

The Christian in the Workplace

by Mr Mark Seymour

Strength in Truth Conference 2022

It is lovely to see each and every one of you today and I do genuinely hope as we try to pray, that you will take something away from today, and actually each of us whatever age, that there is something for us to take home. We use the expression, and we hear ministers often say it, 'to take home and beat out', that is something that comes from the book of Ruth, that we may be able to take something home and beat it out before the Lord and consider it. So may the Lord help us, you in hearing. and me and my dear friend Rowland Wheatley in speaking today.

The subject that I have been given to speak from is 'the Christian in the workplace'. When I started to ponder this subject I realised just how huge it was there are so many different aspects to think about.

First of all I want to introduce myself as I do not think all of you know me, so I think that's a good place to start. My name is Mark Seymour and I have been a minister amongst our churches since July 2018, I cannot honestly think where those four years have gone, it is amazing when we look back and see how the Lord has helped us hitherto.

My current work place position is as Chief Operating Officer with the Tenterden Schools Trust, I have been in this role or similar role since 2011. Tenterden Schools Trust is made up of the biggest secondary school in Kent called Homewood School with 2200 pupils, it has four primary schools, two nursery schools, and two Church of England primary schools, we are a mixed Church of England/non Church of England MAT (multi academy trust). I originally started as the Schools Business Manager of the Secondary school in 2011 and since that time I have effectively become Finance Director of the Trust which we formed in 2016 and I now have the title of Chief Operating Officer. My work responsibilities are for the finance across all schools in the Tenterden Schools Trust, we have a turnover of £18m, also for the premises and health and

safety across all sites, which broadly speaking is to support the teaching and learning in those areas.

Previous to my current work for ten years I was a Business Manager with a group of veterinary surgeries, as I will talk about a little later I tried to get out of that job for six months and in God's providence the Lord would not have me to do so. That job was one where I ran the finances, health and safety, HR and also all the non-clinical aspects of that position, we had sixty six staff to look after and £4m turnover business.

Before that for twenty years (you can see how old I am now!) I worked for National Westminster Bank in a number of different roles, starting off by being the tea-boy, and I never forget the first time I made tea for the manager and he said, 'Boy, that's not the right colour'! You know that was a lesson for life and I have never forgotten that it matters how we treat our staff, that is something I want to bring out as we go on. In that job I did a number of different roles which eventually culminated in management positions. I was never one that was particularly ambitious, but it happened to me shall we say, and I saw God's providence in so many ways across those twenty years as I gained experience in training, in lending and in all sorts of financial aspects for the bank.

So pretty much, that is Mark Seymour! Now for forty two years this July I have been out in the workforce, so I hope I know a little bit about this subject. The thing that challenges me is, have I acted as a real Christian out there in the workplace? It will be a challenge to you each as well, because we do question ourselves don't we, and rightly so?

So the areas I want to cover today are:

- Background to the subject
- A general code of conduct and responsibility that I feel we have in the workplace
- Prayer and guidance
- Warnings from work situations that I feel I've had through the years and the need to pray to be kept

- Challenging situations for the Christian, Sunday working and LGBT issues (I am not going to step away from these things)
- Finally, letting our light shine before others.

Let us come onto

Background

I want to be clear as you may well have a different aspect and view; this is my view and my experience. As we read in some very helpful scriptures on some of these things there is not a view as they are what the scriptures say (I will come to that later).

On certain aspects there is a view, such as, to what degree do we let our light shine before men? You may have a different view to my view, and I respect and understand that, I am just being very clear as I present to you, that is about what my thoughts are, so bear that in mind.

“The workplace”, what do we mean by the workplace? I feel it covers a diverse range of places, we have many in our denomination that are self-employed, many office workers, those in hospitals, schools, those that are business owners, and all these various aspects it covers the whole lot. Of course, each of the workplace situations will be individual and different therefore you will need to tailor the thoughts, feelings and ideas that we mention, to those circumstances that you are working in.

