

Missional Work: The Series

by Timmy Brister

(contributing authors: Owen Strachan, Jason Meyer, and Matthew Wireman)

This is a document consisting of a compilation of eleven articles on the topic, “missional work.” In early March, I shared an account of sharing the gospel at work that was an intense moment in my life. I entitled that post "[The Cross Isn't Sexy: A Dying Man's Confession](#)." That article produced considerable feedback, both for and against my actions. Given that the issue of evangelism in the workplace is one that I have been currently dealing with in real life, and realizing that there was little I could find on the topic, I decided to write a couple of articles on the topic as well as invite my fellow blogging partners to pitch in as well. Below are the articles that have been posted during the months of March and April 2008 at www.timmybrister.com.

1. [The Cross Isn't Sexy: A Dying Man's Confession](#)

**For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
1 Corinthians 1:18**

During the first hours of the morning that commemorated twenty-nine years of being alive, I never more felt that death was at work in me.

For those who do not know, I work the graveyard shift (3rd shift) at UPS along with several thousand other folks, most of whom are college-age students taking advantage of the great benefits provided them. During the 3+ years I have worked there, I have come to realize that there are huge segments of society where the church has effectively failed to engage with the gospel. I would argue that many if not the overwhelming majority who work with me are not only unbelievers, they have never been exposed to any personal encounter with the gospel or Christian witness (for instance, almost my entire belt of coworkers who have attended church with me, only one has ever stepped foot into a non-Catholic church). Simply due to their schedule, they by default become some of the least reached people in Louisville, and their lack of engagement comes from the fact that they are practically non-existent to the people who work in the day.

My current job is to train new hires when they come into the division and area where I and about 200 other UPSers work. Each week I meet a new employee and spend the next five days teaching and training them in their new environment and help them get adjusted to their work requirements. As you would imagine, during this time, I have the opportunity of getting to know my new hires and they get to know me as well. After training them, it is common for me to visit them weeks and months after their training to see how they are doing, talk about life, and hopefully continue the friendship that was started as their trainer turned friend.

Over the past week, I have been working with a young man under the age of 21 who grew up without a father in his life. He has four kids by four different women from three different states. We began talking about kids, family, and marriage, at which point he told me, “It’s against my

religion to get married. I just cannot do that.” So I asked him, “So what is your religion, then?” He told me that one day is he going to settle down and start going to church, especially since the ladies he has been meeting appear to be faithful church attenders.

One thing I noticed was a shiny silver cross on his necklace. So I asked him, “What does that cross mean to you?” He replied, “It represents Christianity.” I queried further. “So it is just a symbol or does it have any personal meaning to you?” Stumped, he returned with a question of his own. “I don’t know. Is it supposed to mean more than a symbol?”

At this point, two other co-workers began listening attentively to our conversation.

I told him that the cross was an old form of execution that was one of the bloodiest, more gory means of death. Hands and feet were crushed and pierced by nails, driven with hammers; blood poured from all four extremities of the body; pressing up to breathe caused even further pain as the person would gasp for air to keep from suffocating. If necessary, their legs would be broken to prevent further attempts of getting air, and the person would eventually pass out and die. A long, painful, bloody spectacle was the cross before a watching crowd. The cross is not covered in sterling silver but crimson blood; indeed, the cross is the symbol of death.



Jesus Christ died on such a cross between two criminals. He was innocent, undeserving of such a death. Yet he willingly chose to die there as a substitute for those who are deserving to die and bear the punishment for their sin. [He who was innocent died for those who were guilty](#), so that those who trust in him, though guilty, would not face death but be given life and forgiveness through that bloody cross. The only hope that you and I have in this world as sinners is the cross of Jesus Christ where God purchased eternal life for those who would believe in Jesus who died and rose again to bring victory from sin, death, and the grave.

My new hire, not knowing what to say, remained silent. I did too. I didn’t want that moment to pass on with another trivial conversation.

After a few moments, I began to see that the co-workers listening in had moved away and were talking to one another. Having felt that I answered my new hire’s question, we eventually got back on the subject of our children. He came to the point where he asked, “So Timmy, what else is there worth living for other than myself and my children?” I replied, “When I came to Jesus, and that cross became a reality to me, I died, and from that moment on, [I live everyday of my life for the one who died for me.](#)”

As the night was coming to a close, a supervisor from the management team who I work under came to me, and the first thing he asked (in a rather firm manner) was, “**Timmy, have you been preaching on the belt tonight?**”

I replied, “Well, it depends on what you mean by “preaching”. If you mean sharing my life in the conversation with another person, then yes, but if you mean forcing Christianity down the throat of my co-workers then I have not.”

He replied, "I have been notified by others on the belt that you have been pushing your religion on other people, and they were deeply offended by what you said. You cannot pass judgment upon people and tell them how they should believe."

At this point, it hit me that the co-workers who had been listening found the cross as folly and a rock of offense. Making my appeal to the manager, I said, "What was said tonight has to be taken in context. I was having a conversation about life, about family, kids, and the kind of jewelry on people's neck. If you are going to have such a conversation like that with me, which happens everyday here, Jesus Christ is going to be talked about. It's just who I am, and I cannot change that."

Not liking my response, my manager again reprimanded me, "Timmy, you cannot do that. You cannot talk about your religion and tell people how to believe. You are pushing your religion on other people."

