

The Gospel-Centered Life | Work

Rob Rogers May 1, 2022

Introduction

Everything we're talking about through the summer aligns with what we talked about in our Vision Sunday — bringing clarity to what it means for us to continue to move more toward becoming a disciple-making church. If you call GC home, our desire is that you would first *be* a disciple, and then *make* disciples.

What is a disciple?

Someone that is **following Jesus**, being **changed by Jesus**, and **on mission with Jesus**.

In this series... we're tackling what it means to *follow* Jesus.

What we said last week is that the *gospel is not advice, which puts a burden on you, it's good news which lifts the burdens off of you. It's not about what you must do, but the gospel is the good news, everything that Jesus has already accomplished for you.*

But here's the problem... most Christians believe that the gospel is simply the way that you come into the Christian faith. *There is a belief that the gospel is an elementary doctrine. And that belief alone is one of the primary reasons we have an epidemic of spiritual immaturity in the American Church today.* Followers of Christ have not thought through what it means to integrate the gospel into the rest of their life... and ***today, we're specifically talking about how the gospel influences the way followers of Jesus view their work.***

Dorothy Sayers in her essay, "Why Work" that was published in 1942, says this...

"In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion. But is it astonishing? How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?"¹
~ Dorothy L Sayers, Why Work

If you understand what the gospel means for your work — it will completely change the way you in which you think about your work, feel about your work, and actually do your work.

Let's go back to the beginning... all the way back to creation.

¹ Laura K. Simmons. *Creed without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, Oct 26, 2015)

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have **dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and **subdue it**...

Genesis 2:7-9,15

...then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. ⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work it and keep it**.

MADE TO WORK HOW TO WORK WHY WE WORK

MADE TO WORK

Throughout history, there have many different creation accounts — but not one of them has the perspective of work that Christianity gives us.

There’s a famous Babylonian creation account where there’s a battle of all the gods. Marduk is the victorious one and creates the world for all the gods to live in. They start complaining about how much work it’s going to take in order to maintain everything. Marduk comes up with a solution and tells all the other gods, “*I’m going to create a primitive being called man, they will do all the work for us so that the gods can rest.*”

And in most eastern creation accounts, the view of work is that its bad, and too lowly and menial for the gods.

In the Greek and Roman accounts, Zeus gives Pandora a box and says, “Whatever you do, don’t open this box.” And what does she do? What comes out? Death, disease, decay, and what else? WORK!

But what we see in the biblical creation account is that God works... steps back and takes joy and satisfaction in what He created! God gets His hands dirty, and forms man out of the soil.

There are Christians who believe work is a result of the Fall, of sin entering into the world. But what we see in the beginning is that God is working with His hands, and then He puts us in the garden and says, work the land, make it better, and maintain it — tend to it, care for it, grow it.

Work is not a punishment! Work is put in paradise! The garden of Eden. Paradise. You’ve got Adam and Eve, so you have companionship, relationship, intimacy. You have great food. Beautiful things for the eye to look at. You have food, and you have beauty. They walk with God in the cool of the day. You have friendship, you have all these incredible things — *and* you have work. Work is put in paradise.

*And not just intellectual work. Not just philosophy. **Manual labor.***

See, what God does here is in the very beginning of the human story, He elevates what we in modern culture call menial work. Down in the ditch, kind of work. There is a type of work, that when you see it and think about it... there's some part of you that says, "That's below me." I don't do that kind of work. *But what God is telling us is that ALL WORK has inherent dignity and meaning...* (apart from work that is inherently sinful). Just to be clear, being a drug dealer is not a calling from God.

The gospel tells us of the love of a God whose Son came down not (as the Greeks would expect him to come) as a philosopher or (as the Romans would expect him to come) as a noble statesman or (as the Jews wanted him to come) as a great general. *He came as a carpenter!*

What that means is that if you're a ditch digger, or a homemaker, or a lawyer, a salesman, or a CFO, or a janitor, no matter what your vocation is, that work is a calling.

Now, that begs the question, if that's true, if our work, whatever that work is, is a calling — how should we do our work?

HOW WE WORK

Some of you in this room were, and maybe still are terrified that I'm going to tell you that you need to go back to your job tomorrow and just start evangelizing everyone all the time!

How should a Christian airline pilot do his job? What does he need to do?

Land the plane!