Now we talk about the work life, but I actually feel it relates to those thinking about going to university, those that are at university, studying at college or anything in that way, it is how we interact with others and how as Christian followers of the Lord we should react to situations. As I say, some people work on their own, others as part of a close-knit team, all of these have an impact on our working situation and how we will react.

Now Christian, what do we mean by Christian? I thought about this, and I haven't time to spend long on it, you could actually have a whole subject matter for another day on, “what is a Christian?” A Christian is one that desires to be a follower of Christ. I do not know if you young

people remember the minister Mr Clement Wood amongst our churches, he used to say this, 'CHRIST, I am nothing'. I think that's such a wonderful thing, because what it is saying is, my life and all in all is in Christ, and I myself am nothing. I know we talk much in our sermons about being a real Christian but friends; I want to be really simple, let us take that definition as I feel it really helps us to where we are. So we desire to be Christians don't we? We each desire to walk in these matters before us.

Our General Conduct and Responsibility

Perhaps you are employed, if so who is your first point of responsibility in all things? Come back to the word "Christian", it is God. He must be first, He must be last, and we cannot serve God and mammon. Now we are called to work and to work hard, but I do believe our service and responsibility is first to God. We have responsibility for different areas in the workplace but our responsibility is to Him, all of those issues and concerns that you have, and I'm sure some of you have them today, we must look to Him, lay them before Him and ask for His guidance and direction. Friends, He has all the answers to all these things.

So the first point to take away is the point of diligence. Some of us are naturally more diligent than others. What does it mean to be diligent? It means to show care, it means to be conscientious in one's work, in one's study, in what we are doing. So I have some Scripture quotes here. Proverbs 22v29 "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men". (Ecclesiastes 9v10) "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest," Help me, Lord, to do what I have to do with my might, is a prayer that we so often need to pray, isn't it?

Before you start a day's work, try to seek the Lord's help and strength to be given for the day, because you do not know what is going to arise in that day. (Proverbs 12v24) "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute". Diligence will repay you and diligence is something we need to seek the Lord to help give us. Even in those

tasks that are mundane and sometimes we do not like them, the daily repeats and those things, help me to do it Lord, to the best of my ability.

Secondly which comes back to the reading we had in Leviticus and I don't know about you, but it certainly searched me out. In the office, perhaps around the cold drinks machine or the coffee machine you hear other colleagues say 'you know so-and-so in accounts, they are having an affair with so-and-so'. Do we get involved in tale-bearing, do we get involved in the tittle-tattle of the office? Friends, I have to do this at times; I have to beg the Lord to prevent me from opening my mouth, from talking indiscreetly about things. We desire to be followers of Christ and to watch the words of our mouth. James speaks about the tongue you know that, I am not speaking at you friends, because I know what it is, and you young friends will have to prove how challenging it is, you get dragged into it, you see? 'Oh, have you heard about so-and-so, they are spending all their money down the pub on Friday night,' or, 'Have you heard about what they are doing', and all this tittle-tattle. Friends, try and keep a distance from it, try not to get involved in such things.

There are many other commandments for example not stealing. You know, it so struck me when I once completed an expenses claim for the bank, you know, we have a great enemy Satan, I thought, 'oh, you did a bit more mileage than 150 miles, at 45p a mile that will come out a bit nicer, that will help you in your bank account'. No, Satan, that would be wrong, that is false, that is stealing. You see, friends, we think stealing is taking something off a shelf in a shop but in the workplace it is honesty, honesty and honesty again.

Look at what we have in politics at the moment and the lack of honesty at times. We need to seek that the Lord will keep us in these things, not to defraud anybody, not to rob our neighbour; your employer is your neighbour, under that definition. Not to swear and take the Lord's name in vain, and as helped, even to mention to those around you if they take His name in vain that it upsets you as a Christian, I know that's not easy, friends, I've had to do it. My own team know that they do not swear, I have on occasion have had to mention things, and it does help if we set out where we are from the beginning in a job and pray for the Lord's help in it.