Making my final appeal, my heart began churning, voice started shaking, and eyes were being moistened with tears. I said,

"Every day I work here at UPS, people are pushing their religion upon me. They are atheists and live like there is no God, there is no day of accounting, there is no purpose in life except living for oneself. And everyday, that religion is preached from one co-worker after another, calling me to unbelief, and I am offended by that. Everyday I hear godless talk, my Savior's name slurred, and hear of things that used to make people blush, and I am offended by that. Without fail, my coworkers are being entirely intolerant. One would tell me of their love and passion for Kentucky basketball and another for Louisville football, and to believe contrary to them would be against their "religion." Yet I have the same passion and devotion, not to sports or girls or parties, but Jesus Christ. So why is my "religion" the only one being called out here at UPS? Why am I the only person who is being labeled judgmental when I am doing the most merciful thing in telling people about the love of Jesus Christ? If we were to apply the same standard to others as you are applying to me, we would have to shut down all conversation among all co-workers from this moment on, and believing that will not happen, then you have forced yourself to settle with a double-standard predicated upon hearsay of those who found a portion of my conversation as offensive. On the other hand, I exhort you to visit with everyone of my coworkers and supervisors for the past three years, people who I have worked with and talked to on a daily basis, and determine whether the claims uphold any warrant. If at that point you believe that I am unfit to function as a trainer at UPS, I would resign immediately in deference to your judgment and the goodwill of UPS. But I want to make it clear to you that this is not about me, and it has never been about me. Young men like my new hire need someone who will actually take personal interest in them and want to genuinely help them in life, not shove them off like a package on a conveyor belt, and I am of the opinion that those whom I have been given to train, they will be to me of greater worth than a package to be delivered in five days but hopefully a friend for many days to come."

Well, my manager kindly listened to me, and during the course of my appeal, gave me due consideration as I affirmed to him my desire to respect the standards of UPS as a trainer while not compromising my character or commitment as a Christian. We came to an agreement, and

hopefully the Lord will continue to allow me to be a useful employee for UPS as well as a faithful representative as one sent into the night to reach the people of the night.

One thing I learned for sure that morning: **the cross isn't sexy. The cross is offensive.** And while I believe [life is at work in them, death is at work in me](#). And in that I rejoice, for on the day that I am supposed to think about myself the most (my birthday), I was ushered into the reality that [denying myself and taking up my cross](#) is the least I can do for the one [who loved me and gave himself for me](#). It was never more important to breathe in that dying man's confession when I was blowing out candles, and for that, I praise God.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

2 Corinthians. 2:15-17

2. [Missional Work](#)

My post, "[The Cross Isn't Sexy: A Dying Man's Confession](#)" continues to be one of the leading posts though it is no longer on the front page, and one of the topics brought up was whether it is ethical to be witnessing to others while being paid to work. Now, I realize that this is usually the argument made by atheists and unbelievers, but even in recent weeks, I have read it online by professing Christians. So I want to raise the question here for our discussion.

Generally speaking, one will argue that an exemplary employee who has a good kingdom ethic will devote himself entirely to the task and responsibilities determined by their employer. On the other hand, one will argue that someone who is faithful to sharing the kingdom message will distract himself from his responsibility and could become a lazy, incompetent worker. After all, the company pays you to work, not witness, so if you can do only one, it should be the former, not the latter. Simply put, either you are a good, reliable worker who does not share Jesus, or you a reliable witness who does not work.

I am of the conviction that this argument presents a false dichotomy. There is no reason why you cannot have a good kingdom ethic *and* also share the kingdom message (gospel of Jesus Christ) in your workplace. There will, of course, be times where the only thing for you to do is work with all your might (as demanded by the workload); however, there will also be times where, in the course of conversation, several opportunities to share Jesus are presented to you as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Knowing when and how is a matter of discernment and sensitivity that comes over time.

So here we are, living between two worlds and trying to balance a kingdom ethic with a kingdom message, desiring to please our employer as well as honor our Lord and Master. What do you do? How do you do it?

In the coming days, I hope to continue to the conversation of what I am calling *missional work*. As Christians who are "on mission" in our world, the workplace cannot be a place where the

gospel is shelved in the break room. At the same time, as Christians we who work “as unto the Lord” are called to work “with all our might” knowing that our reward does not come from recognition of man but from the the God who performs all things well.

For starters, I would like to pose the following questions:

1. Do you believe it is unethical to share your faith while at work?
2. Is it a false dichotomy? Agree or disagree?
3. If you *had* (operative word) to choose one, which would be more important: being a reliable worker or a faithful witness?

Let me know what you think.

3. Putting in Time or Preaching the Truth: What’s More Valuable?

I have asked that my fellow contributors of P&P, Owen Strachan and Jason Meyer, to participate in the discussion regarding [missional work](#). Here is Owen’s very helpful contribution. He is a PhD student in Historical Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Managing Director of the [Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding](#).

Read more [at his blog, consumed](#).

The answer to the above question must be carefully qualified, in my humble opinion.

Both pursuits, offered out of a redeemed heart, are honoring to God. God has given His creation and His people the opportunity to labor for His glory (1 Co. 10:31). As with all things that we do, we have the opportunity to present our works and deeds to God as gifts. How do we do so? By performing them out of a heart of love. Though it is easy to get a bit over-heated about the nature of work—some theologians have oversold its value, as I see it—and see every task as ushering in the kingdom, it is clear from the Bible that work possesses inherent dignity when done to maximize God’s glory. Though the actual tasks we perform may not in themselves advance the kingdom (the kingdom is advanced primarily by proclamation and inherently spiritual activity, I would contend), yet our attitudes, our dispositions, and our constant devotion to God can well bless the Lord.

We see, then, that while making a shoe may not inherently advance the kingdom (the shoe possesses no spiritual value, after all), the attitude of the shoemaker (his worshipful heart expressing itself even as he sows the shoe together) and the good he accomplishes with the shoe (passing it on to a needy child in the name of Christ, for example) may well contribute to the forward movement of God’s kingdom. Not everything we do contributes to this forward progress, I would argue, but this is not to say that we cannot bring God glory in our daily goings-on and, perhaps often by means of our heart and our spiritually minded acts, claim some kingdom ground. We see, then, that the matter of work—indeed, all of our daily acts—becomes a

matter of theological consideration, and requires us to carefully define the kingdom on biblical grounds.

With all of this said, the preaching of the gospel is the fundamental means of kingdom advancement. See Matthew's first notation of kingdom-oriented preaching in 3:2—it is explicitly connected with the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, we should seek to preach the gospel to advance the kingdom, understanding that this is the primary—though not the only—means of pushing it forward. This means for those of us who work that we should indeed seek to preach the gospel in our workplaces. We should do so, however, shrewdly (Mt. 10:16). I don't think it wise for a Christian to consider their primary on-the-job responsibility to be evangelism. That's not honest. Your employer has hired you to be an accountant; be an accountant. Account. (Sorry, that's a bad joke.)

