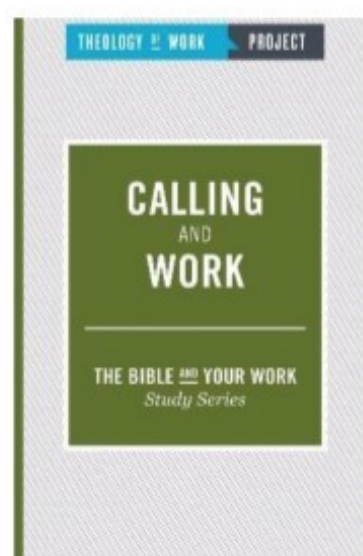


RESOURCE REVIEWS



CALLING AND WORK (THE BIBLE AND YOUR WORK STUDY SERIES)

*C. Gilbert and W. Messenger
(Contributors)*

Hendrickson Pub, 2015, pp67, £6.99, ISBN 978-1-61970-693-4

This book is one of a number of study guides published by the Theology of Work Project (www.theologyofwork.org), an independent, international organisation, based in the USA, dedicated to researching, writing and distributing materials with a biblical perspective on non-church workplaces. Its major achievement so far, on which the study guides are based, is an online 'Theology of Work Bible Commentary' seeking to explore what every book of the Bible says about non-church work.

This particular guide is intended to offer study material to help Christians 'recognise God's calling' in and through their work. It has six sections, each containing a number of 'lessons' concerning topics such as - what is meant by God's call, how might we discern God's call to a particular kind of work and could a call ever entail changing jobs? Each lesson includes a brief introduction, 'Food for Thought,' followed by a space to write reflections and a final short prayer. The lessons 'are designed for thirty-minute lunch breaks (or perhaps breakfast before work), at work or with other people in similar occupations.'

The study guide is to be commended for raising the profile of Christian ministry within the world of work, a sphere of mission much neglected within the UK as well as the USA. It challenges the view that 'Christian vocation' is pre-eminently about church related work, asserts that 'non-church work

is (just) as much full-time Christian service.' It offers a useful overview of issues for the Christian to consider in interpreting their work as a calling, including a realistic assessment of their own gifts and how any job relates to the needs of wider society.

The study guide employs biblical texts as its dominant frame of reference. However, as Miroslav Volf comments in his classic 'Work in the Spirit,' 'We search in vain in the New Testament... for the 'gospel of work'.' Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that the Bible was not written to address many important work-related issues arising from a highly mobile world and global market economy now in the midst of massive technological change.

Although the study guide acknowledges the danger of Luther's contention that Christians can serve God anywhere and should thus be content with their work however subservient, there is a tendency to interpret calling as primarily about the salvation of the worker and his colleagues. There is no reference at all to the gifts of the kingdom available to transform the workplace into a holistic (holy) community and how the Christian might discern and employ those God-given resources.

There are minimal guidelines for any group leader handling each 'lesson' which could easily swamp half-an-hour. Study of faith at work is notoriously difficult to handle well, even in a church context, and leaders need to be properly equipped for that task. Nevertheless, the Theology of Work Project is addressing a huge omission in our understanding of Christian discipleship, evangelism and mission and should be encouraged to press on with this task. Would that we had such a resource in the UK!

David Clark is a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order. He has written extensively about faith and work issues. His latest book is 'The Kingdom at Work Project - a communal approach to mission in the workplace,' 2014, Peterborough: Upfront Publishing.

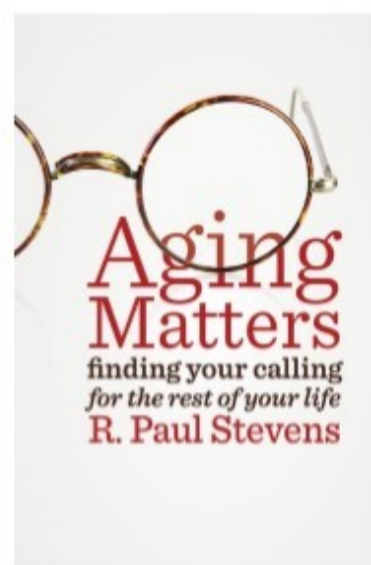
AGING MATTERS (FINDING YOUR CALLING FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE)

R Paul Stevens

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016
pp193, 978-0-80287-233-3

The author is professor emeritus of marketplace theology and leadership at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. A number of his previous books have explored the relationship between the workplace and religion. Despite the sub-title, the book does not advocate that retirement should be the most restful period of our existence, rather that we should continue working

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for the remainder of our life. The two basic tenets of this assertion are that; not only is God calling us to work but it is good for us to remain active and that all honest work is progressing God's kingdom.

