

WORK

MATTERS TO GOD

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We spend most of our time at work. Work is where we spend most of our creativity. Work is the source of some of our greatest joys and our deepest frustrations. Unfortunately, it is easy to develop a gap between our Sunday worship and our Monday work. In this series, I hope to reduce that gap.

This work is a collection of sermons delivered at CrossWinds Church Spirit Lake campus in Spirit Lake, Iowa. I want to thank the EFCA national office and the Kern foundation for approaching us and asking CrossWinds to teach on the relationship between faith and work. I also want to thank Kiley Roth. She patiently edited my working manuscripts turning them into this book. I owe a special thanks to the CrossWinds family. I love you guys!

My prayer is this book helps you honor Jesus from Monday to Friday. Now turn the page. Let's go to work!

Because of God's Mercy,

Kurt

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Why Do We Work?

May 3, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. Welcome to the first week of the new series, *Work Matters To God*. We spend most of our lives working in the office, factory or field. We thought it would be appropriate to see what the Bible says about work, where we spend most of our time. For approximately 10 weeks we will study work. In the following weeks we will learn what went wrong with work and made it so hard? How does Jesus change the way we work? Why is rest important for work? What does the Bible teach about productivity? How do I choose a job? How do I handle difficult bosses? How do I share Christ at work? How do I get a break from work in our hyperconnected world? As you can see, this will be a series we will use almost every day of our lives.

During this series, we are doing something special. We are taking your questions about work, rest, productivity, balancing work and family and any other work and faith questions you have. Each week the pastoral team will answer one of your questions and post the answer on the www.CrossWinds.tv blog and on the CITY. Answers will be typically posted around Wednesday. Check your e-mail box or the www.CrossWinds.tv web site. As I close each week's message, I will whet your appetite for the weekly post by letting you know the question we will answer later that week.

In your bulletin you have a card to submit those questions. The card also has a QR code and a link to an online form if you want to submit your questions electronically.

Let's dive into today's study. As we begin, we are starting with a big picture question. Unless we understand the biblical answer to this question, the rest of the series won't be much help. *Why do we work?* For most of us, the answer seems obvious. We work to make money. We work to pay bills. Haven't you seen the bumper sticker that answers this question? It says, "I owe. I owe. I owe so off to work I go. I go. I go."

Some of us aren't working to survive, we are working to become wealthy. Our goal is that once we have enough money we won't have to work.

Our goal is an earthly heaven called retirement that is free from work so we can focus on enjoyment. What do you think? Is a life free from work a good goal?

The Bible tells us God has a much broader and richer purpose for our work than to pay bills. Today we will discover why God made us for work.

The first foundational truth we need is:

Work is not a necessary evil. Work was in the world before sin was in the world.

Bible tells us work was in the world before sin was in the world. The Bible hints at the incompleteness of the earth before God brought Adam and Eve on the scene.

...and there was no man to work the ground... Genesis 2:5 (ESV)

God created Adam, and ultimately Eve, to work the earth.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. Genesis 2:15 (ESV)

God created Adam and Eve to work this earth before sin came to earth. Once sin entered the world, work became difficult and frustrating. Next week we look at what went wrong with work and how sin changed work. Let's save that story for next week. This week we are learning why we work. The foundational truth we need to begin our study is that work is good. It is not a product of sin. Work is good. It was given to Adam and Eve as a good gift before sin entered the world.

As we put our finger in the text, we will keep our focus on the first two chapters in Genesis, as we discover why we work.

1. We work because we are created in the image of God.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Genesis 1:1–2 (ESV)

In the creation story, God created what looked like an unformed mass called the heavens and the earth. Like a potter working with a lump of clay, God shaped them. First, God created light, and he separated light from darkness, calling one day and the other night. Then, like a craftsman, God separated the water from the sky above and the water on the earth beneath. Next he created dry land and created seas as he separated the seas. Next he worked in the ground creating plants and all kinds of vegetation. Then he turned his attention to the skies, and he sprinkled the heavens with stars and planets. Then God, the master craftsman gave his attention to the earth and he fashioned animals, sea creatures and birds. Finally, as the crown of his creation, God made Adam and Eve. In the flow of the creation was God working like a master craftsman fashioning the earth from something that is formless and void into a planet that is teeming with life. After God was done with the earth, he fashioned Adam and Eve.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:26–27 (ESV)

God created us in his image. We just saw God was a worker and a craftsman. Part of being created in God's image means that he made us to be

workers and craftsman. He made us to continue the task of refining and creating things of beauty and function upon the earth.

When a farmer works the earth to grow corn he is imaging God's craftsmanship on the earth. When a man takes that same food and stocks it on a store shelf, he images God's by bringing order to the earth. When the guy behind the counter at Jimmy John's puts the meat, mayonnaise and veggies on your sandwich to make a great meal he is ordering things in this world to make them productive and helpful. He is imaging the work of God the father, which is exactly what we were created to do.

This is why it says we are to have dominion over the earth. Dominion means to subjugate. It means to shape something and rule over it.

One of the things I love about the summer at CrossWinds is when your out-of-town relatives visit the lakes. I love seeing your children, because they are the spitting image of their parents. They were created in your image. I love to see your parents, because they look like you. You were created in their image.

When we work, we are displaying the spitting image of our heavenly father who was a worker.

Just as God shaped the earth into a thing of beauty, God calls us to continue shaping the earth and creating things of beauty. That could be a farmer cultivating the earth or a teacher developing a child. It could be a boat builder or a house builder. We are to shape the earth, build on the earth and work this earth because that is what it means to look like our dad.

Paul felt so strongly about this he said,

For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV)

Notice he didn't say those who can't work don't eat but those who can work but won't work shouldn't eat. Why did Paul use such strong language? Avoiding work is shattering the image of God we are called to display with our lives.

Work is so fundamental to our lives that it is actually a basic human need like food, rest, friendship and God. Without meaningful work we will feel empty and meaningless. We need work to thrive emotionally, physically and spiritually. If you have faced unemployment, you know it can be a terrifying time because we don't know how to contribute to the world, and everything inside of you knows we must contribute.

It is the same with retirement. Retiring to spend your time sitting in a La-Z-Boy watch pay-per-view sports is torture. It is against the grain of what we were created to do. We were not made for a La-Z-Boy. We were made for work, and lots of it. Work is one of the things we can take in large doses and it won't kill you.

2. We work because God created the earth to be worked.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”
Genesis 1:28 (ESV)

Most of us think of creation was finished in six days. God’s creation was finished in six days but that doesn’t mean creation was complete. God created our planet like a huge Lego kit. The planet was perfect because it was ready for us to begin building things with it. Our job is to continue creating with God and for his glory.

One of the most unbiblical things we can believe is we should go hyper-green where we think the entire Earth should be kept untouched like the Canadian Rockies. The wilderness is wonderful. It is beautiful. God doesn’t want the entire planet to look like a national park. God built our planet like a Lego kit. It is filled with resources he wants us to use to build things for God’s glory and to serve others by doing them practical good.

Are we responsible for how we use the planet? Yes. Is strip mining the right way to get the resources out of the earth? Probably not. We are responsible for how we use the earth but we are responsible to use the earth.

The word subdue means to bring into submission. It is used to describe what you do with a horse. You break it. You make it submit so it can serve a rider. In the same way we are to bring the resources of the earth into submission so it can serve us, serve others and bring glory to God through the process. God wants farmers to plow, plant, fertilize and water to bring the earth into submission to produce corn for ethanol and food. God wants teachers training children so they can be productive members of society. God wants miners taking ore out of the ground that can be melted down into metal for motorcycle parts. All of this brings glory to God.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. Genesis 2:5 (ESV)

Notice the two pieces in tension. We are to work the earth. That means we are to use it. We are to keep the earth. That means we are responsible for how we use it. There is a balance.

3. We work because work is a part of our worship.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. Genesis 2:15 (ESV)

The word *work* in Hebrew is the word *Avodah*. It is usually translated as *cultivating the ground* or *working the ground* but it has a broader meaning. Sometimes the word *Avodah* is used to describe the back-breaking work of the Israelite slaves in Egypt. Sometimes it is used to describe the delicate work of the artists that crafted the beautiful temple. Sometimes it is used to describe the work of the temple priests as they led people in worship to God.

What I want us to notice is the Bible uses the same word to describe work and worship. Our daily work and our worship of God are one and the same. To think of worship as a Sunday thing and work as Monday thing is unbiblical. Everyday work and worship are the same in God's eyes.

Just as half-hearted worship in church and half-hearted attention to God's word dishonors God, in the same way half-hearted work in the office dishonors him too. Our work and our worship are the same.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV)

On the most practical level this means the way a teacher teaches is their act of worship. The way an employee smooths concrete is his act of worship. If you are in the kitchen at Burger King, the way you flip burgers is your act of worship. If you are a car dealer, the honesty of your car sales are your acts of worship.

It is not just what we do that is our act of worship but it is how we do it that matters. Our attitude at work is part of our worship. The mom that changes her son's diapers is worshipping God in the way she cares for her son. If mom has a bad attitude when she is changing the diapers, it taints her worship. The meal a mom prepares is her act of worship to God as she feeds the family. As mom prepares the meal, if she has a snarky attitude the worship of her work is tainted.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world... Philippians 2:14–15 (ESV)

Shining like a light in the world with the excellence of our attitude, is one of the ways we worship God with our work.

4. We work because it is the way we love our neighbors.

We don't just work to worship God but we work to love our neighbors.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:14 (ESV)

One of the most practical ways we can love our neighbors is simply doing our job and doing it well. Pretend you work at Polaris creating motorcycles. It takes more than one person to create a motorcycle. Some workers specialize in motorcycle design. Other workers specialize in assembly. Some workers specialize in paint while other workers specialize in electronics. All it takes to ruin a motorcycle is for one person to not do his or her job well. When he or she does, the entire motorcycle is ruined. To build a Victory motorcycle everybody needs to work together. The best way an employee can love his neighbor through work is simply doing his best at work and having his great attitude as he does his work. That is loving your neighbor. God created us to be connected. Work is one of the most interconnected places we can be. Doing our jobs well is

the best way to love our neighbors because at work we are closely connected to others.

On January 15, 2009, US Airways Flight 1549 ran into Canadian geese while taking off from New York. The engines ingested the birds, transforming the massive plane into a helpless glider filled with jet fuel only minutes after takeoff. Thankfully the captain was Chelsey Sullenberger. He was a former fighter jet pilot with thousands of hours flying commercial aircraft under his belt. He was a man that did not do the minimum amount of work to simply squeeze by. He had gone above the call of duty and become a safety expert. He studied and taught how to handle crisis scenarios in aircraft. He spent time honing his flight skills to perfection. On January 15, 2009, all of the work came to fruition.

What took place that day became known as the Miracle on the Hudson as he guided the lifeless plane into the Hudson River and achieved what is known as the most successful aircraft water landing in aviation history. His excellent work saved the lives of 155 people. How did Captain Sullenberger love his neighbor? By simply doing his work and doing it well. There are hundreds of wives, husbands, children and parents that thank him for simply doing his job and saving their loved ones that day. In the same way, one of the most practical ways we can love our neighbors is by not scraping by at work but by doing our absolute best. When we do, we love our neighbor.

5. We work to give and receive joy from a job well done.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Genesis 1:31 (ESV)

When God looked upon his creation, he had joy in a job well done. One of the reasons God gave us work is because we too should experience joy when we make something and do our job well.

For instance, I enjoy cutting the lawn. I enjoy making sure the lines are the same direction; I kill the weeds, fertilize the grass and water the lawn. I make sure the sidewalk is trimmed. I walk around the house twice a week and personally nuke every new weed with Roundup. I like a nice-looking lawn. It brings me pleasure. I get pleasure from a job well done.

None of us like weeds, brown patches and a half-cut lawn. The reason we like well-done jobs is because we are created in the image of God. When God created the Earth, it was a well-done job. He experienced joy looking at the finished product.. He created us to feel that same joy when we do work and do it well done.

If we don't do our work well, we steal joy from our lives. Did you ever think about that as a student? The way to get the maximum amount of joy out of school is to work really hard and do your best. You may not graduate with straight "As" and start on varsity every game but you will have joy. The way to enjoy your job is to work really hard at your job and whatever work you do make sure it is the best you can do.

Good work isn't just given to us to give us joy, it is given to us to give others joy.

Our family recently bought a trailer to transport and store some of my father's furniture from Philadelphia. I was a tight wad so I bought a trailer that was one of the cheapest I could find. I soon learned you get what you pay for. At first glance the trailer looked fine but days after I purchased it I began noticing flaws. Some doors had gaps between themselves and the frame as large as my thumb. One of the lights didn't work. Metal between the roof and the side was stained. One door was rusting. There was rust under the bottom. The saw that cut some of the metal plates had gone too far and extended but marks were seen in the body. Some screws were put in at angles. There were gaps in pieces of metal where they didn't meet. Part of the roof was dented. Guess what happened when it rained? It leaked! After a while I began wondering if the crew that built the trailer was on drugs or if they didn't care about their jobs. The trailer had a number of quality issues. On paper, did it fit all the specs? Yes. It was not a job well done. I found my attitude toward the trailer turn from thankfulness to frustration because of poor quality work.

I returned the trailer and through some great customer service I was able to get a different trailer without any hassles. We work to have joy in doing a job well and we work to bring others joy because when we do our jobs well; it brings joy into their lives too. When we don't do our jobs well we squander our own joy and we frustrate others.

6. We work because God calls us to a work and shapes us for work.

If you are a high school student, you have a myriad of career options in front of you. As you get ready to graduate, the school counselors always ask you the standard question, "What do you want to do for a job?" Because you have no idea what you want to do, you ask the school counselor the standard question. "Which jobs make the most money?" Those questions are not bad questions but they aren't the most important questions. Those questions assume the reason for work is money and the reason for work is to do what I want to do with my life. Both of those are not the way God wants us thinking about our jobs and our futures.

First, God tells us our jobs are not a matter of what we want to do. We need to begin by asking God what he wants us to do. Focusing on what I want to do makes life about me and my glory. When we begin by asking God what he wants me to do we are starting from the right perspective. Life is not something I am to use for my glory. My life is a gift from God he wants me to use for his glory.

My life is not ultimately about making money. My life is about finding out how God is calling me to serve him and to serve others, then doing it well. Our career search begins by asking God how he wants me to serve him and to serve others. What is he calling me to do with my life?

God may want you to be a realtor and serve others by getting them a great house. He may want you to be a brain surgeon that serves others by removing life-threatening tumors from their bodies. He may want you to be a concrete spreader to bless others with a nice driveway or a sandwich maker that blesses others with a great lunch. The important part is understanding our jobs are not about finding what we want to do. It is asking God what he is calling us to do to serve him and serve others. If we don't start from that perspective it will be very difficult to find what God is calling us to do with our lives.

But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. 2 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

Paul viewed his job as the area of influence assigned to him by God. He didn't begin by asking what he wanted to do or what made the most money. The question is what is God assigning me to do?

The other thing to remember is God doesn't make mistakes in the way he shaped us. God shaped us for the work he is calling us to work. He shaped us with an intellect for where he is calling us to serve.

Last week my daughter Deanna had nine-hour back surgery putting rods in her back for her scoliosis. Thankfully God gave the surgeon an extreme intellect, extremely steady hands and concentration that can last for nine hours of surgery. If God hasn't given you the brains to do nine-hour back surgeries, that isn't where he is calling you to serve. Of course we need to study and develop our skills. Of course we sometimes find ourselves in jobs that don't match our skills. God uses those times to mature us and refine us. Remember that you are not a mistake. God shaped us the way he wants us to serve him and to serve others in the job he is calling you to do. Isn't that a comforting thought as you try to find your career?

Why do we work? We work because God is calling us to specific work and he has shaped us for that specific work.

Conclusion

Work is a big part of our lives. Our work is not a sinful thing. It is a good thing. We work because God is a worker and when we work we are imitating our dad. We work because God designed the earth like a Lego kit for us to work it, shape it and assemble things. When we shape the earth, God is glorified. We work because good work is the first way we worship God and the first way we love our neighbors. We work because there is joy for us when work is well-done and there is joy for others when we do our work well. We work because work is not ultimately about what we want to do and making money but work is about serving God and others in what God is calling us to do and living out the way God shaped us.

If work was created by God and it was designed to be a joy, why is it so hard? What went wrong with work? That is the question we will look at next week.

This week, the question we are answering on our weekly blog post is, "[How do I balance work, family and my personal life?](#)" Look for it this week.

Until next week CrossWinds family... let's go to work.

What Went Wrong With Work?

May 10, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. This morning we continue our study called Work Matters to God. In this series we are learning what God says about where we spend most of our time, that is in the factory, office or field. We spend most of our time at work.

Last week we learned why God created work. God created work for more than a paycheck. Last week we learned work is the way we reflect God's image in the world. We are workers because our God is a worker. When we work, we do a good job because work well done is practical worship of God and the most common sense way to love our neighbors. We also learned that God gave us work as a way to experience joy from doing a job well, and it is one of the most practical ways we spread joy to others when we do our work well.

The problem is work doesn't always represent what God intended. Instead of work being a joy, sometimes work is a pain in the neck. Instead of work being fulfilling, it is a source of suffering. Instead of seeing purpose in our work, work can feel meaningless.

Something went wrong with work. Today, we will find out what happened.

The Bible tell us us that after Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden of Eden by disobeying God and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, part of the consequence of their rebellion is our work lives were touched by the curse of sin.

Let's read about this in Genesis 3.

And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Genesis 3:17–19 (ESV)

The curse of sin twisted work, changing it from a good thing to a good thing that is also a painful thing. There are three ways the curse twisted work.

The curse guarantees pain will be part of my work.

...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life... Genesis 3:17 (ESV)

While there is still joy in work, the curse of sin guarantees there will be pain and suffering in our work. The word for pain means actual physical pain that comes from intense activity over a long period of time. I call it Boston Marathon pain. It is endurance pain.

For example, last week we learned that studying is the way to have a great high school career. While the work of studying is good work, it is also painful work. When you study hard you can't play video games. You can't spend as much time with your friends. You need to stay disciplined.

If you work in concrete, as my oldest son used to, that is hard work. Once you pour the concrete you need to work hard smoothing it before it sets. There is no rest. It is endurance pain.

If you are a farmer, you may enjoy planting and harvest season but because those windows of time are small and there is so much work to be done that the joy of planting and harvest work becomes painful work. That is the curse of sin.

If you work in retail, you might enjoy the challenge of your work and the people that work with you. The problem is that some days the customers are a pain in the neck. They are irritating. They can be disrespectful. The curse transformed the joy of your work into the pain of your work.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Genesis 3:19 (ESV)

This reminds us that work will continue to be painful as long as we live. It doesn't matter how good you get at your work, it will always be painful. Even if you retire from your work, you won't escape the pain of work. You will just experience different pain from different work. The Bible says we will face the pain of work until we die. As people get older I think the pain of work increases. When you were younger the pain of work began once you went to work. When you are older the pain is simply trying to get out of bed in the morning. That is painful work.

The work God intended to be a source of joy has become a mixture of satisfaction and suffering. When work is hard, the problem with work is usually not the work, it is the problem of the curse of sin upon our work.

Younger adults are always looking for the perfect job. For the most part, that is a new unique privilege of the younger generation. In previous generations people were happy just to have jobs even if it wasn't the job of their choice. Thankfully younger adults have the opportunity to find work that is more in line with their natural gifting. One of the unintended consequences of having a generation of young adults looking for the perfect job that matches their gifts is when work gets hard, which it will, they think something went wrong. It is easy to think you have the wrong job when work is a pain.