However, be a shrewdly Christian accountant. Season your conversation with the gospel. Look for opportunities to talk about your church, your faith, your conversion. Ask co-workers if they would like to hang out, and then engage them in honest, normal, but spiritually oriented conversation. Read the Bible in your lunch hour, and keep it on your desk. Let people see that the Bible is an organic part of your life. But do all this while being an excellent accountant (or forester or truck-driver or librarian or politician or athlete or stay-at-home mom). Know accountant laws. Put in a hard, full work day. Be one of the best employees in your office. Be nice, polite, helpful, and kind. Do your work with excellence. In summary, be a worker whose Christianity is apparent, whose goodness is evident, and whose work is excellent. Honor your Lord, but do so while honoring your boss.

Many Christians, of course, work in environments hostile or at least unfriendly to Christianity. In this case, simply turn up the “shrewdness” factor. People are still desperately lost; they are still looking for light, to some extent; they will still be unable to avoid noticing an attractive Christian witness when it presents itself. Over time, they'll ask questions and want to know what makes you tick, a situation helped, of course, by a Christian directing conversation well and living a life that looks and smells differently from others. Above all, Christians in these situations must look to share the gospel just as much as other Christians, though as noted they will need to do so with greater shrewdness than others. On the question of what to do when sharing faith involves the loss of a job, there is no black-and-white answer that I know of. One will have to balance faithful boldness with careful wisdom. One will have to do so, though, with Christ's warning about being an unfaithful or fearful witness in mind. No reward is promised to the timid; much reward is promised to the courageous (see the beatitudes of Matthew 5).

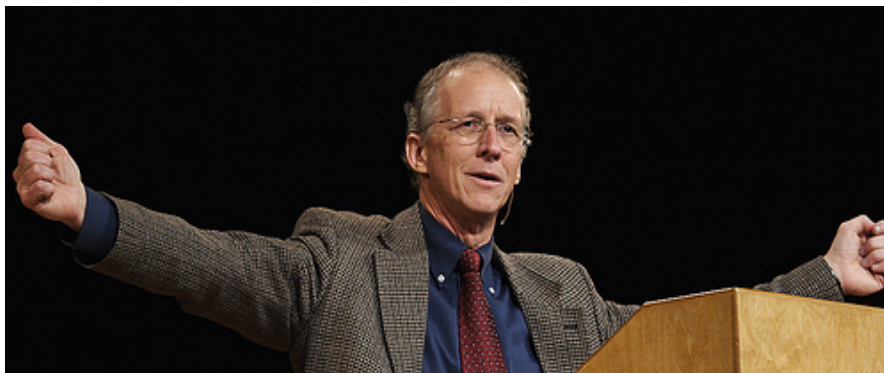
In summary, the Christian must thus see himself as part of a cosmic movement of God's Spirit that is orchestrated by the Father's will and proceeds forth from the Son's redemptive work. The Christian who goes off to work each morning should not simply think that he is putting in time and punching a clock; neither should he think that he is in some vague sense honoring God by working. No, he should realize that he is part of a kingdom movement, and he is able throughout the day to advance that kingdom by a godly attitude and disposition and by acts and deeds of gospel-oriented grace, justice, beauty, and goodness. We might restrain ourselves from saying that every task he performs directly contributes to this kingdom progress, but in doing so we would not make the mistake of thinking that only preachers accomplish spiritually meaningful

things. No, all of us have the opportunity to participate by disposition and deed and word in this cosmic movement.

This perspective threatens to transform our daily rites, doesn't it? However you've considered work, you need not see it in stark terms, either as an evangelistic endeavor alone or a clock-punching exercise. No, work is a beautiful blend of these things, an opportunity to, as I said earlier, send God little gifts of glory by the things we do and the words we say. As you head into the forest, or wheel into your desk, or walk customers around the car showroom, you are not cut off from the kingdom. You are right in the center of it. As you live with integrity, and model Christ's grace and kindness, and speak gospel-saturated words, yes, you are right in the center of it. You may not know it, and no one may see it, but heaven is smiling on you in these times. And somehow, in ways imperceptible to human eyes and ears, a reign is being extended, a light is being lifted, and the earth and hills and stars are being readied to celebrate and surrender to the coming King.

4. [Don't Waste Your Work!](#)

One of the books that has greatly impacted my life in recent years is *[Don't Waste Your Life](#)* by John Piper. In his book, Piper has written a chapter entitled, "**Making Much of Christ from 8 to 5**" ([read it online](#)), where he provides six answers to the question, "*How can my life count for the glory of God in my secular vocation?*" I figured that, in light of our current discussion on missional work, providing Piper's answers would be quite helpful (especially numbers 3 and 6). Here they are, with a few additional quotes:



1. We can make much of God in our secular job through the fellowship that we enjoy with him throughout the day in all our work.

"In [this] way we fellowship with God, listening to him through his Word and thanking him and praising him and calling on him for all we need. It is an honor to God if you stay in your secular job 'with God' in this way. This is not a wasted life. God delights in being trusted and enjoyed. It shows his value."

2. We make much of Christ in our secular work by the joyful, trusting, God-exalting design of our creativity and industry.

“[T]he essence of our work as humans must be that it is done in conscious reliance on God’s power, and in conscious quest of God’s pattern of excellence, and in deliberate aim to reflect God’s glory.”

3. We make much of Christ in our secular work when it confirms and enhances the portrait of Christ’s glory that people hear in the spoken Gospel.

“[This] is by having such high standards of excellence and such integrity and such manifest goodwill that we put no obstacles in the way of the Gospel but rather call attention to the all-satisfying beauty of Christ. When we adorn the Gospel with our work, we are not wasting our lives.”

4. We make much of Christ in our secular work by earning money to keep us from depending on others, while focusing on the helpfulness of our work rather than financial rewards.

