

## God at Work Course 08 – Summary of talks

We hope that this brief summary is helpful. Better yet will be to read the book and perhaps also to listen to the podcast interviews of Ken Costa by Nicky Gumbel. You can go to <http://godatwork.org.uk/category/podcast/> for these.

### Talk 1: Work Matters

Brent Haywood started the series off by looking at “Work Matters”. He alluded to the current turmoil in the world of work and sought to pick out the key principles which we need to be aware of at times like this – the “macro” building blocks. These are:

1. God created the world before handing over responsibility to man (which explains our innate desire to work)
2. Man (through Adam) messed up the responsibility given to him (which is why we sometimes experience difficulties in our work)
3. Even though man messed things up, the Master came back (in the person of Jesus) to give us all a second chance (i.e. where we are today)

We may at times wonder what our part in all of this is – the macro is after all just so large and, well, so “macro”!

Brent had brought along a microscope as a prop and reminded us that God is interested not only in the macro but also in every little part of our lives. It is in the everyday small things, our attitudes, words and actions at work that we live out what God wants of us and that we affect those around us.

### Talk 2: Tough Decisions

Colin Stewart gave this talk. Again, the current turbulent economic climate was an ever present backdrop to what Colin said. Referring to Ken Costa’s book, Colin made the following points:

1. There is a crucial distinction between knowledge and wisdom. We can Google anything or plumb the depths of Wikipedia and amass a huge amount of knowledge very quickly but that does not equate to being wise.
2. Very important is to listen and take time out to reflect and meditate - on God’s Word, understanding what the real question is and attempting to answer it in the light of God’s revelation to us.
3. When making tough decisions, it is only natural and wise to use the gifts and resources that God has provided:
  - a. His Word
  - b. Our learning and reasoning capabilities– incl thinking through the consequences of the outcome of any decision
  - c. Our conscience
  - d. Signs from God

### Talk 3: Work-Life Balance

The third talk, given by Ewan Stark, looked at “Work-Life Balance”. Ewan spoke about running our busy lives as being like getting water, sand, pebbles and rocks into a container. Very hard to do in that order! He suggested the method of filling the container should rather be: firstly with rocks, followed by pebbles, then sand and finally water – his point being that giving priority to many small things can lead to our crowding our lives and clogging up our existence. Indeed, they may obscure the important things in our lives (the rocks), such that not as many of these really important items are properly fitted in. Putting the big

matters/responsibilities into our life-container first is the way to go; pebbles, sand and finally water can be added and all these secondary things can find their own spaces / their own levels around the rocks.

Then he suggested that, rather than look for “work-life” balance, we should consider “*life*” balance and recognise that *all* we do falls potentially within the envelope of what we need to pay attention to and work on. The question is then how to balance the many life demands. How to find poise and stability in all this? He offered us a useful analogy: in the same way that a ballet dancer, when pirouetting, fixes their eyes on one fixed, constant spot to help them, we should do the same as we find life spinning us around. Ewan proposed that our fixed point can be God – “the same yesterday, today and forever”.

As we spin and sometimes threaten to overbalance, we can reach out to steady ourselves. How? – by turning to the friends and family that God has given us.

The other key message from Ewan, which was reinforced in our further discussion at the tables, was that we should do what Psalm 46 advises: “Be still and know that I am God”.

#### **Talk 4: Failure, Disappointment and Hope**

John Purves addressed this, the fourth lunchtime theme of our God at Work series. John ventured that this is not an easy topic or one we tend to talk about a lot, but it is certainly one which we are familiar with in our own lives daily. Often, when we look back at decisions we have made we reflect that we might have wanted to do things differently. Sometimes failures are to do with our business and work lives, and sometimes they are to do with our personal lives. In either case, it is in such experiences that Christians can accept and recognise God’s love for them despite their failings. John gave the example of the disciple Peter: Jesus loved him even after he had been denied by him.

John suggested that there are good ways to deal with failure of relationships in work situations, notably: allow time for things to cool off, and speak with the person face to face; offer an apology if this is appropriate, even if that puts you in a vulnerable position.

John also spoke about the principles in Ken Costa’s book:

1. Turn to God
2. Face the facts
3. Meditate on Scripture
4. Keep a journal
5. Persevere in hope

As always, the talk raised many useful questions for discussion afterwards.

#### **Talk 5: Stress**

Dr Rob Waller is an expert on mental health, working as a Consultant Psychiatrist at St John’s Hospital, Livingston where he deals with all sorts of issues. He is very used to dealing with people at the clinical depression end of the scale. At the other end of the scale, the very familiar everyday end, we are all aware of stress in the workplace – a good pressure when it is our servant, eg making adrenalin flow or warning us by the likes of an upset tummy that our stress levels may be rising overly, but a very concerning pressure when it dominates not only our waking but our sleeping, eg if it makes us lie awake preoccupied not just for one night but two or three on the trot.

Rob got us thinking as to what causes us stress – external pressures but also “internal” ones, i.e. ones that we do have some control over.

In the account in the New Testament of Martha and Mary offering Jesus hospitality, Jesus gently chides Martha that she is getting stressed about the work which actually she herself

has decided she should be doing - to keep up appearances, to treat the guest extra specially well, etc. Jesus says Mary has the better approach, for Mary realises the best thing is to focus on and enjoy the presence of Jesus.

So there are external pressures on us at work, lots of pressures we can't control or necessarily diminish, but there are internal pressures too – ones we have a say in and a say over. We *can* do something about them. "Discuss", as they say! And we did.

The chapter in Ken Costa's book offers seven biblical strategies to keep stress in check.

