

HOW DO I PLEASE GOD AT WORK? (OT: Gen 1:26-31, 2:15; NT: Jn 15:1-17)

PRELIMINARY: Question for this morning – *How do I please God at work?*

- Great question:
 - Many of us work for decades without having much sense of connection between our day job and our faith.
 - End up spending most of our waking hours doing something to which Jesus doesn't seem all that relevant.
- But God has better things in mind...

Transition: Let's start our time in prayer together.

INTRODUCTION

How Do I Please God at Work?

- For today, going to use broad **definition** of work: *Anything you do that is not rest or leisure.*¹
 - Intentionally broad bc we want to cover...
 - **Career** – if get paid for a job → **Studies** – if in school or college → **Parenting** – if stay-at-home mum or dad → **Other Activities** – if you're retired.
- **How** we work looks very different for us all → But we should all work! WHY? Bc...

Work is a good thing...

- When think of work, easy to sigh, roll eyes and say, "Eugh..."
 - There are reasons for that → Talk about them in a moment...
 - But helpful to remember that work itself is a good thing.
- We see this in the early chapters of Genesis:
 - **God works:** **Gen 1:1: In the beginning God created...** → First **entrepreneur**. First **artist**. First **engineer**.
 - Then the working God **gave us work** to do.
 - **Gen 2:15: The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.**
 - Before fall – before sin made mess of world – in absolute perfection of Eden:
 - There was work to do.
 - Part of God's good design for us.
- From Bible's perspective:
 - Work is not a necessary evil/something to be endured.
 - We work bc we've been made in the image of God.
 - To work is to be like him...
 - Part of his good design.
- Helpful to remember that...
 - When you head out to the office, classroom, laundry room, more...
 - You're doing something that you were made for.

Transition: Of course, that doesn't mean it's pain free...

[Work is Hard]

- As if I could tell you that this week...²
 - Went to work, **opened inbox** to find small, easily manageable number of emails, each of which were incredibly reasonable and contained critically important information...
 - Thanks to one of those, able to help **Nigerian Princess** get released from jail. In response she's sending me generous portion of her family fortune, which of course I'll tithe...
 - **2 staff members** were having a conflict that I resolved instantly, much to their thanks/admiration.
 - Checked in on **construction project** → Everything ahead of schedule and under budget.
 - Time to **write sermon**: Put my fingers to keyboard, hammered out most **biblically faithful/culturally relevant/eloquently** crafted message I've ever written.
 - Went home and had time to **fix toilet**, **play** with kids, get a **workout** in, make **dinner** for my bride, **watch** a movie, **read** a book, **meditate**, and get an **early night**.

Any of you have a week like that?!?!

- Bible is much more **REALISTIC**:
 - YES, work is a gift from God → AND YES, we should expect it to be hard.
 - Bc work – like everything else – is tainted by sin.
- Bible makes sense of this too.
 - After the fall, God comes to Adam – whom he has charged to work/care for the garden – and tells him: **Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you (Gen 3:17-18).**
 - Work, like all else, **damaged at fall** → Now we all have **thorns/thistles** to contend with.
 - **Cranky customers/Unreliable suppliers; Fidgety students/Grumpy professors; Difficult coworkers/Critical bosses; Long commutes/Slow computers; Unwanted challenges/Unexpected setbacks.**
 - Count on it, plan on it → then do all you can to redeem it!

That's what we do as Xns...

- In this world where things are not the way they're meant to be, we work to make things the way they're meant to be.
- Jesus has saved us from all sin and now we live for him.
 - Push back the effects of the fall by following his will...
 - That it might be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Transition: What does that look like in our working lives? How do we take these truths and live them out? How do we please God at work?

- I have three considerations for you.
- Come from Missy Wallace:
 - She worked in Corporate America for a decade before leaving the workforce to care for her daughter (misdiagnosed with an autoimmune disease that almost took her life).
 - Sparked a season of study on the relationship bt faith/work.
 - Wallace lays out a helpful theological framework → Biblical way to think about redeeming work.
- To please God at work, consider → Your Heart, Your Community, Your World.

1. Your HEART → Consider how God is using your work to shape your heart.

- The work you do is no accident:
 - You may feel like you've just fallen into your role – in office, classroom, home...
 - But God has you there to shape YOU.
- **Ask yourself:** How is God using this work to shape me? How is my job an opportunity to become the person he's calling me to be?
 - Maybe it's on the level of character:
 - **Diligence** as you learn to meet deadlines and study.
 - **Honesty** as you refuse to overstate your hours or overcharge your clients.
 - **Courage** as you refuse to make decisions based on popularity or pressure.
 - **Patience** as you run endless carpools and clean up the house – again.
 - **Generosity** as you give your time to others in your retired years.

How is God using your work to shape YOU?

