

# Work as Worship

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## Introduction

Welcome to Mercy Church! Want to start by reminding you that next Sunday, on fathers day, we kick off our summer here with all of us worshipping together at 1 time...10:30am. We'll be doing parent commissioning so parents, be sure to sign up ON THE WEBSITE and invite the grandparents and all that. Then afterwards, lunch! Bring a covered dish (details?).

And speaking of summer...how many of you ever had to go through a bad summer job? You know, the job you get for 3 months to make some cash while you aren't in school or whatever? Anybody ever have a bad summer job? I got off pretty easy...a lifeguard. Basically sat in a chair for a few summers. I recommend it. BUT, Jared Lawson...

Our pastoral intern, had a summer job called "trash outs." This is where you go clean out the apartments of people who were evicted for non-payment. His boss would always say "bring gloves & a mask." Hows that for a summer job? He would find dead animals, fridges that when they opened them flies would come out in swarms from months of rotting food, and in one case a literal pile of cockroaches. All for \$10/hr.

Some jobs stink. Literally. And we may have stinky jobs for a season or maybe you are still in a stinky job. But regardless of what kind it is, *work* is a part of life. A big part.

We spend the most time, and the most productive time, of our days and of our lives, at work. Whether we have a summer job we loathe or the career we always hoped for, both of them are work. The people you spend the most time with during a given day are clients, patients, co-workers, students...people you *work* with. Work occupies our time, our passion, & most of our best brain function hours. It's hard, its filled with highs and lows, and most of us will do it daily for 50 years or more.

Yet a question I always seem to get from Christians is...what does it mean to live as a Christian at work or in work? When some people think about their work as being Christian some pretty awful themes come to mind such as

- A barber shop called "a cut above"
- A coffee shop called "he-brews"
- Or "bread of life" Bakery

Perhaps you remember the 2004 incident of an American Airlines pilot who, in his pre-flight announcements on a flight from LA to NY, asked all the Christians on board the plane to raise their hands and said "the rest of ya'll are crazy." He then apparently said you can either use your time wisely and talk to one of these Christians, or just sit back and watch a movie....". He also told passengers he'd

also be happy to talk to anyone who had questions. Understandably, it freaked a lot of people out: the pilot of your airplane that is about to take you over the rocky mountains talking to you about whether or not you're ready to meet Jesus?<sup>1</sup>

While they might admire the guy's zeal, many Christian businesspeople think, "I *just* don't think I could do that and keep my job."

So here's what happens: Many Christians think that you just can't substantially serve the kingdom of God at work. That Kingdom work happens "after hours"—volunteering in the church kids team, attending community group, going on a mission trip, serving at the soup kitchen. Many think our work is a necessity that must be endured to put bread on the table. That God's interest in our work is primarily that we tithe off of it.

The Bible offers quite a different perspective. Scripture teaches us how to serve God *through* our work, not just *after* work. The Bible speaks clear and radical words to people in the workplace, showing us that even the most

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2004/TRAVEL/02/09/airline.christianity/>. Also cited in John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission* (Zondervan, 2010), 172-173.

menial of jobs have a purpose and value to God.<sup>2</sup> But so few people I know have ever connected the Christian worldview to their work. And I'm telling you it is freeing and inspiring when you do.

I want to take this weekend where we are between series as a church and drill down on this topic that a lot of Christians just haven't considered. To do that I want to answer three questions today about work.

- **Why do we work?**
- **Why is work hard?**
- **How does the gospel redeem our work?**

This is one of those where we will be primarily in one passage but will jump to a few others. My hope for today is that you will leave with a compelling vision for your work.

And I'll go ahead and tell you today's message was heavily influenced by pastor Tim Keller. He wrote an excellent book on relating faith to work called *Every Good Endeavor*. Many ideas here either came from him or are expanding on an idea from there. Ok here we go:

### **1. Why do we work?**

The bible answers this question on the very first page. Which is our anchor spot for this sermon. Genesis 2. We see

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<sup>2</sup> This idea taken from J.D. Greear's article called "What Makes Work Christian" published at 9marks.org in January 2013.

