

Bethany School
Towards a Christian Curriculum
Topic Theme – Work

Context

A Job for the Heart and Soul

Completing a worksheet, teaching a lesson, attending a meeting, making a telephone call are activities, which involve the **head, hands, heart and soul**. Working effectively for Bethany School, at whatever level and in whatever area, must involve each element – **hands, head, heart and soul**. It is not always possible to detect by looking at a particular activity how much **heart** and **soul** has gone into it, and certainly most people, especially children, are not interested in knowing about this. Often we seek approval because of the amount of time we have spent on an activity and the effort it represents. Perhaps we think our work is acceptable because of the *time* spent on the activity. Time is just as much a poor guide to quality as it is a guide to **heart** and **soul**.

Time spent on an activity can be quite short (being slipshod) or may take a much longer time than necessary (through laziness) precisely because the **heart** and **soul** balance (attitude) is not right. A good days work that may impress our colleagues can lack any evidence of **heart** and **soul** (only pride).

Colossians 3:23-25 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism.

Work + Heart + Soul

In Bethany School, a Christian organisation with Christian values, we are looking for evidence of the moral and spiritual elements in our work – the **heart** and **soul** of our work. Obedience, faithfulness, service, truth, joy, diligence, creativity, justice, love, sobriety, devotion, fervour, patience, sympathy, humility, holiness, pleasing God, hating evil – these are guidelines for living as redeemed people in a fallen world

(-mainly Romans 12). Many people we deal with in the course of a day may not be the elect of God (*Colossians 3:12 – another list of rules for holy living*) and they work from a different motivation (*usually self centred but can be philanthropic*). God's standards are the standards that we are working to and although the world may adopt some of these principles for pragmatic reasons, they are not concerned about the glory of God.

These biblical qualities are at the **heart** and **soul** of Bethany School and we need to spend just as much time in ensuring success in these areas as in, for example, teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar or 'The Times-Tables'.

God looks on the **heart**. (*Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*)

What was God's evaluation of Adam and Eve's work – the covering of fig leaves sewn together?

You've used an inappropriate material? **No!**

I know sewing isn't your thing but you've worked so hard on it? **No!**

You must have spent all night on this – well done? **No!**

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"
(Genesis 3:13)

God evaluated the **heart** and the **soul**! Adam and Eve found that their work, beautiful as it might well have been, was unacceptable to the Creator-God who is jealous for His own **glory**. Our work for Bethany School, including lesson preparation, work in the classrooms, meetings and conversations has a moral and spiritual dimension and God assesses the motives more than the outcome.

WHY?

God worked to declare His glory!

God chose acts of creative work to declare His glory.

God did not work to meet any need or to satisfy any lack that He had, but He **made things** (worked) to demonstrate His nature, His glory. Work is the part of the creation mandate and the part of our lives that particularly reflects the character of God!

Therefore:

Our work, ... (*'whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God'* - 1 Corinthians 10:31) **...should declare His glory.**

What is God like? What is His glory?

God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. (Westminster Shorter Catechism – Question 4)

		being	
	Infinite	wisdom	
		power	
Spirit	Eternal	holiness	= GLORY
		justice	
	Unchangeable	goodness	
		truth	

God did not work to make things so that things (including people) would conclude how marvellous things are but to declare His glory. God's glory – weightiness, to be heavy with wealth or reputation - the inescapable weight of the sheer God-ness of God! God's otherness! He is different from the cursed creation, which is *material, limited by space and time, temporal, and constantly changing*. For us, created by God, to deny Him one of His attributes or to ascribe to God something He does not claim to have is to attack His glory. Similarly, we can represent God as something less than He actually is or misrepresent one of His attributes and again, attack His glory.

It is for **this** God we are teaching. It is for **this** God we are working. It is for His glory! It is for **this** God and because of Him we live and move and have our being. Tasks are important but the living and glorious God is supreme. As Governors, teachers and parents, we need to represent this biblical view of God to our children and build in to our systems how to evaluate an appropriate response to the glory of God.

Each day, each activity, any time spent working for Bethany School, should embrace the concepts of 'God willing' and 'to the glory of God'.

