

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).

This is an appropriate passage for us to think about at the beginning of a work week or school week and Labor Day weekend for sure. A passage that is so rich; it affirms that all work is a calling from God. It tells us that all work has value and that all work is working for God not just my earthly boss. It shows that God sees what I do 24/7 so I am accountable for what and how I work. And Paul adds that there is a promise of a reward, some kind of inheritance as we serve the Lord.

Welcome to our last topic in our summer Base Camp series. All summer long we have been looking at Essential Tools we need for the Journey, essential tools we need to live and grow in our faith. Tools such as Scripture, Prayer, Faith and Trust, The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Living in Community with other Believers, Finding God's Will and finally today, another tool essential to living our Christian life until Christ returns and makes all things right: something we call work.

Work

Whether our occupation takes us outside the home working for a company, keeps us inside the home as a parent, whether we are full-time students, or whether we have retired from our day jobs and our work is volunteering, God makes it clear that work is necessary and valuable and God uses us and grows us through this thing we call work.

In the history of most civilizations, work was considered something to be avoided. Only poor and disadvantaged people worked. Respected people didn't have to work. We have many reasons to thank the protestant reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin for the faith lessons they taught us almost 500 years ago. They taught us that the Bible is our true authority, not religion. From their study they came up with something we know as the “Protestant Work Ethic.” They taught us that society was wrong about work; work was a higher calling.

They studied the scriptures and learned that work was God's will for everyone. It wasn't a curse, it wasn't a punishment, and no one was above or below work.

They studied the scriptures and learned that all work—whether you were scrapping road kill off a highway or performing brain surgery—was before God equal and should be given equal dignity.

They studied the scriptures and learned that God wants us to be honest, diligent, and invest profits and not waste profits. They saw that the Christian should be the tip of the spear when it comes to investing profits for good to change the world.

Our work matters to God. Some of our jobs are messy, some are clean, some are low stress, some are high stress. Have you ever wondered what people think the hardest jobs are? Maybe some of you have worked in these fields. I googled a website and it gave me the three hardest jobs according to their research.

- Oil Rig Worker (roughneck)
- Crabber on the High Seas
- Firefighter

I know some of you are saying, “You have never worked at my office.” You are saying, “I'm a stay-at-home mom, let some of those roughnecks try to do what I do for a week.” Some of you are saying, “Fight a fire every month or so, I fight fires every day at my office.” Or crab fishing, “I'm in sales! When I don't catch anything I don't eat.”

To some of us work equals curse. You hate your job. You are looking at the clock, counting the hours until you get off work. No doubt you share the TGIF sentiment. There is nothing wrong with the TGIF sentiment, but have you ever said to yourself on the morning following a relaxing weekend, TGIM? My prayer is we will be able to say TGIM when we wake up Monday. So let's try to answer this first question,

Why Can Work Often Feel Like a Curse?

Because there is a curse. The curse was that sin entered into the garden and filled paradise with weeds and thorns and filled innocent hearts with guilt and shame and conflict. Sin took root on earth and it took root in Adam's heart and was passed down to every succeeding generation. This curse entered our world through Adam's disobedience to God. And from that point forward, work became difficult. Work became distorted and work became disillusioning. Here is what happened after Adam disobeyed God.

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

Meaning because of your sin, here is the by-product.

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow

you will eat your food

until you return to the ground,

since from it you were taken;

for dust you are

and to dust you will return.” (Gen. 3:17-19)

Because of sin, God curses the ground. The curse fundamentally changes the nature and context of human work. As fast as we can read these verses the entire landscape of work was transformed from a perfect fruit-picking-blue-bird-on-your-shoulder-whistle-while-you-work paradise to crabbing on the high seas! From invigorating work to needing Aleve and Icy Hots after a long day. Adam immediately felt the weariness of work like a huge weight, a weight that humans were not originally designed to bear.

And today, work continues to be what it is not supposed to be. Work remains hard, sweaty and frustrating. Our technologies, our economy, our corporations, our government institutions all reflect our broken values and a broken system.

So how do people view their own work today because of the fall? They either see work as no big deal and that leads to slothful living. Or they see work as too big a deal and that leads to workaholic living. Maybe seeing work as being too big a deal hits a nerve for us here on the peninsula. Has your work become the center of your identity? Do you try to draw your very life from your job, your career, and the successes and recognition that come with it? But we know from God’s Word—Jeremiah 2:13—this is trying to drink in life from a mirage. It’s continuing to draw water from broken cisterns that never satisfy instead of drawing from the Living Water that satisfies.

