

Introduction

Last week Ian Bentley started a new sermon series that focuses on our work. So before we get going let me ask you a few questions.... How do you feel about people you work with? Are there some people you're not so keen on? Are there some people you work with who really think there 'it' and you'd love to see them get knocked down a peg or two? Are there some people who just give you a really hard time and you just wish they'd leave? Let's face it - sometimes being at work is really hard. So this morning we continue thinking about work and in particular the challenge of being a Christian at work - hence the title - "Its all part of my way of living".

You see we are not just a Christian on Sunday's or at home or with our Christian friends - being a Christian is a 24/7 calling which of course includes our time at work. So as we continue unpacking this area of our lives there's two main points that I hope will emerge: 1.As a Christian what is work? 2. As a Christian how can we minister at work?

So firstly - what is work? Last week Ian described work as the activity you are principally involved in during the week. Some will think of work as something that happens in the office or the factory or the shop. But if you're a child or young person then effectively your work is school, college or university. Or you may look after an elderly person or maybe young children so your place of work maybe mainly at home.

Ian also talked last week about work being something that God always intended for us and is therefore something natural and good. More important than that - as a Christian it is our principal ministry and service. Often we only think of ministry based on something that we do at church, welcoming, catering, reading, Adventurers, Pathfinders, Preaching, music, doing the PA. I'm not saying this isn't some form of ministry but it is not our principal ministry because our principal ministry is our work - in other words the activity you are principally engaged more than anything else.

So how does it make you feel to think that your main ministry as a Christian is when you are at work? In other words 'you' are a minister at work! You might say - well that fine for you to say Gordon. You work for the church - so it's easy for you to relate to ministry in your job. But as for me I'm **only** a housewife or I'm **only** a hospital worker or I'm **only** a shop assistant or I'm **only** a student or dare I say it I'm **only** an administrator.

So you may be saying: surely this ministry stuff is not something I get involved in? Well the fact is this ministry stuff is for you - but before I go any further lets deal with this word "only". I'm only a housewife, I'm only a shop assistant etc.

We all do it - I'm 'only' this or 'only' that - but as a Christian God reveals to us something different. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we discover that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**". John 1:12 we hear: "all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God**" and in Galatians 4:7 we are reminded of this: "you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an **heir**". You are a new creation, a child of God and an heir. You are not an 'only'

You see the fact is that as a Christian you are a minister in your principal area of work - whether that means chatting with others at the school gate like my Ruth used when she was looking after John & Lorna full time or being an international evangelist like Billy Graham. Either way you are a minister for God. We are a follower of Christ wherever we go. We are his followers and his ambassadors for good or ill. All of us as Christians are ministers no matter who we are and no matter what our work is. You may be the newest student, the caretaker not the head, the kitchen cleaner not the chef but you are a minister. So with this in mind let's move on and think about how can we minister at work?

How about this situation - imagine you are a slave. How do feel about being a minister from that position? Because that is exactly what we discover in our reading from 2 Kings 5. Take a look at verse 1: Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, **but he had leprosy**. Here we discover Naaman - Commander of the army, a great man well thought of by the King and highly regarded. You'd have to be pretty special to minister to him wouldn't you? But this verse also shows this great man

had leprosy. As such the whole of his life was about to crash down. He would lose job, family and everything. Here was a big man with a big problem. Who can minister to him? Who can sort out his problem?

Verse 2 gives us the answer: Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.

So here we have a slave girl from Israel. Surely there's nothing she can do - is there? As a slave she receives orders and the last thing she does is think about expressing her views. Yet she could see the problem and she was concerned and so she acted: Verse 3 "She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

V3.... You can almost hear Elisha, the prophet, saying thanks a bunch and what if I don't cure him? But of course the confidence of the slave girl was not in Elisha but in God and Elisha as a man of God. This Slave girl is a wonderful example for all of us.

She showed concern for her master. She wasn't simply doing a job. She was aware of what was going on about her and concerned for the people she was working for and with. This slave girl ministered to her master. It was her words that started him on the path that would bring his healing. Her words were part of her ministry - and yet this was a simple statement. Not a huge act but a significant act. She could have thought - there is nothing I could do. But instead she thought - what can I do - and then she acted. She ministered to Naaman - in other words she sought to bring the love of God into this great man's life even though she was "only" a slave girl - just like we are 'only' a shop worker' or 'only' a child minder or whatever 'only' we decide to attach to our principal ministry.

So let's get rid of this word 'only' because it is not right. As you go to work next week please remember that you are a child of God and as such you have his commissioning to do your work with his resources behind you as you minister there. But nevertheless it is still a bit scary thinking about how we minister the grace and love of God at work? Can I therefore suggest three words.

