

Work Part 2: The Spiritual Rhythm of Work
Starting 2015 Right: Rhythms and Relationships
1/11/15

Welcome/Good morning/intro—especially if first time ever or first time in a long time in a church setting, thanks for joining us!

If you're a guest with us, great time to jump in, doing a series here in January to help all of us get off to a great start in 2015

Talking about rhythms and relationships—a new year is a great time to step back and evaluate and look at our life rhythms to make sure that they're healthy and sustainable

And if you weren't here last week we started a very important conversation talking about what most of us spend most of our days doing: work!

And we're at lots of different places when it comes to work:

Most of us spend most of our days working at a job that we love or we hate or we're ambivalent about

Some of us have reached the promised land of retirement where every day is Saturday

Some of us are really struggling right now with unemployment or under-employment

or we're in our 30's or 40's or 50's and we're still trying to figure out what we want to be when we grow up!

And some of us LOVE to work, it's one of the primary ways that we think about ourselves and our lives

And others of us work at our day jobs to pay the bills but it's just a small part of how we think about ourselves and our lives, we've got lots of other things that we're interested in

Given that we've got all these different perspectives and different experiences of work, we talked about a couple of core things last week:

We opened up the Scriptures and looked at the story of creation and we discovered that from the very beginning before sin entered the picture, we see God putting Adam in paradise and he's given work to do

This was very disheartening for some of you to hear, that even in paradise there was work to be done!

So the first thing we said last week was that work is good—God goes to work making a beautiful and perfect world and then he makes people in his image

And part of how we reflect that image is by going to work as sub-creators, co-working with God to tend to his beautiful world

And we noticed last week that part of the picture of work in the Garden of Eden is that it doesn't involve a paycheck or a time-clock

So another key thing for all of us is that work does not equal your day-job. In the biblical category of work, our day jobs are just a small part of what work looks like

But work also includes stuff like marriage and parenting and grand-parenting
it includes volunteering and mentoring and tutoring
it includes self-care of your body, mind, and spirit
it includes your home and your yard, the stuff that's under your sphere of dominion that's yours to tend to and cultivate

All of this is our work! And depending on your age and life stage, what the big-picture of your work looks like is going to morph and shift and be re-shaped

And we talked about the fact that we only have limited time and energies, so we have to figure out how we're going to spend that time and those energies

Figuring that out is something that all of us need to spend some amount of time here in January 2015 praying about and thinking about
including looking back on 2014 and paying attention to any warning signs or flares that went up
often in our lives we get these indications that all is not right or well in our jobs or in our marriages or with our kids
and part of us figuring out what our work is in 2015 is to look back on 2014 and pay attention to the warning signs that are there

And finally we looked at this passage in Ephesians 2, where the Scripture declares the good news that

¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And we talked about this idea that our if our identity is in our work or in our play or in our social status or in our competence or abilities or what we own or what we can do

then that's going to have consequences

But if we can begin to wrap our lives around the good news that we are God's handiwork, that he has crafted us and is crafting us and knitting us and shaping us as his son or daughter

If we can begin to root our identity in something deeper and greater than our work or our day-jobs, then we can begin to have perspective on all of it that allows us to work and serve without it becoming all-consuming

So we left last week talking about where are we attempting to find our identity? What are the consequences?

What might it look like to find our identity as God's beloved handiwork, how might that begin to free us to work and to play more freely?

And we started to ask if God's prepared good works in advance for us, what might those be for each of us in 2015?

As best as we can tell, what might be the work he's prepared in advance for us to do in 2015?

There's always surprises, to be sure, but for many of us there are some very clear tasks that we know that God is calling us to do in the coming months.

All that's setting the table for what we're going to talk today

This week I want us to consider that when God prepares good work for us to do, He cares about the work we're doing, but he ALSO cares about the work HE'S doing INSIDE of us while we do the work he's given us to do

In other words, work isn't just for work's sake, but it is also a tool that God uses to shape us, to mold us, and to make us more healthy, more holy, and more like the men or women he designed us to be.

There are SPIRITUAL RHYTHMS to work that we have to be intentionally looking for and attending to, because if we miss it, then we miss out on a huge chunk of the gift God has for us in the work he's prepared in advance for us to do!

