

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRAYER AND INTERCESSION

Commissioning & Thankfulness

When someone gets a new job or is promoted it is in itself something to be thankful for and perhaps to acknowledge as a whole church. Furthermore, a new job is not just a source of provision it is an opportunity for mission and ministry. And so, in the same way that one would pray for a new pastor, it is hugely encouraging to commission someone for their new job or their new role.

Ideally, prayers might have three main thrusts:

1. Reflect an understanding of the job to be done and how it may contribute positively to others, the place it will be done, and the skills required
2. Reflect the conviction that the Christian goes into the workplace as a representative of the Lord Jesus carrying his commission and confident in his promise to be 'With' his disciples' to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)
3. Reflect the conviction that the Christian goes into the workplace as the individual representative of your church. Thank God that he has given your community an opportunity to make an impact in that place

After the Offering

Most churches do this every week so you don't have to change anything in a service to begin to enrich people's understanding of God's generosity and the variety of ways he may bless his people in, at and through work and other mechanisms of provision. Across a year you could probably teach and pray a whole theology of work, divine provision, money, generosity.... just through offertory prayers. Themes might include:

- Gratitude for work
- Gratitude for being created with skills
- Recognition of the need for stewardship
- Recognition of God as the source of money
- Gratitude for money
- Gratitude for the privilege of being able to give
- Gratitude for our workplaces, our bosses and colleague

General Prayer

The simplest way to build faith-consciousness is to include a reference to the world of work and school within general prayers. Take for example, a confessional prayer like:

‘Lord, we bring to you our relationships – our relationships at home, our relationships with neighbours, our relationships at work or at school. Show us where we have failed to love as you would have us love.’

The simple addition of seven words, ‘our relationships at work or at school’, instantly transforms this prayer into one that encourages the whole congregation to recognise that their life cannot be compartmentalised, that God is interested in the 9 to 5. And it only takes another 3 seconds to say.

Prayer & the Rhythm of the Year

Harvest

Since most people don’t make their living by farming, traditional displays of or bringing food into the church as offerings do helpfully remind us to give thanks for God’s provision of our daily bread but don’t clearly or visually connect to the way that he has chosen to meet our wider material needs. A suburban child does not look at a display of potatoes and make the connection to their parent’s job in IT.

A contemporary harvest display might involve a range of objects that represent how people are engaged in work – a hard hat, a baby’s bottle, a set of keys, a spade, computer, or a syringe. In one church, the whole congregation were invited to bring an object that represented their work and then were invited to lay it on the altar... as a symbolic dedication of their work, their co-workers, and their workplaces to God. Children were involved and brought textbooks or pencils and one unemployed person laid their UB40 form on the altar – a moving reminder of their lack of paid work but also of God’s provision through the wider community.

Another church asked people to bring in pictures of themselves in their workplaces and displayed them around the church – could be an office, could be their kitchen, etc. The point here was to find a way to the community to get to know and appreciate the variety of places God has given them to work.

Other important times

Harvest was key moments in the agricultural year that in a rural community everyone shared. In a mixed economy, however, there are still moments we all share. So for example, for the bulk of the population the tax year begins in the first week of April so the first Sunday of April might be a good moment to ask for God’s blessing on the work of our hands in the coming year. Similarly, May Day retains some of its historic connection with work and therefore might be natural moment to give thanks for our participation in God’s mission through work.

Praying for Business and Workplaces in your Community

Businesses are vital to alleviating poverty – the poor in many places do need help, food, medicine, shelter, and stable honest government, but they also need jobs. Your community probably needs jobs too.

One of the things a congregation can do is to thank God for the businesses, shops, and organisations you have in your town. Proactively you could inform local shopkeepers or businesses that the church would be praying for their health and prosperity (Jeremiah 29:7) and ask them if they had any particular requests. In one small town, the pastor simply went into the local shops – but you could ask individual members of a congregation to do this or to adopt a shop/business that they used or was significant to them.

This is also a great way of engaging in a local community.

Prayer & Pressure Points

Just as Harvest represented key moments in the agricultural cycle – not least in terms of effort – so a church can connect its prayer for different people into the rhythm and pressure points of their working year– sheep farmers in lambing season, accountants at the end of the tax year, kids at exam time, teachers at the beginning and end of terms, shop assistants during sales. Why not set up a calendar on your notice board on which people can note their pressure points for prayer?

Praying Blessing @ work in groups

On the completion of each day's work of creation in Genesis 1-2 God blessed the living creatures He had made, bidding them increase and multiply and fill the earth. Blessing is powerful – our words matter! How can we bless our work?

- Ask the congregation for aspects of their work that would want to bless. Help them explore why it would be good to bless each aspect.
- Possible areas: the privilege of having work; relationships at work; the prosperity of the organisation for whom we work; management and decision making; use of resources; the 'output' of our hands & minds; the godly aspects of the culture and values of the organisation; and evangelism.
- In groups of 3-4 ask them to construct a short prayer (1-2 sentences) to bless one aspect of work. Record and group these.
- As a congregation pray blessing on work as different people stand up and read out their short prayers.
- Type up the prayer of blessing to be circulated for future use.

An example prayer of Blessing

Thankfulness: Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits. We bless You, Lord, for your gift of work – for the opportunity to co-labour with you and to provide for our families and communities.

Output: We bless the creativity and skills you have given which enable us to make goods and deliver services that others need.

Relationships: We bless every contact with another person, be they colleague, customer or supplier. We bless those we meet, speak to or email that they may experience something of your love through us.

Resources: We bless the use and stewardship of all resources: financial, material and human. We bless ethical decisions on how we source our materials and how we dispose of waste.

Organisation: We bless the organisations for which we work; we bless them as employers and pray that job opportunities may multiply through them. We bless the management decisions to reflect kingdom values.

Culture: We bless the culture of our organisations. May they be contexts for human flourishing – places where people feel valued. We pray for people's life outside of work – that it will be honoured.

Evangelism: We bless our contact with non-believers through work. We bless every opportunity to speak of you, through both our words and actions, with fruitfulness. Amen.