Now the new commandment, that we should love one another, how we should try. Don't we come up with those in the workplace who are completely different to us, they are hard to work with, hard to deal with? 'Help me to pray for so-and-so, help me to pray that they might have a different spirit towards me'. Our dealings with others, kindly affectioned, not slothful in business, and that isn't just business owners, that is each of us working to earn the crust, not to be slothful, fervent in Spirit, remembering that we are serving the Lord in what we do, as Christians representing the Lord Jesus Christ. What a standard! It's beyond us each! I do not feel any of us can reach this standard, the bar is so high, but we need to beg of the Lord to help us day by day to get towards the standard. "Given to hospitality, provide things honest in the sight of all men", and what an important point this is friends.

I have had some conflict through the years I don't mind telling you, I've had some roles that have brought conflict naturally, but as far as possible to live peaceably with all men, we do well to remember this. When a harsh word is spoken to us oh to have that peaceful spirit to turn away, turn the other cheek. In the church they have this expression, "what would Jesus do?" It is a good thing to apply this in our daily lives. What would Jesus do, how would He have responded to the circumstance we come into?

Then, "forgiveness", how slow we are to forgive. Perhaps somebody in I.T. cannot get the technology going and we are frustrated and complaining about it. You know, even in that, to remember these things are in the hand of the Lord. "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." (Ephesians 4 v1/2)

What a standard there is for a Christian in the workplace. As in Matthew 7 v 12, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." We do not like people that are unpleasant to us, we do not like sharp words, people shouting, unpleasantness, friends, and we ought not to do it to others. Again, we are guilty even like this, you may get an email in your inbox if you are in office-type work, or if you are a nurse and get a patient that is being difficult,

you want to have a little go back at them, or you get this email and it makes you feel angry and want to answer it in five minutes and then go, you feel, 'no, this is my view, this is the way it is'. You see how we are, I would say this piece of advice, if you get an email that really upsets you, do not answer it for a while, spend a night on it, don't rush into a response, sit back and pray over it. To that nurse that has that has a patient being difficult right in their face, try as helped to turn the other cheek with gentleness, kindness and meekness.

We further quote from Peter and this last point is pertinent as Christians, if people know by our walk and conduct that we are Christians, that we go to church, they will be watching us, the eyes of the world will be upon us to trip us up, to watch our every step. Friends, we do need to pray to be kept.

Prayer and Guidance

Friends, when I put this talk together, it was such a wonderful mercy the Lord showed me so many things in my 42 years at work where I believe He has answered a poor man's prayers, I found it such an encouragement. I am sure that each of you, I hope that each of you, are praying souls, and may you be helped to pray in these difficult times.

So let us look firstly at a prayer in time of opposition. Be sure, friends, you are going to know at times to have some opposition, we hear it in our pulpits, if we are going to heaven it is not going to be an easy pathway. If we are full-time work we are spending much of our time at work and the Lord is going to allow opposition and difficulties to come. Why? Because if you are a real Christian He will bring you to prayer, and to pray again and again. He will bring you to lean upon Him totally in these situations.

Opposition, now, when I was employed at the vets, I managed all the practice managers, we had four practices and it went alright at first, I don't know what I did but after six months one of the practice managers began to be very difficult, she would not do anything and always left any reports I requested to the very last minute. I would have to chase these up, she wouldn't speak to me, and there was a communication shutdown. The senior partner spoke to me and said, 'I

fully support you in it Mark' which I was thankful for. I couldn't understand it, she was so unhelpful, I didn't know what her problem was. Friends, it took probably two years of praying that the Lord would resolve the situation. I know I made a decision that she did not agree with, but it was not around that time, I just didn't know what it was. One evening the information communication technology broke at that particular branch, it was a Friday night and I normally went home at 5pm. She rung up desperate at ten minutes to 5pm and I said, 'I'm coming over now'. She said, 'but you're due to go home'. I went over, I didn't know if I could resolve it. That surgery was a fifteen minute journey from where I worked, friends, the fifteen minutes, I say it to the blessing and praise of God, I spent in prayer, 'Lord make a way, use this.' You know, we were able to resolve it, the evening surgery went ahead as normal, and the Lord showed me what the problem was. The snare was broken, from then onwards I was her 'best friend', she would ring me about anything, she would ask for guidance and direction in everything. Now I don't know who is opposing you today, but you will get opposition, and even if you're running your own business, you'll find you'll have opposition from those that are against you in things. Opposition, take it to the Lord in prayer. We sing,

"Prayer can force a passage through

Iron bars and brazen gates."

