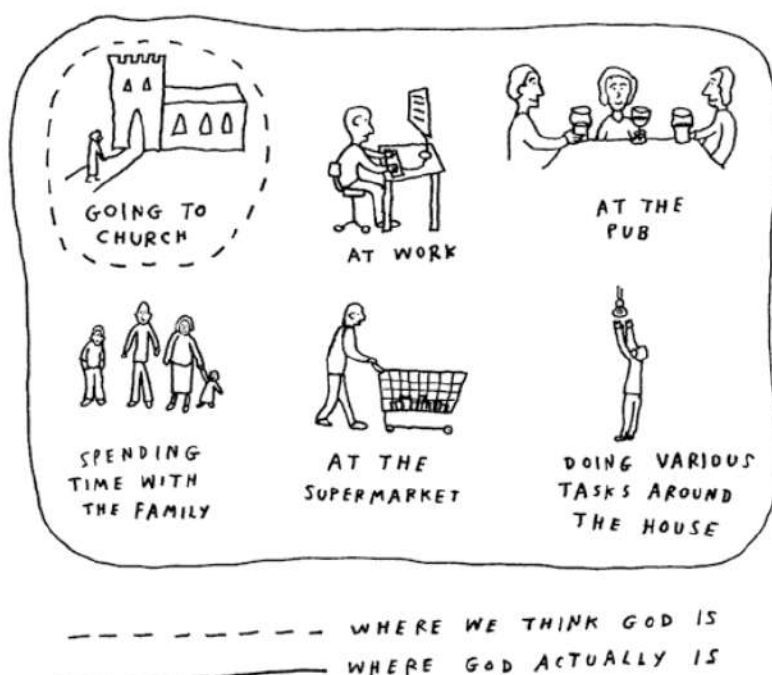


WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP: JOINING IN WITH THE SPIRIT



Session 2: Joining in with the Spirit in all of life.

What is our mission?

What might discourage us from seeing our daily work as part of God's mission?

Why might we struggle with what spirituality means?

Why might we struggle with our ultimate destiny?

Why might we struggle with the meaning of work?

What was the original task God gave us?

What is going to happen to the earth and our daily work?

How does God's mission include helping us recover our original task?

What happens to the fruit of our work when God renews all things?

Are some things sacred and some things secular?

Is work a blessing or a curse?

What is my calling and how do I know it?

How do I celebrate ordinary, everyday things well?

How can the Good News transform daily life and work?

How can my church reinforce the value of everyday faith in God's mission?

What is our mission?



We have started to see how vast God's mission is. God is working to "bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ....the re-creation of the world, when the Son of Man will rule gloriously." God is looking to "restore all things". (Acts 3:21)

Our calling as disciples is to do what the one we follow did, in the way that He did it. It is not that the church has a mission, but that 'the mission of God has a church'.

As we shall see, joining in with this mission helps us to be fully the people we are created to be. It can also have a deep social impact because God's mission involves reversing of all the evil consequences of sin, against both God and neighbour.

At the heart of Birmingham is a story of someone who joined in with the mission of God in such a way that it touched every aspect of his life and has left a legacy of what society might look like when God's reign - His kingdom - is experienced.

George Cadbury, a Quaker, set up a business in 1873 with his brother Richard. He was a bit of an eccentric - passionate about sport - football, cricket, tennis, swimming and golf. He loved early-morning cold baths and swimming in freezing cold rivers.

But George was not just concerned about making a profit, but saw the way in which he did it as an expression of God's kingdom on earth. One of his chief aims was the happiness and well-being of his employees.

What was it like to work in the Cadbury chocolate factory? Well, each day began with Bible readings and prayers for all. The working day was considerably shorter than many other factories at the time.

George and Richard believed in the balance of work and rest and they introduced half days on Saturdays and bank holiday closing. In 1878 when the factory became too small, they decided to build a factory in the country and named it Bournville.



On this site they provided football and cricket fields, a huge playground for children, even an open-air swimming pool. They built schools, hospitals, and introduced a pension scheme which they started at their own expense.

George would often walk into the factory in the afternoon and tell the workers to knock off for a few hours so they could play cricket. They made sure each person had their own garden planted trees along the wide roads.

On his estate he had a special building created and each year thousands of deprived children found in its grounds every delight that could appeal to them - swings and cricket, races and games and above all the open air swimming pool.

When George died in 1922, his funeral was attended by over 16,000 people. His chocolate factory was a signpost of the kingdom of God.

In such a complex world, it is easy to see why we might struggle to connect our everyday lives, at home or work (paid or voluntary), with the mission of God.



There may be issues which we find it hard to work through. Or we might find it hard to juggle all the competing demands work, family, or church place upon us. We might see work as demeaning or oppressive – a distraction from God.

We might not see how the different parts of our lives can fit together. Being part of a church community can feel like welcome 'time-off' from the demands of our daily lives. No doubt George Cadbury faced many pressures. But it is equally true that his discipleship led him to join with the Spirit in every area of his life.

This session is designed to inspire us with the big picture, and some simple ideas, about how we can serve as disciples wherever we are, and with whatever issues we face.