The book is divided into three sections. Within each section, at the end of each chapter, there are a number of suggested readings and questions to facilitate group

debate or personal contemplation. The first section is titled 'Calling,' where the subject of being called to do God's work during retirement is explored. This covers not only that older people have much to offer, but that we should work until we die. We are encouraged that work can be a continuation of our working skills or a development of hobbies or latent skills. Provided it is an occupation carried out honestly, it is asserted that whatever activity we choose, we are doing God's work.

The spiritual journey of aging is the subject of the second section. The question of whether our spirituality increases with age is debated, as are the pitfalls and challenges of the spirit when the time for us to leave becomes closer and represents a greater part of our thoughts. Balancing this are the real opportunities of a longer perspective to encourage those of both similar or younger age groups in the Spirit. Of course, underwriting this is the hope embodied in the Christian faith.

The final section is headed 'Legacy.' It touches on our personal legacy and how well we have used our God given gifts, both in terms of material and spiritual wellbeing, to enrich the lives of those we leave behind. This is followed by the preparation for death through a life review and continuous learning, or relearning, so that we approach the inevitable with a greater understanding. And, of course, the opportunity, through God, to recognise our mistakes and to find peace. Finally, this section ends with the way that different societies recognise death and the prospect of life after death in God's kingdom and what we can deduce from scriptures. It is affirmed that there is a certainty of a glorious life after death, but also there are some questions that we will only answer after we leave this existence.

This is a scholarly, earnest and well researched book, drawing on religious writings, mainly from Christianity and Judaism. The format of the book can be disconcerting, with readings and discussion questions at the end of each chapter, the reader is left wondering if one is reading a book or a series of lectures with questions to be debated in a house group. The initial sections of the book can be rather tedious, after all, few would disagree that an active retirement is a good thing. However, I can recommend the

later chapters. These have a number of interesting and useful passages to engage those contemplating the final passage of their earthly existence.

Colin How is a retired MD of an Aerospace Company, has spent thirty years working with homeless and vulnerable people and worships at Kempshott Methodist Church.

WILL YOU JOIN IN OUR CRUSADE? *Steve Mann*

CIRCLE BOOK, 2013,
pp191, £8.99, 978-1-
78279-384-7

I approached this book with some trepidation. 'Les Miserables' was the first West End show I had seen in London in the mid-1980's, decades before I was called to serve God as an ordained person. This book brings together for me two loves; God and 'Les Mis!' My fear was that neither would be served well - I was pleased to be proved wrong!

The book, written as a study for Lent - but can be used at any time - encouraged the reader (preferably as part of a group) to read a portion of Scripture each day and see how this is related to the human condition as portrayed in Les Miserables. Each week, topics such as grace, responsibility, truth, compassion, fellowship, darkness and reconciliation are covered. The joy is that you don't need to know Les Miserable (or even the Bible) well, to appreciate the book; equally if you do know either or both of them, Steve Mann has a way of revealing something that you hadn't thought about or noticed before.

With a daily study and a guided group gathering, the book encourages the participants to talk about God, the struggles of life and faith - all using the musical as a framework. If I am honest, I did find it a little frustrating how the author jumps quickly from referencing the Scripture to speaking about the show (or film) - but then this isn't a reference book, it is a bible study, and as such, it certainly hits the mark - encouraging the reader to go further into the scripture from the springboard of the musical.

I would be very happy to recommend this book to churches who would like a different approach to a Lenten reflection, and would like to thank publicly the author for his stimulating input.

The Revd Paul Wood is Coordinator of Ministry Development in the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team.