

## FINDING MEANING IN WORK PT 6

Final in our series on work. Much of this series has been taken from teaching of Timothy Keller's book *Every Good Endeavour*. Read during lockdown.

There have been some profound insights in this series about how we view life and interact with the world around us. They challenge the typical Christian viewpoints on how we live out our Christian faith.

We have a tendency to want to separate, to view material world as less than, and to disengage with culture. There is still a strong default setting that sees life in a very binary fashion where the spiritual is elevated about the physical.

Today I want to examine two more keys to finding satisfaction in work.

**A new compass for work** What guides our work is different from those who are not Christians.

### Different ethics

If you read books on ethics, or do courses on ethics, they will often argue that we should be fair and honest, we should treat employees well and we should give back to the community. The reason: long term it will be good for business. It will give you a good reputation.

Therefore, the ethics are really around a cost benefit analysis. Integrity will pay off in the end. However, what if there is a short-term gain and little downside to acting with no integrity? As Christians, we are to act ethically, not because it will be better for us, (which it often will be) but because good ethics are right in themselves and honour God.

Sometimes that integrity will cost us, but our motivation for ethics is different. It is based on what God says is right. Sometimes that will put us at odds with others.

### Different view of people

Human rights that we hear much about today are because every person is made in the image of God. Pre Christianity there was no such concept of human rights. Many people who do not believe in God passionately believe in human rights. All people have the right to be treated with dignity and honour and love.

It is easy to fall into the trap in work of treating certain people better than others. However, if every person is made in the image of God, then they have rights regardless of gender, class, sexuality, lifestyle or moral character.

### Different source of guidance

The Bible has much to say about how to act ethically. However, what about the 80% of decisions for which the Bible does not give guidance?

There is no verse in the Bible that tells you what job to take, or who to marry, or when to speak up and when to keep quiet. This is what the Bible calls wisdom. Wisdom helps us make good decisions. Wisdom comes from knowing God personally. Prov. 1:7 Our relationship with God helps us keep pride and anxiety in check, both of which hinder good decision making. We gain wisdom from experience, if we are willing to learn from it. The proud person blames everyone else. The person with low self-esteem beats themselves up rather than see others role.

Proverbs is the book of wisdom. It has huge insights into human behaviour and the heart. James says if we lack wisdom, we should ask for it. James 1:5 The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of wisdom. Eph. 1:17, Col. 1:9 God is interested in your work and the issues that you face. Ask God for wisdom. He might answer from any source; others, the Word, an insight etc.

When the early church struggled with an issue about Gentile converts, it says that they debated and discussed the matter. They concluded, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us." I.e. they used thinking, reasoning, listening experience, prayer to come to a wise decision. Acts 15

### Different audience

Ephesians 6:5-9 Paul says all work should be done as if you are serving the Lord. He was speaking to slaves and masters. When we think of slavery we think of the African slave trade. Greek and Roman world slavery was quite different. It was not race based or normally lifelong. (this is not to say it was good or at times abusive) However, quite different from what from slavery of 17-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Paul is saying is to both master and slaves; Slaves, you are not working for your masters. You are working for God. So do not do the minimum necessary to get through the day. Give your very best because you are doing it for God. How you work is not dependent on how much money you get or whether it is a menial job or an important job or if your boss is nice or horrible or whether his is watching or not. All your work is for God.

We are to show the boss deep respect (it is very easy to rubbish the boss) and fear (not cringing but showing honor) We are to do God's will (work ethically) and work with enthusiasm.

To masters in a highly hierarchical society Paul says, actually, you are a slave as well. Your Master is in heaven. Therefore, you should act like a slave. Treat your slaves in the same way. I.e. with Respect, honor, sincerity. This was radical teaching. They were not to manage them by threats. Look out for their interests. There is no favoritism with God. He sees all people as equal.



