



RESOURCES





An Understanding of Work

by Michael William

In the Genesis narrative, work is depicted as a basic dimension of human existence. Its character is shaped, first, by the fact that human beings are made in God's likeness (Genesis 1:26) with the capacity to participate actively in the wider creation. Their commission is to rule over it and administer God's gifts. Secondly, work acquires the character of a burdensome necessity because of the Fall. The curse which followed man's disobedience to God (Genesis 3:17) means that human survival depends on 'painful toil'. These are the twin themes of the Old Testament view of work. Throughout, it is assumed that work is part of the divine ordering of the world. Although frustrated by human sinfulness, work is something to be accepted willingly as a means of God's blessing (Psalm 128:1ff.). The meaning of work, however, is not defined solely by its character as a divine ordinance. Both God's work of creation and human work also has an extrinsic purpose which is expressed in God's rest on the seventh day of creation (Genesis 2:2) and in the commandment to keep the Sabbath (Exodus 20:11). In contrast to the modern concept of leisure, this rest is not a state of idleness but a higher form of activity which involves worship of God and the enjoyment of His creation.

The New Testament values work in the same way as the Old Testament, and sets it in the light of Christ's 'work': His ministry, miracles and work of redemption (John 4:34). The incarnation of God as the carpenter of Nazareth is the perfect fulfillment of the teaching that work is necessary and good. But the work of Christ takes His people beyond the mundane realm of necessity into the joy and freedom of serving God. The gospels condemn any approach to work which would make it or its products a substitute for God's kingdom, while the advice of the epistles is to treat work and everyday life as the sphere in which service to God is rendered. Christians are seen as 'co-workers' with God (1 Corinthians 3:9) and their first priority is the furtherance of the gospel. Therefore, the motive for working diligently and well is not merely duty or obedience to the law, but a grateful response to the work of Christ.

The Christian's 'calling' or 'vocation' is to new life in Christ. This word does not refer in the first instance to a profession or occupational role. However, in resisting the tendency of medieval Catholicism to elevate the monastic orders to a 'divine vocation', the Reformers employed the concepts of profession (*Beruf*) and vocation (*vocatio*) to show that 'ordinary' stations in life could be a means to glorify God. Luther, Calvin and others were reasserting the NT view that ordinary work is an integral part of Christian living, not a hindrance to it. It has been argued, notably by Max Weber, that the Reformers' idea of 'vocation' to a divinely ordained task or occupation was one important element in the 'Protestant work ethic', the others being abstinence from worldly pleasures, a strong propensity to save and a disciplined use of time. Weber's thesis that there was a close affinity between this work ethic and early capitalist entrepreneurship in parts of Europe is not capable of convincing historical demonstration. But there is no doubt that these values (or secular versions of them) did play a significant part in Western attitudes to work and employment, and continue to do so among some sections of the working population. Weber's contribution draws attention to the important place of values, including religious values, both in the individual's commitment to work and in its social organization.

The doctrine of work is spelt out in Scripture against the background of the types of economic activity which prevailed in the eastern Mediterranean between 2000 BC and AD 100. These societies were either nomadic or agrarian. Work was organized on a family or household basis and closely linked to rights over land. Present-day industrial societies based on capitalist accumulation and a free market for labour are quite different and present particular problems for the theology of work.

First, there is the tendency for work to become synonymous with paid employment. Work in this restricted sense becomes the measure of worth. It devalues the contribution of those whose work is mainly within the home or in the voluntary sector. The second problem is that labour markets are an imperfect mechanism for allocating work, leaving many people either without a useful occupation or in an ill-suited one. Third, industrialism entails a complex division of labour which reduces many tasks to repetitive and meaningless routines. Instead of being the subjects of the work process, human beings become the objects of technical and organizational systems. All these aspects of work in Western industrial society have attracted much criticism, but the theological response has been sluggish. Indeed, certain narrow interpretations of work and vocation still lend support to a business ethic which stresses achievement and material success as a sign of God's favour. Increasingly however, biblically informed approaches to work, employment and unemployment acknowledge the need for just and peaceable relationships in the social organization of work. This, rather than the individual's commitment to work *per se*, is the dimension which is historically and culturally most variable and fraught with difficulties of interpretation.

A theology of work will recognize the continuing and fundamental importance of work for human existence and well-being. The mandate is for every human being, for every generation, at every stage of economic development. However welcome the release from drudgery which automation may bring, a 'leisure society' is not a valid goal. There is no end to useful work within the created world. The theology of work has also to consider the intrinsic value of work in the light of the problems of authority, control, technology and alienation. It has to engage with contemporary critiques in order to develop an appropriate ethic for these times. Finally, theology has to face the challenge of the social (dis-)organization of work, especially mass unemployment. Where the means of livelihood, social identity and participation are obtained or denied largely through the labour market, the social right to useful work must be established as a matter of priority. A theological understanding can no longer be developed, as previously, in relation to the individual worker. It is called to express the interdependence of human relationships under God in the world of work no less than in the family, the church or the state.