Reality is that no matter where you work or what you do, work will always be a pain, not just a pleasure. That is a Bible promise. That is part of the curse of sin upon work. Don't be disillusioned when work is hard. Don't be quick to leave a job because you aren't fulfilled. Remember work will always be hard. It

will have the constant dull ache of an endurance sport. That is the nature of the curse of sin upon work.

The curse guarantees problems will be part of my work.

...thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you... Genesis 3:18 (ESV)

Sin didn't just curse work making it a mixture of pain and pleasure but sin cursed work by making sure we always face problems in our work. The example given is gardening. This spring, when we plant our tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots, you can guarantee that a bunch of pointless scrub weeds will crop up and attempt to choke out our vegetables. We didn't plant them there. They just show up on their own. We need to give constant attention to weeding our garden because while the earth helps our vegetables grow, it fights against us. There will always be a problem at work. It is part of the curse.

This means it is normal to go from one crisis to another at work. That is the way the fallen world works. Just expect it. This means we may build a house but a tornado will knock it down or a fire from faulty wiring will burn it down. There will always be a problem where the world fights against our productivity. This means we can be typing on a computer and the screen will go blank because the hard drive crashes. Don't be shocked. Expect it. This means we may have great plans but not enough resource to accomplish them. Expect it. We will plant our crops but a hail storm may knock them out or a drought will dry them out. Our minds may conceive of great ideas but the tiredness of our bodies or the weakness of our minds will not allow us to accomplish them. That is part of living in a cursed fallen world. We may spread concrete but an unexpected rainstorm may ruin it.

We typically call this Murphy's law. Murphy has nothing to do with it. It is called the law of the curse. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong. I am not being a pessimist. That is what the curse of sin promises.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:22–23 (ESV)

The Bible describes all of creation groaning under the curse of sin as creation is frustrated by its own lack of productivity.

Here is a practical application. Expect problems in our work and stop freaking out when they happen. At Polaris, expect an assembly machine will break. Expect your boss will misunderstand. If you are working on a farm, expect your equipment will break. Expect bugs will attack your corn. If you are working in an office trying to put together a spreadsheet, expect you will have a headache and have a hard time organizing your thoughts. Don't be shocked by it. Don't freak out over it. It is part of life in the fallen world where the earth fights against its God-intended productivity.

What should we do? Pray about it. Ask God to help you get around it and restore the productivity that was intended. Also let it whet your appetite for eternity.

Later in this series we will see how God intends us to be workers for all of eternity in the new creation when heaven and earth are combined. Work in the new creation will be different than work in our fallen creation. The curse of sin against productivity will be lifted in the new creation. When you farm, you won't need to spray for weeds. Round Up won't be needed. When you conceive of things in your mind, you will be able to get them done because scarcity of resources won't be a problem. Fogginess of thought life or the inability to remember won't happen. All of eternity will be filled with the joy of productivity without the curse against productivity. Won't it be great?

Don't freak out when problems are part of work. Turn to God, ask him to carry you through them and think of eternity when we won't experience them.

The curse guarantees I will struggle to find purpose in my work.

I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun... Ecclesiastes 2:18–20 (ESV)

The separation from God that happened with sin also separated us from purpose in our work. Without purpose, our work feels pointless. I recently read about the predicament of Chinese factory workers in what is the world's largest computer parts manufacturing plant in China. For many of the workers, their jobs are repetitive. They live a mindless life of doing the same tasks over and over each day. To end the mind-numbing tedium some workers were throwing themselves off the top of the high-rise apartment buildings they lived in.

Do you want to guess how the plant manager at the factory put a stop to their suicides? It wasn't by improving their work conditions. He simply spanned nets between the buildings to catch people that jumped. After the nets caught them he sent them back to work.

What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 2:22–23 (ESV)

Work can become mind-numbing tedium. It seems like all we do is spend our lives working, then we die. What is the purpose of it all? You may get rich through your work, like Steve Jobs did with Apple computer, but then you die and you can't take it with you. His hearse wasn't pulling a U-Haul of Apple products. I checked.

Just as sin separates us from God, it separates us from the purpose of work, making it feel pointless.

Jesus restores us to the purpose of work. Remember what we learned last week — work is the way we worship God. Work is the way we love our neighbors. Work is the way we give and receive joy. The curse of sin robs work of a greater purpose. Jesus restores work's greater purpose. In two weeks I will give an entire message on how Jesus changes the way we work. Without that purpose, all of us would be jumping off buildings.

The curse tempts me to make an idol of my work.

Does anyone know the names of the four tallest buildings? No. 1 is the Burj Khalifa in the United Arab Emirates. It is 2,717 feet tall and has 163 floors. No. 2 is the Shanghai Tower in China. It is 2,073 feet tall and has 128 floors, which means it is one long elevator ride. No. 3 is Abraj- Al-Bait Clock Tower in Mecca Saudi Arabia. It is 1,971 feet tall and has 120 floors. The United States finally gets on the map with One World Trade Center in New York as No. 4. It is only a mere 1,776 feet tall with 104 floors. That is approximately 1,000 feet behind the No. 1 building.¹

What is amazing is all those buildings were built in the last four years. There is a worldwide race to see who can claim the fame of having the tallest building in the world. Everybody wants the title. It is almost like they are trying to make a name for themselves. The Bible tells us a story about trying to make a name for yourself by the greatness of your work.

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:4 (ESV)

In the story of the tower of Babel, the work of their tower was the way they were trying to make a name for themselves. They wanted the world to remember them because of their work. The tower of Babel was a way people were making an idol of their work. They were worshipping their work and using their work as the way they found significance in the world. They were trying to memorialize themselves by making an idol of their work.

The curse of sin tempts us to make an idol of our work, to worship what we do. The problem is our work is a bad god to worship because it will always disappoint us.

I ask you, have you given into the temptation to worship your work and assigned work a place of importance in your life that should be reserved for God? Here are a few questions to help diagnose if your work has become your idol.

Am I using my work to make a name for myself or as a way to serve God and others?

It is not wrong to do a good job and want to work hard. That is God-honoring. If your claim to fame in this world are the accomplishments of your work, you are probably making an idol of your work. In social situations, do you

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_buildings_in_the_world

casually mention your accomplishments so people know about your work success? If you do, that is a hint you are using work as your identity. Are you comfortable in competition or do you try to eliminate the competition? For instance, if you are on a sports team and somebody shows up that is better than you and they threaten your spot on varsity, is your identity rocked because you may not be on the starting lineup? You may be using your position on varsity as a way to make a name for yourself and prop up your identity rather than using your sport as a way to serve God and serve others.

What am I sacrificing on the altar of work?

Work requires lots of time and energy. It requires sacrifice. That is not wrong. That is natural. We will always have competing priorities with demanding work. Sometimes work will ask us to continually sacrifice things that only we can do, like be a spouse or be a parent. Some people are willing to sacrifice their marriage because their work is more important to them. That is because work has become the idol they worship. Sometimes work will ask you to consistently give up parenting your children because work calls you to be constantly gone on travel. You realize you are sacrificing your children on the altar of work. God may be calling you to take a lower-paying job to be at home with your kids because you are sacrificing them on the altar of work.

There is no easy answer in these situations. I trust the Holy Spirit is working in your heart today and telling you if you are worshipping the idol of work because you are consistently sacrificing on it things that only you can do.

When I look in the mirror, do I see what I have done or what God has done?

Let's be honest on this. God has allowed some of us to be successful, very successful. Success can be intoxicating. We can become inebriated with pride and delusional with our own importance. We don't see our success as a gift of God. We see it as something we did on our own strength with our own wisdom. Who gave us our intellect? Who gave us the opportunities? If we see success as a product of our own choices, who gave you the doors of opportunity? God. God gets all the credit for any good thing we do.

Success tempts us to insulate ourselves from the pain of real life and it can kill our compassion for others. Sometimes God, in his compassion on us, lets pain in our lives to keep us from becoming self-absorbed, worshipping ourselves and the success of our work. Sometimes God allows pain in our lives to keep us soft to him so when we look in the mirror we don't just see what we have done and worship the idol of work but we are filled with thankfulness for God's grace and we see our success as a God-given gift.

The curse tempts me to be idle in work.

Just as we can over-identify with our work and make it the idol we worship, the curse of sin also tempts us to be idle and expect others to provide for us. The curse leads us to finding excuses to not work or to do just enough work to

get a paycheck. This violates the very image-bearing essence of our nature since we are created in the image of God and we are created to be workers.

This idleness is seen in college students who spend their college years partying because they know mom and dad are footing the bill. This idleness is seen in retirement adults who retire early to live long, leisurely and self-indulgent lifestyles that focus on serving themselves instead of others.

The Bible commands us to work hard.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men... Colossians 3:23 (ESV)

Sin inclines us to be lazy workers. The Bible calls lazy workers sluggards.

I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man. Proverbs 24:30–34 (ESV)

You know someone that is inclined to be lazy by looking at his yard. He lets it get overgrown and refuses to do the hard work to fix it. For the fun of it, and for practical help for all of us, I did a little skating through the Scriptures to see how we can recognize a sluggard, someone that has let the curse of the fall make them idle at work. See if these questions help you determine if you have become lazy.

Do I neglect to plan ahead?

The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing. Proverbs 20:4 (ESV)

The first way you recognize a sluggard is they don't do the hard work of preparing for the future and planning. They don't put money away for their kids' retirement funds. They don't save for their own retirement. One of the reasons people don't think ahead is because it takes hard work and discipline. The curse inclines us to be lazy and simply live for the moment. We need to ask ourselves if a lack of future planning reveals a streak of sinful laziness in our lives.

Am I unwilling to get up early?

How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? Proverbs 6:9 (ESV)

Some people have a good reason for not getting up at the crack of dawn. More often than not the reason we can't get up in the morning is because we putter away our time late into the night so we are exhausted when our alarms go off. We end up sleeping in and missing the most productive hours of our day.

Many times we are too undisciplined to turn off the television and go to bed at a reasonable hour so we can get up at a reasonable hour. The honest reason

is we do this is because we are lazy. We are letting the curse of work make us idle in our work.

Am I known for being all talk and no action?

The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. Proverbs 21:25 (ESV)

Am I a person that always talks about what I am going to do but I never get around to doing it? Not only is that a character flaw but it is also sourced in laziness. It is sourced in being a sluggard.

Do you make promises and not come through? I know there are occasionally extenuating circumstances that make it almost impossible to always keep our word but the truth is people that are all talk but no action are usually that way because they are simply lazy. The curse of work is that they don't want to work.

Do I make flimsy excuses to avoid work?

The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!" Proverbs 22:13 (ESV)

We all makes excuses for why we don't do things. The curse inclines us to make flimsy excuses to avoid work. The reason we are avoiding work is ultimately because we are lazy. What excuses do you have for avoiding work?

Am I painfully unreliable?

Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. Proverbs 10:26 (ESV)

I love this proverb. I can just picture somebody wincing in pain as they give tasks to people that prove unreliable. When mom asks you to take out the trash, do you get it done right away or is she wincing like there is smoke in the air an hour later because she asked you to take out the trash but you still haven't done it? The reason the trash isn't out is ultimately because of laziness. You have let the curse of sin make you an idle worker. That is something we can repent of this week.

Is my life littered with unfulfilled desires?

The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied. Proverbs 13:4 (ESV)

Are you a person who has plans but you never accomplish them? One of the reasons we have a life littered with unfulfilled desires is because we are by nature lazy workers. The curse of sin makes us idle.

Idleness is rampant in today's workplace. Many people have a sense of entitlement from work rather than a sense of responsibility for work. If you are a hard worker, it is hard to stay a hard worker. There is a lot of peer pressure to be lazy. If you are honoring God by being a hard worker your peers will look down on you in school because your hard work makes them look bad. The same thing

happens in the workforce. Your peers will look down on you for high productivity because your hard work exposes their laziness.

Conclusion

Last week we saw God's good design for work. This week we saw how sin changed work to fill it with pain, problems and a lack of purpose. Sin didn't just change work but it changed our hearts toward work so we either worship work as our idol or we avoid hard work so we can be lazy.

Is there any hope for the problems of work? Next week Pastor Stephen will teach on how to find a job as I will be moving my father's stuff from Philadelphia. The following week I will pick up where we left off and we will see how Jesus restores work to its rightful place and how Jesus redeems and transforms our work.

How Does Jesus Change Work?

May 24, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. Today we continue our series called Work Matters to God. In this series we are discovering what the Bible says about life in the factory, office or field. We are learning what the Bible says about work.

In the first message of this series we learned God created work for more than a paycheck. Our God is a worker. Look at creation. Our work in creation is the way we reflect God's image as a worker. Part of being created in the image of God means we are created to work.

Just as God experienced joy from his creative works, God also created us to experience joy from our works.

Two weeks ago we moved from answering the question, "Why do we work?" to "What went wrong with work?" We saw that sin twisted work from a source of joy to a source of pain and problems. Sin also inclines us to put work in the wrong place. We either want to make an idol out of our work, we worship our jobs and let our jobs become the source of our identities or we let sin incline us toward slothfulness. We do not work hard.

Last week, Pastor Stephen did a great job in a stand-alone message.

This week we are moving from, "Why we work?" and "How sin warped our work" to "How does Jesus change work?"

When someone comes to Jesus, everything changes. One of the ways Christ changes us is how we handle our work. Jesus changes the way we pour concrete. Jesus changes the way we spread manure. Jesus changes the way we weld on the assembly line at Polaris. Jesus even changes the way a mother does her work of laundry at home. How does Jesus change the way we work? Let's dive in and discover some answers.

1. A Christian employee serves a greater boss.

Bondservants... as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man... Ephesians 6:5-7 (ESV)

Bondservants... Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men... Colossians 3:22-23 (ESV)

Every Christian that asks Jesus to be their savior also asks him to be their ultimate boss. We no longer just work for an earthly boss. We now work for Jesus, the greater boss.

How does having Jesus as our boss change the way we work? If your job is cutting the lawn, we cut the lawn like Jesus is coming to inspect the work, not just your boss. If you cook in a restaurant, that means every plate you serve is served as if it were given to Jesus and as if it were checked by Jesus. You

make good meals. Meals that your earthly boss may accept may not be meals your greater boss would accept. We do our work with excellence for Jesus.

If you are a waitress, you have a great attitude for your customers and offer to refill their coffee as if you were serving Jesus. If you are a secretary, this means you don't burn your time; when you are done with your work you don't start painting your nails, but when you have free time you get creative and find ways to add value to the company. Remember we are not just working for a paycheck. We are working for Jesus. Jesus loves productivity. Jesus loves work that is well done. Earlier in this series we learned the way we do our work is one of the ways we worship. A job well done is an act of worship to Jesus.

If you are a high school student studying for a test, remember that what matters is not the grade on the paper. What matters is you did your absolute best in that class as an act of worship to Jesus. Remember, Jesus is your boss.

Having Jesus as our boss means we don't try to do the minimum amount of work but you try to go above and beyond the call of duty. We do whatever work it takes to do a job well and in a way that Jesus is proud of when he looks at it. If you are a coach, you coach with excellence, caring for your players, going above and beyond the bare minimum needed to coach. You are not coaching for a paycheck. You are coaching for a boss named Jesus.

This week ask yourself, how would I do my job differently if Jesus was my boss? Sometimes we wouldn't change a thing. Sometimes we need to change. Maybe the Holy Spirit has already laid on your heart something you need to change. If he has, write it down in your sermon notes so you remember to follow through.

2. A Christian employee shows respect for his earthly boss.

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling... Ephesians 6:5a

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

It is often said we live in a culture of disrespect. Children are not taught to respect their parents. Women are not encouraged to respect the authority of their husbands. Politicians often slander one another and do not respect one another. Recently we have even seen a surge in disrespect for police, especially after the death of Freddie Gray.

One of the places we often see disrespect is the workplace. When Jesus comes into our lives, not only do we work for Jesus, but the Holy Spirit cultivates within us a new respect for our bosses at work. Respect for the authority of Christ in our lives cultivates a respect for the authority of others in our lives. How we treat our earthly bosses is often akin to how we treat Jesus, our greater boss.

I would go so far as to say that if you have a problem respecting the earthly authorities over you, whether they be your boss at work or your parents,

the root of the problem is probably not your boss or your parents. It is probably you. There is a spirit of rebellion in your life. A spirit of rebellion against authority is not something the Holy Spirit fosters in your heart. A spirit of rebellion comes from Satan. A spirit of rebellion is most likely rooted in the sinfulness and stubbornness in your heart. Your boss may not be fair to you but how you respond to your unfair boss reveals the sinfulness that is in your heart. Your boss didn't put the sinful responses in your heart. Harshness may be your boss' problem but a disrespectful and rebellious attitude toward a harsh boss is your problem. It is something we need to confess to Jesus and ask him to change our hearts.

What if I disagree with my boss?

If you disagree with your boss, you should talk with him or her about it. You should be clear and loving in your speech. If your boss is not asking you to do anything illegal or against the Word of God, when you are done talking with your boss, if he or she still doesn't agree with you, submit to your boss, support him or her and don't fight him or her. You are the employee. He or she is the boss.

Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Titus 2:9–10 (ESV)

Christians are to please their bosses by not arguing with them or stealing from them. The idea is that our submissiveness to our bosses and our attitudes toward our bosses is to adorn the gospel. Our attitudes to our bosses it to make the gospel attractive to our bosses as they see our submissive and respectful attitudes at work.

A disagreement with a boss can be a great thing. It is an opportunity to demonstrate Christ-like character. This means that after you have a disagreement with your boss, after speaking your peace, you don't keep bringing it up again. You work hard for them, even if you don't agree with them. Even if our boss' decision turns out to be a poor decision you protect your boss and help your boss. You never undermine your boss. This is how Jesus changes the way we work. We are loyal employees to our bosses.

Sometimes this is really hard. It is easy to join others in side conversations that slander the boss. I see this all the time where parents or students are speaking against teachers or coaches. Sometimes it feels natural to jump in rather than defend a teacher or coach, especially if you think they may be right in their criticism. It is easy to talk smack at the lunch table. Jesus changes us. Christians have notable respect for those in authority over them.

How do you handle disagreements with those in authority over you? In those situations you can say you may not understand why a boss or a teacher or coach did what they did but you trust they had a good reason. You will support them and help them. That is how Christians treat those in authority over them.

We may not always agree with those in authority over us but we submit to their authority. We support them and in so doing we make the gospel attractive to them.

What if your boss is a nut-case?

This happens. I worked for a few nut-cases. I worked for bosses that are slave drivers and had little concern for their employees. I know what it is like to work 80-100 hours a week. If your boss is a total nut-case, you can always look for another job or try to get transferred. While you are still working for a nut-case boss, how do you handle them?

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 1 Peter 2:18–19 (ESV)

We continue working for our nutty bosses and we respect them as our bosses. Respecting an unfair boss honors God and makes the gospel attractive to him or her. Chances are your boss knows he is unfair. He is watching to see how you respond to his unfairness. Make the gospel attractive by responding with a Christ-honoring attitude under pressure. If we never had unfair nutty bosses, we would never have a chance to show Christian character under pressure.

Peter also reminded us that God knows your boss is unfair. He knows what is being done to you is wrong, and God is taking note of it. God cares about you. God will ultimately do something to right the wrong. When you suffer from an unfair boss, God notices unjust treatment. God will use the injustice being done to you as a way to mature your character and grow you to be more like Christ. Jesus understands injustice. He was unfairly condemned and killed. God may be using an unjust boss now to teach us how to handle much greater injustices that will be done to us later.

What if my boss is a Christian?