“Christ has lifted the curse of work. He has replaced anxious toil with trust in God’s promise to supply our needs (Philippians 4:19) and has thus awakened in us a different passion in our work. We turn with joy to the call of Jesus: Seek the kingdom of God first and his righteousness, and the food that perishes will be added to you. So don’t labor for the food that perishes. Labor to love people and honor God. Think of new ways that your work can bless people. Stop thinking mainly of profitability, and think mainly of how helpful your product or service can become.”

“Jesus calls us to be aliens and exiles in the world. Not by taking us out of the world, but by changing, at the root, how we view the world and how we do our work in it. If we simply work to earn a living—if we labor for the bread that perishes—we will waste our lives. But if we labor with the sweet assurance that God will supply all our needs—that Christ died to purchase every undeserved blessing—then all our labor will be a labor of love and a boasting only in the cross.”

5. We make much of Christ in our secular work by earning money with the desire to use our money to make others glad in God.

“[O]ur secular work can become a great God-exalting blessing to the world if we aim to take the earnings we don’t need for ourselves (and we *need* far less than we think) and meet the needs of others in the name of Jesus.”

6. We make much of Christ in our secular work by treating the web of relationships it creates as a gift of God to be loved by sharing the Gospel and by practical deeds of help.

“[God] has woven you into the fabric of others’ lives so that you will tell them the Gospel. Without this, all our adorning behavior may lack the one thing that could make it live-giving. The Christian’s calling includes making his or her mouth a fountain of life. ‘The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life’ (Proverbs 10:11). The link with eternal life is faith in Jesus Christ. No nice feelings about you as a good employee will save anyone. People must know the Gospel, which is the power of God unto eternal life (Romans 1:16).”

Piper's conclusion:

“If you work like the world, you will waste your life, no matter how rich you get. But if your work creates a web of redemptive relationships and becomes an adornment for the Gospel of the glory of Christ, your satisfaction will last forever and God will be exalted in your joy.”

5. Because Christ Is Risen, Abound in the Work of the Lord

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:58

I have always wanted to do a series on “the Bible’s great ‘therefore’s’”. One of the greatest, if not *the* greatest “therefore” in the Bible is found at the conclusion of 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul explains that *everything* in the Christian life hangs on the resurrection of Jesus Christ—everything including our work.

Have you ever considered what Easter Sunday means for you on the following Monday? It *should* mean everything. No labor is in vain. Because of the resurrection, we should be abounding in the work of the Lord as those who are steadfast and immovable, *knowing* that the resurrection means the vindication of all things done “in the Lord.” Is this not what Paul means when he says, “*knowing* that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord”? Indeed, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, *knowing* that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

I am convinced that if we believed in the resurrection on Monday as much as we do on Sunday, our work would drastically change because the perspective of the workman has a new trajectory. I know that there would be some to think that the application of Paul’s conclusion is for “ministry” or “spiritual work” or the work of “vocational ministers.” But if that was the case, then this passage would have very little relevance for the majority of Christians who have ever lived. Clearly, Paul is speaking to all of us, to live our lives under the purview, and through the power of, Christ’s resurrection. We are citizens of a kingdom whose King is coming back, who comes with an accounting for all we do in this life.

Easter has great significance for our lives—greater than sometimes we think, for Easter is not for Christians to remember on one Sunday a year, but for every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of every year. Easter means that we should know with certainty, grounded with conviction, that the sweat of our brow and the callousness of our hands do not reflect mere futility because of the Fall; rather, they speak of a recompense that comes from Him who has worked for us redemption and righteousness before God our Father. *Knowing* that we are His workmanship, created for good works which God prepared beforehand, then how much more should we *walk* (abound) in them? I fear that so much of our Christian “walk” has been spiritual steps without earthen shoes. When we think about the command to “go and make disciples,” we should not be amiss to be mindful that the front door to our world is most consistently found in our workplace. No doubt, the work of making and mending tents is not as glamorous as a captive audience on Mars Hill, but neither do I believe that Paul considered that you could have one

without the other. We live between two worlds, and God has given us a message that is the power of God unto salvation, God who transfers those from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son. What will adorn such a message and validate its truth but those workmen who believe that Easter means absolutely everything to Monday morning?

Therefore, because Christ is risen, abound in the work of the Lord.

6. Witnessing at Work: Sacred vs. Secular?

Continuing in our series on missional work, Jason Meyer chimes in to address the false dichotomy with a biblical-theological approach. More contributions to come, but for now, consider Jason's response.

Christians tend to see things in pieces and miss the big picture. This inability to see in a panoramic way leads to many false dichotomies and dualisms. I think recovering a full-fledged biblical worldview would help put the pieces together into a more coherent whole, which in turn would eliminate much of the spiritual schizophrenia that Christians in the workplace often feel.

Many Christian authors are turning to a creation, fall, redemption model as a biblical grid for understanding all of life. Although this grid is useful in many ways, I will focus on three benefits for the sake of the question we are addressing today. First, it allows one to share the gospel in a structured way by answering the three essential questions that many people keep asking: (1) where did we come from [creation], (2) what went wrong [fall], and (3) what is the solution [redemption]. Second, this three-fold grid also functions as a tool for analyzing the worldviews of others, like those with whom we work. Contending worldviews must attempt to answer these same three questions and so Christians and their co-workers can compare and contrast their answers and assess how these answers stack up next to the reality that they see all around them. Third, it is not only useful for explaining the gospel in our personal evangelism at work, it is also useful for understanding a Christian perspective on work itself. I would like to spend a few moments explaining this third benefit.

Many Christians think that our sole objective is to receive salvation and share the plan of salvation with others. Nancy Pearcey's book *Total Truth* offers some staggering statistics that solidify this common stereotype. She notes that research polls identify the strength of evangelical convictions in these areas. An overwhelming percentage of evangelicals believe the authority of the Bible, and the necessity of personal salvation and evangelism. However, she also noted that no one polled (*not one person*) could articulate a distinctively Christian mindset toward work. Christians typically thought in terms of infusing the secular with the sacred by praying at work or having a Bible study. When pressed further, Christians talked in vague terms about the importance of honesty and morality at work. Now let us be clear: these are all good answers in and of themselves. But they fall far short as complete answers. Can Christians glorify God at work even in those moments when they are not explicitly telling others about Jesus or praying with them?

