



6 Sessions on
the Theology of Work

euston area talks



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Study 1

In the beginning, God created ... work!

Why do we work?

On average people spend one third of their life-time sleeping and one third at work. Not voluntarily, many of us might add. We often can't wait for each working day to finish, for our holidays to arrive, and many of us have been dreaming of retirement since our twenties!

What is the point of spending so much time at work when life is so short? Why do we work? Should we work? What is the Bible's view on work?

(A) Discussion starter questions

Discuss some of the questions below:

- How do you picture your personal paradise world? Would you want work to be there? Why/ Why not?
- If you won £1million, what would you do? Would you stop working? Why?
- What is work? How would you define it? What activities does/doesn't it include?
- Why do people work? Make a list of reasons why people say they work.
- Why do you work? What motivates you to work?
- From what you know already, what do you think the Bible says about work?

(B) What does the Bible say?

(1) Read Genesis 1:1-2:3. What do we learn about God as “worker” in this chapter?

Gen 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.*

⁶ *And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.*

⁹ *And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.*

¹¹ *Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.*

¹⁴ *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.*

²⁰ *And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.*

²⁴ *And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.*

²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

²⁷ *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

²⁸ *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

²⁹ *Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.*

³¹ *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. ^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.*

² *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

(2) When God designed humans, he made them in his image. In the context of Genesis 1:26, what do you think this means? What does this tell us about work?

(3) What kind of work does God give man to do (1:26, 2:15)? How does this compare to God's own work? (look at the example of Genesis 1:5,8,10 and Genesis 2:19)

Gen 2:15 *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

Gen 2:19 *Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.*

(4) Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. What does this add to how we should approach work?

Ecc 5:18 *Then I realised that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. ²⁰ He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.*

(C) Thinking it through

- How do you feel about work being good, being part of God's perfect plan for his world?

- How has your view of work been challenged?

- a) When you are thinking that work is some kind of punishment.

- b) When you are tempted to worship work and spend all your time at work.

- Picture what it was like for Adam and Eve to work in a perfect world. In your job, are there ever moments when work is really satisfying and enjoyable? What are they?

- Have you (or someone you know) ever experienced not having work? What does it do to people's sense of worth and value? How can we understand this in light of what the Bible says about work?

- How can we help ourselves, and others, to go on being thankful to God for his good gift of work, for the privilege of sharing in God's rule of his world?

- What would change if you approached your job every morning with the motivation that God made you to be a worker, that you are made in his image and excellently designed for the job of ruling, filling and subduing the earth?

(D) Praying it through

(It's a great idea to note down your prayers and others for reference as you work through the manual.)

(B) What does the Bible say?

When God made the world, it was perfect. So was work in the garden of Eden. But sadly, Genesis 3 has brought the great turning point. Rather than believing God's word and trusting in God's goodness, Adam and Eve disbelieved and disobeyed God. Rebelling against God had huge consequences. Most importantly, man's relationship with God was wrecked. However, also many other aspects of life, including work, were affected...

Read Genesis 3:6-22.

Gen 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." ¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" ¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

¹⁷ To Adam he said,

"Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. ²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." ²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

(1) Did God sack Adam and Eve from their jobs? How does their rebellion against God affect the character of work itself?

(2) How does sin affect human relationships? How would this affect work?

(3) Read Ecclesiastes 2:10+11 and 2:17-23. How does the writer of Ecclesiastes experience work? Why? In what ways is this also a consequence of sin and the fall?

Ecc 2:10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Ecc 2:17 So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²² What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³ All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

(4) Read Isaiah 65:21-23, which talks about the new heavens and earth that God is going to create for his people one day. What will the new creation be like? Will there be work? Why does it make sense that work is part of the new creation, too? What is work going to be like in the new creation?

Is 65:21 They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²²No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.

(C) Thinking it through

- How does what we have learned today, help us make sense of and manage the frustrations we experience in our job? (work itself, relationships at work, futility of work)

- Is there such a thing as the perfect job? How does what we've learned today help us make wise decisions when looking for jobs? Should you quit a job you don't enjoy?

- Are you surprised about the prospect of working in the new creation? How do you feel about working for all eternity?

- When work is hard, how should we react? How can a flash-back to Genesis 3 help? How can fast-forwarding to the new creation help?

- What might you say to colleague who struggles with work?

(D) Praying it through

Study 3

Getting out of bed on Monday morning

How should we approach work?

So far in our studies we have seen that work is good. In fact, work is a real privilege because it reflects the fact that God made us in his image, to share in his rule over his world. However, human rebellion against God has spoiled work and so for a big part, work has become hard, frustrating and far from being satisfying.

Nevertheless, God still wants us to go to work on Monday mornings, and how we approach work and do our jobs is hugely important to him...

(A) Discussion starter questions

Discuss the questions below:

- What do job advertisements promise/offer people these days? What do you look for/hope for in a job?

