

Give Jesus Your Profession!



Do I need a
“Special

What is
the secret
of fulfillment at
work?
Is work doomed
to be secular?

A Special Call? Many of us don't see how we can really serve God through secular work itself, precisely because it is secular. We can only witness when we get a chance and give to God's work. We believe that if we want our lives to really count for God then we must receive a special call and switch vocations to “full-time” Christian work. When we come to decision times like commitment night at the Urbana Missions Convention, we wait openly for a special call. If we receive it, we rejoice. If we don't, we may breath a sigh of relief and resolve to pray and give (which fades with passing time).

Many of us realize this can't be right, but it is our operational theology. However, I have wonderful news! You don't need to receive a “special call” or change vocations. Today's special call theology that God only calls some into “full-time” ministry is horrible theology. It wrongly elevates those in “full-time” service and reduces the rest to second string. It lets us off the hook and robs us of full participation. What insanity! The vast majority of the Church will always be everyday Christians—lay people, and they are the ones who have regular contact with non-believers.

God calls *all* of us! He calls us to himself—to give all that we are to all that he is. The New Testament consistently uses “call” in this way. Are you an engineer, a teacher, a lawyer? Turn that over to him along with everything else you are. Further, Jesus has already called all of us to work toward reaching all peoples—in the Great Commission. We do not need a special call, though we need God's leading.

Tentmaking? And there's another piece of good news—tentmaking! Tentmaking enables you to be a full player in carrying the gospel to other people groups *without* changing vocation. Biblical tentmaking means using your “secular” profession—integrating work and witness—to reach people in another culture with the gospel. (“Marketplace ministry” refers to the same integration within one's culture.) Real tentmaking transforms your secular profession into sacred service! It allows you to reach people who've never heard of Jesus without becoming a traditional missionary. But it comes with a requirement—one we implicitly met when we came to Christ—handing over our profession to him.

As Lord, Jesus calls us to lose our life in order to gain it. He commands us to do everything to bring honor to him. This includes work, the biggest focus of our waking hours. This does not mean giving up our God-given uniqueness, but surrender-

ing it to him and giving up self-seeking. Jesus does not want all Christians to switch to Christian vocations. In fact, he wants committed disciples scattered through all the professions. He asks each of us to turn over our profession to him—to consciously commit our profession to serving him. When we do, God transforms our profession into divine calling—it becomes “vocation” from the Latin “vocatio” meaning “calling.”

We must choose this deliberately and knowledgeably. To fail, we need only to do nothing. Without conscious resolve, we fall into the default cultural roadmap—pursuing success, material things, the good life, entertainment, comfort, security, status, and power. But the path to fulfillment is giving ourselves away in servanthood. Negatively this means consciously rejecting self-seeking—living for paycheck, success, material things, the good life, entertainment, comfort, protection from risk, status, power, and so on. Positively it means accepting servanthood.

Rupture! Many of us want to do this, but don't know how. Because of the rupture between the secular and the sacred, non-religious work is secular. But this polarization is a lie. Everything belongs to God by right of creation—every arena of human activity. Every activity can be sacred. In fact, God commands us to do *everything*, even eating and drinking, to his glory. (1 Cor. 10:31) This means 24/7 and certainly includes work. So we can serve God *full-time* through our work without changing professions. What makes anything secular or sacred is what we think and do with it.

Again, the secret is servanthood—laying all we are and have at Jesus' feet to please him and to serve people. This is completely counter to fallen human nature and to American thinking which gives us the right to self-fulfillment, to demanding our rights, to success, to the good life, to leisure, and so on. Instead, Jesus calls us to give up our rights and to become servants. Ironically, when we do this, we discover real life, abundant life as a by-product.

Supernatural Servanthood. But how can we do this? Such a life is humanly impossible. Again, wonderful news! When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit transforms us. He makes us born again to live supernatural lives—*lives that require an explanation*. He transforms us for servanthood in the workplace. So now that we know we have the power, what does servanthood mean in the workplace?

1. **Serving God** – Make it your first priority to obey and honor Christ. Reject all thinking that “This is the way it's done, so

it's okay," or that "Faith and church are one thing, but this is business (or work)." Instead resolve to please and honor Christ in everything you do at work. Very basically, do quality work which serves people well as service to Christ himself.

