



A Christian perspective on work is a big perspective; full of hope, full of purpose, full of the goodness of God

BY CHRIS PARKER

IS SCHOOL JUST A PREPARATION FOR AFTER SCHOOL?

DO WE JUST GO TO SCHOOL TO GET TRAINED FOR A JOB?

What are your big picture hopes for your children? Where does schooling fit? Do children go to school only to be prepared for life after school?

With two children, my wife Coco and I were forced to do some soul-searching. Was school simply to equip our children for university acceptance, further training, widest employment choices, and opportunity? We discovered the founding parents and grandparents of Christian schools had embraced a much richer view of learning. They believed learning about God and His world gave opportunities for bringing Him glory. Preparation for vocation was part of the purpose of school; but it was not the main game. Making future employment

the guiding purpose of school could significantly work against the aim of Christian education. Their intent was for the unfolding of a deep and full and rich and wide view of life and learning shaped by the Bible. The notion of school as life preparation was under-emphasised, and a biblical view of work (and life) was actively woven into the learning at every opportunity.

What does your school do? Are you supporting them with how you talk and pray about school and work in your home with your children?

What does the Bible say that work is all about?

How would your children answer these questions from a biblical perspective:

- What is work?
- Why do we work?
- Is work a good thing?
- Should Christians work even if they don't need to?
- Why is work so hard sometimes?

Can you remember what spoken, and unspoken, messages about the purpose and meaning of work were given in your own home while you were growing up? Was schooling the stepping stone to achieving the 'best' job and therefore reducing possible toil in life? Were school and work the ultimate vehicles for success—a life defined by power, comfort, personal fulfilment, and early retirement? For me growing up, work was spoken about as simply a means to an end. It put food on the table and at best was a necessary evil. Coco and I are taking every opportunity to nurture more positive, biblical views of work, particularly during dinner conversations with Miss 10 and Master 12 about the days we have just had.

We flourish as humans when we acknowledge that we have been created by God to bring glory to Him. We bring Him glory when we faithfully fulfil our role as caretakers of all the strands of creation and the culture that flows from them. When work is considered this way—expanded to all human doing, less about self-identity and more about God's glory—we begin to see that it is distinctively Christian to see work as good. We don't see any hierarchy of different types of work in the Bible. All work has dignity whether you are involved with cancer research, ditch digging, scraping gunk out of nappies, or thinking about theology.

Damage to the good design for work

This perfect view of human work is not always what we experience. Millions of workers sit on assembly lines doing robotic jobs for minimum wage to make a few people extremely wealthy. Others find themselves engaged in tasks that are not demeaning by nature, yet find their pursuits tainted by a sense of fruitlessness and profound frustration. Work is good by design but the decay introduced by the first workers—Adam and Eve—is ever-present.

Work redeemed

What shapes our view of purpose in life is some big picture story; whether we are aware of the story or not. The biblical story not only gives a way of life and living but also a rich and deep framework for understanding ourselves, our purpose, others, and God's world. This biblical perspective has an extremely optimistic and hopeful view of work.

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God has blessed humankind with the task of cultivating all aspects of His world. Combined with His role as provider and sustainer, we are in a sense co-cultivators of all strands of the creation with Him. Christians can then see their involvement with music, family, learning, paid work, preaching, coaching, helping their neighbour, and writing all as an opportunity to serve God and bring Him glory. The biblical story of life has hope in the form of self-sacrifice but our dominant cultural story is founded on a false hope in the form of self-service and self-salvation through what we do and achieve; particularly in the context of work.

So what job should our children do?

In some communities it might be acceptable for students to ask "what job will make me the most money and give me the most status?" Perhaps in your community the question is not quite so blatant. However, would this variation of the same question be any more acceptable, "what job will give me a reasonable pay level and good job security and not too much stress so that I can live a comfortable life?"

As Christian parents let's be deliberate about training our children to ask, "how, with my current gifts, skills, and opportunities can I be of greatest service to others and the Lord Jesus by working with Him in His grand plan to redeem all things and establish His kingdom in Christ?"

How will our children determine what to do with the paid work part of their lives after school? I am hopeful, and prayerful, that my children will ask big picture, cross-shaped questions when they reflect on their place in God's world after school.

A Christian perspective on work is a big perspective; full of hope, full of purpose, full of the goodness of God that provides sustenance and resilience when decay makes work toil. 🍷

Chris is passionate about helping children to see the world through the gospel of the Lord Jesus. He is currently a lecturer and speaker with the National Institute for Christian Education and on the executive team of CEN. Chris and his wife, Coco, live in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. They have two children and a growing collection of ukuleles.

