

Integrating Work and Life with Paul Valler

This Saturday morning seminar hosted by Reading@Work was held on Saturday, 22 March 2003 at St. Saviour's Church, Reading was led by Paul Valler. Paul, a former Finance and Human Resources Director of Hewlett Packard Ltd (HP), is now a seminar speaker and an associate of the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (LICC).

He is married with two sons and is a preaching elder at Finchampstead Baptist Church.

Paul shared with us his seven keys to a choice for better integration between work and life.

1. 1. Low debt lifestyle

With the exception of mortgage debt (but only where there is no negative equity), debt should be minimised in order to permit more freedom to make changes in life patterns according to God's will rather than being led by debt. For example, Paul still retains a three-bedroom house, no credit card debt and chose not to drive expensive cars from before his corporate career took off until now, after he took early retirement. Paul was not trapped and we should endeavour not to trap ourselves by debt from reaching our potential use for the Kingdom of God.

Secondly, having a low debt lifestyle prevents a hard landing should matters go wrong – are we seeking status in the wrong medium: money, house, cars etc.?

2. 2. Open and consistent identity

Paul explained that he did not hide his Christian faith at work: for example he wore a simple fish lapel badge. This encouraged a culture around Paul of people expecting him to explain what and why he did things as a Christian.

Secondly, this openness meant that those around him would accommodate his faith without knowing it, practically such as language, but also recognised for example the benefit of not holding meetings in the US such that Paul was unable to attend Church on Sundays – the regular meetings were rescheduled.

3. 3. Effective working patterns

Paul outlined his working pattern of plan, do and review, and noted the parallel to the Trinity in form of God with His redemptive plan, Christ the redeemer and the Holy Spirit reviewing and encouraging our follow up. Practically, Paul used the example of not permitting back to back meetings, and ensuring there was space between the meetings to permit reflection and actions to take place – a benefit from this was de-stressing the working day.

At this point Paul reflected that the Bible makes it clear that the day starts in the evening, and having a day off from work requires the evening before that day off to be included. There is never likely to be enough time to do everything that seeks one's attention and therefore, we need to consider what is relevant, and set that within the right priority framework.

As an example of this, Paul realised at one point that he had too many commitments at work, church and at home to be able to fit them all into his schedule and requested that he be reduced to a flexible four day week. This was done for a three month trial with his manager's consent: stakeholders at work did not notice the difference, the trial did not withhold his promotion in due course and his manager did not reduce his pay following the trial since his results had not diminished. The low debt lifestyle in part had permitted this decision to reduce his working week to be made in accord with the priorities that Paul considered God had given him.

4. 4. Knowing your non-negotiables

Some principles in Scripture cannot be over ridden - truth, taking a day off a week - we need to determine what these are for ourselves. By way of practical example, Paul referred to a potential recruit he interviewed who was an orthodox Jew. The interviewee explained early in the interview that he needed to return home before sunset on Friday, to be home for the Sabbath (Saturday). During winter, due to relative locations, this would mean leaving work early. Paul answered that this would not be a problem, so long as the time was made up etc., to which the Jew looked most relieved. However, Paul's point was that the set of values this employee lived by, his religious convictions, were strong enough to govern his whole life, including his work. Once employed, these personal convictions and values undoubtedly connected with him being one of the best performing employees Paul has had. To that extent, employers should seek employees with such convictions of their own personal values.

But, rather than personal values (which we would base on the Christian Truth) we can impose pressures, on ourselves such as ambition, requirement for more money, or time, or both, etc.: all of which leads to quiet desperation in the workplace.

At this point Paul led those at the seminar through a prayer to denounce driven-ness and perfectionism, which prohibit us from reaching our potential for the Kingdom.

From the freedom of driven-ness and perfectionism, on what basis do we make our career choices? Paul introduced a model that our choice over future jobs would align to a role defined by three axes: Organisation, Function and Geography. Paul's experience was that typically one of these axes may be fixed but the over two can 'float': e.g. staying in Reading, but potential changing employer and job role. How then to choose the job? Paul invited us to consider the fit of our personal values and non-negotiables with the potential organisation and role. Would we find an overlap of our personal profile with the organisational need of goals, network, competencies and values? In view of 70% of people leaving their manager and not their jobs, what motivates our reason for moving? Is it to find a boss who we can respect and learn from, someone who has the vision that enables our own development?

5. 5. Retreats to reflect and pray

We need to have time to reflect and Paul's experience when he first went on retreat was his amazement at how tired he actually was. Retreat gives us the opportunity for revelation about our lives, what we think we need, and permits a clearer focus of what it is that we integrate our lives around to worship.

Through retreats, Paul had been able to set his worship on God. Paul undertook a retreat around once a quarter, and these formed a lifeline for his relationship with God and permitted time to think things through, especially around life choices. While such

times without structure can be viewed as scary, Paul introduced a couple of light objectives to his retreats.

