment and self-assertion. Vocation focuses on self-sacrifice.

The Bible instructs wives to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. At the same time, though, the Bible instructs husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The husband is not to receive the wife's submission in domination or in "lording it over" her, since that was not how Christ loved the church. Rather, he is to emulate Christ precisely in "giving himself up" for his wife. Thus, both the wife and the husband are called to sacrifice themselves for each other. Both are presenting themselves as living sacrifices.

The father, coming home from work dead tired, has presented his body as a living sacrifice for his family. So has the mother who drives her kids to soccer practice when she has many other things she would rather do. So has the worker who has put in long hours to do the best job possible for the company's customers.

Christ, who is in vocation and in the neighbor, takes up all of these sacrifices, small or great, into His sacrifice. And He loves and serves His creation by means of our love and service in our vocations.

In all our religious and ethical life," says Einar Billing in his classic work on vocation, *Our Calling*, "we are given to an incredible overestimation of the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary." We look for miracles, spectacular events, and mountain top experiences. Meanwhile, the spiritual significance of everyday life gets overlooked. Vocation, though, transfigures our ordinary, mundane existence, charging it with spiritual significance and with the very presence of God.

Luther said that changing a baby's diaper is a holy work. A child doing his chores is outperforming the Carthusian monks in works of holiness. By extension, we can see the office desk, the factory machinery, the computer screen—likewise the voting booth, the marriage bed, the dining room table—as altars upon which we exercise our royal priesthood.

Vocation is where sanctification happens, as Christians grow spiritually in good works and in their relationships. Vocation is where evangelism happens, as Christians teach their children and interact with nonbelievers. Vocation is where cultural influence happens, as Christians take their places and live out their faith in every niche of society.

Vocation changes the quality of what we do. An artist with a sense of vocation will create not just to express himself or to advance his career but to love and serve—not corrupt or

ridicule—his audience. A businessman who sees his customers as the objects of his Christian love will serve them with his very best work. From the outside, the economy has to do with the division of labor, individuals pursuing their own self-interests, laws of supply and demand, and other impersonal forces. And so it is, as part of God's created order. From the inside, however, the economy can become transfigured into a vast network of mutual dependence and mutual service, and economic activity can become an expression of love.

John Calvin (*Institutes*, III, x, vi):

The Lord commands every one of us, in all the actions of life, to regard his vocation. For he knows with what great unrest the human mind is inflamed, with what desultory levity it is hurried hither and thither, and how insatiable is its ambition to grasp different things at once. Therefore, to prevent universal confusion being produced by our folly and temerity, he has appointed to all their particular duties in different spheres of life. And that no one might rashly transgress the limits prescribed, he has styled such spheres of life vocations or callings. Every individual's line of life, therefore, is, as it were, a post assigned him by the Lord, that he may not wander about in uncertainty all his days. And so necessary is this distinction, that in his sight all our actions are estimated according to it, and often very differently from the sentence of human reason and philosophy. There is no exploit esteemed more honorable, even among philosophers, than to deliver our country from tyranny; but the voice of the celestial Judge openly condemns the private man who lays violent hands on a tyrant. It is not my design, however, to pause to list examples. It is sufficient if we know that the principle and foundation of right conduct in every case is the vocation of the Lord, and that he who disregards it will never keep the right way in the duties of his station. He that is in obscurity will lead a private life without discontent, so as not to desert the station in which God has placed him. It will also be no small alleviation of his cares, labors, troubles, and other burdens, when a man owns that in all these things he has God for his guide. The magistrate will execute his office with greater pleasure, the father of a family will confine himself to his duty with more satisfaction, and all, in their respective spheres of life, will bear and surmount the inconveniences, cares, disappointments, and anxieties which befall them, when they shall be persuaded that every individual has his burden laid upon him by God. Hence also will arise peculiar consolation, since there will be no employment so mean and sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God.

Teresa of Avila:

God walks among the pots and pans.

Lester DeKoster:

The difference between life in a wilderness and here is work. In the wilderness, you must do everything for yourself. But civilization is sharing in the work of others. Look at the chair you sit in. Imagine making it yourself — even if you had the skills, you'd need the tools. Do you have the skill to make the tools? And even if you had the skills for that, could you mine the

ore to get the metal? And if you had the skills to do that, how would you get the ore down from the mountain? Would you make the truck? In other words, to simply make a chair from scratch is, in a sense, a lifetime of work for one person. But through the work of others, you can buy it with the fruit of a few hours of labor. Civilization is sharing in work of others. Your paycheck, whatever it is, can buy you the use of far more than you could possibly make for yourself in the time it took to earn the check. Work makes us interdependent. Work is cultivating the resources of the material and human universe. Work plants the seed; civilization reaps the harvest. Work is the form in which we make ourselves useful to others; civilization is the form in which others make themselves useful to us. Work unifies the human race and carries out the will of God.

....

The basic form of stewardship is daily work. No matter what that work may be. No matter if you have never before looked on your job as other than a drudge, a bore, or a fearful trial. Know that the harder it is for you to face each working day, the more your will to persevere schools the soul. Work is the fundamental form of stewardship because:

God himself works: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17), the Lord says. It is not recounted that God plays, but he works. That is to say, God is ever-busy making provision for our existence. Work is that which serves another. Play is that which serves ourselves.

Work knits the fabric of civilization. We take for granted all the possibilities which work alone provides. And we become aware of how work sustains the order which makes life possible when that order is rent by lightning flashes of riot or war, and the necessities which work normally provides become difficult to come by.

Man's history begins in a garden and mounts to a city. A garden is what God the Holy Spirit does, without man, with a wilderness. A city is what God the Holy Spirit does through man's work.

It is of the nature of work to serve the community. Whether work is done in the home, on the land, or in the countless forms of enterprise developed across the centuries, work is doubly blessed: (1) it provides for the family of man, and (2) it matures the worker.

Work matures the worker because it requires ethical decision. Merely to rise to one's daily tasks requires an act of will, a decision to serve the community, however reluctantly, however unaware the worker may be that such is the case. Such willed acts of service not only make and sustain the fabric of civilization and culture, but also develop the soul. And, while the object of work is destined to perish, the soul formed by daily decision to do work carries over into eternity.

This perspective on work, as a maturing of the soul, liberates the believer from undue concern over the monotony of the assembly line, the threat of technology, or the reduction of the worker to but an easily replaceable cog in the industrial machine. One's job may be done by another. But each doer is himself unique, and what carries over beyond life and time is not the work but the worker. What doing the job does for each of us is not repeated in anyone else. What the exercise of will, of tenacity, of courage, of foresight, of triumph over temptations to get by, does for you is uniquely your own. One worker may replace another on the assembly line, but what each worker carries away from meeting the challenge of doing the day's shift will ever be his own. The lasting and creative consequence of daily work happens to the worker. God so arranges that civilization grows out of the same effort that develops the soul.