(Gadsby 397)

There is a beautiful word in Proverbs 1v1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Don't forget it friends.

I've had to be reminded of that recently in a matter that I'm dealing with - opposition. You know, I had such a difficult day one day with customers in the bank, it was so unpleasant, and someone in particular (you get such unpleasantness at times). As I got into my car, the first thought is, put the radio on and hear the news. Friends, I'll just give you a bit of guidance, on those days when I've had a really difficult trying day, more than once the radio hasn't gone on, I've had to pray out loud in the car, 'Lord, thou knowest', sometimes that's all we can pray, 'O Lord, thou knowest',

and instead of listening to the radio, the time of prayer. On that particular occasion, the Lord spoke these words to me, three words, "Peace be still". Friends, we were softened, we were touched, we could go on next day feeling if the Lord is with me, who then indeed can be against me. Customers may come in, complain and moan, oh they may, but the Lord will strengthen and help me, as He will you, maybe you younger ones too in your studies as well. "Opposition". So fear not their faces, look to the Lord Jesus Christ. What opposition Moses had! You know, it is a subject we could go on and on about.

May the Lord help us to move on to prayer for guidance and direction? Now you may say, 'I do this, I naturally do'. I'm glad if you do friends, the word of the Lord is absolutely clear, and how He showed David in that simple word, 'All my times are in thy hand', we sing that hymn 64 so often, "All events at Thy command".

Prayer for guidance, you know, I pondered this and I have to say the two occasions I have moved employer, the Lord has given me a word. Now, a word of warning here friends, the Lord does not always give us a word, sometimes He opens a door without a word, sometimes we venture in faith, in true prayer, but there is no word given. So don't think I've had that therefore you must have a word to move employer, but we must pray about it, we must seek the Lord's will in it. I have three examples. The first one is when I tried to do something. So I went to work for the vets, the vets was a very nice job but it had one major flaw, and that was, the senior partners' wife, because what she wanted to do was to spend the profits instead of paying the main drugs supplier, she wanted to spend the money on her posh new kitchen or the latest car. Whilst he wasn't keen on it he wouldn't stand up to her and it made it really difficult for me, when we were seven months behind paying our main supplier. You know, if there was ever a job I had to pray, I couldn't see any strength or ability to do it. Anyway after six months in this job, I thought I've had enough of this, I'm going to get out of it, and I'm going to move on. So what did I do? I saw a job in a school, the school right next to the surgery. So I put my application in, spent hours, I did pray about it. This is a close line, to be submissive to the Lord's will. "Lord, Thy will be done," and to mean that, and I'm not sure that I did, but the application went in ten days before and didn't

hear anything. I rang the school up, they said, 'we've only just received it today it's obviously been delayed in the post' A shut door, how I was humbled, and friends that is our guidance.

There was one day when we really were in financial difficulties, I didn't know how I would pay the wages, and the bills were due to come in for the drugs company National Veterinary Supplies. I was in the office on my own, the bills came in the post, I said, 'Lord, I can't open them'. I wonder if you know what this is? I had to beg of the Lord that the figure would be low enough that we could continue, but because of the cycle and flow it wasn't a month that would normally tend to be low. I then opened the bills, friends, that month was the lowest bills that we ever had in the ten years I was there, I had to walk out the office and go for a walk to praise God from whom all blessings flow. You will prove the same God. Nothing too small, even in tasks you don't know how to do, and things going wrong, to pray and to plead for guidance even maybe in your studies, a prayer for guidance.