How does it change the way I work for a boss if he or she is a believer? Sometimes working for a Christian boss can breed a subtle attitude of disrespect in the heart of employees. You start to think that since you go to the same church and sing the same worship songs and may even serve on some of the same boards, that means your boss is your peer.

Sometimes Christian employees can develop a laissez-faire attitude toward their Christian bosses. They start assuming their bosses must extend extra grace toward them.

Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things. 1 Timothy 6:2 (ESV)

The Bible says that if you are a Christian and your boss is a Christian that simply means you should not be slack in your work or respect. Rather you

should work extra hard for him. You are serving a fellow Christian brother. Even if you disagree with them, you work harder for him.

So, the first way Jesus changes my work is Jesus is now my greater boss. Everything I do at work I do as an act of worship to honor him. I do things with an excellence that is beyond what my earthly boss asks for. The second way Jesus changes my work is I have a new level of respect for my earthly boss that I didn't have before. As I submit to God's leadership in my life I learn to submit to other God-appointed leaders in my life.

What if you are the top dog? What if you own the business? How does Jesus change the way we work then?

3. A Christian boss treats his employees so he can stand before God with a clear conscience.

If everyone reports to us we must remember that we will ultimately stand before Jesus Christ. The boss will answer to Jesus for how he treated his employees. The Bible tells us to whom much is given much is required. This means bosses have a lot of responsibility before God for how they treat their employees. The more employees a boss has, the more responsibility before God you have as an employer.

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. Ephesians 6:9 (ESV)

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 4:1 (ESV)

There are two distinctive qualities of Christian bosses. That is the way they motivate their employees and the fairness of the way they treat their employees.

Don't motivate employees through threats.

When we get frustrated with people it is easy to motivate with threats. Sometimes the easiest thing to do for motivation is to raise your voice. In the ancient world it was legitimate to whip a slave. Standard forms of motivation included whipping.

While there is a place for setting boundaries and having consequences at work, the Bible doesn't want Christian bosses to be known for their threats. I believe the Bible calls Christian bosses to motivate by rewards. That is the way God motivates holy living in our lives. God delights to reward us in eternity for how we live now. Christian bosses should endeavor to motivate by rewards for a job well done.

This might be giving bonus pay for those who have done exceptionally well. A nice way to motivate is to wait for an employee to go on vacation and if they have done a good job, just before vacation, give them a bonus check and a

note of appreciation. That money will be well-spent because they will work much harder from that reward than they would a threat.

Treat employees fairly and equally.

It is easy to play favorites based on how well you connect with some people and based on appearances. It is easy to play favorites with family members or long-term employees. The Bible tells Christian bosses not to play favorites with their employees. We are to be known for evaluating employees and compensating them fairly. Is there room for graciousness at work? Of course. Grace is one thing. Unfair treatment is another. A Christian boss can never steer clear of inequities but we should strive to steer clear of as many as we can.

4. A Christian employee steers clear of office politics.

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ... Ephesians 6:5 (ESV)

How many of you remember the Survivor television series? One of the things that made it unpredictable was the off-camera alliances that took place between contestants to try to protect themselves from being voted off the island or to get rid of a tough competitor.

Sometimes the workplace feels like the Survivor television series. Work can have a lot of politics where people try to gossip and manipulate to their advantage. They try and control the flow of information and create alliances for self-preservation.

The Bible is clear that Christian employers and employees are to steer clear of catty office politics. Both Ephesians and Colossians say Christ changes the way we work by giving us a desire for a sincere heart. The word sincere means having pure motives or intentions. It means no duplicity. That means we don't help our bosses by staying late in the office intending to manipulate them toward giving us a raise. We don't try to develop friendships with powerful people so we can use that to our advantage. When we coach a sports team we play the best players, not just the children of the most influential families. If you are a woman in the workplace you don't use your sexuality to manipulate your boss to your advantage.

This means we avoid gossiping. When we have a problem with someone, we talk to them and not about them. We don't build camps. Building a camp is when we tell everybody our little whiny problem and build a little group of people that agree with us and there is a group for our opponents. We divide the office down the middle instead of getting work done. That is unbecoming to God. As Christians we keep our mouth shut and we work hard. We do everything we can to keep the entire office or factory united and working together. We don't split it into camps.

5. A Christian employee is known as a hard worker.

Whatever you do, work heartily... Colossians 3:23

Two weeks ago we learned how the curse of sin inclines us toward idleness. It inclines us to be sluggish; if you want to use the street term, you can say the curse of sin leads us toward laziness. When Jesus comes into our life one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit working in our life is we change from unmotivated minimalist workers that only want to do the bare minimum. Jesus makes us hard workers. Christian employees will make others uncomfortable because they work harder than other people. The Holy Spirit helps the Christian to work hard. That is a distinguishing factor of the Christian employee. Sometimes we call it the protestant work ethic.

If you find yourself struggling with sluggishness, outside of a medical problem or old age, it is good to bring your sluggishness before God in prayer. Confess it as sinfulness and ask God to help you stay motivated at work. Ask God to help you be a productive worker to his glory. Simply realizing that God is cultivating within us an attitude of hard work and productivity is the first step toward pleasing God in this area of our lives.

6. A Christian employee looks forward to an extra paycheck.

There is nothing wrong when it comes to working for a paycheck. A paycheck is biblical. The amazing part is Christians get an extra paycheck. God promises to pay Christians a huge life-end bonus.

As Christians we are saved by what Jesus did on the cross. We are guaranteed heaven based on the sufficiency of what Jesus did for us, not on all the hard work we do for him. Now that we have the free gift of salvation through Jesus as a gift by faith, that doesn't mean God intends for us to sit around until we die. Ephesians 2:10 tells us God has good works he planned for us. Many of those good works will take place from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The really Kool part is God doesn't just want us to do good works. He can't wait to reward us for our good works. God promises to reward us for the honesty of our work, even if it means we lose money. God promises to reward us for the extra effort we put in at the office, even if we are not properly compensated. God will reward your integrity that nobody else knew about. Our God is not just a God who saves us but is a God that delights in rewarding us for how we do our work.

...rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Ephesians 6:7-8 (ESV)

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)

7. A Christian employee can move beyond the injustices they suffer at work.

...knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:24–25 (ESV)

Paul told us that just as we will one day be rewarded for how we worked, those who sin against us in the office will also one day be paid back by Jesus for the injustices done to us. Jesus won't show favorites. Nobody will get off the hook because they have connections with the boss. There will be no partiality.

Some of us are consumed with the injustices done against us at work. We have a burning desire to get even with someone that unfairly shafted us at work. Some of us are rightfully furious. What someone did to you at work could be just plain evil. It is easy to lose a lot of sleep over the things people say about us on the job that are untrue. Sometimes the dirty underhanded way we are treated makes us want to scream.

Here is the good news. As a Christian, you can leave these frustrations at the Lord's feet and know God will make sure justice is done. Sometimes God hands out a measure of his justice in this life toward those that sin against us. If not in this life, we can rest assured that one day, when everyone stands before Christ, those who sinned against you will be dealt with justly and fairly by Christ. Unless Christ has paid for someone's sin, it won't be pretty.

I understand there is a need for lawyers, courts and justice in our lives but rest assured that God will make sure justice will be taken care of in the next life. Leave it in God's hands.

We don't need to worry about making sure others have been fair toward us. We need to concern ourselves with making sure we have done everything we can to be fair and honest toward others. We will one day also stand before Christ, and we will have to give an answer for how we treated them at work. We may not be able to change what was done to us, but we can change what has been done by us.

As Christians, we can move on with life even if there was extreme injustice done to us in the work place. Justice will be served by Jesus. Nobody gets away with anything when they stand before Jesus, including us.

8. A Christian employee has peace in underemployment or job loss.

Some of us have faced turbulent times at work. You lost your job or were laid off. I talk with people each week that are underemployed. They are not doing what they planned with their lives. It can be very unsettling to take a career step backward.

How do Christians handle job loss or demotion? The Bible tells us how to handle these in the story of the apostle Paul. Did you know he took a major step back in his career? He planned to be gainfully employed sharing the gospel but he found himself underemployed in a job he didn't expect.

Paul was arrested and locked in a Roman prison. Rather than traveling the world starting churches, he was cooling his heels in a Roman prison. That was not part of his career plan. Life felt like it was out of control and his plan to tell about Jesus was derailed.

God had a good reason for Paul's demotion. From a Roman jail Paul wrote four letters that are part of our Bible. They are known as the prison epistles. They are the letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Those are some of the most-loved books in the Bible. If God did not force Paul to sit down, he may have not written those letters.

Paul had no idea that God derailed his job plans to put him in a Roman prison so he could write what would become four potent books in our Bible that God has used for 2,000 years.

God had a good purpose for the job turmoil in Paul's life. In the same way, when we face job turmoil, because of Jesus, and we find ourselves being under-used, as Christians, we don't worry because God is large and in charge of it all. Look what Paul said about his time in prison.

[I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. Philippians 1:12-13 \(ESV\)](#)

Conclusion

Christ completely changes the way we work. He becomes a new boss so we work with a new level of excellence to please him. Christ changes the way we respect our earthly bosses, even if we disagree with their leadership. We make the gospel attractive by the respectful way we handle our bosses. As Christians, we avoid the office politics and manipulation. As Christians, we work hard. As Christians, look forward to an extra paycheck when we see Christ. As Christians we can face the injustices of the office knowing God will one day set things right. As Christians, we face underemployment and job loss differently. We know that God has a purpose for our lives. God has a reason for the change in our work. His purposes for our lives will not be thwarted.

How Does Work Touch Eternity?

May 31, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. We are in a series of studies called Work Matters to God. We are learning what the Bible says about the significance of what most of us do during the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. What does the Bible teach about work?

We framed this series as a series of questions. So far we learned:

- Why do we work? We learned we work because we are created in God's image. Look at creation. God is a worker. He created us to work just like he works.
- What went wrong with work? We learned sin twisted the goodness of work so while it is still a joy, it is mixed with constant pain and problems.
- How does Jesus change work? That was last week's study. We learned that we now work for a greater master. The quality of our work is much higher. We now respect our earthly bosses as a result of the change in heart God brought into our lives.

This morning we will learn how work touches eternity.

A few weeks ago I was with a friend in another part of the country. We sat in his beautiful living room. In front of us was his stereo system and big screen television. To my right was a beautiful dining room with a table set for dinner. Behind us was his completely rebuilt and modernized kitchen. He did the work with his own hands and a little help from his friends. My friend has a good job and is very successful at his work. As we were talking about his work in the office and the work he did in rebuilding his home, maybe it was because he was embarrassed by his success, he stopped himself mid-conversation and said, "Well, none of this matters. It is all going to burn. I can't wait to see Jesus." That sounds very spiritual. Maybe he says that every time he has a pastor over for dinner. I don't know. Multiple times through the evening he said, "None of this matters. It is all going to burn." Is that true?

Is everything he built with the work of his hands going to go up in smoke? Does any of his work matter? Will all his hard work to provide a good home for his family just go up in smoke? Is all that matters the day we see Jesus?

What do you think? Does anything we do with our lives on earth have permanence? This is the question we will answer this morning. Does our daily work touch eternity?

The first half of the message, we will look at what the Bible says about eternity. The second half of the message, we will see what the Bible teaches about eternity means for our daily work. Let's begin with something that most of us agree on.

God's plan is to resurrect our bodies, not just save our souls.

What happens to Christians when we die? We know Christians go to heaven to be with Jesus.

If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:22–23 (ESV)

Paul was adamant. Death for the Christian is the better end. Our spirits being with Jesus is much better than anything life on earth can offer. When we cry at a Christian's funeral, it is for our loss, not their loss. The death of a Christian means when they close their eyes in this life, they open their eyes to see Jesus in heaven, which is far better than anything we could ever experience on earth. The Bible describes God's presence as the fullness of joy, and God is the source and fountain of all joy².

While many of us are familiar with this part of the story, unfortunately, many Christians don't know the rest of the story. They adopt what is called a neoplatonic view of eternity. Plato taught that matter was evil and the spirit was good. He taught the goal of life was for the spirit to be released from the bondage to the material world. Many Christians, this may include you, subtly adopt Plato's philosophy of life. They focus on the spiritual life and ignore the physical life. They don't care for their bodies. They eat Twinkies while singing hymns. They don't care about this world. After all, they think it is all going to burn and all that matters is our spirits being with Jesus.

That is unbiblical. While God brings our spirits to be with Christ in heaven at the moment of death, and that is better by far than life as we know it, that isn't the end of the story. The Bible is clear that just as Christ rose from the dead and he has a real physical resurrection body that will last for eternity, one day Christ will return from heaven and he will resurrect our self-same bodies and reunite our spirits, which was in Christ's presence, back to our resurrected bodies. We will get the same bodies back, but they will no longer be known for their weakness but for their strength. They will not be known for fatigue but for energy. They will not be known for sickness but for health. We will one day get our same bodies back and they will be resurrected, new and vastly improved.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

C.S. Lewis once said, "God is not anti-matter. God loves matter. He created it." God created us to have a body. Even if our spirits are in the presence of Jesus, we can never be fully satisfied apart from having a body. We were created to have a body.

² Psalm 16:11

The resurrection of Jesus means that when Christ returns, every Christian will get his or her body back, just like Jesus has a body. Christ's resurrection body is the prototype for our resurrection bodies.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Philippians 3:20–21 (ESV)

Look at how Paul described our new resurrection bodies.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 (ESV)

This is incredibly important. Historically, this is why Christians shied away from the Roman custom of cremation. This is why the Christians in Rome began burying bodies. It was out of respect for the body, which was considered good and will be resurrected. The typical custom in Rome was to burn the body because the body was considered bad and the spirit considered good.

Can God resurrect a burned body? Of course! God can resurrect a burned body or a body eaten by sharks or dismembered by animals. While God can resurrect a cremated body, to the early Christians, cremation pictured the fires of hell, while burial pictured respect for the body as it slept in the dust of the earth awaiting for Christ's return and its resurrection.

Burial gave the body a place to rest while it waited for Christ's return. Burning eliminated a body. This became such a big issue to Roman Christians that it gave birth to the catacombs. When Christians ran out of real estate to bury bodies horizontally they dug down and buried them vertically.

The resurrection of our self-same bodies and its reunion with our spirits is a review for most of you. I begin with the basics because it is foundational to our next step.

God's plan is to restore and renew the earth, not just restore and renew Christians.

Will the earth be burned up and dissolved?

For years, many of us were taught the earth we live on will be destroyed. It will be consumed by fire and blotted out of existence. We were taught God would create a new heavens and a new earth, but the earth we live on and the works done on it will perish.

A number of passages appear to support this view. One of the most famous is 2 Peter 3:10.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

It appears to teach what the friend that had me over for dinner believed. This earth will be burned up and dissolved. Does burning the earth and dissolving the earth mean it will pass out of existence?

Peter was using this analogy from the work of a metallurgist that melts down metal to dissolve it and burn away the impurities. The metals don't pass out of existence. They are burned up and dissolved when they are purified.

These verses also says the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. To expose something means to take what is hidden and reveal it for all to see. For the earth to be exposed, the earth needs to continue to exist. The earth cannot be completely burned up and destroyed.

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

This verse appears to teach there will be a new heavens and a new earth. We often think the reason we need a new earth is because the old earth was destroyed. Here is where it gets interesting. In the Greek, there are two words for new'. *Naos* means new in the sense of temporarily new. It means to bring something into existence that did not exist before. The creation of a vaccine for polio was *naos* new. It was bringing into existence something that did not exist. *Naos* is not the Greek word used to describe the new heavens and earth.

The other word for new in Greek is *kainos*. *Kainos* doesn't mean temporarily new, it means qualitatively new. It means restoring an existing thing to a state where it is new just like the day you took off the cellophane. A friend of mine has a Model-T Ford. Most cars of that age are rusted and ruined. His car looks beautiful. He spent a lot of time restoring it to the way it was. That Model-T is *kainos* new. It was around a long time but was restored to make it just like new.

This is the word used to describe the new heavens and the new earth. They are the same heavens and the same earth but they are qualitatively new and even improved. The Bible doesn't describe a new heavens and earth that did not exist. It describes a restored heavens and earth that now exist.

This same word for qualitatively new is used by Jesus in Revelation.

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things (qualitatively) new." Revelation 21:5

Just as Jesus resurrects our self-same bodies and makes our bodies qualitatively new and vastly improved, he will resurrect and restore the self-same earth and make it new and vastly improved.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and

that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 2 Peter 3:5–7 (ESV)

At a time in the past God hit the reset button on earth. Noah's flood happened because the inclinations of men's hearts were always evil all the time. The word *perished* doesn't mean perished out of existence. God didn't destroy the earth out of existence. The earth as it was at that time perished. He purified the earth through water. He scrubbed the earth clean with water. Peter paralleled the flood to the return of Christ saying God will purify and restore the earth again, but this time it will not be a surface cleaning but the entire planet will be burned free of sin. It will not be a partial restoration, it will be a complete restoration.

After the flood, Noah and his family still had a sinful nature. The entire earth was still in bondage to decay. The effects of sin were pushed back by the flood but not eliminated by the flood. The purifying of the earth with fire will ultimately destroy all the effects of sin on earth once and for all.

If God was forced to annihilate the universe and completely start over, Satan won a great victory by forcing God to destroy the work of his hand. Satan has not won such a victory. He did not force God to blot out of existence the created order. Satan was decisively defeated at the cross. God is revealing the full dimensions of Christ's victory over Satan's as history unfolds. Today we see people with born-again hearts because of Jesus. When Christ returns we will see resurrected and restored bodies because of Jesus. Ultimately, we see a restored and purified earth because of Jesus. Satan gets no victories.

The earth's restoration is intimately connected with our resurrection.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:19–21 (ESV)

What amazing verses these are. As Christians, we can feel insignificant. In this world we feel like a small cog in a big machine. That is not the biblical picture. Our identity as Christians is so important that the entire universe is eagerly waiting for the moment for Christ to return and give us our resurrection bodies.

The entire creation knows that it will ultimately be set free from its bondage to decay from sin as a consequence of Jesus setting us free from our bondage to sin and death. The restoration of the earth is only possible because of Jesus' commitment to resurrect and restore us, not just in spirit but also in body. The creation knows it will ultimately be freed from sin because we need a restored earth to live on with our resurrected bodies.

Satan doesn't get an ounce of victory. Our bodies may die now but they are coming back better than ever, just like Jesus'. Our planet may be falling apart now but just wait. It is coming back better than ever as our restored home. It will be a planet bursting with life, not twisted by sin and death.

...and through him (Jesus) to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:20 (ESV)

The blood of Jesus on the cross reconciles to God all things. Whether things on earth or in heaven. The entire creation will be reconciled to God.

...Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Acts 3:20-21 (ESV)

God will unite the restored earth with heaven and put it all under Christ.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. Revelation 21:1-3 (ESV)

This is pretty amazing. Not only will God restore our bodies and restore the earth, but just as our resurrection bodies are vastly improved from our earthly bodies, God will vastly improved the earth when he restores it. He will improve it by bringing heaven to earth. Can you think of a better way to improve earth than bringing heaven to it?

We get the same earth back, but completely free from sin and it is combined with heaven. We will see God on earth. If being in God's presence is fullness of joy, having heaven on earth makes earth a place of fullness of joy. It can't get better.

There will be great continuity between our current fallen earth and the new heavens and earth.

We often forget the continuity between the earth now and the restored earth that is combined with heaven in eternity later. The new earth and new heaven then will be very earthy like our life is today.

...through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2 (ESV)

There are streets. There are cities. There are rivers. There are trees. The same tree of life from the Garden of Eden is brought into eternity. There are months which means there is time.

