

Title: Faith and Work  
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Text: Colossians 3:17  
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## Faith and Work

This week we continue our series FaithWorks: Living Out What You Believe In. Two weeks ago Pastor Byron dug into Romans 4 with us and showed us this beautiful reality that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ and not by our own works. Last week we looked together at James 2, where James wants to warn us that real faith is not belief in concepts, but a vital trust in God which expresses itself in works. This week we come at the idea FaithWorks in terms of Faith and Work in the sense of our occupation or vocation.

Maybe that doesn't seem like all that important a topic to address, what with all the other doctrine, life issues, and roles we face as we seek to follow Christ. But, consider these numbers: the average person will spend approximately 90,000 hours at work over a lifetime. That is somewhere between one quarter and one third of your life spent that will be spent at work, which means that more than virtually any other setting in life your following Christ will happen at work.<sup>1</sup> Of all the opportunities for you to express living faith which trusts God and expresses itself through action, many if not most of them will happen in the context of work—and here I want to have a broad view of work including stay at home parents. It is not just exhibiting Christian character in the context of work, but the actual tasks we do and roles we take in our work that can be expressions of our faith in Christ and desire to see him glorified.

**I want to invite you into seeing and taking to heart that your work is an important part of God's redemptive story, and it is a crucial way that you live out his purpose in your life.**

Though there isn't one passage that we can point to for a fully developed theology of work, overall the Bible does tell us quite a lot about work. This morning we going to use several Scriptures to help us focus on three aspects of how work connects with the life of faith: God's story for Work, God's purpose for work, and God's power for work.

First,

### **I. We must take to heart the importance of work in God's Story (Gen 1, Isa 65, Rev 21:1-22:5).**

It is important to notice the context in which Paul says this verse Colossians 3:17 “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The context is this (v. 1-4) you have been raised with Christ, seated with him, and you are called to set your mind on things above not things that are on “earth.” That can't mean that you never think about what it means to live here as a husband, wife, son, master, etc—because the rest of the chapter is about exactly those types of things. “Set your minds on things above” means to see your current

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in several places, [http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/publications/globstrategy/en/index2.html](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/globstrategy/en/index2.html), <https://revisesociology.com/2016/08/16/percentage-life-work/>, [http://www.gettysburg.edu/news\\_events/press\\_release\\_detail.dot?id=79db7b34-630c-4f49-ad32-4ab9ea48e72b](http://www.gettysburg.edu/news_events/press_release_detail.dot?id=79db7b34-630c-4f49-ad32-4ab9ea48e72b)

life on earth from the perspective of God's plan, or story, of redemption. You and I are to look at "whatever we do" in light of the story of God and the Gospel.

One way of outlining the story of God as revealed in the Scripture is to talk about four phases: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation. When we pay attention to the theme of work as we move through those phases we see that "work" is actually a thread that runs all the way through God's story. We don't have time to look at each of these passages super in depth, but they will be on the screen, and I'd encourage you to write them down and read and meditate on them this week.

As we look at the first phase, Creation we find that

***A. Work is part of being made in God's image.***

The key passage here is Genesis 1-2. In Genesis 1-2 we find that God made human beings in his own image—and amongst other things, being in the image of God includes a commission—a job to do. The job human beings are given is in verse 26 and 28, "let them have dominion over...all the earth." Human beings are made to do the work of expressing and embodying the rule and reign of God through our lives on earth.

Likewise, Genesis 2:15 adds that men and women are put in the garden to "work and keep" it, to cultivate and guard it. These words are used together in other places in the OT to speak of the duties of the priests (see Num 3:7-8, 18:17)—which means the work God gives humans in the garden is initially invested with deep spiritual importance. Work is not something to get over with as soon as humanly possible. In God's story work not about increasing our leisure and decreasing our responsibilities, it is about increasing his glory through our responsibilities.

In the Second phase, we see that:

***B. Work is not a result of sin, but sin makes work "toil."***

The story of Genesis three, especially Genesis 3:16-19 tells us of humanity's Fall into sin. Adam and Eve do not trust that God's rule and care is their best option, but instead turn their own way. In rejecting God's care and rule, they introduce a fracture in their relationship with God, and with the earth—they receive a curse for breaking the covenant relationship with a righteous and holy God. One of the key repercussions of sin is that work will now be hard, toil, a struggle to survive. When work feels unfulfilling or not as fruitful as we want is the problem is not that work is bad, but that our world is broken and we are sinful.

