

FINDING MEANING IN WORK PT 5

Review: This series on work has been asking and answering 3 key questions. 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?

We have answered the first two. Work is designed by God as a reflection of himself. In work we create culture, and this is our calling. However because of the fall, we at times can find work fruitless and pointless. Work can easily become self centred, and an idol. We find meaning and identity in work, rather than in God. Work can very easily become an idol. If we love, serve and derive meaning from something more than God it is an idol. Ex 20:3 Whatever we use to face life with confidence with is our God. In the NT, we read less of idols but a lot about self-effort to save ourselves. This is one and same thing. The idols of our culture are also deeply influential on our place of work.

How do we find satisfaction in work?

A new Story for Work We make sense of life through story.

Simple example. You are up the street one day. when a woman who you have never seen before comes up to you and says. The name of the common wild duck is histrionicus histrionicus. You can understand the words but it makes no sense to you at all. The only way to make sense of it is to understand the story behind it. Perhaps the young woman is mentally ill. Or she has mistaken you for someone. Perhaps the young woman is a spy and this is some prearranged code sentence to identify the contact.

Therefore, if we get the story of the world wrong, i.e. maybe that we see the purpose of life is about self-fulfilment then we are going to get our responses about work wrong as well. Worldview is the master story of how we see the world.

If we Analyse movies and story there is a very basic plot. Life is going along ok. Then something happens. I.e. Divorce, accident, etc. that throws life off balance. Then the characters try to get things back right again with lots of twists and setbacks. Either things are restored or not.

We live out a story that gives our lives meaning. Examples
Strive to be successful from a tough childhood
Strive to be part of a just cause like saving the environment
Strive to find true love
Striving to bring our family out of oppression to freedom in a new country
Strive to see better morals in society.
Strive to forge a unique identity. Sexual, cultural, political identify against the prejudices of others.

Countries and cultures also have worldviews. Freud had a worldview that the problem with humanity was the internal suppressed conflicts with in us. Marx said the problem is an unjust economic system. Others have said the world is a

mess because of the rules of religion that we need to free ourselves from. Many worldviews are hugely influential.

The Christian worldview (story) is very different. How are things meant to be? Whole world is good. God made the world and everything in it is good. No evil parts of the world. The created world is good. What is the problem? The whole world is fallen. No aspect of the world that is more or less affected by sin. Non-Christian world views demonize make bad some aspect of the created world, in order to find a villain.

Christianity understand that the main issue is a relational one. We were made for fellowship with God. We have broken that relationship. Only God can forgive and restore that relationship. The problem with the world is a relational issue.

Christianity says the problem is not with the world, or any part of the world. The problem is with sin - our loss of relationship with God. We cannot divide the world into heroes and villains. Christians and non-Christians. Secular and spiritual, emotions and reason, mundane work and good religious stuff. Everyone is villain as it were, because of sin, but everyone is a hero. Made in the image of God.

Christian worldview story is the God made a good world marred by sin. Jesus Christ has redeemed it at infinite cost so the one day all will be restored no death suffering. How does this worldview affect our work?

Questions you can ask of your field of work (*)

What are the underlying assumptions worldview behind my work?

What are the idols in my work place?

What parts of the story align with Christian worldview that I can support?

What parts of the story are irreconcilable to a Christian worldview?

How can I work in my field with both excellence and distinctiveness?

What are the opportunities to serve in my work to?

Serve others, society, and my field of work, model excellence, and witness to Christ

Once we grasp the God story, then work can take on new significance when we see our role to align our work with God's story.

A new conception of work If Christians have a unique worldview when it comes to work, then how is it that those who are not Christians can often do their work better? Have better values, better service. How come often we cannot see any difference in the work a Christian does and the work a person who is not a Christian does? A good mechanic is a good mechanic is a good mechanic regardless of what religion he is. This comes back to this idea of common grace that we looked at in previous weeks.



