

to pray together and read God's Word together as a family every day.

When children are younger it is unrealistic to try and wade through three or more chapters of Scripture at a time; modify your readings to meet your family's needs, dependent upon what stage of development they are at. Far better to read a passage of ten or twenty verses to establish and discuss a fundamental teaching, such as the resurrection of Christ, or a teaching such as, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" . . . And . . . 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Mt. 22:37-39). Ask your child how they think this might work in the playground, or at the park with their friends. Get little ones drawing or colouring. As your children grow older, so discussion of the practical applications can go deeper and perhaps be more challenging.

We should always make time for God's Word and fellowship with brothers and sisters; to do so teaches an important principle, that the eternal things take precedence over the material. If this principle is ingrained in a child's psyche from an early age then hopefully it will not leave them.

Imperfect creatures

It is easy to become disheartened when we think about these high principles and then reflect on our daily existence. We may be very disorganised, or deliberately absent ourselves from the family home. Sometimes we may neglect God's Word or

prayer. Perhaps we have not been as selfless as we should have been towards our marriage partner. Maybe we have been too harsh or too lax in our attitude towards instructing or disciplining our children. Sometimes, perhaps, we are proud and hard-hearted.

However, whilst recognising our failings is a necessary exercise, we are not to dwell on these departures from God's way. We must try to forsake the sin which so easily besets us, and go forward in faith, believing that we "can do all things through Christ who strengthens" us (Phil. 4:13). We have the light of God's Word to guide us. We have the power of prayer to revive us as we confess our sins and seek forgiveness. We have the joy of fellowship to build us up. With these weapons in our armoury, and with confidence in God's mercy, we can experience the joy of spiritual growth with those we love, and in faith face the challenges of family life in Christ. In doing so we look forward to that joyous time to come when "the whole family in heaven and earth" (Eph. 3:15) will be blessed with eternal life and be united in the glory of His Kingdom. We join with the Apostle Paul in his prayer:

". . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (vv. 17-19).

Faith and works in daily life: employment*

Lawrence Cave

WHETHER WE like it or not, earning our 'daily bread' can often be a challenge to our faith. Challenges come in various forms in different parts of the world. Obvious challenges are being unable to find any work at all, having to accept work we do not want, or ending up redundant. Less obvious challenges come when we are in work and everything seems to be going well. This article is written from the perspective of the engineering industry in the UK,

which has had a very turbulent history over the past thirty years. It is hoped that the lessons I have learned will be of help to brethren and sisters in whatever circumstances they find themselves.

We will look first at the less obvious problems we can encounter whilst in work and see how they can test our faith. Then we will look at the more obvious problems of redundancy and not

* Quotations from NKJV.

being able to find suitable work. Finally, we will look at the real challenge that all of these situations present.

Making our position known

The prophet Daniel was an example of how a God-fearing person should behave at work. We read in Daniel 1:8 of his behaviour when at 'university': "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies . . . therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself". He had made up his mind and was not afraid to make his views known. In Daniel 6 we see Daniel next to the king; he could not go much higher! In the 'lion's den' episode it is obvious that it was well known that Daniel was a God-fearing man. His enemies used that knowledge to trap him. Despite the threat to his life, he no doubt again "purposed in his heart", this time that he would continue praying to God.

So we can see that we must make our position known to all at our place of employment. This should start with our CV. A useful phrase to include is something like, "Active member of the Christadelphian church". This tells our prospective employer that we have other commitments apart from work. If we also include details of the activities we are involved with, this shows that we are not just nominal Christians.

The other lesson from Daniel is that all our work colleagues should know what we stand for. One of the most useful opportunities for doing this that the present writer has found is the Monday morning conversation, which quite often includes the question, "Did you have a good week-end?", to which the reply can be, "Yes, great, I was at a Christadelphian gathering at wherever on Saturday". A conversation about what Christadelphians are sometimes follows. We can then give people around us regular reminders by ensuring that the word 'Christadelphian' occurs regularly in our conversations. This can be in reference to our friends, where we have been and what we have done.