Third,

***C. Redemption re-affirms the spiritual significance of all work.***

The next major act in the story of God is Redemption. This includes all the stories of Israel but finds it's full expression in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Paul writes of what Jesus has done in Galatians 3:13 that Christ rescued us from the "curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." He took all of our sin and brokenness on the tree so that God's wrath against sin would be removed and his blessings would come to anyone who believes, including the gift of the Holy Spirit living in you. And Romans 12:4-6 tells us the Holy Spirit gifts each of us differently to be the body of Christ *in the world*. We can't be the body of Christ living on mission if each of us does exactly the same work. It is because of redemption that Paul can say "whatever you do, do in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Finally,

***D. The Consummation promises work that is perfectly for God's glory and our delight.***

Finally, Consummation (or New Creation) is the great "happy ending" that God promises to bring to pass when Christ returns. Key passages are Isaiah 65:17ff and Revelation 21-22. In

Isaiah 65:21-23 talks about the redeemed building, planting, and enjoying the work of their hands—no longer is work done in vain. In Rev 21-22 we are introduced to the new heaven and earth as a Garden-city, the culmination of God’s original intent for the world, and his servants will worship him day and night. God is going to make all things new, remove the curse, and while these depictions in Isaiah and Revelation are certainly symbolic—they are telling us that the New Creation will be abuzz with activity as we enjoy our work for the glory of God! And we who follow Christ, being seated with him already, get glimpses of this in our work on this earth.

*Illustration:*

In his book *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre highlights the importance of story for shaping our actions with the following example. Imagine you were standing at a bus stop and a young man you’ve never met before comes up to you and says, “The latin name for common wild duck is *Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus*.” Though you understand the sentence, you have no idea what it means without the story which this strange event fits into. If he is mentally ill that would explain it. If yesterday he had a conversation about wild ducks at the library with someone who looks exactly like you that would explain it. If he is a foreign spy speaking the secret code words, that would explain it too. Depending on the story, your understanding would change, and so would your reaction.

That philosophical art-film *Monster’s Inc* illustrates this as Mike and Sully find out the true story of their world (children aren’t dangerous, and joy is more powerful than fear) their lives and work can’t help but change.

That is why we must take to heart the place of work in God’s story—because knowing that story will shape how we understand our work, and how we actually do our work. This story of God infuses our work—whatever it may be—with royal dignity, spiritual significance, and delight for God’s glory. So **take to heart the importance of work in God’s Story.**

Another key aspect of connecting faith and work is that:

## **II. We must be intentional about living out God’s Purpose through our Work (Phil 2:3-4, Eph 4:28)**

Again, Paul says in Col 3:17 whatever we do, do it in the “name of the Lord Jesus,” and v. 23 he says we should “work as unto the Lord.” We work for the honor of the Lord Jesus, but there is also a sense in which we work *for him*, as if he himself were there receiving our works. In other words, work is an opportunity to live out God’s purpose for us, as reflected in Jesus’s great commandment: that we would Love the Lord your God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

### ***A. We Love God through our Work***

We love God through our work by sincerely wanting to do a good job, and working hard at it (Col 3:22-23). By being wise in our business decisions as in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. By using the gifts and talents God has given us as we saw in Romans 12. By reflecting God’s character and values in the work that we do and the way that we do.

But we also love God through our work by loving our neighbor through our work. Jesus says in Matthew 25:35-36:

<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

Whenever we love our neighbor, we are loving God.

### ***B. We Love our Neighbor through our Work***

We love God and love others because we recognize how supremely God has loved us. He sent Jesus to remove the curse and secure his plan to make all things new, and now through faith in Jesus’s death and resurrection we can be made new and brought into his story. This compels us to want to obey Jesus and share God’s love by loving our neighbor. God would have us see all our work as opportunities for us to respond to his love, and to embody his love through the way we do our work.<sup>2</sup>

What I’m trying to get at is that our work is not just the way we earn money out of which we give a portion to love our neighbor, or an interpersonal context where kindness can happen—but the very task and roles of our work are opportunities to love our neighbor. Whatever you do—so long as it aligns with and is empowered by God’s love—is an opportunity to serve God by loving your neighbor.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Illustration:*

Milton Hershey...founded the Hershey Chocolate Company in 1903 with the innovation of putting milk into the chocolate bar. The company prospered, as did all the dairy farmers in the surrounding countryside. When the Depression hit and business fell part, Hershey committed to not lay off his employees. Instead he created his own public works projects in town and put the employees to work

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<sup>2</sup> All of the following Scriptures point to the connection between work and love of neighbor: In the book of Proverbs 21:25-26, we see the contrast between the sluggard and the righteous man is that the righteous man works hard so he can give.