God at work creating the heavens and the earth. Creating the sun & moon, the land & sea. The plants & animals and even people. Do you know what God is doing? He is **working**. Genesis 2.2 reinforces this.

And on the seventh day God finished his **work** that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his **work** that he had done.

That word for “work” is the same one used throughout the bible for ordinary human work. Bible could open saying.. In the beginning... God went to work. Creating...and then cultivating his creation.

Then, the bible tells us God created mankind. And he put mankind in a garden and what did he tell mankind to do?

Genesis 2.15

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work** it and keep it.

God made man to look like him...and part of that meant carrying on the task God had begun. To Work. To work the garden, keep it, bring potentialities out of it.

A biblical understanding of work energizes our desire to create value from the resources available to us. God invites us to join him in creating and cultivating the earth. Why else wouldn't he name the animals? He named the sun, moon, & stars, earth, & sea, day and night. Yet Genesis 2

tells us he gave man this job. Why? Wasn't because God was tapped out on brainstorming that day. “ummm platapus...I got nothin'” It's because he was showing Adam what it meant to be created in the image of God. To work and develop the world he put him in.

When you begin to see your work, no matter what job, as a God-given medium for cultivating God's creation, your perspective starts to shift.

Just like God created something beautiful, so man was to take the raw materials God gave him and develop it. Our work is, still to this day, rearranging the raw materials of God's creation in such a way that it helps the world in general, and people in particular, thrive and flourish.

Which has a big implication for us.

Work, watch this... was not a necessary evil that came into the picture later. In the beginning God *worked* & he did so for the sheer joy of it. And he designed man to reflect his image...by working. *Work could not have a more exalted inauguration*<sup>3</sup> into the world. Work was good!

Here's the point: **work was a part of paradise. Before there was sin, before there was evil, when the world**

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<sup>3</sup> Keller, Tim. *Every Good Endeavor* “Connecting your work to God's work” (Dutton, NY NY 2012) 35.

**was perfect...there was work. Man, in his most perfect state, had a job!**

So according to the bible we don't merely need the money from work to survive, we need the work itself to live the fully human life!<sup>4</sup> **Why do we work (put back up)? We work because we were made for it.**

This is another one of those things that sets Christianity apart from its contemporaries. The greeks saw work as something for their slaves to do. As something somebody had to do, but true living is getting to a point where you don't have to work and you can live a life of leisure free of struggle where you can read, dine, & converse with others privileged like you. Which is also the way many today look at work. Like it is a necessary evil needed to get you to a place where you can one day STOP working, go to the lake, and pontoon your life away.

But the bible says work was a part of paradise! And look at the work to rest ratio...The bible doesn't say we should work one day and rest 6. Nor should they be evenly balanced. Work is so foundational to our makeup as humans that it is one of the few things we can take in significant doses without harm. Leisure is a great good but according to God's design our bodies can only take limited doses of it without suffering harm.

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<sup>4</sup> Keller, 38.

You know where I see evidence of this? I see it in retirement communities. Where people think they are going to lounge their lives away...yet there are woodshops & art studios & craft rooms. Why? Because we were made to create and cultivate. And we can't stop until we physically lose the ability. We were made in the image of God which means we were made to work. To create and to cultivate.

BTW – quick aside to you workaholics....I'm talking to myself here. You think I just gave you a license to overwork. YEAH! PREACH ON! Nope. God rested. Why? He wasn't tired. He can't be. He rested to sit back and enjoy his creation. And to teach us to rest and enjoy it as well. Ever think...why did God make us so we get tired? The scientific reality that your body gets tired without rest is a message from God to you. You are not supposed to work all the time.

Studies say only 1-3% of humans can truly get by on less than 6.5 to 8hrs of sleep. Which means that probably aint you. You need to sleep. God made you to go to sleep, so that you couldn't do as much as you want to do then told you to take a day off, so that you will trust him with the outcome instead of yourself. Day off doesn't mean email on your phone at the beach. It means OFF.

Ok, if we were created to work, then **Why is work hard?** And of course I'm assuming...your work is hard. If you have an easy job where you don't do anything hard and love everything and nothing ever stresses you, then this sermon

is not for you. Keep that to yourself. You won't make friends. No, work is hard.

Growing up I watched my dad work 80-100hrs a week during tax season because being an accountant is *hard*. I've talked men and women in our church who are executives in large corporations and small companies, decision making at their level is hard. People's jobs are on the line. My beard is growing grey because pastoring you people is *hard*. And ya'll are awesome. My grandfather said "they call it work, not play. If it aint hard, you aint doing it right."

But we still gotta ask...why if God made work to be a good thing to enjoy, why is it difficult, why is it sometimes frustrating, and sometimes downright awful? Some of us would be cool with work being *difficult* if it was rewarding. But hard and pointless and terrible co-workers all come together to make us say every now and again...GRRRR! "I had a bad day at work day today."

Why is work hard? Let's go back to our story in Genesis.

Something happened after God put adam and eve in the garden. Genesis 2.15 – work and keep the garden. Here is the next verse:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2.16

Why could they not eat out of this tree? Not because it was poisonous. But because he wanted them to obey Him. Simply because they love and trust Him more than anything.

This was an opportunity for the human race to voluntarily make our relationship with God the primary value of our lives and to obey his word simply because it was what was best for us.

But they didn't. They chose to be their own authorities. They chose to eat the fruit because they wanted to be the ones setting the course for their lives. As a sailboat is designed for the water, such that if it runs aground it is damaged and useless, we human beings 'run aground' when we choose to be our own source of authority. We were designed to know, serve, and love God supremely – and when we are faithful to that design, we flourish. But when we instead chose to live for ourselves, and make us our chief authority, everything began run aground. Listen to what God said when they disobeyed:

Genesis 3.16-19

[17] And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; *in pain* you shall eat of it all the days of your life; [18] *thorns and thistles* it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

Why didn't Adam & Eve just drop dead? That would happen in due course, for eventual physical shutdown is one aspect of the comprehensive death and decay that now comes to every aspect of human life. Nothing works now as it should. Sin leads to the disintegration of every area of life: spiritual, physical, social, cultural, psychological, temporal, eternal.<sup>5</sup>

Notice the phrase "thorns and thistles." (put verse 18 back up & highlight thorns and thistles)

When we work, what used to be just fruit, will now also come with thorns and thistles. In other words, **while work itself is not a curse, it now sits under the curse of sin.** "Thorns and thistles" will come up as we seek to grow food.

Gardening as a representation of all of work means all work will be marked by frustration and lack of fulfillment. Part of the curse of work in a fallen world is its frequent fruitlessness. Meaning we will always be able to *envision* far more than we can *accomplish*. Because sin has corrupted our ability, our relationships, and our work environments.

- Companies work for months or years to create new products or ventures that may die a quick death in the marketplace
- Corruption scandals derail the progress of an organization

- Research into the properties of the atom becomes the basis for the atomic bomb
- Maybe you have a real dream of making a contribution to your organization or your field, maybe to genuinely change the world...this is an admirable goal. But few people achieve these goals and the ones that do, often do so at the expense of other aspirations. Why can't we all achieve our dreams? Thorns and thistles.
- Future UNC basketball players suffer height & talent shortages. "One day you can be whatever you want to be." No I can't. Thorns & Thistles.

See Genesis 3 is an ancient text, But it could not be more relevant and practical to life today. "Do you find work to be excruciatingly hard sometimes? *This* explains why."

Why is work hard? **Work is hard because it is under the curse of sin.**

Thankfully, the Bible's understanding of work doesn't end there. We were created to work, but sin has cursed it and made it frustrating...so what now? Well next comes the great hope of the Bible. Many stop there and just go yep. Its hard. So, suck it up. Not inspiring. The Bible however gives great hope for our work even though its under the curse of sin and that's what leads to our 3<sup>rd</sup> question

**3. How does the gospel redeem our work?**

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<sup>5</sup> Keller, 85.

