



# I AM WHAT I DO?

A Theology of Work  
and Personal identity



Slavery



Freedom



Delight

A 6-week course guiding  
you from slavery to delight



I am what I do

## **Introduction: The pervasive nature of "I am what I do"**



LIFE@WORK



### **Course Summary**

How do you normally introduce yourself? I'm guessing it often includes something about what you do for work. Why is that? As we'll discover in this course, it's a feature of individualism, and not a good one at that. In this course we'll explore the tremendous burden it is to live according to "I am what I do", before outlining the way that the Gospel provides freedom from this burden. This freedom is firstly for ourselves, but also provides a powerful witness to our colleagues of the difference that the Christian faith makes in our workplaces.



### **Big Idea**

One of the most powerful ways that the Bible describes conversion is the movement from slavery to freedom. This course will apply this glorious motif to the burden of "I am what I do".



### **Key concepts**

This course has three parts, in weeks 1 and 2 we'll consider the problem (slavery), weeks 3 and 4 we'll consider the solution (freedom), and in weeks 5 and 6 we'll outline some of the implications of being freed from the burden of "I am what I do". The icons over the page represent the shift from slavery to freedom to delight as we progress through the coming weeks.



## Lesson Structure

### Part 1

#### Slavery



**Intro: The pervasive nature of "I am what I do"**

**1: The crushing burden of "I am what I do"**

**2: How has "I am what I do" gripped you?**

### Part 2

#### Freedom



**3: Freedom from the burden of "I am what I do"**

**4: Implications: Freed to be vulnerable**

### Part 3

#### Delight



**5: Implications: Freed from workplace envy**

**6: Implications: Freed to grow and perform**



## Let's get started

So let's begin! Now that you've seen the short introductory video, you might like to consider what other creative ways you could introduce yourself to people, without mentioning your employment!



I am what I do

# 1: The crushing burden of “I am what I do”



## Course Summary

In this session we will reveal how “I am what I do” is a philosophy many people live by, to devastating effect. We’ll show how it is a feature of individualistic societies like ours, but also how more communal societies don’t relieve the burden of attaching our value and worth to our work either - only the Gospel can do that. As a result of this session you’ll be more alert to the degree to which this is a significant problem in our society today.



## Big Idea

“I am what I do” (attaching our personal value and worth to what we achieve or accomplish) is a devastating way to live, which tragically crushes many people in our society today.



## Theme

“When work is your identity, success goes to your head, and failure goes to your heart” (Timothy Keller).

How true do you think this is?

What evidence do you see of this way of thinking in your life?



I am what I do?

## 1: The crushing burden of "I am what I do"



### Key truths

The key points of this lesson are:

- "I am what I do" is a feature of Western individualism
- It is a devastating way to live
- A more corporate sense of self (often found in Asian cultures) is not the solution either



### Application

Can you see more clearly now how dominant an "I am what I do" philosophy is in our culture today? Do you better appreciate the dangers of it?

(If you want to explore this issue further you might like to read "Selfie: How the West became self-obsessed" by Will Storr).



### Prayer

Heavenly Father, individualism is in the air I breathe. I am often oblivious to how prevalent (and dangerous) it can be, especially when it comes to my work. Help me to see more clearly the negative ways that it has crept into my heart and mind and shaped my behaviour. Help me be more alert to it, for my own sake and the sake of others.





I am what I do

## 2: How has “I am what I do” gripped you?



### Course Summary

In this session we go a bit deeper, and allow you to make a personal diagnosis of your own condition. We'll consider five questions that will help you better understand the degree to which an “I am what I do” philosophy has infiltrated your own heart and mind. You'll gain the skills to better diagnose this in your own life and in the lives of others you care about.



### Big Idea

How to personally diagnose the degree to which “I am what I do” has gripped your life, using five diagnostic questions.



### Theme

These are the five diagnostic questions for you to consider, once you have watched the video for this session:

- How do you respond when your work is criticised?
- How do you respond when people praise your work?
- Can you celebrate the success of others in your same field?
- Why are you working so hard?
- How do you view the work of others, in particular the work of your children?



I am what I do?

## 2: How has "I am what I do" gripped you?



### Key truths

Three key truths for this lesson are:

- Individualism is in the air we breathe
- We need to get better at noticing the degree to which it is impacting us negatively
- These five questions will help you do that in relation to work and personal identity



### Application

Take some time to reflect on the five diagnostic questions in the "theme" section. As a result of this session you will be able to better diagnose any unhealthy connections between your personal identity and work. But this is not to induce guilt! Rather, it will pave the way for the grace of the Gospel which we will consider in the next session.



### Prayer

Heavenly Father, it is sometimes hard to see the degree to which the culture I live in is shaping me negatively. Please give me the eyes and the wisdom to notice this better, and to be humble enough to receive the counsel and correction of other Christians in this area.







I am what I do

## 3: Freedom from the burden of “I am what I do”



### Course Summary

Now that we have considered the slavery of “I am what I do” in sessions 1 and 2, this session will outline the Gospel solution - how it frees us from this burden. We will discover that as we embrace our identity in Christ, work is no longer the source of our identity, but becomes the expression of it.



### Big Idea

When we embrace our identity in Christ (“This is my child whom I love, with them I am well pleased”) we are freed from the burden of “I am what I do”.



### Bible Passages

#### Matthew 3:16-17

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”



I am what I do?

### 3: Freedom from the burden of "I am what I do"



## Bible Passages

### Colossians 3:1-14

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.



I am what I do?

### 3: Freedom from the burden of "I am what I do"



## Key truths

The key points for this lesson are:

- For those "in Christ" His identity is our identity, irrespective of our "work/s"
- Therefore before God we are His loved child in whom He delights
- Therefore we live in light of this new identity (Colossians 3:1-14) and our daily work becomes the expression of this identity (rather than its source)



## Application

How does this shift from work as the source of your identity, to the expression of your identity, impact on the way you see your work? Does anything need to change?

