

## Work

Starting 2015 Right: Rhythms and Relationships

1/4/15

Good morning/intro

Happy New Year! Hope you've had a great Christmas and New Year's

To help all of us get off to a good start in 2015 we're doing a couple of things

One is this series for the next couple of weeks talking about healthy rhythms and healthy relationships

But another thing that I wanted to highlight is this overnight retreat that we're doing not this coming weekend but the NEXT weekend, January 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, that's a Friday and Saturday

And the idea is that you'd come and bring your calendar, your life, and the year coming up

and kind of look over all of it with God's eyes, asking for his perspective on this year that's coming up and asking him what he might want for you to be doing in the year ahead

I shared with y'all a couple of weeks ago that every couple of months I'll spend a full day just me, my Bible, my journal, and all the various areas of my life: my kids, my wife, my work, my friendships, my extended family

My hopes, my dreams, the problems or knots that I keep tripping over

And I'll offer it all up to God and ask him what if anything needs to happen in those areas, is there a step or an action he would invite me to take that might be fruitful or helpful in some way?

What if one year from now you could look back on 2015 and say that 2015 was a year where you connected more deeply with God and met him more often in the midst of your every day stuff

in part because you took just one overnight retreat to invite him into your year and to hear from him in terms of what needed to happen?

What if this year ahead is a year where God wants to do some important work in your life or around you but there's stuff that we need to be awake to or thinking about or engaging with in order to do that work?

I want to ask each of you to seriously consider taking one night away in January so that the rest of the days and nights in 2015 might be a little bit more alive, a little bit more rich and filled with the larger reality of God

Again, Jan. 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, the cost is \$50/person, there is some scholarship money available if money's an obstacle, fill out that information card in your bulletin with your name and contact information or you can register online at [www.retreatofsilence.info](http://www.retreatofsilence.info)

Last week we started this Rhythms and Relationships series with my partner in crime Steve Tamayo and he suggested that our life rhythms do 3 three things:

Our life rhythms REVEAL—they reveal what matters to us and what's important to us—no matter what you say your priorities are, your rhythms of what you do and how you spend your time show what actually matters to you!

Second, our rhythms SHAPE us—whatever rhythms we embrace or do, they reinforce us, they have a reinforcing tendency in our lives

Third, our rhythms have consequences: HEALTHY rhythms sustain us, they keep us going over the long-haul, but UNHEALTHY rhythms ultimately will destroy us or something or someone else.

This is a brilliant and Steve started last week by talking about the healthy rhythm of sleep—so if you missed that one, you should check that out!

Today, we're going to tackle a very applicable subject as tomorrow we come to the day many of us have dreaded for several days now:

It's the day everyone goes back to work! And kids, you get to go back to school! Mom and dad are looking forward to the latter but dreading the former!

Today we're going to talk about work—it's the thing that most of us spend most of our waking hours doing, but many of us have gone our whole lives without getting much help here

If you're a church-person, the sad thing is that you can go your whole life in church and never once hear anyone talk about the thing that you'll spend most of your life doing

So today and next week, we're going to help fix that by spending the next two weeks looking at what the Scriptures have to say about work

and how we might think about it and do it in ways that are life-giving both to us and to the people around us.

Now to start with, we have to recognize that as usual there is a spectrum of approaches to how different ones of us think about or approach work

and we have to recognize that there are pitfalls at either end of the spectrum

Several weeks ago I was getting lunch with an old friend who was talking to me about his job and how his boss was retiring after decades

In his world and in his organization, this position is very prestigious and comes with a lot of other opportunities, and I was asking him if he was thinking about applying for it

And he was telling me that he wasn't sure about it because he knew that it would mean more time and more travel

He knew that to take this promotion was going to demand more of HIM and he wasn't sure he wanted to give much more

And he said to me something that perhaps many of you resonate with:

“it's just as important to me that I get to the gym every day and get a good workout as it is that I work hard that day at my day job”

How many of you resonate with that idea—that your day-job is just a part of what's important to you and maybe not the most important part?