When I say “gospel” I am talking about the Christian story that explains why the world is the way it is. Everyone operates by a storyline. We sometimes call it a worldview. Whatever story we believe, it explains (a) what the world should be like (b) what knocked the world out of balance and (c) what can make the world right again?

The gospel says the world should be peaceful and man should be in a harmonious relationship with God and with one another. But, sin entered the world and corrupted everything so now the world doesn’t work like it should. Sin is also something we each commit. Where we rebel against God and, like adam, choose our way over God’s way. We want to build our own kingdom instead of living as stewards in his kingdom. The penalty of that rebellion is death. because that’s what sin brings. It corrupts everything, even the physical. But the great news of the gospel is that God went on a mission to set things right again. He sent Jesus to die the death we deserve for our sin so that now we may be reconciled to the father. One verse I share often when explaining the gospel Romans 6.23.

Not only will we have eternal life in heaven, but renewed purpose and joy in this life here on earth. And now, we as the church, in everything we do, point people towards the glory of the one who saved us.

When we say that Christians go about our *work* from a gospel worldview, it does not mean that they are constantly trying to preach at work. Trying to be right there for a “GOD

BLESS YOU” when they sneeze moment. It’s *much* deeper than that.

Instead, think of the gospel as a set of glasses through which you “look” at everything else in the world. It becomes the way you see your work.

### **1. The Gospel changes my bottom line**

See, without the gospel I’m still going to work for *some* bottom line. Some thing that I believe will give me security and purpose. That thing is the bottom line. The most common bottom line is money. Money, we are told, is the key to stability and pleasure so everything we do becomes about building the bottom line: money. So everyone and everything becomes an end to growing my bottom line...money. Now, we’ve said before here, making money is a good thing. Bible has no problem with wealth. But when the good thing becomes the ultimate thing, when it becomes the bottom line, it never delivers on its promise. It can’t make you secure or happy. The gospel says I am secure! God has secured me and met my deepest need in Christ.

The Gospel frees us from the relentless pressure of having to prove ourselves through our work, and to secure our identity through work, for we are already accepted and secure in Christ.

This is life altering for me personally & by extension it is so significant for the health of my family

Let me splain: I have a habit of being 'always on.' I'm always thinking about work, talking about work, and trying to sneak in a little work. Why? Because I like my job? Sure...but its more than that. See the deeper drive is that I have a fear of failure. I'm a pessimist that fears this thing is going to explode at any moment. And...watch this...if I fail at my job then I believe I, Spence, am a failure. See what happened? Down in the soul level my self-worth is tied to my work success. So whether I realize it or not, I begin to tie my emotional well being to my work. Then I become the type of person I don't want to be and that nobody wants to be around. My home life gets dictated by what kind of day I had at work. Because work sets the tone for everything. Nobody wants to be that guy. Some of you are like...the pastor is messed up. Yes. I am. And so are you.

but if WORK is where I find my purpose, it will set the tone for the rest of life. The gospel says no, I can be about so much more than the bottom line of attendance. Or in for-profit business...I can be about so much more than maximizing profits at all costs.

When work becomes animated by the gospel, profit is one of *many* bottom lines. Here are some other ones:

- **Vision for serving the customer** – Customer might be a student, a patient, the rowdy bunch at table 8. because they too are made in the image of God so we will not take advantage of them or deceive them but honor them as image bearers of God. & in doing so set new standards for customer service.

- **Emphasis on Excellence** – My work is a way to create and cultivate...to reflect God's glory and to tell God's story of sparing no expense to bring me back to himself. As a Christian, everything I do I do for the glory of God which means I will do it with as much excellence as I can. Dorothy Sayers chastised the church for not teaching this idea of excellence more. She said:

"The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him to not be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sundays. What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables." Do your work with EXCELLENCE! Because that brings honor & glory to God who gave you the skills and opportunity to do it. Whatever that is.

