CHRISTIANS IN THE WORKPLACE

Working for Jesus in a ‘secular’ workplace.

Elizabeth Culhane <twitter.com/e_culhane>

My first two jobs were for ‘secular’ companies – Safeway and Target. Here are some things I learnt during my time there.

Work with all your heart

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Colossians 3:22-24).

In my ‘secular’ workplaces I tried to work for God to the best of my ability. When I was bored by mundane tasks or tempted to ‘slack off’ when opportunity arose, this passage challenged me to work with all of my heart, and not only when my manager was watching. When my ‘human masters’ were unpleasant or rude, the thought that it was Jesus I was ultimately serving spurred me to respect their leadership graciously and humbly.

I was not always successful. After initially being told I could not change a shift to attend a friend’s funeral, my first thoughts towards my manager were not genial or kind. But thankfully God’s word stands true to correct my thoughts and remind me to honour my ‘masters’ and act graciously in accordance with the knowledge that I was working for Christ.

That others may glorify God

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

This passage challenged me to pray that I would do the right thing so that my co-workers would turn to God and praise Him. In my workplaces, ‘doing the right thing’ meant taking the regulated fifteen minute break rather than eighteen minutes. It included turning up to work on time, not taking ‘sickies’ unless you were actually sick and not loaning one’s employee discount card to friends. It could include volunteering to clean up mess that wasn’t particularly attractive (the hazards of supermarkets and department stores with lots of toddlers) and to speak well of co-workers and managers behind their backs. Again, I sometimes failed. At times I tried to avoid mopping up unsightly mess and was tempted to call in ‘sick’. But thankfully God persists in the project of transforming us to be like his Son.
Do not practice your righteousness in order to be seen
But there’s an excellent warning about performing good deeds from Matthew 6:1-4 – ‘Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you’.

Pride means that we want to receive honour for our actions. Rather than wanting God to be glorified for the right things I did, sometimes I was motivated by my desire for my co-workers to like me, or by wanting my managers’ respect so that I’d be more likely to be ‘promoted’ to better tasks.

It can be hard to work out whether you want people to praise God for good deeds or because you desire praise for being seen as a righteous person. But the principle I took for my ‘secular’ work was that if my good deeds became about wanting to be seen to be a particularly righteous person, then I probably needed to do them in secret.

Summary
‘Secular’ work is a privilege. I found it helpful to remember that I was ultimately serving God, that doing the right thing could point others to Him and that I needed to be careful that my motivation for doing so wasn’t to receive others’ praise. What have you learnt through your ‘secular’ jobs?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR…
(And other contributions to the Student Newspaper)

The Student Newspaper is made up of letters, articles, poems, photos, essays, cartoons, and much more – all contributed by the Ridley Community or it’s friends. If you have something you would like to write about, an announcement you would like to make, or a picture you would like to draw, please get in touch with Miriam Dale at <miriam.dale@gmail.com> - she would love to hear from you!
RIDLEY IN PICTURES...
Our intrepid photographer Kevin Vo has been capturing moments all around campus already: this edition’s Ridley in Pictures will focus on the Week 1 BBQ and the new-and-improved Launch24!
MEET THE FACULTY:
Kara Martin

1) Tell us a little about yourself and your hobbies.
I spent most of life growing up in Sydney, and we just moved down here permanently. My husband David is setting up an office for HammondCare, a Christian charity specializing in aged care. My 16-year-old son Guy has started Year 11 at Ivanhoe Grammar. My 18-year-old daughter Jaslyn got to keep our house and my car in Sydney, and is doing a gap-year program at Morling College, as well as working for our old church. I am an avid reader, able to process books quickly, but often with terrible recall 😞 I just received a bike for my birthday, and am enjoying taking that up again in flat Melbourne.

2) What is something you have learned about God in the past week?
I learnt the power of the audience of one. All I do, I do for Christ, to honour him, and he delights in me.

3) You are abducted by aliens, who take you to their leader, the great Ghabruk. In a fearsome, tentacle-y voice, he asks you “Seriously, what is the deal with humanity?”… How do you answer him?
I know, I know, I know… I understand your incredulity and despair. We humans were created good, but stuffed it up, and continue to stuff it up. The great thing is, we all share the one creator. His name is God, and one day he will put all things right. Already he sent his son in human form, and took on the punishment that we deserve for all we do wrong. We now have an opportunity to get right with God in relationship, but I look forward to the time when all will be put right. Though to be honest, I am not sure how aliens fit into that plan.

4) How did you become a Christ-follower?
A friend invited me to a church camp. I just thought we were going to ride horses. There was a guy who drew pictures with crayons. He drew a picture of Jesus knocking on a door, and explained the door was our hearts. That night I told Jesus I was opening the door, and nothing has been the same since.

5) How would you describe your role at Ridley?
I have two roles. I am Associate Dean of the Marketplace Institute, which is an organization designed to bridge the gap between the church and the marketplace, the Sunday-Monday divide. We teach subjects to help students make those links, and to prepare them for the possibilities of all forms of marketplace ministry. I am also Coordinator of the Ridley Certificate, which is an online video-based theological course that we call theological education for busy Christians. We hope it will be a training tool for churches, and an opportunity for Christians to get excited about studying the Bible more, and applying it to every aspect of their lives.