The forms of work are countless, but the typical one is work with the hands. The Bible has reference to the sower, to the making of tents and of things out of clay, to tilling the fields and tending the vine. Handwork makes visible the plan in the mind, just as the deed makes visible the love in the heart. While the classic Greek mind tended to scorn work with the hands, the Bible suggests that something about it structures the soul.

The results of one's work can never be fully known. What will become of the produce raised, of the machine built, of the person fed? No one can foretell what will be the final consequence of today's effort. Nor does the paycheck really measure the value, nor the effort, of the work for which it is given. Wages are set by the market, and the results of work are hidden in the mists of tomorrow. What endures is what happens to the worker who bravely makes it through the day.

Seen in this light, which is the light shed by the Bible on work, it is easy to understand why work is the primary form of stewardship. To work, most of us give the largest unit of our lives. By work, we together raise the level of our culture, keep its order, supply its needs, and point to its promise of better living for more of the world's peoples.

For the believer then, stewardship begins with the day's work. Done well, as unto God, in the full knowledge that by work the world lives, work serves God and man and the self.

Dorothy Sayers:

The habit of thinking about work as something one does to make money is so ingrained in us that we can scarcely imagine what a revolutionary change it would be to think about it instead in terms of the work done. To do so would mean taking the attitude of mind we reserve for our unpaid work – our hobbies, our leisure interests, the things we make and do for pleasure – and making that the standard of all our judgments about things and people. We should ask of an enterprise, not “will it pay?” but “is it good?”; of a man, not “what does he make?” but “what is his work worth?”; of goods, not “Can we induce people to buy them?” but “are they useful things well made?”; of employment, not “how much a week?” but “will it exercise my faculties to the utmost?” And shareholders in – let us say – brewing companies, would astonish the directorate by arising at shareholders' meeting and demanding to know, not merely where the profits go or what dividends are to be paid, not even merely whether the workers' wages are sufficient and the conditions of labor satisfactory, but loudly and with a proper sense of personal responsibility: “What goes into the beer?”

The first [proposition], stated quite briefly, is that work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.

...

A very able surgeon put it to me like this: ‘What is happening is that nobody works for the sake of getting the thing done. The actual result of the work is a by-product; the aim of the work is to make money to do something else. Doctors practice medicine, not primarily to relieve suffering, but to make a living—the cure of the patient is something that happens on the way. Lawyers accept briefs, not because they have a passion for justice, but because the law is the profession which enables them to live. The reason why men often find themselves

happy and satisfied in the army is that for the first time in their lives they find themselves doing something, not for the sake of the pay, which is miserable, but for the sake of getting the thing done.'

...

The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.

Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly – but what use is all that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made Heaven and earth. No piety in the worker will compensate for work that is not true to itself; for any work that is untrue to its own technique is a living lie.

...

[The Church] has lost all sense of the fact that the living and eternal truth is expressed in work only so far as that work is true in itself, to itself, to the standards of its own technique. She has forgotten that the secular vocation is sacred. Forgotten that a building must be good architecture before it can be a good church; that a painting must be well painted before it can be a good sacred picture; that work must be good work before it can call itself God's work.

My all-time favorite article on Christian business:

The Kingdom Work of the Corporate World

DICK DOSTER, ISSUE NUMBER 11, OCTOBER 2006

Scanning the church directory you couldn't help but notice: in almost every household, someone was, or had been, involved in business. Which means, if this church is typical, that God has called all but a handful of His people to some form of commercial enterprise. He hasn't called them to missions or the pastorate or to any other "full-time Christian work," but to profit-driven, money making, dog-eat-dog, secular business.

What, we might be tempted to ask, is God thinking? Christians are "not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Romans 2:2), and yet business is relentless in its temporal demands. It's a zero sum game: When one salesman wins, others lose. For lawyers to succeed, they must cause others to fail. If I work for Chevrolet, it's my duty to steal customers, market share, and profits away from Toyota. Hardly a picture of a caring community.

Christians are commanded to do nothing out of selfish ambition (Philippians 2:3), but business, at its essence, is striving and acquisitive. It grows or dies. Microsoft, Google, ExxonMobil, and Wal-Mart swallow up weaker competitors. They expand across the globe, their profits unfathomable, as the value of their stock continues to soar — almost always at the expense of weaker, more vulnerable competitors. This is raw, naked, unvarnished ambition, and it makes business, at best, an awkward environment for humble souls who "consider others better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

We most easily spot the "pattern of this world" in man's reverence for wealth. And the singular goal of nearly every business ever mentioned on the pages of *Forbes* or *Fortune* is to earn as much

profit as humanly possible. When they evaluate corporate performance, Wall Street analysts, the press, and investors all join in Jerry Maguire's once-famous chorus: "Show me the money!"

And the evidence from the church directory is indisputable: God's people willingly — and even gladly — join forces with these worldly, ambitious, profit-hungry organizations who, they hope, will share the wealth ... with them. And they do so knowing that it is impossible to love God and money (Matthew 6:24), and knowing, as surely as they know the chief end of man, that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

Certainly, business is no place for those who have "set their minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2). And yet, that is precisely where God has put them. And that can only mean one of two things: either most Christians need to find new work, or they need a new perspective on the institution of business.

There are, when we look closer, hundreds of biblical and godly reasons for Christians to be in business. And many of them fall into one of these three categories.

Business and Our First Responsibility

In Genesis 1:26, God lays out His plan for the human race: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule" Two verses later, He commissions Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

That cultural commission, writer/theologian Paul Marshall argues, is more than a set of commands or instructions. Its emphasis is not on what God tells the man and woman; but on why He created them in the first place. As His consummate act of creation, God forms a creature "to be our image and rule" over the Earth. "Ruling" Marshall says, is "built into our very being If we do not take up our responsibility for God's world, we defy not only His command, but also our very nature and the very purpose for which we have been created."

Stamped with God's image, Adam and Eve were to continue God's creative work in the world. They were to take the raw materials God left behind and continue shaping, molding, and improving His creation. As Michael Wittmer, a professor at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, notes, "God's world was flawless, but it wasn't finished."

He didn't create computers, but they were here waiting for His image bearers — working together and combining their diverse skills and talents — to put the pieces together. He didn't create phonograph records, 8-tracks, audiocassettes, CDs, or iPods, but the raw materials existed from the beginning, waiting for man to make one discovery, then another, each generation building and improving on the work that had come before. God didn't create television, telephones, or microwave ovens, but the elements were all here, awaiting the creative prowess of His image bearers — engineers, scientists, and industrial designers, working in concert with one another — to call them into existence.

