

Work Is Not A Four Letter Word

Tomorrow is Labor Day, a national holiday set aside to honor the contributions of the working men and women of America. Pat yourself on the back if you are a working person: tomorrow is all about you! And since it's labor day weekend, I want to talk about work. I've called this message, "Work is not a four letter word." You'll see why as we go along.

If I took time to ask everyone how you felt about your work we would get a variety of responses I'm sure. Some would say, "I love my job." Some would say "It's just a job. I go in, put in my time and go home." Some would say "I hate my job. Work is a four letter word. I would love to do anything else but I can't quit and can't go looking. I have to pay the bills." Or "This isn't what I trained to do or want to do but it pays the bills." Work is what you do to pay the bills and hopefully save enough to retire someday and never have to work a job again.

When we talk about work I'm talking about the work we do to earn a living, not the work you do for free when you come home from work! Thinking about the job you do, your work, let me ask you, **Does God care about your job?** Does your job matter to God as much as your involvement at church matters to God? Maybe you should wait until the end of this sermon before you answer, but let's do some thinking about work.

We live in a culture that places a high value on work. The majority of our adult life is taken up with work. It is one of the first questions we ask people. "What do you do?" meaning "what's your job?" We use words like occupation. What is it that occupies your time? And rather than basing worth on character and integrity and faithfulness, our culture bases worth on what we do to earn a living, or on how much money we earn doing our job. Let me give you – **Three basic truths about work.**

1. Your job does not determine your value or worth. In spite of what our culture tries to do, your value and worth intrinsically come from who you are, not from what you do. You are God's creation. He made you and that gives you inestimable value. **You are a one-of-a-kind God made original.** Not only did God create you, giving you value, He sent his son to die on the cross for you, giving you inestimable worth. Your value and worth come from who you are and whose you are, not from what you do to earn a living. Remember that. You are valuable to God.

2. Your job and income do not determine success. In our culture success is usually based on material things: job, cars, houses, income, etc. That is far from God's idea of success. In fact, it is far from any thinking person's idea of success. Wealth doesn't determine success, it just means

you have a lot of stuff. Rising to the top of an industry doesn't determine success. There are too many wealthy, powerful people who take their own lives, failures at everything in life that really matters – relationships, marriage, parenting, etc. If you gain the world but lose your marriage, your family, your soul, what have you gained? Jesus said **“What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.” Luke 16:15**

Then what is an appropriate basis for measuring success? We talked about it last Sunday. **“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.” Matthew 20:26.** Success looks different in God's economy. **Success for a follower of Christ is faithful obedience to God and loving service to others.** We succeed as we stay true to Christ and live according to his word.

3. Your secular work must not be separated from your spiritual walk. Have you or someone you know ever said something like “That's church but this is business.” We try to separate what we do for a living and how we do it from our walk with the Lord. We have our work life, our home life and then our church life. God never intended for our lives to be carved up into sections. Our faith should be integrated into every area of our lives. The needs of our home and family and church should factor into our work life. Our faith should affect and inform the way we do our job and the way we live at home. Don't try to isolate your job from your faith and God's plan for your life. Keep these three things in mind as we look further at what the bible tells us about work. First of all, understand,

God is a worker. The creation story says, **“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” Genesis 2:2-3.** God is a worker and he is still working.

Unlike the pagan gods of other eastern cultures that slept while their human slaves did all the work, the God of the bible works. While you were sleeping last night, God was still at work. “He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” Psalm 121: 3-4. Jesus said **“My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” John 5:17.** God is a worker. In fact, think of the images the bible gives us of our God.

God is an architect/ builder. Proverbs 8:27-31 tells us God “set the heavens in place...marked out the horizon on the face of the deep...established the clouds above and fixed

securely the fountains of the deep...gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command and ...marked out the foundations of the earth.”

God is a doctor/healer . “I am the Lord who heals you” **Exodus 15:26**

God is a creator/weaver . “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb...when I was woven together in the depths of the earth...” **Psalm 139: 13** We could go on but you get the idea. God is at work. Now look back at Genesis 1. **“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ 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**

We were and are created in the image of God. And what does that mean? That means since God is a worker, then we too are created to be workers. Work isn’t a four letter word. It’s not a bad thing at all. It’s built into our design. “But I thought work was a result of the fall and the curse.”

Genesis 3:12-19 tells of the curse that came as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden. But look at an earlier passage in Genesis 2. **“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” Genesis 2:15.** Work was a part of God’s plan for man from the beginning. Work was not a result of the fall or the curse, instead, it is a reflection of God’s very nature and image in us. Makes sense doesn’t it? God is a worker. We are created in his image. We are workers and our work is a reflection of the image of God.

The bible says, **“For we are God’s fellow workers...” 1 Corinthians 3:9.** In some sense all legitimate work has an ingredient of this partnership in it. As fellow workers with God, your job makes a difference. There is a sense of fulfillment that comes as we work and produce and create and build and serve. And think about it – not only is work a reflection of the image of God, but in a variety of ways your work provides a service making life easier, better, more enjoyable for others. Your work for a communications company means we can talk with one another. Your work in oil and gas means we can travel, or have heat, power. You drive a truck and we can have food, goods and services. You make rubber bands for a living? You help me hold things together! You make “aglets.” You know what they are? The little plastic things that go on the end of your shoe strings. You help me lace my shoes. You clean churches, or buildings, or houses? Wonderful. Because of you I’ve got toilet paper and paper towels in my bathroom!

You are making a difference. In some way our work partners with God, directly or indirectly in sustaining what God is doing in the world. And in so doing our work reflects the image of God. God is a worker and so are we and our work makes a difference.