In the book 'Holy Habits' Andrew Roberts tells the story of Shona who "...over the years has introduced hundreds of children to Jesus. She has taught them to pray, shared biblical stories with them, introduced them to Christian worship and has engaged them in Kingdom activities including the support of Fairtrade and providing gifts for other children by filling shoe boxes with toys.

All at the same time as equipping the children with the foundational learning skills that they need to flourish, and being a listening, prayerful support to colleagues struggling with illness and bereavement.

"Shona is not ordained or employed by the church. She is a primary school teacher faithfully doing her best to follow Jesus and bring transformation to the lives of the children she serves and the community in which the school is set. All at the same time as equipping their children with the learning skills necessary for life."



What might discourage us from seeing our daily work as part of God's mission?



As much as we might warm to the vision in these stories, it is common for Christians to feel a disconnect between our daily lives and our discipleship.

We can grow up with the sense that certain activities matter less to God. Decades ago, Dorothy Sayers wrote, "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."

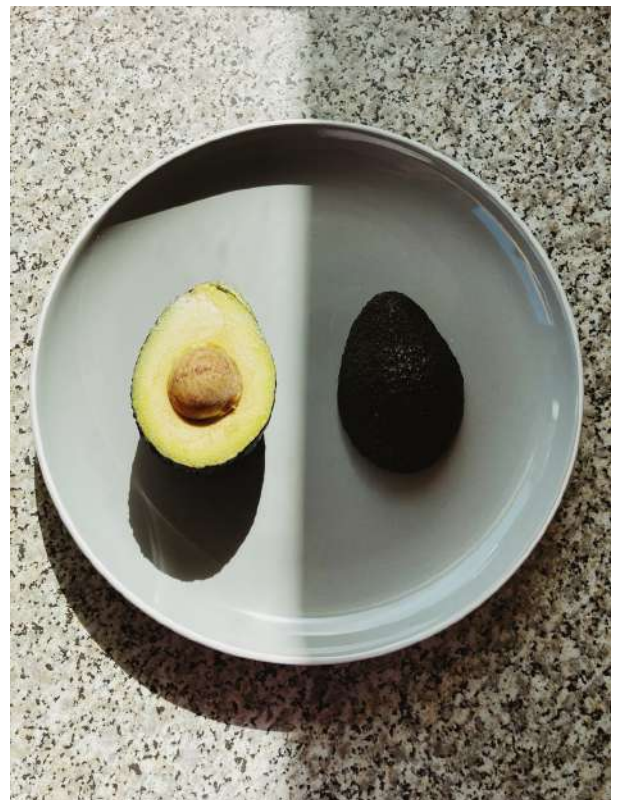
Or we can absorb the idea that certain callings are more acceptable expressions of discipleship. On Desert Island Discs Sister Wendy Beckett was asked, "When did you first decide you wanted to be a nun?" She replied, "I was a baby. It was the only thing I wanted because I didn't know there were other ways to love God completely. I now know of course that you can be a bus conductress or a television person and love God completely."

This can lead to us having a split view of life and God's mission. Jim meets the vicar at the back of church. "That was a very nice sermon, vicar, very comforting. And now I'm going to step out into the real world." The vicar bristles and thinks, "I had thought we were in the real world. The world that belongs to God – every square inch of it – and in which Jesus has come to bring his rule."

Jim has a split worldview. He has one way of looking at things in church, but as soon as he steps into his workplace, he's operating by a different set of assumptions. He has a different framework of basic belief about things which govern his business dealings.

In fact, which govern most of the rest of his life. He splits life up into 'sacred' and 'secular'. As churches, we can reinforce this sacred/secular split-living.

Jean is discouraged. She's an athlete, who could go far. But people at her local church have put on a discipleship course and a few prayer meetings at the same time as her hurdle practice. What should she do? Her fellow Christians are encouraging but make her feel that the meetings should come first. That if she really wants to worship, she should do it in the meeting room, and not on the race track.



When a teacher says, "I do Sunday school for one hour a week, and my church get me up to the front and pray for me. I teach 30 children for 39 hours a week and no one ever mentions it in church," we see this split-living and thinking.

We see it in the phrase "Full time Christian Worker" when it is only applied to those working in churches.

We see it in the way that people who have enormous skills in their working lives may be unable to transfer those skills into the church area of life.

Or in the lack of a weighty Christian presence in the arts, politics, music, academia or business.

Or when we give money to someone going to preach the gospel in Transylvania, but not to support a struggling Christian artist who seeks to bring the yeast of the kingdom into the world of art.

In terms of joining in with God's mission, Mark Greene says this is the decisive issue:

“

The UK will never be reached until we create open, authentic, learning and praying communities that are focused on making whole life disciples who take the opportunities to show and share the gospel wherever they relate to people in their daily lives.”

As we shall see, the roots of this disconnection are centuries old. More recently the Church of England has set up reports and projects called 'Setting God's People Free' and 'Everyday Faith' in order to address this for our generation. The report aims for two things:

Equipping all people to find and follow God confidently in every part of life, and

Recognising the gifts and callings of all people, whether ordained or not, and encouraging all people to use these skills for the good of God's Kingdom.



**Setting God's
People Free
for... Monday
to Saturday**



 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Why might we struggle with what spirituality means?



Simeon Stylites was a monk who built a column six feet high in the Syrian desert in the fifth century AD and lived on it for several years.