6. 6. Personal values and mission statement

Personal values and arriving at our own personal mission statement is an important guide, a plumb line, for the decisions we have to make. Paul referred to several good books on the subject, such as “The Path,” “The Purpose Driven Life,” and “Living on Purpose.”

Paul’s own experience was that particular scriptures came to assist with formulating the personal mission statement in particular areas. However, we each need to work through the process – however, it is a living document and not something that will necessarily be set in stone for our whole lives. But, once done, it creates a sense of clarity and direction for choices for our resources and career: but it should remain as a model and tool and not become a false idol itself.

7. 7. Accountability partners

People to whom we can be held accountable forms an important part of our discipleship in our quest to become ever more Christ-like. Paul wished that he had developed a close-knit support group early in his life, including role models or mentors who could have forewarned him of future pitfalls. Paul now has a mentor role with several younger men in his Church in order to assist them move forward in the Kingdom.

Summary

To summarise, Paul referred to a conferences on career choices at HP that he had spoken at, where he outlined the need to have integrity in life and it was to many a revelation of Christian discipleship. The outlined model operated in three spheres - survival (medication, debt etc), success (winning, image, possessions), and significance (purpose, mission, vision, convictions - focussed and derived what matters in life). The balance of life shifts between these three spheres and the one that is dominant will drive what you do at that point in time.

Then, throughout life we make trades of one of the three areas for another – for example, Paul’s decision to reduce his working hours to four days a week, from the success to significance sphere. Our life choices fit into this framework and the result depends upon whether you are doing what you really care about; whether it aligns with our significance sphere.

While the survival sphere is relatively obvious, and the success sphere is promoted endlessly by secular material culture around us, we have to answer the fundamental questions of values to determine our significance sphere, which in turn will determine our destiny. The significance sphere will be tied closely to the determination of personal values and our mission statement for life.

What these personal values are for each of us is linked to seasons of our life – we have to take ownership, identify values from multiple choices, heed wisdom from mentors/accountability partners, seek examples etc., and move into the purpose driven life stage.

Through this process we will ditch hypocrisy and take on integrity. It is people with integrity that make the best employees and those that employers most like to employ, as then automatically there is trust.

Conclusion

To conclude, Paul stressed that we must not fear commitment to our personal values, since procrastination is the biggest enemy of us defining our work-life balance. We must not let ourselves drift, but through prayer and reflection identify our personal values and personal mission statement: a rock to direct our resources. To resolve stresses in life we need to identify the personal life values and live these out with integrity.

Small groups

The session then split into small groups and the following points were discussed in coming back together in the main forum:

- • Reading as a historical trading town with its spiritual climate and rampant materialism means that the spirit of driven-ness is highly prevalent: it needs to be dealt with, including by the prayer used in the session.
- • Importance of having one's own personal values and personal mission statement, but in balance need to be hearing from God as what His will is for you.
- • Importance of mentoring so that the same mistakes are not applied again.
- • Each person needs to spend time with God as one size does not fit all – and that need for 'quality' time that is not squeezed into a schedule that is too busy.
- • Process of writing a personal mission statement will bring some clarity to one's own personal values, and the process of working towards it is as important as the final statement itself.
- • Importance of knowing what your own personal values are and how that impacts everything else in one's life: the need to tie in what you do to those values. (It was noted how amazingly counter-culture that is since the media push values that are to be adopted in any situation or case.)
- • Tough passage in Judges 11 Vs 30-35: how much uninterrupted time do we have with God each day? We should write down what God says to us every day. Do we sacrifice our family responsibilities for work in all honesty, or is that just how we like to view it, to appease ourselves?
- • Requirement to pray in a transformational manner for the business in which we work - taking our faith and making it an active salt in the workplace.

Personal reflection

The seminar then gave the opportunity for personal reflection and identification of personal action plan points.

Conclusion of seminar

Paul concluded by stating that we would not want to leave the impression that he had always made the right decision. For example, the low debt lifestyle derived from problems arising from while he was a student. He had been given a clear vision that he was to have seven good, plentiful years with HP and then he was to leave. However, Paul decided to leave three months later than the seven years for various reasons, even though it was clear when the starting and hence end point of the seven years would be. That decision, through stock options in a falling market, cost him over £100k and reaffirmed the need to follow God's instructions exactly.

Now working with LICC and Mark Greene, Paul reminded us of the need to practice the presence of God in our lives, and that busyness is the enemy of intimacy with God. We need to keep connected with God, through prayer and bible study such that we are to develop ourselves to be in the presence of God the whole time.

By developing a rhythm in our lives of being in relationship with God – on the bus or train, in the car, waiting for the elevator or downloading an Internet page – let us keep connected with God to maintain progress with integrating work and life.