My good friend is on the end of the spectrum that I'll call “work to live”—he works to pay the bills and he wants to do a good job, he's excellent at what he does, actually

But his job is not the most important thing in his life. He's got a number of other things that matter as much or more than his job does

And there are a number of strengths for folks on this end of the spectrum—at their best/healthiest: tend to have healthier life/job balance, can be healthier in general, often have very developed hobbies or other interests

Folks on this end of the spectrum are often just healthier and enjoy life more than many of us!

However, at their worst, the pitfalls of this attitude is that it can under-value work as a place where we're called to serve others and serve God

an ambivalent attitude towards work that misses the opportunity to take seriously the call to contribute towards the common good

it misses the ways that a work-challenge can bring out the best of our God-given talents and abilities

and at its worst or in some of us, it can devolve into utter self-absorption where I just don't like doing anything that I someone else asks me to do or don't like being anywhere where I'm just not in charge of my own time and my own tasks

Any of you who TEND toward this end of things ever fall into one of these pitfalls?

On the other end of the spectrum I'll call “live to work” folks—these are people for whom their work is the primary way that they think of themselves and their lives

True confessions and this won't come as a surprise to those of you who have been here for a while, I fall on this end of the spectrum

For those of you like me, we're at our best when we give our all to a cause or a work that we deeply believe in and that is making a difference in the world

Whether it's helping people to feel better who are sick  
or bringing organization to a chaotic office environment  
or helping kids to flourish as you teach them to read and write and do math  
or as you spend your days parenting them and helping them to grow up to be wise men and women

And this is a blessing to us as it challenges us to give our all and our best gifts and bring them to the table to make a difference in our world

But we also have pitfalls on this side of the spectrum, don't we? If our whole lives become consumed with our work, we lose perspective, we lose ourselves, we lose our identity

Countless marriages and kids have been sacrificed to the false god of a job or a career that consumed either the husband or the wife and became everything to them

Over-identification with our work causes us to over-work, it can destroy life-balance where we don't know ourselves or what else we like to do, it can mean we don't exercise or keep up other healthy habits

Burnout, anxiety, depression, and anything negative or setback or disappointments can lead to massive gut-wrenching despair!

Over-working costs us deeply: physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

Any of you on this end of the spectrum ever fall into one of these pitfalls?

Both under-working and over-working have significant pitfalls that can cause significant damage to ourselves, our relationships with others and our relationship with God

But what if in 2015 you didn't fall into any of your old pitfalls?

What if following Jesus and understanding his perspective on you and your work would equip those of you who struggle with apathy towards work to find joy and purpose in the work he's given you to do

as well as helping those of us who can get over-wrapped in our work to get a God-perspective that frees you from getting so consumed by what we do that we miss out on all the other important things in life?

We're going to start 2015 in the Scriptures in a very appropriate place—in very the beginning, it's a very, very good place to start!

So if you've got a Bible, turn with me to page 2, Genesis 2, if you don't it'll be on the screen and if you don't own/have a Bible at home anywhere free Bibles on the book table

***<sup>8</sup> Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup> The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...***

***<sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> 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."***

Now, we're starting here to help us all to see a couple of very important things about work that we have to get fixed in our heads and hearts before we get very far

First, all of this is happening in the very beginning, before the Bible says that any sin had ever happened or before any brokenness entered into the picture

There's this warning about the tree of good and evil, we'll get to that in a minute, but before that command from God gets violated we've got perfect paradise and Adam is put in the middle of this garden

And what is he told to do in this garden? "WORK IT AND TAKE CARE OF IT"

Adam is told to work in paradise! This is extremely disheartening news for some of you! Even paradise has work that needs to be done

This is our first four-stop in our conversation about work as we head into this new year: *1. Work is good.*

Work is good. It is a part of the goodness of our original design and creation that God goes to work to make something beautiful and that he invites us in as sub-creators, co-laborers with him to cause it to continue to be beautiful and even to flourish beyond what was originally made

Even in paradise there is work to be done! God is creative and he goes to work creating.

