

SESSION 1 – WORK

BUZZ GROUPS:

Do you feel like God is interested in your work?

What is your vision of how you are serving God at work? Do you have one?

If the person sitting next to you were a fly on the wall at your workplace would they be surprised by what they observed of you?

If some of your work colleagues observed what you got up to and how you lived over this weekend, would they be flabbergasted at the contrast?

Have a time of feedback from groups before starting the talk.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

Say an opening prayer

You will remember that the aim of the weekend is that we shine like stars for Jesus – and in this first session we are thinking about how we might shine like stars for Jesus in our work. Perhaps the most crucial thing for this is for each of us to have a clear vision for our work. So often we can feel like God is not interested in our work – but that is so far from the truth. The aim of this session is that we will know a purpose, as Christians, in what we're doing and where we're heading with our work, wherever that work takes place.

I love this quote on the handout by the Christian pastor, John Piper which he writes when talking about work. He writes this: "You don't waste your life by where you work, but by how and why".

And I quote that sentence by Piper now because it is, if you like, a good commentary on how the four verses I'd like us to look at together this morning – how these verses can give us a great understanding of God's vision for each of us in our work. Because these four verses tell us about where to work, about how to work and about why to work.

So firstly -

1. Where to work

The short answer is anywhere. We have Amazing Freedom as to where to work.

In verse 31, Paul writes – **So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do.**

And the apostle Paul has been particularly talking in the previous couple of chapters about what amazing freedom the Corinthians had in relation to whether to eat food sacrificed to idols.

So back in chapter 8, verse 8, of the letter, Paul writes this: **8But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.** And it's exactly the same principle with where each one of us works. We are no worse or no better depending on what job we do. What job we have doesn't bring us nearer to or further away from God.

Nicky G because he is vicar of HTB is no nearer to God than Jim because he is a builder or Miriam because she's a mother or Fred because he is unemployed (use people in the pastorate as examples).

There's no hierarchy of jobs as though some jobs are better than others for the Christian.

And there's no restrictions too. As long as it's legal.

If you are fascinated by architecture or accounting or advertising or the army – then look for a job connected to those things. That's fine – you're free to do so.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do.

No restrictions.

As John Piper says -
You don't waste your life by where you work

We have amazing freedom.

But it is a different matter when it comes to points 2 and 3 – because we can waste our life by how and why we work.

So secondly
How to work

As I've said, the previous chapters of 1 Corinthians have been all about the amazing freedom we have as Christians .

But that's not all they have been about.

They have also been about this hugely important principle – that Christians have the freedom to actually restrict their freedom. And that principle is what is being defined in chapter 10 – verse 31. Just look at it again.

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do – that's the freedom, do it all for the glory of God – that restricts our freedom.

Because everything we do, how we work – it must come under the heading, it must fit in the category of being to the glory of God.

But what does that actually mean? What does it look like – to do things to the glory of God?

Well in verse 32 Paul continues.

32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—

So Paul is saying – first of all – that we are to **work so non-Christians (Jews and Greeks) don't stumble**

Give an example of where you have caused non-Christians at work to stumble in investigating Jesus because of your actions. If you can't think of an example, recount my example:

I'll never forget, in my old job as a management consultant, when the department I was a part of when on a two day team-building session in the Cotswolds. There were about 15 of us there, and at one point in the programme we had about an hour where we had to spend five minutes in a pair with every other person on the team, and we had to tell the other person very briefly, how we saw them. What their strengths were – and their weaknesses.

And I'll never forget what one person said to me.

He said the nice things – it's always the way isn't it. People butter you up with the nice things and then they drop the bombshell on you. And that's what he did. He'd said the nice things and then he said to me –

"You are too focussed on whatever you are doing". "Often I'll come and ask you a question, and you give me the answer, but you are not interested in me and don't chat to me and just see how I'm doing. You are too focussed".

And I was really shaken and ashamed by what he said to me. There was me - at the time the only Christian in this small department – as far as I know the only Christian that this guy knew - and his impression of Christians and Christ from me was that he was of little importance. As though I didn't have time for him.

My actions were causing a stumbling block to this guy coming to Christ.

And so I would urge each one of us to do a bit of assessment of how we go about our work.

We need to consider whether anything we do or say causes a stumbling block to others. Is there anything at work that we do, that blocks people from coming to Jesus because they think – if Christians are like that – well I don't want to have anything to do with Christianity.

So how to work – work so non Christians don't stumble.

But secondly, we are also to **work so Christians don't stumble** as well. Look at how verse 32 finishes

32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeksor the church of God.

So the church of God – that's other Christians.

Give an example of where you have caused Christians at work to stumble in their Christian living. If you can't think of an example, recount the example below:

So take James. He decided not to drink alcohol with his colleagues after work. He was fine with having a glass or two, and then stopping. But a Christian colleague of his often came out in the group and ended up having far too much to drink and getting plastered. Because this Christian colleague really struggled with alcohol, James thought it better that he didn't drink any alcohol at all so that he wouldn't in any way be a cause of his colleague stumbling by getting drunk.