However, he became rather ashamed of the small column and after a determined search he found a 60 foot pillar situated thirty miles from Antioch in a sun-scorched wilderness.

This pillar was perfect; it was three feet across with a railing to prevent him from falling off in his sleep. On this perch Simeon lived uninterrupted for thirty years, exposed to rain and sun and hail. A ladder enabled his disciples to take him food and remove his waste.

He bound himself to the column by a rope; the rope became embedded in his flesh, which putrified around it, and stank, and teemed with worms. Simeon picked up the worms that fell from his sores, and replaced them there, saying to them, "Eat what God has given you".

Simeon lived on this pillar for thirty seven years in every extreme of weather, praying and posturing or standing with arms outstretched in the form of a cross for as long as eight hours at a time.

Simeon's view of the world and what it means to be "spiritual" affected his whole approach to life. He believed that the world, and therefore his body, was essentially evil – a corrupted creation in need of redemption.

The purest form of discipleship was therefore to be removed from the earth (literally 60 feet above it!) in order to be closer to God and await rescue from matter.

If you had asked him what a Christian approach to art, education, politics, food, sexuality, business was, you know, all those things God has created – he would probably have replied, "They are at worst essentially evil, and at best distractions from the real business of life, which is following God alone."



While he might be an extreme example, he illustrates what has been a common struggle in discipleship – the relationship between the soul and body, between sacred and secular.

It is common among religions to see the body as something to 'escape from'. Christians have been influenced to see life this way in part by thinkers such as Plato, for whom "the body is a source of endless trouble...if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body..."

The more we can be freed from 'worldly' concerns, the more truly 'spiritual' we will be. If we are influenced by this in any way, it is easy to see why this would lead to an understanding of some **areas of life being more set apart for God than others**, some **callings being more sacred than others**, and why some things which seem more "worldly" are distractions for discipleship, rather than part of God's mission.

Why might we struggle with our ultimate destiny?

The path you take through life is shaped by where you think your destination is. A common misunderstanding is the belief that ultimately the earth will no longer exist, and instead our souls (without our bodies) will go to be in a place called heaven when we die.

The main aim of life becomes preparing for heaven and winning souls for God. The earth is simply the temporary stage on which this is played out. If we believe this it is easy to see why we might feel that much of what we do now is at best a distraction, and at worst wasting our time.

There will be two areas of life – the real and eternal one of church and worship, and the ultimately pointless one of everyday life – work, politics, rest, entertainment, football, business, art, sexuality.

In this scenario while we seek to be a disciple in the church sphere as soon as we step outside of that we are not sure what it is God really wants us to be doing with this temporary life.

It might also mean that people who hold fantastic responsibilities and have major talents outside of the church sphere of life won't really feel encouraged to use their gifts which they use the rest of the week within the context of the church sphere of life.



Why might we struggle with the meaning of work?

The first mark of mission is to “proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom” and the fourth to “seek to transform unjust structures of society”.

But operating as a Christian disciple in a society and culture which might not share some of our values presents challenges in how or if it is appropriate to display our faith in a public sense.

If we are in a position of influence, we might struggle with how much we expect Christ's presence and ways to change our context.

We will come across issues where knowing what to do might not seem clear cut, and we struggle to work out what a Christian ethical response should be.

We may ask in a general sense whether work should be experienced as a blessing or a curse. All these questions may make it very tempting for us to compartmentalise life into parts in which God is involved, and those in which He is not.

While raising the question here, we explore how we work through harder questions in module 4 as we look at how to interpret the Bible well.

What was the original task God gave us?



After God and human beings rested on the seventh day, God gave Adam and Eve their task. This first task is a part of us living out what it means to be made in God's image and describes the shape of the daily existence God made us for.

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'....He brought (animals) to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name." (Genesis 1:28; 2:19)

God gives humans genuine influence in how the world develops – we name the animals. While we are not equal co-creators with God, our participation is meaningful, and honoured by God.

We are made to “rule over” and “subdue” creation in the sense of *protecting* it and keeping destruction at bay.

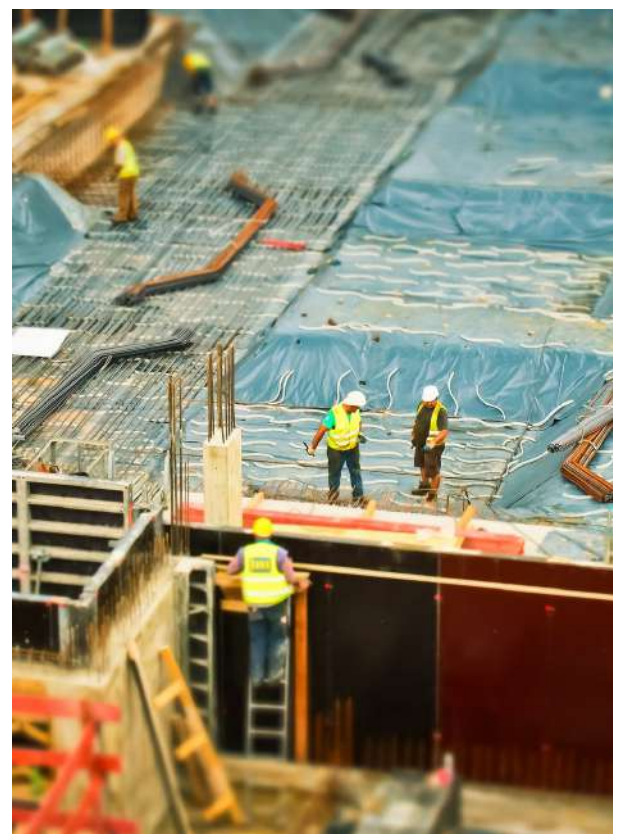
Most fundamentally in terms of our daily work, God makes human beings to be “fruitful...fill the earth” by unlocking the potential of the world that He has placed within it. This of course means creating more humans, but it also means so much more. Everything God has made is good, from the minutest cell to the furthest galaxy. It all belongs to him, and all brings him praise.