And he makes humans in his image and one of the express purposes for why we're here is that we might go to work as well!

*Our work is one of the ways that we reflect God's image to bring creativity and order and flourishing to the world*

Notice another thing here, and that is that there's no paycheck involved. There's no clock to punch. All that wouldn't come about until much later on in human history

So as we talk this morning about work, it's important to see that *work doesn't necessarily equal your job.*

Some of you are retired. You still have work to do.

Some of you have jobs that you hate and that do not capture your imaginations or bring out the best that you have to offer

2015 might mean that you look for a different job as a part of this call to work

But maybe the call on your life is to keep doing that job but start to ask "Lord, is there some other work that you've got for me to do here?"

Is there some other place that needs my gifts and attention and focus and energies while this other thing called my day job pays the bills?"

[VISUAL] In the biblical world, our work INCLUDES our jobs but is a larger category than our jobs.

For some of us, our current day jobs might be the primary work God wants us to do here

For others of us, our current day jobs might be just a part, even just a small part, of the work he's given us to do

If work is the one of the ways that we reflect God's image to bring creativity and order and flourishing to the world

Then in the category of work is all of this: jobs, marriages, parenting, grandparenting, mentoring, friendship

if we do these things faithfully, we are expressing some of what it means for us to reflect God's image, to bring creativity and order and flourishing into the world

And along with that are all kinds of things like starting or volunteering at a non-profit that meets a need in our community, coaching or tutoring kids, caring for elderly and widowed folks

we've got many folks in our community who would say that their primary work right now is not a job that they're getting paid to do but some way that they've just felt compelled to make a difference

A few of us have even started something from scratch to meet those needs

Work includes volunteering and serving here at the church whether that's with kids or small group leading or baking up cookies for our hospitality table—my kids are especially delighted that some of you feel called to do that particular work!

Next Sunday you'll have an opportunity to volunteer to do God-honoring, life-giving work when we host our Connection Celebration, I'd encourage you to find your spot!

Work also includes self-care—you've been given a body and a soul to tend, to work, to take care of, to put time and energies into tending the garden of your body and your soul and your mind

Work includes your home, your yard, the stuff immediately around you that's yours to tend to and keep up

Any and all of that is "work"

and depending on who you are and where God has you and what you're interests are, your "job" might be very large in this category or in this season

OR your job might just be a small fraction of this larger thing called work that God has put us all here to do

Question for you this morning: if all of this *could* be your work

and "work" is this delicious pie given to us as one way to express the fact that we're made in God's image to be creative sub-creators, bringing order and blessing to this work he's made

How are you dividing that pie?

We've all got limited time and energies, and we're going to divide up our time and this work pie in some way or another

[PIC/image of a pie-graph here with 99% of it one big piece labeled "JOB" and 10% as "other"]

And some of us are going to be tempted to divide our "work" pie up in such a way that our job gets all of our time and energies and everything else gets crammed into a very small slice

And others of us are going to try to minimize the energies and time our job gets and try to do other stuff

And there's no one right answer here!

There are seasons of our lives when our job is going to take up more of our time and energies and then there are seasons of our lives when our job is going to be a much smaller chunk of time

But one of the things that we've got to recognize as we start 2015 is that part of a healthy 2015 where we are living the life that God has for us

Is that we're praying about this pie, evaluating this pie, making sure that we're matching pitch between this season of our lives, what matters most to God for us in this season, and what he's created us to do

Early on in our marriage I did some counseling on my own to deal with some issues that were coming up

And one of the reasons why this was so good for me was because given my natural tendency to over-work, without any correctives or Jesus in my life  
my life would look like 99% job and 1% everything else

Going to counseling was especially helpful for me to put time, energy, creativity and focus into my marriage

Because for those of us who tend to be over-workers, we tend to pour all of our creativity and focus and attention into our work, don't we?