<sup>25</sup> The desire of the sluggard kills him,  
for his hands refuse to labor.

<sup>26</sup> All day long he craves and craves,  
but the righteous gives and does not hold back.

In Ephesians 4:28, Paul says:

<sup>28</sup> Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so *that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul tells Christians to consider others more significant than ourselves, and look out for their interests not our own—that is, we should care about the common good above our own.

<sup>3</sup> Gene Veith, “Which Occupations Are Off Limits to Christians?” available at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/which-vocations-should-be-off-limits-to-christians/>

building houses, an amusement park, and a hotel. Toward the end of his life, he and his wife (who were childless) founded a boarding school for orphans to give them practical life skills within a supportive community. The trust that runs the school owns a large portion of the company stock, so today the school is funded by dividends and stock appreciation.<sup>4</sup>

This story illustrates many ways work can be an opportunity to love our neighbor and be instruments of God's common grace. You and I probably won't be titans of industry—but how might you have opportunity through your work to love your neighbor as yourself? Maybe you are a salesperson, and rather than convincing a customer that the product you're selling is what they need, you send them to a competitor because that is what they really need. Or, if you actually make products you try to make goods that are of excellent quality and reasonably priced rather than simply maximizing profits by making products that don't last. Maybe it is providing compassionate customer service to that difficult customer.

To help you think about how the story of God should shape your work, consider asking yourself the following questions, or better yet, talk about them in small groups and conversation with other Christians:<sup>5</sup>

*1) As an image-bearer of God, how does your work reflect some aspect of God's work?<sup>6</sup>*

*2) How does your work give you a unique vantage point into the brokenness of the world?*

*3) Jesus commands us to "love our neighbors as ourselves." How does your work function as an opportunity to love and serve others?*

Finally, to live and work as part of God's story and as a way of loving our neighbor

### **III. We need to receive God's Power for Work (Col 3:16-17)**

Look again at Colossians 3:16-17, Paul says "whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Paul is calling us to do whatever ever do, from the shortest occasional interaction to the longest sustained relationship, from single action to our sustained habits and career, all of it done in the

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 166.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Mullins, "The Butcher, the Baker, the Biotech Maker," available at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-butcher-the-baker-and-the-biotech-maker/>, accessed May 1, 2018

<sup>6</sup> In her book *Kingdom Calling*, Amy Sherman offers six categories of God's work that give us a helpful framework for our vocations:

- creative work (artists, designers, architects, etc.)
- providential work (entrepreneurs, janitors, civil servants, bankers, etc.)
- justice work (lawyers, paralegals, diplomats, supervisors, etc.)
- compassionate work (nurses, nonprofit directors, social workers, EMTs, etc.)
- revelatory work (scientists, journalists, educators, etc.)
- redemptive work (pastors, authors, counselors, etc.)

name of the Lord Jesus. This is ennobling, but also incredibly daunting, and because God has not yet made all things new, we know we could never keep this frame of mind as we face a broken world. But Paul helps us, by adding this clause “giving thanks to God the Father through him.” He is saying work for Jesus becomes an expression of thanksgiving to God the Father. There are two parts to that...

***A. The Engine of the Christian Life runs on grace.***

First is that by describing our activity as one of “giving thanks,” Paul is emphasizing that our activity is a *response* to God. It is *because* the word of Christ dwells in us that we are moved and empowered to respond to God. When we receive God’s grace through faith (trusting) in Christ, our lives become an expression of thanksgiving to God for his grace. Just as a diesel engine isn’t meant to and won’t run on gasoline, and vice versa, so the fuel the engine of the Christian life is meant to run on is not our own abilities or willpower or innate goodness, but God’s grace as expressed in the Gospel received through faith. That is the dynamic at play here.

***B. The Gospel is a “rich” source of power***

Paul encourages us in v. 16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” The message of the Gospel is that Christ has triumphed over the spiritual forces of darkness and set aside our debt of sin through his cross and he is reconciling all things to himself, beginning with people like us who put our faith in him. When Paul says let the word of Christ dwell “richly” he saying, go get another helping of grace. The Gospel can dwell richly because it is so indescribably rich.

In other words, not only is the Christian life meant to run on the grace of the Gospel, but we find that no matter how often we “fill up” the tank there is always more to discover and receive. Just when you think you must be getting near the shores of God’s grace, you are plunged again into the fathomless fountain of grace.

So receive his grace as you take to heart that your work is an important part of God’s redemptive story, and a crucial way that you live out his purpose in your life. Amen.