- How did you choose your current job? Do you think some jobs / careers are more worth pursuing than others?

- What is your approach to your work? Read and think through the following statements. Which of these apply to you? What do you make of them?

"I really enjoy the days when my boss is away, because there is less pressure and I can work less hard."

"Some tasks I enjoy less and so I put less effort into them / procrastinate doing them / don't do them."

"I think it is fine to take time during work hours to chat to my colleagues, have coffee or surf the web. Everybody does it."

"I don't put as much energy into my work as I could, because nobody else does and my boss doesn't seem to reward the extra effort anyway."

"I often try to work extra hard in order to impress my boss and get closer to that promotion."

"I think it is important to be willing to stay back after work / work long hours to show commitment and dedication to the job."

(B) What does the Bible say?

(1) Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, 1 Timothy 5:8, Ephesians 4:28, and 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. What reasons does the Bible give for why we should work and how we should choose what work we do?

2 Thess 3:6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." ¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. ¹³ And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

1 Tim 5:8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Eph 4:28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

1 Thess 4:11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

- We should go to work, because...

(2) Read through Colossians 3:22, Ephesians 6:7 and Titus 2:9-10. How does God want us to conduct ourselves at work? Why? What is the main reason?

Col 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. ^{4:1} Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Eph 6:7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

Tit 2:9 Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, ¹⁰ and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

(C) Thinking it through

- In what ways Bible's reasons for going to work different from the world's? What do you make of these reasons?

- Have you ever thanked God that he has given you work to keep you from being a burden to anyone, to keep you from being a busybody, to enable you to provide for your family and those in need?

- Do you think God concerned about which particular job you do? Are you able to achieve the Bible's goals of work in your job?

- How does working for Jesus rather than your boss challenge the way you do your work?

- Re-read the statements from the beginning of this study. Has your view on these been challenged? If so, how?

- What does it mean to work whole-heartedly? Does this mean you should work endless hours and not take your holidays?

- Where are the limits in your obedience to your office boss? Are there any areas in your job, where obeying God means disobeying your boss?

(D) Praying it through

Study 4

'Who took my stapler?!'

How should we relate to colleagues at work?

In the last study, we have seen that God is hugely concerned with how we approach work (much more so than with what kind of job we do). He wants us to work wholeheartedly, not in order to impress our office bosses and to get to that promotion, but rather, because Jesus is our real boss.

However, doing our jobs well is one thing, but dealing with that annoying colleague who yet again has failed to return the stapler, is quite another... What does God say about how we should relate to our colleagues at work?

(A) Discussion starter questions

- Many workers testify that at times they've come close to punching a colleague at work. Have you ever been tempted? What annoys you most about your colleagues / your boss / the people who work for you?

- Look at the statements below. Which of these do you find most difficult to do at work? Why?

- not complaining about my boss
- not moaning about some of my colleagues
- not joining in on office gossip
- respecting my boss
- being patient with some of my colleagues who annoy me
- saying thank-you and encouraging the people who work for me
- being fair when the people who work for me don't fulfil my expectations
- apologising to my colleagues for losing my temper
- not being envious of the success/salaries of some my colleagues
- owning up when I've made a mistake
- being honest

- Do you think your colleagues would be able to guess that you are a Christian, by looking at the way you treat the people in the office? Are you concerned about them being able to guess?

(B) What does the Bible say?

How to treat the boss

(1) Read 1 Timothy 6:1, 1 Peter 2:18 and Titus 2:9. What do these passages say about how to treat / not treat the boss? Why should we behave like this? What about masters who are harsh? Why should we still respect them?

1 Tim 6:1 All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered.

1 Peter 2:18 Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Tit 2:9 Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, ¹⁰ and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

How to treat your employees

(2) Read Colossians 4:1 and Ephesians 6:9. How are we to treat the people who work for us? Why?

Col 4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Eph 6:9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

How to treat your colleagues

(3) Read Colossians 3:5-14. How should we behave towards our colleagues? What does a Christian wear/ not wear to work?

Col 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

(C) Thinking it through

- How would life in your office be different if people treated each other in the way the Bible calls us to?

- What would it look like practically for you to respect your boss? Are there any areas where your attitude / behaviour towards your boss needs to change?

- What would it look practically for you to do right by your employees? Are there any areas where your attitude / behaviour towards your employees needs to change?

- Think about the behaviours listed in Colossians 3. Which of the negatives do you find most difficult to avoid? Which of the positives do you find most difficult to do?

- How does the reminder of what Jesus has done for you help you in your attitude / behaviour towards your colleagues?

(D) Praying it through

Study 5

God at work while you're at work

What is God working on today?

In the second part of our Bible studies on "work" we are going to look at what kind of work God is doing today, and how God's work today should impact the work we are doing in our workplace.