A Creation/Fall/Redemption approach recognizes that work is a gift from God that came before the fall. Adam and Eve were called to be fruitful and multiply. They were also commanded to bring the earth under God's dominion. The fall into sin did not make work sinful, it simply made it more difficult (In the same way, the curse on the woman did not make childbearing evil, but it did make it more painful). Redemption in Christ provides an atoning answer to the fall, but it also takes us back to our original calling at creation.

This calling has been called the Cultural Mandate. Rather than narrowly seeking to escape culture, Christians must recognize a commission from God to create culture and civilization as we seek to bring it under God's redemptive dominion. The Great Commission (evangelism and discipleship) is at the heart of this agenda, but it is not the whole of the agenda. God delights to give gifts to His people and thus we seek to use these gifts in the power of His strength for the purpose of His glory. Work does not have to be drudgery. One trend we see today is that people are dissatisfied with their jobs - even if they pay well. They endure high paying jobs that they don't like so that they can retire early. After retirement they get bored with doing nothing, so they get another job - but this time they find a job they like! I have always wondered why we don't just find jobs that we love on the front end of our lives, instead of waiting until the end.

If God delights in these creative gifts, we can delight in using them. The reality of the fall and sin does introduce frustration and feelings of futility at times, but persevering through trials and hardships in the strength that God supplies also glorifies God. Christians can celebrate the creative gifts that God has given his people and model the act of giving thanks to God, which our co-workers should be doing as God's creatures but refuse to do (Rom 1:21). Therefore, one can glorify God at work - by the very work that we do there! And the work can be "secular" because "This is My Father's World" as the hymn so rightly says.

The cosmic scope of Christ's Lordship has staggering implications for His Lordship over every aspect of the believer's life, which is especially emphasized in the Colossians 3:18-4:1. Christ's Lordship extends to one's personal holiness, family life, work life, and everything in between ("whatever you do in word and deed" [Col 3:17]). One is reminded of Abraham Kuyper's sweeping claim: "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" (These words were spoken as part of his inaugural address at the founding of the Free University on October 20, 1880. See James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 488).

Therefore, I hope the dichotomy between verbal and non-verbal witnessing at work will be erased as well. We are called to live out the gospel at work so that when we verbally share Jesus our actions won't contradict our words. Verbal witnessing for Jesus will also make our non-verbal witness more effective. People who know us as Christians will recognize the source of our work ethic and they will be in a better position to glorify God and not us for that work ethic.

Let me close with five practical principles for work that flow out of a Christian worldview.

1. Display the glory of God and give glory to God as God's glory is seen and the echoes of His excellence are heard in our individual disciplines. In light of the fall, guard against all

temptations to make your discipline be all about you and thus embezzle praise that belongs to God alone.

2. In light of the cultural mandate, view your vocation as a calling in which Christ is both the goal and fuel for excellence in our field.

3. Value people over projects. Reject a utilitarian view of people that would use people for other ends; rather than treating them as ends in themselves. Adopt the mindset that people are made in the image of God and thus model a Christ-like ministry to them by pursuing Christ-like self-giving so that you can serve them instead of being served by them.

3a. Value those with whom we agree as those made in the image of God by not using them or taking advantage of them so that we get the credit for their work and they don't.

3b. Value those with whom we disagree as those made in the image of God by first listening and seeking to understand them. Display both love and justice by fairly representing their viewpoints and by not standing in scorn over them and their work.

4. Take the long-view so that you do not get consumed with short-term successes or pitfalls. Chart a long-term course and find a pace to finish the race. On the one hand, expect great things from God and therefore attempt great things for God. On the other hand, remember that only God gets his to-do list done everyday (as C. J. Mahaney says), so yield to His plan and His timing.

5. Care and think deeply about biblical fidelity for both your message and your methods. Reject a pragmatism that only looks at "what works." Do the Lord's work in the Lord's way.

7. [Gospel at Work, Part 1](#)

Should you share the Gospel at work? The short answer:

Yes.

But before you answer that question we have to re-consider what we mean when we say "gospel" and "share." So much of our evangelicalism has bought into the notion that the "gospel" consists of four points merely with a decision called for at the end. Sure, the backbone of the Good News is God, Man, Sin, Repentance, Forgiveness.

Throughout our lives, however, we are called to creatively interweave the gospel *in* our lives. In other words, we need to think of the gospel as integrally tied to our worldview. We cannot look at the customer buying something from us apart from seeing them as made in God's image and in need of redemption. We cannot listen to the demands of our manager without considering that we are to revere him as we do the Lord. We cannot respond to a frustrated customer without understanding that there are idols of the heart that must be demolished.

Some people have said that we should not “share the gospel” at work because we are not being paid to “share the gospel.” I think I know what they are getting at. Of course we shouldn’t set up a chair at the water cooler and field questions of faith when we should be making phone calls. Of course we shouldn’t transition from selling a cell phone by saying, “You know how important communication with your loved ones is? Did you know that God wants to communicate with you too?” That would be awkward, it would burn a bridge rather than build it since people can sniff the farce of the sale.

If, on the other hand, we begin to integrate our lives in such a way that the gospel becomes the thread by which we weave the fabric of our lives, we cannot help but share the gospel in every conversation we have (all speech should be “seasoned with the salt of the gospel”). My job is pretty slow by way of customers coming in the doors, so I have the pleasure (sometimes it is a drudgery, honestly) of talking at length with a customer provided there is not someone waiting in line. There are a few folks I see every couple weeks or so. I try to remember their names, their situations in life (college, loss of family member, broke up with girlfriend, etc...sometimes I feel like a bartender!), etc. When they come in I ask them about their life, and they do the same. Whether I am having a hard week or a good week, I share it. Today, I mentioned to a lady how I am thinking and praying through my life decisions that are coming down the pike. At times I get to ask them how they celebrated Easter, Christmas, etc. I seek to be human and treat them as humans. When they are frustrated, I try to help them.

