

FINDING MEANING IN WORK

Work, paid or unpaid takes up a significant portion of our lives. I realize a number of you are stay at home parents. You don't need to be told this is hard work. Some of you are Retired from "work" but tell me you are as busy as ever. Some of you are students and this is work.

Work can be both deeply rewarding and incredibly frustrating. We can have a love hate relationship with work. When it goes well, it is deeply satisfying. When it goes badly we can't wait for the day we can stop working.

Work also tends to be disconnected from our faith. Some see work as just a place to make money so they can be generous with it. Some see work as just a place to be a witness and tell others about Jesus. Some see work as just a place where God develops our character. Some see work as just a place to support oneself. Some see work as just a place to find personal satisfaction in using your gifts. Some see work as a way to advance the kingdom. Some see work as their calling, others as just a means to an end.

For many work is not seen as spiritual. Some churches seem to not be interested in their work at all. Over the next 6 weeks we want to answer: Why do we need or want to work?

Why is it that work can seem so hard at times?
How can we find satisfaction in work?

Deeply integrate what happens on Sunday with what happens on Monday. Biblically. Over the years I have preached on this before. Done a series here on this. During lock down I read a new book on the subject by Timothy Kellor called Every Good Endeavour that had new insights that I found really helpful. So I want to share some of those with you.

The Design and the Dignity of Work

The 5th word of the Bible is "created". At the very beginning of the Bible is work. This creation process by God is described as work. . Genesis 2:1-3, 15. It describes God working in the form of a typical 7 day working week. (this need not be literal). We see God's incredible breath-taking creation as work. And in paradise we are introduced to humans working. God, creation, human purpose all linked together with work. No other belief system does this. None. Most other belief systems have some kind of creation story. Typically creation is a result of some kind of struggle between warring cosmic forces. Babylonian account god Marduk overcomes the goddess Tiamat and the world comes about. Greeks have this idea that in the golden age, when humans and gods lived on earth, neither had to do any work. The original earth just provided food. But in Genesis God is repeatedly described as being at work. Not a special word that is used. Just the bog standard word for human work. Work is not seen as some necessary evil. Not something for humans but that is below God. God worked it appears for the sheer joy of it. We read that God delights in his work, He stands back and looks at what he has done and he says.

That is pretty good. God sees as it were himself in his work. Just as painter expresses himself in his work, so God expresses himself in this work. The heavens declare the glory of God. Creation reveals to us God. We see in Chap 2 God not only creates it but then he cares for this creation.. He makes humanity, plants a garden, waters it, makes a wife for the man. Throughout the rest of the Bible we read of God caring for his creation. When he creates humans in his image, then he commissions them to continue his work. Fill the earth and subdue it. "Subdue" has a meaning of continuing to develop. Indicates creation is good but huge potential to develop. So God works for us and we work for God. Work is good. It is part of paradise. It will be part of our future. Because work reflects the fact that God is a worker. We are designed to work. Without work we do not thrive as humans. Work is fundamental to human dignity which is why not having work is such a big deal. We are not designed to work one day and have 6 off. We are actually designed to work 6 days and rest one. If are not designed to have one big holiday Dorothy Sayers says. Work is not a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do.

Made for work

Often people say Christianity just a load of rules. I would love just to be free to do what I want. True freedom is actually doing what we are designed to do. A fish might argue it should be free to go wherever it wants. But actually it is designed to live in water. That is where it finds its freedom. A plane must follow the rules of aerodynamics or it crashes. But if it follows the rules it is free to be what it is designed to be. Commands in the Bible help us find freedom. They are not restrictions on our freedom. Way we find freedom. Is 48 17-18

10 Commandments. 6 days you shall labour and do your work. Tend to focus on the last part of the command. About rest. But the first part calls us to work. The second part of the command puts the limits on work. God rested after work.

Work is good, and you will not have a meaningful life without work. But work is not the meaning of our life. If work becomes the purpose of our life, then we have created an idol. But many people see work as a necessary evil and leisure or family or spiritual stuff is the true meaning of life. Bible exposes this as a lie also.

We are called to stop work and just delight in life and in God. Enjoy creation, worship God, just stop and reflect on what we have done. Delight we see in creation. More than just functional.