The Bible is clear that God is not simply a "watchmaker" who stopped working after he created the world and now is merely sitting back and observing how things tick-on in his world. No, God is still very much at work today. Day by day, he creates new life and he actively sustains his creation. But he is also doing a far greater work than that...

What is on God's work agenda? What are his plans for the future? What is he working towards? And what does this mean for our plans and ambitions?

(A) Discussion starter questions

- What are your aims in life / in your job? Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years time? What are you working towards? Why?

- What are most of your prayers about?

- As you hop on the tube or bus each morning to go into work what are your concerns for the day? What do you think / pray about as you go to work each morning?

- What do you see / think /feel when you look around your colleagues in your office? What do think each of them wants the most? What do you want the most for each of them?

(B) What does the Bible say?

Read John 5:1-30.

John 5:1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁴ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁵ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" ⁶ "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." ⁷ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." ⁸ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ⁹ and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." ¹⁰ But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' " ¹¹ So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" ¹² The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. ¹³ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." ¹⁴ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁵ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. ¹⁶ Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." ¹⁷ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. ¹⁸ Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ¹⁹ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. ²⁰ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²¹ Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²² that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. ²³ "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁵ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁶ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. ²⁷ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁸ and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. ²⁹ By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. ³⁰

(1) Why are the Jews opposing Jesus? And how does Jesus answer their accusation?

(2) What is the relationship between the work God is doing and the work Jesus is doing? How can we know what God's work is? (v19-20)

(3) What is the work that Jesus is doing (v 21-30)? When is he doing this work?

(4) As we look at what God's work is today, it is also worthwhile establishing what God's work is **not**. Read John 6:14-40, in particular v15, v25+26, v28 and v30. What is **not** Jesus' agenda for the present?

John 6:14 After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

¹⁶ When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, ¹⁷ where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. ¹⁸ A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. ¹⁹ When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. ²⁰ But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." ²¹ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

²² The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. ²³ Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. ²⁴ Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

³⁰ So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" ³¹ Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'

³² Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

³⁴ "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

- v15:

- v25-26:

- v28:

- v30:

(5) Why is that God sees the giving of life as his work priority? Look at the passages below and for each one of them answer the question: how does Jesus describe people like you and me without his life-giving work?

John 5:24 I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

John 6:63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

John 7:7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

(6) How would you sum up what Jesus is saying about people? What is their greatest problem / need? How does this help us to understand why God's work is to give life above everything else?

(C) Thinking it through

- How does God's working agenda compare with / challenge your own aims and ambitions in life?

- Do you ever think of your colleagues as 'walking in darkness', 'being slaves to sin', 'blind', 'condemned', 'children of the devil'? How would your attitude towards them change if you did?

- What would it mean practically to begin to make God's priorities your own in your office?

- How should God's work agenda impact your prayer life? How could you practically do this?

(D) Praying it through

Study 6

Workplace missionaries

How does God do his work today?

In the last study we saw that God is actively at work today giving people spiritual life. Without this life-giving work, people are cut off from God, facing his eternal judgement. Realising the desperate state our colleagues who don't know God are in, should get us on our knees praying for them.

But is there more for us to do? How does God do his work of giving life today? And how can we therefore make the most of our time in the office and engage in meaningful work that counts towards eternity?

(A) Discussion starter questions

- How would you rank the following people in order of importance / value of their ministry? What does this tell you about our view of work place ministry?

Pastor
Stay-at-home Mum
Christian with secular job
Deacon

Missionary abroad
Full-time church worker
Rich Christian
Missionary in the UK

- Where do you see your main ministry area at the moment? Why?
 - leading / being part of a bible study group at church
 - being a church member
 - serving at church on a Sunday
 - sharing the gospel with family and friends
 - my faith is a private issue
 - sharing the gospel with work colleagues
- Have you ever considered the fact that you are a workplace missionary? What might be reasons why work place evangelism is often not on people's radar screen?
- Why do you think workplace ministry is important in this day in age?

(B) What does the Bible say?

Read John 3:1-8.

John 3:1 ¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

(1) What picture does Jesus use for how someone comes to have spiritual life? Why is this picture a good illustration given the helpless state people are in who are cut off from God?

(2) How does God give new, spiritual birth?

(3) Read John 5:24-27. How does God do his work through His Spirit?

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

(4) Read also through the following verses. Where does spiritual life come from?

John 6:63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

1 Peter 1:23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

James 1:18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

(5) Read John 5:1-9. How can we see that Jesus' words carry executive power? Can you think of any other examples in the Bible that show how powerful God's word is?

John 5:1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁴ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁵ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" ⁶ "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." ⁷ Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." ⁸ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

(C) Thinking it through

- If God gives spiritual life through his Spirit by his word, what are the implications for you in your life / in the workplace?

- Has your view of workplace ministry changed?

- What impact does being a workplace missionary have on job choice and career advancement?

- What can you do practically to be more effective as a workplace missionary? What makes this difficult?

(D) Praying it through