Why I keep going to Church? by Pete Hammond

Another Sunday morning; and I sure would like to sleep in. Lots of my friends avoid going to Sunday church. They remind me that it's boring and often irrelevant. They often add the comment that they have a hard time understanding all that religious stuff that goes on too. They sometimes sum it up by saying they will not associate with the hypocrites that show up there either. Often they say it just isn't enjoyable.

Why do I keep going? Sometimes I feel the same arguments that my friends have—I don't understand lots of what goes on either; I don't like some of the people that are there; the leaders don't do it my way in terms of music, length, themes or language; it's a distraction from the big things in my life like love, work and pleasure; and it is easier just to avoid the whole thing and grab a morning for me.

But, I do keep going and I will keep going. Here's why:

I need help in **REFLECTING** on the past week to see it as just a small part of my journey of life. I need to be led by others instead of a constant diet of my own choices for subject matter. I need to be regularly reminded of **WHO I AM** before God and who I can become in Christ. I need help in acknowledging my **SHORTCOMINGS**. I need help in acknowledging that I am a **SINNER** and regularly discover new dimensions of its meaning. I need to hear how **BELIEVERS** of the past struggled, grew and lived out their faith long before I ever came on the spiritual scene, or even started trying to cooperate with God. I need a taste of the **ARTS** as expressions of faith, e.g. music, symbols, prayer, architecture, colors, etc. I need to **LEARN** why some parts of worship that totally escape me are important to those who choose them. I need to participate in music rather than just be entertained. I need to be **SILENT** once in a while. I need help to face **ISSUES** of life and faith presented through the readings and preaching that I probably would avoid or never even think of myself. I need to hear of **OTHERS'** joy and agony, so mine fit into a larger context. I need to be **REMINDED** of what other followers face even if I do not enjoy who they are. I need to be **AWAY** from the endless messages of my cultures so I can carefully weigh the values and implications embedded within them. I need a **BREAK** in my rhythms of living and working. I need to hear again that "I am **LOVED**...". I need help in the area of **PRAYER** as I hear others lead, and am reminded of some of the prayers of centuries past. I need to be drawn into **SCRIPTURE**, including those parts that I would avoid, struggle to comprehend, or misuse carelessly without someone else's perspective. I need to **BELONG** to a community of faith whether I am at my worst, really on a roll or just plodding along. If I choose the lesser route and avoid these and other things involved in

joining others in regular worship, I turn inward too much and get an inflated view of my own importance, or fall captive to my own failures or challenges. I just can't keep living with my worm's eye view of the "world according to Pete," and expect to develop any kind of healthy attitudes or relationships. I **go** because I need help. Whether I get it depends on me – not those who develop the services, lead them or attend for their own variety of reasons. I **also go** because I want to say "thanks to God" for yet another day and another chance to live, work and grow.

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Reflections on Graduation by David Tan

GRADUATION – A TRAUMATIC TRANSITION

Well defined

A student's life is generally well ordered, with many activities pre-planned for him. He has a timetable and certain responsibilities that he must fulfill. At the same time there is quite a certain amount of leeway in his daily program to allow for changes in routine, as well as other unstructured activities like leisure and religious activities. His needs are generally few and his goals well defined. The rules of his life are also quite well defined and uncomplicated – study, no cheating, finish all assignments, attend lectures, pass exams and you will attain your goal. He has many like-minded friends around him and usually what he needs is provided for or close at hand. He is generally held in high esteem, both by his family and by society. This gives him confidence.

Uncertain

When he graduates, he achieves the very thing he has been working towards and looking forward to. "At last I have succeeded!" he says to himself. Success, however, does not achieve for him better circumstances. It is a success he cannot enjoy. For graduation is not a doorway to a special passage that leads to experiences that will be better than his experience in campus. It is merely a doorway that leads to a common room where everyone else also enters and he has to compete all over again not necessarily with any advantage over others, and certainly with very uncertain rules. He has climbed to the doorway that is highest, and often the fall he experiences as he steps into the hurly-burly world of adult life, is hard to take. Especially in these times when employment is scarce, the graduate is at square one with everybody else.

