

# God Works

Working out our calling  
in the midst of our profession

Dr. Andreas Pohlmann

# Impressum

Publishing: Quality for Eternity  
P. O. Box 7125  
72793 Pfullingen, Germany

Notes: For reasons of readability, the use of male and female pronouns has been avoided. All personal designations apply equally to both sexes.

Bible quotations are usually taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.<sup>1</sup>

The “Deutsche Nationalbibliothek” lists this publication in the “Deutsche Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data can be found on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>

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ISBN: 978-1-097857-54-8

# Dedication

The many questioning managers,  
who asked me to share my source of inspiration  
and to put it a little more precisely.

My recommendation: Do not read this book like a  
religious writing. You'd better have the courage,  
Sir/ Madam, to get to know the role model  
of my life personally. After all, He has risen!

There's no one I could ever care about more.



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# Foreword

At this point, I would first like to let two friends have their say: Joachim, who has both feet on the ground working as university professor of law and volunteering as an elder and Bible teacher in a free denominational Church in Hamburg.<sup>2</sup> The other friend is Larry, president of a network of several hundred missionary churches worldwide<sup>3</sup>, who encourages entrepreneurs and Christians working in secular jobs to plant churches; many of them are today led by elders who are consciously and voluntarily operating in pastoral team ministry.

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Andreas Pohlmann presents an inspiring book in several respects. It is a prime example of how good theology can be profitably combined with current insights from other scientific disciplines and personal experiences.

Both the different creeds of Christianity with their focus on the facts of salvation and the emphasis on the work of the Spirit, which is often found in the Free Church spectrum, lead to the fact that the earthly life of Jesus remains underexposed and is not developed in its meaning. This can certainly be

understood as a shortcoming of the development of church history.

Andreas starts with this gap in Christian theology and shows from a refreshingly new perspective how the fact that the Son of God worked practically by hand can also sanctify and inspire our professional work and thereby put not only our Christianity, but also our congregational life on a new foundation. His book does a threefold job. It is fundamental to realize that the working Jesus is to be understood as the happiest person. Based on this, Andreas Pohlmann develops how the Gospels teach us the amazing: We can become happy precisely in our everyday work and correspond to our spiritual calling. Finally, consequences are drawn for Christian works and congregations which – so much may be revealed – have a highly explosive power.

Another strength of the book lies in its witness character. Again and again, Andreas Pohlmann proves with examples from his professional activity that he does not only present a new theology, but a functional life model. His book is recommended to not only all those who ask themselves after the Sunday service what Monday will bring, but also to those who are responsible for a congregation.

*Prof. Dr. Joachim Jickeli, Hamburg*

Elder and Professor of Law, University of Kiel

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As a pastor, missionary and church planter for the past fifty years, I appreciate Dr. Pohlmann's very clear and direct message that has gone overlooked by so many. In "God Works, Working out our calling in the midst of our profession", he is unpacking New Testament truths that can revolutionize the evangelization of the world. He takes terms like, "tent making ministries" and "by-vocational pastor" to a whole new level of understanding. He gives the reader a beautiful picture of Jesus as, "The happiest person I know." Showing us that, "happiness" comes out of our work. "Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "You are my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with you!" (Luke 3:22). He writes that, "It is interesting to note that God gave this testimony of his son at a time when he had previously only worked in a secular profession and had not even begun his public ministry".

I hope that Christ followers everywhere read and understand the message of this book. I believe that many will find the purpose they are looking for in their profession while seeing their place in the kingdom of God more clearly. It's so simple, Andreas writes, "Every Christian is called to follow Christ in his footsteps. This means that just as Jesus worked in the workplace, each and every one of us can make a difference."

I am especially challenged by the stories of Dr. Pohlmann sharing his faith with leading professional people around the world. It is in fulfilling his profession that he has opportunity to share his faith and happiness. Very few "full-time ministers" will ever have the opportunity to be with so many professionals. He added that "Professionals have one big

advantage: They can finance their mission or mission project themselves.” That makes me jealous.

