

Work Part 3: Work as Mission
Starting 2015 Right: Rhythms and Relationships
1/18/15

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 true confessions: when we initially outlined this series we thought we'd just do ONE week on work as a part of healthy life rhythms

But somehow talking about work has mushroomed from one-week into three weeks—this is what happens when I get too much room to roam!

But my feeling has been that if we're not helping each other think about how our faith intersects what most of us spend most of our days doing
then what are we doing here?

And if you're not much of a church person and you're coming here with questions or looking for something

From my perspective it's important for you to see that what we're doing here isn't just about some Sunday morning spiritual experience that has nothing to do with the rest of your life

but that what we're talking about here as we follow Jesus changes and affects every single area of our lives in ways that are life-giving and good

So this is the LAST week, I promise, of our little mini-series within our series talking about work, we will move on and talk about play next week I promise!

If you're just joining us, let me get you up to speed on the last two weeks and what we've been talking about.

Two weeks ago we talked about how God is the first worker, he goes to work creating a garden paradise, then God creates Adam in his own image and puts him in the middle of paradise

and THEN he gives Adam a job to do—he's told to go to work!

Work was a part of the original plan from the beginning, it was there before any sin or brokenness entered the picture

So we said first off that ***work is good***—it is a part of what it means that we're made in God's image

Then we talked about how in the Scriptures work isn't just about a day-job, it's a big category of things that includes our day-jobs but also includes a much larger set of tasks:

- 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

And we talked about how the Scriptures tell us the good news that our identity and who we are is not wrapped up in what we do but is rather rooted in God

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

Who we are as God's creation, his craftsmanship as followers of Jesus shapes how we think about our work and we go to work in faith, trusting that he's prepared good works in advance for us to do in 2015

And last week we picked right back up there and we talked about the SPIRITUAL, internal, rhythms of work and about the fact that God has priorities for us

And here's his most important priority for us: He cares more about who we're becoming than what we're doing.

This whole idea of being God's handiwork, being crafted and shaped by God, is the ***first*** and most important storyline in our lives

We tend to think about work in terms of what it is we're producing or how we're serving customers or impacting clients or growing the company or caring for the kids

But often God has a work he wants to do INSIDE of us, shaping and forming us, and the work he's giving us to do is simply a means to doing that

And we talked about paying attention to the issues are being surfaced by God in the work he's given you to do?

Often, God uses our work environments to show us what's inside our hearts that needs to be dealt with or addressed

Then I encouraged you to work with this little equation as a part of the character formation part of our work

Your work + Your Personality = Predictable Set of Probable Temptations and Challenges

If we can step back and think through what the work is we've got to do and if we can be honest about our temperament and tendencies

Then we can anticipate a set of likely temptations and challenges that we're going to face in this work and pre-decide how we'll handle

So all that is what we've been talking about briefly the past two weeks, if you've missed it every single one of our messages is on-line in multiple formats

Today we're going to wrap up our conversation about work talking about work as mission

that as important as the work inside of us is, the ways that our work impacts others and makes a difference in a fallen, messy, broken world ALSO matters greatly

If you have kids, then you definitely know this is flu season!

After Christmas on the soccer sideline with a group of parents they were all sharing stories and comparing notes about who had the flu over-run their house the worst over the holidays

Fortunately we had a flue-free Christmas but just when I thought that perhaps we'd escaped it entirely, it turned out to simply be a stay of execution.

A week and a half ago one of our kids woke up with a 103.5 temperature and just feeling gross, Kelly took her to the doctor and got the confirmation that she was all flu'd up

The doctor prescribed the holy grail of flu treatments, called Tamiflu, maybe you've heard of it

My wife goes to pharmacy to get it and it turns out it is not cheap. But we've got a sick kid who has a history of respiratory illness and so we suck it up and pay the big price tag—everyone's got 3 mortgages these days, right?

And I tried to NOT to calculate how much it was costing us per fluid ounce every time she drank it!

But here's what happened with our liquid gold costing Tamiflu: it worked. Within 24 hours, she was 90% better. Another 12 hours and she was all there.

We stayed quarantined for one more day to make sure, but the Tamiflu totally took care of the problem

See, the people who researched and created Tamiflu not only did a good thing, they did a good thing excellently and well
they created a medication that worked with minimal side effects that healed my daughter in a day--I'm a total believer in Tamiflu!

Today, we're going to talk about good work. Work as mission that calls out the best work in us that we can create or generate to bring healing to a broken world.