But what does he want humankind to do on this earth? Keep it as it is? Sit around waiting for it all to end so that we can enter some higher non-material sphere of existence? The truth is much richer. God gives Adam and Eve a world inherent with possibilities: minerals wait to be mined for metal instruments; plants grow to be cut for food or herbs; animal skins can be converted into human clothes; trees to be made into furniture, houses, cities, books, musical instruments.

He places them on the stage and says "Act! Use whatever you can to bring glory to my name." Fill the earth, not just with babies, but with music, creativity, technology, learning, art, architecture, parks, photography. Make it interesting.

Stewardship is more than maintenance, keeping things ticking over until he comes again. The task Adam and Eve got, and the role that we have inherited as a result, is one of building a civilisation which teases out of God's creation all that he primed it to be able to do to the glory of his name. This is the main human task. And Jesus did not change it. It is what we were made for.

Theologians call it the “cultural mandate” – a commissioning to develop things. We are not here just to evangelise until the Second Coming (though we have a burning desire to see others in the Kingdom), but to continue in our daily work, in whatever small way, the task of caring for God's creation and working to unfold its wonders. This is what we are saved, or made whole, to do.



The fifth mark of mission, "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth" is nothing less than a reminder of our human calling. In our daily lives God has given us this task. It is the cultural mandate given to Adam and Eve for every sphere of life. The Bible has no sacred and secular split.



We can obey this command to develop the life of God's creation just as much outside the church as within it, because the whole world belongs to God, and he cares for every part of it. God made everything. And we are here to unfold it to his glory. To unleash music that hasn't been heard before, business initiatives that haven't been practised before, games that haven't been tried, technology that hasn't been invented, teaching methodologies that haven't been devised. If belonging to a church doesn't equip us for unfolding the life of creation then we have a partial vision.

God provides ways in which every aspect of life can flourish. As well as setting up laws for the natural world, God invites human beings to discover and live into His norms for every kind of activity. For example, the prophet Isaiah talks about how God has a design for good agriculture:

"When a farmer ploughs for planting, does he plough continually? Does he keep on breaking up and working the soil? When he has levelled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way." (Isaiah 28: 24-26)

The writer sees how God designs and rules the natural world. But he also sees in the same breath that in the same way God provides commands and words that work to his people.



Human life is normed in everything: in every field of human affairs there are right and wrong ways of doing things. Just as God has laws for nature so he has norms for human behaviour.

In our society people are not generally happy with this idea. They find it easy to accept that God might be sovereign over the animal kingdom, but not have a plan as to how the state should function.



They might believe that God has designed energy exchanges to occur according to certain laws, but not the world of agriculture.

But as disciples, part of joining in with God's mission will include seeking wisdom on how God has purposed each aspect of life to work best.

What is going to happen to the earth and our daily work?



Rather than devaluing our daily work, how might our understanding of God's healing Kingdom and the ultimate renewal of all things help us recover a sense of the worth of everyday tasks?

God will restore the world, not rescue us from it. We have traced in many ways how God's mission is not to destroy the earth and take us off to heaven, but to renew it. The whole story of the Bible speaks of God's plan to redeem, 'buy back' everything touched or broken by sin or evil.

When Scripture looks to a "new earth" at the end of the Bible (Revelation 21), the word for new isn't describing something completely new, but a *restored version of something that already exists*.

God's mission is more like Spiderman than a fireman. A fireman will rescue people by getting them out of a dangerous place and taking them to a safe place. A lot of people think that Jesus came to take them from a nasty place - earth - to a safe place - heaven. To get them out before the whole thing goes up in flames.

But that is a worldview which can lead us to abandoning any sense of real purpose for being on this earth whatsoever. If redemption is about waiting around to escape, what's the point?

Jesus was much more like Spiderman. Spiderman's mission is to get rid of the enemy so that the people can once more live in safety and peace in what was originally a good city. The nature of Jesus' ministry shows God's kingdom coming to earth, as it is in heaven.