Perhaps you are a person who has achieved great material and professional success, yet you find that something is still lacking. Dr. Pohlmann gives the answer here. He is a professional who travels all over the world coaching leaders and companies to rise to greater achievements. He writes, “I have been friends with God for over 37 years now.” He says that Jesus is his, “role model.” He asks the question, “Who is your role model?” He doesn’t stop there but clearly shows us how to have success in the professional world and happiness through a full commitment to Jesus.

*Larry Neville, Los Angeles*

President Praise Chapel Christian Fellowship International

# Introduction

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden  
to work it and take care of it.*

*Genesis 2:15*

Under the heading “Weeding weeds in the Garden of Eden,” a well-known news magazine in Germany addressed the question: “Is man made to work? ‘In the beginning, God created heaven and earth [...]’ He immediately commissions man himself: Adam and Eve are to cultivate the Garden of Eden. Rake, weed, plow...”<sup>4</sup> Not praying, fasting and singing, but simply working – in this case even quite practical. That was the assignment. Of course, the importance of prayer cannot be overstated. But the point here is that prayer, fasting and singing are not holier than physical or intellectual work.

Most people who are really enthusiastic about their faith immediately think of so-called “spiritual” vocations, such as priest or pastor, when they talk about work. But how about simply making a spiritual difference in a secular profession?

Jesus chose this option – and for the longest part of his life. The amazing thing is that his eighteen years as a construction worker were an immensely long time compared to his only three-year public mission project – especially since he had a unique calling.

Didn't everyone wait for the Messiah such that he had no time to lose? So why did he choose a normal profession? This, I did not understand for a long time, particularly during the time when I myself helped to build a church for more than twelve years and was active as its pastor. I even encouraged others to pray for a spiritual release *from* their secular professional life. It was the only way, I thought at the time, to devote oneself entirely to the mission. But in this book I would like to describe another way that I came to understand. There can be a spiritual release *to* one's professional life.

Of course, it is foolish to say that pastors do not work. As a young ambitious preacher leading a church I had perhaps overdone it a bit by also leading the building project, the social work, the Bible school, the many conferences, and five years of television work reaching many people a week. At some point I realized that as a full-time pastor, I often suffered from being downright immersed in a pious subculture. Actually, it has always been my desire to connect with the so-called church-distanced people. But how could this work for me? I came to the conclusion that living our spiritual life in the midst of our professional life is just the example the master set for us, and that is exactly what I would like to explore.

Jesus had much to say about secular professional life and it might have even been his favorite topic. In almost all his parables he addressed very specific work situations (cf. Appendix). Jesus spoke clearly of the positioning of Christians in this world, of the light and salt of the earth, of sheep among wolves, of the wisdom of snakes, and of the blamelessness of doves. When he sent out his followers he instructed them to take their own money (cf. Luke 22:36).

Only after twelve years of pastoral work did I see how financial independency could be achieved, and this only after I had begun working in my profession as a physicist. Above all, it became clear to me that my profession could not only make my mission possible, but also that it could finance it. Over time I have met pastors who, as successful entrepreneurs, have planted churches and also lead them on a voluntary basis. I believe this to be a fantastic model.

In my current job as a coach, trainer, and management consultant for major automotive suppliers, I meet managers and engineers who are hungry for God. Most of them do not know Jesus Christ. Very few have ever read the Bible, entered a church or seen a Christian film. But I can testify that their lack of religious practice has not prevented them from seeking God.

In my profession, which has led me to over 35 countries, situations have repeatedly arisen in which it has been possible for me to bring people closer to faith in the midst of my profession. Among them were many who came to know Jesus directly. They learned that he lives, saves and reconciles. Today, they are connected with their Creator. He gave them

new hope – not just a written-off business vision, but a real vision for their lives.