A simple, description of the glory of God is hard to find. Some biblical examples where God explains His glory may help.

- *Exodus 33:19 When Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory the Lord replied: "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you ...I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion ..."*
Glory = goodness, mercy and compassion

- 1 Samuel 15:29 *“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind.”*
Glory = truthful and faithful
- Psalm 19:1 *“The heavens declare the glory of God.”*
Glory = majesty, wisdom and power
- Romans 3:23 *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*
Glory = righteousness
- Romans 6:4 *“Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father”.*
Glory = power, love and faithfulness
- Isaiah 6:3 *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”*
Glory = majestic holiness

Glory = goodness, mercy, compassion, truthful, faithful, wisdom, righteousness, love, power, majesty, holiness

So...

God’s glory is supreme!

Man’s chief end is to glorify God! (and enjoy Him forever)

Nothing is excluded! (hands, head, heart, soul)

**WORK WORK WORK WORK
WORK WORK WORK WORK
WORK THE WHOLE DAY THROUGH.**

The first article in the Apostolic confession of faith states, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” Maker is synonymous for Creator and Creation may be defined as *“that free act of God whereby He, according to His sovereign will and for His own glory, in the beginning brought forth the whole visible and invisible universe, without the use of pre-existent material, and thus gave it existence, distinct from his own and yet always dependent on him.”* (L Berkhof)

God Creates ex nihilo (although the biblical words used for ‘the creation’ do not specifically give this meaning) and He also creates from pre-existing materials but creation is a declarative act to make God’s glory manifest. God did not create to meet any need, but to declare His inherent glory in the works of His hands.

In the beginning God created...	Then God said... and it was so.	And God saw that It was good.
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GOD WORKED IN CREATION

As creatures we create, because, as image bearers of God, we reflect the eternal character of God who has sovereignly chosen creativity as a method of revealing His invisible attributes (Rom 1 v 20). We create because of the mandate to exercise dominion over the lower creation, something which constitutes the very essence of man, and which requires the use of our special rational, moral and creative faculties. We create because we are fallen creatures who have to overcome the effects of God’s curse on creation in order to survive.

WORK IS PART OF THE GOOD CREATION WORK WAS AFFECTED BY THE FALL

The process summarised below illustrates that from the outset man has had problems with finding a biblical approach to work.

We're naked	Sewed fig leaves	Have you eaten?
Death	The Lord God made tunics of skin	Without the shedding of blood...

However, Adam and Eve were taught that their work had moral and spiritual dimensions and that its results cannot escape evaluation by the Creator-God, jealous for His own glory.

Encouragements and Warnings from the Scriptures

The scriptures are full of references to the things that people have made by working. The humble milk bottle (Judges 4 v 19) and the exquisite, priestly garments made for 'glory and beauty' (Exodus 28 v 1-43). The strange commission for golden boils (1 Samuel 6 v 5) ordered to be made to the glory of God and the costly alabaster boxes filled with fragrant oils used as a world-wide memorial to Mary's 'good work' for her Lord (Mark 14 v 3-9). Simple, everyday objects, hammer, axe, nails (1 Kings 6 v 7 and Isaiah 44 v 9-17 – note their different uses) and lavish, visionary descriptions of a city whose name is 'THE LORD IS THERE' (Ezekiel ch 40-48) are mentioned in the scriptures so that we can grasp the scope and importance of the made environment and see that the 'chief end of man' can be realised through our work.

"There the ships sail about" (Psalm 104 v 26) – A Psalm of praise to the sovereign Lord for His creation and providence. A celebration of the wonderful and gracious works of God and His wise and powerful management of His creation. However, even though work of man seems comparatively weak even beside Leviathan who plays in the great and wide sea, the ship is there! What imperfect man can do by working and using his skill, placed alongside what God has done with His absolute perfection, in a song which entreats God to 'rejoice in His works' should be the ultimate encouragement to us all, as to the significance of our work.

Work – Not because we need money to live! Not because the government needs to stimulate economic growth! But because it is as much a part of our nature as our language and our worship. It is the ultimate expression of service and the means for exercising wise dominion over this fallen world.

A Word of Warning – The cause and end of consumerism.