Man invents, produces, and improves products, writer Nathan Bierma says, "because we're following our mission. ... We do this out of instinct, obeying God's command to fill the Earth and subdue it."

In the August 2006 issue of *byFaith*, readers discussed the importance of the arts. As God's image-bearers, many said, we are meant to create, and the arts are the vehicle for our imaginative expression. But have you ever thought about the creative power of business?

Consider the things that make your life richer, more comfortable, more convenient, and more productive. Think about all the things that make you safer, healthier, and wiser. They are all products of business innovation. There is no more creative force in the world than business, and God has placed most of His people there, not to pursue money or power, nor to satisfy their selfish ambition — but to create, rule, fill, and subdue the Earth. Christians go to work each day to transform God’s world, to make it better than it was the day before. And they do it in obedience to God’s first command — as an act of worship, and for the sake of His glory.

Business Is How We Love Our Neighbors

The Pharisees wanted to test Jesus, and so they asked Him for the single greatest commandment. He replied with two. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... And 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 27: 37-40). Here, essentially, is every believer’s duty: love God, love others, and love yourself. The rest takes care of itself.

God has placed most of His people in business because it is there, working with others in a common purpose, that is how we fulfill these duties. In *The Fabric of this World*, Lee Hardy discusses Luther’s concept of vocation. Hardy summarizes Luther, saying, "Vocation is the specific call to love one’s neighbor, which comes to us through the duties which attach to our social place or ‘station.'" (Calvin, in response to a freer labor market, would emphasize “gifts” rather than “station.”)

"The call to love one’s neighbor goes out to all," Luther believed, "but what this call requires of me in particular is discovered in those vocations which I presently occupy." In the 21st century, as much as when Luther said it, "It is ‘through the human pursuit of vocation ... that the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the sick are healed, the ignorant are enlightened, and the weak are protected.'"

Luther saw the connection between the cultural commission and the great commandments. He understood that God continues his creative work in this world through those who bear His image, explaining that: "God even milks the cows through those called to that work." In the 21st century it is business, blending the skills of diverse people, that brings the human race under God’s providential care.

In *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, Gene Edward Veith also cites Luther: "When we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He ... does it by means of the farmer [think Cargill, Inc. or Archer Daniels Midland] who planted and harvested the grain, the baker [who, while working for Sara Lee, Pepperidge Farm, or Flowers Bakeries] made the flour into bread, we might today add the truck drivers who hauled the produce, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the warehouse men, the wholesale distributors, the stock boys, the lady at the checkout counter. Also playing their part are the bankers, futures investors, advertisers, lawyers All of these were instrumental in enabling you to eat your morning bread."

Calvin affirmed much of Luther’s thinking. In his *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels*, he criticized the common interpretation of the Mary / Martha conflict found in Luke 10 ("Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?") He refused a dualistic understanding of that passage, writing: "We know that men were created for the express purpose of being employed in labor of various kinds, and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when every man applies diligently to his own calling, and endeavors to contribute to the general advantage."

Zwingli also concurred. In *Of the Education of the Youth*, he added: “...[it is] those who exercise themselves in righteousness that they may serve the Christian community, the common good, the state, and individuals that are ‘the most like to God.’”

Business Is How We Care for the Poor

Business is the means by which we rule and subdue the Earth. It is an instrument through which we love our neighbors. And it is, in an ultimate sense, the only solution to poverty.

At the most fundamental level, business provides wealth to share. Psalm 37: 25, 26 says, “I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread. All day long he is gracious and lends; and his descendants are a blessing.” When God’s people prosper, they’re generous and take care of the poor. There’s a related idea in Ephesians 4:28: “Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.” Paul seeks more than a transformed heart (let him steal no longer); he understands that for-profit work in the secular world is how we care for those in need.

But there’s far more to business, as an institution, than that. In his book, *Business as a Calling*, Catholic theologian **Michael Novak argues that “capitalism makes it possible for the vast majority of the poor to break out of the prison of poverty — to find opportunity — to discover full scope for their own personal economic initiative; and to rise into the middle class and higher.”** Those who live in democratic, capitalistic societies, Novak says, “walk the walk of the free — erect and purposeful and quick.”

The Scriptures remind us often of God’s concern for the poor. They command us to respect them, to have compassion for them, and to seek justice on their behalf. And that is surely one reason God has called His people to business, the only institution that can have a permanent effect on their poverty.

Some might argue that it is technology and science — and not business — that have improved life for the poor and made living conditions more bearable. But, Novak rhetorically asks, “Whence came the drive to advance technology — and not only through gaining knowledge about it, but by bringing it to markets that carry it to billions of individuals — if not from an enterprising, dynamic market system?” He pushes the rhetorical argument further, asking, “How many pharmaceuticals do you have in your home that were developed in communist countries or for that matter, in Third World countries?”

The former Soviet Union, Novak points out, trained more scientist and technical experts than any country in the history of the world. Yet they accomplished little for the greater good of mankind. Why? They had no moral or economic incentive. And even if one had existed, there was no market system — no vehicle — for moving knowledge out of the lab and into people’s lives.

Management guru Peter Drucker once said, “The greatest need in underdeveloped countries is people who build ... an effective organization of skilled and trained people exercising judgment and making responsible decisions.” The poor, Drucker was saying, need business if they’re to have a chance of changing their circumstances.

As we think about “kingdom work” and jobs that have value, it’s helpful to remember that only business — not the Church, not government, not ministry, nor non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—creates new wealth. And wealth is the only cure for poverty. We must, therefore, encourage believers to go into business, to create new products and wider

distribution (in obedience to the cultural commission) in order to create new wealth (good stewardship), which creates more jobs (loving our neighbor, caring for the poor). Adam Smith, the 18th century economist and philosopher, once said that new wealth is the road to “universal opulence,” which he defined as “the condition in which the real wages of workers keep growing over time, until the poor live at a level that in 1776 even kings and dukes did not enjoy.”

A realistic hope for a better (economic) future, Michael Novak says, “is essential to the poor” And that is why God’s people must build profitable businesses.

Transforming Business for the Kingdom

Suzy Schultz and Mako Fujimura are talented artists. Their Christian worldview informs and inspires their work, and both are critically acclaimed by Christians and non-Christians alike. Novelists Marilynne Robinson and Bret Lott are believers who sculpt words into beautiful stories that enrich millions of lives. Musicians from Bach to U2 have, in response to God’s call, created the world’s best music.