How should a Christian CFO do his work?

Manage the money!

How should a Christian plumber do his work?

Plumb the pipes.

One of the things that is an unfortunate view within Christian circles is that everyone that can, should go into vocational ministry... and I actually think it's the opposite. What the world needs is Christians doing great work out in the world!

1 Thessalonians 4:10-12

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

He's saying... everybody, be quiet, mind your own business, and get to work. Now, Paul was addressing gossipers and busybodies in the church. The "why" behind the command to get to work is, "So that you may walk properly before outsiders." It literally means that you might win their respect.

If you're constantly sharing Jesus with people in your workplace, but you're terrible at your job — you need to stop talking about Jesus and get better at your job. Because truthfully, every day you're giving your coworkers reasons NOT to listen to you or follow your Jesus.

But, if you're GREAT at your job. It's been referred to as the ministry of competence.

If you love Jesus but you're incompetent at your job, then you're not really loving Jesus. Or maybe you just need to find a different job...

Three things to help you narrow your focus as you're trying to determine what vocation God might be calling you into...

Look in | Look out | Look up

1. **Look in** – how am I wired, gifted, what do I enjoy doing?
2. **Look out** – What needs are out there? How can I help or benefit someone else? Because believe it or not, your work was never meant to be about you. It's not about you. That's part of the reason why we're not satisfied in the work we do because we've made it about us... but it was never intended to be about us. It's for and about others.
3. **Look up** – Is there a sense of mission in what I'm doing? Do I see God at work? Do I have a sense of God's pleasure in my work?

WHY WE WORK

Now, I know that no matter how much you love your job, no matter how great your job is, or how perfectly aligned your job is with your wiring, and meeting needs of others, and on mission it is... there will be seasons where the pressures, the stress, the weight of your work can be so frustrating and aggravating and exhausting, or your coworkers are just getting on your nerves... or your boss is treating you unfairly.

So don't think I'm saying that if you find your right vocation it's going to be perfect, and you'll live happily ever after.

But in our passage, we're given a way to have a joy and a freedom in your work — that can only come to you through the beauty and the power of the gospel.

1. Years ago... after winning his third super bowl, Tom Brady with all his success, power, fame, wealth... and he basically says, *"It's all empty! I thought this would fill me, but it's empty. There's got to be more than this... and I don't know what the answer is."*²
2. Madonna in Vogue magazine years ago in an interview said, *"Every time I accomplish something, I feel like a special human being, but after a little while, I feel mediocre and uninteresting again. I find I have to get myself past this again and again. My drive in life is from the horrible fear of being mediocre. I have to prove I'm somebody."*³
3. In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, Harold Abrahams, who runs the 100-yard dash in the Olympics says, "I only have 10 seconds to justify my existence."⁴

² Smokie Norful. *Take the Lid Off: Trust God, Release the Pressure, and Find the Life He Wants for You* (Thomas Nelson, Sep 5, 2017) p 174

³ Madonna, *Vogue Magazine*, interview, June 16, 2020

⁴ *Chariots of Fire*, British historical sports drama film, Produced by Allied Stars, Ltd, 1981.

Each person is saying, in different ways, “I’m doing my work for *me*. I need something from it. I need to know that I’m somebody. I need to know that I matter. That I have an identity. That I’m worth something. *In other words, my work is about ME!*”

And if we’re honest, not one person in this room approaches their work with purely selfless motivation. Not one of us. But some of us, and this is our danger — the primary reason why we’re working so hard, or neglecting our families, or sacrificing our health for our work is **because we’re trying to prove that we’re somebody! That we have value. That we’re worth something.**

But look at what God does in the creation account...

Genesis 2:2-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² 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. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy...

Why did God rest? Was He tired? All that created just got Him all tuckered out?

NO... God neither slumbers nor sleeps... He’s not in need of rest. *But God knows that people learn best through modeling. Seeing it.* God is going to extreme lengths to let us know that if we’re going to be able to approach our work with a level of healthy motivation and perspective, we have to be able to turn the work switch off. *We have to rest.*

God set apart the Sabbath, which means it’s *for us*.
If you’re going to learn how to work the way God intended —
you have to learn how to rest.

But it’s not enough to just stop working.

It’s not enough to simply put it down.

You need a deep inner satisfaction, and deep inner rest.

