

FAITH & WORK

1. What are the most significant work-related challenges or questions that should be addressed by pastors and/or theologians in order to help Christians think more Christianly about the work they do for a living?

Plumber friend of mine who has for years struggled with the purpose of his life, feeling as if his work is second-best in the Kingdom order of priorities.

I have heard work related to “kingdom” in several different ways:

1. My work earns income supporting me in doing real ministry on the side.
2. My work earns income which I use to support others in “kingdom” causes.
3. In my work I create an environment in which evangelism/discipleship can flourish.
4. In my work I reflect a Christ-centered life as “light” and “salt.”
5. In my work I serve others (Luther).
6. In my work I fulfill, in part, what God created me for thus bringing glory to him. We were created to be created, designed to design... * see DelHousey quote below

The Cultural Mandate: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Genesis 1:28

The Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations...” Matthew 28:19

Our vocation/calling is the same;

Our offices and/or “stations” are as varied as people and situations.

- Eric Liddell, the Scottish runner, is famous for once saying “**God made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.**” Apparently, when Liddell competed, He could sense God’s happiness about what he was doing. And yet, the pleasure that he sensed was not so much in the fact that he was able to run fast but rather that he was fulfilling the purpose for which God had created him. In other words, the source of the pleasure for his Maker was in his child being the very man that God had intended him to be. Hence, the divine pleasure was not in watching his child perform but in seeing him fulfill his superintended calling. <http://kentdelhousaye.com/2009/08/19/is-god-pleased-with-you/>

Another way of framing this question is: If you had the chance to ask God one direct, practical question about work (or your work), what would that be?

2. How would you describe the relationship between your Christian faith and the work you do for a living? For example, is there “a gap,” “harmony,” tension,” or . . . use whatever terms you would like to describe this relationship.
 - A. If you do not experience any particular problems in this relationship, who or what has proven to be most helpful to you in connecting your Christian faith and your work?

[God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life \(Focal Point Series\) by Gene Edward Veith](#)

[Barbara Brown Taylor “Vocation”](#)

[Various website articles](#)

[Veith: “Christianity and Culture: God’s double Sovereignty”](#)

http://www.issuesetarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/veith2.htm

- B. If you do experience some problems in the relationship between faith and work, what is the most difficult aspect? What might the church do to help address this problem?

[Teach a biblical doctrine of work.](#)

- C. What faith-related or faith-impacting challenges do you face that seem unique to the type of work you do or the level of your responsibility?

HOLISTIC & INTEGRATED LIVING

2. What are your primary motivations, value-connections, or sense of purpose for the work that you do? How, if at all, have those changed over time?

[Much less enamored of accomplishments than in simply living in the presence of God and in his world.](#)

4. Most of us value want to live lives that are balanced and integrated. That is, we want lives that include a healthy combination of work, family, service, recreation, and the like. And, we want to live lives in which our energies and actions are spent in ways that are consistent with our beliefs and values. As you consider these domains of life, what, if any, challenges do you experience with regard to this type of balance and integration, particularly as it relates to work? What advice regarding this would you give to young persons as they formulate and pursue their path in life?

It's not as hard as some want to make it!

If we see work not as the antithesis of family, service, etc but as consistent with, then much of the problem goes away.

Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Micah 6:8 "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Quotes:

Calvin: Institutes III X 6 "No task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight."

Althaus summarises Luther's view in this way: Work in our vocation or station is our appropriate service to God. Since God has commanded this work, it certainly pleases him. As a result Luther rejects any piety that tries to find especially "holy" works ... Let each "fulfill his duties in his vocation" - then he will have enough and more than enough to do ...

If we take that requirement seriously we have neither time, nor space, nor energy to seek out special works for ourselves. There is no special outward characteristic that distinguishes the Christian's activity in his vocation from that of other men...What he does is Christian because he does it in the certainty that God has called him to serve his neighbour and that God is pleased with what he is doing. (Althaus 1972: 39-40)

Luther's conception of calling is one of duty rather than position. He understands calling as a call to service that comes to a Christian within the midst of their sphere of work. Hence vocation is primarily a summons to work for a neighbour's sake within one's estate. In this sense a vocation is distinguished from a person's work; 'the eyes of God regard not works but our obedience in them. As a result, vocation requires a right use of one's office. A person who is not a Christian cannot have a calling. They lack the faith which alone is pleasing to God. And some types of work are not part of God's calling. Luther lists a number of sinful orders like robbery, usury and prostitution. Each of these is a false 'estate' in which no Christian with sustained faith and love can remain. A person must avoid estates which are sinful.