PS In his spare time Rob likes to encourage understanding of mental health issues in society at large. He has a wonderful website you may find useful: <http://www.mindandsoul.info>

## **Talk 6: Ambition and Life Choices**

Sam Lynn was the speaker for week 6 with the topic being "Ambition and Life Choices". She started by reassuring us that ambition is not a dirty word. Christians believe that God created us, gave us certain gifts and talents and therefore surely wants us to use them. We need of course to think about the focus of our ambition and Sam quoted Ken Costa: "*Christian ambition is about the passionate and contented pursuit of challenging, yet attainable, God-given objectives*".

As we progress through life, we invariably come to points of choice and Sam suggested that when we do we can take a leaf out of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, namely: don't panic. Why? Because we can choose to believe God is in control. From her own experience Sam outlined some life-changing events, notably a time when she had a job change and career break. She found that Jesus' words as recorded in Matthew's Gospel to be a source of strength: "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'". Having outlined her story, she highlighted a few key points we can remember when faced with life-decisions:

1. We need to be working in God's time, i.e. take things one step at a time, review and refocus regularly, persevere and expect setbacks; above all, be patient and wait on God.
2. We are on one of God's training programmes! God wants us to grow and will provide opportunities. He also makes sure we are properly equipped. Our part is to learn to listen and say "yes" when he asks.
3. We need to look out for God's sign-posts and then be prepared to step out of our comfort zone, and in the process to learn to use our God-given powers of rational thought.

Having outlined the positives, Sam ended with a cautionary tale, using the film "Wall Street" as an example. The main character in the film saw his ambition get out of control and go spectacularly wrong. That is the kind of ambition Christians should not have. Rather we should look for guidance from the Book of James chapter 3 verses 13 to 18 and cultivate the type of wisdom which God desires us to have.

## **Talk 7: Money and Giving**

The talk for this, the seventh lunchtime in the series, was given by Alison Franks who, in her own words is "not sure it's a good idea to ask an accountant to talk about money: they have an unhealthy enough obsession with it already!" Alison began by asking the question: "How do we feel about money?" and highlighted from Christ's teachings that money itself is not the issue but, rather, our attitude towards it. It is too easy to become the servant of money

rather than of God - and so get our priorities wrong. Alison made five points about how we can feel about money:

1. We should expect fair compensation for a job well done. In Luke chapter 10, Jesus is quite clear that the worker deserves his wages.
2. We need money to provide for our basic material needs. That's hard to argue with.
3. We need not be defensive about enjoying the financial rewards of work. In John's Gospel, Jesus says "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." We are called to enjoy a particular kind of good life which can only be lived out in relationship with God and others.
4. Our income bracket is irrelevant. It's what we do with what we have that matters.
5. Money and wealth come with responsibilities attached. What we have is not ours – it's God's actually. He lets us enjoy and steward it, and calls us to keep our financial affairs straight and above board and to be generous with our money and whatever else we may have.

With these points in mind, Alison turned to the topic of giving and asked us to think of: why, when, how, how much and to whom should we give? She pointed us to Ken's chapter and reminded us that giving is not only about money but can be giving our time, our spare bedroom, our holiday flat, our car.

Alison posed the question that many of us ask: "How do we know we are on track in our giving?" She told us of a helpful seminar she had attended some years ago at Spring Harvest (a big holiday conference event). Here is what the speaker came out with:

1. What has God given me? - write them down.
2. Why has he given me these things? – what a great question to mull over!
3. How will I use these things in a way that pleases God AND (the sticking point) provides an appropriate return on his investment?

Alison concluded by pointing us to a quotation from Ken Costa's book – words of John Wesley which she paraphrased as:

*Gain all you can*, without hurting either yourself or your neighbour. *Save all you can*, by cutting off every expense which serves only to indulge foolish desire. *Give all you can*. Waste nothing on sin or folly.

## **Talk 8: Spiritual Renewal**

The final talk of the course was given by Iain Archibald who led us through a comprehensive review of the final chapter of Ken Costa's book, augmenting Ken's key points. Iain's notes from his talk are available in full if desired – email [iain@businessmattersedinburgh.com](mailto:iain@businessmattersedinburgh.com) but here is a summary:

Iain reminded us of Ken Costa's comments on how society views Christianity: many people think Christianity is "anti-society". In fact, Christianity is very much "pro-society" – having a care and concern for our neighbours, all those around us.

Ken helps us understand the relevance of Christianity to ourselves, thus:

1. We have a spiritual dimension.
2. It is to do with a something extra about us that we 'intuit'.
3. It has to do with being relational.
4. We yearn for relationships with human beings – the horizontal plane.
5. We have a longing for relationship with our Maker, God – the vertical plane.

Are we left to work this out on our own? No: God provides us with a connection to himself by means of the Holy Spirit. We can avail ourselves of the Holy Spirit's help.

Iain outlined the main conclusions from the final chapter of Ken's book:

1. "the answer (...) lies in a new discovery of radical hardcore Christianity"
2. "(...) nothing short of a new Pentecost, an out-pouring of the Spirit that brings newness, creativity and adventure, is required if we are to see our places of work transformed, our communities throbbing with life, and our society healed."

Iain then suggested three practical steps to bring about those real prospects:

1. Consider afresh the attractiveness, the validity, the basic appeal and meaning of Jesus' core message: "Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself".
2. Consider too the person of Jesus himself. To help us, we have the four gospel records. We also have people's accounts down the centuries of what Jesus has meant to them, to this day.
3. Then, come to Christ. That means: invite him into your life and *receive him*, as the gospel writer John puts it

Iain finished by alluding further to John's words, urging us: "Do get a life! – the life in all its fullness that Jesus came to give us".