As believers we have the challenge to affirm the high dignity and value of work but at the same time affirm that our work will never bear the weight of our deepest hopes and longings. Work is good but it needs to remain in its proper place and not become an idol. If we don’t get a handle on this now we will become like the writer of Ecclesiastes whose mad pursuit of personal power, pleasure and material comforts led him to realize years later that it was all in vain.

Solomon, after his unsuccessful attempts to work his way into peace and harmony said this: “*So I hated life, because the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me*” (Eccl. 2:17-18). “*What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless*” (Eccl. 2:22-23).

Solomon seemed a long way from saying “Thank God it’s Monday” here. And when people figure out that work is meaningless without God, instead of running to God they become cynical about work. The hugely popular older TV show *The Office* and the comic strip *Dilbert* are quite telling. Both are pretty funny commentaries on work. People get it; the system is broken.

But listen to what Solomon says in the very next chapter in Ecclesiastes 3:12-13. “*I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.*”

Solomon is telling us there is a reason to say TGIM. And that reason is God. So work can be hard because of the curse, and at the same time work can be satisfying because it is a gift from God. Don’t you agree? Sometimes I come home from work and I sound like Eyore. Other times I come home from work and sound like Tigger. And that ambiguity is because of the curse. Work will never be paradise until Christ comes again, but in the meantime, work can be a noble expression of humans created in the image of God.

So let’s go way back, back before Genesis 3, back before the fall. What do we see?

God is a Worker

The very first verse of the very first book in the Bible says, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” The first glimpse we get of God, He’s doing what? He’s working. He’s creating, He’s designing, He’s engineering, He’s inventing, He’s sculpting, He’s shaping our world. The Lord God Almighty is a worker.

**So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Gen.1:27)**

God created male, female, men and women in his own image. We know from the next verse—verse 28—that God created us to exercise dominion over all God worked to create. We were made to work. It’s in our bones. It’s in our DNA. What we do does matter. What we do is central to our role as an image bearer of God. That’s why when we experience unemployment it hurts so much. Let’s pick up in chapter 2.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. (Gen. 2:1-2)

Not only do we see the rhythm of work and rest modeled for us, we can look deeper at that Hebrew word for work and it's *melakah*. It's used for ordinary human labor. The Christian God who is claimed as the Creator of heaven and earth is described as a worker with the ordinary word for work, the same ordinary word we would use to describe our work.

We are Workers

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Gen. 2:15)

So the first glimpse of humans, and they are doing what? They are working. They are cultivating. Adam has the glorious work assignment to create a place for humans to flourish in God's presence. This idea of working and caring for the earth means that Adam was to work the earth to create shalom and peace for himself, his family, and his descendants. Before the curse, when Monday came, Adam was able to say TGIM.

If any of us are going to be able to say TGIM today, we need to understand how our work today connects with how God continues to work today. How does God continue to work today?

He Provides

In Psalm 104, the psalmist writes, *"He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts."*

Julie and I know when we walk home after our regular Saturday trips to the San Mateo Farmer's Market that God provides. But in God's design, we are to participate in his ongoing provision for the world through our own work. God uses human workers like farmers, pickers, botanists, and truck drivers to get me my peaches. This is all part of the cultural mandate of work for the Christian. We are to love and serve our neighbors through our daily work that participates in God's ongoing provision for his creation.

Some of us build refrigerators to keep our food fresh. Some of us are builders who provide us places to live and work. Some of us create things that create good jobs that employ people and support families.

The Jewish Talmud contains a riddle: Why didn't God create a bread tree if he meant man to live on bread? Because God prefers to partner with us and offer us grain and invites us to buy a field and plant the seed. And he prefers us to till the soil and he sends sunshine and rain and we become creative partners.

It goes further. Providing is also maintaining and preserving. Some of us work in jobs that if they didn't exist chaos would break out. Some of us are building inspectors and food inspectors that keep our buildings and our food safe. Some of us are janitors who keep our public health up to standards.

I want to challenge you as an employer, an employee, or as a student to consider how your work reflects you partnering with God as Provider. When you make the connection that you are partnering with God to serve His creation, you are more likely to say TGIM.

