

REVIEW FROM LAST WEEK—WORK AS CALLING

Our Work reflects the image of Our God who is a worker

Our Work can be holy ground if consecrated to God in Faith

Our Work is our calling from God, not just a job—In Christ it has purpose, joy, direction, focus, and motivation

Our Work value is not determined by prestige, impact, or financial gain but by its service and redemptive value in Christ

Our Work can and should be done for the glory of God—Ex. Bach, S.D.G.

Our Work is done Coram Deo, before the face of God, in His presence, under His authority, and for His glory

The mission of our work yesterday, today, and tomorrow is to join God's mission:

1. **Be Salt and Light in the World (Matthew 5.13-14)**—Our work is God's strategic placement and calling for us to bear His image and reflect His gracious Gospel in that place.
2. **Give service, provision, and blessing to the world**—God is working through our vocations to serve the world, to feed, give pleasure, heal, speak, etc.
3. **Participate in and cooperate with God in His mission to restore all things by reconciling them to Himself** (Col. 1.20; Rom. 8.18ff; I Cor. 3.9-15, 15.1-58; Rev. 21-22). This is an amazing privilege and honor, and it invigorates our work as we look to God to resurrect our offerings of work just as he will resurrect our bodies.

We do this by:

1. Hope in God's promised future—can I envision my work being caught up by God in His redemption? Do my purposes match His? Do I live out the fact that there are no little people and no little places? We pray Psalm 90.16-17 and ask God to prosper and establish our work.
2. Dependence on the Spirit—Am I approaching my work prayerfully in dependence on God's Spirit rather than in self-reliance? Is my work pervaded by a sense of thankfulness for my gifts/abilities? We offer our work to God in humility
3. Trust in God's providence—Do I look for and recognize that God is guiding and providing daily?

WINTER 2011: GOD AT WORK

WORK AS OPPRESSION: WHY IS WORK SO DIFFICULT, UNJUST, AND FRUITLESS

THE WAY WE'RE WORKING ISN'T WORKING?

GALLUP: 75% of workers are 'phoning it in,' 55% describe themselves as 'disengaged' in their work and 16% are 'actively disengaged.' The actively disengaged alone are costing their employers \$350 Billion/yr.

According to the U.S. Dept. of Labor there were 1483 "mass layoffs" in the U.S. in December 2010 alone.

40% of Americans believe their job "is extremely stressful," 26% say they are either "often or very often burned out or stressed by their work," and 29% say they are quite a bit or extremely stressed at work.

Even the best fail. Wise statesmen are voted out of office (Churchill). Noble generals lose the war. Hard workers lose their jobs. Those with a clear sense of calling get laid off.

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Genesis 3:14-19: The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." ¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." ¹⁷ 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; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ 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."

CREATION → FALL → REDEMPTION → CONSUMMATION

1. **Work is changed**—still blessed, still called but changed by the entrance of sin. Work is not cursed—the ground is and now the ground will no longer submit to Adam but frustrate him and eventually swallow him up. “Work in a fallen world has the character of striving against forces that resist the worker’s effort (Leland Ryken).” Now work involves pain/toil, and sweat. The word for pain is the same word used for the woman’s ‘pain’ in childbearing.
2. **Work is abused**
 - a. Laziness/underwork (Prov. 6.6-11)
 - b. Overwork/Self-reliance (Duet. 8.17-18). Instead of thanking God we congratulate ourselves, instead of trusting him, we “eat the bread of anxious toil (Ps. 127.2). Instead of resting in God, “even in the night our hearts do not rest (Eccl. 2.23).”
 - c. Creational Abuse—rather than steward the land, we strip the land.
 - d. We abuse one another to get what we want. God is concerned for justice in the workplace—Proverbs 11.1, Amos 8.4-6. Notice in the Amos passage how injustice works against the aims of God in work. It dehumanizes rather than reflects God’s image; it strips rather than blesses; it makes poor rather than provide; it has only short-term goals rather than eternal redemptive ones. No wonder our work is making us sick, burning us out, and stripping the environment—we have forsaken God, the God who works, who created work, who blessed work, and who empowers work. We have taken God’s good purposes in work and twisted them to our own desires. Masters, employers, managers will have to give an account (Eph. 6.9)
3. **Work is battle**—I say ‘battle’ because Adam will have to battle thorns and thistles which will always be opposed to his efforts of order, blessing, meaning, and purpose.

All jobs are subject to the four F’s: frustration, failure, futility, and false starts. Puritan prayer: “O what a death it is to strive and labor; to be always in a hurry and yet do nothing!” Shakespeare referring to his own work of writing poetry: “with what I enjoy the most, contented least.”

WHERE DOES IT GO?—CAIN AND ABEL, JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR

1. Presence of God despite circumstances—faith (Gen. 39.2, 21)

If anyone had a right to be bitter about his work life, it was Joseph. Sold into slavery by his brothers, separated from his family, and living in a strange land, completely exploited, and out of control of his destiny, he could have complained and loafed. Instead, he believes by faith in God's providence, He believes by faith that God is present even here, and rather than complaining he works with integrity.

2. Power of God despite injustice—prayer

The greatest hindrance to our prayer is self-reliance, which is one of the biggest characteristics of the American attitude about work. Instead of self-reliance to fix everything, we can take each slight, each, injustice, each frustration, each failure as a window into poverty of spirit. Only from poverty of spirit, not self-reliance, will our prayers become cries of desperation, the longings of faith, heart-felt burdens that reach out to God. "He who knows that there are times when all human ways are blocked...In a special sense, this is the time for prayer." (Gustaf Wingren). "Our prayers are most intense and genuine when we are at our wits' end, when problems press themselves upon us to the extent that we give up, when in our desperation there is literally nothing that we can do (G.E. Veith)." I Peter 5.7

3. Purpose of God despite frustration—hope (Gen. 39.3, 50.20)

In spite of his circumstances, the injustice, and the frustration of futility, Joseph trusts in God's presence and providence in such a way that even his master notices the presence of God with Him (v. 3). God is revealed in Joseph's attitude about his work. Just the same, Joseph promises that he is one part of God's larger purpose in the world and rather than kicking against that with all his might, he trusts so that he eventually tells his brothers and us his secret to contentment—"you meant great evil against me but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive (v. 20)."

WHERE WILL IT GO?

CREATION → FALL → REDEMPTION → CONSUMMATION

We know even from the passage in Gen. 3 that death and decay will not have the last work. God is working now and will one day finally write over the four F's: Restored, Redeemed, Reconciled, and Renewed. The evil serpent who also battles and tempts us in our vocation will lick the dust of defeat and crawl whimpering on his belly before the Lord God as he is purged from God's world. So, our work takes on the qualities of the cross; in what seems like death, God has the power to bring life; in what seems like failure, God has the power to bring success; in what seems like frustration, God has the power to bring redemption. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we can be assured that our work "is not in vain (I Cor. 15.58)," that what we offer to God in faith and hope can be caught up in his eternal purposes, and rather than burning away like hay and straw will come out as gold and silver (I Cor. 3.9-15).