Christian artists add beauty and complexity to God’s creation, transforming the raw materials of paint, language, and sound into finished products that proclaim God’s glory.

Where are their business counterparts — the entrepreneurs and corporate executives who, with the same passion, reshape the world through business? And who, intentionally and for the sake of God’s glory, manage the power of free markets to make the world more productive? Where are the Christians who are propelling the world’s best corporations?

God’s people can, as agents of His redemptive plan, transform business, stripping it of selfish ambition and pursuing instead what’s best for their neighbors. Through business, God’s people can harness mankind’s creativity, and with it nurture His creation, developing products that make the world more satisfying. Through the economic power of commerce, Christians can make the world safer and healthier. The members of Christ’s Church, distributed in offices around the world, can transform greed into good stewardship, showing the world that business has a biblical responsibility to create new wealth and provide a fair return to investors (Matthew 25:14-28). But, with an eye toward the consummation of Christ’s kingdom, we also create wealth in order to create new and satisfying jobs, which offer the hope (and perhaps a glimpse) of a coming world where there is no poverty.

God has placed His people in business so that they can — in humility, and making full use of the talents and resources He’s given — serve customers, employees, suppliers, and the world at large, looking out for the interests of others and providing for their needs.

On their deathbeds, many Christians will regret that they didn’t love their neighbors, care for the poor, or advance Christ’s kingdom as they should have. They might therefore, with their final breath, gasp: “I wish I’d spent more time at the office.”

More Keller:

Everyone will be forgotten, nothing we do will make any difference, and all good endeavours, even the best, will come to naught.

Unless there is God. If the God of the Bible exists, and there is a True Reality beneath and behind this one, and this life is not the only life, then every good endeavour, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God's calling, can matter forever.

The material creation was made by God to be developed, cultivated, and cared for in an endless number of ways through human labor. But even the simplest of these ways is important. Without them all, human life cannot flourish.

If God's purpose for your job is that you serve the human community, then the way to serve God best is to do the job as well as it can be done....

...we are continuing God's work of forming, filling, and subduing. Whenever we bring order out of chaos, whenever we draw out creative potential, whenever we elaborate and "unfold" creation beyond where it was when we found it, we are following God's pattern of creative cultural development.

It (idolatry) means turning a good thing into an ultimate thing.

Two things we want so desperately, glory and relationship, can coexist only in God.

Our daily work can be a calling only if it is reconceived as God's assignment to serve others.

Community service has become a patch for morality. You can devote your life to community service and be a total schmuck."

...the gospel also gives us new power for work by supplying us with a new passion and a deeper kind of rest.

"all human work (especially excellent work), done by all people, as a channel of God's love for his world. They will be able to appreciate and rejoice in their own work, whether it is prestigious or not, as well as in the skillful work of all other people, whether they believe or not. So this biblical conception of work—as a vehicle for God's loving provision for the world...

So when we say that Christians work from a gospel worldview, it does not mean that they are constantly speaking about Christian teaching in their work. Some people think of the gospel as something we are principally to "look at" in our work. This would mean that Christian musicians should play Christian music, Christian writers should write stories about conversion, and Christian businessmen and -women should work for companies that make Christian-themed products and services for Christian customers. Yes, some Christians in those fields would sometimes do well to do those things, but it is a mistake to think that the Christian worldview is operating only when we are doing such overtly Christian activities. Instead, think of the gospel as a set of glasses through which you "look" at everything else in the world. Christian artists, when they do this faithfully, will not be completely beholden either to profit or to naked self-expression; and they will tell the widest variety of stories. Christians in business will see profit as only one of several bottom lines; and they will work passionately for any kind of enterprise that serves the common good. The Christian writer can constantly be showing the destructiveness of making something besides God into the central thing, even without mentioning God directly.

In short, work—and lots of it—is an indispensable component in a meaningful human life. It is a supreme gift from God and one of the main things that gives our lives purpose. But it must play its proper role, subservient to God. It must regularly give way not just to work stoppage for bodily repair but also to joyful reception of the world and of ordinary life.

Why do the Ten Commandments begin with a prohibition of idolatry? It is, Luther argued, because we never break the other commandments without breaking the first.

Every artifact of human culture is a positive response to God's general revelation and simultaneously a rebellious assertion against His sovereign rule over us.

Work done by non-Christians always contain some degree of God's common grace as well as the distortions of sin. Work done by Christians, even if it overtly names the name of Jesus is also to a significant degree distorted by sin...

Work is so foundational to our makeup that it is one of the few things we can take in significant doses without harm. Indeed, the Bible does not say we should work one day and rest six or that work and rest should be balanced evenly but directs us to the opposite ratio. Leisure and pleasure are great goods, but we can take only so much of them.

Freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones, those that fit with the realities of our own nature and those of the world.³² So the commandments of God in the Bible...

Nonetheless, Christians are equipped with an ethical compass and power of the gospel that can set us apart—sometimes sharply, sometimes subtly—from those around us. This is because biblical Christian faith gives us significant resources not present in other worldviews, which, if lived out, will differentiate believers in the workplace.

In her book *Creed or Chaos?*, Sayers addresses the traditional seven deadly sins, including acedia, which is often translated as "sloth." But as Sayers explains it, that is a misnomer, because laziness (the way we normally define sloth) is not the real nature of this condition. Acedia, she says, means a life driven by mere cost-benefit analysis of "what's in it for me." She writes, "Acedia is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing and only remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die.

The great danger is to always single out some aspect of God's good creation and identify it, rather than alien intrusion of sin, as the villain.

The foolish heart—blinded from reality because of its idols—does not learn from experience.

A biblical understanding of work energizes our desire to create value from the resources available to us. Recognizing the God who supplies our resources, and who gives us the privilege of joining in as cocultivators, helps us enter into our work with a relentless spirit of creativity.

[Look at] the chair you are lounging in. . . . Could you have made it for yourself? . . . How [would you] get, say, the wood? Go and fell a tree? But only after first making the tools for that, and putting together some kind of vehicle to haul the wood, and constructing a mill to do the lumber and roads to drive on from place to place? In short, a lifetime or two to make one chair! . . . If we . . . worked not forty but one-hundred-forty hours per week we couldn't make ourselves from scratch even a fraction of all the goods and services that we call our own. [Our] paycheck turns out to buy us the use of far more than we could possibly make for ourselves in the time it takes us to earn the check. . . . Work . . . yields far more in return upon our efforts than our particular jobs put in. . . .

To be a Christian in business, then, means much more than just being honest or not sleeping with your coworkers. It even means more than personal evangelism or holding a Bible study at the office. Rather, it means thinking out the implications of the gospel worldview and God's purposes for your whole work life—and for the whole of the organization under your influence.