But my entry, out of the “spiritual” into the “secular” profession, was anything but easy. Apart from the fact that I had no experience in business and was happy to start at least in a technical call center, this step was contrary to the prevailing view according to which I had allegedly given up my spiritual ministry. I now had to devote myself to “worldly” work. At least that's how I felt about it from the looks of some of my former pastoral colleagues. “Regrettable, since he has such a calling!”, I could read in their eyes. In addition, there were numerous evenings when I was tired and thought how easy it was not to go to prayer without being exhausted. During my pastoral work I was paid for praying and reading the Bible, or so I thought – which of course is not true. So, in the first few months, when none of my colleagues had yet found faith, I began to quarrel with God. I just wasn't sure if I had understood him correctly anymore. In my environment there were hardly any role models for my new lifestyle. It would take years before I had my breakthrough. But then things began to happen very quickly: Responsible for quality assurance during the relocation of a production line from Germany to Israel, I traveled dozens of times to the country that I love so much. In the past I was only connected to this country through the “Israel Prayer” event, but now I was finally able to help with the work in a very practical way. And the nice thing was: The people felt my sincere interest. When I was finally able to lead the first person to faith near the Dead Sea, I finally overcame my initial frustration about starting a “secular” professional

career outside pastoral ministry. Now I no longer have to travel to the “Holy Land” to understand that we can honor God in every situation. But I needed it then. God wanted to lead me to a new level of faith, but I was not ready yet. Today, it seems to me that he came down to my level and taught me in the Holy Land what Paul once said: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,”* (Colossians 3:23). I realized that my entire professional activity can be sacred if I pursue it with the right attitude.

At the same time two aspects have occupied my thoughts. The first is my wonder if there is a deeper sense of why Jesus worked in a secular profession for the longest period of his life. Was he not called to something “higher” as the greatest model of Christians? Or have we perhaps overlooked the “higher things” in our work for too long? The second concerns the mystery of why Jesus never burned out in view of his demanding life. At the age of 33, he could have said that he had accomplished his mission. But what was it that made him so effective?

These and similar questions never let me go. You might have noticed it: This book is all about the person of the Nazarene. And there is a good reason for that: If we are looking for an example or model for a fulfilled working life that leaves us enough time for ourselves and other people, a concept of life that we would describe today as a perfect “work-life balance”, then we find what we are looking for in Jesus. Who would have thought it! Within Jesus the itinerant preacher? No, in Jesus the worker.

Therefore, in the first part of this book I will look closer into this working Christ and realize that Jesus was probably the most joyful person who has ever lived.

The second part of the book is about this man's deeper secret of happiness. At a time when modern happiness research is booming, the rediscovery of Jesus as a happy person and the secret behind his lifestyle is of great interest.

Lastly, I am going to address myself to those who dream of practicing a so-called “spiritual” profession. But in this is there any “pious” work at all? And if so, is it suitable for living?

I am not sure: Maybe more questions will be raised here than I can answer. But if I can only contribute to discovering Christ in a new way, which gives a new meaning to our working day, then it has already been worth it. Once He said, *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:29-30) – Jesus

And that is what we want to do – learn from Him. God bless you for that!

Summer 2018

*Andreas Pohlmann, Pfullingen / near Stuttgart*



## Part I

# Jesus works

### 1. The Spirituality of Secular Work

#### Why Jesus worked for eighteen years

*Isn't this the carpenter's son? – Matthew 13:55*

Most theologians and Bible connoisseurs agree that Jesus learned the craft of carpentry very early as a teenager. This was not unusual in his time. One was usually introduced into the profession of the father from the twelfth or thirteenth year of life.<sup>5</sup> A Jewish proverb went like this: “He who lets

his son learn nothing educates him to be a thief.”<sup>6</sup> A father therefore began to train his son professionally from the age of twelve when puberty began. From the age of 14, the young men were already subject to the head tax.<sup>7</sup> We know from scripture that Jesus practiced his profession until the beginning of his public teaching. The period of his professional activity therefore lasted surprisingly long in comparison to the three years of his public work. According to Luke, we know that Jesus was “*about thirty years old when he began his ministry*,” (Luke 3:23). It follows that his 30th year of life was preceded by approximately 18 years of professional activity. The following table illustrates the four life phases.