- Or maybe he's revealing idols in your heart that need to die.
 - Why do you check email so late at night?
 - Why are you so despondent when things don't work out?
 - Why so elated when things go well?
 - Why are you so driven to succeed/afraid to fail?
 - Our work reveals these idols and gives us the opportunity to dig through them → Figure out what they're about → And seek renewal in our hearts.
- How is God using your work to shape YOU?***
- **Think about it:** If we spend most of our waking hours at work, do you not think God is going to use it to shape us? To make us more like Jesus? The people we want to be?
 - Don't just think about what you're meant to be doing.
 - Think about what you're becoming.

We please God at work when we allow it to shape our HEARTS.

2. Your COMMUNITY → Consider how God is calling you to love your work community.

- The people you work with are also no accident:
 - You may feel like you just joined a random team, some of which you could do without.
 - But God has you there to love THEM.
- **Ask yourself:** How is God using me to shape this work community?
 - What's going on with that employee who keeps missing deadlines? You might need to fire them but let's do some digging first.
 - How is my boss in need of encouragement? What would it look like to serve them well?
 - How do I treat my clients, suppliers, competitors well? Am I treating them like I want to be treated as well?
 - What's going on with these kids? Forget their grades/sporting achievements, what are they wrestling with and how can I help?
- **Think about it:** If we're to love our neighbors, there's no better place to start...
 - We spend more waking hours with our work communities than with family/friends.
 - So, shape that community as God intends.

We please God at work when we shape our WORK COMMUNITY.

3. Your WORLD → Consider how your work can be a blessing to the world.

- The work you do is also no accident:
 - You may feel like you're just doing what needs to be done – office, classroom, home.

- But God has given you your work to be a blessing to the WORLD.
 - Don't mean through philanthropic endeavors your company may be involved in – I mean through the work *itself*.
 - Our society should be better off bc YOU do YOUR job.
- Of course, it's legitimate to pursue profits:
 - Jeff Van Duzer – former partner at an international law firm, provost of Seattle Pacific University – says that if God wrote a business plan for your business, it's purposes would be: 1) To develop the products and services needed to help people flourish; and 2) To allow people to use their time, talents, and gifts to provide for themselves.
 - Within this framework, profits are important bc they allow you to sustain those things.
- But along with profits, we should each consider how our work *itself* brings blessing to world.
 - Think of the work you do...
 - What larger good is brought to the world through it? What would be missing without it? What blessing do you bring?
- Be careful not to overly spiritualize this point:
 - Unhealthy assumption in the church that some work is holier than the rest.
 - Missionaries at top, then pastors/church workers, then nonprofits, then all the rest, then politicians at the bottom.
 - But that's not how God thinks about it:
 - There's no sacred/secular divide...
 - Instead, calls each of us to play a different role in bringing blessing to the world.
 - 10,000 occupations are needed:
 - **Peter** caught fish, **Paul** made tents, **Jesus** built furniture – imagine life w/o those!
 - Lawyers, teachers, musicians/artists, engineers/accountants, nurses, realtors, stay-at-home moms, servers, trash collectors – on and on we could go – **each** provides an important service to society/**each** makes our lives richer/**each** is a blessing to world.
- **Ask yourself:**
 - How does my work make a positive impact?
 - What larger good does it bring to the world? What would be missing without it? What blessing do I bring?
 - Offer that up to the Lord → then pursue it with all your heart.

We please God at work when we use it to bless the WORLD.

Summary:

- Work is a good thing. Like all good things, it's impacted by the fall.
- But we can redeem it – and please God at work – by using it to shape our HEARTS, our work COMMUNITY, and our WORLD.

THE CLOSE: Can I encourage you to try something this week?

- You've heard of *Bring Your Kids to Work Day*...
- How about: *Bring Your God to Work Day*...
 - Pick one of the areas we discussed and think about it on your commute.
 - Which stands out → How is God shaping heart/community/world through your work?
- Throughout the day keep an eye out – as you make that sale/write that paper/feed that kid/all the rest – you'll find he's already at work.
- Meet him there, join him in it → That's how you please God at work.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*
- D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*.
- L. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*.
- P. Jillette, *There Is No God*.
- T. Keller, *The Reason for God and Generous Justice*.
- Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice*.
- C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*.
- Logos Bible Software.
- J. McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter and A Ready Defense*.
- D. Plotz, *Good Book: The Bizarre, Hilarious, Disturbing, Marvelous, and Inspiring Things I Learned When I Read Every Single Word of the Bible*.
- C. Sanders, *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*.
- F. Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*
- E. Shillito, *Jesus of the Scars*.
- L. Strobel, *The Case for Christ*.
- R. Wilbourne, *Seek Justice*.

Endnotes

¹ I heard this definition in a talk by Missy Wallace at the *City To City Faith & Work Conference* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 11/14/22.

² I owe this illustration to John Ortberg, *The 7 Deadly Sins of Work*, accessed [here](#) on 12/30/15.