And even when we're physically present on the weekend or on a night out with our spouse or on vacation with the family, we can be still be mentally checked out and engaged in our job

And a big part of my work in those first couple of years of counseling  
And then continuing over the years has been not only to put physical and time boundaries around my job but also to learn how to un-hook mentally from my job

So that I might attend to ALL the work that I have to do—which includes my relationship with God first and foremost, which has only a little to do with my day-job

And then to attend to my wife who is first and foremost on this earth, and then my kids, and from there developing meaningful friendships and other relationships and yeah, my job, too

All of that is my work and I have to make sure that I'm attending to all of it

Otherwise I might wake up one day and discover that Jesus' warning has come true: that I'd worked hard in ONE area of my job and maybe I'd gained the whole world  
but in the process I suddenly realized that I had forfeited not only my own soul, but also every relationship that mattered most to me in the whole world

If work is a big pie filled with all of these different things, how are you dividing that pie in your own life, your time, your energies?

Here's a hard one: were there consequences in 2014 that resulted from the fact that you did not divide the pie rightly last year?

Are there things that went bad in the past 12 months that you need to learn from and re-think how you're spending the time and energies given to you?

Are there warning flares being tripped in your job, in your home, in your marriage, in your relationship with your kids, in your physical health  
that are alerting you to the fact that there's work that's being overlooked or neglected that you need to attend to in 2015?

That might mean that this pie needs to be re-cut so that your time and efforts and energies and focus are appropriately applied for this next season of your life.

This is so important—some of the time, disaster just happens, it's completely out of the blue, and we had no warning

BUT MOST OF THE TIME, there are warnings, there are flags, there are these little signs along the way that there are problems, there are issues that need to be addressed

And most of the time after something falls apart or disaster strikes we look back and we say

“I should have seen this coming! If I had been paying attention and acted differently this might have played out differently.”

Where do you need to pay attention to the warning flares, the signs, the alerts that have gone up over 2014 so that you might do a course-correction in 2015?

This is a deeply spiritual work on so many levels

in part because there's so much to this and it's so complex and we're not always sure where we need be investing or how we should be cutting this pie up, right?

And there's all these competing voices and we've all got our own natural bent in one direction or the other

but our natural bent and simply following our own hearts doesn't always lead us into healthy or life-giving places, does it?

Fortunately, the Scriptures don't stop talking about work in Genesis 2, there's lots more where that came from

and I want to pick up some of the best and clearest words about work from the New Testament in Ephesians 2:10

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

Christmas is a time for new things, especially fun with kids our ages in elementary school

And this year was a jackpot year for our kids, we have very generous grandparents and great grandparents and a couple of gifts have been especially BIG this Christmas

One was a Wii U, our very first video game system, we've been holding out on that for many years but we've taken the plunge much to my 11-year-old's squealing delight

we were like the last mean parents on the earth to hold out on the gaming system

And the other big hit which has been surprisingly fun to see is a microscope that they got and it came with a bunch of prepared slides of stuff like cat hair and an ant and fungus and such that they can look at through the microscope

So there's two key questions when it comes to a new gift: 1. What is it? and 2. What do you do with it?

And the first one is the most important question and it dictates the answer to the second. If you don't get that first question right, then you're going to do the wrong thing!

If you mistakenly think that the microscope is the Wii, you're going to be disappointed when you go to load up Mario Kart—it just won't work!

What is it and what do you do with it? Knowing the identity of something is crucial to understanding what you do with it.

Here, the Scriptures give us the rock-solid, most foundational answers to those two questions

To help us to understand how to approach all of this

First, what are we or WHO are we? My friends, as we go into 2015, hear this good news: you are God's handiwork.

