

## REFLECTION

### Field to Fork: Our Work and Worship

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In my study I have a photo of my grandfather, Revd Canon Hobbs who for many years was a vicar in the Cotswolds amongst farming communities, communities that he had a great love for, and a great connection to, through a mutual love of land and agriculture.

Now, this photo pictures him in cassock and surplice in a small rural church blessing a plough. The plough is centred front and centre in the nave. And you see, one thing that he recognised, that others do and certainly this service today does also, is something that is all too often overlooked. That is, that God is a God not just of Sunday but a God of everyday, he's a God of ploughshares, of balance sheets and supply chains. He's a God of stacked shelves and taxi ranks and city hall. God is a God of rest, but he's also a God of work and of finding flourishing from field to fork and everywhere in between.

But the truth is, we live in a world where trillions of dollars in assets and goods and services are traded daily, impacting everyone around the globe from the wealthiest to the poorest communities and individuals. All our lives are shaped by trade and business and our work, whether it's the cost of fish in the market, or the ability to fill our car with fuel, or whether it's the trust that we can place in financial markets, in our pensions. Our work is and has always been a core part of our society. It's no surprise then that 45 of the 52 parables of Jesus are set in the marketplace. Jesus calls us to be active ambassadors for his glory, and his Gospel, in everything we do.

The question is, that when our work not only impacts our lives but the lives of everyone throughout the whole value chain from production to consumption, when our work impacts whole communities and livelihoods, when our work impacts the planet; how does God call us to live out our Christian faith as we till the land, either literally or metaphorically?

In 1970 the economist Milton Friedman wrote 'The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits', in that moment he convinced the world that business, the business of our work was about maximising financial return, and importantly, doing it for shareholders. And in so doing, a total commodification of creation has transformed the human and non-human world, often as assets for mere exploitation. The earth has become unit and humanity becomes capital and over time our worship and our work become detached from the ways of God and become the ways of incessant economic growth.

A few years ago I was speaking with a Christian oil executive who fervently explained the cost benefit analysis, that for him justified an oil slick in the Niger delta. Recently I was with a CEO of a clothing firm who justified their employment practices in Bangladesh, because it enabled him to maximise profits and then give away some.

In fact, just this week I was interviewed about the slave trader Edward Colston who trafficked tens of thousands of Africans so that he could generate and maximise financial return.

The truth is that whilst Freidman might have given us a language we have been wrestling with the relationship between the work of our hands and the worship of God since almost the dawn of time.

'With what shall I come before the Lord', we read in our passage in Micah don't we?

With what shall I come before the Lord  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
With thousands of rams,  
or with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn?

We're hearing him say, shall I worship the Lord through the things our world values the very most?

But instead we see a call for a change of perspective. We experience a paradigm shift, our daily worship is neither defined through financial value nor commodity. God, does not value the same things we have come to value in the world, but rather:

The Lord requires of you  
to do justice, to love kindness,  
and walk humbly with God?

And I love that, I love that image, and I don't think it's accidental either, of us walking with God, the same way that God walked through the Garden and blessed us with our first work to name the animals, before we lost our way. As we worship, we align ourselves with the creator and as we walk with him, we partner with him in his creative work. Our work and our worship are inextricably connected to the mission of God in his kingdom.

Now, whilst of course money is needed, yes, the fundamental value of our work contrary to Freidman is not found in maximising financial return, but rather it's found in the worshipful call to participate with God in creating a kingdom in which there is no more pain or tears; in which equality reigns, in which the planet thrives, in which food is sustainable.

We are called to be paint brushes in the artist hand of God.

It's so clearly put in Luke, what you value, you worship. So, may your work, our work, be as worship, may it be an investment in the unfailing things, the unfailing treasure, the unfailing glory of God, in heaven.