John Stott gave a Christian definition of work as “**The expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God.**” ...John Stott

I know some would argue with that definition. “I don’t feel fulfilled standing at a machine or a press all day long, punching holes in some piece of metal,” or answering the phone, or asking “Did you want to supersize that order?” etc. But ultimately does that piece of metal you poked holes into go into a machine or product that helps someone fly to care for a loved one, or does it go to a machine that digs a hole so we could build a church where people come to know Jesus. In that broad sense the work you do does ultimately serve others and you can recover a sense of fulfillment when you stop to see the big picture. It can be fulfilling and it does benefit the community and all of that together brings glory to God. You bring a godly influence onto the job site where perhaps there is little Christian witness. You are light and salt in a dark and decaying work environment. In that sense, your work is certainly an expression of love for your neighbor that brings glory to God. You fulfill God’s plan and his great commandment through the work you do. Feeling any better about work? Work is not a four letter word.

Work is a means of fulfilling our social and spiritual responsibilities. We work in order to pay the bills and provide for ourselves, our family, and meet our obligations and responsibilities. The apostle Paul said “**If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**” **1 Timothy 5:8.** We have a biblical command to work in order to provide for our family. Paul had heard there were some men in Thessalonica that decided not to work. They would just live off of others. He is not talking to people that couldn’t find a job, he is talking to those who didn’t want to work, who refused to work.

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you brothers to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’ We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy, they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you brothers, never tire of doing what is right.” 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13. That’s straight talk about work!

We work in order to meet our needs and that of our family. In doing so, we are being obedient to the command of the Lord. We also work so that we will have money with which to help others. **“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands that he may have something to share with those in need.” Ephesians 4:28.** Paul wants to make sure people are working so they can provide for their family and have something left over to help the needy and hurting.

I believe sharing with those in need includes both physically needy and spiritually needy. We work in order to give to advance the spread of the gospel through our tithes and offerings. We work and give so others can be saved and blessed. Work is not a four letter word, it is an opportunity – a means to provide blessing to others both now and for eternity. We may not think about it in this way, particularly after the day you had Friday or yesterday, but...

Work is a gift from God. That job you have is a gift from God. Just ask some folk who can’t work for one reason or another. Listen to what the writer of Ecclesiastes says. **“Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work - this is a gift of God.” Eccl. 5:19.** We are all wealthy by most of the worlds standards. If you can start to realize that your job has worth and value and dignity because you are partnering with God, you are blessing your neighbors, you are providing for family, meeting the needs of the needy and giving to the work of the Lord, you can start to “accept your lot and be happy in your work” and that is a gift from God. He has blessed you and provided for you. He is supplying your needs by means of that job. Don’t curse it. Give thanks for the job you have and recognize it as a gift from God. By giving thanks, it just might put you in the place to receive an even better job.

If we recognize our job as a gift from God then we will do our work as unto the Lord. Paul’s gave instructions to slaves and masters that I believe we can translate into instructions for workers and employers. In Colossians he writes **“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in**

everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men...” Colossians 3:22-23.

Listen to a similar passage written in Ephesians but from The Message Bible. **“Servants, respectfully obey your earthly masters but always with an eye to obeying the real master, Christ. Don’t just do what you have to do to get by, but work heartily, as Christ’s servants doing what God wants you to do. And work with a smile on your face, always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving the orders, you’re really serving God.” Ephesians 6:5-7.**

We should work differently than those who don’t know the Lord. We work not just to please an earthly boss, but to please our heavenly Father. It is not just about seeking advancement, it is about obedience and service to the Lord who has allowed us to partner with him and graced us with a job. We do our work as unto the Lord.

Martin Luther said **“In making shoes the cobbler serves God, obeys his calling from God, quite as much as the preacher of the Word...God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation it is.” ...Martin Luther** Whatever we do, whatever our job, if we do it with gratitude to God and do it as unto the Lord, our work can be an expression of worship and it will make a difference.

I said at the beginning that we were made in his image and since he is a worker, we are workers. Well, think about this on your job: The way we do our work should reflect the image of God as well. We are to reflect Jesus in all of our work and our work relationships. In our conduct, our attitude, on the job and off, people should see Jesus. You probably can’t witness openly on your job. You aren’t there to evangelize on your bosses time or your company’s time, but you can certainly be a witness through your life, your words, attitudes and actions.

Listen to what the bible says. Such common sense and wisdom. **“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” 1 Thessalonians 3:11-12.**

Your work ethic, your attitude, your disposition, your character, your response to people, it makes the way you do your work a powerful means of presenting Christ. Consider this: you are involved in carrying out the plan and purpose of God on your job. It is a bigger and higher calling

and purpose than what you think. When you recognize that God placed you on that job after all, that you are partnering with God in his plan and purpose, that you are providing for your family through that job, that you are helping and loving your neighbor through that job, that you are earning enough money to give to missions and win someone to Christ through that job, that you are witnessing for Christ on that job and influencing others in a godly fashion, that job may suddenly have more dignity and respect and value and purpose than what you thought when you drove away last Friday afternoon.

You are a part of something bigger and grander than what you think. Thank God for the job you have. Keep the right perspective. The story is told that, “One day when Christopher Wren, the English architect, was directing the construction of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, he stopped to talk to one of the laborers at the building site. ‘What do you do?’ Wren inquired of the man. Not realizing that he was talking to the great architect, the man, who was a cement mixer, answered, ‘Sir, can’t you see? I’m building a great cathedral.’” Your job matters. You are a part of something bigger and greater than you think. Let God show you your place and value this morning in terms of your job. You aren’t just mixing cement, you’re building cathedrals!

Whatever you do, remember this, you are a worker, reflecting the nature and image of the God who is at work in and through you. He has blessed you with ability and creativity and if you have a job - do it with all your might, as unto the Lord with gratitude and thanksgiving.