The first is OBSERVE. Going back to 2 Kings 5 the slave girl was clearly observing what was happening to Naaman. It was out of this awareness of problems that existed that her ministry to Naaman stemmed. Now think about this in relation to where you work? Think round the people you work for and with, the children, the boss, the teachers, your colleagues. What have you observed recently? What have you heard? What are their concerns and needs? The start of ministry is knowing what the needs are. So ask yourself - what do I observe where I work because that helps you to start your ministry.

The second word is COMPASSION. The slave girl could have taken delight in seeing this great commander get his comeuppance. In your work there may be quite a few people whom you'd like to see brought down a peg or two. But that is not the slave girl's attitude. Her attitude was one of compassion and she looked for a way help. Isn't that what we see in Jesus? Mathew 14:14: When **Jesus** landed and saw a large crowd, he had **compassion** on them and healed their sick. Mark 1:41 Filled with **compassion, Jesus** reached out his hand and touched the man. Matthew 20:34 **Jesus** had **compassion** on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. And isn't this what Jesus commands of us: Luke 6:31 we hear Jesus say: **31**Do to others as you would have them do to you.

The third word is ACTION. If you observe needs and you have compassion what are you going to do about it? Unfortunately we sometimes have a tendency to say that there's nothing we can do - its not down to me to get involved - how can I possibly make any difference? But look again at the slave girl and recognise that she had no resources and no status in the company but she did what she could not what she couldn't. She didn't march up to him and try and heal him. No the first rule of any pastoral care is to know your limitations and the first rule of ministry is to recognise your gifting. Knowing she was not gifted to heal and her limitations as a slave she acted within those limitations but **she did take action**. So what might you do for the needs of those you work for and with?

Whoever we are and wherever our work we can be involved in ministry as we observe the needs, feel compassion and seek to act. That's what Jesus did. He saw the needs, had compassion and acted dealing with both spiritual and physical needs. As we think about the needs in our place of work the greatest need of course is for people to know Christ. For many people the place of work is the place where we most regularly rub shoulders with non-Christians. Usually in church when we encourage people to think of their witness we think of those who live near us or with whom we have contact in the community. But where do most of us interact with large numbers of non-Christians on a regular basis. It is of course at work. So often we try to fish in little puddles and yet at work we have these huge lakes to do our fishing in.

As Christians when we are at work we are effectively Christ's adverts. If people know you are a Christian the chances are they will watch how you live your life, how you deal with failure and success, how you relate to colleagues and bosses.

It's not easy is it - knowing that you are potentially under the microscope. But at the same time its important to recognize that the way we live our lives and the way we have opportunities to bring into focus a Christian perspective on what goes on at work can have a bearing on people. But before you begin to feel a huge pressure building on your shoulders remember that we are just the messengers through the way we live and the words we speak and that it is God who actually changes lives.

So for the moment I'm gonna stop for a bit and ask Rob Pullen a few questions about what he does at his place of work.

1. What do you do?
2. As you look round your place of work what do you see?
3. How can you minister there?
4. How can you share your faith there?

I'm conscious this morning that as we talk about ministering to people at work many of us may be feeling a bit inadequate. It's easy for me to stand here and suggest we observe, show compassion and take action but I recognize this might feel like rather a large "ask". So how might we respond? Five quick things:

Firstly **think** - think about yourself as a minister in your work situation and then think who are the people who have needs that is who have problems and also those who need to know Christ. Recognise you can't necessarily help everyone so perhaps think of three.

Secondly **Pray**. Begin praying for them. They might look impossible, intimidating or whatever but God is able. So pray that God might do a work in those you work with. Pray that God would give you opportunities to speak with them, wisdom to know how you can help them and chances to testify to God.

Thirdly **plan** - plan what steps you might take in the next week the next month, the next three months as you minister to those three people.

Fourthly **share** - share your thinking with someone else who will pray with you encourage you and help you do step five which is...

Think over what you have done what is happening and what future steps you might take.

And can I just add that in all this we need to hold onto the grace of God for when we seek to minister and witness to others there will be plenty of times when we get it wrong. We all sometimes open our mouths only to put our feet firmly in them. But at the same time we need to remember that God is gracious and that he is able to take our feeble efforts and our failures and use them to his glory and to the benefit of those we are with.

You see there are many Naamans around us. They are our neighbours, our colleagues, our classmates, our teachers, our friends our work mates. God used a slave girl to save dying general. She observed his real problem and then in her compassion gave the right advise. Today we are these servants. When God puts us close to someone - work colleagues, classmates, neighbours - He gives us the privilege to know some things about the person (their pain, hurts, illness...), God does it so that you and I can speak a word that would give them hope, a word that can sustain the weary. They need someone who will reach out and touch them, who will love them, who will see their pain and tell them where they can find help

God has placed you where you are to make a difference. Treasure the privilege you have that no one else has. And let the words we say bring hope and life to them as we seek to win people for Christ.