How were you tempted, like the people building the tower of Babel, to use your work to make a name for yourself?



## Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for who I am in Christ! I acknowledge it is a free gift because of Christ's death and resurrection on my behalf. May I never lose sight of the wonder of this identity which is mine through no effort of my own. May it increasingly grip my heart and my mind and so overflow in how I live and work.





I am what I do

## 4: Implications- Freed to be vulnerable



### Course Summary

In this session we will consider the first of three implications which flow from embracing our identity in Christ, that we are free to be vulnerable with our colleagues. When work is no longer the source of our identity, we are able to be more honest and “real” with our colleagues, we don't need to keep up the impression that we “have it all together”. We'll see how this creates a context in which we might find it easier to speak about our faith with them.



### Big Idea

Knowing our status before God (“This is my child whom I love, with them I am well pleased”) frees us up to be more honest and vulnerable with our colleagues, which can lead to greater opportunities for Gospel witness.



### Theme

“We put on a false front of seeming perfect, where you cover up mistakes and shortcomings” (Will Storr, “Selfie”)

This is how we will live if we do not embrace and take to heart the truth, that Matthew 3:17 is how God views us in Christ.



I am what I do?

## 4: Implications- Freed to be vulnerable



### Key truths

The key points for this lesson are:

- We live in a culture where we are encouraged to present as “perfect”, especially in the workplace
- Embracing who we are in Christ frees us from this burden, and allows us to be more vulnerable with our colleagues
- Such vulnerability may lead to greater Gospel witness



### Application

What is one practical way that you can remind yourself of your identity in Christ this week?

Having done that, what is one practical way you can be more vulnerable with your colleagues this week?



### Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that my identity in Christ frees me from the pressure to perform and present myself as perfect to my colleagues, because I know that in Christ I already am. Help me to embrace this truth so that I might be more honest and vulnerable with my colleagues, and so have opportunities to share with them the reason for living this way.



I am what I do?

## 4: Implications- Freed to be vulnerable



### Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.





I am what I do

## 5: Implications - Freed from workplace envy



### Course Summary

We will be envious of the work of others in our field if work is the source of our identity. However as we embrace our identity in Christ we are freed to celebrate the success of others. We can begin to "love it the way you love a sunrise". This session will explain what this kind of delight is and how it is possible as we embrace our identity in Christ.



### Big Idea

We can celebrate the good work of others in our field and "love it the way you love a sunrise" when work is the expression and not the source of your identity.



### Bible Passages

#### Proverbs 14:30

"Envy rots the bones"

#### Mark 15:10

"It was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over"



I am what I do

## 5: Implications - Freed from workplace envy



### Theme

“Wouldn’t you like to be the type of person who, in their imaginary life, does not sit around fantasising about hitting self-esteem home-runs, daydreaming about successes that gives them the edge over others?” Or to see the great work of others and “To just love the fact that it was done? For it not to matter whether it was their success or your success? To love it the way you love a sunrise.” (Timothy Keller, The freedom of self-forgetfulness)



### Key truths

The key points for this lesson are:

- Envy is a “rotten” way to live, but we will be driven to it when work is the source of our identity
- When work is the expression of my identity we no longer need to envy the work of others
- Rather we can celebrate it and “love it the way you love a sunrise”



I am what I do?

## 5: Implications - Freed from workplace envy



### Application

- Try to recall a time when you were envious of someone else, who did you envy? What had they done?
- What emotions did you feel? Anger, fear, self-loathing? How did you respond at the time?
- Consider how you treat that person now and whether those emotions are still present.

When you notice yourself being envious of the work of others, ask yourself why, and take a moment to pause and remind yourself of who you are in Christ, and pray that God might convict you of that afresh.



### Prayer

Heavenly Father, I have been envious enough in my life to know how “rotten” it is. Thank you that your Gospel frees me from it! Continue to impress upon my heart who I am in Christ so that I might be able to increasingly live free from envy, and be the kind of person in the workplace who celebrates the good work of others.



I am what I do?

**5: Implications -  
Freed from  
workplace envy**



**Notes**

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I am what I do

## 6: Implications- Freed to grow and perform



### Course Summary

In this session we will consider a final implication of being freed from the burden of “I am what I do”, namely we are free to grow and perform. When our work is no longer the source of our identity we are able to receive criticism and correction, and hence learn from that and develop our workplace skills. This session will explain how this is possible as we embrace our identity in Christ.



### Big Idea

When we are freed from the burden of “I am what I do” we will be more open to correction and criticism in the workplace, learn from it, and become better workers in the long run.



### Bible Passages

#### Proverbs 27:6

“Wounds from a friend can be trusted.”



I am what I do?

## 6: Implications- Freed to grow and perform



### Key truths

The key points for this lesson are:

- Criticism of our work will feel like a personal attack when work is the source of our identity
- However when our identity is secure in Christ we will be free to hear criticism of our work
- As a result we will likely grow and develop our workplace skills as we embrace that feedback, rather than be defensive about it



### Application

Notice how you ordinarily respond to criticism or correction of your work. Are you automatically defensive? Do you respond angrily? Consider how this might be the overflow of an unhealthy connection between your identity and your work and pray that God might continue to loosen the bondage you might be under in this area. Imagine instead how you might respond the next time you receive criticism or correction of your work.



### Prayer

Heavenly Father, I know there have been times when I have been overly defensive when my work has been criticised. Forgive me for this. Help me increasingly embrace the sure and secure identity that I have in Christ so that I respond well next time my work is critiqued.