Two other aspects, I worked in the bank for 21 years, it was a job for life but suddenly in October 2000 the threat of redundancy hung over me. I went to chapel and oh what a state I was in, but our Pastor Peter Cottingham spoke of this, "And he led them forth by the right way". I felt the Lord was about to lead me forth in a different way, I was blessed that Sunday, and I have never known such a service when every hymn was right and when the prayer seemed to touch my heart, our dear previous Pastor how he was used. Well, friends, this was about the time Royal Bank of Scotland took over Nat West and the managers were doubled up, I was offered a situation to continue in my role but it meant travelling round the country, three weeks out of four I would be living out of a suitcase. I didn't feel that was right, it wasn't something conducive to married life, and I didn't feel that it was right. At that stage according to God's providence we were starting the adoption process for our two girls and everything felt to me it was not right. I remember having a meeting with a senior manager at the time who said to me, 'we will give you redundancy but we will give you a job to apply for', and that was a reasonable job with travelling so I applied for it. Well it was in the time when they were very obsessed in marking us on competencies, team skills and influencing skills. Well they marked us and at the end of it, when I

had the results, they said. 'you missed it by one mark, the person before you was given the job, actually you are a better candidate, I know you well, but have to follow the system'. The following Sunday our Pastor said this in his sermon, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing", and I felt it was unclean living three weeks away from home. Friends, we had to beg of the Lord, to provide something, we think we have skills after being with an employer for twenty one years but have we? I had doubts come in as what would be provided, but the Lord made a way, and how remarkably He did.

When my application went into the veterinary job, the senior practitioner there said to me, 'you were bottom of the list because I didn't think someone with a banking background was right', but when I saw him afterwards he said, 'you are the one I prefer the most (the interview was very informal), but what I do like is this, at the end of your CV you attend a Baptist chapel, I like that and thought this man is going to be honest with my finances.' Friends, we mustn't be ashamed in our CV of putting on there that we attend a Baptist chapel, we shouldn't be ashamed of these things, I know it's easy to be but how that proved to me that that was a good thing. How the Lord made a way, I did get my redundancy and two weeks later I started at the vets, and I had to look on and see the wonders God alone could do.

Eventually I left working at the vets, the finances again were in a terrible state in December 2010 and at that time I begged of the Lord to make a way, this job I am in now came up at Homewood School in Tenterden, I saw it, applied for it and then I prayed afterwards, I am ashamed to tell you young friends, I prayed afterwards. You might say, 'Well that's a good thing,' but why didn't I pray before? Try and pray before, try and do things better than what Mark Seymour did. There was teaching in it for me, we have failings. Try and pray before you submit a job application, a university application, and an application for anything, because I should have done it. May the Lord forgive us for our sins. I was deacon at Staplehurst Chapel, 'ah deacon, you didn't pray when applying for a new job', friends, how remiss we can sometimes be. As I turned and put the board up for the morning hymns on the Sunday after I sent the application, it came in so forcibly that if our Pastor should mention that word, "This is the way, walk ye in it when ye turn to the right

or the left”, that I would get the job. Now our Pastor took his text that day from Deuteronomy, words spoken by Moses to Joshua, “And the Lord, He it is that doth go with thee, He will not fail thee”. In the afternoon during his sermon he stopped and said, ‘I have to mention this word because it has just come into my spirit, “This is the way, walk ye in it”. Oh friends, I came away confirmed, oh what a kind and gracious God He is. You know, there were fifty applicants for this job, and then two weeks later I get called for interview, the night before I woke up with that word, “And the Lord, He it is that doth go before thee,” I felt the Lord would be with me in that interview. It was a day and a half of interviews, six of us started it off by having a coffee with the head of the school, and as I sat there they wanted us to present two minutes about our background and what we were, to get to know each other. I started and was very short, my faith went quickly, two chartered accountants, two existing school business managers; two that had run their own businesses what was I to these? ‘Lord it can’t be so’, but “This is the way, walk ye in it”. You know, what that did was to take away all my natural fear, because I thought I have no hope of getting this job. Ah faith! Pray that the Lord will be with you and believe in Him in these providential things.