Let me say that again: you. are. God's. handiwork. He has crafted you, ground up, in his image, made beautiful, and dearly loved

That is true for everyone, every human being ever made, we are all made in God's image, intended for beauty, strength, courage, creativity, love, purpose, and pleasure

That's how God made us—but a not-so-funny thing happened back in the garden with that tree that God warned Adam and Eve about

We fell. We fell from grace, we fell from being the image-bearers we were made to be

We are still made in God's image but that image has been defaced, marred, scarred by sin

we are damaged image-bearers, who regularly re-damage ourselves by sin, that is, we mar the image of God placed in each one of us by breaking relationship with God and doing things our own way

Kelly and I used to live in this big historic district in Richmond called “the fan” and there were all these big, old, beautiful buildings and homes that had become dilapidated and ruined or marred by mis-use, time, fire, or simply neglect

And what happened over the past 25 years or so is that people have really rallied back into this area of Richmond to re-claim all that beauty and history restoration and renovation was not only big business or a few people’s hobby, it was revitalizing to the whole town, to the whole community

To a community of Jesus-followers in the letter to the Ephesians

Paul writes that you are God’s handiwork ***created in Christ Jesus***, created, renovated, being renewed and re-made to reclaim all the beauty and history and intention that was intended to be you

God is in the renovation and restoration business, it is his work done in and through Jesus Christ to reclaim God’s image in you and in me

If you understand that this Christmas present is a microscope then you understand that what you do with it is you look through the lens and you see amazing wonders

If you understand that this gift is a Wii, then you understand that what you do with it is plug your kids in and you’ve just outsourced your parenting duties for the next 3-8 hours

And if we understand that we are God’s handiworked, redeemed and re-created being restored and renovated by Christ Jesus then we start to understand what God’s doing in our lives is this renovation work

But that work has a missional purpose to it: we’re being remade by Jesus for the sake of the work he’s prepared in advance for us to do.

That’s work in that bigger sense and that work might primarily be our “jobs.” OR that work might have only a little bit to do with our jobs.

But for those of us who are ambivalent about work or who just simply would rather not do any kind of work as we’ve talked about it

It’s important for us to understand that because of who and what we are as God’s workmanship, made in his image, being renovated and re-made and redeemed by Jesus

All that work is being poured into us not simply for us, not just so that we feel better about ourselves or have good self-esteem

We're being renovated, remade into who God intended for us to be IN ORDER THAT we might do good works that he prepared in advance for us to do

And for those of us who are inclined to be overly-wrapped up in our jobs, what this Scripture helps us with is this: it anchors our identities in something larger than our work

Those of us who overly focus on work do so in large part because that's what we feel like gives us our identity and significance in this world

We ask each other: "what do you do?" And that's a fine question, but for some of us that becomes the question that most defines who we are

If all we are is our work, if that's our only identity or our primary identity, then functionally work becomes our god

And we will sacrifice all kinds of things to our god to keep it happy—including the stuff that matters most in our lives

But if there is a God larger than our work, and if we can find a bigger point of reference from which to look our work and see it for what it is

And if there's a greater, richer, fuller, bigger identity that can define us, then we can have healthy perspective on our work

If we're really God's handiwork, if THAT's who we are, if THAT's what matters most, if that's our core identity, then our work is simply one expression of that larger, bigger identity

We don't need work to define us because we've got something way more important than that that already does.

We're going to pick this up again next week, to help us to continue to think about what it means that we're created to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do

To help us to engage with this issue in our lives this week, a couple of homework questions

First, a big one that I'll hopefully help you to break down a bit:

1. Where is your identity & what are the consequences?

Do you understand at the core of your being that you're God's handiwork, made in his image

and if you're a Jesus person today are you living into the fact that you're being redeemed and renovated and re-created by Jesus Christ?

Do you understand that that renovation project is happening not just so that you feel better about you

but so that you might participate in God's mission, his re-claiming everything mission?

We're going to talk more about next week.