(Ezekiel ch 27-28)

Tyre – a rich and prosperous trading and manufacturing nation. Perfectly situated geographically, rich in natural and human resources with a skilled workforce at all levels of trade and industry. Having access to the finest materials and the widest range of goods and services, they were the envy of the world. This is not condemned but seen as a sign of God's blessing and favour. Tyre was originally assigned to the tribe of Asher in Jacob's death-bed blessing – Genesis 49 v 20 – 'Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties.'

BUT 'Thus says the Lord God' – Because your heart is lifted up, and you say 'I am God...' ... Your heart is lifted up because of your riches. You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and beauty ... Till iniquity was found in you. By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; ...

Therefore I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you ... you ... shall be no more for ever.

A word of Encouragement – Fifty-two days that started a revival

(Nehemiah 6 v 15-16)

'So the wall was finished ... and all the nations around us saw these things ... they perceived that this work was done by God.

In 1865, C H Spurgeon published the first issue of the *Sword and Trowel*. The title was inspired by those who re-built the walls of Jerusalem lead by Nehemiah and Ezra. (Nehemiah 4 v 17 – 'Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction and with the other held a weapon.')

Then (ch 8) ... Ezra brought the law – stood on a platform of wood they had made for the purpose – read the law of God to all who could hear with understanding – and people wept – and rejoiced.

The platform of wood was in God's plans as preparation for the revival just as was the reading of the law. The work of the carpenter was just as much part of God's plans as the work of the priest.

Function and Form

(Everything beautiful – in it's time.)

As an image bearer of God, all men possess the ability both to create something beautiful and to delight in it. Creativity in the realms of our work in the arts, crafts, sciences, politics, manufacturing, commerce and technology is a gift which God imparts sovereignly and promiscuously to believers and unbelievers. As history shows, creative gifts have flourished in both camps. There is no special status for 'Christian' art, artefacts, systems, technologies, etc. However Christians alone should recognise that, as the sad consequence of sin, much of the really beautiful and delightful is distorted or hidden by fashion-lead, technology-lead or economics-lead consumerism. That is, the public want it, we can provide it, it will make money, provide employment etc – so, just do it! It should be, therefore, the Christians joyful task to acknowledge in *their* work, that the world once was beautiful and declared by God to be good, but by the curse has become undone, even distorted and ugly, and that by the final act of renewal will pass to it's full state of glory, excelling even the beauty of paradise. Christians only can truly 'see... the God given task with which the sons of man are to be occupied' and that having 'eternity in their hearts' gives all our work eternal consequences. So, we should seek a Christian (ie biblical) approach to work in every area of life. (Ecclesiastes 3 v 9-15)

True work and true acts of creativity should remind us of the beauty that was lost, aid us in living by God's wisdom and help us to anticipate the perfection of what is to come. Christians alone can truly understand God's work in creation, the all-pervasive effects of sin and the curse, the completeness of redemption and the final state of righteousness in the 'new' (renewed) creation. Consequently, our motives for working can transcend survival, economics, and culture and be a declaration of God's complete work with His people. Viewed in this way, work has a spiritual aim, our activities involve spiritual values and the products of our work will affect us spiritually.

Meeting Needs Through Work

Solomon, the writer in Ecclesiastes writes about the human needs that we have and the path to true happiness. He has the benefits of God given wisdom, old age and the experiences of the routes through which people expect to find happiness. He concludes that true happiness (our every need met) is not to be found in secular wisdom, sensual pleasures, worldly greatness, abundant riches, or false religion but by the fear of God and obedience to his laws. This is in sharp contrast to the needs that the secular world see as important and strives hardest to meet and which are stated in Gagne's heirachy of needs as: Physical, Social, Love, Self-esteem and Self-actualisation. (Physical, Intellectual,

Emotional and Social) Contentment, cheerful enjoyment of life and assurance of future and everlasting happiness can be ours if we attend to our spiritual needs before surrounding ourselves with the things of this world which, if alone are the source of our happiness, will prove ultimately to be vanity, grasping for the wind and a bubble that bursts.