A couple came in a few days ago and they were extremely perturbed, planning on canceling their service with us because they had been told one thing and something else had been done. I looked at them and had genuine compassion on them. I sought to max out their discounts on service and see what I could do to make their lives better. Instead of chaos in their lives, I sought to bring wholeness — *shalom* in the Hebrew which means a holistic restoration of the broken order. They had been deceived but I sought to bring truth and alleviate their suffering. In a way, this is like offering a cup of cold water to the parched soul.

[Continued in Part 2]

8. A Christian Education and Witnessing at Work

Here is Jason Meyer’s second contribution to “missional work”. Check out “Witnessing at Work: Sacred or Secular?” also by Jason.

I will always remember the day that my dad gave me some wise counsel. He said, “Find a job you love and you will never work a day in your life.” I am sure he told me other wise things, but I probably was not listening. I have kept this particular piece of advice me for all of these years because something about it rung true. I never thought it had anything to do with evangelism, but I do now. I will try to explain my rationale in what follows.

Most people wouldn’t give a minimum-wage job a very high ranking in the category of “rewarding and fulfilling.” Therefore, a college education can be an essential aspect of finding a job that fully fits with your God-given gifts and passions. Although some colleges would omit

the “God-given” part, most recruiters at colleges and universities use this kind of proverbial wisdom to press for educational decisions from high school seniors.

My burden today is to point out that following this advice will actually cause you to be a more effective evangelist at work. In other words, one of the most neglected strategies for witnessing at work begins long before your hire date: know yourself so that you can identify what a fulfilling vocation looks like for you, and then take the necessary steps to secure a job within that field. Education is one of those “necessary steps” for many today.

The importance of finding a meaningful and fulfilling vocation for evangelism should be obvious: it is hard to witness winsomely concerning the joy of following Jesus when we look miserable at work. I remember working at jobs where I had to fight feelings of futility. There were some days when I felt like they could train a monkey to do my job, which certainly didn’t leave me with lasting feelings of fulfillment.

Now don’t get me wrong, we can still glorify God in the midst of the most mundane work imaginable. I remember learning that lesson as a college sophomore when I read Brother Lawrence’s book *Practicing the Presence of God*. Great theology should form the foundation of great doxology. In this case, knowing and cherishing God’s glorious omnipresence has enormous ramifications for our ongoing experience of God in the midst of menial tasks like washing dishes. Jesus didn’t say: “I’m with you always, except when you are washing dishes.”

But the point still stands that God created us with different gifts and passions and thus we honor God by using those gifts as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. This is one way that we fulfill the purpose for which we were made. Therefore, it should follow that we will delight in the opportunity to use our God-given gifts at work. Loving our work can testify to our love for Christ. We demonstrate that love within the totality of His Lordship by loving and enjoying what He has called us to do, which includes work!

One may wonder why this post concerns “Christian” education. All we have talked about thus far is the importance of education in general. There are several arguments for why a distinctively Christian education is valuable. Let me illustrate a few of these in story form.

I am a professor at [Louisiana College](#). A colleague of mine recently attended a conference on Christian principles for money management. The conference speaker offered some apparently practical advice to the audience: “Before you invest in education, first calculate the effect of the education on future potential earnings. An expensive education doesn’t make sense if the education cannot eventually lead to a significantly higher income.” He went on to give an example: “It makes sense to go to Louisiana College for a pre-med degree since LC is so respected by medical schools and can offer graduates greater opportunity for success. But a public school teacher makes the same salary no matter where she earned her degree [*author's note: don't miss the woeful stereotype concerning the exclusive role of women as public school teachers*]. If you plan on becoming a teacher, don’t waste your money on an LC degree. Go to a less expensive public institution.”

Now a slick recruiting brochure may tout the inexpensive nature of a secular education, but more is at stake in education than promotions and higher salaries. Thus my colleague, [Dr. Quarles](#), wrote an article that challenged this “Christian” perspective by comparing price versus cost. He went on to cite the work of Steve Henderson, whose research demonstrated that 52 percent of the students at non-Christian colleges who identify themselves as “born-again Christians” during their freshman year will no longer identify themselves as born-again four years later or will not have attended a religious service in more than a year (Steve Henderson, “[A Question of Price Versus Cost](#),” *Christianity Today* [March 2006]).

I recommended adding three further points of response. First, the 52% figure is a strong one that cannot be dismissed as a mere scare tactic. Who would buy a heavily discounted airline ticket if the flight attendant told them there was a 52% chance of this particular plane crashing? The flight attendant is not saying that crashing is inevitable, but rational people could agree that the potential cost of crashing certainly outweighs the discounted price of the ticket.

Second, a “price versus cost” analysis is important, but in order to avoid sounding overly simplistic, one must acknowledge that some Christians go to a secular school and are stronger because of it, while some go to a lukewarm Christian school and are lulled into a lukewarm attitude. One cannot simply assume the inevitability of Christians becoming non-Christians just because they go to non-Christian schools. Some go to Christian schools and become non-Christians too. In this vein, my colleague also informed me of Henderson’s findings that a liberal Christian school is significantly more devastating for a student’s Christian commitment than a public university.

Third, and more relevant for this discussion, the initial statement of this “Christian” financial advisor is a weird mix of utilitarianism and materialism. Utilitarianism says that the consequence of an action is all that matters and the end result must be happiness for an action to be wise and ethical. He has adopted a materialistic definition of happiness as the end result of college planning. His view of education fits the contemporary pragmatic approach which asks, “what can this do for me?” A consistent Christian approach to education asks a more important question, “what will this do to me?” In other words, this is the opposite of a Christian worldview because it does not fit with a biblical definition of humankind - *we are more than matter and therefore need more than materialism*.