Boredom

The world he steps into is so unlike the world he has left. There is no timetable. He wakes up every morning and there is nothing to do. All that he has been longing to do, to sleep more and pig out, he has overdone in the first two weeks after graduation. He finds it hard to handle the

vast amount of free time available. Boredom sets in and when this happens there is even less inclination to do what he is not compelled to do. He has so much time that he has no time. All his friends are gone and there is no one to do anything with. He begins to discover life is a one-way street that he can only try to live in the world he has entered into because there is no other world he can go back to. His hometown has changed. Campus life has changed. There is very little he can do.

Campus has not prepared him for this. The good life was supposed to come with the degree. Campus has not prepared him for failure, for rejection, and for the interminably long wait with no real hope. And the rules of life keep changing. There are so many variables now – success depends on luck, knowing the right people, on having the right personality, on being at the right place at the right time, on working till you drop.

In the meantime, his view of himself changes. He resolves inside himself that if he cannot contribute financially to his family, at least he would not be a burden to them. Taking money from his parents becomes a very big issue and a lot of pride and self-respect is at stake.

Changes

In the midst of all these changes, he wonders what has happened to all he has been taught as a Christian. Either it bothers him and becomes an additional point of guilt and pressure, or it doesn't bother him at all and he sheds his Christian clothes as easily as he leaves behind his campus memories.

Stigma

The options available to him are few and far between. There is much pressure to go for any available job. 'Don't be too choosy', well-meaning people tell him. But they are people who already hold cushy comfortable positions. They don't understand his struggle is not only with pride, but also with having to give up long-cherished dreams. He gives tuition. He teaches temporarily. He finds companies who exploit his situation. And when he finally gives up and lines up for a job far below his qualifications, he is rejected. The stigma of being an unemployed graduate weighs heavy on him.

Job

But sooner or later (and later is more frequently the case nowadays), he settles down to a job, whether a temporary job or a more permanent job. Here another radical change takes place. From having too much time, he now has very little time he can call his own. He is not used to working long hours at a stretch, and he is tired in the evenings. His world shrinks as his capacity is reduced. He hardly has energy left to pursue anything intellectual and his church life is reduced to worship on Sundays. A common word on his lips is "no".

Money

Money takes on new dimensions. He now has his own hard-earned money. Previously he wants few things because he cannot afford them and moreover it is not his money. Now he can live the lifestyle he wants without any guilt. Credit buying adds to his purchasing power. His lifestyle rises to his level of affordability, and often, even beyond it.

These two new forces in his life are very powerful forces that can take over his life. His job eats up his capacity and his lifestyle eats up his affordability. Other forces also come into play such as ambition and the drive to rise in status and salary. External forces like targets and deadlines, the boss' expectations as well as the fashionable way of thinking of the crowd he keeps. He finds his idealism or ideals that he holds out-molded, under attack and maybe something to be ashamed of. He has few allies and is very tempted to change the uniform he wears.

Somewhere along the way he becomes disillusioned. Life is not as he has expected it to be. The contraction – expansion – contraction – expansion of his time that he experiences unsettles him and all the time he is just trying to cope. He is unhappy because so much of his life is occupied by his job and he is trapped because his lifestyle has forced commitments on him that he cannot run away from. He is uneasy because so much of his thinking seemed incompatible with his life. He is alarmed because he discovers new and powerful drives in him that he cannot but come to terms with as yet. So many things have changed. He knows he has to change. But what is he changing into?

POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO CHANGE

Chameleon

There are a few ways in which a person in these circumstances can respond. Firstly, he can be a chameleon, - changing his color constantly to suit the environment he finds himself in. Such a person is basically pragmatic. He chooses the line of least resistance and lives in a way that brings the least stress. The good side of his pragmatism is that he is quick to accept the realities he finds in life and therefore is much more able to adapt. He keeps his expectations firmly in line with reality and therefore, does not experience much conflict. The bad side is, of course, that he may be one who compartmentalizes his principles according to the company he keeps, having one set of principles for his business life, one set for his religious life and one set for his social life.

Dreamer

Secondly, he may be a dreamer – living in a world of his own making. The dreamer is an idealist who finds it hard to live in the real world. He is inflexible and keeps on reliving days gone by. He compares everything with the "perfect" world he has thought out in his mind and is highly critical of the messy world outside, either at work or in church. Nothing (obviously) and nobody turns out the way he expects. Probably he will find it hard to fit into any job or church for long. The good in such a person is that often there is a sincere desire to adhere to principles, keep standards and pursue excellence. However, he cannot accept reality nor does he have the patience for the long process of growth and development.