Many of you know that you don't really know or get the whole Jesus part, so glad you're here, so want to invite you into this conversation because you're looking for an answer to this question, too

ALL of us are looking for an answer to this question: who are we? And all of us are trying to answer it one form or another

And EVERY ANSWER has consequences or outcomes, some good, some not so good:

if our jobs are our identity, there are consequence

if our social status and standing is our identity, there are consequences

if being handy and independent is our identity, there are consequences

if Jesus is our identity there are consequences

Where are you drawing your identity from and what are the consequences?

This is a big question, so here are some ways to identify where your identity might be coming from

- a. Stepping back and looking at your life rhythms, what are the most likely places that someone like you would draw their identity from?

In other words, step back and look at you and your life—what takes up most of your time? What takes up most of your thoughts?

What are the people or positions or neighborhoods or situations that you find yourself in most often?

And if you were looking at someone just like you, with your life, and they asked you, "where do you think I might be tempted to find my identity?" what would you say?

Then take a good hard look at those places and see how those things might be at work in you—and here's the trick with that:

Most of us vastly UNDER-estimate how easily sucked into this stuff we are—we might say

“yeah, sure, I spend tons of time at work, but that doesn’t really affect me all that much, that’s not really a problem for me or the people around me, I’m not REALLY overly-wrapped up in my work.”

Really? I know you’d LIKE to believe that about yourself. But are you really that impervious? Are you willing to move past denial and wishful thinking to take an honest look at yourself?

- b. Another way to get at this: What makes you angry/defensive? “When someone questions or doubts my \_\_\_\_\_ I know that I can get a little touchy.”

Do you get super-defensive if someone questions your ability to fix something?

You love being the man or woman who knows how to get things done—that’s your identity

Do you get super-defensive if someone questions or doubts your ability to deliver on a project at work or if someone offers you some parenting advice?

Being the all-knowing, super-competent one might be the place where your identity rests

Places where we get the most defensive are often the places where we’re either the most insecure or the most invested emotionally and in terms of our identity investment

And when that gets threatened or questioned, we can get very defensive.

- c. Start with the consequences and trace them back to the question of identity

For some of us, the consequences are the thing we see:

my spouse is complaining that I work too much or that I play too much or that I spend too much money or that I’m over-committed with too many activities on my plate

Or I’m exhausted all the time. Or I’m bored all the time. Or I’m doing things now that I said I would never do and that I’m ashamed about

Or I’m healthier, more alive spiritually and emotionally and maybe even physically than I’ve ever been before—good chance that you’re operating or at least starting to operate out of this core identity as God’s handiwork

- d. What do you pray about the most?

Someone once posed this question to me and it kicked me in the butt, so I’ll pass it along to you:

the thing that you most pray about is likely the thing that is most competing with God for your attention and your affections and your worship

That's the place where you're likely looking for your identity outside of God and in something else.

Where are you looking for your identity and what are the consequences?

2. Very simply: what do you think it would look like to be someone who is God's handiwork, living as someone who was being renovated and redeemed?

How would that change your life, do you think, and how might you begin to move in that direction?

3. What is the work that God might have prepared in advance for you to do in 2015?
  - a. Are there warning signs from 2014 that you need to pay attention to?
  - b. Do you need to re-cut your emotional, mental, and time "pie" to attend to a bigger or different work that God has given you to do?

Take these three questions and think on them this week, see if God might use these to start to show you his work priorities for your rhythms in 2015

And as an aside, these are the kinds of questions that having a little bit of prayerful focused space at an overnight retreat can do wonders in your life  
maybe you just need to write these down and take them with you next weekend to the overnight retreat

Next week we'll talk a little bit more about what kind of work God has for his people to do

if he's prepared good works in advance for us to engage in, what kind of work is that?

What does he expect or want for us to do or be about whenever we roll up our sleeves and go to work—whether in a job or in our marriage or when we volunteer?

We're going to talk next week more specifically about our work rhythms

Because our rhythms reveal what's important to us  
and our rhythms reinforce our habits and thoughts, for good or for bad  
and our rhythms will either sustain us or will undo us in the coming year