

Next Steps – Your Work Matters to God!

5/19/19 – Pastor Randy

The Sunday after Easter I shared a message with you that I titled “Next Steps” We looked at the recommissioning of Peter by Jesus after the resurrection. Peter was unsure about his next steps, so he went back to what was comfortable and familiar. Jesus performed a fishing miracle -similar to the one He performed when he first called Peter to leave his vocation as a fisherman - to convince Peter that God would provide if Peter would obey.

When I began this message I didn't intend for it to turn into a series but when I found out what God was placing on Pastor Dana's heart to share the next Sunday I realized that God wanted us to stay with this idea of “next steps”.

Two Sunday's ago Pastor Dana challenged us to take our next steps along the path of becoming like Christ; serving with Christ and through the power of His Spirit. His challenge emphasized finding a place to serve in our church.

The next two weeks I am going to focus on the subject of work and vocation. Peter's next step entailed leaving his vocation. This does not mean that every time someone comes to faith in Christ, experiencing a 'grace awakening' to the implications of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, that his/her next steps will necessitate changing the kind of work he/she does.

Your faith in Christ may, or may not, change **what work you do**, but it will absolutely change **why you work**. It may not change **where you work** but it will change **the way you work**.

This morning I want to address the subject of “vocational discipleship”.
Vocational Discipleship: Following Jesus into and within the workplace.
Following Jesus ought to influence:

1. **How we view** our “work”
2. **How we do** our “work”

Vocational discipleship is the joining together of the creation mandate (aka. Cultural Mandate) and our missional mandate (aka The Great Commission)

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Creation Mandate

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created human beings in his own image. **In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** Then God blessed them and said, **“Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.** Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

Genesis 2:15

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden **to tend and watch over it.**

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand,** that we should walk in them.

Missional Mandate

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go **and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them** in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.** And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

2 Corinthians 5:15; 18-20

He died for everyone so that **those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.**

And all of this is a gift from **God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.** For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. **So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!”** For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be

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the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

The cross and resurrection of Jesus forms the foundation for the Christian's sense of calling. There are two aspects to our calling.

1. We are called TO COME BE RECONCILED TO GOD- God calls us into fellowship (a relationship) with him so that we might be "shaped" to become like him. Our "calling" is first and foremost to *someone*, rather than to *something* or *somewhere*. One of the most illuminating phrases used in the NT to describe a Christian is "the called" (Romans 1:6, 1 Corinthians 1:24). Jesus described his mission to save sinners as having "come to call them to repentance" (Luke 5:32). A Christian is one who has become a child of God "by calling" (1 Corinthians 1:2). He has been "called" out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9) and simultaneously "called" according to God's purpose (Rom. 8:28).

2. We are called TO GO FOR CHRIST - God shapes us to accomplish a work ordained by Him; a work involving both the creation and missional mandates.

If anyone in this world should live with a sense of purpose it should be the Christian. EVERY aspect of our lives is infused with a divine purpose that impacts eternity. Unfortunately, too many of us compartmentalize our lives. Sunday is for Jesus but Monday- Saturday is for me. The tithe is for Jesus, the other 90% for me.

Consider the fact that the average person spends 35% of their total waking hours over a 50 year working-life and 50% of their total waking hours during any given working day. That is a huge part of our life. How could that part of your life not matter to God?! (See ReviseSociology.com)

Work is part of God's good creation. (Genesis 1-2)

Premise #1: God is a "worker" (2:2-3)

Premise #2: We are created in the image of God (1:26-27)

Conclusion: We were created to WORK! (1:28; 2:5,15)

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Revelation 22:1-5 gives us reason to suspect that “work” will be part of our existence forever, even in the new creation. Our eternal “reign” might be a return to God’s original intention for Adam, which was to “rule over creation”.

I asked someone a while back, “What work do you do?”. His response was, “As little as possible”. We have all heard people fantasize about what it would be like to win the lottery and Never. Have. To. Work. Again.

That view of work is a distorted, non-Christian perspective of “work”.

Work is part of God’s good creation. God ordained that we would work PRIOR to the fall. Work, like every other part of life was corrupted by the fall, but work itself is not a “necessary evil”. Rather, it is a godly activity.