To practice Sabbath is a disciplined and faithful way to remember that you are not the one who keeps the world running, who provides for your family, not even the one who keeps your work projects moving forward.

According to the Bible, wisdom is more than just obeying God's ethical norms; it is knowing the right thing to do in the 80 percent of life's situations in which the moral rules don't provide the clear answer.

Also, the Christian worldview has made foundational contributions to our own culture that may not be readily apparent. The deep background for our work, especially in the West—the rise of modern technology, the democratic ethos that makes modern capitalism thrive, the idea of inherent human freedom as the basis for economic freedom and the development of markets—is due largely to the cultural changes that Christianity has brought. Historian John Sommerville argues that Western society's most pervasive ideas, such as the idea that forgiveness and service are more important than saving face and revenge, have deeply biblical roots.¹⁶⁶ Many have argued, and I would agree, that the very rise of modern science could have occurred only in a society in which the biblical view of a sole, all-powerful, and personal Creator was prevalent.

Work is a major instrument of God's providence; it is how he sustains the human world.

Veith, showing how Luther's doctrine of vocation erased and reversed his monastic vows:

For Luther, vocation, like justification, is ultimately God's work. God gives us our daily bread through the vocations of the farmer, the miller, and the baker. God creates new human beings through the vocations of fathers and mothers. God protects us through lawful magistrates. Vocation is, first of all, about how God works through human beings. In His providential care and governing of His creation, God chooses to distribute His gifts by means of ordinary people exercising their talents, which themselves are gifts of God.

Thus, God heals by means of doctors, nurses, and other medical vocations. He makes our lives easier by means of inventors, scientists, and engineers. He creates beauty by means of artists, authors, and musicians. He gives us clothing, shelter, and other things we need by means of factory workers, construction contractors, and others who work with their hands. He cleans up after us by means of janitors and garbage collectors.

God thus looms behind everyone who provides us with the goods or services that we need. In one of Luther's many memorable lines, God milks the cows through the hands of the milkmaid. This means that all work and all workers deserve honor. Whereas the world might look down on milkmaids and garbage collectors, they actually bear the sacred presence of God, who works in and through them.

God created us to be dependent on others—meat processors, manufacturers, journalists, lawyers, bankers, teachers, parents—and, through them, we are ultimately dependent upon God Himself. Just as God is working through the vocation of others to bless us, He is working through us to bless others. In our vocations, we work side-by-side with God, as it were, taking part in His ceaseless creative activity and laboring with Him as He providentially cares for His creation. Today the word vocation has become no more than a synonym for "job." The theological term includes the work that we do, but it includes much more than that. God calls us to many different tasks and relationships. The unemployed still have vocations from God. Every

Christian has multiple vocations.

Luther sorted them out into four “estates,” or spheres of life that God has established: the church, the household, the state, and what he called “the common order of Christian love.” Every Christian has been “called” through the gospel into the life of faith (Romans 8:30), becoming a member of Christ’s body, the church. While God providentially works through nonbelievers as well as believers in their labors, “vocation,” strictly speaking, applies to Christians, those who hear themselves addressed in God’s Word. In response to that Word, Christians recognize their other callings as works of faith. But God also calls people to tasks in His church. Pastors speak rightly of being “called” into the ministry, whereupon God works through them to teach His Word, preside at His sacraments, and give spiritual care to His people. Laypeople too are called to do tasks in the local congregation, singing in the choir, serving on committees, serving meals, and in other ways blessing their fellow members. Being in a family is also a calling. God established marriage, and being a husband or a wife is a vocation. Being a father or a mother is also a vocation. So is being a son or a daughter. So are being a brother or sister, a nephew or uncle, a grandmother or grandfather. (Notice how one person holds multiple vocations within a family: A woman may be the wife of her husband, the mother of her children, the daughter of her mother, the sister of her brother, and more, with each vocation having its particular dimensions of service.)

For Luther the estate of the “household” includes both the family and the activities by which it supports itself. He had in mind the concept expressed in the Greek word *oikonomia*, the laws of the household, from which we derive our word economy. For Luther, in his day of family-based labor, economic life is connected with family life.

We also have vocations in the state. We were each born into a particular time, place, and society. The cultural context in which we find ourselves is thus part of the life that God has assigned us. We thus have responsibilities to our government and to our culture as a whole. Some Christians are called to positions of authority in the government. Americans have the unusual calling of being both subjects and rulers at the same time, since our democratic republic places the governing authorities themselves under the authority of the people who elect them. Christians thus have the vocation of citizenship, which means that politics, civic involvement, and cultural engagement are all realms of Christian service.

Our formal positions in the family, the workplace, the church, and the culture are not the only spheres of service to which God assigns us and to which He calls us. Journalists like to refer to themselves as “the fourth estate,” but Luther’s fourth estate is the “common order of Christian love.” This is the realm where people of different vocations interact informally. In Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite were on the way to serve in their vocations, but they ignored the man bleeding by the side of the road. In the ordinary course of everyday life and in our relationships with our friends and neighbors, God also calls us to service.

In stressing the spiritual significance of these so-called “secular” estates, Luther was challenging the Roman Catholic practice of reserving the terms vocation and calling for religious orders, to an individual’s calling from God to become a priest, a monk, or a nun. To enter into these “spiritual” offices required taking a vow of celibacy (thereby rejecting marriage and parenthood), poverty (thereby rejecting full participation in the economic life of the workplace), and obedience (which involved substituting the authority of the church for that of the state). The Reformers insisted that the Christian life requires not withdrawal from the world but rather engagement in the world. The Christian faith is to be lived out not primarily in “church work” but in vocation.

What this meant in practice is that the “spiritual disciplines” moved out of the monastery into secular life. Celibacy became faithfulness in marriage. Poverty became thrift and hard work. Obedience became submission to the law. Most importantly, prayer, meditation, and worship—while still central to every Christian’s vocation in the church—also moved into the family and the workplace.

Today even Protestant Christians have often slipped into the assumption that serving God is a

matter of “church work” or spiritual exercises. Churches set up programs that can take up every night of the week. Some Christians are so busy doing church activities, making evangelism calls, or going to Bible studies that they neglect their spouses and children. Some Christians are preoccupied with “the Lord’s work” while letting their marriages fall apart, ignoring the needs of their children, and otherwise sinning against the actual responsibilities to which God has called them.

But according to the doctrine of vocation, the church is the place where Christians meet every week to find the forgiveness of Christ, feed on God’s Word, and grow in their faith. Whereupon they are sent out into their vocations—to their spouses, children, jobs, and culture—for that faith to bear fruit.