	<b>Infant</b>	<b>Child</b>	<b>Teenager, young man</b>	<b>Man</b>
	Age: 0-5	Age: 5-12 1/2	Age: 12 1/2 - 30 1/2	-> 33 1/2
Period		School time	Vocational training and activity	Public ministry
Duration	5 years	7 1/2 years	18 years	3 years

Table 1 – Life stages of Jesus Christ

One might think that in view of his short life and unique mission, the phase in which the Son of God was engaged in secular activity was excessively long. Let us put ourselves in the position of the heavenly Father: Would we have advised our Son Jesus to such a life plan? We would rather have reminded him how brilliantly he could interpret the scriptures from an early age. After all, at the age of twelve he astounded the theologians in the temple: Everyone was “*amazed at his understanding and his answers*,” (Luke 2:47). In addition, he did

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not only impart information and knowledge, but also real revelation. His listeners had one “aha” moment after another. One thing was for sure: he was unlike anyone else in this regard. Wasn't everyone waiting for the promised Messiah? Everybody needed him. So why waste time with vocational training?

We know about missionaries who went on the mission field at the age of sixteen. Couldn't Jesus have started his preaching and healing ministry even earlier? This is how I used to think. Who says of himself that he is so fascinated by God that he can hardly wait to experience everyday professional life? – Well, Jesus did.

It was quite obvious that Jesus felt compassion for the sick and helpless and felt a great empathy for their fate. I am sure that the heavenly Father was watching this closely. In his stead, we said about Jesus: “Well, if he absolutely wants to learn a profession, then at least one which relates to his mission as a miracle healer. To become a doctor, as the evangelist Luke was, would certainly be a sensible option. Thus, Jesus could later have confirmed the healings as a physician. A psychiatrist or psychologist would also have been a very useful profession to make the demon-expulsions of mentally ill people plausible later on. And yet, we know it didn't happen.

Jesus learned a very normal craft profession, which in the beginning apparently had nothing to do even with his so-called spiritual ministry. *“Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?”* (Mark 6:3), the people asked during his performance with his disciples in Nazareth. The Greek word *tektōn* (τέκτων) was translated as

“carpenter” although “construction worker” would have been a better translation as it meant the “bricklayer, carpenter, wainwright”.<sup>8</sup> In wood-poor Palestine, he was mainly engaged in the processing of stone and home construction. There was a real building boom in the time of Jesus on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>9</sup> At that time the area was heavily forested, offering the resources for many new houses were built. Thus, it is understandable why Jesus was so often at the lake. He frequently took a day trip from Nazareth simply for professional reasons: There was a lot to do at the lake. Many other Jewish teachers were craftsmen at that time as well, as being a rabbi was not always a teacher’s main profession.

Jesus' many years of professional activity challenges us in light of our theological culture today, which teaches us that spiritual vocations are somehow more valuable than secular vocations. In the year 1521 Luther recognized in his paper “*De votis monasticis iudicium*” that the fulfilment of the divine did not consist in the special obligation of the monk, but in everyday work within the secular profession. Luther not only considered the clergy superfluous, he also acted in accordance with his realization: Three years later he took off his religious robe of a celibate Augustinian monk, and married Catherine von Bora, a former Cistercian. Yet nothing could take away his theological education, which in the end helped him to translate the Bible.

Jesus also did not miss the usual rabbinical school:<sup>10</sup> Already at the age of five, the Jewish pupil was able to read the Torah, and at ten, the Mishnah, i.e. the interpretation of the law. At the same time, it was customary for the boys to

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take part in the Passover festival at the age of thirteen, which Jesus had already experienced at the age of twelve. Afterwards the best students were allowed to study the prophets, the writings of the Old Testament (Tenach), and the oral Torah in the memorization of the Beth Midrash (teaching house). In Jesus therefore we see a professional craftsman who was neither uneducated nor unreadable in the languages Aramaic and Hebrew. It should be noted that the spiritual activity of the Jewish scribe was very compatible with the practice of a craft. Although we find no indication that Jesus attended one of the great Rhetoric schools, he mastered the typical rabbinical question-and-answer game, after which a question was answered not with an answer but with a counter question.<sup>11</sup> When the spiritual leaders once asked him who gave him the authority to act, he answered:

*“I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism – was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!” They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’...” (They feared the people for everyone held that John really was a prophet). So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” (Mark 11:29-33)*

In fact, there was a connection between the authority of John the Baptist and his own. Authority for both came from heaven.