This last point illustrates another potential benefit of a *Christian* education: guarding against dualisms. One can adopt an orthodox theology in the “sacred” realm and yet unknowingly absorb false and harmful ways of thinking in the “secular” realm. In a college business class for example, a teacher may focus so much on the economic “bottom-line” that a Christian student loses sight of a distinctively Christian perspective on money. In classes on jurisprudence, a student can unknowingly adopt the current pragmatic and relativistic approach to law if they are not grounded in a Christian perspective on law. In other words, losing your soul is not the only potential danger or “cost” associated with a secular education. Another potential danger is losing your mind. I am not talking about insanity - I am talking about losing a Christian mindset or approach to your vocation. Divided minds and hearts will invariably hinder our witnessing at work. Christian education exists to help us love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt 22:37), even at work.

9. [Gospel at Work, Part 2](#)

[Part 1 of [Gospel at Work](#) by Matthew Wireman. You can read more at Matt's blog, [Off the Wire](#).]

In the last post I sought to give some examples of how I share my life with people at work. I have taken the long-view in thinking through my relationships at work. Everyone at the store knows I am in seminary, that's an easy one. Even if you're not in seminary, make it your goal to at least have everyone know you are a church-goer. Trust me—you don't have to try and tell everyone—the word will quickly spread. When the news first got out, there were about three or four times employees let the other employee that I was a “preacher man” when I sat down to eat in the break room. With that said, people will watch your work ethic and how you treat folks that curse you (you return with a blessing).

I mentioned in my last post that we need to reconsider how we speak of “share” and “gospel.” “Share” is not merely conveying a message, it is imparting your very life (1Thess 2.8). It is not just reconsidering your method, but it is reconsidering the audience. They are not variables in the equation: Message + Listener = Conversion. Rather, they are where you were before your eyes were enlightened by the power of the Spirit to the glorious beauty of the saving gospel - the purifying, hope-giving gospel (Eph 1.18). These swearing, lying, promiscuous, cheating sinners are in need of the Savior - that is what you once were (Col 1.21ff; 1Cor 6.9-11).

We also need to reconsider how we conceive of the word “gospel.” Is it merely enough to share four points with someone? No, we should help people see how the Good News of Christ sin-conquering death on the cross gives them hope for life eternal. We must show them how the Good News of Christ's perfect life imputed to them gives them power to press on through trials of sanctification. We have to model for people how we do not revile because we have been forgiven much and cannot help but forgive, no matter how difficult the labor pains.

What we need as Christians is to not settle for an understanding of evangelism to be limited to sharing a four point message. Surely we do this at opportune times, but this four point outline is just that—it is an outline. We have to help people see that walking an aisle is not our goal. We have to convince people that prayer is a lifestyle and not simply the door into a relationship with Jesus.

Sadly, though, we have not shared the full-orbed gospel with people because we have not been gripped by it. We have been led to believe that it is the first step in a very long journey. Rather, it must be present in every step we take on this short pilgrimage.

10. [Churches, Affirm the Importance of Work and Mission](#)

Tomorrow, I am going to conclude this series on missional work with a working paradigm for missional work, but before I do, I wanted to share an excerpt from the pen of John Stott on the need for churches to affirm the importance of work among God's people and offer a few thoughts in response. John Stott writes:

“Many people say that they have never heard a sermon on work, even though they may have been a member of their church for many years. Yet the congregations of our churches are composed of people who are workers, either in paid employment or in some other context. Many of their deepest challenges emotionally, ethically, and spiritually will be faced in the context of work. It is essential, then, that churches show that work is important by bringing it into the teaching of the church and by praying for those in the church as workers, and not simply as family members or for what they are doing in the church.

[. . .] Laypeople need to know that their daily work is important to God. Indeed, it is essential to furthering God’s purposes for the world. They are not in a waiting room designed for those who are not doing ‘Christian work’, nor are they in some second league because they do not preach every weekend. What they do they are called to do ‘as unto the Lord’, because it is service for him. Every church needs to know what its members do, whether paid or not, because they *are* the church and they need to be supported in all that God has called them to do and be.”

- John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 230-31.

I think Stott makes an excellent point. How much emphasis are our churches placing on work? If you think about it, Christians will likely spend more time in their workplace throughout the week than any other area of life (40+ hours). Are our churches seeking to help Christians redeem that significant time each week by developing a Christian worldview and theology of work that is distinctively gospel-centered?

I ask this because, of all the efforts I have seen churches make regarding work (such as bulletin boards and employment opportunities), they has not been a connection made between work and mission. In other words, they help people find jobs to make a living without reference to a kingdom ethic or gospel emphasis. Don’t get me wrong: making a living is vitally important, and we need to be doing everything we can to help people find jobs and live productive lives. Yet, can we say that is *all* that churches should be doing when it comes to work?

Here’s the reality: there are thousands of electricians, bankers, doctors, lawyers, plumbers, engineers, servers, and on and on *who need Jesus*. And who are the best people to reach them? Preachers? “Vocational ministers”? No. The best people to reach them are electricians, bankers, doctors, lawyers, plumbers, engineers, and servers who work alongside them on a daily basis with 40 hours of exposure and intimate access to their lives on a weekly (or daily) basis. What are churches doing, then, to train laypeople in those missional contexts to work with a gospel-centered focus and drive? In other words, what are we doing to develop and bridge the theology of work with theology of mission?

Evangelism in years past has been compartmentalized to Sunday School or one night a week where churches go out on “outreach.” It is like we do evangelism as a slice of our week and lives while the overwhelming bulk of who we are and what we do, the gospel is off-limits. On the other hand, the church mobilized in the workplace will have relationships cultivated with unbelievers where the gospel can operate in the natural overflow of our lives, not something we must get psyched up to do for a couple of hours during the week. If you have 200 members who work full-time in their workplace, then each week there is **8000 hours worth of missional work**

available. Consider that! Are we, as churches, faithful stewards of such precious time and opportunity?