Faith bears fruit in love (Galatians 5:6;

1 Timothy 1:5). The purpose of every vocation is to love and serve our neighbors.

God doesn’t need our good works, Luther said, but our neighbor does. Our relationship with Him is based completely on His work for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. But just as God is hidden in vocation, Christ is hidden in our neighbors. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers”—feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and imprisoned—“you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). We love and serve God in our vocations by loving and serving the actual human beings He places into our lives.

Every vocation has its particular neighbors. Members of a congregation are called to love and serve each other. In marriage, husbands are to love and serve their wives, and wives are to love and serve their husbands. Parents love and serve their children, who, in turn, love and serve their parents. Rulers love and serve their subjects. Workers love and serve their customers.

Certain vocations exercise authority. But authority itself is not just a matter of exercising power over others. “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,” said Jesus. “But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. . . . For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Of course, we often sin in and against vocation. Instead of serving, we want to be served. Instead of loving our neighbor, we often use our neighbor for our own selfish purposes.

Vocation clarifies moral issues. Mothers are called to love and serve their children, not abort them or abuse them. Doctors are called to heal their patients, not kill them. Leaders are called to love and serve those under their authority, not exploit and tyrannize them.

Some actions are sinful when done outside of vocation but good works when done within vocation. We have no calling from God that would authorize having sex with someone to whom we are not married. But within the vocation of marriage, sex is not only authorized, it becomes the means by which God creates a one-flesh union, engenders new life, and builds a family.

Vocation has to do with the priesthood of all believers. A priest is someone who performs a sacrifice. We no longer need sacrifices for our sins, since Christ, our great High Priest, offered Himself as our sacrifice once and for all (Hebrews 9:26). But, in light of that sacrifice, God calls us “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

Loving and serving involves an act of self-denial for the sake of someone else. That is, it involves a sacrifice. Again, Mark 10 says that rulers are to serve as Christ did, giving His life as a ransom. Today’s “Gentiles” not only seek to “lord it over” others, they are obsessed with self-fulfillment and self-assertion. Vocation focuses on self-sacrifice.

The Bible instructs wives to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. At the same time, though, the Bible instructs husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). The husband is not to receive the wife’s submission in domination or in “lording it over” her, since that was not how Christ loved the church. Rather, he is to emulate Christ precisely in “giving himself up” for his wife. Thus, both the wife and the husband are called to sacrifice themselves for each other. Both are presenting themselves as living sacrifices.

The father, coming home from work dead tired, has presented his body as a living sacrifice for

his family. So has the mother who drives her kids to soccer practice when she has many other things she would rather do. So has the worker who has put in long hours to do the best job possible for the company's customers.

Christ, who is in vocation and in the neighbor, takes up all of these sacrifices, small or great, into His sacrifice. And He loves and serves His creation by means of our love and service in our vocations.

In all our religious and ethical life," says Einar Billing in his classic work on vocation, *Our Calling*, "we are given to an incredible overestimation of the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary." We look for miracles, spectacular events, and mountain top experiences. Meanwhile, the spiritual significance of everyday life gets overlooked. Vocation, though, transfigures our ordinary, mundane existence, charging it with spiritual significance and with the very presence of God.

Luther said that changing a baby's diaper is a holy work. A child doing his chores is outperforming the Carthusian monks in works of holiness. By extension, we can see the office desk, the factory machinery, the computer screen—likewise the voting booth, the marriage bed, the dining room table—as altars upon which we exercise our royal priesthood.

Vocation is where sanctification happens, as Christians grow spiritually in good works and in their relationships. Vocation is where evangelism happens, as Christians teach their children and interact with nonbelievers. Vocation is where cultural influence happens, as Christians take their places and live out their faith in every niche of society.

Vocation changes the quality of what we do. An artist with a sense of vocation will create not just to express himself or to advance his career but to love and serve—not corrupt or ridicule—his audience. A businessman who sees his customers as the objects of his Christian love will serve them with his very best work.

From the outside, the economy has to do with the division of labor, individuals pursuing their own self-interests, laws of supply and demand, and other impersonal forces. And so it is, as part of God's created order. From the inside, however, the economy can become transfigured into a vast network of mutual dependence and mutual service, and economic activity can become an expression of love.

More Keller:

The great danger is to always single out some aspect of God's good creation and identify it, rather than the alien intrusion of sin, as the villain. Such an error conceives of the good-evil dichotomy as intrinsic to the creation itself... Something in the good creation is identified as [the source] of evil. In the course of history, this "something" has been variously identified as... The body and its passions (Plato and much of Greek philosophy), as culture in distinction from nature (Rousseau and Romanticism), as authority figures and society and family (psychodynamic psychology), as economic forces (Marx), as technology and management (Heidegger and existentialists)... As far as I can tell, the Bible is unique and it's rejection of all attempts to either demonize some part of creation as the root of our problems or to idolize some part of creation as the solution. All other religions, philosophies, and worldviews in one way or another fall into the trap of idolatry--of falling to keep creation and fall distinct. And this trap is an ever present danger for Christians [as well]...

Without an understanding of the gospel, we will be either naïvely utopian or cynically disillusioned. We will be demonizing something that isn't bad enough to explain the mess we are in; and we will be idolizing something that isn't powerful enough to get us out of it....

The gospel is the true story that God made a good world that was marred by sin and evil, but through Jesus Christ he redeemed it all at infinite cost to himself, so that someday he will return

to renew all creation; and also offering and death; and restore absolute peace, justice, and joy in the world forever. There are vast implications of this gospel worldview – about the character of God, the goodness of the material creation, the value of the human person, the fallenness of all people and all things, the primacy of love and grace, the importance of justice and truth, the hope of redemption – affect everything, and especially our work...

In the business animated by the gospel worldview, profit is simply one of many important bottom lines....

To be a Christian in business, then, means much more than just being honest or not sleeping with your coworkers. It even means more than personal evangelism or holding a Bible study at the office. Rather it means thinking out the implications of the gospel worldview...for yourself and the whole of the organization under your influence...

God is creator of the world, and our work mirrors his creative work when we create culture that conforms to his will and vision for human beings – when it matches up with the biblical story line. Yet theologians speak not only of God's creation but of his providence. God does not simply create; he also loves, cares for, and nurtures his creation. He feeds and protects all he has made. But how does his providential care reach us?... God's loving care comes to us largely through the labor of others. Work is a major instrument of God's providence; it is how he sustains the human world....

How Christians work with others should be marked by both humble cooperation and respectful provocation. An understanding of common grace, as well as an experience of God's pardoning grace in Christ, should lead us to freely and humbly work with others who may not share our faith but can be used greatly by God to accomplish enormous good. At the same time, an understanding of the gospel worldview means we should at times respectfully pursue a different path or winsomely point out how our Christian faith gives us powerful resources and guidance for what we are doing....