Because Christ has a rightful claim on everyone and everything, seek to see more people bow to him. Openly affirm your allegiance to Christ right away. Rejoice every time you have an opportunity just to turn people's thoughts to him—to his rightful kingship and to his extravagant grace. Tell the story of Jesus, not just propositions. There's no story like it. It captured our hearts; it will capture others. But never force unwanted religious conversations on people. Learn appropriate workplace witness. (Download "Workplace Evangelism" from "Tentmaking 101" at www.globalopps.org.)

Stand for what is right, even at risk of losing your job. Resolve this in your mind from the beginning. This means not going along when a boss asks you or ... However, don't be obnoxious. Be warm, encouraging, and positive with people in every way you can long before any conflict arises. When it does, look for alternate ways to meet the legitimate goals of the other party. As much as possible, seek to work cooperatively to resolve the problem, rather than becoming adversarial.

Christians have special responsibility for their profession—for its worldview and moral practices. In medicine, we must study the Bible and relevant science to understand and speak compellingly for righteousness related to abortion. And we must equip other Christians to do similarly in their networks. As lawyers, we are responsible to think and act Christianly about law, even when it means challenging legal theory and practice. Commit yourself to this in your profession.

"Joe" went with five others to a university in China on an exchange program. He taught English and studied Mandarin. Within a short time the other five had either quit or been expelled because of discontent, immorality, or bad behavior. In response, three Chinese students asked Joe, "Why are you different from the others?" So Joe invited them to visit his home and talk. That evening they showed up with several others. Over the next few weeks Joe led three to Christ and began discipling them.

When his contract expired, he returned to the US, very concerned for these new believers. But he soon received a letter from the university asking him to return, because of his integrity and excellence. When he stepped off the plane, one of the three Christians met him with a big grin and introduced a friend whom he had led to Christ. He asked, "Do you have any materials so I can teach 'Deng?'"

During his second year, officials asked Joe to teach a course on American holidays to 60 students going to America. Joe responded, "But I can't talk about American holidays without talking about Christianity." "That's okay," they answered. Many faculty and staff also attended the class. Later, they asked if he would help them recruit more English teachers for the university—"teachers just like you," he added. Excellence and integrity in work carry power. (Don Hamilton, *Tentmakers Speak*, Duarte, CA: TMQ Research, 1987, 4-6)

2. **Serving People** – Decide to treat others as you desire to be treated—even more, to love them as one who is a perpetual debtor to God for his incredible grace and mercy.
 - **Boss** – Obey them wholeheartedly as serving Christ, himself. Genuinely work to help them reach their legitimate goals. (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-24)
 - **Co-worker** – Make their job easier, not harder; help them rather than taking advantage and ladder-climbing; be positive and supportive; yet, don't just accept wrong behavior.
 - **Customer** – Provide excellent product or service, realizing that you are meeting a very real need. Serve them as if serving Christ. (Admittedly, some jobs produce inappropriate or trivial or extravagant luxury products. If so, you may want to find a different job.)
 - **Vendors** – Treat them as co-workers because they actually are for specific tasks. Don't take advantage, but treat them with respect. Pay bills on time. Be positive, cooperative, and appreciative.
 - **The Larger community** – All humans possess inherent value as God's image-bearers, strangers equally to colleagues and friends. So we must treat all rightly. Seek to obey Christ in issues like pollution, consumption of resources, discrimination, working conditions of suppliers, etc.
 - **The world** – We are more global than ever. Our work affects others. Again, commit to pursue mercy and justice at every point in which your work and your organization intersect with other people around the world.
3. **Love beyond work obligations** – I've discussed our specific responsibilities within work. But Christ calls us to love people beyond that—to have compassion on nonbelievers because they are like sheep without a shepherd and to love believers as he loves us.

A Christian was chatting with a non-believing co-worker during coffee break. The co-worker asked, "Did you see the job posted on the board? I'd love to apply for it, but I've never been able to write a good résumé." The Christian responded, "I'd be happy to help you with it." So he helped his non-believing co-worker to strengthen and polish his résumé.
4. **Love ultimately—draw people to Christ** - Of course, if we truly love people, we will seek to move them closer to Christ. He is their ultimate and greatest good. He is "*the way, the truth, and the life.*" (Jn. 14:6) Commit to actively lead non-believers to Christ. While never imposing, take initiative to point coworkers to Christ. Don't wait to build in-depth friendship to win the right to be heard before introducing Jesus. Jesus never did this. People knew from the outset that he stood for something. He won the right to be heard.