By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it... Revelation 21:24 (ESV)

There will be nations and kings in the new heavens and earth. There will still be government and leaders in eternity. Jesus is in charge of it all so it actually works. There is manufacturing as people bring their glory, the things they made, to the new Jerusalem. There is travel.

Isaiah 60-65, which is the old testament parallel for the end of Revelation, provides more details of the new heavens and earth.

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. Isaiah 60:6 (ESV)

There will be animals on the new heavens and earth. How many of you like animals? God created animals. We get them for eternity. Isn't this starting to sound familiar? The best snapshot we have of the new heavens and earth is to look at the things we love about our current earth that are good and glorifying to God and imagine them for eternity in the future.

Here is where I want to stretch your imagination.

God will reveal the truth of our current work, reward us for it and carry it into the new creation.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (ESV)

This is talking about what we do with our faith in this life. Each one of us spends our life building on our faith. What we have done with our lives will one day be tested by fire. The purifying fire of Christ will one day reveal the truth of our life's work.

Paul said that if the work of our lives was glorifying to Christ, it will survive and we will receive a reward. We read this passage and jump to the idea of rewards in eternity for how we live for Christ today. That is true. God will reward us in eternity for how we live today. We miss something else very important. *Paul said some of the work of our life will survive and pass into eternity.* Just as the new earth is the old earth purified and carried forward, our works from this earth will be tested by Christ, purified and carried forward into eternity. When we go to work, every good thing we do in the name of Christ will in some way be transmuted to become part of eternity with Christ.

For example, John Newton wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace". Do you think we will sing "Amazing Grace" in heaven? I think so. I suspect that work will survive and be carried forward. Do you think Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel will ever be seen in the new heavens and earth? I think they will survive the test and be carried into eternity.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)

Paul said none of the work we do in Jesus' name is in vain. This is hard to conceive. I don't know how all this works. The Bible only tickles our imagination with the details. We know that just as our planet will be purified, improved and carried forward to eternity, so will the works of our hands be tested to reveal the truth of them, and if they survive the test they will be carried forward to eternity.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands! Psalm 90:17 (ESV)

Moses prayed that God would establish the work of his hands. Establish means make permanent. It means that God would make permanent the work of Moses' life. We are learning that God plans to make part of eternity the work that is done in Christ's name in our lives. It too will last forever.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Revelation 14:13 (ESV)

We always hear that you can't take it with you to heaven. A hearse doesn't pull a U-Haul. Apparently these guys did take it with them. We can take it with us. The work of our hands that is done for Christ will carry forward into eternity.

God doesn't give us all the details on how this works. We just need to know that it all doesn't burn. Our daily work matters.

God's plan is to reward us with even greater work in the new creation.

How many of you are familiar with the story of the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25? I won't read it for lack of time, but many of you already know it. There are three different people, each put in charge of different sums of money. One is given one talent, the modern equivalent of \$2.4 million. The other is given two talents, the modern equivalent of \$4.8 million. Another is given five talents, the modern equivalent of \$12.3 million.

The one who has five, makes five more. The one who has two makes two more. The one who has one simply buries his money and does nothing. When the master comes back, he commends the guys who worked and made a return but the guy who just sat on his talent and did nothing was condemned. Do any of you remember the specific commendation given to the first two?

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

The one who is faithful in a little responsibility was rewarded with more responsibility for his work. That is the ultimate reason why our work today

matters in light of eternity. The faithfulness of our work now leads to the greatness of our work then.

Call it selfish, but just like you I am looking forward to work in eternity that will be even greater than the work I get to do today.

Conclusion

Does it matter what we do? Will everything be burned up? Will this earth be destroyed? Will all the work of our hands be forgotten? Absolutely not! The earth will be purified and transformed. The work we have done with our lives will be tested by fire. What we have done for Christ will be rewarded, and it will carry over into the new heavens and earth where we will continue our work with more joy and satisfaction than ever.

This week, let's go to work knowing that our work matters — it touches eternity.

Why Is Ordinary Work Important Work?

June 7, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. This summer we are in a series of studies called Work Matters to God. In the last four messages we gave the big picture of work. We looked at the creation of work by God, the fall of work through sin, the redemption of work through Jesus and the restoration of work in the new heavens and earth. Today, we move beyond the big picture questions of work to look at some of the common questions we ask about our work every day.

Maybe you had this experience. You attended a Bible conference and the speaker left you with the clear impression that what you are doing with your life in the workforce isn't that important. If you want to do something important with your life you will become a pastor or a missionary, because pastors and missionaries are the heroes of the Christian faith. You notice that every speaker at the conference is either a pastor or a missionary. There is nobody from the business world.

You are left with the impression that if you want to make a difference you need to be in full-time ministry because the business world is unimportant. If you are a janitor or a teacher or a mechanic or a realtor, you need to get serious about your faith.

Sometimes speakers will even say work in the business world is like rearranging chairs on the Titanic. The people in the business world are just rearranging chairs on a sinking ship while those in ministry are trying to save people before the ship goes down.

If you are a business executive, you may attend a men's breakfast where former executives speak about their mid-life career change where they moved from a life of success to significance. They left the business world for full-time ministry, and they are challenging you to do the same.

This leaves the average Christian that processes loans, that works road construction, that changes diapers or makes dinners for his or her family feeling like his or her life's work is insignificant. Is that true? Is some work for Jesus more important than others? Does God play favorites with full-time pastors and missionaries while the rest of us he tolerates? Is ordinary work important work? This morning, we will learn the Bible's answer. I think the answer will surprise you. Let's begin with a little history.

The reformation rediscovered that God's work was not just church work.

The medieval church was nothing like church today. The church kept separate from society. The church developed hierarchies and sacramental systems to separate church work from real work. They even developed the monastic movement to keep God's people separate from real people. The medieval church viewed itself as God's kingdom on earth, so only work in and for

the church qualified as God's work. To do God's work you needed to be a priest, monk or a nun. Every other vocation was considered a demeaning necessity.

Martin Luther was one of the great voices in the reformation. One of his rediscoveries was the priesthood of all believers. This meant you didn't need a priest to come before God but everyone had equal access to God. We didn't need a special priest to confess our sins before God. Everyone could confess their sins to God directly and ask for forgiveness. There is no middle man needed.

In Martin Luther's writings, he saw the priesthood of all believers not just applied spiritually but also applied vocationally. The medieval church taught the only way to please God was by pursuing vocational church work. Martin Luther pointed out that all vocations that were benefiting others and society were equally pleasing to God. A priest, a monk or a nun was not a higher spiritual job than a farmer, a blacksmith or a shopkeeper. God approved of all forms of work that did good for society.

One of the ways Martin Luther showed this was from 1 Corinthians 7:17.

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 1 Corinthians 7:17 (ESV)

Paul used religious words to describe ordinary work. In Romans 12:3 and 2 Corinthians 10:13, Paul talked about God *calling* people to salvation and *assigning* them spiritual gifts. Here, Paul used those same words to talk about ordinary work. Every Christian should remain in the work God has *assigned* them and to the work God *called* them. This means God assigns people to places of ordinary work and God calls people to secular vocations. Our secular job is part of God's calling for our lives. This means that just as God equips and calls Christians to work in the church for building up the body of Christ, he also equips and calls people for the building up human society.

Martin Luther also illustrated this point in his sermon on Psalm 147:13.

For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. Psalm 147:13 (ESV)

This verse is talking about how God protects a city. Is the only way God protects a city supernatural? Martin Luther pointed out that often God protects a city by calling and equipping people to ordinary work. God gives a city good iron workers to make strong iron bars for the city's protection. God protects a city by giving it good government workers and good city workers. He protects the city by giving it faithful and courageous police officers. God protects a city by calling and equipping people in the city to do the very ordinary work of protecting the city. God often answers the prayers for a city's protection by the natural work of the people. Ordinary work is important work.

Martin Luther also commented on the way God answers our prayers for daily bread. God does not usually answer our prayer for food by providing manna from heaven. He answers our prayers for daily bread by calling a farmer

to a field, by calling processors to transform a harvest into flour. He answers the prayers for daily bread by calling a baker to transform flour into bread. He answer those prayers by calling a merchant to sell the bread to the people who need the bread. Ordinary work is important work. All ordinary work that builds up society is God's work. God provides for the needs of his people by the ordinary work of others.

Church work is one of one of the ways God calls people to work. It is not necessarily better work. It is just different work.

Jesus gave value to ordinary work

An amazing verse on the value that Jesus gave to ordinary work is Mark 6:3.

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Mark 6:3 (ESV)

Jesus' full-time ministry lasted less than three years. What was Jesus doing prior to his preaching and healing in the Palestinian wilderness? He was an ordinary carpenter that worked in a small town business. He worked with his hands. He sanded wood. He cut wood. He built tables and chairs. He framed houses.

Remember, Jesus didn't suddenly have an epiphany experience with a flash of light that supernaturally empowered him and catapulted him into ministry. The book of Luke tells us Jesus was baffling the rabbis with his knowledge of God and biblical insight at the age of 12. Even though Jesus was fully aware of his identity and was able to teach at a very young age, he spent most of his teenage and adult life doing ordinary work, not cloistered in a monastery like a monk. I love this. Jesus gave value to ordinary work by spending most of his life doing it. I think there is something to learn. If Jesus didn't think running a labor-intensive business in a small town was beneath him, neither should we.

Think about Jesus' true identity and contrast that with his life as a carpenter.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15–17 (ESV)

The one who fashioned the universe and spun the planets in their orbits, the one that created every sea creature and animal on the planet plus every angelic being was now taking some of the trees he created and helping people frame their homes. Jesus developed callouses. Jesus knew the thrill of a good day's work and what it meant to be exhausted at the end of the day. Jesus understood the problem of not enough sales. He understood the problem of irritable customers. Jesus understood the problem of making something and

having it break. Jesus understood the pain of needing to maintain laser-like focus for long hours of work to do it well.

Ordinary work, and lots of it, was not below the life of Jesus. Ordinary work is important work. We shouldn't be afraid of it.

Ordinary work was the center of God's will for most of Jesus' life.

Sometimes I hear people say they are unsure of God's will for their lives. She is just a line worker at Polaris. He is just a truck driver for Pure Fishing. She is just a banker for 5/3 Bank. They are just working in a small town doing ordinary work. They feel they could do more but they missed God's calling.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he was baptized by John the Baptist. In his baptism, God the Father's voice showed up and this is what he said:

And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:11 (ESV)

God the Father was pleased with how his son lived his life prior to his ministry. God the Father's will was for Jesus to be a simple carpenter in an obscure town off the radar of society. Jesus pleased his father by doing the ordinary common work of a carpenter even though he was capable of so much more. Jesus' ordinary work was important work.

In a similar way God has called many of us to the ordinary work of serving others in a simple small town business. Maybe you make school lunches. Maybe you are a secretary. Maybe you sell tractors. Maybe you drive tractors.

Realize you probably aren't missing God's will for your life. The center of God's will for most of us is to do ordinary work, just like Jesus. God may eventually call us to a different place or to a place of prominence, like he did his own son, but right now we are doing the work he has for us, even if that work is not glamorous. That is OK. Jesus did lots of ordinary work because that was his father's will for his life.

Ordinary work is the way Jesus served his neighbor.

The Bible tells us the most important commandment is to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. The second most important commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus loved his neighbors from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. by simply doing his work and doing it well. I am sure he made great tables and chairs. I am sure the quality of his work was good, and he blessed his customers through his work. I am sure he stayed late after work helping others in need. Maybe a lumberjack needed an ax handle repaired during the night so he could go back to work in the morning. Jesus loved his neighbor by staying late at his work so his neighbor would be ready for work the next day.

I am sure Jesus dealt with irritable customers. He loved them with patience and kindness. When we do our work and do it well, we love our neighbors, just like Jesus.

Ordinary work was Jesus' training ground for greater work.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.
Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)

While this verse is talking about Jesus' death on the cross, I think it also applies to the rest of Jesus' life. While Jesus is fully God, he is also fully man. That means he went through the experience of learning. Jesus didn't just learn obedience to God in his suffering on the cross but he also learned how to love people through his work. I am sure Jesus had difficult customers. Jesus needed to learn how to love them.

When it came time for Jesus to wash his disciple's feet in John 13, I think the reason Jesus was a good servant then was, in part, because he learned to be a good servant on the job to others.

All work that builds up society and serves others is important work.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:3–8 (ESV)

This passage is speaking about the local church, but I believe the same principles hold true when we apply them to society at large. The best way to think about our jobs is to realize we are all part of a big body called society. God gives us different talents and calls us to different jobs so that the body of society can be built up. All of our jobs are designed to fit together into one harmonious unit to make the body function. *Any work that builds up society and serving others in society is important work.* The best way to think about our jobs is not to determine which ones have more value than others but to realize all our jobs work together make society function and serve other people. All our jobs are important jobs.

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? 1 Corinthians 12:17–19 (ESV)

How do we decide which part of the body is more important? Which part of the body would you like to lose? Would you like to lose an ear? A brain? A heart? A hand? You can see my point. Just as God designed the physical body to be different parts that work together, he also designed and gifted members of the church to fit together and serve one another. In the same way, God puts

people together in society together with different gifts and different callings to serve the needs of society. Everyone can't be pastors and missionaries. There needs to be police officers, teachers, carpenters, business people, sales people, inspectors, builders, waiters and lawyers. Just as the body needs different parts to serve others and function smoothly, so does society.

Ordinary work is more important than we realize.

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable... 1 Corinthians 12:22 (ESV)

While we may agree that all jobs are important for society to function, we often think some work as more important than others. Sometimes we think, "My job isn't that important. I am just a waitress," or "My job isn't that important. I am just a mechanic." We forget that it is often the most ordinary work that is the most important in society. What would happen if nobody did the job of being a waitress? I don't think anybody would go out to eat. What happens if all mechanics went away? When a car broke down, it would never be repaired.

Some of you know I recently drove a trailer, with the contents of my father's house, back from Pennsylvania to Iowa. It took us two days to pack the trailer. It is 24-foot long and 8.5-feet wide. On the return trip, while driving through Ohio on the turnpike at 70 mph, my truck took a sudden lunge to the right. A quick glance in my right rearview mirror let me know I had no wheels on the right side of the trailer. The bolts holding both rear wheels snapped off while driving 70 mph on the turnpike! With no tires on the right rear of a fully loaded trailer, let's just say God was very gracious that we made it to the side of the road. We were safe but we had a serious problem. What do you do with a fully loaded trailer that has no right wheels and no wheel studs for new tires on the side of the Ohio turnpike? I did what you are supposed to do in an emergency. I dialed *990 for help. I had visions of needing to unpack the entire contents of my father's house to the side of the highway. I had no idea how we would get out of the jam.



First they sent a flatbed tow truck, but the driver just chuckled. The trailer was bigger than his truck. Then he had an idea. He said, "I know just the guy for you. I will call Delbert." I was wondering who would have the name Delbert and how this guy could help? The tow truck driver told me he would show up in an old ambulance. I was suspicious. About 45 minutes later, Delbert showed up in his old ambulance that was retrofitted into a repair truck. It was old and and dirty but Delbert and his ambulance were just what we needed. Using air jacks he lifted the trailer and pulled off the drums. Next he left and drove to a repair shop.

He bought new studs for the drums. Using compressors in the back of his old ambulance he replaced the studs in the drums and put the wheels back on the trailer. We were back on the road by evening.



As Delbert was working, we had a chance to talk. He is a Christian that loves his work of helping cars and trucks that break down on the side of the road. He is just a mechanic with an old ambulance, but his ordinary work is important work or I would still be in Ohio!

Some of God's best work is done by people in ordinary work, not church work.

As we already learned, God doesn't just call and gift people into church work. He calls and gifts people for all kinds of ordinary work. Church work is only one kind of calling. As I was thinking about this, I realized the Bible shows us many people God called and equipped for ordinary work, and God did amazing work through their lives.

Think about Daniel. He didn't get a calling into ministry, but his calling was when he was taken into captivity in Babylon. He simply went the direction God forced him to go. He didn't ask for the job but he found himself head of the magicians and enchanters. I am sure that wasn't the career path his good Jewish mother wanted him taking. Daniel focused on devoting his life to serving God in a hostile work environment. God did extraordinary work through Daniel's life. He led Nebuchadnezzar to God and introduced two other world rulers to the true God of the universe. He ended up with his own book of the Bible. He didn't do church work. He did ordinary work. God called him into ordinary work and equipped him for his ordinary work. He did great things for God with his life.

Did you ever consider Esther's work? Her calling was to be queen of the Persian empire. The way God equipped her for that calling was to make her stunningly beautiful so she could win the Miss Universe pageant to marry the king. God gave her this ordinary work so she could save the Jewish people from the genocide planned by Haman. She wasn't in church work, but she was used by God for a great work. She also ended up with her own book in the Bible.

Did you ever consider David? He had a circuitous career path. He started out in an obscure shepherding business in a small town. He simply visited his brothers and ended up in the Octagon with the reigning MMA champion known as Goliath. To everyone's surprise, David destroyed the guy. David then went from a career in MMA to life as a professional musician giving concerts for the king. He eventually ended up as part of the king's personal body guard. Later his career was a fugitive from justice and eventually the king of the nation. David never went into ministry. God moved David's career all over the map. Some of God's best work is done by people in ordinary work, not church work.

Did you ever consider the story of Joseph? God's career path for him was that his own brothers would sell him into slavery. That is something you don't see every day. He didn't spend his days in Egypt whining about homesickness and claiming he was out of God's will for his life and he was meant for something more than slavery. He simply served God in the job God placed him. At first, that was with Potiphar, and he was a raging success. When Mrs. Potiphar made a pass, he honored God and avoided her but found himself treated as if he had done the wrong thing when he actually did the right thing.

It looked like his life was spinning out of control. It looked like his career path was ruined. He continued to serve God faithfully in the dungeon. At just the right time God moved him from the dungeon to the throne to be in charge of Egypt so he could save a nation and his family.

Some of God's greatest works are done by people who honor God in ordinary work.

Conclusion

In 1689, parliament forbade the importation of liquor. The Irish and the British began making their own. Parliament unwittingly unleashed the Irish gin craze. The entire nation found itself living in a drunken stupor.

The vast majority of the Irish drank whisky or gin as their primary beverage. Why did everyone drink so much alcohol?

Water was considered unsafe. Not knowing about micro-organisms, when people drank water from the rivers they became mysteriously sick. To avoid sickness, people drank alcohol. Statistics say that one in every six houses was a gin house. The entire country was a drunken mess with no way out.

Arthur Guinness was infuriated by the drunkenness and depravity of his country. He constantly prayed to God, asking God to help him do something about alcoholism in Ireland. Arthur eventually sensed God calling him not into church work but into ordinary work. As a business man, God was calling him to "Make a drink that men can drink that will be good for them."

He developed a dark stout beer called Guinness Beer to give his country something to drink that wouldn't ruin their lives. The key is Guinness beer has so much iron that people feel full before they can drink another pint. The alcohol level was much lower than gin and whisky.

The quality and success of Arthur Guinness' beer helped pull a nation out of drunkenness. With his success, he chose to do practical good. He began the first Sunday schools in Ireland so people could understand the gospel. He worked hard to create a family culture that focused on generosity and investing in people.

One of Guinness's grandsons became a famous evangelist. Another descendant worked hard to eradicate poverty in Ireland. Another descendent went into politics and passed laws to outlaw dueling. In that day, when people had a disagreement, they simply shot each other until somebody died.