I was brought through the interview and offered the position. Friends, something I did (just a bit of guidance), I said that before I take the job, I would like to spend the weekend considering it anyway. I didn’t get a word then. He will guide you, He will direct you, if you seek His ways. “I will guide you with mine eye”. I said to the Head (a lady), ‘I cannot work on a Sunday.’ You see about my point, because I didn’t feel it was the right type of work. Now I want to be careful because as we know nursing and many other jobs, there is nothing wrong with doing them on the Sabbath Day. I mentioned it from the outset, and she said, ‘I’m a Christian as well Mark’. Now I know her Christian views were different but it was helpful to do that from the very beginning as I have proved in so many cases through the years,

I go back to 1988 when I started to do mortgages in the bank, I was the mortgage officer. We had a really strict and old fashioned manager there who to be honest was a bully really, and how

I went in, I can take you to the place between Staplehurst and Headcorn where the Lord put this word in me, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee", as I went to the workplace that day.

I go back to a time where I had to stand up a for a fraud case in the Tunbridge Wells courts, I was the business manager at the bank and had been involved with the case, how I dreaded standing in front of the court giving evidence, and how the Lord helped me.

Another time when I had to prove, "My times are Thy hand", I went on an assessment training course, friends you know what these things are, having assessments all the time in different fields. Again, seek the Lord's help and support. My dear Dad, he preached on the Sunday before my course, "My times are in thy hand". I didn't remember that until the following Thursday (it is a long story but I'll keep it short) when we were due to get our results after three days of constant assessment, and on that day, we were sent back to our rooms for an hour. Why did they do that I don't know, they sent us back for an hour to contemplate the results to come ahead. Friends, an hour in prayer before the Lord, what a gift, how thankful we were for it, so we prayed to the Lord, and do you know, friends, I was given a satisfactory result. More than that, what I proved the next day as my car wouldn't start, I had to get the AA out and was very late getting home, I had to prove the day of adversity is set over the day of prosperity, you will prove it. You will get trials in the workplace, but prayer, prayer, oh what a beautiful thing it is to a Christian, they have that gift of the Lord.

In February 2020 I come to another example, I was due to go to Australia to preach, and within our trust we were owed a lot of money that wasn't coming through, the cash flow was looking pretty disastrous for the next two weeks. Now you might say, 'well, you shouldn't get in that position in a school', no you shouldn't, I was Finance Director and I felt ashamed of it friends, but it was because the money that was due in from sale of land etc wasn't coming in, and how we had to plead with the Lord, how He humbled me. You might say to me, 'dealing with £18m in the trust, don't you know what you're doing?' No, I don't, friend, unless the Lord helps me. He will bring you down whatever your role. You could be the most senior consultant in a hospital but the Lord will have you to be humbled if you are a Christian. I've proved it time and time again that I

am nothing, you will prove it in the workplace, but pray, 'Lord give me success according to Thy will,' that is the thing, and He will help you in that success. How I had to be brought low, 'Lord, provide, Lord, make a way'. We needed £80k to get through on the cash flow, 'Lord, thou knowest', begging of Him that it would come from some source. Two days before we were due to go, £85k came in from houses being built in Tenterden some money was due to come into the school, I did know about this money, I didn't know it was due that quickly but the Lord knew. I went down and spoke to the same lady that had spoken to me about being a Christian, and when I said, 'we've got £85k, we'll be ok, we can go off on holiday to Australia (to preach), I can go away without having to worry about it'. Do you know what she said? "The gold and the silver are Mine", oh how that melted me. Pray, if there's nothing else you can do, seek the Lord's help and guidance.

There are so many things in 42 years I must move on.Warnings and Being Kept.