Then the co-worker discovered that his Christian colleague was applying for the very same job. He had actually helped him to compete against him. This is the kind of supernatural love which should overflow "naturally" from Christians.

by the way he lived, loved, and treated people. So should we. Resolve to seek lost people and not to give up learning to do it better.

- 5. Be willing to suffer unjustly** – All of us face times when we will suffer if we obey Christ—rejection, scorn, hate, discrimination, job loss, financial loss, sometimes even physical pain or death. God tells us every godly Christian will suffer (2 Tim. 3:12), but promises special help. (Mk. 13:11) We will suffer both for acknowledging Christ and for standing for right on issues like fraud, pollution, abortion, homosexual practice, etc. We also suffer pain from disease, accidents, and human sinfulness just like all humans. But these struggles are meant to develop our strength, our likeness to Christ, our dependence on him, and our satisfaction in him rather than in his gifts. So decide beforehand to accept suffering whenever it is a matter of loyalty to Jesus. (But don't kid yourself if you suffer for being obnoxious or mistreating others.)
- 6. Love other peoples** – The Great Commission is a mandate to all Christians, not just to missionaries with a "special call." Every one of us is called to work toward reaching people of other cultures—outsiders to our culture. Jesus repeatedly sought those outside ever-larger circles of "us," of the in-group.

One of the most powerful passages in the Bible is Jesus' invitation into intimate friendship with him in Jn. 15:15, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." Notice that this is not an invitation into buddy-buddy relationship. Jesus has just said, "You are my friends if you do what I *command* you." Jesus does not surrender his absolute kingship and cannot. This is a much bigger invitation—an invitation into intimacy with the High King of Heaven—to share his purposes, his heart for the world. It is like King Arthur inviting his knights to join him at the roundtable to help him rule. So also Jesus calls us to join him in seeking and loving the whole world—all peoples. Any Christian who does not internalize the Great Commission misses this friendship. Every Christian who does embrace his global mission receive his special promise of power, "Lo, I (the One with all authority in heaven and on earth) am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt. 28:18-20)

Pronounce your profession open to the Lord for him to use to reach other people groups. Put it on the altar for him to use, willing to sacrifice and take risks for his sake and the sake of those he loves. Then begin in your current job, even as a student. Reach out to outsiders, to strangers, to internationals, to immigrants. Work with the King in seeking to reconcile people to him. This will build your heart and skills, and God's leading will unfold fairly clearly before you.

- 7. Give sacrificially** – How we spend money is extremely powerful in our lives. Not only do motives affect spending, but spending affects motives. Jesus tells us, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Mt. 6:21) Check-

ing and credit card statements tell the story. Only 9% of American evangelicals give even 10% to charity. The average has dropped to around 3%. Younger generations do even worse. (www.barna.org, Barna Research Online - Research Archives – Stewardship; Barna Updates – The Year's Most Intriguing Findings) There is no way that such giving could be called "treasure." That means American Christians are not devoted to Christ, no matter what they claim. Think about something you have worked, saved, and scrimped for in order to buy. How valuable was it when you got it? You sacrificed because you valued it, and you valued it when you got it because of the sacrifice. To increase your heart for Christ's agenda, begin to give significantly more money, as well as, time and energy. Begin giving at the "treasure" level, adjust spending to do so and seek to increase giving because you love him.

Invitation to Jesus' Inner Circle! Jesus invites every Christian into intimate friendship with him—into full participation in his purposes. (Jn. 15:12-17) He calls us to do this as the unique people he has made us. He urgently seeks everyday Christians who are sold out to him. Only *everyday* Christians can validate the gospel in the workplace and demonstrate its power. Only they can add the credibility of unpaid witness rather than paid witness. Only they have regular contact with nonbelievers and only they can penetrate all sectors of society, because only they are there. And only *everyday* Christians can legally enter many countries that desperately need Jesus.

I invite you to consciously hand over your profession to Christ. Prayerfully and thoughtfully surrender it to him and indicate that below. Then keep this in your Bible to hold you on course. Leave the **FAQs** tear-off with a Global Opportunities person to receive occasional input from Global Opportunities about this and tentmaking. We want to encourage and pray for you.

By God's grace, I give my profession to Christ, embracing his global mission, accepting servanthood, and seeking his friendship.

Signed _____

Date _____

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Global Opportunities



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