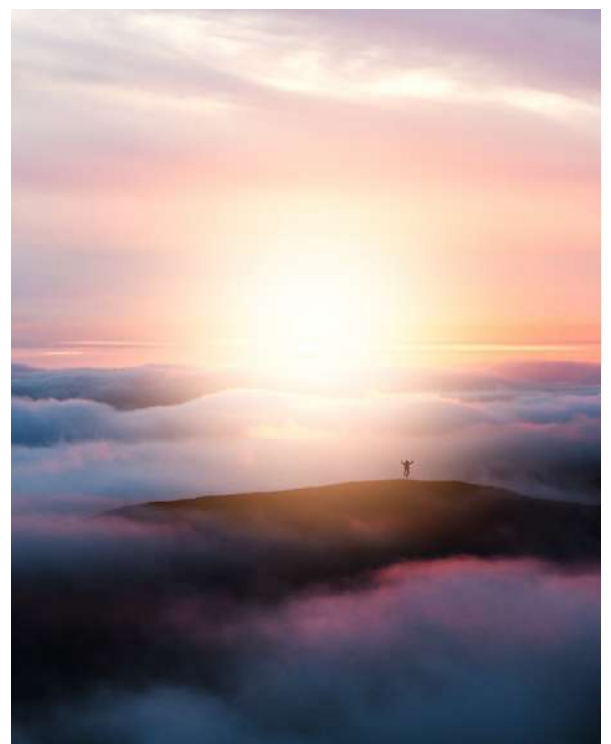
Where God is not King there is disease, injustice, hatred, exploitation, spiritual possession, and death - and so Jesus brought healing, and broke the power of oppressive forces through dying and rising again.

The world cries out for God's just and gentle rule, for the "earth to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea". (Habakkuk 2:14)

The mission of God aims to bring healing to every aspect of life. Everything has been created and will one day be redeemed.

Even cookery belongs to God. Even pots will be made holy: "On that day, the Big Day, all the horses' harness bells will be inscribed 'Holy to GOD'. The cooking pots in the Temple of GOD will be as sacred as chalices and plates on the altar.

In fact, all the pots and pans in all the kitchens of Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies." (Zechariah 14: 20-21)



How does God's mission include helping us recover our original task?



All the words in the Bible that talk about salvation imply a return to something that was once there.

Reconciliation means restoring a friendship that has been lost.

Renewal means making something new again – restoring the newness it once had.

Restoration means a return to the goodness of a first creation.

Recreation means an old creation being restored.

Redemption means buying something back that was once yours. The image is of a slave being released by being paid for and enjoying the freedom she once enjoyed.

God refuses to abandon the work of his hands. As disciples, God has restored us to covenant relationship with Him.

But He has also restored our calling – to serve Him in every aspect of unfolding creation once again. Part of resurrection hope includes a promise that our original human task will be completely restored to us in the life to come.

Paul promises Timothy, “The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.” (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

The vision of Revelation points to disciples who God has “made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:10)

Jesus tells a parable to show that those who have been faithful in this life will be entrusted with more in the age to come: “His master replied,

‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” (Matthew 25:21)



What happens to the fruit of our work when God renews all things?



God's mission to restore the world is not a return to the Garden of Eden, before human beings were able to make any changes to the world, but a renewal in which everything we do in our lifetimes, which reflects His goodness, will be included in God's future.

This means that every small act of work and creation we do can have eternal value. The music, technology, recipes, languages and countless other things we have and are creating will not be thrown away – daily tasks are not a distraction.

This is why the renewal of all things is shown as a city, and not a restored garden. (Revelation 21) It is a promise which includes human work.

When John describes this future "city", he writes how "...the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it." (Revelation 21: 24) In other words, all that is a true reflection of human worth is brought in.

Isaiah promises that God's "chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain." (Isaiah 65: 22-23)

It is clear that not everything will be included. There are many aspects of our work or history that do not reflect God's glory. This is why Peter promises that on "the day of the Lord...the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." (2 Peter 3:10)

The true value of our work will be seen, and what reflects God's kingdom will remain. Paul expands on this: "...their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work." (1 Corinthians 3:13)

It is this hope that what we do can have eternal value in resurrection that means Paul can write: "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)





Are some things sacred and some things secular?

The Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper famously said, "There is not one square inch of creation over which Christ does not say, 'It is mine!'"

Every part of life belongs to God, every part can be spiritual. To call some things "sacred" and other things "secular" creates a false gap between areas of life God created and those we think He did not. There is no job that is purely 'secular'.

However, any area of life made by God can be going in one of two directions. It can be reflecting and shaped around the goodness of God's kingdom – such as George Cadbury's approach to business.

Or it can be shaped around the values of the present world, as if this is all there is and God has nothing to do with it.

To be secular literally translates as to be only shaped around the values of this particular age or world. So while nothing God has made can be secular in itself, it can still be heading in a *secularised* direction. Every sphere of life can be lived according to God's rule, or not.

Historically some Christians have thought various things are wrong in themselves. For example, some have said that Christians should not get involved in pop music. They have said the same thing about dancing and playing cards.

But they are getting confused between the *structure* of music – the essence of the gift of music, the thing that God made – and the *direction* in which that music is going. Nothing God has made is evil in itself, in its structure. Dancing is wonderful – but it can go in sinful directions. Playing games is part of the structure of God's creation – but games can be warped by over competitiveness, corruption and gambling.

The structure of atoms created by God can be made into energy to resource or destroy life, the films we watch or make can reflect something of God's values or dehumanise other people, the organisation of societies through the gift of politics can free or enslave people.

Instead of calling things 'sacred' or 'secular' it is more helpful to ask, "How is this aspect of life or my work originally good?" and "Is the direction it is going reflecting God's kingdom, or is it being secularised?"