The Guinness legacy was particularly amazing when it came to its investment in employees. In 1928, the year before the Great Depression, if you worked for Guinness Beer, you had free 24-hour medical care, free 24-hour dental care and on-site massage therapy. Your funeral expenses were paid. Your company pension was paid without you needing to make contributions. Your education, your wife's education and your children's educations were all paid for by the company. The company had libraries, reading rooms and an athletic complex. That was 1928, not 2015 working for Google.

What is amazing is how a Christian business man incorporated his faith into his business to help lift an entire nation out of drunkenness by giving men something they could drink that was good for them. He changed the lives of thousands of workers by being a company that invested in workers instead of taking from workers. Ordinary work is important work. Sometimes God does his best work by people called to ordinary work, not church work.

This week, know church work is not better than ordinary work, it is just a different calling. God does some of his best work through ordinary Christians working in ordinary jobs. That is us.

Why Is Rest Essential For Work?

June 14, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. This morning we continue in our series called, Work Matters To God. Today we are looking at everyone's favorite topic. Rest! Taking a break. Why is rest essential for work?

While we all like rest, statistics say we don't take a break from work even when we have the opportunity. An article in the New York Times talked about how Americans work so much they don't take vacations.³ The article noted that at the start of summer 40 percent of Americans have no plans to take vacation in the next six months. This is one of the lowest percentages in the last 30 years. Twenty-five percent of U.S. workers do not get paid vacation time. For those of you that don't get vacation, this is hard. You have no opportunity for rest. An additional 33 percent of Americans will take a seven-day vacation, but that includes the weekend, so that is technically a five-day vacation.

One Associated Press poll from 2006 found that one in five carried his or her laptop with on vacation while 80 percent of Americans bring their cell phones on vacation. That was 2006. Today, I am sure those numbers have skyrocketed. I have to ask. How many of you take a vacation with your smartphone and laptop? Did having work with you help you relax? Were you less distracted on vacation because you had your cell phone and laptop with you? Absolutely not!

Today many companies give you a laptop. They expect you to take the laptop home with you at night so you are now working on your time, not just their time. They also expect you will take your company-issued laptop with you on vacation because all vacations are now working vacations, which by definition, is not a vacation. A working vacation is like a fun root canal. It is a contradiction.

What makes it even harder to rest from work is we live in a 24/7 world that has no natural break times between work time and rest time. If we feel like it, at 3:15 a.m. we can go to a 24-hour gym for exercise. When we are done, we can stop at a 24-hour Taco Bell to eat a Chalupa and put back on the calories we just burned off. We can then go to a 24-hour Walmart to buy flowers and begin planting by 4:30 a.m. This is the world we live in. There are no longer times when we are forced to take a break from work.

Some couples even bring their computers with them into the bedroom so they can respond to e-mails. Instead of snuggling, they are typing and texting. When the alarm goes off in the morning the first thing we do is check our e-mail instead of check on our spouses. Work in our electronic world never stops. There is no rest in our work.

³ http://paidpost.nytimes.com/mastercard/the-surprising-cost-of-not-taking-a-vacation.html?_r=0#_VX635jNr_t0

Our corporate heroes are not helping us. In an interview with Bill Gates he talked about taking six days off. He took those days between 1978 and 1984. That is six days in six years.⁴

Marissa Mayer, president of Yahoo and a former executive for Google, gets 700-800 e-mails a day. Imagine how many times her phone vibrates a day. She spends 14 hours straight on Saturdays and Sundays catching up on e-mails. She has learned to live on four-six hours of sleep a night.⁵

This is the world we live in. It is a world without rest from work. This is not good. Today we will see why rest is essential for work.

We need rest to be restored physically.

We need the daily rest of sleep.

God built rest into the created order. Human beings are not machines. We cannot work continually without breaking. The first form of rest God built into our lives is the need for sleep. Our bodies need to rest. Our minds need to rest. We cannot go 24 hours a day without breaking. God designed us this way for a reason. He made night time for that time of rest. In previous generations, when they didn't have electricity, people went to bed much earlier because when the sun was down, the day was over. Today, with electric lights, we stay up late into the night and are massively sleep deprived. The average American gets two and a half hours less sleep than Americans did a century ago.⁶ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention claims more than 40 million Americans get fewer than six hours of sleep a day.⁷ Lack of sleep leads to diabetes, obesity and a host of other diseases. With no environmental cues forcing us to bed, and plenty of electronic gadgets to keep us awake, we are simply not getting the sleep we need, and our work suffers.

We can borrow time but we can't steal it. Staying up late into the night to get a paper finished may sound like a smart move because we are using sleeping time. Skipping a night's sleep didn't gain you any time. You will need to pay it back the next day when you are a walking zombie or you get sick or you get in a car accident because you couldn't stay awake. You can't cheat sleep indefinitely. You can only borrow it. You need to pay it back.

It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Psalm 127:2 (ESV)

⁴ http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Bill_Gates.aspx

⁵ http://money.cnn.com/popups/2006/fortune/how_i_work/frameset.exclude.html

⁶ Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 96.

⁷ David. K. Randall, "Rethinking Sleep," *New York Times*, September 22, 2012.

Sleep is God's gift for the stressed-out worker. It is the way God refreshes us and recharges us. Working when we should be sleeping is refusing to be blessed by a gift from God.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22–23 (ESV)

God gives us a fresh day for a reason. The rest of a good night's sleep is part of the way God restores us. We can choose to ignore sleep all we want, but we will not be productive without sleep. We will only become stressed, irritable and sick without sleep. God didn't just build us to work. He built us for a rhythm of work and rest, making rest essential for work.

We need a weekly day of rest.

God didn't just design us for a time of rest each day, but he also designed us to need a day of rest each week. Around church you hear this day called the Sabbath.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus 20:11

Let me demystify the Sabbath. The word Sabbath simply means stop. If we lived in ancient Israel and they had stop signs, every one of them would say Sabbath in big letters. Sabbath means to stop what you are doing. Sabbath means that once a week we stop our work to get a break.

The word holy simply means different or set apart. If you have a room full of ladies with black hair and a blonde walks in the room, which one is holy? It is the blonde. She is different from the rest. She is holy.

A holy Sabbath day means a day when you stop work and do something different with that day. One of the purposes of a holy Sabbath is so we would get rest from our work and refreshment for our work by taking a break and doing something different. Just as essential as a night of sleep is a weekly day of rest.

Did you know that even God rested and was refreshed on the Sabbath day?

It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. Exodus 31:17 (ESV)

If God was refreshed after his work by the Sabbath day, what makes us think we don't think a weekly day of rest and refreshment? If we ignore this day, and work 24/7, we do this to our own peril. If we ignore a day of rest, all we do is eat into our work day by littering it with little periods of rest as we scan Youtube and Facebook on work hours.

There were two experiments conducted in history to abolish the seven-day week. One was done in Russia and the other in France during their communistic

revolution. Both failed miserably. Why? We are built in the image of God and God designed us to need a holy stop day every seven days. If we ignore it, we ignore it to our own peril.

In the Old Testament, it was a boss' job to make sure his employees took a day of rest.

...but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. Exodus 20:10 (ESV)

Some of you may have noticed that Chick-fil-A is not open on Sunday. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A, believed it was his responsibility to give his employees a day for physical rest and spiritual renewal each week. Since Sunday is the natural day of worship, the business closed on Sundays so their workers wouldn't feel pressured to work and skip church.

We need extended times of rest.

We don't just need daily rest and weekly rest but we need times of extended rest.

This week I was thinking on the Jewish holiday calendar and it struck me how much mandatory vacation the Jews were to take. These were not arbitrary vacations, but they were religious holidays where they were refreshed in God spiritually while they rested from their work physically.

Listen to some of their holidays. They had new moon holidays, Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Unleavened bread, the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Atonement, the Feast of Purim and the Feast of Dedication (which we know as Hanukkah). We thought we were really kicking it because we had the 4th of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas. They had a lot of seasons of extended physical and spiritual refreshment.

Incidentally, they didn't end up impoverished because they took too much time for rest and worship. On the contrary, they were blessed by God for observing the Sabbaths and religious holidays. The rest that appeared to ruin their productivity actually was honored by God so it increased their productivity.

“ But if you listen to me, declares the Lord, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And this city shall be inhabited forever. . . But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter by the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.’ ” Jeremiah 17:24–27 (ESV)

When ancient Israel interacted with the surrounding cultures in the ancient world, those cultures did not observe the Sabbath as a stop day. It was only the

Jews that chose to shut things down one day a week. This made them look weird. It felt weird. These were the guys that rested while everybody else worked. Look how Nehemiah reminded the Jews that they didn't need to fit into the 24/7 cultures around them.

In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Nehemiah 13:15–17 (ESV)

Nehemiah was furious when the business entrepreneurs, and foreigners living among them, wanted to open up Wal-Mart on the Sabbath day. When people should be resting from work and having a refreshing day, they were buying and selling because they treated the Sabbath just like every other day. The refusal to rest was what sent them into exile.

I know the first thought some of us have is we would love to rest but our culture won't allow it. We live in a 24/7 culture that doesn't allow rest. The truth is we live in a culture that allows more than many others in world history. We have a two-day weekend. When our founding fathers were working on our calendar they couldn't decide if we should rest on Sunday, which is the Christian day of rest and worship or rest on Saturday, which is the Jewish day of rest and worship. They decided to give us both days off. Some days I want to shake the hand of the guy who had that bright idea. It was a good one. I like having both days off. Historically, most nations do not offer their people a two-day weekend. This is a wonderful gift. We have more time to rest than we realize. The problem is we don't use that time for rest.

The biblical basis for an extended time of rest is not just from the Old Testament. We see it in the leadership of Jesus with his disciples. Jesus took his disciples on a vacation when things became too busy so his disciples didn't burn out.

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Mark 6:30–32 (ESV)

Notice Jesus didn't say, "Let's grab a Red-Bull and keep going." He said, "Let's get away to a place with no cell phone coverage and get some rest." That is the definition of a desolate place.

We need rest to be restored spiritually.

...because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Ezekiel 20:16 (ESV)

In Nehemiah's day, the way you knew people were walking away from God is they didn't want to keep the Sabbath to not just be restored physically, but be realigned spiritually.

When I was young, I drove an old Camaro. I bought it with a salvage title. It was rebuilt after a wreck so things were never quite right. One of its problems was the wheels were always going out of alignment. Every potholes, road rumble or even rolling over a dime would put the front end out of alignment so the vehicle wanted to steer off the road. It seems like I needed an alignment with each oil change.



In many ways our spirits are like my old Camaro. A work week with pressure from the boss, being cussed out during our commute in traffic, a constant stream of off-color jokes at the lunch table at work and a nasty fight with our spouses start to add up and knock our hearts out of alignment with Christ. Add to that an evening where we try to be refreshed by television, movies and music that are ungodly and it doesn't take long for us to end up out of spiritual alignment. We need regular times of spiritual realignment to stay on the road of following Jesus.

We need daily time in prayer and Bible reading for spiritual alignment, just like we need daily rest. We need weekly time in corporate worship and Bible study to recalibrate ourselves just like we need a day off from work each week. We need holidays that are extended times of spiritual renewal, not just an extended break from our work. This is why we need Christmas not just as a time to break from our work but as a time for refocus on the coming of Jesus. We need Easter not just as a time to rest physically and to gather with family to make good memories but as a time to be realigned spiritually as we reflect on what the empty tomb means for our lives.

What if I can't afford time to rest and realignment my heart?

Taking time to rest, is always a test. It is a test of trust. Do you believe you are the one that drives the success of your business or do you believe God is the one that drives the success of your business? If you are the one behind your success, you can't afford to rest. If God is the one behind the success of your business he will make it possible for you to take time to rest physically and take time to be realigned spiritually. If God says rest and realignment is so important we must take it, that means we can't afford to not take it.

In the book of Exodus, the Israelites learned God makes it possible for his people to take time for rest and spiritual renewal.

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, "This

is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' ” So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.” On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day. Exodus 16:22–30 (ESV)

In Exodus 16, we read the story of God giving manna. God told the people of Israel to gather twice as much manna on the day before the Sabbath because on the Sabbath God wasn't sending manna. He wanted them to rest from work. Not only did God provide extra manna on Friday, enough that would take them through the weekend, but he supernaturally sustained the double Friday manna through the Sabbath and kept it from rotting. All other days of the week extra manna became worm-infested if they keep it until morning. Do you see how God supernaturally provided the ability for them to take a break? Who was in charge of putting food on the table? Were they in charge or was God in charge?

On paper, it doesn't work to take a rest, but God made it work. Some of you think your job is too busy to take time for rest physically or realignment spiritually or to take a vacation. The reason you think you can't take this time is because you think you are in charge of your success at work. You don't trust God to take care of your business in your absence. Obeying God's commands to rest and have time for spiritual refreshment takes faith. It takes trusting that God will provide. Rest is always a test. Some of us know our action step. We need to schedule times for rest and realignment, trusting God that he will provide for our work.

How does Jesus change the rest?

There is a lot we could talk about when it comes to Jesus and the Sabbath. We could talk about how Jesus changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, which is why Christians worship on Sunday as we celebrate the day of Christ's resurrection and look forward to the new creation instead of looking back and remembering the old creation.

We could talk about how Jesus restored the Sabbath to its original purpose when he said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” He took the day of rest that had become a burden because religious leaders had added lists of rules and regulations of what you could and couldn't do on your rest day and Jesus stripped them away. Jesus said the purpose of the Sabbath is simple. It is a day that is a gift from God to you. It is a day of rest to refresh you, not burden you.

As Christians, the one thing we need to talk about with Jesus and the Sabbath is that Jesus is our Sabbath.

All other religions are about working. All other religions are about the work we do to earn God's favor. As Christians, Jesus earned God's favor for us, now we just rest in God's favor by faith. Because of Jesus, we simply rest in God's love, we don't have to earn God's love. Jesus is our Sabbath.

While I don't think many of us do this consciously, a refusal to rest from our work each day, each week and for special seasons of the year may be rooted in our disbelief of the gospel. We think we have to provide for ourselves. We don't want to rest from our work and thank God for how he provided for us.

How do I rest for work?

1. Disconnect from technology.

E-mail, text messages and the computer can kill any form of rest in our life. Set blackout times in your life to turn off the computer and smart phone. If it isn't every evening, set black out times a few evenings a week. Go for a walk without your iPhone. Actually turn off the cell phone and computer. Let them go completely dead. Get off the grid and read a book. Some of you are like me and all your books are on the computer. In that case turn on the do not disturb button or turn off all the notifications. I did that with my iPad. I turned off all notifications and beeps, bells and pops. If I don't do that, I can't Sabbath when I read. I can't take a rest without being interrupted.

Don't take your electronics to bed with you. In bed, give your spouse attention, not your cell phone or your laptop. People won't die if they have to wait until morning to hear from you. One of the most annoying parts of the cell phone is when you are with your spouse in bed enjoying the refreshment of being alone and your phone lights up the room as a trivial text message goes off. Take a rest. Get off the grid.

If you don't make these times, they will never happen. In today's world nobody is going to plan times of rest for you, you need to take leadership in your life and plan them for yourself or you will find yourself in a constant drip of work all day and night.

If you are a young adult, set times when you can get away from your phone to pray and read your Bible.

When you go on vacation, take a real vacation, not a working vacation. It will be hard for you but it is good for you.

2. Take a day for rest.

While the typical Christian day of worship is Sunday, and I think that is the best day for rest and worship, I realize everyone can't take Sunday as their day of rest. The electricity needs to turn on. The police need to be on duty. Gas stations need to offer fuel.

If your day of physical rest and spiritual restoration can't be on Sunday, find a different day of the week for it and force yourself to observe it. Remember that a day of rest to enjoying God's goodness and thanking him for what he has done is part of the creation order. You can ignore it all you want but you will only end up bucking the way God built the universe. We are not machines. God designed us to need rest.

3. Take your vacation.

Twenty-five years ago we were told that technology would make our lives easier and we would work less. That was a mistake. Twenty-five years ago the average American worked 40 hours a week. Today, the average worker puts in closer to 50 hours a week. The only nation that works more hours each week than America is Japan.

Most of us refuse to stop and take our vacations. Let me do a quick poll. Raise your hand if you took all of your vacation time last year? Most of us didn't take our time to rest.

4. Manage work so you are not working on the weekend.

Sometimes our 24/7 work-world teaches us to not manage our time. We don't get our work done in a timely manner during the week because we know we will have to work on the weekend anyway. Sometimes this is unavoidable because of a crisis. Many times this is just an issue of better self discipline and time management to protect our times of rest with our family. Manage your time well and get your work done before the weekend so you can actually enjoy some rest.

5. Have a plan for your day of rest.

I am guilty of this. On my day off, I often have no plans beyond staring at a blank wall and listening to my heart beat. That may be refreshing for the first 30 minutes of my day but not making plans with my family doesn't give me, or them, anything to look forward to on our day of rest. We don't make the day holy, different, something we look forward to enjoying.

6. Give mom a break from the kitchen.

Exodus 35:3 gave the Israelites a strange-sounding Sabbath observance. They were not to kindle a fire on that day. That simply means the Sabbath was a day when mom didn't have to cook. She was given a break from her work in the kitchen. (Right now every mother loves this message.) I don't know how this will work out in your life. Maybe Sunday is leftover day so mom doesn't have to cook. Maybe Sunday you order pizza. You will have to figure it out for your family but mom deserves a holy Sabbath day too.

Conclusion

My friends, we live in a 24/7 world where, especially with our electronics gadgets, we never take a break from work. God created us to need rest. We need a rest from work each day, each week and for extended times during the

year. Those rests are not just times when we need to rejuvenate physically but they are also times when we need to be realigned spiritually. When we don't think we can take time for rest and realignment we need to remember who is in charge of the success of our business. It is not ourselves, but it is God. Just like the ancient Israelites were most successful in their business and in their walk with God when they observed their days and times of rest, we will also be most successful in our lives and in our walk with God when we observe our days and times of rest physically and spiritually. Remember who is in charge of the success of your business. It is not you. It is God.

This week I want us to plan and take our times for rest. As you do, remember we are not planning rest from work. We are planning rest for work. Rest is essential for work.

What Is Common Grace For The Common Good?

June 28, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. If you are new, it is great to have you worshiping with us. We are in a series called Work Matters To God. Before we jump into our study, let me lay out the rest of the summer's teaching so you know what to expect.

Next week, we will look at what the Bible says about productivity at work. There are many books on how to be productive, like David Allen's Getting Things Done and Matt Perman's What's Best Next? We thought it would be good to see what the Bible has to say on the subject.

The following week we will finish the series by answering the questions you submitted on integrating our faith to our work.

After that I have a little vacation. We aren't going anywhere. It will be a staycation. It will be a good break for the family. When I return we will have a short series answering some crucial questions about sex in the media. We will look at "What does the Bible say about premarital sex?" and "What does the Bible say about homosexuality?" That took on new importance after last week's supreme court decision legalizing homosexual marriage. Finally, we will look at "What does the Bible say about transgender?" We could subtitle that, "What would God say to Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner?" My goal in those messages is not to demean anyone but to teach us from the Bible. I want us to know how to think biblically and how to honor Christ and love others when we talk about those questions with our friends and neighbors. These are very important topics in our culture.

After that it will be fall. As we get our feet on the ground after the busy summer, we will begin a verse-by-verse study of the book of Genesis. That series will bring us through most of next year.

We aren't there yet. Today, we are on the topic of work. Let's jump into this morning's study. This morning I will talk about something I haven't talked about of the last eight years. It is something you don't usually hear from the pulpit, but it is essential to understand if we are going to be a church on mission to reach our community. Let me introduce the topic.