Love occupies a supreme place in the Christian imagination. As Jesus says, to be fully human boils down to loving God and loving our neighbor. Everything else – our accomplishments, our causes, our identity, and our feelings – is a distant second. Of course this understanding of the nature of reality will have an extensive impact on how we do our work...

We all work for an audience, whether we are aware of it or not. Some perform to please parents, others impress peers, others to win over superiors, while many do what they do strictly to live up to their own standards. All of these audiences are inadequate. Working for them alone will lead to overwork or underwork – sometimes a mixture of the two, based on who is watching. But Christians look to an audience of One, our loving Father, and that gives us both accountability and joy in our work....

Theological and ethical reflection on our field of work is not easy. It is easier by far to focus on our job and merely seek to work with personal integrity, skill, and a joyful heart. That is indeed a major part of what it means to be a Christian and do faithful work, but that is not all it takes. Christians are to think persistently and deeply about the shape of work in their field and whether it accords as well as possible with human well-being and with justice....

Sabbath is therefore a declaration of our freedom. It means that you are not a slave – to your cultures expectations, your families hopes, your medical schools demands, not even your own insecurities. It is important that you learn to speak this truth to yourself with a note of triumph – otherwise you will feel guilty for taking time off, or you will be unable to truly unplug....

When your heart comes to hope in Christ and the future he has guaranteed – when you are carrying his easy yoke – you find the power to work with a free heart. You can gladly accept whatever level of success and accomplishment God gives you in your vocation, because he has called you to it. You can work with passion and rest, knowing that ultimately the deepest desires of your heart – including your specific aspirations for your earthly work – will be fulfilled when you reach your true country, the new heavens and new earth.

Christopher Wright on work and redeemed creation:

A common Christian assumption is that all that happens here on earth is nothing more than temporary and transient. Life here is nothing more than the vestibule for eternity, so it doesn't really matter very much. To this negative comparison between heaven and earth is added the idea, drawn from a mistaken interpretation of 2 Peter 2, that we are headed toward total obliteration of the earth and indeed of all physical creation. With such a prospect, what eternal value can we possibly attach to the work we do in the world's marketplace here and now?¹ But the Bible presents a very different prospect. God plans to redeem all that he has made because he "loves all he has made" (Ps. 145), including all that we have made with what God first made—that is, our use of creation within the great cultural mandate. Of course, all that we have made is tainted and twisted by our sinful, fallen human nature. And all that flows from that source will have to be purged and purified by God. But that is exactly the picture we have in both the Old and New Testaments. It is a vision of redemption, not of obliteration.

Isaiah 65:17-25 is a glorious portrayal of the new creation—a new heavens and a new earth. It looks forward to human life in which we are no longer subject to weariness and decay; in which there will be fulfilment in family and work; in which the curses of frustration and injustice will be gone forever; in which there will be close and joyful fellowship with God; and in which there will be environmental harmony and safety. The whole of human life—private, family, and public—will be redeemed and restored to God-glorifying productiveness.

The New Testament carries this vision forward in the light of the redemption achieved by Christ through the cross and especially in the light of the resurrection. Paul comprehensively and repeatedly includes "all things," not only in what God created through Christ, but also in what he plans to redeem through Christ.

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col. 1:16-20)

Because of that plan of redemption, the whole of creation can look forward to the future.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Rom. 8:19-21)

Even the text often used to speak of the destruction of the cosmos (when in fact, in my view, it is actually portraying redemptive purging) immediately goes on to the expectation of a justice-filled new creation: "In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13).

And the final vision of the whole Bible is not of us escaping from the world to some ethereal paradise, but rather of God coming down to live with us once again in a purged and restored creation, in which all the fruit of human civilization will be brought into the city of God.

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev. 21:24-27)

The "splendor," "glory," and "honor" of kings and nations is the combined product of generations of human beings whose lives and efforts will have generated the vast store of human cultures and civilizations. In other words, what will be brought into the great city of God in the new creation will be the vast accumulated output of human work through the ages. All this will be purged, redeemed, and laid at the feet of Christ, for the enhancement of the life of eternity in the new creation. Does that not transform our perspective on a Monday morning?

All human history, then, which takes place in the marketplace of human public interaction, will be redeemed and fulfilled in the new creation, not just abandoned or destroyed. All human work, then, in that marketplace, has its own value and eternal significance, not just because of our understanding of creation and the mandate it laid upon us, but also because of the new creation and the eschatological hope it sets before us. With such a hope, we can heartily follow Paul's exhortation, knowing that "the work of the Lord" does not mean just "religious" work but any work done for as unto the Lord, which includes even the manual labor of slaves: "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Bob Lupton on work, job creation and mercy ministry (<http://www.fcsministries.org/blog/by-bob-lupton/>):

Forty years of serving in the inner-city has given me at least one clear insight: the poor will not emerge from poverty unless they have decent jobs. Service is important, to be sure. But service will not move the poverty needle. Wealth creation is the well-spring from which all economic life flows. It is the wealth-creators who take the business risks that ultimately create jobs. Our non-profit ministry has certainly provided employment for many people, but like every other non-profit, we would not exist without the donations of up-stream, for-profit wealth producers. We exist on the "wealth-transfer" side of the ledger. The "wealth-creation" side is where the economic life originates.

Wealth creation is a gift of the Creator – a spiritual gift. *But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.* ([Deuteronomy 8:18](#)) I have often heard sermons on the seductiveness of wealth and the corrupting influence of mammon, but I have yet to hear a sermon affirming the spiritual gift of wealth-creation. And yet it is this very gift that enables our society to flourish. And it is this gift that holds the key to the alleviation of poverty.

Doug Wilson:

The Latin verb that means "to call" is *vocare*, from which we get our word "vocation," *calling*. This is not to disparage the importance of a call to the mission field, or the ministry—of course not. **But all Christians are called, and are called to labor self-consciously and faithfully in their calling, whether it is law, real estate, carpentry, medicine, brick-laying, shop-keeping, changing diapers, writing novels or songs, digging latrines, or planting trees. All of God is in all of it.**

We must fix it in our minds that God is in everything, and works through everything. This means that Christ is hidden in the artisan, and Christ is hidden in the customer. Christ is

hidden in the one behind the counter, and He is hidden in the one in front of the counter. He is hidden in the dentist, and hidden in the patient in the chair.