We want to talk about how the work that God has prepared in advance for us to do is worth you bringing you're "A-Game"
because whatever your work is, God gives it to us so that we might be part of God's huge, cosmic story of redeeming all things

To start with, we've got to back to the beginning, to the story we started in a couple of weeks ago
because in the same conversation that God has with Adam about working the garden there's a warning about a tree that he's NOT supposed to enjoy, a tree he's NOT to eat from

[⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."]

But of course, he disobeys this command and he DOES eat of it and here's what happens as a result:

¹⁷ 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,'

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

***¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.***

***¹⁹ 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."***

The last few weeks I've started by saying that work is good—so last week someone was giving me a playful hard time when she said, "hey, work is also a curse!"

And maybe some of you feel that the most in your day-to-day work life, right? The work I'm doing doesn't feel like it's all that good, it mostly feels like toil or boredom or frustration

Here it is! Work was good in the beginning, but because sin has been introduced into the system, work is now cursed and hindered and barbed because of sin

Now, be sure to catch this: God's not ticked and trying to figure out how to get humans back for doing something he said not to do

This curse is the natural consequence of introducing sin into the world

We've introduced sin, that means that work, which was supposed to be joyful and free and life-giving is now riddled with this parasite called sin

sin is an add-on, a leech onto every good thing God has created that distorts and disrupts every good thing God has created

That includes work and everything else—friendships and families and government and economics and law and race relations and education

And so it's like the kid cooking their first solo batch of cookies who mistakes salt for sugar and dumps all this salt that gets mixed into the whole batch

it might look good from the outside but one bite and you know that something is wrong

So you can either dump the whole batch and start over again, which is what most of us do and that makes sense—and God had that option, right? Could have blown it up and started over

But God LOVES this thing that he has created, so in spite of all the difficulties, he goes to work redeeming and re-making all of it, he's going to pull out all the sin, every single grain and fleck of sin he's going to burn off, purify out

So God goes to work re-building what's been damaged. And to change the metaphor all of this world is one giant construction zone, all of it is under reconstruction and renovation

[BREAK OUT CAUTION TAPE] Spiritually, every single person, place, idea, relationship, government, country, is wrapped in spiritual construction tape, all of it is a work in progress

And over Christmas we talked about God's promised solution: that throughout the Scriptures there's this promise of this one who is to come who will bring SHALOM to a broken world—the peace-child will come

Shalom, as we talked about, gets translated “peace” but it's always a much bigger than just me feeling calm and peaceful although that matters

Shalom is right relationships, wholeness, right-ness—shalom is going to work in this world under construction with power and authority to bring the full healing God desires.

Shalom is the doing away of this leech and this parasite called sin and the fulfillment of the work of redeeming, renewing, rebuilding all that is wrong in this world

It is a “NO” to the parasite of sin so that we might live into the fullness of God’s “YES” to us as people made in his image whom he loves

And so this peace-child comes, Jesus, and he comes to bring wholeness and redemption.

Catch this: everywhere Jesus goes, there is this SHALOM in his wake—every single interaction, every conversation, every town, every house, every person
everywhere Jesus goes he leaves behind a trail of life, he sews seeds of life with every step, every breath, every single word

Have you ever known someone who was so consistently negative, destructive or unhealthy and sick that everywhere they go they leave a trail of destruction and death?

Like even if it’s subtle, they just destroy relationships, break trust, undermine other people, bring everyone down, bring pain or violence blech to the situation?

It’s like they’ve got this flu virus, only it’s not physical it’s emotional or relational or even spiritual—and they’re extremely contagious and everywhere they go they bring this virus with them

And in their wake, it’s nothing but pain and brokenness and people picking up the pieces

Here’s the good news: Jesus is JUST AS CONSISTENT but in the opposite direction. It’s like he’s got this GOOD VIRUS—SHALOM VIRUS that he brings to every situation

And even the people who are rejecting him and pushing back against him are like my kid who didn’t want to take her Tamiflu
you might not like how this tastes or what it sounds like or looks like, but in who this man is and in what he says there is LIFE here.

And everyone who rejects his touch is rejecting the life-giving spirit he’s come to bring because if we’re honest many of us prefer to be sick and in darkness than we want the life and the light, don’t we?

The Scriptures say this about Jesus and describe him this way:

The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit.

Jesus was and is this life-giving Spirit, he is filled with this Spirit and he offers this life-giving power to all people.