Do you ever find yourself jealous of others' success? Maybe you are a student trying to follow Christ. You try your best in school but you are, and will always be, just an average student. On the athletic field you have average athletic ability. That wouldn't get under your skin too much if it wasn't for others in your class that seem too gifted. They party on Friday night. They eat the wrong food. They don't study hard but they always get an "A". On the athletic field they are amazing. The coach calls them naturals. They are far from God. They have no interest in Christ. You tell God this is unfair. You try to honor God

but are average. They have no interest in God and are gifted. How do you explain it?

Another way to look at it is from the business world. Maybe you are a Christian business man trying to honor Christ. You give generously and sacrificially to your church. You are good at what you do. When it comes time for a promotion, they don't give you the promotion. You get passed over. They give it to somebody of equal talent to yourself but they don't love Christ. They are a virtual pagan. Why would God gift someone far from him with a promotion instead of you. It doesn't feel fair. How do you explain it?

Another way to look at this is from a completely different angle. Imagine you find yourself in need of a critical life-saving operation. There are two doctors available to you in the hospital that can perform the surgery. One is a Christian doctor of good, but not noteworthy, skill. The other is a world renowned surgeon that specializes in the operation you need. The problem is that this surgeon is a Muslim. Which doctor do you choose? The one with world renowned skill or the one that aligns with your faith?

To answer these questions we need to understand something in the Bible seldom discussed from the pulpit. It is called God's common grace. We need to understand how God uses his common grace for the common good of society. To help us understand common grace we need to define it. I want to define it next to saving grace because common grace and saving grace are both from God, but they are different.

What is common grace?

- *Common grace is God's unmerited favor extended to all people made in the image of the triune God regardless of their eternal destiny.*

The word common means it is something given to all people and not restricted to Christians. God is incredibly kind to all kinds of people in all kinds of cultures, even people that are very far from him.

- *Saving grace only comes through Jesus and it is the only way to have a restored relationship with God.*

Saving grace is when God brings us to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit makes the good news of Jesus Christ click in our hearts. We see our sin. We realize our complete inability to save ourselves from our sin and our need for complete dependence upon God's grace through Jesus to save us from our sin and restore us to a right relationship with God. The ability to see your sin, see your need for Jesus and trust in Jesus is a supernatural gift of God. It is God's saving grace. In our salvation, God gets all the credit.

Common grace is different. It doesn't save any but it means God is incredibly kind to all people, even people far from him. He gifts people in the world like a farmer scatters his seed. Let me show you how the Bible describes common grace.

1. Common grace is God's kindness shown to everything he made.

The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. Psalm 145:9 (ESV)

As sinners we deserve nothing but immediate eternity in hell. God is kind and compassionate. He has restrained his hand of judgment to be kind and to give people a chance to repent. Not only is he kind to us by giving us more time to repent but he blesses us by giving us health, life, strength, work and families even when we haven't repented. God is incredibly kind to everyone and everything when we deserve destruction and condemnation.

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. Psalm 145:15–16 (ESV)

It is God's common grace that provides food for the birds. He provides sun and rain for the crops. He provides not too much rain to drown the crops and not too little rain to wither the crops. He provides warmth, heat and light. He provides health, life and strength. God's common grace is what gives enough sun to grow the grain and enough cloudy days to not wilt the grain.

The beautiful days of sunshine everyone gets to enjoy at this time of year all come from God's common grace upon his creation. It is not just Christians that enjoy these beautiful days. Health, life, beauty, success, work and freedom are all gifts of God's common grace. Everybody, regardless of their eternal destinies, gets to enjoy them.

2. Common grace is the universal recognition of God's existence.

For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you... Acts 17:23 (ESV)

Two weeks ago, when I was traveling to California, I went to board my plane in Sioux Falls, and the agent at the gate informed us the flight was overbooked. They asked for five of us to take a later flight. To compensate us for our inconvenience they would give up a few hundred dollars in Delta ticket vouchers. Nobody wanted to take the vouchers so he started raising the size of the offer. When he finally got up to \$1,300 in free airline tickets I decided this was a free vacation I wanted. This was an easy way to take my honey on vacation this winter.

Why was my flight overbooked? Apparently the archery world championships were held in Yankton. The teams from 51 countries were flying out of the tiny Sioux Falls airport so the place was packed and most flights were overbooked.

A few hours later I was waiting for my next flight. I was the odd man out because I was not wearing a jacket with a country name sewn between the shoulders. Guess what happened? The plane was overbooked. They started offering airline vouchers to take a later flight. The problem was this agent was

not as generous. She got stuck at \$800. Having learned from my earlier flight that \$1,300 was the maximum Delta airlines was allowed to offer I couldn't resist. When the ticket agent was desperate I went to the counter and offered to take a later flight if she would give me another \$1,300 in free airline tickets. It felt like "Let's make a deal." She went for it. I know my wife would be proud, because now I had \$2,600 in airline tickets.

The catch was that to take a later flight I needed to take that flight out of Minneapolis. I needed to drive a rental car from Sioux Falls to Minneapolis. The U.S. archery coach and a Canadian team competitor were also bumped off the flight and needed to take flights from Minneapolis so they rode in the car with me.

This wasn't the way I planned my day but now I had four hours to learn about archery from some of the best archers in the world and a chance to talk about Jesus with people that didn't begin their day expecting to hear about him.

As I drove I prayed about a lead-in line to begin a Christ conversation. I decided to casually ask them if they went to church. One guy immediately began telling me about his church. No worries with this guy. He knew Jesus. The other guy came right out and told me he was an atheist. I then knew one of the reasons God gave me this unplanned diversion.

I began praying for a way to bring Christ into that conversation. Here is the line I chose. I asked him if he was an atheist or an agnostic. He didn't know the difference so I explained it to him. An atheist says there is no God. The entire world came from absolutely nothing. It ordered itself from nothing. It will eventually become nothing. There is no meaning. There is no such thing as truth other than what we define. There is no such thing as absolute right or wrong. True atheism is a hard position to hold. An agnostic believes there is a God because somebody created this planet, ordered this planet and put everything on this planet. An agnostic believes there is a God but we simply don't know him. Like I suspected, my new friend claimed he was an agnostic, not an atheist. The reason he changed was because of God's common grace. With God's common grace stamped on the heart of everyone comes the knowledge that God exists. Everyone looks at creation and the heavens declare the glory of God. There is this common ground of God's existence that by common grace God has stamped on all consciences.

This recognition of God is not enough to save us. It is only enough to condemn us. It was this common ground of God's existence that Paul appealed to in Athens and it was the common ground of God's existence that I appealed to on that car ride. Like Paul, I simply said, "Let me tell you the rest of the story about the God you know exists and about his son, Jesus."

3. Common grace is a universal consciousness of sin.

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves ... They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. Romans 2:14–15 (ESV)

The sense of guilt for sin that everyone experiences is a gift of God's common grace. People do not need to read the Bible to know murder is wrong. By God's common grace, consciousness of sin is stamped upon all psyches. Guilt for sin is also part of God's common grace. Guilt for sin is what helps restrain the spread of sin. Imagine what this world would be like if nobody felt guilty for sin. By God's common grace everyone feels guilty.

4. Common grace is the universal blessing of enjoying God's creation.

Common grace is God letting his creation bless even unjust people.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
Matthew 5:44–45 (ESV)

God doesn't just give a good harvest to Christian farmers. Through God's common grace he is even kind to godless farmers. Many times he even gives farmers far from God a good harvest. When a Christian farmer has a good harvest, he worships God and credits God for the good harvest. When a farmer that is far from God has a good harvest, he worships either himself or mother nature. The truth is that God was behind the good harvest and the reason he gave the good harvest to the farmer far from God was out of his common grace to the farmer that doesn't deserve it.

5. Common grace is scientific discoveries.

The Bible says any advancement in farming and improvement in agriculture doesn't come from the ingenuity of the farmer. It comes from God as a gift of his common grace upon the farmer. Look how Isaiah says all scientific discoveries in sowing and harvesting are from God.

Give ear, and hear my voice; give attention, and hear my speech. Does he who plows for sowing plow continually? Does he continually open and harrow his ground? When he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, sow cumin, and put in wheat in rows and barley in its proper place, and emmer as the border? For he is rightly instructed; his God teaches him. Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge, nor is a cart wheel rolled over cumin, but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod. Does one crush grain for bread? No, he does not thresh it forever; when he drives his cart wheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it. This also comes from the Lord of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. Isaiah 28:23–29 (ESV)

Everything a farmer learns about how to plant and how to harvest is not from his own ingenuity but it is a gift of God's common grace and kindness to the farmer for the common good of all.

I want us to notice that farming is only an example. All human culture ultimately follows the same pattern as farming. Every advancement in medicine came about as a gift of God's common grace upon humanity. Every invention

that makes work better and our lives better is a gift from God, and it came about as a result of God's common grace for the common good of humanity.

6. Common grace is beauty and artistic gifts.

Every beautiful work of art is ultimately from God's common grace upon unredeemed and fallen humanity. Every beautiful piece of music and every piece of artwork has its origins in God's common grace upon humanity.

The Lord said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze..." Exodus 31:1-4 (ESV)

Artistic skills come as a gift from God. God gives them as a way to bless society, to bless people and to ultimately bless us.

7. Common grace is every good gift given by God to his creation.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. James 1:17 (ESV)

Knowing that God intentionally gifts people, even fallen people that don't care about him, to bless the world and to bless others is very important. It completely changes the way we think about life.

How does common grace change the way I think?

1. Understanding common grace moves me out of my little Christian enclave.

There is a trend in the American church to cut out of our lives people that don't know Jesus. We think we should only go to Christian doctors, Christian lawyers and Christian counselors. It is easy to start thinking we can only appreciate overtly Christian art and only value overtly Christian music. What happens is Christians start to extract themselves from society. They don't realize that God intentionally blesses people far from him with his common grace to bless us.

There is a healthy tension in this. For example, while it is great to have a Christian doctor, just because a doctor is a Christian doctor, that doesn't mean they are the right doctor or the best doctor for your needs. God, in his common grace, may give a Muslim doctor greater skill than a Christian doctor. You may have a medical complication where the best surgeon is a man or woman far from Jesus. Even though the Muslim doctor doesn't know God is the one who gave him his skill to bless society, you know that. You give God the credit for his common grace kindness. The Muslim doctor doesn't know God's saving grace through Jesus but he is a beneficiary of God's common grace to bless society. The reason God gives these common grace gifts to those far from God is it forces us out of our little Christian enclave so we build relationships with people that need to hear the gospel because we need to be blessed through their

common grace gifts. If we don't recognize God's common grace given to all people, we will live in a Christian bubble and we won't be a light in our world. We won't value God's gifting of people far from him.

Early in our marriage Cindy and I disconnected cable TV to save money. We were told about an all-Christian satellite TV television network. The price was modest compared to cable and the advertising looked good so we thought we would give it a try. It turned out to be a poor choice. Most of the channels were poor teaching televangelists just asking for money. Some programs were good but many were cheesy and poorly done. While the hearts of the producers were good, they were not gifted with the skills needed to have a good production.

While not all programs on cable are wholesome, I missed being blessed by the good programs on the History Channel and on the Discovery Channel and National Geographic. Those channels are not Christian channels, but God-gifted producers far from God produce good quality programming. Because of God's common grace I don't need to just look at the all-Christian satellite TV. I can watch the wholesome programs on cable and give God the glory for gifting people far from God to come up with decent quality productions. Of course there is a lot that is not wholesome, but there are still some decent programs I can enjoy that do not come from an all-Christian perspective.

A great example of allowing yourself to be blessed by God's common grace given to people far from God happened when Israel was taken into exile in Babylon. Babylon was a godless city. The Bible describes Babylon as the poster child for the fallen wicked cities of the world. Look how Revelation describes Babylon.

And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." Revelation 17:5 (ESV)

And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast." Revelation 18:2 (ESV)

Imagine what the Jews felt like when they were moved into a section of that really wicked city. They wanted to extract themselves from society. They wanted to only use Jewish doctors, Jewish lawyers and buy clothes from Jewish stores. They wanted to live in a little cultural enclave. That isn't what God told them to do.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Jeremiah 29:4-7 (ESV)

God wanted them to settle down and get involved in the life of the city. Appreciate the common grace God had given to these godless people. Pray for them. Help the city flourish. Be a light to them not by running away from them but by working with them and appreciating God's common grace to them, and as the Jews built bridges into the godless society they were to tell people about the truth God of the universe.

This is an essential paradigm for CrossWinds church. Spirit Lake is not as godless a city as Babylon. Our job is not to build a little cultural enclave of Christians on the corner of 28th and Erie. We are to pray for the good of our city. We are to work for the welfare of our city. We are to recognize and appreciate God's common grace given to all people in our city, not just the Christians. We are to participate in the life of the city so we build bridges of influences. By not giving all his common grace to Christians but by scattering it throughout our city we are forced to integrate with our city.

2. Understanding common grace helps me value work that is not overtly done in Jesus' name.

If we don't understand common grace we think the only work God values is overtly Christian work. If you are an artist, it is tempting to think the only work God values is artwork that has Jesus as its theme. While Jesus is always the best theme, that doesn't mean God doesn't value well-done artwork. If you are an engineer designing motorcycles, you don't have to design a motorcycle with a cross etched into its frame for God to value your design work. If you are a teacher, you don't need to teach in a Christian school to have your work count for God. If you work for a company, you don't need to work for a Christian company to have your work be pleasing to Jesus. Knowing that all scientific discoveries and all artwork is a gift of God's common grace helps us value all the good work that blesses society that is not done overtly in Jesus' name.

If we don't understand common grace we can end up with a judgmental attitude toward good work that is done by people far from God. We undervalue their work because it is not expressly Christian.

As I was preparing this message I found myself appreciating my laptop. From what I know about the people running the company that made my laptop, while they are very gifted by God's common grace, they are also very far from God. I can appreciate my laptop. I can be blessed by their good work even though it wasn't specifically Christian work. I can give God credit for the laptop because he is behind every scientific discovery, and I can use my laptop as an opportunity to enter into conversations about Jesus. I don't have to not buy the laptop and stay in a little Christian enclave because it wasn't made by an expressly Christian company.

3. Understanding common grace helps me value God's gifts from other cultures.

If we don't understand that God often shows kindness to people far from God, we will undervalue what God has done out of kindness to other cultures.

How many of you like Chinese food? Anybody like Mongolian BBQ? I appreciate the culinary gifts given by God's common grace to those cultures. I can value those common grace recipes because there is good in them that blesses society. Does the chef in the Chinese restaurant need to hear about Jesus? Of course! The best way for me to tell him about Jesus is to go to the Chinese restaurant, enjoy a good plate of General Tso's Chicken, tell the chef how much I appreciate his cooking and use that as an opportunity to tell him about Jesus. How can I tell him about Jesus if I won't eat the good Chinese food he makes?

Understanding God's common grace for the common good to other cultures is essential to sharing Jesus in other cultures. It moves us into society and keeps us from becoming a little subculture.

4. Understanding common grace explains why non-Christians can exceed Christians in morality and wisdom.

By God's common grace there are some really nice people out there that don't know Jesus. They are not saved because nobody is saved apart from God's saving grace through Jesus, but by God's common grace everyone is not as evil as they could be. Some people, by God's common grace, are really nice folks.

A few years ago I found myself in a conversation with a woman about her Muslim father. She said her Muslim father was the most moral, kind and loving person she ever met. She went on to describe how he gave to the poor and loved his family. She claimed he was kinder and gentler than any Christian she met. She was sure he was going to heaven.

She was probably right about him being kind and gentle but she was wrong about the heaven part. The Bible says nobody is going to heaven apart from God's saving grace in Jesus. While some of us are more sinful than others, all of us are sufficiently sinful to be separated from God and suffer eternal never-ending punishment for eternity.

Some people, by God's common grace are just nice people even though they are far from God. The reason he was so kind, giving and moral is God's common grace. Imagine what his character would be like if he also experienced God's saving grace!

We are to be a people that image God by extending common grace to those that don't deserve it.

Now that we understand that our God is a God of common grace and he loves to bless people in practical ways, not just with saving grace, it should change the way we live and work. Just as God extends his common grace to people who are undeserving, God calls us to extend common grace to people who are far from him, just like he has.

The reason why this is so important is because *the root of saving grace grows best in the fertile soil of common grace*. When we show undeserved

kindness to people that are far from God and we value their well-done work, it opens the door for people to hear about the saving grace of God through Jesus.

One of the best places to extend undeserved common grace is in the workplace because that is where we rub shoulders with the most people. It is in the workplace we can graciously and joyfully serve patients, customers, fellow employees and the students we teach. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Move beyond tolerance to care.

Most workplaces have a tolerance initiative encouraging employees to be tolerant of people from different cultures and races. Move beyond tolerance and extend grace to people that are different from us, especially people that are far from God. Value their work. Value the gifts God gave them out of his common grace. We don't need to agree with or applaud the sin in their lives. We get to value God's common grace that is given to their lives.

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but **always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.** 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

It is in the fertile soil of common grace that the message of saving grace takes root.

2. Show compassion to the weak and outcasts.

A great example of common grace in the workplace comes from the story of Ruth. You can read her story in the book of Ruth in your Bible. She is a Moabite woman that went back to Israel with Naomi, her mother-in-law. Naomi and Ruth went back dirt poor. Ruth ended up gathering leftover grain in the field of a man named Boaz after the harvesters went through. That was how the poor found food. They picked up the leftovers. Ruth was poor. Ruth was a foreigner. She had everything against her. Boaz extended common grace to her. He made sure she had water to drink. He made sure there was a little left for her to provide for herself and her mother-in-law. Boaz showed common grace to a poor foreign woman living among them.

In our town we have poor foreigners living among us. They work in our fields. They work in our construction industry. It is easy to ignore them but God tells us to show common grace to them. God has given them common grace, we are also to extend common grace.

It is in the fertile soil of common grace that the message of saving grace takes root.

3. Affirm good work done by people far from God.

Affirm work that is well-done even when it comes from people that are hostile to Jesus. Use it as common ground. Imagine there is an art show in Spirit Lake. In the art show one of the paintings is done by a homosexual. How do we handle this to glorify God? We can affirm the well-done artwork done by a homosexual because his or her gifts are from God. We can affirm his or her well-done work without affirming the lifestyle.

Remember that it is in the fertile soil of common grace that the roots of saving grace grow best.

4. Be kind and merciful to my enemies.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:35–36 (ESV)

Just as God is kind and extends common grace to his enemies, we are to be kind and extend common grace toward our enemies. When people hurt us it is easy to let a root of bitterness grow in our heart. It is easy to dream of revenge. We are to be like God and extend grace to those who don't deserve it.

It is in the fertile soil of extending common grace that the roots of saving grace take root.

5. Pray for my boss.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 1 Timothy 2:1–2 (ESV)

Pray for your boss, even if they are far from God. Pray for our president no matter where he is in his relationship with Jesus. Praying for our boss at work and the leadership of our country, no matter where they are at with Jesus is showing common grace toward them. We don't just work for a boss, by common grace we pray for our bosses.

It is in the fertile soil of God's common grace that the roots of saving grace grow best.

Conclusion

This week let our new understanding of God's common grace change the way we work. Know that God gifts people far from him to bless society. God extends common grace for the common good. Let that move us out of our Christian sub-culture to appreciate God's gifts given to others in society. Let it help us build bridges into our world so that we can be an influence for Jesus in our culture. That was the way God directed his people when they lived in Babylon. It is the way God directs us as we live in Spirit Lake and surrounding communities.

Remember that the roots of saving grace grow best in the fertile soil of common grace that we extend with our lives.

What does the Bible say about productivity?