See, many of us when we finish work for the day... I’ve noticed this in myself at times... there is a restlessness, an anxious need to push or to make sure I’m not failing, or disappointing someone... *but that inner lack of rest is an indicator that I’m not resting well.*

**The Sabbath is an intentional weekly reminder
that we are more than what we DO!**

We’re *not* human DOINGS!

We’re human BEINGS!

And the Sabbath is a weekly reminder from God of who we are.

Hebrews 4:9-10

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

- There is rest available to us
- It is a rest from work, but it’s not just rest from work.
- It’s rest from ***self-justifying work***.

- ***It's rest from the fear*** that we'll never be good enough, that we'll never have approval, or belonging, or acceptance

The Pharisees followed the Hebrew Law — they were well behaved, religious, they repented of their sins, the wrong things they did — but Jesus still had harsh words for them. Why? If you just repent of the bad things you do, *without repenting of the selfish motives you have for doing the good things that you do* — you only have a piece of the puzzle.

Why was Jesus so hard on the religious people? Because they *built an identity for themselves on religious adherence that was strictly motivated by selfishness* and their need for self-justification. They didn't love God. They loved themselves. And Jesus knew it.

**Could it be that your spiritual maturity
is not determined by how hard you work
but by how well you rest
in the finished work of Jesus Christ?**

See, again... **the gospel lifts the burdens off.** The beauty of what Jesus has done is that not only is there a *rest that we get to enter here* and now through believing the gospel... but there is the *hope of a future rest* that we will enter into... the new heavens, the new earth, the true Promised Land.

This is how the gospel changes the way you approach your work.

- It changes the way you view your work.
- It changes the reasons you have for your work.
- It's not about earning a salary or an obtaining an identity.
- It's about fulfilling a calling given to you by God to bring glory to His name in all you do
- Not because you're earning something from God
- But because God has already given you everything you need in the person of Jesus Christ.

The gospel restructures your motivation for why you're doing your job

- because it's no longer about you!!
- It's about learning how God has gifted and wired you
- and linked that up with what needs are out there in the world
- because **all work has inherent dignity**
- **and all inherently good work is a calling from God.**

So what do we do?

How do we grow in this?

How do we get this ingrained in us?

How do I apply this?

How does the gospel work its way out in my work?

Here's how — Take a day off

Observe the Sabbath. Take one 24-hour period and do not do any work. Don't work. Don't think about work. Don't worry about work. Don't plan your work. Turn that switch off.

OBJECTION: And even saying that some of you are going... *but Rob, that's irresponsible, that's bad stewardship... that's laziness... that's negligent and careless...*

- *If that's your reaction to God's invitation to rest from your work, then what the Holy Spirit is exposing right now is your lack of trust in God as your provider.*

Observing The Sabbath does two primary things in us... it exposes and it expands.

- 1. It exposes our lack of trust in God.**
- 2. It makes room for God to work in us.**

If you do this...

1. It reminds you that you are not needed to make the world go round.
2. It reminds you that you're not just a cog in a wheel.
3. It reminds you that you are more than what you do.
4. There will be moments when you have no other choice BUT to **remain dependent on God to provide for you what you could produce but choose not to.**
5. But ultimately it's a reminder that Jesus Christ took upon himself the brokenness of the human condition, all of our restless efforts at self-justification, and freed us from anxiety-ridden efforts to make a name for ourselves.

Jesus Christ, when He carried the sin of the world on His shoulders, the Father gave him silence and rejection, but now gives us unconditional acceptance.

What that means is that you're now free from the NEED to prove yourself. Or earn an identity.

It doesn't mean that what you do doesn't matter — ***but it means that who God says you are matters infinitely more.***

If you allow that to sink in, you will have the ability to work FROM the deep inner rest that only the gospel can give you.

Discussion Questions

1. In your personal experience, have work and religion become separate departments in the world? Example? How has that affected your ability to share the gospel?
2. Had you ever considered that "work" was a positive part of Paradise, and not just a negative result of the Fall? Does that change your overall view of "work"?
3. How do Christians win the respect of others in the workplace?
How would you define the "ministry of competence"?
4. What are ways to determine what vocation God might be calling you into?
5. Why did God rest on the seventh day from all His work? What does that physically mean for us/you as an individual?
6. Discuss: "Could it be that your spiritual maturity is not determined by how hard you work — but by how well you rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ?"

NOTES