Is work a blessing or a curse?

The preacher John Stott called work “... expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfilment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God.”

In itself work can be a great blessing. But many experience it (or aspects of it) as more of a curse.

This balance in our experience is reflected in the Bible in which work is given to human beings as part of God’s imprint and blessing before human beings fall. Human beings are designed to be fruitful and productive for all our lives.

James Davison Hunter writes that “People fulfil their individual and collective destiny in the arts, music, literature, commerce, law and scholarship they build, and in the institutions they develop - family, churches, associations, and communities they live in and sustain - as they reflect the good of God and his designs for flourishing.”

Lack of work (paid or unpaid) denies us this fulfilment and leaves us incomplete. Fruitfulness does not have a cut-off date. While we might stop being paid to work, the idea of retirement from being fruitful is not in the story.

Yet soon work is shown as being affected by the brokenness of the world, and our current experience is that aspects of it cause toil, sweat and hardship.

Part of our calling as disciples who are being restored in God’s image is, like Cadbury, to try and reverse these effects.



What is my calling and how do I know it?



In joining in with God's mission, every disciple has a calling from God, and there are no callings that are more or less important than others.

Paul makes it clear in his picture of the church as a body that every part is needed, and in fact "God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it." (1 Corinthians 12:24)

To think that those who have callings within the church sphere have a 'vocation', while those who have a calling to God's mission in a hospital do not creates a destructive split not only in our individual lives, but also in the church.

The truth is that most of God's mission occurs as disciples serve their callings outside of the gathered church community.

The second person in the Bible to be anointed by God's Spirit for a task is not a priest or preacher, but a craftsperson named Bezalel, whom God chose "to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts." (Exodus 31:4-5)

Church-based callings are one aspect of our vocation. We are called by God in many different ways.

Christians have spoken about having callings in three ways. In our **relationships** – as a child, parent, spouse, friend, sibling – our **ministry** – serving the church – and our **social callings** – how we impact and serve wider society. Discovering our own particular calling can need prayer and advice from others but Frederick Buechner's definition makes 'vocation' into something which can bring joy and resonate with the way we have been made and gifted. He writes, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."



In other words, if I ask myself, "What makes me happy?" and, "Which needs do I care about in the world?" the answers to those two questions will point to our God-given calling.

Samuel's story illustrates this sense of calling. "I used to run a marketing and communications business. I was in Paris with the marketing team, in a building that was all brushed aluminium and steel. It felt good.

The Managing Director of the company asked me to do a campaign for a product that was prohibitively expensive and might actually be bad for you. That was quite a moment. I'd thought a lot about running a business, but here I was faced with a dilemma. I said 'yes', and what was interesting was working to redeem the product. Marketing can be hard-nosed, cut-throat and manipulative, but I'm not interested in that. I'm not sure that there was a right or wrong answer in that situation, but it's about how your values impact the world through your faith.

What brings me alive now, is seeing people step into their fullness, that there is an opportunity within the ordinariness of life to step into something holy. There's something extraordinary about bringing in a new hiring policy that levels up employment for people from the edges of society, as much as for those who went to Oxbridge. I'm passionate about that."



How do I celebrate ordinary, everyday things well?

Finding God in the ordinary things of life becomes much more possible when we remember He has created every aspect of life.

In his book 'No Splits' Steve Shaw describes how laying a table for dinner with friends can be a joyful response to God, handling all the 'ingredients' of God's creation in a holy way.

He reflects on how choosing whom to invite can become an opportunity for discipleship, how the choices about food can involve fairness and justice, how making the table look good reflects God's glory...He is asking three things in doing this. What is a dinner party called to be in God's world? How does it serve God and creation? Finally, how do all the small decisions help to open up all the different elements involved to proclaim the life of God's kingdom?

Similarly a short video from LICC about 'Anne' demonstrates how each part of what she considers to be a "normal, boring life" has the potential to be part of God's kingdom in many ways:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVKbvE-HQel> .

Celtic Christians, with their emphasis on heaven overlapping with earth, have a long history of celebrating God in the ordinary things of life. This prayer, by Bruce Prewer, in a Celtic style, offers a farmer's daily work to God:

Bless, Lord God, my little plot of land,
and the strength with which I'm tilling it,
bless the seed I'm carefully planting,
and the prayers I'm sowing with it.

Bless the seasons that are coming,
and the sunshine and the rain.
Bless the days and shortening nights,
and the hopes of my small barn.

Bless, O Father of good giving,
Bless, O Son of redeeming.
Bless, O Spirit of the living,
Bless, O Holy Three all-loving.





How can the Good News transform daily life and work?

These three stories, two real and one imagined, demonstrate how joining in with the Spirit in a workplace, while involving prayer, witness, and kindness, has the potential to bring transformation at every level – reflecting God's 'cultural mandate' and bringing healing to what is broken.

John started working in his company three years ago. The company made an ordinary but essential household object. John was given the opportunity to steer the direction of things in the company and to ensure the relationships among staff were what they should be.

Several people at his church had suggested that John should look into going into the ministry, but he knew that his full-time Christian work was actually found in the company. After all, it was here that he was able to use his gifts and he had contact with those outside the church whom if he'd been a vicar he might not have met.