He Protects

We should understand that God is at work restraining evil. It may be hard to grasp given all the horrors of sin and suffering we see in our world today. But know that life here would be immeasurably worse if God in His kindness was not holding back His wrath and has limits to how much evil can torment His creation.

Some of us are partnering with God to restrain evil by working as police officers, judges, soldiers, and advocates. And some of us are highly placed in companies and given influence to sway their companies away from poor ethical practices. When we participate in God's restraining work, our work matters. Use whatever position you have been given to make a stand for goodness, justice and mercy. If you make this connection you can say TGIM when you wake up in the morning.

He Restores

If we look at what the work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ did we see that His work is a grand mission to renew all things. The great gospel story has four chapters: creation, the fall, redemption, and future fulfillment. His perfect kingdom is fully established on earth once again in the future because of Christ.

As have sung at Christmas, Jesus comes to make His blessings flow "as far as the curse is found." He is actively using His church to push back against the world's corruption, evil and suffering.

Some of us work in bio-tech. We work for companies that push back against suffering by bringing drugs that heal and restore. Some of us are counselors who bring people from mental suffering to mental wholeness. Some of us invest and revitalize poor areas to increase the quality of life. Some of us design new products that are protecting the environment while protecting the sanctity of life of those who are made in God's image. Some of us work as medical doctors and nurses to touch and heal and minister compassion to those who are sick. If you can connect the dots to see that you are working as God's partner to restore creation from the fall, you can wake up in the morning saying TGIM.

As Christians we are to connect our work with God's work in the world. I know what some of you are thinking right now: Easy for you to say Dan, you work at a church, you get paid to read the Bible and drink coffee with people at Starbucks all week. And

you work with people who love Jesus. I work at Facebook. I work in a jail.

We've talked about how the work itself matters. But the ways in which the work gets done also matters to God. I found this illustration this week: Consider an ordinary carpet or rug. For the sake of argument, let me say, "I believe that rugs matter to God." Rugs are good for human flourishing. They keep us off the floor so we're cleaner. Rugs can be very beautiful and can provide aesthetic pleasure as works of arts. Rugs make for softer floors which makes it easier for dads to have fun wrestling with their kids. If a clerk can stand on a rug or pad rather than on the concrete floor it helps their bodies—their feet and backs won't ache as much. So rugs are good and the act of making rugs is good.

But God doesn't just care about the quality of the rugs or the fact that it's good for human society to have rugs. He also cares about how the rugs get made. And in some parts of the world, rugs get made through the use of child-bonded labor. There is injustice in parts of the rug-making industry. So it is appropriate not only to think Christianly about rugs but also to think Christianly about how rugs get made.

In other words, another way to integrate our faith and work is to consider how we can contribute to the culture of our work-places; how we can make them places of justice, peace, beauty, community, and human flourishing, places of shalom. "Work is the gracious expression of Yahweh's creative energy in service to others to create shalom." (Gerry Breshears)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:8-10). God restored us so we could get back to the beautiful creative work of providing, protecting, and restoring we were re-created through Jesus Christ to do.

Two Lies We Believe About Work

Our work is a means to an end

When you wake up tomorrow don't just think you are going to work to make money to pay bills, get stuff, or so you can get off work so you can go play somewhere. If work is a means to an

end, then the end is more money, fame, and worldly success. The truth is God called us to live to work. We were made by God to work, to create shalom, to make the world a place for humans to thrive in God's presence.

Our work separates into sacred and secular

It's what a lot of people call the sacred and secular divide. It's the myth that certain kinds of work is more spiritual than other kinds and matters to God more. This idea of working in a church, or for some kind of nonprofit matters more to God is a flat out lie. But it's deeply embedded in the Christian culture and CPC needs to be about changing that.

All life is spiritual. We want to compartmentalize our lives into spiritual and secular. Have you ever read Paul or Jesus in the New Testament asking, "How is the spiritual part of your spiritual life?" Have you ever asked someone, "Hey, you told me about your spiritual life, now tell me how is your secular life going." We never ask that! It doesn't make sense. That isn't how God sees our life and work connections.

God is calling you to work. God is calling you to connect with His work on earth. Your work is an essential tool for the journey in this life. May I be so bold as to say, Your work is worship. He wants to go with you every minute of every day and walk with you into the world. He wants all of your life to matter, because all life is spiritual. He wants you to wake up tomorrow and put on whatever work hat you wear and advance His glorious work in the world.

And one more thing—He wants you to be able to say with enthusiasm, Thank God it's Monday.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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