I worked with college students for many years before coming here to work at Chatham community church

And every summer we'd send out from our chapter a few students who would go all over the world to do mission work

Sometimes that was working with kids, sometimes with doctors, sometimes with missionaries or churches

And when the fall kicked off we'd invite them to share a little bit about their trip with the rest of our community

And these presentations almost always ended the exact same way.

They would close with what I called the "Postcard Picture"--a picture of the kids they had worked with or with a picture of the sun setting over the Alps or over the African sahara or wherever they were

And they would say something like this:

“I went thinking that we were going to serve these kids or this people or this community and help them in some way

But in the end I was the one who was most changed by this whole experience.”

Every single time this work that they had done had impacted them more than it had impacted the people that they were there to serve

See, when we think about work, we mostly think about stuff that we’re doing that’s somehow making an impact on other people, or other situations, or making a difference somewhere outside of ourselves

And that’s true I don’t want to undervalue that

But I think that one of the deeper things that’s true about work is that not only is “work is good” [PPT call-back from earlier]

BUT ALSO that work is “Good for you”

The work that God has prepared in advance for you to do is not only to make a difference in a fallen and broken world

It is also a work that God has specifically prepared in advance for you to do to shape and form YOU, to heal YOUR OWN fallen and broken soul

Today, we’re going to look at one of my favorite stories in the whole Bible and a passage that taught me this whole principle that the work God does IN us is many times what’s most important

We’re going to drop down into Exodus 33 today—Exodus is the 2nd book of the whole Bible, there’s a movie out about it right now called Exodus: Gods and Kings, I haven’t seen it yet, heard kind of mixed reviews about it

This story of Exodus is one of the most important and formative experiences for the whole Bible story

and I’m super-geeked out because we’re going to spend about several weeks in the first half of Exodus story after we finish with this series

But for today, we’re just going to drop down into this little piece of Exodus 33, a little background

Moses is the leader of the people of Israel, they were a slave nation for over 400 years in Egypt and he’s just dramatically led hundreds of thousands of them out of Egypt

And now Moses is leading hundreds of thousands of people through the desert to the place that will become their permanent home eventually—the land God promised them

But it's a long road to getting there, and in the mean time, they're a huge nomadic group of people and they're in the desert for a long time and the worship of God was very important for these people since God was the one who had just freed them from Egypt

So here's what Moses does as we pick up the story here in Exodus 33:7

7 Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.

8 And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ...

10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. 11 The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

My dad was an officer in the Navy for 20 years and he did many different jobs but one of them was as an Admiral's aid

His job was to basically be the right-hand man for an Admiral in the Navy—keep him on schedule, organize his appointments, make him look as good as possible as much as possible

My dad really enjoyed this job in part because the admiral he worked for was a really good guy

And in part because when you're the aid to an admiral you end up hanging out and getting access to stuff that's above your pay grade!

And he would meet high-ranking officials from all around the world and be in conversations and conferences that he had no business being in except that he was with the admiral!

But there were limits. And there were meetings that he would have to wait outside the door for while the powers that be had their conversations

Well Moses here is the big-wig! He's the one that's led the people out of Egypt, he's the one that when he goes into the tent of meeting a pillar of smoke comes down and when that happens hundreds of thousands of Hebrews see it and come out of their own tents to worship God

And notice Moses is speaking to God face-to-face like a man speaks to his friend, this is incredible!

But there's another person here: JOSHUA is the aid, he's the side-kick. And while Moses is having this incredible experience of meeting with God face to face and talking like with a friend

Joshua is hanging out, outside the tent.

And after Moses is done with this ecstatic experience of talking with God face to face and after Moses goes back to the rest of the camp, Joshua stays behind at the tent, guarding it, keeping it safe, maybe inviting others to come in and pray

Moses is leading the charge, making high-level organizational and spiritual decisions for the entire nation.

Joshua is simply doing tent duty. Now he's got a great and once-in-all-of-history level mentor in Moses to learn from and study under and work with

But in his day job, he's still just doing tent duty. Tent duty is what I call any work that seems not particularly spectacular at the time.

Tent duty is watching other people have wonderful experiences, do wonderful things, while you just guard the tent and watch people come and go

Tent duty is the job you had in high school bagging groceries. Tent duty is the lame job on campus you did to put yourself through college

Tent duty is what you're doing after you lose your job and you're laboring through endless job web sites for months and applying everywhere you can

Tent duty is the months of thankless and quiet work you did caring for a sick or dying family member.