When I went into the bank, I was told unless I was a good drinker I wouldn't get to be a manager. When I left my first branch after 18 months they were determined that I would drink heavily, they lined 9 pints of beer up and Seymour was going to drink the lot, and I did! I went home on the train that night and I was ok with it, I was ok with it because it was over a 3 hour lunchtime, but let me tell you friends, it was a lesson for life for me because I felt I was trying to please man. I know these are different days and alcohol is not so much in the office these days, but be watchful ever. because once we get into it we can't get out easily. I know that is a subject for another day but I must you warn you about that and we must pray to be kept. I have lost people involved with alcohol, a man who offered me a job, he took a new department up in London, the following weekend he was drunk at a function, walked out in front of a bus and was killed. The very man who lined up the 9 beers died two years later with a beer in his hand at a residential training college of the bank. When I heard it, it went straight to me, what hath made me to differ?' Friends, to realise we are made different in the Lord's mercies, oh what a blessing!

I have been away on residential courses, I have seen people sleeping with each other, and have been encouraged by others in these things, I've been away before and after I was married on

these courses, and we need to pray to be kept, and thankfully we have. You see, friends, the world of work it brings its difficulties, we need the Lord to be a wall of fire round about us and God the glory in the midst

Challenging situations for the Christian

Entertainment - I am a sporty person, I played cricket matches with solicitors when I was in the bank, I didn't see anything wrong with it. You will have your own standards, not on Sundays of course, and I felt for me not on Saturdays as they are family time. I've always been very watchful about parties. I'm known as quite an anti-social person at work which is opposite to what I am, but you will find prayerfully your own level and own way. We must be consistent because the world will notice inconsistencies with you. When I was training and doing my exams in the bank, the friend I was close with said, 'Mark, I'm just going to the betting shop in Tonbridge, you've got to come inside.' I couldn't go inside, my conscience was pricked, I said, 'no, I'll stay outside'. Friends, kept, kept. How we need to pray the Lord will keep us in these things, in challenging situations.

Sunday working - "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy". Now this applies differently according to our type of work, for example if we are in care or other such work then of course we have to work on a Sunday. I had a situation in my secondary school, the situation was this, 'this year we really want to get good grades in Maths GCSE.' Someone said to me, 'Mark, I have bypassed you as I have asked to open the school up.' The person knew my stance on the Sabbath Day. What happened that year? We had the worse Maths GCSE year we ever had. I didn't pray for that of course, but how I saw the Lord's hand. Eight years later I can say we have never done that again. There have been other issues, we had a 3G football pitch and I arranged a lot of funding for the pitch. Now it is occasionally let on Sundays but I have nothing to do with that letting, that pitch was for the school, but it is let out. Should I have gone out to get funding, from the local town councils? Yes, because it was for the enhancement of the school, I'm not directing how that pitch is used. It's a very close line; some of you may not agree with me, I felt I had to prayerfully look though these things are not easy.

At the vets I had a telephone call more than once on a Sunday morning, the computer system has gone down, can you help us? Now I didn't ever go in but I did talk them through the process. Why? Because there were animals in an emergency, animals that are sick need to be treated, I felt that I had a duty to help, but I didn't want to drive in and miss a chapel service. So friends, there is a balance, that balance is difficult, that balance is personal. There are many things like this.

LGBTQ issues – I wish I didn't have to put this up here but we are obsessed with minorities, I see so much of it in the school. I read somewhere that 1.5% are gay, 0.03% are trans and they want to build it up, they want to give all the children and young people thought that they might be that way. What a world we live in, how much prayer we need to lay up to be watched.