And everywhere he goes, there is life in his wake, he leaves a trail of people more alive, more free, less enslaved to sin and to all its consequences

And the people’s response to the ways that Jesus did his work was overwhelming— here are some quotes from Scripture immediately following some of the miracles and teachings that Jesus did

The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. –Matt 15:31

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. – Luke 4:22

People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well” –Mark 7:37

*They were all amazed and glorified God saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”
–Mark 2:12*

And there are dozens more like these, but you get the point!

What Jesus does in a world that’s wrapped up in construction tape, in a world that’s completely under construction and undergoing re-construction
is he’s this life-giving Spirit who comes and brings life to this world

And everything he touches gets better.

So Jesus spends his life and his death and his resurrection
all about pouring out this life-giving spirit to the creation that he and his father both love, both made and both are re-making

And after he gets done with his work, as he’s getting ready to leave this earth, he promises his followers two things:

1. I’m going to give you this same Spirit that I have, we call that the Holy Spirit and
2. Because you’re going to have the same Spirit I’ve had, you’re going to do the same types of thing, even greater things, than I have

Jesus went to work bringing his life-giving, shalom-bringing power to bear wherever God his Father wanted him to go, doing whatever he saw his Father doing

And then he looks at his followers, and he looks at you and he looks at me and he says,

“I’m going to give you my same life-giving spirit, and then I’m going to go ahead of you and I’m going to prepare good works in advance for you to do

And your work, your job, is that your work might bear the family resemblance that you, too, might be bringing shalom and peace and wholeness to a world under construction

Everywhere Jesus went, his work looked enough like God that people recognized the fingerprints of God at work through him

Jesus’ work looked like his Heavenly Father’s work because he was doing it in step with his Father and filled with God’s Spirit.

The same thing should be true of us as we are in process of growing up into Christ—we’ve been given his Spirit, we’re learning how to follow Jesus in every area of our lives

And therefore, our work bear that same family resemblance, it should look enough like Jesus’ work that it should point to something or someone larger than ourselves

In a world that is a giant re-construction zone
Jesus as the life-giving spirit brings healing, hope, love, power, truth,
leadership, and a servant’s heart and attitude
that re-forms and re-names and redeems everything he comes in contact
with

And then he gives US that same spirit and he lays out work for us to do that is in the exact same line of life-giving work

Whether that be in our marriages and homes, in our neighborhoods, in our local schools, or in our work places, and in the places where we feel compelled to serve or volunteer to make a difference in our community

Jesus says: “I want YOU to go to work, bringing healing to all things, just like I did!”

So let’s talk practically about what work that participates in Jesus life-giving work looks like—how do we do OUR work as mission just like Jesus did HIS work as mission?

One of the things that’s true about me is that there are certain tasks and chores that I just put off and put off and put off NOT JUST because I don’t like to do them

But because they feel a little overwhelming.

I do almost everything electronically but try as I might, there’s always random pieces of paper that I have to file away or figure out where to keep so that I don’t

lose them. If I was smart and a little bit disciplined, I would do this regularly and it would stay under control

But I'm not that smart and I'm not that disciplined and so often random pieces of paper will just be piled up or stuck in random places and then of course that one time when I need that one paper I have to dig through stacks of junk to try to find it

Putting papers away or throwing them away just *feels* overwhelming—any of you have some area of your life that just FEELS overwhelming: cleaning the attic or garage or writing some report that you dread or some other task you freeze in front of?

And in a world with many needs and faced with a call that says we've been given a life-giving Spirit to bring wholeness and shalom and healing to the world

It can get a little overwhelming for some of us, can't it? There are so many places, so many people, so many needs where this life-giving spirit of Jesus needs to be brought

So the first place to start for all of us is to remember this good news: **1. There's one Messiah, and you are not Him!**

We trust that Jesus alone is THE life-giving spirit, HE is the Messiah, and not us: good news, isn't it?

And He's gone ahead of us and prepared good work for us to do and our job is to first trust HIM to be Messiah and then to discern and discover what the good works he's prepared for us to do.

Two implications: first there are LIMITS to what you are supposed to be doing. Finding those limits and embracing those limits for some of us is the hardest thing about our work

In his earthly life, even Jesus did not cure every sick person, give every blind person sight, teach every single person he possibly could have taught

Jesus embraced human limitations. Jesus got tired and rested. Jesus went away and withdrew from his work and prayed. Some of us need to learn from all of that!

If this whole world is a construction zone, all wrapped up in caution tape with signs all over the place that says "AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY"

then there are a FEW sites where Jesus has given us permission to cross the tape, put on a hard hat and go to work

and with every other site that we go on, we're actually TRESPASSING spiritually! And Jesus kindly asks you to get OFF his construction site!

Question: what are the limits to the work God has given you to do? What has he NOT given you to do?