Tent duty is that season of parenting your kids where nothing spectacular was happening,
you were just doing the daily routines of drop-offs, pick-ups, homework, discipline, teaching, encouraging, and just doing life together

Tent duty is that season of your marriage where you were just sticking with each other through the natural and normal un-remarkable seasons of our lives

Tent duty are the seasons of our lives where we're engaged with a work that does not appear flashy, significant, or extraordinary in any way

Joshua here in Exodus 33 is doing Tent Duty. It is unremarkable except that he's there, he's present, and as best we can tell he's faithful in doing it

But Sunday School kids, time to shine: a couple of books later, do you remember who it is that leads the people into their permanent home, the promised land?
THIS SAME JOSHUA!

Joshua is the one who will lead the people out of the desert and into the promised land, Joshua is the one who will be hearing from the Lord directly

We have all kinds of stories about all kinds of people from the Old Testament and almost every single one of them make big mistakes
or have one signature fall or sin that cause significant pain to them and the people around them

In many ways this is encouraging because it reminds us that God is in the business of working with messy and broken people like you and like me

But situated among this cast of messy characters is Joshua, and get this, Joshua is one of the very few of the OT heroes that we get zero report of any significant moral failing

One of the places where that kind of character, that kind of perseverance, that kind of faithfulness gets forged is Tent duty.

But not just tent duty by itself. By itself a work or a job that is boring or uneventful or that feels like a grind doesn't necessarily help us or shape us in positive ways, does it?

Many of us have been in situations or know someone who was in a situation where some boring or dull work was required
and we hated it, we grew resentful, we shut down, we checked out, we complained or gossiped or grew bitter or despondent about life and our purpose

But if we engage in tent duty rooted in the larger realities that we talked about last week, then we can begin to experience and know and trust that Tent Duty work is not the end but a means to an end

If we are, indeed God's handiwork, his workmanship, if we're being crafted and sculpted by God,

then we can trust that even the seasons of our work-life that feel dull or pointless are intended by God to do something INSIDE of us that is good

We had some good friends with kids and one of their kids had some developmental delays

And so they were taking this kid to an occupational therapist every week.

And they were telling us about their occupational therapist who was great; she really got to know their kid and really understood what the issues were

And every single week she would lay out exercises and work for that kid to do that was tailor-prepared for them to work parts of his body or brain that was needing to be developed

Ladies and gentlemen, we are all born with developmentally delayed souls; we are all in need of significant spiritual therapy

But we are also God's handiwork, and the good work he's prepared in advance for us to do is like he's the perfect occupational therapist for our souls
who knows exactly who you are, what you struggle with
and he knows exactly what kinds of exercises and what kinds of work you and I need to do in order to be made whole again.

We can apply this ALL our work, even the work that we love to do
but it is especially helpful to understand and apply this when you're in a season of tent duty and wondering what the heck is going on and why you're doing this particular work

Work is given to us by God as one way that he is at work re-making us, redeeming us, and making us whole again
and sometimes a dead-end job is just that and we need to get out of it—not EVERY job is a tent duty job that we need to stick with
But sometimes in a job or work that feels dull God is wanting to do formative work he cannot do any other way

And one of the important questions to engage with as we survey all the different aspects of our works whether that's jobs or marriages or parenting or volunteering or tending house
is simply to pray "God, what is it that you want to do INSIDE OF ME here, in all these different areas?"

I'd encourage you to pray this prayer no matter where you are spiritually, even if you're not the kind of person who prays very much or ever or at all

Because the Scriptures tell us that we are God's handiwork, his workmanship, and that he's prepared good works for us to do
and sometimes the primary point of that good work he's given us to do is the work and transformation inside of us

There are a couple of primary ways that God uses work in our lives to shape us and do character development in us
whether it's tent duty or a work that you actually love and are thriving in

1. Different types of work bring different issues to the surface

Pay attention to internal noises surfaced by different types of work

Your job, your spouse, your kids, your volunteering situations, all of these apply different pressures which surfaces issues of character for each of us

I want to suggest to you that if we're actually doing it right, one of the gifts of work is that it surfaces much of our junk, much of our shortcomings, some of our sin patterns that we wouldn't see or realize any other way

Now, what most of us tend to do when those things surface is we tend to blame circumstances or people around us:

that one kid really pushes my buttons, that boss or that co-worker really brings out the worst in me or that situation really did a number on my personality

We say this as if we're naturally perfectly reasonable, wise patient, perfect human beings who are completely victims of our environment!