This is not to denigrate our labours or to discourage us from enjoying the products of cultural and technological developments. Solomon recognised our true needs (Ch 3: 1-8) and the status of our work as a 'God-given task' (v10) and its fruits as the 'gift of God' (v13). God has given us our work that we should 'fear before him' (v14) and he 'requires an account of what is past' (v15). Chapter 3 concludes 'So I perceived that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage.' (v22) but, because we have 'eternity in our hearts' (v11) there is always a spiritual dimension to our work.

Spiritual needs and wants can and should be met through our work just as our Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and social needs are met.

WHAT ARE OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS?

HOW CAN SPIRITUAL NEEDS BE MET THROUGH OUR DAILY WORK?

Spiritual – To find a single, clear definition of what it means to be spiritual or to operate spiritually is difficult. The following ideas are a collection: Endowed with the attributes of spirit; Any being made in the image of God who is a spirit, and thus having the nature of spirit, is a spiritual being; The seat of the emotion in desire or trouble; mental and moral qualities; The principle of life which distinguishes man from the brute; The part in man which thinks, feels, wills and can characterise a person (e.g. poor in spirit, spirit in gentleness, of bondage, of jealousy, of slumber or to which a person submits, e.g. a wrong spirit, a spirit of error, of truth, of council, of wisdom); The human spirit can be brought into relationship with God. It can be renewed, revived, broken, overwhelmed. It covers the entire range of our faculties: intellect, feeling, will, - all the attributes of personality.

The intellectual can be divorced from the spiritual but the spiritual can never be divorced from the intellectual. The Spirit of God operates directly on the mental faculties enabling us to discern His purposes, nature and will. This is mistakenly limited to 'religious experiences' as spirituality can be part of every mental action and be seen in science, art, philosophy, commerce and law, as well as religion.

HOW?

What is different about the way Christians approach their work?

Job 28 – At the beginning of his discourse (Ch 26) Job contrasts man's frailty and God's majesty and states about God that, in His creative acts, we have only seen 'the mere edges of his ways' and 'how small a whisper we hear of him' (We must never lose sight of this contrast for fear of pride.) However, in chapter 28 he lauds man's creative and technical abilities in discovering and using the earth's resources (v 1-6). We have extended our senses so that we can see better than the keenest bird (v7). We can do things and go to places that the strongest in the animal kingdom cannot contemplate (v8). We 'put an end to darkness' and 'what is hidden we bring forth to light' (v 3 and 11). From the earth we can extract all that we need to feed ourselves (v5); we can satisfy our deeper needs for precious and beautiful things (v10); we can excel in technical achievement (v 10 and 11) – but we can still lack the critical qualities for a Godly approach to our work.....

WISDOM and UNDERSTANDING!

(v 12 But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? – v 20 From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding?) These

qualities are hidden from the whole of creation (v 21) but, “to man he said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding’” (v 28).

We are expected to ‘get wisdom’ and ‘get understanding’ (Prov 4 v 5) and use them in a shrewd and sound handling of our affairs. These things involve a saturation in the biblical knowledge of the nature, ways and purposes of God and with reverence and respect, practicing the skills in right living which are the result of a glad obedience to his commands. Spirituality is a result of wisdom and a wise man is a God-fearing man. What goes in, must come out!

Wisdom – The Hebrew word ‘hokmah’ appears 141 times in the Old Testament, mainly in Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes – the ‘wisdom literature’. The word refers to technical skills in making something. The ability to do wood or metal craft and make beautiful things. Exodus 28 v 3 “So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make.... Exodus 35 v 30 “... Bezaleel... and he has filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship to design...”

‘Hokmah’ – Skill in living – the knowledge and the ability to make the right choices at the opportune time. It is possible to have much knowledge and little wisdom yet you cannot have wisdom without knowledge.

Spirituality and wisdom are to do with the whole of life and it should be expected to demonstrate these qualities equally clearly through practical activity and religious activity. Every area of our life manifests our spirituality. Spirituality can then be seen as the active orientation of the whole person. It is the direction of our heart response, either to God in worship, commitment and service, or away from him in idolatry, disobedience and rejection. We have all been brought up and educated in a secular culture and what we have been taught as truth (man as the ultimate reality and human reason the ultimate source of truth) undermines Christian spirituality which begins with God as the ultimate reality and the ultimate source of meaning.