July 5, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. If you are a visitor, it is great having you on this July 4 weekend.

We are in a series called “Work Matters To God.” In this is a series we are looking at what the Bible says about our everyday work. Today, we finish the pre-planned teaching section in the series. Throughout the series we provided questions cards. They are a place for you to share your questions on how your faith integrates with the everyday work challenges you face. Many of you shared great questions. Some of those we answered during the series but the remainder we will answer next week as we close the series. It will be a fun weekend.

This morning we have what might appear to be the least biblical of the messages in this series. We are talking about what the Bible teaches about productivity. That sounds like a business issue, not a church issue. There are many business books on productivity. There is David Allen’s Getting Things Done. Stephen Covey and Peter Drucker wrote books on business productivity. Do any of their productivity techniques belong in church? This morning we will discover the answer.

This message is in two parts. In the first half, we will see what the Bible says about productivity. In the second half will be very tactical. I will share some of the productivity strategies I learned over the years and we use around the office. I am still learning in this area and have a long way to go. After the service, some of you can help me learn how to be more productive but for some of you, the basics I share will be helpful. Let’s jump in!

Why study productivity in church?

A lack of productivity is not just a business problem, it is a spiritual problem. Let me say that again. A lack of productivity is not just a business problem, it is a spiritual problem. Let me show you why.

1. God created us for productivity.

...And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:28 (ESV)

This is the charter God gave the human race. The heart of the charter is human beings are to be productive. We are to create culture on the earth. Adam and Eve, along with their posterity, should take the resources of the earth and produce something with them. God told us to develop the earth. God doesn’t want the earth to remain an untouched wilderness forever. When God finished creating the earth in six days he said it was very good; that meant the earth was complete and now ready for us to make something good with it. When the earth

was complete, it was like a box of Legos. All the necessary pieces were in the box for us to begin building with them. God told us to be productive.

2. We will give an account to God for the productivity of our lives.

Matthew 25 gives us the parable of the talents. I will not read it but just briefly sketch it. In the parable, the master invested his money with three servants. Two of the servants were productive and did something with what was given to them. They doubled the money the master put in their keeping. They were commended for using their gifts. The last servant didn't do anything with the money. He just buried it. He was more concerned with not losing it than with using it. For being unproductive, he was condemned. It is the same with us. God gave each of us talents, gifts, and the ability to work, to earn money, to bless our family and bless others. We have time, energy and opportunities. When Christ, our master, returns, the question will be, "Was I using his gifts or just worried about not losing his gifts? Was I productive with what God entrusted into my hands?" God wants us to live productive lives. An unproductive life is something God condemns.

We find the same concern in Romans 14 when Paul talked about the day we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;... so then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Romans 14:10, 12 (ESV)

We can do many things with our lives, but all that matters is what Jesus thinks about our lives when we stand before him. When we stand before Christ, we will give an account of our lives. Part of that accounting will be, "Were we productive?" Did we make use of the skills, gifts and opportunities that God gave us, or did we waste our lives? The more productive we can be for Jesus, the better off we will be on that day.

3. God commands us to use our time wisely.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:15-17 (ESV)

This is the core New Testament passage on productivity. We are not to breeze through life taking whatever comes our way. We are to "look carefully" at our opportunities and think about how we live. We are to make sure we are making the most of the time God gives us. There a lot of things we can do with our time that are just foolish and wasteful. Too much television can be a wasteful use of our time. Too much Snapchat is also a waste of our time. Don't be a fool. Think about what we are doing with our lives and use the time in our lives wisely.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:12 (ESV)

Moses' prayer was that we think about our lives as a limited amount of time. He prayed we don't just burn our time but become wise in how we use our

limited time. Before we know it, the currency of our lives will be spent. Think carefully about what we do with our time.

4. God wants us to do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, at all the times we can, to all the people we can as long as we can.

That is a quote from John Wesley, and it is a good quote. God's desire is that we live a life of good works. God wants us to be as productive as possible when it comes to doing good works for other people. That is the MO of a Christian. People of the street should know us as the good works people.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

As Christians, we don't need to work on good works to save ourselves. Jesus did all the good works needed to save us. Our job is not to focus on saving ourselves but to focus on loving people. God puts all kinds of opportunities in our paths each week for us to love other people.

...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14 (ESV)

We aren't to be people that do just a few good works but we are to be zealous for good works. Zealous comes from the word zealot. The zealots were the crazies of the day. They were nut jobs. They were totally-off-the-deep-end freaks. We are to be like them. We are to be the nut jobs for good works. We are to always go out of our ways to help people in any way we can at any time we can in any way we can. We look weird because we do far more good works for other people than is normal. God wants us to live an extremely productive life when it comes to good works.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:8 (ESV)

God's desire is that we live fruitful lives. We are to do all kinds of good work.

The more we look at it, it sounds like productivity is not just for the business world. It is something we should study in church.

God created us to be productive.

Our lives will be evaluated on their productivity.

God tells us to make wise use of our time so we live productive lives.

We are to be extremely productive and do all the good we can to all the people we can at all the times we can in all the ways we can.

Why is productivity difficult?

If you haven't noticed, productivity, especially in our modern world, is very difficult. What makes productivity so hard?

1. Life is filled with distractions.

There are more things to distract us than ever before. You sit down to pay the bills and before you get started we get a phone call, then a text message, then the doorbell rings. Then a pop-up comes across the screen telling you somebody commented on your Facebook post. You have to stop what you are doing to check on that. We live lives of constant interruptions so nothing gets completed. Can anybody relate?

2. Life is more complex than it used to be.

Only a few years ago, when men went to work, all they carried was a lunch box. Now we skip the lunch box and carry a cell phone, laptop, and a tablet because we work through lunch, we work at home and we work on the commute to work. There are now more laws to obey and online passwords to remember than ever before. There are a few of you out there that are foolish enough to have the same password for everything. If that is you, I recommend you change. However, if you have a different password for every online account, it is impossible to keep them straight. Life is so complex.

We used to be able to do the maintenance on our car's engine by ourselves in our own driveways. Then the engine became too difficult to work on so we needed to take it to the dealer for work. Then the engines became so complex that even the mechanics couldn't figure them out. Mechanics have to hook engines up to a computer to figure out a problem. Things are so complex that on our newest car you can't even change the oil yourself or at a Jiffy Lube. You need to take it to the dealer in Mankato just to get the oil changed. No wonder it is hard to get anything done.

3. We live in an era of knowledge work not task work.

Sociologists tell us the very nature of work has shifted. In the industrial era, tasks were generally self-evident. If you were a farmer, you simply followed the seasons. You plowed fields, you planted fields, you sprayed for weeds and bugs then brought out your combine in the fall to bring in the harvest. Tasks were straight-forward. That has changed.

We now live in an era of knowledge work, not of industrial work. Knowledge work means you not only have to do the work but you have to figure out what is the right work to do because you can't do all of it. There is just too much to do. In the industrial era, a job had closure. For example, you painted a house and when you finished painting a house the job was done. In the knowledge era, we receive 100 e-mails a day. We have to sort through them, figure out which ones to throw away, which ones to act on and which one to do something about a week or a month later. By the time we finish sorting our e-mail, another hundred come into our inbox. We are never done. In knowledge

work, which is about creating and utilizing knowledge, you need to be very self-directed. This makes productivity very difficult because there is too much information hitting us in a non-stop way through e-mail, text messages, snail mail, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and that is just to name a few. Once you sort it, you need to be productive with it.

You need to understand how the world has changed. In 2008, the web had 1 trillion pages. By 2013, the amount of information on the Internet was doubling every 72 hours. In 2010, there were 95 trillion e-mails sent a day. That is an average of 153 e-mails for every Internet user's mailbox a day. If you get fewer than 153 e-mails a day, be thankful you are below average. In 2010, there were 92 million tweets a day. There were also 2.5 billion photos uploaded a day to Facebook.⁸ That was 2010! The size of the web was more than doubling every 72 hours then. I can't even imagine what it is today.

While the Bible talks about the importance of making wise use of our time and living productive lives, just working harder and more efficiently can't solve the problem. There is too much to do. Sociologists tells us that to be successful we must figure out the right things to do, learning to discard the rest. Peter Drucker said it well. "There is nothing more inefficient than becoming efficient at doing the things that don't need to be done." The big problem of the knowledge-based work is discovering what the important things to do are, not just getting more work done. What is the answer to this problem? It is something you wouldn't expect. It makes this topic very appropriate to talk about in church.

Jesus is the answer to the problems of modern productivity.

Most of us do not think about Jesus as the solution to the problem of productivity, but the Bible tells us Jesus is the key to living a productive life on this earth. Let's start with the big picture and then tighten our focus.

1. Excluding God from my life leads to ultimate unproductivity.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? Luke 9:25 (ESV)

The ultimate in unproductiveness is being successful on earth but having it count for absolutely nothing in eternity. Any life on earth lived apart from God is completely unproductive, no matter how successful. The great example is Steve Jobs. He was one of the most successful men of the modern era, but as far as I know, he lived his life apart from Christ and all his earthly success counted for nothing in eternity as he will spend eternity apart from God's presence.

In an ultimate sense, he lived a completely unproductive life. Every one of us, no matter how successful we are in this world, lives an unproductive life apart from God.

⁸ Perman, M. A., Piper, J., & Perman, M. (2014). What's best next: how the gospel transforms the way you get things done. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2. Since sin is the cause of confusion and frustration at work, that makes Jesus the answer for productivity in our work.

In the book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve sinned, the earth was cursed.

...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. Genesis 3:17–18 (ESV)

When we read this, we typically think of the curse of sin just affecting manual labor. Farming become hard. Droughts and floods came on the earth. Weeds and bugs choked out productivity. Any kind of work with our hands is difficult.

When we move from the front of the Pentateuch and turn to Deuteronomy 28 at the end of the Pentateuch, we find an elaboration of the curse and we learn more ways that the curse of sin affects work. The curse of sin doesn't just affect manual labor but it affects mental labor. It affects our ability to think clearly and our ability to see what is and isn't important.

“The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me. Deuteronomy 28:20 (ESV)

The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind... Deuteronomy 28:28 (ESV)

Sin has not just tampered with the earth making it hard to get a crop but it has tampered with our minds, making it hard to get things done. I don't believe the blindness God talks about in Deuteronomy is physical blindness. I think this is talking about mental blindness. Because of sin, people will be blind to the obvious truth of things. Apart from the wisdom and sensitivity of the Holy Spirit, people can't see the truth. Sin leads people to do lots of unproductive work and lead useless lives.

Sin twists the mind so people think they are smart but in reality they are fools because sin has clouded their thinking. Paul brought us the same themes of Deuteronomy 28 in Romans 1.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ... For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. Romans 1:21–27 (ESV)

Sin clouds the mind ethically so people look at homosexuality and see absolutely nothing wrong with it. They see nothing abnormal about it. To those with the Holy Spirit, the twisted nature of homosexuality is clear but those blinded

by sin cannot see it. This is why there seems to be no connection with some people on this issue.

Since sin is the problem, the only solution to the problem of sin is Jesus. Jesus is the one that frees us from the bondage of our sin. He is the one who takes the blinders of sin off our eyes so we can see things for what they are in God's eyes. Jesus helps us to see what is a foolish unproductive use of our time. Jesus is the only one who can steer us through the multi-faceted input of modern life to live productive lives.

3. Productivity is understanding the will of the Lord and doing it.

...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Ephesians 5:10 (ESV)

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:17 (ESV)

As Christians, we are to take everything we need to do and want to do and bring it before God; then ask him to help us see what is fluff and what is his will for our lives. We need God to help us think through our schedule and our priorities. If we try to think things through on our own, we don't have the needed wisdom, because of the blindness of sin, to make the right choices.

This sounds trite. It isn't. Most of us start with a busy schedule filled with priorities that don't need to be done, then we ask God to bless it. The Bible tells Christians we should start each day with God. We bring before him all the things we want to do and need to do. We bring before him all the stuff of our schedule and ask him what is important. We ask God to help us organize and prioritize the schedule of our lives.

This is very important in the modern world because there is no way we can get everything done.

Let's shift gears and let me share some of the things I have learned about scheduling. Some of you may do this better, and I am certainly open to learn. I will be all ears after the sermon. For some of you, these basic productivity strategies will be helpful.

How do I structure my time for God-honoring productivity?

1. Begin by a daily time with God.

Some of us think this is just a cute Christian cliché. Remember what we just learned. This is essential for productivity in our work. We must get to know God to hear his desire for our lives. We do this by reading God's Word every day. As we spend a daily time with God, he changes the desires of our hearts to be the desires God has for us. He helps us think clearly about the options in front of us. He helps us see what we should do with our time and the things we shouldn't do with our time. It is our time with God when he shapes the desires of our heart to be the desires he has for our lives.

If we start the day off by just planning our schedule, it is backward. Start the day by spending time with God. Tell him you want to understand God's will

for your life today and you want to do it. You want to apply what Ephesians 5 told you do to.

The old saying is true. You are what you eat. If you eat Doritos and hot dogs, you will look like a plump hot dog and smell like rotten Doritos. If you spend your time looking at violent movies, you will learn violence. If you spend your time watching extramarital or premarital intimacy of your television, extramarital and premarital intimacy will become normal for you because that is what you are chewing on subconsciously.

This is why it is so important to spend time each day in God's Word. We need a clean input of truth or we will just follow the trends of the people around. Look what the Bible says about the importance of meditating on God's Word each day so we don't just follow the world around us.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:1–3 (ESV)

You want to live a productive life where you see the right things to do? Begin by spending time in God's Word every day. Steer clear of the counsel of sinners. Let God steer your heart. You will see sin. You will see distractions. You will see the unproductive wastes of time.

Your time with God is the anchor of your schedule. Let's call it 15-30 minutes in the morning for God's Word and prayer, just one chapter to read and reread, to think about before you begin building your day.

Here is how I structure my life after my time in God's Word.

2. List my roles.

What are the roles God gave you to play? I like to take a sheet of paper and write them across the top. For example, my primary roles are church, family and personal. Under my primary roles, I write the sub-roles I must fulfill in each area. At church I have three sub-roles. They are preaching, leading and relationships. In my family the sub-roles I must fill are being a husband, a father and a son. In my

personal life the sub-roles I must fulfill are physical exercise, staying fresh in my walk



with Christ and occasional fun. Once I have my primary roles and sub-roles listed across the top of a page, I draw lines down the paper, creating columns. In the columns I prayerfully talk to God about what should be my goals in those areas.

3. Write my goals.

Goals are things I need to accomplish in each role I must plan in my life. For instance, I was traveling recently and feeling sluggish. I remembered my goal was to stay physically fit. If I don't exercise, I get depressed. I feel sick. I am generally an irritable person. That is why I have a goal of staying physically fit.

In my family section, I have a goal of loving and romancing Cindy. My goal is to constantly remind her she is special. I also have a goal of spending time with each of my children.

What is important is that we begin our goal-writing time with God. Remember that we want our goals to be the goals God has for our lives. We want to be sensitive to what God wants for us, not what everyone else around us thinks should be the goals of our lives.

4. Write my actions (Specific, Measurable and Time-based)

This is moving from a general goal to a concrete plan of action to achieve the goal. One of my goals is to stay physically fit so I needed to make specific, measurable, time-based actions to support my goal. For instance, since I was traveling so much and not getting any cardio, my specific measurable time-based goal became to run 3 1/2 miles to and from McDonald's before breakfast on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. No I didn't stop and eat at McDonalds, I just ran to it.

	Church		Family			Personal			
	Preaching	Leading	Relationships	Husband	Father	Son	Physical	Spiritual	Professional
Goals →	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...
Actions →	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...

Do this with every role you have in your life. Prayerfully set your goals, listening to the Holy Spirit, then prayerfully write down the actions that will lead you to those goals. When I do this, I end up with a long list of goals and actions. Before I go any farther, I need to trim them down to size.

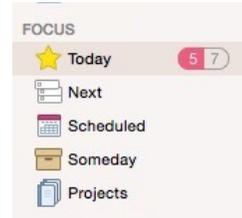
5. Eliminate actions foreign to my goals.

Ask God to help you eliminate actions that pull you off your goals. For me, at one time, I was going to write an app for the iPhone because I have computer programming experience. When I prayed about it, I felt it would be fun but it would pull me too far off my goal of being a pastor and honoring my family. I would spend time that should be church time or family time to work on an app,

which was something I could do but not something I should do. You will be surprised how many things we will choose to not do after you pray about it and listen to the Holy Spirit.

6. Defer and delay actions.

I have decent-sized lists of deferred actions. I use a program for organization called Things. I love that it has a *Someday* folder where it allows me to take actionable items and put them in a file that I don't have to look at all day but they aren't forgotten. Pastor Jordan uses a program called OmniFocus. I used to use it but it was too complex for me. He is a really smart guy so it works for him.



The things I haven't put in a someday folder but are not high priority I defer to a future date. I put a date on them in the future where they pop up and I can do something about them.

For example, I have an entire list of Easter ideas but I won't be reminded of them until six weeks before Easter.

I end up with a list that is trimmed by prayer. Some of it is just kept on file. Some of it has a date for the future. What is left are action steps I need to do something about. Now let's get out the calendar and get things done.

7. Calendarize my actions.

Take out your calendar and begin by creating anchors. We already talked about the most important anchor. That is a daily time with God, reading his Word, praying for my family, our country, work and our church. We also pray through our roles, goals and actions to make sure God is guiding us on what we should do each day. Here are other important anchors in the calendar we need to schedule.

- **Sleep** — Make sure you get adequate sleep. Force yourself to go to bed early. Force yourself to get up early. This sounds counterintuitive but most people will improve their efficiency by simply getting enough sleep. We are a sleep-deprived society. Set a wake time and a bed time that supports getting healthy sleep. Put them on your calendar.
- **Time with God** — Remember this is the most important part of your day. You can't prioritize your schedule and think about things the way God wants you to if you don't spend time reading the Bible and praying, letting God create and trim your goals and actions.
- **Physical exercise** — Make sure you schedule time for exercise. Put it in your schedule. You can't keep giving to others when you aren't healthy. Even if it is not much time, make time. Some people exercise first thing in the morning. I like to exercise first thing in the morning and for an hour over lunch. I learned that from reading a book on George Bush and how he crafted his schedule. He started his day early and exercised over lunch to get a de-stressing physical

break before a mentally demanding afternoon. It worked for him. It works for me.

- **Family Bible Study Night** — Plan one night a week to have a family Bible reading time. If your kids are young, they will probably let you to read them the Bible every night before bed. Take advantage of that opportunity. I would encourage the rest of us to simply anchor one night a week.
- **Date Night** — If you can anchor a date night, do it. That is a great investment in your marriage.

8. Create time zones that support my roles.

This may be something new for a few of you. I don't believe David Allen in recommending this in GTD. In your calendar, create windows of time when you work on a role or sub-role in your life. For instance, from 9-11:30 a.m. on Tuesday is our staff meeting. For me that is a zone blocked off for leadership-related church activity. Monday afternoon is blocked off for sermon research. Tuesday and Wednesday from 4-5 p.m. is the time I work on church relationships and take appointments. From 11:30 a.m.-noon is a time when I work on relationships and return phone calls, e-mails and texts. Rather than taking calls all day long I try to let them pile up and batch process them at one time. From 6:30-9 p.m. is often a family zone. What happens is I learned my zones and it helps guide my life so work doesn't get out of balance. Rather than procrastinating on returning phone calls, I hit 11:30 a.m.-noon knock them all off.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6 am							
7 am							
8 am							
9 am							
10 am							
11 am							
noon							
1 pm							
2 pm							
3 pm							
4 pm							
5 pm							
6 pm							
7 pm							
8 pm							
9 pm							
10 pm							

9. Avoid interruptions.

We live in a hyperconnected society where our phones and screens are constantly distracting us. If you have intense thought work, set aside long blocks of time where you won't be disturbed so you can get work done. When you finish that time zone, check and respond to all your sources of input in batches. One of the best ways to get these long blocks of uninterrupted time is to start early. The problem is people cannot think deeply when there are constant interruptions.