Procrastinate

Thirdly, he may procrastinate. There are nagging things that demand his attention but he constantly puts them off for that fine day when he will deal with all these issues. In the meantime, he keeps running and doing the many things that come his way. Most of his decisions are ad-hoc and very dependent on impressions, the convictions of others, how he feels and whether he has the time and energy. Often he is a 'go-alonger'. He goes along with whoever is most persuasive. There is very little good about being such a person. And yet that is the category that most of us fall into. Maybe his best contribution is that he keeps the motor running. But there is no input, no initiative, no vision, no direction, because he has not thought through, nor does he carry through his thoughts into action. That 'fine day' never arrives.

Reacts

In the same category is the person who merely reacts. Life is difficult. Things don't turn out the way he wants, or expects. Instead of responding to the situations he finds himself in, he reacts. He withdraws and becomes bitter. Self-pity creeps in. These feelings and reactions affect other areas of his life. Alternatively he may run back for shelter, to escape the harshness of a world where he has to carve out his own place in the sun, and be responsible for himself. He is excessively dependent.

The result is the same. He makes no real contribution and instead hangs on to the contribution of others.

Schemer

Fourthly, he may be a schemer, in a nice sense of the word. He has life mapped out. He knows exactly what he wants and he pursues what he wants, with the courage and drive that is a part of his character. Schemers generally do well because of their energy and drive and their ability to be unaffected by circumstances and criticisms. In fact they bend their circumstances, and often people, to accommodate them. There are schemers who are actually dreamers and all their plans fall to pieces because the drive and conviction is lacking. The drawback about schemers is that they often bulldoze through people's feelings and aspirations. Schemers do very well with a group of 'go-alongers'. But their lives have the weakness of most one-man shows, for all their energy and talents, they are after all, only one man.

Reviewer

Fifthly, he may be a reviewer. Here is a person who has definite goals and he has thought through and understood enough to have a broad framework rather than a rigid plan. This process of thinking through is a constant on-going process in his life that helps him to adapt to the changing world around him. The principles he adheres to need fresh perspectives, especially from the point of view of his present experiences, and the circumstances and situations he finds himself in, need to be understood and dealt with from a consistent framework of goals and principles. Thus, there is constant interaction of belief and experience, values and desires, person and circumstances.

TENSIONS A NEW GRADUATE ENCOUNTERS

Security and certainty

The immediate need for most people is security and stability. The unknown generally scares us and there is a very strong impulse to move into more known and reliable circumstances. This usually means finding steady employment. Intersecting this area are our ideas of the will of God, personal dreams and preferences, our qualifications, status and pay, as well as economic realities. Often our parents' wishes also come into play. The job will be our new hope, our new identity, our new occupation and preoccupation. Naturally, we desire to be happy and fulfilled in this new environment and this is translated into our quest for the 'right' job. Is this the right job for me? Is this the right thing for me to do? What is the will of God? Often the intersecting concerns conflict. We are afraid to make wrong decisions. Is it right to decide according to my ambitions, desires? We are afraid that God will punish us if we are selfish. Sometimes we try to bribe God – "God, let me have this job. I promise to give my spare time in service to You." Or we are torn between a job we don't like, but it seems to be what God likes – "I suppose I ought to try teaching since I can then have more time to serve God" – and what we like but are afraid that it is only from a selfish thirst for material wealth and status.

There are questions no one can really answer: "Should I put aside my engineering qualifications now and go into insurance (which has available jobs) or should I hold out and wait, just in case?" And there are questions of values and priorities: "Should I give in to the realities of the situation and go for any job at any price? Should I hold to my ideals of doing what I'm trained for? Can I choose remuneration over opportunities for service? Should I practice faith by praying and waiting for the job that I believe God desires for me or should I take by faith the opening available now as God's will?" And things go wrong. Things do not turn out the way we expect them to. "What is God trying to do? Why does there seem to be no end to this long dark tunnel?" In our deep unhappiness over our quiet time, worship and service turns stale and dry, lifeless. Guilt in turn creeps in. Together with guilt comes a whole mass of other emotions – the cycle of hoping and losing hope, boredom, bitterness, jealousy, shame, fear – which are as strong as they are contradictory. "Is God punishing me because I seem to be losing my faith? Yet how long must I hang on before He will deliver me?" Sometimes in our dark moments we want to rebel against God, disbelieve

Him, stop hoping in Him, in order to punish Him, to gain His attention and sympathy. Sometimes in the weakness of our faith, He seems so ineffective, so inconsequential in our time of need.