A true, biblical view of the Creator God “In whom we live and move and have being” affects the whole purpose and meaning of life, even to the smallest detail, with no area neutral or beyond the remit of spiritual approach. Viewed in this way, our work is a truly spiritual activity and all activity is spiritual!

This is not a theoretical approach.

Job was a very successful father, farmer, civic and national dignitary who properly combined these roles with his duties to God. The adversary wrongly imputed Job’s goodness to his prosperity rather than to his spirituality.

In chapter 31 Job explains how his life was lived and although his friends contradict his assessment, God does not. All of Job’s daily activities were performed:

- V 1-4 With a purity of desire.
- V 5-8 With complete honesty.
- V 9-12 With attention to God’s moral law and civil law.
- V 13-15 Without abuse of power or status, recognising equality.
- V 16-23 With great compassion.
- V 24-28 Without making an idol of wealth or nature.
- V 29-30 Without gloating.
- V 31-32 With generous hospitality.
- V 33-34 Without concealing sin. No cover-up to save his reputation.

V 35-37 With complete and manifest integrity.
V 38-40 With all his dues paid in full.

These motives, values and attitudes can be specifically applied to any human situation and provide a checklist for our own work, employment, and leisure activities.

Micah rhetorically summarises these qualities (ch 6 v 6-8) when he answers Israel's question "with what shall I come before the Lord...?" as, He (the Lord) has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

Flanders and Swann humorously adapted and humanised the idea as "It ain't what you do it's the way that you do it... It's a natural law!" Do what you like as long as you do it with flair. This is wrong! Micah and Job would say it is both, what you do and the way that you do it that constitutes the spiritual way of life. This is God's law!

Applied to our work, this means that the artefact, the artifice and the attitude are equally important. (The product/service, the process and perspective.) A product may be 'just the job' and beautifully or appropriately crafted, accepted and sought after by all but if it is the result of exploitation, greed, compromise, dishonest or immoral motives, then its value is diminished, it should be acknowledged as inferior and rejected as true work with spiritual significance. If by our work we produce an artefact, process or system does not have qualities which speak of justice, mercy and humanity then it will not please God and so cannot be deemed spiritual. Christians are exhorted to meditate on whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy, using God's definitions of those concepts not the relativistic notions of our 'gentile' environment. (Philippians 4 v 8)

**What is a motives, values and attitudes check-list?
How can I demonstrate the Spiritual nature of my work?**

The Person

Am I joyful?
Am I working with humanity?
What is my demeanour?
Have I got a clear conscience?
What are my thoughts/feelings towards God/teachers/other pupils/equipment/materials/surroundings?
What is my attitude to the task?
What is my goal?
What do I hope to achieve today?
Do I fear pride?
Am I approaching my work with integrity and purity?
Am I covetous of the skills/work/abilities of others?
Am I concealing any errors/wrong doings during the lesson/course?
Am I being lazy, careless, thoughtless, selfish, deceitful?
Am I helpful, polite, conscientious, preserving, hard-working?
Am I treating myself/others/tools/materials/surroundings with respect/honour?
Am I thankful to God to teachers to pupils for today, this work, this group?
Do I need to acknowledge any wrong doings?
Is my conversation loving, necessary, true and wholesome?
Can I offer any word of encouragement?
Can I build up any who may be discouraged?
Can I challenge a conscience, stir up a gift, model a good example?

The Process

Is it legal, decent, honest and true?
Am I working safely?
Am I using correct methods and correctly following instructions?
Do I always need to ask for help or am I learning to think for myself?

Am I cutting corners?
Have I been wise in my choice and use of materials?
Am I wasteful?
Am I tidy?
Do I serve others?

The product/Service

Is the need real and legitimate?
Does the product fully meet the need?
Is my solution beneficial?
Will the product be honourable in purpose and use?
Will the solution enrich the user?
Will the product enhance its surroundings?
Can the product be used or adapted in order to encourage sin?
Will the product stimulate wrong thoughts desires or actions in its user?

The Organisation

Is the aim of the organisation to serve God for his glory?
Does the organisation promote activities which are in keeping with God's law and state law?
Are workers treated fairly and with compassion?
Are clients treated justly?