10. Plan yearly, weekly and daily.

I suggest we don't just take time on a daily basis but we take an extended time to think through things on a weekly, quarterly and yearly basis. This way we can set, and schedule, the big goals in our lives.

Conclusion

The key to productivity is not getting more done, it is listening to God so you do the right things. There is always too much to do. There are many things that easily pull us off the roles and goals we have for our lives.

Are we to live busy and productive lives? Yes! We should be as efficient as possible to do all the good we can do by all the means we can at all the times we can. We will give an account to God for our productivity. There is nothing more unproductive than becoming productive at things God doesn't want us to do.

This week, before you develop your calendar, set time to listen to the Holy Spirit and listen to his voice on what we should do because there is always more than we can get done.

Q&A on Faith and Work

July 12, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. If you are a visitor, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are excited to have you. As a church, across both our Spirit Lake and Spencer campuses, we are in a series called Work Matters to God. In this series we are learning the importance of our faith in our daily work.

This is the last week of the series. Next week, Pastor Gerhardt from Urban Impact Ministries in New Orleans will be sharing. We will also hear from Katy Northey, one of our own that is now a missionary in Spain. After that, Pastor Jordan and Pastor Stephen will fill the pulpit while I am on vacation. I will return in August to teach a small but very important four-week series called, "What does the Bible say about heterosexuality, homosexuality and transgender?" After that it will be September and we will launch into a study of the book of Genesis that will take us about a year.

This morning we are having fun as we finish up our series on work. During the series you submitted your questions on the relationship between faith and work. Some of your questions were answered during the series. We saved your five best questions for today. Today, you wrote the sermon. You wrote the questions.

Let's get started. The first question came from a woman (or a man with really nice hand writing). I don't know who wrote it.

1. What do you do when a father puts his work above his children?

Every father can relate to this question. Work is consuming, and it is easy to let your work consume you. It is easy to unintentionally neglect your wife and children. When I read this question, two men of Scripture came to mind. The first is David.

David was a man after God's own heart. He lived a storybook life that most of us only dream about. He went from tending sheep, to slaying a giant and becoming a national hero overnight. Then he lived as a fugitive from justice until he became king of a nation. The Bible says David was a man after God's own heart.

While David was wildly successful, he was a disaster as a father. He masterfully led a nation but neglected to lead his home.

One of his sons, a man named Amnon, was attracted to David's daughter Tamar. David should have talked about the birds and the bees and controlling lust with Amnon but he didn't attend to his home. Amnon's lust eventually gained so much control in his life that he raped his half sister. Rape is not cool, especially when you rape your own sister. This was a terrible tragedy in David's home. Do you know what David did about it? Nothing. He kept on leading the nation but skipped out on the hard work of leading his home. Amnon need a

father that was involved in his life to help him deal with his lust. After raping his sister, he needed the discipline and love of his father, but David stayed at work and ignored the problem at home.

Another of David's sons, a man named Absalom, was Tamar's full brother. Seeing his father do nothing, he determined to get revenge for his sister. The Bible tells us Absalom didn't say a word to Amnon for two years. Imagine how awkward this was at the family table every night. Imagine how dysfunctional things felt over the holidays. Everybody knew trouble was brewing, but David ignored it. He pretended it didn't exist and he devoted himself to his work while neglecting his home. Absalom needed a father in his life that could help him deal with his anger. David was an absent father.

Absalom eventually murdered Amnon. Absalom ran from David and the family. Do you know what David did about it? Nothing. He let it ride. Once again it was his work over family. "Dad, if we ignore problems at home, they don't go away."

Absalom eventually led a coup d'état which led to Absalom sleeping with his father's concubines, and he almost successfully took the kingship from his David and had his father murdered.

What an incredible picture of a man gifted by God for leadership but David neglected to lead his home and it resulted in disaster. Men, if we neglect our children it will only lead to disaster.

Incidentally, we should notice this is not just David neglecting his young children but this is David neglecting his adult children. It is easy to step away from our children when they hit age 19 and let them do their own thing. Fathers, we still have a responsibility to wisely parent our adult children, especially when they are making sinful choices. This is a great reminder for all of us with adult children.

The second example that came to my mind comes from the book of 1 Samuel. The man's name was Eli. He was a priest that pursued church work to the neglect of home work. Eli's two sons were also in the priesthood. Their names were Hophni and Phinehas. These guys were scoundrels. One of the reasons they turned into such brats is because dad ignored them instead of correcting them.

And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. 1 Samuel 3:13 (ESV)

Eli prioritized his work above his children. He let his boys run wild. He didn't take leadership in his home. I think ignoring his sons and letting them run wild started when they were young, and he let it continue when they were old. 1 Samuel 2:12-17 tell us his sons were so self-serving that rather than following the tradition of plunging a fork into the pot of boiled meat to get a random piece, they came to the people before they boiled the meat and took the best parts. They

took the tender loins and the back straps. They refused to eat them boiled but they insisted on cooking them on the grill because meat always tastes best on the grill. If people didn't give them the best meat willingly, they took it by force. They used their position of leadership to serve themselves and stuff their stomachs rather than serve others. They were selfish little brats in an adult body that needed a good smack-down. In 1 Samuel 2:22, we find they were sleeping with the young women that worked in the sanctuary. They were having affairs with the church secretary. Dad knew about this but did nothing to stop it. He let them be child-gone-wild. Brats with beards is what they were. 1 Samuel 2:25 tells us that when their father tried to correct them, they wouldn't listen to him. God finally took the strong hand of leadership that Eli refused to provide and he struck Hophni and Phinehas dead on the same day. That would break any dad's heart to have both your sons die on the same day.

What started this disastrous situation? An absent father. A dad that let his kids run wild and refused to correct his children at home. He was too busy at work to invest in his home, and it ended in disaster.

One of the things I was told as a young father was to make sure you discipline a child when they are young because it is much harder to discipline a child when they are old. In both of these situations we find that was true.

Deuteronomy 6 also reminds us how we are to teach God's Word to our children. While every wise man hopes and prays his wife does a good job teaching the children the word of God, it is not her responsibility. Before God it is his responsibility. Here is how a dad finds time to teach his children about God.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. Deuteronomy 6:6-8 (ESV)

A dad talks with his kids about the Bible when the family sits in the house. Dinner time is one of the few times an entire family sits in the house. Dads, it is our responsibility to bring up God conversations at the dinner table with our children. It also says we are supposed to bring up God conversations as we walk by the way. That is called a family road trip. When you are driving someplace, you teach your kids about God. It says we are to teach our kids God's Word when they lie down. That is called bed time Bible reading and prayer over our kids. We are to teach them God's Word when we rise. That means you have the summer memory verse at the breakfast table and talk about it with your kids over breakfast. We teach our kids God's Word as we do the natural rhythms of life with them.

2. What should our response be to someone that refuses to work or sees no reason to hold a job?

This question was submitted multiple times by multiple people. Apparently this is something many of you are thinking about.

The first thing we need to do is separate the issues in the question. We need to distinguish between those who can't work and those who won't work. There are those who can't work and are on disability for physical or psychological reasons.

My heart goes out to those who can't work. Work was intended to be a joy. If you can't work, you don't have a sense of purpose and fulfillment that comes with work.

At one time, I was unemployed for nine months. It drove me nuts. The one thing I don't do well is sitting at home doing nothing. I needed structure in my life to keep me productive and sane. I created a rigid schedule of exercise, Bible reading, book reading, prayer time, writing and job hunting. I put myself on a rigid diet and lost 25 pounds in four months. I corresponded with 170 churches in nine months as I looked for a job. Not having work was a terrible feeling.

Another category we need to consider is those who fall into the governmental grey area. They earn more money sitting at home than they can earn by going to work. That is not good. There is no incentive to get a job. Without a job, there is no experience of joy in work. There is no experience of the joy of contributing to society rather than receiving from society. Anyone living in this situation is in a tough place. Don't be jealous of them. Feel bad for them. There is no incentive to improve!

There is a third category. Those are the people that can work but they are too lazy to work. If you are a Christian in this situation, it is not just a practical issue, it is a spiritual issue. God created us to be workers. When we work hard, we properly image our heavenly father that is a hard worker. Christians should have a reputation for hard work and productivity. That is how we adorn the gospel with our lives. Look what Paul said to those that refuse to work.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 (ESV)

Paul gave us three steps of dealing with the lazy man or woman that won't work. The first thing we do is we refuse to hang out with them. They will have

plenty of free time. They want you to waste time with them. You don't have that much free time. Refuse to waste time hanging out with them, watching reruns of the "Love Boat." That is a gentle way of rebuking them for doing nothing productive with their lives. If they want to be idle, they need to be idle alone while everyone else goes to work and does something productive with their lives. That sounds harsh but it is biblical.

The second thing Paul did was work very hard. Even though Paul had the right to a free lunch for all the work he did teaching the Bible in the Thessalonians' church, he didn't take advantage of that right in that town. He worked hard teaching the church, but he was bi-vocational and he worked day and night so he could pay his own way on everything. Nobody needed to give Paul a free lunch because he didn't just do church work, he did extra work to cover his costs.

This was another way of rebuking those that were lazy. Everybody wanted to be like Paul. If Paul was a hard worker that didn't live on handouts, they wanted to become hard workers that didn't live on handouts. Paul was careful that his lifestyle didn't encourage a free-loader mentality.

Let me review. First, if you have somebody that is lazy, you rebuke them by refusing to hang out with them. Second, you work really hard around them and show them that you work for a living, you don't survive on handouts for a living.

Paul had one final corrective measure for idleness and it is one of my favorites. If you don't work, you don't eat. Cutting off someone's food supply motivates people to get a job in a hurry. This doesn't mean we literally starve people to death. It means I have no trouble eating a steak and baked potato from Minerva's and when the guy that refuses to get a job looks at my steak and his mouth is watering and he asks me to buy him one, I have no trouble telling him that I keep a loaf of Wonder White Bread and a jar of peanut butter in the car and he is welcome to make himself a sandwich. If you don't like my limited menu selection, get a job and buy your own steak. Some of you think that is harsh. It isn't harsh. It is biblical. Sometimes the only way to motivate people is with their stomachs.

I like the way the Old Testament handled this situation. If you were poor, the government didn't send you a check. While there were offerings for the poor and gifts given to the poor when it came to eating, the poor had the dignity of working for their food. In the book of Ruth we see the poor went in the fields after the harvest and picked up the leftover grain from their food. They worked for their food. We also see that on the Sabbath year fields were to take a rest. Whatever grew on a field in the Sabbath year was for the poor to take. If you were poor, you had the dignity of work. If you didn't work, you didn't eat.

3. Please deal with the false idea this teaching on work has no application to retired folks.

This is another popular question that many of you submitted. Some of you thought this teaching on work wouldn't apply to you because you are retired. As you learned, that was not true. Let's think about retirement from a biblical perspective.

The only place in the Bible where we find age-specific retirement is when the Bible talks about the Levitical priests. They were to serve in the temple from age 25 to 50. They retired at age 50. That is a pretty scary because I am almost age 50. I don't feel ready for retirement. Thankfully, when you read the fine print, you learn this means the Levites retired from the heavy lifting of the animals on the altar but they were still to assist their brothers in the work. They were just not allowed to do a clean-and-press of the the hundred-plus pound sides of meat on the altar.

Apart from the Levites, the Bible is silent on the issue of age specific retirement. There is no magical age when we stop working. There is no age where we move from work that serves others to a life of self-indulgence.

Instead the Bible tells us that our job is to serve the Lord for all of our lives, and we are to do that until we close our eyes in death, not until retirement.

...for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:20 (ESV)

How should we think about retirement? The best way to look at retirement is to remember that we don't retire from something. We retire to something. That is a favorite saying of Dan Foote, one of our elders. Retirement is a time where you move from one form of work to another form of work. The pace we work may be slower. The work may be different. All we do is change the way we work. When we retire we move from a job that was needed to provide our daily needs to having our daily needs provided for by our pensions. Now, we are free to work without needing a paycheck.

Let me take a moment to tell you how thrilled I am with many of our retired men and women. They didn't retire from work to self-indulgence but they retired from vocational work to using their leadership gifts and skills in the church. CrossWinds wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for the gifts of the retired men and women that redeployed their skills in service to Christ's church when they retired.

A lot of the leadership behind our multi-campus movement came from retired, godly men. The Commons was redone this winter by retired men and women that didn't have to work for income. They didn't sit home and live a life of self-indulgence. They came to church and rebuilt the Commons to bless us and to honor Christ with their gifts. I am so thankful they redeployed. If it wasn't for the way they use their gifts, very little would be done around here.

Most of my elders are wise, retired men that give their time to serving Jesus in a way they couldn't during their full-time employment. All of us are filled with thankfulness for the leadership and the wisdom they are pouring into Christ's church.

In addition, godly retired men have the opportunity to take under their wings younger men and mentor them.

Finally, when we think about retirement, we must remember the doctrine of eternal rewards. God promises not just to save us through Jesus but to reward us for how we live. Retirement is a great time to move from investing financially for the rest of our earthly lives to laying up treasure in heaven by good works and investing in our eternal lives. In retirement we can do all kinds of practical and spiritual good.

Is it wrong for those in retirement to enjoy an extra round of golf or to take a trip? Of course not. The issue is the orientation of our lives. As Christians, we are never to orientate ourselves toward self-indulgence. We just reorientate our lives from one form of serving to another. Maybe the pace is slower but our work never stops.

4. What does the Bible teach about profit? How much profit should a Christian make?

Some Christians are anti-profit. They think all Christians should work for free. They believe everything should come as a gift and Christians should give deep discounts. They are anti-profit.

This may shock you but God is not against profit. Christians shouldn't feel guilty for making one.

Profit means you created something that has value. Profit means the work you do is recognized as valuable. For example, if you bake 100 loaves of bread and it costs you \$100 to make the loaves, but you sell them for \$200, that is \$100 profit that you receive for your work.

In Luke 19, Jesus endorsed making a profit, even large amounts of profit. Luke 19 has the parable of the 10 Minas. One servant was given 10 Minas and he made a 10-fold return. He had a 1,000 percent profit margin. He wasn't condemned for it, he was commended for it. In that same parable, another servant made a profit five times over what he was given. He had a 500 percent profit margin. He was commended for it. The guy who was condemned was the guy who didn't make a profit. God is not against profit. He is not against a healthy profit if that is what your work is worth.

One thing we must remember is that profit doesn't just represent take home pay. It also represents manufacturing costs. Let's go back to our loaves of bread illustration. The \$100 profit for making the 100 loaves of bread also covers the rent of the bread facility and the payment on the machines to make the bread. It also covers the cost of employees. If there was no profit, the

employees wouldn't have a paycheck and there would be no bread to buy to bless us with food.

Profit covers risk. Every day our imaginary bread baker bakes 100 loaves of bread. He bakes them in faith that 100 customers will walk in the door to buy the bread. What happens if only 80 customers show up? Who eats of the cost of only selling 80 loaves. The baker eats the cost, and it comes out of his profit. If the baker didn't have a profit, it would only take a few days of bad sales to put him out of business.

Profit is a deserved reward. Profit is the reward the baker gets for risking his money and time trying to try to bless others in society by making their daily bread. Shouldn't the baker be rewarded for taking a risk to bless us with bread so we have something to eat?

God has no problem with a profit, even a large profit, if that is what a product is worth. As Christians, don't feel bad about making a good profit if your product is valuable.

The problem is when a profit doesn't come from meeting the needs of people but it comes from exploiting people. When a company gets a monopoly on a necessary commodity then jacks up the price, that is extortion. That is sin. Imagine our bread baker is the only source of bread in town. He knows nobody else can come into town to make bread so he starts charging \$20 for a loaf of bread instead of \$2. If you had a car and could drive out of town to get it, all other bread is \$2 but our baker is taking advantage of people without a car and making \$19 profit. The important thing to remember is that God is not against profit. He is even not against a large profit.

For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." 1 Timothy 5:18 (ESV)

5. How can I share the gospel at work?

This is another great question. It was submitted at the beginning of the series but I saved it for the end

Let me share some of the things I have learned about how to bring the gospel into casual conversation at work.

1. Nobody can stop you from talking about your weekend.

What is everybody talking about at the break table? What they did for their weekend. Some people went out on a boat. Some people had family over. You can share about your time on the boat and about having your family over but you can also share about what happened at church. Church was part of your weekend. In casual conversation tell your friends about the teaching series we have at CrossWinds on work. Tell them you learned about retirement and how to retire and become a man or woman that blesses others instead of a person of self-indulgence. You can also tell them you talked about the importance of a father staying involved with his children at home. Most of the people at your break table are struggling with retirement and parenting. Chances are they will

want to learn more about church. All you needed to do was bring up church as casual conversation about your weekend.

2. Nobody can stop you from asking someone if they go to church.

Ask people about their churches. If they go to a church, they will start telling you about church. You might discover people you talk to are atheists. You might discover they have some strange beliefs. All you needed to do was ask people if they went to church. Eventually they will ask you about your church. You can tell them. You turn the conversation from church to God and you can talk about Jesus.

3. Nobody can stop you from inviting someone to an event.

Nobody can stop you from inviting people to an event. At work, people ask their friends from work if they want to join them at Arnolds Park for the concert. They ask you if you want to join them for drinks after work at the bar. It is completely natural and healthy for people to invite their friends to events. All you need to do is invite your friends to events at church.

A friend of mine was asking me how he could get a friend to church. I told him to just invite his friend to the July 19 cookout and carnival games after second service next week. Don't make the church service the lead-in. Make the cookout and the bouncy house the event you invite them to. Tell them the lunch is great. Tell them it is free. Tell them the carnival games for the kids are fun. Even adults enjoy the carnival games. Just invite people to church and to the meal and games afterwards.

When they come, introduce them to your friends. Have a good time. I will take care of talking about Jesus for you. Nobody is going to freak out if you invite them to a burger lunch with games for the kids. No pressure. No worries.

4. Nobody can stop you from doing good toward others.

Last week we looked at Titus 2:14 that tells us Christians are to be zealous for good works. That means we try to do all the good we can to all the people we can at all the times we can. At work, nobody can stop you from doing acts of kindness. You can bring Spud Nuts in for the office. You can provide coffee. You can bake cookies. When someone is going through a hard time, make a meal. Quintin Stieff from Valley Church in Des Moines has a great line that says, "Good works leads to good will which leads to good news." Good works opens the door to the gospel.

5. Nobody can stop you from offering to pray.

Dr. Fox gave a great example last week of prayer evangelism. At work, he asks if he can pray with his patients before they go into surgery. Almost everybody says yes. When you hear of a coworker than is facing a tough time, ask if you can pray with them. They might say, "No" but I suspect they will say, "Yes." Most people are open to prayer in a crisis moment. When you pray for them, pray to Jesus and include the gospel in your prayer.

Conclusion

As we close this series, I want to remind us of the importance of work. We were created in the image of God, to be hard workers just like he is. Work is the way we love our neighbors. Work is one of the most practical ways we worship God. Work is a source of joy. While sin brought pain and problems to work, Jesus redeems our work. We won't just work for this life. We will work for all of eternity.

My friends, work matters to God. Let's go to work.

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