It is not difficult to step back and look at the above picture in a detached manner, to realize that *the source of these questions is the insecurity of a person facing an uncertain future*. Such a person, because he is intolerant of the uncertainty, seeks to secure his future and expresses this desire by his search for the right decision, the right move to make, the right response to give. What is right is determined by at least 3 factors that may not agree – his desires and plans, the reality of his situation, and what he perceives to be God's will. The situation is worsened when he does not know much about each of these factors. We can lessen the trauma, pressure and burden on our decision-making at this point if we clarify in our minds a few things.

- 1) *Uncertainty is a fact of human experience. The Christian finds security in the midst of uncertainty by his faith in God. The presence of God in his life does not change uncertain circumstances into certain ones.*
- 2) *In the absence of specific knowledge of the will of God upon the situation considered, we can and should continue to make decisions (where necessary) based on what we know and what we are willing to commit ourselves to (perhaps within a time frame) and work out. These decisions, of course, need to be within the framework of God's general will (e.g. no immorality, your growth as a Christian will not be impeded...).*
- 3) *God does not promise us a rose garden. Life is like an untilled land for us to weed, to wrestle with, and to make it fruitful. Making good decisions is important. Even more important is the daily effort put in, perseverance and courage to work out those decisions. Where, because of new circumstances, new experience and realization, new knowledge, we come*

to believe we have made poor decisions. We should be free to change our decisions and make new ones. In fact, the fact that God is with us ought to make us bolder and more courageous to step into the uncertain future ahead of us.

Identity

A second area of tension is in the area of identity. Varsity, like it or not, is a very closed environment and stepping out of it is stepping into a world where we are very inexperienced. It is amazing how much we do not know – from how to write a resume, or business letter, to the simple technical details of an assembly line, the procedures of an office operation, the unwritten normal practices of a court hearing – things that people much, much less educated than we, can do without a second thought. We carry a big title – graduate, lawyer, marketing executive – but we feel the depth of the inadequacy that our smile and swagger can scarcely cover up. At the same time, weightier responsibilities are placed on us. *No longer do we merely try out things. Most of the things we are called upon to do are for real this time. No longer is it just theory and concepts – action, and with action, responsibilities is the order of the day.* This happens to us, not only in our working environment, but also in the home and at church. If we are involved in a serious relationship with another, then the prospects of marriage, home, housekeeping, pregnancy, in-laws, loom large and real. The more these things intrude into our lives, the more we are aware of our failings, our weaknesses. As one new graduate wrote:

"I feel I suddenly have to grow up very much. Now I am no longer a student. I have to think, act, react, behave and work as an adult. The change was quite drastic to me as I was expected to be a professional teacher even though I did not have the experience. At home I became the breadwinner and had a bigger share of family affairs and responsibilities. In church, the members seemed to see me differently. I seemed to have become so old as to be considered among the leaders of the church, or at least a budding one. I don't know how much the image of me has changed but I do know I need time to grow. Nevertheless I am thankful for everything. I'm sure God knows how to take care of me."

Yet despite all these changes taking place around us, and all these demands and expectations on us, we feel that we are still very much the same, not in the position to carry these responsibilities and demands. If we are unemployed, the situation is even worse as slowly our self-confidence deteriorates and our sense of worth vanishes in the face of countless idle days.

Thus the transition that we are going through creates tensions in our sense of identity. The views and expectations of society on us, the demands for competence and effectiveness by our jobs, our own personal expectations and desires that alternate between wanting to be successful and acclaimed, and wanting the safe, comfortable shelter of student life, and the reality of our inexperience and inadequacy trouble and confuse us. Many of the things that initially affect us are beyond our ability to determine, and yet we are still judged and assessed by society. Our jobs want to shape and mould us so that we will be like the current model of success. The church wants us to come to the forefront and lead. Be aggressive, be assertive, be personable, have a listening ear, be creative, be interesting, be charismatic, be sociable, be hard working, - after a while, we don't even know who we are to be ourselves, or worse, the only self we want to be is not to be anything.

"I need time to grow!" The only time you have is the time you take. The only way to be in control is to take control, not in reaction, but with determination, with courage and with a sense of your limits. The needs and demands around us will pull us in a thousand directions, and we need to move, discerning the necessary, the good, the long-term and the superfluous, sensibly. At the same time, the ability to give and take is very important. We are in a stage of transition and transition is a space where we can move back and forth between being a student and an adult. A friend related to me an incident that happened some time after she graduated. She was still unemployed at that time. She was going to town to visit some friends and her parents wanted to give her RM10 as spending money. She refused but her parents were insistent. That simple incident erupted into a major quarrel.

She told me that she felt very silly to have made such a big fuss over nothing at all. The point is that it was not nothing – it struck at the identity that she felt she ought to assume, of no longer being a child who receives from her parents, and at her personal frustration that she is a failure, since she cannot give to her parents yet. It rankled even more because her parents insisted, indicating that they were aware of her financial needs (being loving parents), of which she is very sensitive about. Some 'give and take' would have helped ease the situation.

"When you're a nice person, people will take advantage of you and ask you to do all kinds of things that are not your responsibility to do. They think you are a fool not to tell lies (e.g. get an MC to have the day off when you're not sick); claim more than you have actually spent; enjoy gambling and dirty jokes. What I did was to withdraw from such people. They think I'm antisocial."

For some, like the one who wrote the above, the battle of identity takes place in the area of being Christian, and upholding Christian principles or blending into the crowd. There are certain values which for a long time we have taken for granted, like honesty, working hard, being nice, but now find that they make us unpopular and we are often subject to ridicule and abuse because we uphold these qualities. They make us stand out, and society tends to cut down to size anyone who does not blend in with them. The problem here is that we have never really suffered or been taken advantage of, for being a Christian. Our 'Christian-ness' becomes uncomfortable and we have not learnt to live with this discomfort. There is also the problem of public relations. We need to work hard to help people understand the values we hold as well as to respect our principles. However, we need to realize that the Christian difference can be painful and we are to 'count it joy' that we are, nonetheless faithful.

Lifestyle: Time

Lifestyle is another major area in which changes take place and with the changes, tensions. Time, either too much of it or too little of it, is the issue most conspicuously felt. Of course, this is not the right way to view our lives. There is neither too much nor too little time. The issue is more to do with the things we have to do, the things we ought to do and the things we want to do. As one graduate described it,

"Too much is demanded by the job, and as a result I have less time to spend for church and others. The goal to be a good and loyal employee (as the Bible exhorts us) conflicts with our aim to be active in church."

If we add to these areas time to spend with our family, friends, exercise, leisure, reading, Bible study, witnessing, thinking through issues, community service, we may conclude that we need a few lives before we can fulfill all these obligations. And then, when the first child comes, we will be out of circulation for the next couple of years.

The problem is very real and solutions, I believe, can be found only when we approach it from various perspectives. We are all weary of simplistic answers and I am all too conscious that what I offer here might not have taken into account factors that are beyond our control (e.g. an unreasonable boss). Nevertheless I believe a fundamental distinction must be made between one who uses the problem as an excuse (meaning that his real wish is to do as little as possible) and another who is constantly seeking to do more (but is constrained by the limitations his capacity imposes). In the former, the real issue is motivation. How many of us have known of people who seems to be so tied down with work and has no time for anything else, suddenly is able to be involved in many activities because he has fallen in love? Our capacity increases tremendously when we are highly motivated.

Balance is obviously needed, between giving and receiving, personal, professional and social, urgent, important and useful/good. This balance can only be approximated if we take the time and trouble to evaluate our activities and concerns. Then too we need to be aware that our concerns merge into one another. The Bible tells us that the work we perform can also be seen as a service to God. Bible study can bring real solutions to work issues or family problems. Family worship can also include other family friends. Games can be played with non-Christian friends to provide opportunities for evangelism. While we may not as yet have the time to take up a position in church, visitation, developing friendships within the church (as an example of informal involvement in church

work) can be very helpful and at the same time meet some of our social needs. Naturally, nothing can be achieved without discipline. Discipline increases our capacity by reducing wastage. Finally, we can work at increasing our capacity by being able to do more, and by being able to take less time. We will never be able to do everything. The trick is to do enough so that each day is filled with accomplishments worthy of the time that God has given us.

Lifestyle: Materialism

Materialism, that is, the love of possessions, status and comfort, and the pursuit of it is another issue where lifestyle is concerned. As our affordability increases we are more and more in a position to decide the kind of lifestyle we want to pursue. Many of us come from poor backgrounds and there is a very strong urge to taste 'the other life', now that we have the chance. Also, in the uncertain economic climate we live in nowadays, possessions and status offer some measure of security and concreteness. As some may say somewhat cynically, we can't eat ideals and principles. They may be good to have when times are good, but become cumbersome when times are bad. A recent graduate wrote this,

"There has been a sudden and intensive exposure to the material wealth the world has to offer. One feels attracted to the life of big cars, large houses, expensive branded clothes, etc. One wants to attain them because the feeling is that those things comprise the "good life". There is a fake confidence that these things are easily within reach and will form the course of great happiness. The real tension arises because you know that all that is an illusion and the truth is that God is the only real source of happiness. You may know the truth but materialism feels true."

While we were students we have not thought through this issue. Even if we have, the decisions we made were in an absence of the pull of materialism, and at a time when we did not have the capacity to acquire much. We are filled with vague ideas of living a simple life and romantic notions of a cheap lifestyle. Abstract

distinctions between real happiness (from God) and illusory happiness (from material comforts) crumble under the relentless assault from the mass media, peer pressure and bodily appetites.

The pattern of life after graduation is very predictable. We get a job, and after some years we may get married, take a postgraduate degree or do both. In the meantime we settle down in a nice church, contribute to the church and this goes on for the next 30 years, after which we retire. This pattern is marked by an extraordinary degree of ordinariness and an absence of challenge unless we have a very challenging job. We can see that in such a situation material acquisition, status climbing and pampered living provide simple goals and are widely recognized as marks of achievement and accreditation of prowess. Moreover modern life is built around the material. In the name of efficiency, comfort and privacy we live further and further apart from each other, talk less with each other and have more and more machines to do work for us. Human help becomes increasingly expensive. To cater for the social needs of the modern man, organized leisure has muscled in - family clubs, business clubs - making it more and more expensive to relax. Good clean fun, fresh air and sunshine has a price tag on them now.

Rejecting the material lifestyle may not be as simple as saying "No". So what's wrong with material possession and comfort? What's wrong with surrounding myself with the symbols of my achievement? What's wrong if I prefer to pay more for quality and distinction? After all, I can afford it.

I think that we are on the wrong track if we argue in this way. One focus should be on things that matter, and in that case, material is immaterial. The important matter at hand is, *what is going to be the fruit of your life?* The issue at stake where materialism is concerned is neither the possession nor preference of the material, but the pursuit of it. What is your achievement? And if your main offering before God is largely measured in ringgit and sen, then I believe that we have strayed from the calling to which we have been called. What does God desire to see

on the altar of our lives? Let us occupy ourselves with these things, pursuing them in the midst of our jobs, family, church, society, and not apart from them. I believe that when we have etched this into our lives, then we can consider our material need and desires with common sense, without it interfering with our primary pursuit in life.

Lifestyle: Loneliness

Loneliness and boredom are two issues worth considering as well, as they also affect the lifestyle that we lead. When we were in varsity friends were in abundance and in great variety. There are always a lot of activities to be involved in and enough time to actively participate in these activities. Varsity is also a place where we experience many things for the first time. The newness carries into the time when we have graduated as well. The working world is so new, so exciting, so different from what we have experienced in the past. After a while, the newness wears off. There are not so many Christians whom we are in contact with. In fact, most of our daily contacts are with non-Christians. We find that while some people may be nasty or boring, many of them are quite nice people, and attractive as well. They are knowledgeable, sophisticated and know how to treat a person well. At the same time our circle of Christian friends stagnate and we are more likely to find more new non-Christian friends than Christian ones. And when even our limited circle of Christian friends start to get married, our social life becomes an issue. At the point where we are increasingly vulnerable, the opportunities of being seriously involved with a Christian lessen, even social activities decrease, and we are faced with going out with non-Christians (well aware that we are vulnerable), or accept loneliness as a fact in our lives, or get involved in a relationship that we might not want to start under better circumstances.

At much about the same time boredom and restlessness seep into our lives. Life goes on predictably and since (being good Christians) we do not look for excitement in the fast lane of yuppiedom, a mixture of lethargy and restlessness dull our everyday experience. Now that we are here, what else is there to conquer, and with the same breath, we're too lazy to do anymore conquering anyway. Is this (with a fair amount of disappointment in the tone of our voice) what life is all about? This insidious spirit creeps into every compartment of our lives and brings a death-like pallor of drabness into our Christian activities, our worship and our social responsibilities. Our life tastes insipid and we

make everything we touch (including the Bible study / sermons we preach) insipid as well.

This is such a problem with us. We have forgotten the ideals that we try to live by when we were students. We used to talk late into the night and argue through many a meeting about the things that we ought to achieve as Christians. We have forgotten the way we have demanded excellence of thought, of life and of service in ourselves and in each other. We have forgotten the eagerness with which we have given ourselves to work out new ideas and new ways of achieving what we believe in. A deadly pragmatism has overtaken us. We just want to do the minimum. We have no time and no energy for more.

Sometimes we want to get married to escape the boredom of the present.

Lifestyle: Approach

Why am I raising these things now? They seem to be so far into the future that it is difficult for us to appreciate it now. One simple answer is that in working life, time flies and at the same time, there is so much time ahead of us. Three, four, five years just go by us almost unnoticed. But there is as much as twenty to thirty years ahead of us still.