We talk a lot about frontier missions when it comes to the Great Commission. The frontier and front lines often are painted in terms of unreached people groups where there has been no engagement or Christian witness, and rightfully so. But in the North American context, I do not think it is too much to say that the front lines of evangelism is in the workplace. More time, more exposure to unbelievers, and more opportunities are given to us in this setting than anywhere else, and I believe that if we are going to take the Great Commission seriously in our context, we *must* mobilize our people to change their world with sweat on their brow and tears in their eyes, with callouses on their hands and brokenness in their hearts, with faithfulness to the work and faithfulness to the mission given to us [by Him who said](#), “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

May God help us affirm the importance of work and mission, and may the two become one.

11. A Working Paradigm for Missional Work

While I realize that this post is long overdue, I suppose it is better late than never. 😊

I want to take a moment to share with you a strategy or paradigm of sorts that I have used in seeking to invest myself in the mission God has given me in my workplace. Recognizing that this is something I have been developing in recent months, I know that there are some aspects to be challenged, critiqued, or contributed to, so feel free to share your thoughts.

There are four areas or facets of work that I would like to elaborate in this post. They are: the work of the mind (exegetis), the work of the heart (prayer), the work of the hands (service), and the work of the lips (gospel).

1. Work of the Mind - Exegeting Culture

Wherever you work, there is a culture to exegete (interpret and understand). There are worldviews, values, patterns of life, and beliefs that constitute the personhood of unbelievers you work with. Exegeting culture is hard work; it takes time and a willingness to listen and learn from others as a student and inquirer. Whether they are young or old, city or rural, black or white—people need to be understood. They might be nominally Catholic, devoutly atheistic, confusedly new age or syncretistic, or they might have no readily presentable religious construct. Why is all this important in the workplace? Because we are presenting a Christian message and worldview that is antithetical to the post-Christian, post-modern world in which we live, and we cannot naively assume that four spiritual laws or five points will effectively communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we are going to be prepared to give an account for the hope that is within us, then we must have our minds always at work.

So as I work, I take notes—literally. With each co-worker, for instance, I would have a separate page in my notebook where I would write down things we talked about, new information I gleaned, beliefs that rose to the surface, and other stuff such as friends, music, and relevant

factors. This is incredibly helpful as I will end up remembering stuff they said in the past and use as a topic for future conversation and transitioning into the gospel.

2. Work of the Heart - Prayerful Participation

I regard prayerful participation the work of the heart for two reasons: God gives us a heart for the lost when we pray, and second, prayer opens us up to see how God is working and makes us sensitive to opportunities that come our way. I can say with almost certainly that those who are not praying for unbelievers have never wept for unbelievers. Their heart is just not in it. They also are not open to what God is doing in their world.

There are times when at work you will not have opportunity to be a student and do cultural exegesis. The times when you are busy or by yourself is an excellent time to pray to God while at work. Don't give away those moments to listening to gossip or entertaining trivial thoughts! Participate in the heavenly work of praying and interceding for those who need Jesus as God has promised to bless the means of prayer in bringing sinners to repentance and faith.

3. Work of the Hands - Service to Others

Perhaps this is the most common or practical work; and yet, I often hear of Christians doing shoddy work when it comes to the work of their hands. A lazy, slothful, and undisciplined Christian worker does considerable harm to the cause of Christ—more harm than we sometimes realize. The work of the hands often opens the door for the work of the lips, while the lack of service to others never lends you the right to be heard.

I am not merely talking about doing your job well and working diligently; rather, I am talking about working well to the point that you can not only do your job with excellence but also allow opportunity to work for others above and beyond what is expected of you. Where I work at UPS, these folks are called “internal customers.” When I do my job well and seek to help others when I have opportunity, I am serving my fellow coworker and letting them know that I care about them and want to help shoulder the burden of their work. The result is that they come to know that I care about them and desire to step in and serve them with the work of my hands.

4. Work of the Lips - Gospel Proclamation

The work of the lips in gospel proclamation is last for a reason. It is very hard to be effective here if you are not faithful in the first three mentioned above. In fact, I doubt that there would be much “work” available in this regard if the work above goes unattended and unaccounted for. And yet this is the most important part of our work, because this is where the life-changing power of the gospel goes forth. It is God's intention that we share the message of Jesus Christ at work, but we cannot do that in an irresponsible and immature manner. In fact, I have come to learn that if you are respected and appreciated the work of your hands, your employer will have less of an issue with the work of your lips, even if they do not agree with the message your are sharing.

The greatest joys I have ever had, and the greatest times of heartache have come through sharing the gospel at work. I have seen co-workers saved, disciplined, and growing in their faith, and I have also seen sinners trample over the glorious message of Jesus Christ as though it was junk mail. Scripture calls us ambassadors for Christ whereby God is passionately making his appeal for reconciliation to hell-deserving sinners through our lives and our messages. As such, our mission (work) is to represent God faithfully by declaring boldly and yet humbling, truthfully and yet gracefully the good news that He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Conclusion

So that's my working paradigm for missional work. Let me make some final thoughts.

There will be times or days where you will be able to do all four areas of work, but that is not often. Rather, one day you will find yourself given more to the work of the mind in cultural exegesis as you are surrounded by other coworkers; other days, you will be given considerable time alone where you can do the work of the heart in prayerful participation; hopefully, there will be days where you will have opportunity to do the work of the lips in gospel proclamation. But we are to do all four of them and do them well. Do you see the difference between simply showing up for work, doing what is minimally expected of you, collecting a paycheck, and going home—as compared to what I have mentioned above? That is the difference between work and *missional* work. The former is meaningless; the latter is missional; the former is wasted; the latter is worshipful; the former is ritualistic; the latter is redemptive; the former is self-centered; the latter is God-centered and others-directed.

This isn't easy work. I am not a perfect model of it in action. But it is something I have put together over the past four years as a way of helping me seek to make a difference and seek first the kingdom of God at work. I just imagined that if I were to spend so many hours in one place with so many people, then certainly God could do something with me. I pray God does great things with all of us at work as we seek to participate in His mission of bringing worshipers to the throne of King Jesus!

END