The challenges of employment

We spend much time at work, so we would all like enjoyable work. Some achieve this and others do not. One potential problem of having an enjoyable job is that we may like it too much. This can be made worse if our employer is also demanding of our time. If we are promoted to higher management or director level, and our

employer is rewarding us well, he will naturally want much in return. He may want us to use that company car when he wants, and show no concern for our prior commitments.

It is also possible that, if we have demanding but enjoyable work, life is so full that we have little time to think about the things that really matter. The Lord Jesus warned of this possibility in the Parable of the Sower: "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Mt. 13:22). When work commitments prevent us from fulfilling our ecclesial appointments then maybe the Word is being choked in our lives. It is perhaps time to take a prayerful look at where we are going. Sometimes events make us stop and think. These can be redundancy, which we will look at later, or any of the other problems that make us realise what life is really all about.

Another challenge to our faith can occur if we find ourselves in work which compromises our conscience. The obvious one is making armaments, which none of us would even consider. But the military organisations of most countries are massive organisations that make use of just about everything the rest of us use. We should decide our attitude to doing work for the military before the situation arises. There are different levels of involvement with the military that can occur. The most innocuous is supplying goods and services to the military that everyone uses day to day. But what if we happen to know that whatever we are supplying is to be used for direct conflict? Then what if the military request a slightly different product specifically for their use? The next stage is when the military request a product to be designed for them. The present writer slid part way down this list and was glad to escape the situation. We should make it clear that we are conscientious objectors when we start work, and give reminders when work for the military appears on the horizon.

Young people choosing a career may find it prudent to consider whether the career they are opting for has most of its opportunities in the military sector. It is an unfortunate fact that the military usually has much more money to spend than its civilian counterparts, so it may be difficult to keep away from military involvement.

We can experience difficulties if we work for someone who is 'economical with the truth'. We may be expected to make untrue statements to customers or potential customers. It is vital to

make our position known, then our superiors will know it is a waste of time asking us to tell half truths.

Another challenge occurs when eating out with work colleagues. Closing our eyes and giving thanks for our food can be difficult in these situations. We can give thanks in some more private place before the meal, but that could be considered as compromising our position. If people know what we stand for, they will not be surprised. Our giving thanks may be noticed and result in a conversation about the Truth.

The challenge of unemployment

Unemployment can test our faith to its very limits. Whether it is long-term unemployment or sudden redundancy, the effect can be the same. We can lose confidence and become depressed. Doubts may come thick and fast, including, possibly, doubts about our faith in God. Redundancy comes with a suddenness that can make the shock worse. Our stable life of ten, twenty years or more can be completely destroyed in minutes. We cannot know how we will react until it happens, but, as many will testify, we can find that our faith in God is not as strong under trial as we believed it to be in easier times.

Once the initial shock of being out of work has subsided a little, the problem of finding work must be faced. This can be particularly challenging to our faith if work is scarce and competition is fierce. It is very tempting to grab any work offered and agree to terms that we know are not the best for us spiritually.

On a practical note, if there seems little prospect of finding work, it may be time to consider a change in career. Maybe we are being persuaded to go in a different direction in life.

The real challenge of both employment and unemployment

There seems to be a common factor in all of the problems that we have looked at. The difficulty is that of really believing that God and the Lord Jesus Christ have promised that they will always be with us. Put another way, this is lack of faith. Here are just three passages that can be difficult really to believe at these times:

“For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear’” (Heb. 13:5,6);

“... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20);

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (6:31-33).

These words are reminding us that God and our Lord Jesus Christ are with us to help at all times. If we really believed this, our problems, which seem to loom so large, would be reduced to their correct size. If God can control great nations, He is surely able to overrule our small lives. A well-known speaker used to say, “Worry is a vote of no confidence in God”. We can be so full of our own problems that we find it difficult to think about anything else. It can be difficult to believe God is caring for us when we are sending countless job applications into an apparently bottomless pit and are watching our bank accounts decrease.