For some of us, naming that is the most important thing and a first step towards not wasting our time with all this other stuff he's not asking us to take care of—he's got that!

Embracing his boundaries around your work helps us to focus on what it is we're actually supposed to be doing

Second implication: if Jesus is the Messiah, and he's always at work, the question is in some ways NOT what do I need to do but rather:

“God, what are YOU ALREADY DOING and how do you want me to join in?”

The Scriptures tell us that God is not asleep, that he's not far off, that he is always, always always working

if he's the Messiah and we're his children, his followers, then the question of which work he's prepared in advance for us to do is all about asking him what he's up to and then joining in with his movement and his Spirit.

Two: Excellence

One of my friends was talking once about how Jesus spent his first 30 years as a carpenter and he said:

“I don't think Jesus ever made a junky table.”

When the people around him proclaimed that Jesus does all things well, it means he does all things well! That's profound, I know!

And we're given his same spirit and called to do this same type of work!

In whatever work God has given you to do, whether it is parenting or accounting or house-cleaning or being a golf-pro or babysitting

there is a **craft** to it, and you are called to be a wise and dedicated and diligent student of your craft

learning how to do your craft in ways there are wise and in accordance you with your gifts and personality to do that work

Going to work learning YOUR craft with excellence is one of the ways that we do the life-giving work that God has called us to do

There's a story about Martin Luther, the man who started the Protestant Reformation in Europe a couple hundred years ago

And a shoe-maker came up to him and told him that in order to do his work for Jesus and to honor God, he was planning on putting little crosses on the soles of every shoe he made

And Martin Luther said to him very simply: “Just make good shoes.” Just. Make. Good. Shoes.

My friends, just do good work. That’s honoring to God and it blesses people.

This is an important and helpful corrective for those of us who prefer to live life doing the minimal effort required of us in as much of life as we possibly can!

Some of us just don’t like to do ANY kind of work, we’d prefer the safety of disengagement and ambivalence about work to the cost of honing our craft

But the Scriptures declare that the world is a mess—and you don’t even have to believe the Scriptures are true to see that this is true, right?

And if we have any inkling about God’s HUGE heart for this world that’s a mess,

And if we have experienced that love personally in the work of Jesus in our lives, then for those of us who are inclined towards laziness and disengagement with the work God’s given us to do

Are strongly and thoroughly called to repent, to turn away from disengagement and to receive the life-giving spirit of Jesus who calls us and empowers us with his power to go to work in this re-construction zone

And on the other end, some of us are perfectionists and this call to excellence needs to be rounded out with a couple words: ***(Grace-covered)***

We want to learn and grow in the craft of whatever work God has given us to do, but that is not to be out of a striving, anxious, grasping spirit.

The life-giving Spirit is at work not only THROUGH you but like we talked about last week, it’s also at work INSIDE of you, to give you life,

So that we are not enslaved to a relentless sense of our failures all the time to the point where we’re exhausted by the conversations in our own heads

AND where we’re EXHAUST-ING to the people all around us who know that we’re never satisfied or happy with them!

Perfectionists: you, too are under construction—and Jesus is more patient with you and with the people around you than you are. Receive his grace.

Grace-covered excellence is one of the marks of those of us who are following Jesus and filled with his life-giving Spirit—what does a grace-covered excellence look like in your line of work?

3. Is a “custom job” and takes context seriously

One of the things that Henry Ford did that was brilliant was figure out that if he designed an assembly line
and had everyone do the exact same thing day after day they could build a car that the average person could afford

And eventually they would set up the same assembly line in different parts of the country and eventually all over the world and do the exact same thing

But what we see with Jesus is that he doesn't build assembly lines. Each person and each situation is taken seriously as he walks this line:

FIRST, he DOES have his agenda: shalom bringing is not weak or soft, he is aggressively bringing his shalom agenda everywhere he goes
He declares that the kingdom of God has come in himself and that ALL people need to repent of their own ways and follow him
he's got a clear agenda and plan, that's the call on all of our lives and it does not waver from person to person

But at the same time, *how* he declares that, what kinds of stories and illustrations and tells; and how he embodies that and what kinds of miracles he'll do is radically driven by the context

Jesus is categorically a life-giving Spirit and he gives us that same-life giving spirit so that we might be in the same category that he is

But what that looks like and how that gets expressed in different contexts and through our various personalities will be very different

And part of the work for all of us who are Jesus-followers is to maybe take last week's equation and tweak it and do a little bit different kind of math:

Your work context + your personality + the life-giving spirit + specific life-giving practices = life giving outcomes