More importantly, solutions to the issues of lifestyle must begin now. *What you sow now, you shall reap then.* If you don't start being involved in the things that are important to you now – e.g. thinking theologically, doing Bible study, being involved in a church-life, exercise and leisure, social activities, social awareness – these things will not form the framework of your life later on. If now you are lazy and you do only the things that you like, then when there is so much more demanded of you, you will be even less inclined to do anything else. If now you don't lay the foundation for good social friendships with Christians, and involve yourself in activities that increases the scope of your social contacts with Christians (e.g. be involved with GCF, join a small group if in a big church) then it might be a bit late

to begin after you graduate. If now you don't carry on this habit of working out ideals in the face of reality, of not compromising on excellence of thought, life and service, of desiring to live life in service to God and men, if now you do not take on challenges wholeheartedly, then when your capacity is taxed and your energy is low, you will not rise above mediocrity.

These things however, are merely the framework for a lifestyle. The soul of a lifestyle is the vocation of that life. What does that life want to pursue? What does that life want to achieve? Even now, though we may not know what profession we will be in, we can begin to define what we want to achieve with our lives. And even now, we can live our lives in pursuit of that achievement. We may not have worked out everything completely; many things may need to be adjusted later on, but still, we can begin now so that we will be in an even better position to work out our lives' ambitions. This vocation will give answers to your questions of identity, and will certainly broaden your perceptions as you grapple with your need for a job, the uncertain future, the will of God.

David Tan served 10 years as a staffworker with Fellowship of Evangelical Students. This was written for an earlier generation of graduating students but much of the struggles described here still holds true today. Likewise the encouragement to 'sow today' or to prepare now for your life after graduation.



Tips For Planning Your Time

- Use management tools such as a diary and other modern gadgets (e.g. PDA) to get organized. Compile checklists according to priorities and deadlines.
- Make good use of waiting (and travelling) time and technology. E.g. listen to good cassettes, read, make calls, think and work through ideas, plan, reflect & meditate etc...
- Plan and set aside time for important things. Put them down first. Remember to include items such as appointment with God, time to be alone, time with a family member and a friend (be specific). These items are usually left out of a business diary.
- Plan daily, weekly, month, and yearly. Plan even if tentatively.
- Do not fill up every minute of your schedule because time is not a commodity or resource to be extracted to the maximum for gain. It is a gift from God (Ps 74:16) to be appreciated and cherished (Gen 1:3-2:3; Lev 23). Leave empty spaces for relaxing.
- Pace yourself. Spread out big "events" over time and don't lump the difficult things together.
- Even as we plan, don't presume we have control over time. Plan in such a way that you live each day without regrets (Ps 90:10; Jas 4:13) yet be open to changes and interruptions.
- Be flexible and adapt daily as necessary. Replace missed time for important things.
- Trust God for His timing when things do not turn out as planned. (Ps 75:2; Ps 104:27; Ecc 3:11)



Recommended Resources

1. Sherman D., Hendricks B. ***'Your Work Matters to God'***, Navpress
2. Patterson B., ***'Work & Worship: Serving God in Everything You Do'***, IVP 1987
3. Yancey P., ***'Church: Why Bother? My Personal Pilgrimage'***, Zondervan 1998
4. Leland R., ***'Work & Leisure in Christian Perspective'***, IVP 1987
5. Lamb R., ***'Following Jesus in the Real World'***, IVP 1995
6. Marvin W., ***'Between Friends'***, SU, Malaysia 2002
7. Nouwen H., ***'Life of the Beloved'***, Crossword 1992
8. Smith G. T., ***'Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God Given Potential'***, IVP 1999
9. www.workwise.org.uk A ministry by London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, UK.
10. www.taketheleap.org i-Bridge website, A ministry by Graduates' Christian Fellowship, Malaysia.
11. www.uccf.org.uk/graduates A ministry by University College Christian Fellowship, UK.
12. www.ivmdl.org website of Ministry of Daily Life. A ministry by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, USA.

A Word about GCF

The Graduates' Christian Fellowship

An organization that works among the graduates, GCF has always been our partner serving the Lord's kingdom. We have been working together closely for the past Looking Ahead Camps a.k.a National Graduating Students' Retreat.

GCF has the vision to build a community of servant-leaders committed to transforming society for Christ. In the light of this vision, they commit themselves to challenge and develop Christian professionals to transform society for Christ by **EQUIPPING THEM TO BE SERVANT LEADERS** in their families, in their churches and particularly in their work.

Do get in touch with GCF through their ministry among the young graduates - iBridge.



www.taketheleap.org

Mission Statement

iBridge aims to encourage *networking, spiritual friendship and mentoring* among young Christian graduates in Malaysia.

Find out more about how this mission is to be carried out through the net or even your seniors!