God is a creator God. Our work mirrors his creative work when our work lines up with his vision. However, God not only creates, he gives ongoing care and nurture to his creation. Key way that God cares for us is through the work of other people. God feeds us through the work of others. God provides us with houses through the work of others. Work is how God sustains the world.

Therefore, the work of those who are not Christians is equally fulfilling God's sustaining as the work of those who are Christians. All humans are made in the image of God. All have talents and gifts to work in the world. Why do those who are not Christians do better work than Christians do? God distributes his gifts freely by his grace. Not earned.

Focus on worldview too much and we will under value work done by non-believers. It also leads us to over value white-collar work over blue collar. If your work is manual, physical, worldview does not make as much obvious difference. There is no Christian way to assemble an engine. Therefore, the Christian conception of work stops us putting professionals on a pedestal and stops us devaluing the work of those of non-believers. When we value all work we are coming to understand common grace. Here are examples of common grace.

- God has places eternity in everyone hearts
 - All made in the image of God
 - Rain falls on the just and the unjust Matthew 5:45
 - God's law is written on every heart
 - Creation declares the glory of God PS 191. 97:6. Rom 1
 - Human wisdom comes from God. Skill of a farmer, doctor, comes from God. Isaiah 28:24-29
 - Every good thing comes from God. James 1:17
 - Artistic skill comes from God. Exodus 31:1-4
 - Leaders appointed by God. God works through those who are not Christians to restrain sin. Is 45, Gen 20
- Deep within the human operating system, God had imprinted his story. Romans 1 talks of this. Instinctively, whether a person believes or not, the goodness of God can and does manifest itself.

Christian's reaction over the last 100 years or so has been to disengage from the popular culture, in one of 3 ways.
Denounce all popular culture as evil and bad
Create a sub culture. Christian movies books etc.
Consume all the culture around us form of disengagement.

This disengagement is because we have failed to understand the nature of sin and the nature of common grace. We try to conquer sin by separating ourselves from the culture. (there is a place for this. Flee temptation.) We might feel less sinful. However, this fails to understand that we then often make idols out of good things like family, doctrinal purity, financial security; Sin is not just not doing things that are obviously bad. It is far more subtle and pervasive

The tension that we have to navigate is to not withdraw but not consume this world uncritically. Instead we are to humble engage with our culture.

Disengaging from culture lead us dualism. Separation of the secular and the spiritual. We then fail to recognize the work done by non-Christians always contains some degree of God's common grace as well as the distortions of sin. In addition, we cannot see that the work done by Christians in the name of Jesus is also significantly distorted by sin.

Opposite problem, which is more prevalent and harder to combat, is that Christians only think of themselves as Christians in church context. However, outside of church they uncritically accept the culture around them with its idols and values. I.e. Personal freedom materialism, surface appearances. We fail to grasp the importance of what is distinctive about the Christians worldview. The gospel reframes everything not just spiritual things.

Christians are never as good as their right beliefs should make them because of sin. Non-Christians are never as bad as their wrong beliefs should make them because of common grace. This should lead us to critically enjoy human culture in every field of work. Celebrate the good and celebrate the glimpses of kingdom goodness. However, recognize the half-truths and idols. When we see those glimpses, we will give thanks to the work of God that is behind them.

How does we find satisfaction in work? A new story for Work helps give meaning to work, as we understand the Big Story. A new conception of work helps us appreciate work of every kind, regardless of who does it, and helps us appreciate the hand of God behind it.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

What are the idols in our current society? How do they affect our work?

Can you see how the basic story line talked about is played out in movies? How could this frame work be used to share the gospel?

Can you apply the questions about work * to your own workplace or field of work ?

Are you guilty of valuing professional work more than manual work, and devaluing the work of those who are not Christian?

Talk about idea of common grace. Is this a new idea? How have we lost this idea?

Discuss the thought that Christians are never as good as their right beliefs should make them and non-Christians are never as bad as their wrong belief should make them.

Discuss the three ways we have disengaged from culture. Which one is most prevalent now?

How can common grace lead us to a deeper appreciation of God at work in the world?



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