Walk through example/fill in:

"your work context" is as a parent or as an employee at this company or in your marriage, there are specific people and personalities involved, there are particular types of work or transactions or interactions or processes involved
plus my personality and gifts or temperament: we talked about this last week: people-pleasing, conflict seeking, need to be successful, need to be different, need to be respected, on and on—if you're not sure about this, you can find good personality tests on-line: Myers-Briggs personality test can be really helpful

PLUS the life-giving Spirit—this is something that I pray for very regularly, for a fresh filling or fresh work of the Spirit in my own life and for particular contexts—sometimes I'll ask for a special filling of God's life-giving Spirit for a

difficult conversation I need to have with someone or for a specific task I need to do like writing a message.

PLUS this variable of life-giving practices—all kinds of Christians filled with the life-giving spirit who are NEGLECTING or just never getting around to participating in Jesus' life-giving work because they've never put any thought into what life-giving practices might look like:

PRAYER is always a life-giving practice—are you praying for your work, over your work, for the people who are involved in it?

here's where some of the craft comes in, where you're stepping back and prayerfully considering the place God has you, the people he has you around

and asking the question: what are the life-giving practices that I can do here, in this context, with these people, in this industry, in this office space, in this home or my situation

“How can I go the extra mile I THIS work to be a part of God's mission to bring redemption to all things?”

Chick-fil-a OUTSTANDING example of a group of Christians who have taken an industry by storm by basically running this equation and asking what are the life-giving practices we can weave into fast-food service to a Jesus-like level?

All of those things together equals the same life-giving outcomes that Jesus calls us to be a part of in our specific context

Four: Be prepared to interpret your actions

When Jesus does his life-giving work, you know what the crowds consistently do? They praise God. They give glory to God.

Over and over again, the people see what Jesus does and they recognize that it's sourced in the God of the Scriptures

Now that happens because Jesus is a Jew and he's working among mostly other Jews and they share the same worldview and the same God

so when Jesus does something remarkable, everyone is pretty much on the same page as to who it is that gives someone the power to do that kind of thing: God!

But our context is not like Jesus', is it? There are all kinds of people with all kinds of ideas about God and all kinds of definitions about who God might be if there is any God at all!

You could do excellent work, life-giving work, and people might just think you happen to be a spectacular human being—which of course you ARE, but that's not the source of your life-giving work, is it?

So in order for our work to complete the life-giving cycle, we need to develop simple, non-preachy, non-annoying ways of interpreting what we're doing

Because our actions are not self-interpreting. People don't see you do a great presentation at work and immediately think that God must have something to do with it do they?

So as you do life-giving work, and as people occasionally notice, it's good to have some simple ways to talk about it.

We've got a great set of "I don't do church" friends that we really love

And recently one of them thanked me for going a little bit out of my way to do something for them and I just said: "This is just what it looks like to follow Jesus."

Maybe you get a compliment or a thank you for good work you've done, what that does is creates an opportunity to interpret what's actually going on:

"God's given me some great gifts and some great opportunities and I'm just doing what I can to serve others like he's teaching me."

Coffee-shop convo: "You've got such a great voice!" Response: "Well that's just been given to me from above, you know?"

Find your words, your ways of talking about it, but if we do excellence and embrace limits and really hone our craft of life-giving practices

And we never find a way to interpret what it is we're doing and give words around it, do you know who it's all going to point to? ME! YOU!

Now again, you're beautiful and wonderful, but are YOU the Messiah? Are you that life-giving Spirit? No, we already established how freeing and good that is!

Therefore, we've got to find words to interpret what it is we're doing, our own words, our own ways, that help folks understand that we're doing our work as mission, that there IS a life-giving Spirit who would love to give THEM life, too!

My friends, as we close today, we go as people under construction into a world that is also under re-construction.

Underneath your seat you've got your own piece of this "Caution" tape to take with you to remind you of that

and as a call to put on your hard hat this week and go to work, doing the work that God's prepared in advance for you to do

And as you go into this world, go knowing that God has gone ahead of you and prepared good works for you to do as a part of HIS MISSION to reconstruct this world.

That means we...

1. We embrace our limits and trust that Jesus is the one Messiah
2. We pursue excellence in our craft, whatever they might be
3. We take our context seriously and develop specific life-giving practices
4. We learn how to interpret our life-giving actions that people might be pointed to God

My prayer is that as God gives us good work to do this week, we'll meet him in this work, be formed by him in it, and be a blessing to the world, participating in Jesus' mission of re-building all of it.