For others, work may have been about paying the bills, getting ahead, being successful, justifying their existence. But John has a bigger cause than that. John started off by praying for his workplace and his fellow staff. It wasn't long before he noticed that relationships in the office were not what they could be.

For a start, some of the more junior staff were being made to work longer hours than they were contracted for and as a result there was pressure put on their personal lives. John prayed about it and was able to gently intervene and suggest that the staff might work much more fruitfully if they were actually given adequate time off. The management agreed.

In addition, John found himself in a position to pay attention to those in the office who had more menial jobs and at Christmas time he put on a thank you meal for them.

It was the first time this had been done and several people came up to him to thank him. Over the coming year finances were tight and the management was tempted to cut corners, shortchanging its customers by subtly making their product less than was advertised.

John believed that what they were doing was far bigger than just making a profit, and having prayed about it, was able to influence the company in grasping hold of its vision to be providing a good service – developing a product not just in order to make more money, but to create something of worth, that was good in itself.

John was also able to encourage the company to embrace partnerships with deprived areas of the city that they were based. As a result several of the employees became involved in hands-on work in the local community.



The Walgreen Company is the largest drug retailing chain in the United States. As of May 31, 2014, the company operated 8,217 stores in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.



One of its employees named Julia Turner has Down's Syndrome and she loves her work. "I tell you what – I love this job!" she said. "I'm happy, I'm contented. I've got people all around me who are the best friends I've ever had in the whole world."

When asked by ABC News if it felt good to get a pay-check every week, Julia responded, "It sure does. And if anybody needs a big check, come over here and they'll give it to you." It is Julia's joy in her work that is so striking.

Good work has also brought her friendships and community. She was asked by the bus driver – "Did you have a good day?" she answered – "I had a wonderful day."

How come Julia has a job that brings her so much joy and fulfilment? It's all because a Christian man wanted to join in with God's mission at work. Randy Lewis was a senior Vice President at Walgreens in the USA. Lewis has an autistic son, Austin, and desperately wanted him to have a future and hold down a good job.

Previously Walgreens had employed differently-abled people to do "ancillary rather than mission-critical work"....cleaning toilets, sweeping floors etc.

For Lewis differently-abled people face a death by a thousand cuts when looking for work. Many are isolated, unemployed or have 'rubbish' jobs. He wanted to create meaningful and rewarding jobs for differently-abled people.

He stated, "We underestimate the abilities of people on the margins." He persuaded Walgreens to change the work place...to suit people of different abilities. Walgreens has now designed warehouses where 40% of the employees are differently-abled. These jobs pay an equal wage to the typically-abled workers and hold all employees to the same productivity standards.

So Julie Willard, a deaf woman, opined, "It's my dream to work here!" Angela Mackey, having qualified with an MA, couldn't get a job because of her cerebral palsy.

Her speech sounds slurred but what she says is very intelligent and insightful. She said that no one would employ her! She had applied for 250 jobs without success. At Walgreens she is in charge of the recruitment of differently-abled people.

Employing in this way has unleashed incredible creativity and imagination in typically-abled employees. They have designed new technologies that serve and bless everyone. In these 'warehouses of wonder' they use images rather than words which help people who struggle to read. So instead of an unimaginative Aisle 14 they will have a strawberry image. This helps people who cannot read numbers.

The HR department has changed many of its policies. When applying for a job a differently-abled person can bring a friend to fill in the application forms.

What is so exciting is that the company has discovered that differently-abled people can often outperform typically-abled people.

Not only was performance the same (Lewis called in statisticians who studied 400,000 hours of work and proved performance is similar for those with and without disabilities), but in the warehouse, staff turnover was 20% to 50% lower and absenteeism was also down. Safety costs were also lower for people with disabilities.





"Fears about more accidents had come up, but we found deaf forklift drivers – who many companies won't hire – are twice as safe as someone who can hear", says Lewis. "If I could give everyone a piece of advice, it would be to put plugs in the ears of their forklift truck drivers."

Randy Lewis' work for God has led to thousands of differently-abled people doing work they love and getting good wages as well.

Finally, a fictionalised reimagining of life at a top football club... Let's imagine that a football manager and top players really begin to study the New Testament on a daily basis. They notice that Jesus had compassion on the most vulnerable people in that first century Jewish society. Somehow Jesus challenged the assumption that some people are terribly important (rich people) and that other people (lepers and shepherds) are unimportant.

The club striker makes the following suggestion: "Boss, why don't we pay our cleaners a better wage and start to treat them with real respect?" The manager concurs enthusiastically. A few days later the cleaners at the club are enjoying some of the wonderful benefits of the good news of the kingdom of God. The goalie spends several hours talking to Elsie about her lumbago and impulsively decides to pay her gas bill that month!

Small acts of mercy and generosity flood the club and several players are deeply impressed by Christ's command to 'love your enemies' and they issue public apologies to players they have deliberately fouled. Gary Lineker and Alan Hansen are gob-smacked and discuss the club 'transformation' on Match of the Day.

The captain delves ever deeper into the Word of God and begins to unpack the meaning of Jesus' commission 'to preach good news to the poor' and 'to release the oppressed'. (Luke 4:18). Over a coffee he raises the issue with the gaffer and dramatic events unfold. Ticket prices are slashed in half and unemployed and differently-abled people are allowed into the ground for nothing!