So how to work

1. Work so non-Christians don't stumble
2. Work so Christians don't stumble

And then we read the third way as to how to work as Paul continues – look at verse 32 again.

32Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— 33even as I try to please everybody in every way.

3. So – thirdly – **Work so everybody is pleased**

Now in one way this is obvious - at work, we don't want to be known to be awkward for the sake of being awkward. There's nothing worse than that for the cause of Christ. Christians should be people who are good to employ.

In one way it is obvious – but verse 33 is also a bit of a surprise too isn't it – telling us to try to please everybody in every way.

Is Paul saying we should be people-pleasers, rather than God pleasers? Has Paul suddenly got no backbone, no principles?

Well – look at how he continues in verse 33.

33even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

That is the key – Paul is willing to please everybody in every way – not for his own good, not for his own advancement, not for his own reputation at work.

But for the good of others – their eternal good – that they may be saved.

Just look back to chapter 9 and verse 19 where Paul speaks about this idea in more depth.

19Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

He says - **I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.**

It's our principle again, isn't it. Paul is using his freedom – to restrict his freedom. He is prepared to become a slave to everyone – if it enables him to win people to Christ.

Give some examples that are relevant to the situations of the people in your pastorate. Suggestions are below:

So will we – play football with a colleague once a week – even if it means you've got a bit less time for catching up with friends from church. Will we do that so we can spend time with our colleague so that we might win that person for Christ

Will we – admit to our colleague our own struggles at work, or our own struggles outside of work – even though it makes us look less sorted, less capable, less macho. Will we do that so that they might open up to us about their worries in life.

Will we – stay in our job rather than moving to a new exciting opportunity – will we do that because in our current job there is someone we know well who is very close to becoming a Christian, and we want to be able to win them for Christ, even if it means forfeiting this amazing new job possibility.

Of course it's not always easy. Don't I know how so often in the workplace it is tempting just to look to our own agenda, to look for our own comfort and ease – rather than thinking what is best for others.

But certainly God's vision for us at work is that we look to
Work so non-Christians don't stumble
Work so Christians don't stumble
And work so everybody is pleased.

Let's move on to our final main heading – not where to work, not how to work. **But why to work.**

And our passage gives us two reasons

Firstly - Verse 31. **for the Glory of God.**

We are to work to bring God glory.
In all we do and all we say. In whatever we do.
But here's the challenge – you or I doing a good job – in of itself – does not bring other people to marvel at the glory to God.

Now please don't mishear me on this.

You or I doing a good job – in of itself – that is of interest to God. God is interested in your job.
You or I doing a good job – in of itself – that pleases God
You or I doing a good job – in of itself – that is being obedient to God. It's what God wants.
You or I doing a good job – in of itself – that is a form of worship to God.

But - you or I doing a good job – in of itself – does not bring others to marvel at the glory to God.

It's obvious really.

If on Monday you do really well at work, your boss will not say – praise to be God. Your boss will say praise be to Mary, or Carlos or whatever your name is. You get the glory.

Working for the glory of God is of course far far more than evangelism. It is our whole lives – it is about whatever we do. But working to the glory of God must include a verbal witness.

Otherwise it is to the glory of ourselves – not to the glory of God.
And that's why in these verses there is a second reason too as to why to work.

To save some.

Look at verse 33 again. Paul writes.

For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Now, I'm not saying that we must talk about why Jesus died on the cross with a colleague once a week or we are of no use in our workplace – of course not.

There will be times when we get to speak about Jesus quite a bit – and there will be times when we don't speak at all about Him for a long period of time.

But I think too often – we can completely lose our focus on the fact that one reason for us being at work is to, by God's grace, save some people from an eternity in hell as they come to trust in our Lord Jesus.

Don't I know it – it is so easy to get so wrapped up in our job – that we forget there is a work that as Christians we are all involved in over and above teaching that class or stacking those shelves or delivering those letters or caring for that sickperson (use examples of jobs that people in the pastorate do).

Yes – we are to teach that class well, we are to stack those shelves effectively, yes we are to deliver the letters reliably and cheerfully, yes we are to care for that person in hospital with all compassion.

But at the same time we are to be focused on saving some.

And so if we want to summarise a vision for work as we close – if we want to summarise God's vision for us in our many different workplaces here, we need only look to the next verse of 1 Corinthians. Paul writes. Chapter 11:1

1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Our vision for work should be to follow Jesus' example. It should be to think at work WWJD – what would Jesus do?

And when we think on the example of Christ – we know that wherever he was. whatever he was doing –

how did he work – well he used his amazing freedom – the freedom of being the Second person of the Trinity – he used his freedom to restrict his freedom – to become a man, to take the very nature of a servant, to humble himself and become obedient to death – even death on a cross.

Why did he work like that, why did he restrict his freedom - so that God might be glorified and so that some might be saved.

In our workplaces - we need to do the same.

MINISTRY TIME:

Ask the Holy Spirit to come and encourage us that God is interested in our work, and implant in us a clearer vision of how we can live for Jesus and make a difference for him at work.

Encourage people to pray for each other in groups – asking God to enable them to shine like stars for Jesus at work