I want to suggest to you that it is both true that there are people and situations that are difficult and trying and that could be creating new or particular problems

AND I want to suggest to you that the impatience, frustration, desire to lash back out or whatever you're seeing is sometimes, in fact, very often, already inside of us

And this specific situation is actually just exposing what's in our hearts not for the sake of beating us up or shaming us but for the sake of getting rid of it!

You can't get rid of a cancer you don't know is there! It is all grace and mercy that we see the realities of what's in our hearts and then go to Jesus with whatever it is that's coming up

Right now, in most of our lives, there is some situation in at least one place where we're at work, whether that's at home or at a job or in a volunteer environment, that's surfacing something about our character that God wants us to deal with

I want to encourage you to not excuse that behavior, not run from that or stick your head in the sand or blame other people

I want to encourage you to name it, take it to the Lord, and ask him to help you deal with it, overcome it, address it.

2. Overcome temptations and challenges

Part of character formation that God can do through our work is growing in knowing who we are, what kinds of things push our buttons or are tempting for us

And growing in knowing how to do the hard work of fighting back temptation and even fleeing temptation develops strong spiritual muscles

I'm not very good at math, but I've been toying around with this equation this week, see if this connects with you:

Your work plus your personality equals predictable set of probable temptations & challenges

Every single work coupled with our own personalities and tendencies has its own unique standard temptations. Every. Single. One

Your day-job has its own unique standard ways that people cheat the company, cheat the clock, do slightly or very un-ethical practices or grasp for power or position

Parenting and marriage and house-keeping and retirement each have their own set of temptations; the work of caring for your body and your mind have their own set of temptations and challenges

Temptations and challenges come in all sorts of packages: boredom has temptations & challenges, failure has temptations loaded up with it, success has temptations loaded up with it

busyness has temptations, power has temptations, being the low person on the totem pole has temptations loaded up in it, so does being the highest person on the totem pole,

too much stress has temptations, too much free time has temptations

And which temptations are particularly alluring for each of us are all based on this grid that we all engage life with called our personality—some of us don't care about money, some of us are obsessed with it.

Same person who's obsessed with money maybe couldn't care less what other people thought about her while the person who doesn't care about money is obsessed with what others think about him.

So if we can go into all our work knowing that every work has its temptations, and if we can be honest about who WE are, and the particularities of our own personalities

then we can identify what that set of temptations will likely be ahead of time, and we can anticipate and be prepared which takes some of the power out of the temptations when they come

Let me walk through what this might look like:

1. Identify key personality patterns and key situations you're likely to face in your work

So part of my personality is that I like people to like me—unhealthy people pleasing is one part of my personality that God is re-habbing me on and I'm healthier than I was 10 years ago

But still, I'm a people pleaser AND I'm in a job that's all about people!

And I'm in a job where what people think about me in some cases drives whether or not people stay here with us—and sometimes they let me know it!

So I know that I'm always going to be tempted to take criticism too personally and take people's opinions of me too seriously

That's one of my very real and very probable temptations that I face in my day-job and it's helpful for me to identify that before it happens!

Whether you're a stay-at-home mom, a retiree who volunteers, or working a full-time job in whatever sphere, you're bringing your personality into a situation that comes with its own set of temptations

And how our personality mixes with those set of temptations is helpful and important for us to name

some of you would do my job and have NO problems with people being critical of you—you could care less, you think I'm a freak! Totally fine, I am!

But you'd have your own freak issues and set of temptations to face down and deal with based on your personality

So take a few minutes and do a little evaluation: what are your own personality patterns that may or may not even be something that the Bible would call sin

but when you bring those patterns into some area of work God has for you to do, it creates a predictable set of probable temptations.

Some examples: people-pleasing/need for approval, need to be needed, need for things to be perfect, need to be different, need to have fun/avoid pain, need for everyone to get along, need to have a good fight, need to be successful/smarest/most clever or beautiful or most whatever it might be!