- **Strong Commitment to an ethical work environment** – Customers aren't the only ones made in the image of God. Your coworkers are too. In whatever influence you have, how can you model the gospel for them? How can you model the love of God for those you have influence over?

Example: Story of guy in high rise who takes hit for his employee. She says...nobody does that. Why did you? He shares the gospel with her.

TO be Christian in work means thinking out the implications of the gospel worldview and God's purposes for your whole work life – and for anyone and anything under your work influence.

The question regarding our choice of work, the way we work, is no longer “what will make me the most money and give me the most status? The question must now be **how, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God's will and of human need?**

That's how we approach work through the gospel

## **2. The Gospel gives me hope in failure**

We said earlier that work is hard and sometimes fruitless. Sometimes you will fail because you made a decision and it turned out to be a bad decision. Sometimes you will *knowingly* make bad decisions and they will cost you. Yell at boss in front of employees, you probably gonna feel effects of that. Come in to work late, you will experience consequences. And then sometimes you do everything right and bad stuff still happens. You stay at home moms follow all the right potty training guidelines...and still there is poop on the wall. And you are like...Come On Man! The wall! WHY GOD! Or maybe you get fired because a company bought yours or something and they just downsized. Not your fault. Thorns and Thistles.

The Gospel says you aren't defined by what you *do* but by what's been done for you. Which means you can suffer

minor, or major, setbacks and still be able to rest at night. Because God is not going to forget about you when your work goes south.

Not only that, remember the thorns and thistles verse? It also says...

**[18] thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; *and* you shall eat the plants of the field.**

There will be thorns, but also fruit. That's not a promise that if you lose your job one day you'll get the job of your dreams. But it's a promise your labor isn't in vain. So work hard to the glory of God and trust that as you do, he will honor that work and provide for you here in this lifetime.

## **3. My work is an opportunity to join God's mission**

This is one I often see people missing. The primary life mandate on any disciple of Jesus, on any follower, is found in the great commission at the end of Matthew. Jesus looks at his disciples and says

**“Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

The book of Acts then tells us that the gospel went all over the world through non-vocational ministers. That is, through businesspeople, doctors, servants, who knows, God sent the gospel all over the known world. The best example of this is the apostle Paul who decides he is going to make

the heroic trip to Rome to preach the gospel where it is not known...and who greets him when he finally arrives? Acts 28...the brothers! Sorry Paul, we already brought the gospel here. Thanks for coming though. Want to come to church with us Sunday?

of the three great church planting centers in the ancient world (Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome), not one was founded by an Apostle.

In the same way, Christians in the marketplace today are able to gain access more easily to strategic, unreached places than pastors are. Globalization, revolutions in technology, and urbanization have given the business community nearly universal access.

Secular skills are needed to give Christians access to countries that would otherwise swiftly reject their presence. The countries most in need of a gospel presence—those in the so-called “10-40 window”—are devastated by poverty and joblessness. These places need both the words of the gospel and the tangible reflection of God’s love that businesses can provide. Millions in this region are without work and without the knowledge of Christ.

We are taking trips there this year and our hope is that some of you will go thinking about how your skills could be used there.

So the way we summarize our theology of work is “whatever you do, do to the glory of God, and do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.”

Not everyone will go to the 10-40 window but again, when we work with excellence we will be put in positions of influence. And one day we will experience some version of what [Proverbs 22.29](#) says

Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.

So whatever you do, do to the glory of God. and you will have your time to do it for the mission of God.

Listen, I hope this just gives you a glimpse into the story of God’s great hope in the gospel. See our hope as the local church here is that you will begin to see that the gospel isn’t confined to the spiritual compartment of your life. In fact there isn’t a spiritual compartment. Instead, the gospel tells the story that interprets everything in your life. Your friendships, your purpose, your love, your money, and most assuredly, your work.