## New Power for Work

### The Power of Passion

There is a power that comes from being passionate about something. When we are passionate, we find energy. However, things that are not helpful can sometimes drive passion. Dorothy Sayers says if we are not driven by something bigger than our selves are then our passion is driven by one of the 7 deadly sins. We work hard out of envy, to try to get ahead of others. We work hard out of pride, to prove ourselves. We work out of greed, because we want things. We work out of gluttony, wanting pleasure. One of the seven deadly sins is sloth – we think of as laziness. However, she argues it is really about self. We work only for what is in it for myself.

However, Biblical passion is very different. Romans 12. 1 Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice... then he outlines how to do this in the next verses including vs 11. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. NIV

This reference is not to a sin offering but the OT burnt offering where an animal from your flock with no defects was offered. A burnt offering was a way of showing your total commitment to God saying "Everything I have is yours." Now living sacrifice is a bit of an oxymoron. Sacrifices were dead. But Paul says, I want you to be a living dead thing.

This is about being so passionate for God, that you continually put God before your own interests. The death of Christ is referred to as the passion of Christ.

He goes on to spell it out. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the lord. Paul is saying live with passion. Why. In view of God mercy. I.e. In view of Jesus sacrificial death for us. He lost everything and sacrificed everything. He was totally committed to his goal – a bit like how an athlete trains for the Olympics. Passion can come from our own selfish desires. Alternatively, it can come from a deep understanding of the work of Jesus on the cross.

### The Power of Rest

This command is probably the most ignored of the 10 commands in the Bible. We live in a culture where busyness is a badge of honour. Hard work is a strong value here in the south.

Sabbath rest is a crucial concept when it comes to work.

What is Sabbath rest? Ex 20 ties Sabbath rest to God's creation. God rested after his work. It is part of the pattern built into creation. When we violate the rhythm of work and rest we cause damage in us and in the world around us. Sabbath is a celebration of how we are designed.

In Deuteronomy 5 Sabbath is also linked to the exodus. People were bought out of slavery. In Egypt they were just production units, to make bricks. God says Sabbath is a

reminder you were bought out from slavery. When we don't take Sabbath, we are actually in slavery. We are slaves to expectations of others, slave to our insecurities, slave to hopes of others. If we are in slavery, then we will feel guilty when we stop.

Sabbath is an act of trust. This is especially hard for those who run own businesses or are in leadership. Rest is an act of trust that God will provide, that the world will not fall apart, and that he is in charge of your work.

In Matthew 11:28-30 there is this well-known passage. But it is a bit weird. To the weary and heavy-laden he will give a yoke and a burden. How does that work. God will not drive us into the ground. God does not expect perfection from us. God's work for you is finished. As Christians, we rest in the finishing work of Jesus Christ. We are not working to prove our identity. Or to find significance. Or so God will love us. We do not need to strive after success or fear failure. We can work in freedom. The promise is that the deepest aspirations we have for our work will be met in the future that God has planned.

The process of integrating our work and faith is a lifetime journey. It involves deep reflection of our work, our culture, and our own hearts. It involve discussion with others. It involve reading the Word and Prayer.

Abraham Kuyper said "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry Mine. " My prayer is that each of us would understand how our work is part of God's story, and how all we do is for his glory.

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### REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- Have you ever questioned the ethics of practices in your workplace? Or compromised your ethics? Or struggled with what the right ethic is? How did you resolve it?
- How are people treated in your workplace? Rate out of 10, 10 being the top. What kind of people do you find hardest to treat well?
- Have you ever prayed about issues in your workplace? Have you ever sensed guidance over an issue you have been struggling with? How interested do you think God is in your work? (as opposed to just you)
- How can we live out the idea that we work for God, not a company/organization? How does this create passion?
- "Sabbath rest is the most ignored of the 10 commands". "If we don't rest then we are a slave to something". Discuss these ideas. Why is a Sabbath so counter cultural today?
- What do you need to do to restore Sabbath rest in your life?



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