A. Definition of “Work”

“Physical or mental effort or activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something.” - thefreedictionary.com

“Work is the expenditure of energy (manual and/or mental) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God.” - J. Stott, *Involvement Vol. 2*, pg. 31

Notice that neither of these definitions refer to financial remuneration. An able-bodied man should not be ashamed of being unemployed, but he should be ashamed of being inactive and unproductive! Of course we should be encouraged when our society reports lower unemployment numbers, but that doesn’t tell the whole story. Some “unemployed” men and women contribute more to the good of society than some who are “employed”.

There are three types of employed people. Those who are employed towards destructive ends (ungodly work), those who are employed yet unproductive (Idle), and those who are employed towards constructive ends (godly work). “Work” from a Christian perspective must be a constructive contribution.

The God-Ordained Purpose of Work: Stewardship & Sanctification

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Christian work is done as an expression of the Imago Dei (The image of God) and the Imago Christi (The Image of Christ). Its purpose is to **construct** the worker's physical and social environments consistent with the character and will of God. In doing so, the worker **contributes** protectively and productively to his own needs as well as to the needs of others, being **conformed** to the character of Christ in the process. You want to be like Christ? Work!

Note the three key words: Construct, contribute, and conform. We can sum this up by saying that God-ordained work is a means of loving God and neighbor; thus fulfilling the two great commandments!

Three types of God-ordained work: Vocational, domestic, and volunteer work are all means of loving God and our neighbor. We will talk more about this next week and I will address specific issues about you and your work.

Today I want to impress upon you that God created you with a purpose. He has redeemed you from your sins for a purpose that is both future and present. That purpose will be fulfilled through this activity we call "work". You are His handiwork, His workmanship. He has called you as His own and has placed His Holy Spirit in you so that the Spirit, working in you will perform a work through you that will result in people being reconciled to God, edified in God, and thus giving glory to God. I pray that God will begin to renew your mind about your work; your vocational, domestic, and volunteer work. I pray that you will dedicate the work of your hands to him, trusting Him to use you as you work to bring about reconciliation between God and sinful man and reconciliation between God's will and the sinful political, social, educational and commercial systems of this world.

"You are the light of the world! Let your light shine so that people will see your GOOD WORKS and glorify your father who is in Heaven." - Jesus

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HOW WE VIEW OUR WORK – Part 2

Review: Last week we began speaking about how we VIEW our work.

Examining what the bible says about the subject of work.

Here is what we learned:

1. Work is part of God's good creation. God ordained that we would work PRIOR to the fall. Work becomes hindered and hampered by the fall, but work itself is not a "necessary evil". "If I won 20 million dollars I would never work again." 2.

Purpose of "Work". The kind of work God calls us to involves three key words: Construct, Contribute, and Conform. The work we are called to is not limited to vocation or formal employment. Retired people that are more productive than some employed people. Work is a means of loving God and neighbor.

Bridging the Sacred/Secular Divide

Can "secular" work be "sacred" work? Is 'secular' work inferior to 'church' work.

Read "How The Should we Work" by Hugh Welchel. Preface Location 310, 312 page 70,71

What do you think of what you have just read? Does it mirror your experience as a Christian in a local church? Have we defined discipleship too narrowly in terms of bible study, prayer, worship, fellowship, and witness?

Read Exodus 31:1-6; 35:30-35 ; Daniel 1:17-20

God endows people with "practical" _____ and _____ as well as with "spiritual" gifts.

Colossians 3:23 – Whatever you do, do it as working for the Lord.

God calls people to church-related work (Samuel/Ezra/Paul/Barnabas) as well as to work which is not church-related (i.e Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, Nehemiah)

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Nehemiah and Ezra are a great example of the way God calls and uses some people in the secular realm and others in the religious realm. Nehemiah was called by God to be a construction manager to rebuild the walls of the city. When the walls were rebuilt, Ezra preached the word. A modern day example would be John Wesley and William Wilberforce.

Where am I “Called” to Work?