This eloquence is just one of many examples of the unprecedented quick-wittedness and wisdom of Jesus. But it was not given to him in his sleep as Luke explained: *“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God*

*and men.” (Luke 2:52; AMP). God did not increase in wisdom, but Jesus did in his function as our model. In him, we see the example of a person who continued his vocational training, on the one hand, for his handicraft, but on the other hand, with biblical studies as well. It is undisputed that the Spirit of God gave him extraordinary revelations. For his career as a teacher, he even received the recognition of some Pharisees: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher...” (John 3:2). But Jesus himself did not attach any importance to this title and even demanded “not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.” (Matthew 23:8).*

## **Jesus saves our work**

Jesus Christ came not only as an example, but also as a savior, “...to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10; AMP). He also came to restore the value of work. Where the meaning of our work has been lost, he can give it a new meaning and fill it with joy.

When asked, “How are you?”, people sometimes answer, “Well, it's enough to live. That's all.” This is an answer I have heard more than once. But I believe that this does not have to remain the case when we meet the savior. I would like to explain this.

I think it was no coincidence that Jesus first revealed himself to his future followers in their day of work, exactly where they were fishing. It happened much like the following: Jesus facilitated the hard work of fishing with Peter and Andrew, and he did it in a wondrous way. Their drudgery, with which they spent the whole night trying to catch the fish

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for with no result, suddenly comes to an end. Luke reports: *“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.” (Luke 5:6)*

On this occasion Peter experiences an absolutely supernatural fishing expedition. It is quite noticeable that Jesus often enters our life and reveals his greatness and glory precisely where we least expected it – in our *professional* life.

I am convinced that hardship and stress were not part of God's original plan as these things were only mentioned after man was thrown out of paradise. Sometimes God gives new work that is simply a blessing. My son was once allowed to earn the money for his driving license as a test rider for e-bikes. When he got on the bike in the morning, he said with a smile: “Well, then I'll be off! Going to do some work.” He swung onto the bike and was up and away enjoying driving easily over 65 miles per working day.

Jesus revealed himself not only to Peter and Andrew, but also to the fishermen James and John who were about to repair their nets (Matthew 4:21). This encounter happened in the middle of their professional activities as well. The tax collector Matthew was probably also at work when Jesus introduced himself. Later in the account of the Acts of the Apostles, it is told how God stirred up many people in the middle of their professional lives. A well-known example is the Ethiopian finance minister who was on a business trip. The evangelist Philip is asked to ascend on his chariot to read the biblical writings to him. Shortly afterwards the minister realizes that Jesus Christ is the one about whom the ancient scriptures prophesied and for whom everyone was waiting.

He has a conversion experience and became a Christian – in the middle of a business trip!

In a broader sense, Saul was also on a professional journey during his dubious mission of persecution of Christians, when the risen Christ met him in a vision. After this event he was no longer the same person. He immediately stopped his persecution of Christians and became one of them himself. There are many more examples. Therefore, let us be clear: God obviously loves to meet people directly in their profession even if we think that it should instead be a temple, a church, or a congregation where God manifests himself. He finds us everywhere and is always looking 24/7 for a convenient opportunity for an encounter.

A friend of mine, who visits churches, teaches and preaches for them in the so-called “travel ministry”, once sent a newsletter in the run-up to Christmas in which he told his circle of friends that he needed a financial miracle to make a living. He wanted to fast and pray six weeks before Christmas and asked for a donation. I thought that sounded very pious, thinking it might be best to give him the free advice to just get a job. It's as simple as that. The great truths of life are sometimes very simple! Pious people sometimes remind me of the coworker who was asked if his work was difficult. “No,” he confessed, “but it is a disturbing factor between cure, aftercare, holidays, breaks, weekends and company outings.” I appreciate that the Bible is so clear on this subject. The wise Solomon states: *“The lazy man does not catch and roast his prey, But the precious possession of a [wise] man is diligence [because he recognizes opportunities and seizes them].”* (Proverbs 12:27; AMP)



## Other biblical models

There is a chapter in the Bible, Hebrews 11, that is dedicated to very important personalities. It is striking that God writes his story very differently from the authors of our history books. He honors only those people who have shown a persevering faith and acted accordingly. One German Bible translates Hebrews 11:2 as follows: *“Our ancestors lived this faith. That is why God has put them as models for us.”* (Hebrews 11:2; HFA).