6) What is a favorite childhood memory?
Building a giant sand tower on the beach, and then carving out a path with a ball and getting it to run as many times round as possible before running into the ocean. Either that or throwing my pen knife or jumping off a stable roof.

7) What is one item on your bucket list and why?
I guess I am a little suspicious of bucket lists, since they just seem excuses for people to spend a lot of money on their own pleasure. My great wish is that I would learn to focus less on my activity and more on what God is doing. I find that sort of attitude ends up taking me to some interesting places… like Ridley.

8) What is one thing you would want Ridley students to graduate knowing?
That Jesus is lord of ALL, every thing (Colossians 1:16-20), so that everything we do: our eating, our relationships, our creativity, our working, our reading, our running, our conversations… are actually spiritual activities, that is, informed by the Word, empowered by the Spirit, and done to glorify God.
Trials of Theology: Book Review

Jeremy Watson

Theological study is revolutionizing. Yet revolutions are dangerous business, and their perils should not be ignored. In *Trials of Theology* Andrew Cameron recalls the experience of his inner belief and confidence becoming abstract and academic; a ‘very strange experience, when all the theological words became detached from their meaning, and the entire body of this knowledge began to take on an air of unreality.’ Alarmingly, he adds, ‘I was very unaware of it at the time.’

*Trials of Theology*, in disparate and interesting ways, outlines the dangers and hazards of theological study from heroes past and present. It makes clear that affectionately loving God cannot just be turned on, but must be worked at, cultivated and prioritized. It helpfully links knowing God with loving God, where a growing knowledge produces a growing love. In the high-performance, competitive, intellectual-furnace that is theological study we must remember who we are before God. While personal achievement is great (I’m still longing for that HD), what God has achieved in Christ must be our pride and joy.

Edited by Andrew J.B. Cameron and Brian S. Rosner.
Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010

1) Theologians Past

Many of the insights from *Part One: Voices Past* are surprising.

*Luther* describes temptation as ‘the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God’s word is.’

*B.B. Warfield*’s exhortation will correct anyone tempted to skip chapel at theological college. He points out that doing so reflects ‘the low ebb of your own religious [i.e. spiritual] vitality!’ Warfield’s address makes clear that if I’m not seriously expecting theological study (or chapel attendance) to nurture my own soul, how can I ever be a minister who encourages others to do so!

*Bonhoeffer*’s advice is that a budding theologian should be sold out for their subject matter, otherwise ‘he or she should give up theological studies as soon as possible.’

In *Augustine*’s letter we find a plea to his elderly Bishop for more time to prepare for ministry by praying, reading and weeping for his sins. In Augustine we find beautiful humility; openly weeping at his ordination because of his unreadiness for the priesthood!

*C.S. Lewis*’ warning of ‘Inner Rings’ and the experience of exclusion is extended to the theological context by Andrew Cameron. We all experience exclusion, loneliness, disconnection or aloofness at some time or another, hence it’s only natural (and good) that we seek relational circles. Yet despite inner circles often being for our good, they still falter, with this chapter reinforcing that true belonging is found in Christ.
2) Theologians Present

In reading John Woodhouse’s vision for life at theological college I was struck that my being at Ridley is part of the Lord answering the prayers of others for more labourers in his harvest [Matt 9:38]. It’s incredible to think that what I do in lectures, chapel, lunchtimes and the library has to do with the Lord’s work of building his church!

Because of the subject matter of our study there’s a tendency for spiritual pride. D.A. Carson explains that becoming a biblical expert can lead to a pride that looks down on those who lack this same knowledge, a knowledge that’s meant to engender humility!

Gerald Bray describes the What and Why of Systematic Theology, answering the questions I had when first encountering systematics.

Dennis Hollinger wonderfully explains why the gospel itself provides a better ethical framework than traditional theories. He outlines how the character and action of the triune God, coupled with the Christian worldview, forms the basis for ethics; providing ‘new ways to see and navigate moral complexity.’

The strength of this book is that it allows great theologians of past and present to speak for themselves on the matter, doing the hard work of locating and distilling their precious advice.

I had to think hard to find weaknesses in this book. A surprising observation was that only on a few occasions was the cross specifically identified as a remedy for theological pitfalls. Yet Christ crucified is foundational for connecting knowledge and love: being both foolish and complex, wonderful and devastating, devotional and theological, humbling and uplifting. Only John Woodhouse and Dennis Hollinger briefly refer to the cross as part of their advice. I also found Carl Trueman’s church history chapter to be, well…. boring (but I'm a history ignoramus).

What can save us from being a casualty in this revolution?

From start to finish the book makes clear that theological students must continually rely upon the Theos himself, not on their knowledge about God. Becoming masters of divinity is not our aim (indeed, MDiv is an oxymoron), because no student will ever master this subject matter and should instead aim to be mastered by the Divine. Woodhouse warns that one’s knowledge of God ‘will be displayed in your character and conduct, not your cleverness.’ With even our knowledge of God secondary, of course, to God’s knowledge of us [Gal 4:9].

This book, if for no other reason, is worth reading for the Afterward. There Brian Rosner concludes by reflecting on how Paul’s expertise in theology actually leaves him dumbfounded [Rom 11:33-36]. God is ultimately unfathomable; so the best theological students, like Paul, become most accomplished at praising God with their lives.