All the players agree to a wage reduction and the lead goal-scorer writes an article in the Sun newspaper explaining how easy it is to get by on only ten thousand pounds a week!

The manager decides to adopt a football club in Mozambique and develops a charity which allows young players to come and play football at their club ground. One of the players is so impressed by these fine young players that he flies out to Mozambique, investigates the scenario and then sets up an orphanage for waifs and strays. I

t's only chump change for a millionaire but he finds the experience so rewarding and moving that money is no longer an issue. He is simply grateful to God that he has the financial resources to be such a blessing to so many people.

Oh and when the players play football, they are full of grace and genial bonhomie. They laugh and smile continually and take great pleasure in the game. They play skilful, imaginative football to the glory of God! They are living out the task God gave them. They are full time Christian workers! (With thanks to Mark Roques from www.thinkfaith.net for the Randy Lewis and football stories)

This one and a half minute video from LiCC (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4E_dSz_yd6c&feature=emb_logo) paints a picture of how society might be transformed if every disciple saw themselves as joining in with God's mission in their everyday faith.



How can my church reinforce the value of everyday faith in God's mission?



Most of the time the church is scattered into different areas of life. But when we gather together there are many ways in which we can support and develop this whole-life mission. Here are three particular opportunities.

Praying and supporting. A woman named Ruth recounts how, "I'd been out of the paid workplace for over a decade and I realised re-entry was going to be hard. Yet I'd been encouraged by my friends in church to trust the sense that I had that this was God's next step for me. It was so much harder than I imagined. It wasn't just the confidence issue, which I'd been prepared for.

It was the way people behaved towards me in this predominantly male office. It seems that their relational repertoire consisted of treating me like their mother, a sex object or the office slave. I confess I was ready to move on quite quickly. My church gently challenged that. They were sure God would use me in that place. They also believed I would grow along the way. In fact, they got me up at the front one morning and they prayed for me, for wisdom, grace, humour, godliness.

It was a daily challenge but their confidence was infectious and I found myself praying in new ways. Their continued interest, the insightful questions, Sunday worship; It all encouraged me to see things differently, to turn to God in new ways.

I didn't think it really showed in the office. Until Joe approached me one day with his question, 'Are you a Christian? There's something about the way you've been responding to us.'



It's been quite a journey for me, and for Joe, who's come along to church and seems to have made some significant steps of faith."

Prayer and chaplaincy in the workplace. In Birmingham, as in many other places, informal networks and chaplains can be a resource to link disciples together in encouragement. The CoFE website tells how during the pandemic of 2020/21

"Peter Bethell works for Birmingham City Council as a Transportation Planner. Like many, he has been working from home since March. He misses the personal contact, but he gets a sense of job satisfaction from working in the public interest. Peter keeps in touch with other Christians at work through networks, and he plays a significant part at his home Methodist church.

Anne Smith works for the City Council in helping to organise elderly care: she is also working from home. She enjoys supporting people in the community and making a difference. Anne links up with other Christians through her friendship groups, family and her home Roman Catholic Church. She finds that this gives a shared experience and sense of community.

Anne and Peter are both part of an ecumenical chaplaincy network run by Anglican chaplain Peter Sellick and his colleagues.



The Chaplaincy has been working with the Birmingham City Council for years. They share prayer requests and meet Wednesday mornings and Thursday lunchtimes for prayer.

"It is important to keep in touch with other Christians, to support each other and to know that you are not alone – even though we are all working from home," says Peter Bethell. "The Chaplaincy has been providing a listening ear and emotional support to staff. We have been going through some of the most turbulent times in the Council's history," says Anne.

"During the pandemic they have been needed more than ever. They are there for all staff, of any faith or none. They also provide regular meditation sessions online at lunch times. Many have benefited from these, as sometimes it's the only supportive interaction they have all day."

Learning to change with others. We are all on the journey but making the changes to place God's mission in everyday faith at the heart of being church can be a challenge.

As we have seen, we are seeking to undo habits and thought-patterns which are centuries old. In Church of England Birmingham we offer a very practical response to any church which wants to develop in this way.

We get small teams from our churches together over a two-year period in a learning community to help each other address this. Journeying together, we seek to put seven changes in place over two years which will help our churches be increasingly growing into valuing every calling, and seeing every disciple as equally called.

These changes will depend on where people are starting from, but they cover the things we do, the people we encourage in leadership and ministry, and the choices we prioritise. A handout explains the scheme in detail.

Becoming an Everyday Faith Community

A two-year process.

1. The PCC appoints a group of 3 or 4 to lead the culture change over a two-year process, made up of mostly "lay people".
2. This is communicated to the wider church community
3. The group joins an initial LC session to begin the process.
4. The group then uses the scoping exercise plus grid to choose 3 or 4 actions (or reinforce things that are already happening) which can be put into practice over the next twelve months.
5. These actions will be spread through the grid, and can be taken from the suggested list, or their own suggestions.
6. The group joins a termly LC to share progress and ideas. In the second year they run the process again.
7. When at least seven shifts have been achieved, the Bishop visits to celebrate them being an Everyday Faith community.
8. They are given a visual sign.