It is striking that in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews almost all the models of faith listed there were engaged in secular activity. Among the most famous personalities were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David and Daniel. These and numerous other people mentioned in the Bible were not priests, Levites or pastors of any congregation. They were not sent out by any missionary organization and did not live on alms or donations. Instead, they made their own living and were so filled with God's Spirit that he could use it to change the course of their people's history. In each of these examples, God used their working environment to shape and guide them. In the process, opportunities arose again and again in which God could reveal his actions. Would he also like to do this at our workplace?

We know Noah must have been an excellent craftsman to build the ark in a way that it could withstand the Flood. According to the biblical report, he worked on this ship for about 100 years and preached continuously to the people. But in the end, everyone turned away from him and only his own family was saved. Would Noah be invited to our churches

today as an evangelist? I don't think so. But Noah's success apparently lay not in his preaching, which many understand as truly “spiritual work,” but in his craft activity. In this he simply carried out the will of God. He was working in the right place at the right time. It is simply fantastic when we can say this about ourselves!

Abraham, who is known as the founding father of the Jewish people and is mentioned in the Bible as the father of faith, was also a worker all his life. He fulfilled a function that we would today call a cattle breeder, businessman and investor.

We know from Moses that he led the Jewish people out of Egypt and became the political leader of his nation. Yes, as the adopted son of the pharaoh, he received a thorough academic education. But he had to learn to work as a shepherd and nomad before God appointed him to lead the Jewish people. And in this position as well, he worked with extraordinary professional skill, for example as judge, manager and even as general.

Joseph's mission was different. He experienced his professional career under the pharaoh as he managed the global food supply in times of famine. He did such and exemplary job that he was appointed Chancellor of all Egypt. Joseph was the top manager in a high political position blessed with extraordinary wisdom. Today, we could probably use such a man in the Chancellor's Office to deal with the asylum crisis in Europe and to manage the energy transition!

Or let us think of David: He practiced many different professions, as a shepherd, soldier, leader and king. In

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addition, he worked as a musician and poet. His prophetic psalms showed that he even worked as a prophet. The inspiration that emanates from his texts is undisputed. But David is also a good example of how a person can become a source of inspiration for anyone in the middle of an eventful working life.

Further, we have heard of Daniel being put in Babylon because of his wisdom, in a position where he presided over the scholarly of the land. He also received a great revelation about the end times on earth and thus went down in biblical history as a prophet of God. But many forget that he got his inspiration in the middle of his professional life.

Many other examples could be cited. The prophets have a special significance in the Bible. But they lived anything but isolated or unrealistic. The first of them, Abel, was a shepherd, just as Amos, who also cultivated fig tree plantations. Hence, they were workers who earned their own living. Zephaniah, for example, worked in court, and Ezekiel is said to have been practiced in shipbuilding.

Many women also carried out other activities in addition to their jobs as housewives. Lydia, who belonged to the first church, is reported to have been a purple merchant and a servant in her house as a small businesswoman. And who knows what else possibilities God creates within one's profession. Esther, for instance, was a beauty queen.

The professional spectrum of people who have left their mark in the Bible through their faith is so wide that today we can say with great certainty that simply every profession is suitable to serve God.

I am already aware that this topic challenges us a little as some people feel self-conscious or even trapped in their jobs. Therefore, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions in an honest and open way:

- Do I only work to earn a living or to build prosperity?
- Do I think the work is something small to finance something higher?
- Am I only working so that I can support the really pious, “spiritual” projects with my financial means?
- Am I only working to gain experience for a later leading ministry in a church?

Unfortunately, many Christians regard this as such and must therefore answer some or all of these questions with “Yes.” Some even have a guilty conscience when they no longer have time to attend so-called spiritual programs, such as crusades, street missions or prayer evenings. That is why they begin making their professional activity appear a little more sacred simply by printing fish on their business cards, setting up prayer circles at work and leaving their offices with a hug. But our work does not become more sacred when we impose pious forms of behavior on it. It is already sacred because God is a worker and we were created in His image! Let us walk in the footsteps of our role models, who did nothing less than write history. They did this by standing and working in faith.