Four arenas:

1. Home _____
2. Church _____
3. Job/Career _____
4. Community _____

Attitudes towards work

1. Work is performed to survive (1 Thess. 4:11-12). Work is performed merely for “survival”. (i.e. Viewing work as a necessary evil)
2. Work is performed to attain a sense of self-worth/status. (i.e. “I need to “prove” myself by my work.”)
3. Work is done for the satisfaction of accomplishment. (i.e. Enjoying the work of ones hands)
4. Work is performed merely to attain possessions/pleasure. (i.e. “Working for the weekend”)

Work and Wealth

The Bible teaches that riches are:

1. Sometimes the blessing of the Lord as a consequence of hard work and virtue. Joseph, Abraham, Solomon (Deut. 8:10-18; Josh 1:8; Prov. 13:4,11; 28:19; 1 Thess. 4:11,12) Ex. Job wealthy & righteous
2. Sometimes the product of selfishness, greed, or theft. Theft occurs when a person takes something that belongs to another without their consent, whether overtly (i.e. robbery) or covertly (i.e. fraud, failure to pay a fair wage). (Jer. 22:13; Psalm 73:12; James 5:4; Micah 6:12; Luke 12:15-21)

Regarding those who are poor the Bible teaches that:

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1. Some people are poor due to misfortune, disadvantage, and/or oppression by the rich. (James 5:4; Luke 14:13,14; Deut. 24:17-21)
2. Some people are poor due to their own immoral decisions. They have been lazy, undisciplined, and/or have self-indulgently squandered their resources. Example: The Prodigal Son (Prov. 6:9-11; 19:15; 20:13; 21:17; 23:21; 2 Thess. 3:10)

Last week when Joel Davis shared his life testimony, he mentioned a couple of things I want to highlight:

1. We need to view our work as more than a “job”, but rather as an “assignment” from God. There is a phrase that has become popular among many young preachers, younger than me: Living “on mission”. The idea is that God has a mission for us in life and we don’t take a break from that mission when we engage in our vocation. That mission is not limited to your vocation either.

Example: Jimmy Swaggart visiting a prostitute/stripper. When he went there in his disguise, how many of you know that God was not fooled?

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses. Jesus did not say, “and you will go and witness”. Disciple is not a role we assume for a certain portion of our day/week, but an identity that abides with us 24/7

2. Work should not be performed merely to attain possessions/pleasure. (i.e. “Working for the weekend” or “working for retirement”). In this case, the actual contribution of the work makes little difference to the person, so long as there is compensation. This is why we have this economically destructive attitude that seeks as much compensation as possible for as little work as possible. This mindset is not concerned with the contribution there work makes. Not all compensation is commensurate with the work performed. Are we open to the possibility that a lower paying job could be necessary in order to make the contribution God wants one to.

. Myth’s about “Christian calling”.

1. When Jesus ‘calls’ people into service for Him he calls them to be either pastors, prophets, missionaries, evangelists, or apostles.

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2. Your vocation must have a direct connection to the mission of making disciples. Paul worked as a tentmaker. This wasn't Paul's primary calling or mission but it was something God wanted him to do in order to contribute to the needs of others.

Someone needs to grow, catch, or hunt food. Delivery systems need to be created and maintained so that this food can be distributed to the consumer. Structures need to be built so we have homes to live in and places to engage in commerce, education, and social life. Treating and caring for the sick, creating and producing products that contribute to human flourishing, creating and maintaining systems of communication and transportation, creating and maintaining systems of education, and the research and development that leads to a higher level of all the above, are examples of "good works".

In particular, our work must be an integral part of our participation in Christ himself. His work of creation underlies the act of creativity and production in the universe ([John 1:1-3](#)). His work of redemption can occur in every workplace through justice, healing, reconciliation, compassion, kindness, humility and patience ([Colossians 3:12](#)). Christ's redemptive work is not limited to evangelism, but encompasses everything necessary to make the world what God always intended it to be. This redemptive work occurs in harmony with the work of creation, production and sustenance that [God delegated to humanity in the Garden of Eden](#). The Bible does not indicate that the work of redemption has superseded the work of creation. Both continue, and in general, Christians are commanded to participate in the work of both creation and redemption.[1]