First, God provides for us through means. We benefit from the work of the farmer, the fertilizer salesman, the trucker, the grocery store clerk, the dairyman, and when we bow our heads to thank God for the breakfast cereal, we are thanking Him for His work *in all of these people*, whether they know Him or not. We receive from God through the work of others. We acknowledge this when we pray for our daily bread (Matt. 6:11). We know that God is working in and through all things (Rom. 8:28), and this includes countless daily kindnesses.

Second, Christ receives from us as we work in each of our vocations. God gratefully *receives* from us through the work we do for others. "Lord, when did I ever give you hot French fries when you were famished?" "Don't you remember? It was that time at the drive-through window." This is the other side of vocation. God keeps track of every cup of cold water (Matt. 10:42), and He reckons *everything* we do for others as done to Him (Matt. 25: 34-46).

This means that Christ is hidden in our vocation, and He is hidden in our neighbor. We are to discover Him there with the eye of faith. We were created for work (Gen. 2:15), and called to work diligently six days out of seven (Ex. 20:9-11). We are to render all our work to Christ, and not just to the boss when he is present. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23). And we are to receive all the work done for us as a gift from Jesus Himself (Matt. 6:11). The mother gives milk to the child, but who fills her breasts with milk in the first place? When the farmer first planted the wheat, he did not know he was making milk for the baby.

All work is full of glory but it is a glory apprehended by faith. This faith does not necessarily mean that a Christian carpenter pounds nails differently than an unregenerate carpenter. But it *does* mean that he should understand the meaning of what he does, and, over time, this should result in differences in craft competence.

Neither should this doctrine be taken as an excuse to become a one-trick pony. Your vocation is varied, and extends to every aspect of your life. This means that you are not only called to be, say, a software designer, but you are also called to be a son, a student, a husband, a brother, a citizen, a churchman, and a putter of model ships into bottles. Incidentally, parents, this means that education should be equipping your child for his or her vocation in this *broad* sense, not the narrow sense. And this, incidentally, is the meaning of a liberal arts education.

Vocation is not a talisman against worldly difficulties. Americans love "three steps to automatic success," but that is not what the Scriptures promise. Diligence in this way of thinking will *generally* result in long term satisfaction with what you do—instead of the constant flitting from job to job that is so common in our day—but don't think that God-given changes are a sign that something is necessarily wrong. And don't think that vocation means that you will just float through your work day—the diapers can really stink, the customers can really be unreasonably irate, the promised shipments really can be subject to exasperating delays. Rain falls on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). And Christ is in all.

Remember the message on living in the will of God: what is His revealed will for all Christians, and, after that, what are your abilities, your opportunities, and your desires. When all that lines up, then go for it. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9). And as you go, remember this: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. 22:29). This is not carnal ambition—it is what enables us to see *death and resurrection* in our daily callings.

A message on this subject would be grossly deficient if we did not quote Luther at some point. His wonderful grasp of vocation, the most heavenly and *earthy* of truths, was remarkable. "God Himself milks the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid." And amen.

Some good essays and articles:

<https://rabbitroom.com/2015/05/some-thoughts-on-vocation/>

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/1999/06/calvin-and-the-christian-calling>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-most-important-reason-we-work>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-purpose-of-work>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-dont-have-to-get-elected-or-make-movies-to-change-culture>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-ways-god-s-at-work-in-you-at-work>

Check out Ian Hart's fine series:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1995-1_035.pdf

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1995-2_121.pdf

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1995-3_195.pdf

Owen Strachan:

Every spreadsheet, every counseling session, every diaper changed, every car repaired is a little tiny blow to the kingdom of darkness.

Every Christian of every calling has the opportunity to live doxologically, and give God maximal glory (1 Cor 10:31). All of us.

C. S Lewis:

Meanwhile the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning. A cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world...It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

Again, Lewis, recognizing skill in vocation:

Nearly everything that is very well done looks easy to do, especially if you have never tried it yourself.

More wisdom from Lewis:

Don't be too easily convinced that God really wants you to do all sorts of work you needn't do. Each must do his duty 'in that state of life to which God has called him.' Remember that a belief in the virtues of doing for doing's sake is characteristically feminine, characteristically American, and characteristically modern: so that three veils may divide you from the correct view! There can be intemperance in work just as in drink. What feels like zeal may be only fidgets or even the flattering of one's self-importance. As MacDonald says, 'In holy things may be unholy greed!' And by doing what 'one's station and its duties' does not demand, one can make oneself less fit for the duties it does demand and so commit some injustice. Just you give Mary a chance as well as Martha!

Gerald O. Forde on the Lutheran view of vocation:

Precisely because the totality of the gift, the new being [the one justified by faith] knows that there is nothing to do to gain heaven. Thus the Christian is called to the tasks of daily life in this world, for the time being. Students, for instance, are sometimes very pious and idealistic about 'doing something,' and so get caught up in this or that movement 'for good.' It never seems to dawn on them that perhaps for the time being, at least, their calling is simply to be a good student! It is not particularly in acts of piety that we are sanctified, but in our call to live and act as Christians..

Dorothy L. Sayers, from *Creed or Chaos*:

How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables....

Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly – but what use it all that if in the very centre of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made Heaven and earth....

Yet in Her own buildings, in Her own ecclesiastical art and music, in Her hymns and prayers, in Her sermons and in Her little books of devotion, the Church will tolerate, or permit a pious intention to excuse work so ugly, so pretentious, so tawdry and twaddling, so insincere and insipid, so bad as to shock and horrify any decent craftsman....

God is not served by technical incompetence; and incompetence and untruth always result when the secular vocation is treated as a thing alien to religion.

Luther said, "The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

You could rework it for physicians: The doctor helping patients is doing the will of God, not because he prays or evangelizes while on the job (though he may) but because God loves healthy bodies. And you could rework it for every other legitimate vocation.

Martin Luther was once approached by a man who enthusiastically announced that he'd recently become a Christian. Wanting desperately to serve the Lord, he asked Luther, "What should I do now?" As if to say, should he become a minister or perhaps a traveling evangelist?

Luther asked him, "What is your work now?"

"I'm a shoemaker."

Much to the cobbler's surprise, Luther replied, "Then make a good shoe and sell it at a fair price."

In becoming Christians, we don't need to retreat from the vocational calling we already have. Nor do we need to justify that calling, whatever it is, in terms of its "spiritual" value or evangelistic usefulness. We simply exercise whatever our calling is with new God-glorifying motives, goals, and standards—and with a renewed commitment to performing our calling with greater excellence and higher objectives.

As we do this, we fulfill our God-given mandate to reform, to beautify, our various "stations" for God's glory.

Anonymous:

If you want your dreams to come true, don't oversleep.

You can't achieve a million dollar dream with a minimum wage work ethic.