I was at the vets and we had application for two nurses, the head nurse came to me and said, 'I have four applications, two of them live with each other they are gay, and there were two other applications. She said, 'the two that live together are the strongest applicants'. Now friends, I am in charge of HR, she said, 'what are we going to do?' I said, 'how do you know they're gay?' She said, 'they put it down'. I said, 'you interview the best candidate, I'm interested in their work, I am not interested in their sexuality'. She said, 'but I've got to tell you the team don't want them, they don't want gay people working here'. I said, 'you need to interview them because they are the best in the matrix score chart we did, because there are people out there who professionally look and go through it.' I said, 'let me take it away and ponder it', I meant pray over it, and I begged of the Lord that the right thing would come about. Within a week before the interviews, one of the nurses had dropped out; within two days later the other one dropped out and didn't want to come to interview. How I saw the Lord's hand in it. But I've worked, and I'm sure some of you have, with those that name themselves to be gay. We need wisdom, we need help, we need the Lord to be with us, but we should ever stand by what the word of God says. And friends, it's not easy, I know. But He does defend His people, He will watch over you in these issues. I've had a trans situation at work, 'Mark, can you please ring the solicitors, we need some legal advice to help us over this matter, we have this 14 year old boy who wants to wear a

skirt all the time, and he's taking us to court over the fact we have boys and girls uniform'. So we had to get legal advice. Do I do it or don't I do it? Well, friends, I thought I was supporting the school, so I went to get the legal advice and we have had to say to him that we will allow him to do that, but he gets a lot of stick, and the teachers have been clear, and I am glad about this, that he will get stick because seeing a 14 year old boy with a moustache and a skirt is crazy, it just doesn't look sensible. I'll be honest with you, children do give him problems all the time, and the staff back off and let them do that. Now you might think that's wrong, friends, but it's a difficult world for teachers, and it's a difficult world for us each. There are many things which we could talk about. Take them again to the Lord; it's all we can do in these challenging situations.

Letting our light shine – this is one where I have been involved in certain things, and I just want you to know, I went to give a speech to the Tenterden Church of England Men's Breakfast on a Saturday morning. You might say, 'well you're a Gospel Standard Strict Baptist what are you doing there?' I went there because I've an opportunity to spread 'the Christian at Homewood', subject, to be able to say how we've helped the poor children, how I have set up a Poor Relief Fund at the school; we help the poor children across our schools. I have been able to support the Gideons, I have been able to support what we are doing in our church schools to make sure we have texts up everywhere. Marcus Funnell's wife Sarah works in one of the schools I work in, and we've been able to bring the church influence from our church schools into our non-church schools. We were able to bring people in to give a talk on marriage, people that had been married 30-40 years to give that talk rather than bringing in those who are anti-marriage, when we were talking to the secondary school. We've been able to have influence. We had prayer meetings. I heard about a prayer meeting at our secondary school when we had a schools Christian worker we brought in. Now they were Church of England and you might say, 'you can't have anything to do with these other religions'. Friends, they're not against us, they believe in the same Bible. We know they are free-will etc, but I say this, if you find Christian friends, go along with them if you have an opportunity to meet with others because it's helpful. I tell you what made me, we went to a staff meeting and there was open ridicule about the prayer meeting

and I wasn't going to go because I thought perhaps it wasn't my scene. Friends, I said I must go, I must let my light shine, and do you know, the Lord blessed me at one of them through the reading of the Word and it wasn't our version, and friends, I love our version, don't get me wrong. There is nothing that will stop the Lord's hand in blessing His people. We need much wisdom as we ponder these things. So letting our light shine in small ways, our speech, our kindness, the way we deal with others, CV, and acknowledging colleagues in other denominations. A quiet example is what so often works before the people. May the Lord help us to do that?

So in summary, when I was 18 I sat under the ministry of Seth Mercer one Sunday at Matfield, and he said this, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not" (Jeremiah 45v5). Well, we have proved we haven't sought them, but friends, seek the Lord for great things and He will provide you with great things, and so He has me given that measure of success, even to the point once where I was overlooked for promotion, and maybe that's where you are at the moment. There's a beautiful word in the Psalms. You know, my Dad was a Pastor, if you have a Pastor don't tell him everything or the ministers that come, I didn't tell Dad how I felt, he was my Pastor at that time. I went down to hear him at Horam in the evening and you know in his sermon he said this, "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another". (Psalm 65v6&7) and so He will for you, He will provide, He will make a way, and you will prove it.

Well, friends, that's where I come to an end, but it starts with that word Christian, Christ, I am nothing.

Thank you.