According to Luther, vocation is not confined to occupation, but also includes domestic roles and any action that concerns the world or a person's relationship with their neighbour. There is nothing which falls into a private sphere lying outside of estate, office or vocation. It is clear that every Christian occupies a number of different offices at the same time. Also vocation has nothing to do with salvation. Faith in God and willingness to serve one's neighbour constitute an organic unity. Salvation comes only through faith. Vocation is not the Gospel and does not give us heaven. Luther is most concerned that people should not place ultimate confidence in the work of their own hands. There is a marked difference between the certainty that our work matters to God and is part of Christian discipleship and the certainty of our salvation which only the Gospel can give. Luther separates the heavenly and earthly (eternal and temporal) realms so that work is not over-valued as a means of salvation or eternal identity, significance or status. While Luther speaks about God's continuing work of creation through a person's work in their various estates, he also makes plain that this only refers to a person's co-operation in response to God's initiative in the earthly realm (Wingren 1958: 17-18).

"Vocation"

By Barbara Brown Taylor

Originally published in [The Preaching Life](#) 1993

"What many Christians are missing in their lives is a sense of vocation. The word itself means a call or summons, so that having a vocation means more than having a job. It means answering a specific call; it means doing what one is meant to do. In religious language, it means participating in the work of God, something that few lay people believe they do. Immersed in

the corporate worlds of business and finance, and in the domestic worlds of household and family, it is hard for them to see how their lives have anything to do with the life of God... Somewhere along the way we have misplaced the ancient vision of the church as a priestly people – set apart for ministry in baptism, confirmed and strengthened in worship, made manifest in service to the world. That vision is a foreign one to many church members, who have learned from colloquial usage that minister’ means the ordained person in a congregation, while ‘lay person’ means someone who does not engage in full-time ministry... Language like that turns clergy into purveyors of religion and lay people into consumers who shop around for the church that offers them the best product.” 23-24

Finding out what God expects is not very attractive to many because they are already so busy. “No one has ever introduced (them) to the idea that ministry might involved being just who (they) already are and doing just what (they) already do, with one difference: namely, that (they) understand (themselves) to be God’s people in and for the world.” 24

Luther attacked this clergy-laity dichotomy. “He made careful distinction between a Christian’s vocation and a Christian’s office, suggesting that our offices are what we do for a living – teacher, shopkeeper, homemaker, priest – and that no one of them is any dearer to the heart of God than another. In our offices we exercise the diversity of our gifts, playing our parts in the ongoing life of the world. Our offices are the ‘texts’ of our lives, to use a dramatic term, but the ‘subtext’ is the common vocation to which we are all called at baptism. Whatever our individual offices in the world, our mutual vocation is to serve God through them.” 25

In terms of our “vocation” then, our “ordination” is our baptism. It is then that we are “set apart as God’s people to share Christ’s ministry, whether or not we ever wear clerical collars around our necks.” 26

“To believe in one’s own priesthood is to see the extraordinary dimensions of an ordinary life, to see the hand of God at work in the world and to see

one's own hands as necessary to that work. Whether those hands are diapering an infant, assembling an automobile or balancing a corporate account, they are God's hands, claimed by God at baptism for the accomplishment of God's will on earth." 26

What does a "priest" do? (Remember the author is using the term here to refer to our "vocation" not our office.) "The first thing to say is that a priest is a representative person – a parson – who walks the shifting boundary between heaven and earth, representing God to humankind, representing humankind to God, and serving each in the other's name. It is not possible to exercise such priesthood without participating in Christ's own, which means there are not entrepreneurs in ministry, only partners. Pursuing that vocation, priests are likely to wear a hundred different hats – social worker, chauffeur, cook, financial advisor, community organizer, babysitter, philanthropist, marriage counselor, cheerleader, friend – but whatever hat they happen to be wearing at the time, priests remember that they wear it as God's person, for God's sake, in God's name." 27

Gene Edward Veith

https://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/WRHC/057_God%20at%20Work.PDF

Luther identified four types of callings that every Christian has: As a member of the church, as a member of a family, as someone who works, and as a citizen of a community.

The *Small Catechism* includes a "Table of Duties," which consists of Scriptural direction for the various vocations. (Technically, only a Christian—who has been "called" by the Gospel—has a 'vocation.' Luther uses other terms—"office," 'estates," "stations"—for positions held by non-Christians, through whom God also can work.) As one reads the "Table of Duties," it is evident that one person can hold a number of different vocations at once. A man might be both a husband and a father, a master (to his employees) and a servant (to his boss). He is subject to the governing authorities and, possibly, a leader in his church. In each case, God's Word gives direction for how we should live out our callings.

With the doctrine of vocation, everyday life is transfigured. We realize that the way to serve God is not by some extraordinary act of mystical devotion, but by serving our neighbors in the daily circumstances of life—in our families, our jobs, our church and our involvement in the community. With the doctrine of vocation, ordinary relationships, the 9-to-5 routine, taking care of the kids, the work-a-

day world—the way we spend most hours of the day—become charged with the presence of God.