What can we do to recover our battered faith in such circumstances? Prayer can be one answer. But from personal experience, it is possible to reach the depths of doubting the existence of God, so talking to a being we are not sure is there to hear is not very helpful. In this situation, we need to go back to basics and ask, “Why do I trust the Bible?”. If we are not sure, perhaps that is the reason why our challenge has arisen. This can be particularly difficult for those of us who have been brought up in a Christadelphian home. If all of our life has been spent in a Christadelphian environment, being baptized can seem almost like joining a club. Knocks in life like redundancy could be sent to try our faith.

It appears to the writer that as a community we do not acknowledge that we can ever have problems with faith. Hebrews 11:6 is frequently quoted from our platforms: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”. Listeners are almost always left with the impression that we just mysteriously acquire this faith with no assistance. Scripture is quite clear that our Father does not expect blind faith. God gave Moses signs in Exodus 4 as evidence that He had sent him. He made it clear to Isaiah in chapters 43–48 that the Jews are His witnesses. The Lord Jesus Christ performed miracles to make people realise that he had been given powers that no other man had. This should have made them listen to his message.

We are in a similar situation. The Bible has many unique attributes. When we come to really trust the message, we will then trust the message giver and our faith will be strengthened.

Evidence exists to encourage us to trust God's Word. Among a range of resources available that attempt to bring all the evidence together, I have found two especially helpful; one is Brother Alan Hayward's book *God's Truth*, the other is the more recent *The Evidence—You Decide* preaching material.¹ Whenever and however our faith

is challenged, we should prayerfully look at the evidence God has given us in His message. This will encourage us to realise that we are not on our own, however great the challenges may be.

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1. *God's Truth* is available from Printland Publishers, www.printlandpublishers.com. *The Evidence—You Decide* is available from Sister (Mrs) Janet Howe, 13 Twentywell Road, Sheffield, S17 4PU, or on www.theevidence.org.uk.

Faith and works in daily life: ecclesial life*

Trevor Hughes

FAITH AND WORKS in ecclesial life are expressed through the Word, works and worship, which unite each member in the family of God. It is important, therefore, to express our faith in fellowship, and "our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jno. 1:3).

Unless we focus upon the place we have as a brother or sister in God's family, our faith will not result in works done to the glory of our heavenly Father. Our relationship with Him has only been made possible through Jesus Christ, who is head of the ecclesia as the husband is head of the wife, in the Lord (Eph. 5:23). Faithful works performed in the ecclesia and in honour of God are done in observance of those principles God has provided for us in His Word. This sets a general pattern in which, in broad terms, we see the brethren involved more in the **words** of worship, whereby we are brought into fellowship with God through the Word, exhortation and prayer (Tit. 1:9), and the sisters more in the **works** of the ecclesia expressed in welfare, edification and development of each individual and family within their sphere of influence (2:1-5).

The family meal

An inestimable blessing in family life is the joy of sharing the family meal together. The table spread with food to sustain life and health is surely recognised by those who love God as His expression of love in supplying their every need.

The meal is partaken with thanksgiving as a good gift "coming down from the Father of lights with Whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas. 1:17).

We may not readily perceive attendance at the Breaking of Bread as faith expressed in works. Yet it is so. Special arrangements in Eastern custom could be ratified by sharing a meal together, which was regarded as a 'covenant of salt', bringing the participants together in an inseparable union. That is why Jesus expressed his endearment to the disciples at the institution of the Last Supper in the words, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Lk. 22:15). Willingly to absent ourselves from the Lord's table is an act of faithlessness, a rejection of the blessings through Jesus Christ given by God's grace for our salvation.

In our meetings

The family bond is strengthened the more we meet together and remind ourselves of the ties that bind us in fellowship with our Father. An expression of faith in works is our mutual edification by God's Word. Bible classes take varying forms according to the ecclesia to which we belong. It should be paramount that the class be a forum for *learning* God's words.

Mutual encouragement is best achieved within a family framework, providing encouragement for

* Quotations from the ESV.