These aren't even necessarily bad or sinful, depending on how or if you act on them

But hear that these patterns plus your work assignments equals a predictable set of probable temptations that you will likely face.

2. Pre-decide what you're going to do when that temptation comes.

So I've named that temptation: I'm going to be prone to take criticism too personally in part because I like people and I want them to like me!

So I go to Scripture and I see what the Scripture has to say about that. And the Scriptures tell me that my identity is NOT what others think about me, but my identity is rooted and secured in God's perfect love for me

Therefore, I've pre-decided, before I hear criticism or critique from anyone, that I'm going to fight to root my identity in God's love for me, that's the only opinion in the end that dictates who I am and what I'm all about

And as I'm holding onto my identity as a child of God who is loved by the Father, I'm free to have healthy distance between me and people's opinions about me,

All kinds of wins there: one of them is that with my identity in Christ and not people's opinions of me, I am free to hear/learn from any criticism or critique!

I DO want to listen to anything that I need to hear, I am always looking to grow and sometimes the people who are the most critical are picking up on something that I need to pay attention to

But I'm not going to have conversations in my head for days with people, I'm not going to get angry or defensive—some people are going to not like me or what I do or say, that's just a part of this gig! Why I get paid the big bucks!

And if I find myself struggling with something someone has said, then I've got some friends that I can go to who know me well and who can pray for me and help me to sort through what I need to listen to and what I just need to let go of

Pre-decide what you're going to do WHEN that temptation comes—it's going to come, don't be surprised by it, make a short, simple, clear plan and then...

3. Do what you've pre-decided and don't re-decide in the moment

99.99% of the time, what you pre-decided in a rational, prayerful, clear-headed moment was the right thing and you shouldn't RE-decide in the moment

PRE-decide and don't RE-decide, especially not on the spot!

IF there's re-deciding that needs to happen you need to do that SOME OTHER TIME, NOT in the middle of the temptation, you will lose that battle 95% of the time.

4. Correct after a fall as quickly and thoroughly as possible

When we fall into temptation—God’s never shocked. Never surprised. We’re regularly surprised by what we’re capable of, but God is under no illusion as to how innately good we are

So when we make a mistake, the Scriptures call us to repent, repentance is turning away, changing your path, turning toward the Lord

And the call is for that repentance to be as radical and whole-life as possible, to not just dabble around the edges but a whole-life repentance and as thorough going as possible

One old dead wise theologian said that maturity in the Christian life is primarily marked by the speed and thoroughness of our repentance

That is, when we see sin at work, we deal with it immediately

I want to invite you do this work this week—and again, if you’ll excuse me—maybe you need to go on overnight retreat this coming weekend and do some of this work

1. What issues are surfacing in the different areas of your work? Sometimes God gives us work that acts as a mirror to show us what’s inside of our hearts.

Whether that’s a kid who drives you crazy or a situation at your job that’s bringing out some not-so-great things in you.

Sometimes those ARE situational. But sometimes, it’s just showing us reality. Are you willing and able to engage with those, bring those to the Lord, and ask him what he wants to do with it?

2. Your work plus your personality equals a predictable set of probable temptations

Try spiritual training through the 4 steps:

Take a good look at your personality, your history, your tendencies

Then look at your key areas of work, name each of their unique temptations, get those out into the light and see what God has to say about them in the Scriptures

And then prayerfully pre-decide what you’ll do when those temptations come, and then act in line with what you’ve decided in advance.

And when you fall, when you forget, when you sin, name it, bring it out into the light, and turn from it as quickly and thoroughly as you possibly can

That process is seriously formational, transformational for us in our characters.

If we pay attention, sometimes the work that God is doing in our work has more to do with what he's doing IN us rather than what he's doing THROUGH us

And if we're aware of what's going on, if we're asking the questions and willing to step into the Spiritual internal, formational rhythms of work, the transformation in our hearts and minds and lives can change everything.

BENEDICTION:

Let folks know that ended early so people can go through Connection Celebration and connect with folks while kids are doing normal thing

Call up ministry leaders, read through list of needs from bulletin and have the ministry leader wave

Second service ask people to do chairs

Blessing