The Dignity of Work. Genesis 1:28-29

The Greeks saw work as demeaning and a curse. Their aim was to live without needing to work. They stressed this idea of not being attached to this world and to material



things. They realized that work was a necessity. But they thought not all work was equal. So work that involved the mind was better and more god like. Manual work was the lowest form of work and so they used slaves. Some people they said were born to be slaves

But the problem is that these ideas have continued through out the centuries. Many would love to live without working. Many see work as just what we have to do to support our families and to do what we really want to do. We still have in our culture this idea that thinking jobs are worth more than manual jobs. Why is it that those who care for our elderly are paid so little compared to those who are accountants? Why is one valued so highly compared to the other. This Greek attitude is still around today. And people on higher salaries may get others to do menial jobs and look down on such work. Bible says that all work whether - Labourer, cleaner, surgeon, or lawyer - all work has dignity because it reflects the image of God.

The animals were not given work to do. Only humans have a job description. Greeks thought that manual work made us like animals. Bible says I work is what distinguish us from animals. Ancient cultures saw their rulers as gods. Canal digger was never seen in that light. Bible says humanity is royalty. We work out the purposes of God within creation. We bring order out of chaos. We build communities out of the material world. We care for creation. Our work has dignity because we are doing what God does, and we are doing it in his place, as his representatives.

The Jews expected God Messiah to come into this world as a ruler, as one of the elite class. Jesus came as a carpenter. One who worked with his hands. Just as God did when we created the world, and humans out of dust and planted this garden. In the OT God is described as a gardener. In the NT he is a carpenter. Take the most basic of human work. cleaning. What would happen if you did not clean your house. Eventually you would get very sick. Germs and viruses that would breed in your house. Therefore, God has created a physical world that needs ongoing care and maintenance. So if we don't clean then human life does not flourish. Cleaning is a gift from God.

Timothy Keller tells the story of a doorman in a large apartment building. He is an immigrant from war torn Croatia. 100 families live there, many quite wealthy. He has been doing the role for 20 years. Many in the apartment might consider such work below them. But to Mike it is far more than just a job to earn money. That is demonstrated by how he goes about his role. He takes great pride in it. He knows the names of all the residents and the names of every child. He keeps the lobby spotlessly clean. He helps with unloading groceries and finding parking spaces. He makes guests welcome. When he is asked why he works as he does, he is grateful for a job and for life. He wants to do the best he can every day. He understanding the dignity of what he does.

The dignity of work comes about from two things. 1 is that work is a reflection of God. 2nd reason is because the material world matters. Greeks saw death as a friend because it liberated us from the prison of physical life. The Bible sees death as an enemy because the created world is good and beautiful and eternal. Creation says material world is good. God came in human body. The resurrection gives us back a physical body. Revelation says that the physical world will be renewed and restored. All this says there is no separation of the physical and the spiritual realms. They are interlinked. So called secular work and work in a church are of equal value. We are body and soul and Shalom, the idea of well being is when our body and soul and spirit are all thriving.

We have in Gen 1 God's Spirit creating and Ps 65 and Ps 104 God watering the ground and renewing it by this Spirit. Yet in John 16 we have the Spirit of God convicting people. So we have God's Spirit creating and gardening, and preaching. Both are God's work. So who are we to say one of better than the other.

This foundational theology of work is incredibly far reaching. It should get rid of for all time classing some work as spiritual and some as secular. It should profoundly alter our attitude to work. Cleaning the house, cutting the lawns, paid employment. It is all working with God and for God in this ongoing plan for his creation. It should profoundly alter how we treat people regardless of their role and how much they get paid. Rid us of attitudes of superiority. It should profoundly free us to find work that suits our gifts and passions but also to seek any job if need be, knowing all work has dignity. We should be able to clearly identify how our work is part of God's plan for the world.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- What job have you disliked the most? Why? What job has given you the most satisfaction?
- Look at paragraph 3. What would sum up your primary attitude to work at present?
- How does this message challenge your attitudes to work?
- How have we adopted the Greek idea that the "spiritual" world is superior to the "physical" world?
- What is your attitude towards the command to rest one day a week? Why is this a struggle to keep?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS