

Series: Soul Life	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: The Work Life - JOY	Date: 12.13.2020
Website Writeup:			
<i>Colossians 3 urges us in... 'whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' How do we view our work lives in light of our calling as Christians. Do we work to live, or live to work? Do we recognize the influence we have through our work life? Do we understand our call to serve as if we are serving Jesus himself?</i>			

We're three weeks into our series, *Soul Life*? The first week we focused on the Inner Life, last week the Family Life, and this week we want to look at our Work/Active Life. We often say at Six:Eight, *everything's spiritual*, which includes our work lives, and any other activity in which we involve ourselves.

Brother Lawrence imitated this sentiment when he said, *"The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer...In the noise & clatter of my kitchen...I possess God in as great a tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."*

Replace 'kitchen' with office, work site, business meeting, what have you. All divine moments filled with opportunity for witness & worship of Jesus. My job as Pastor is no more spiritual than your job of accountant, nurse, teacher, student, or business owner. We're called to glorify Him with our time, talent & treasures in whatever station we find ourselves.

Our time's viewed in light of the calling we have in Christ. It's not that we don't spend time in relaxation & enjoyment, which is also called for in Scripture. Yet, over all, the larger question is how do we choose to spend our time? Is our leisure time to restore, worship & find energy to reengage in the tasks to which God's called us? How does our time at work or leisure activities glorify God & further his kingdom objectives? And, what activities do we involve ourselves in? These are all ongoing questions for the Christian life.

Our talents are divinely appropriated. We're expected to expend them in service to the king even in the workplace. Are they utilized for His glory, or just in selfish gain? Do we view our talents & skills as blessings given to better bring glory to Jesus & the betterment of those entrusted to us? Great questions.

And treasures, again, not that we don't spend on ourselves, however, does that spending go towards real need & reenergizing us to better serve God's kingdom, or just self-indulgence? Do we see our treasures, money, home, car, etcetera, as tools which God's entrusted to use towards the furthering of His kingdom & the betterment of others around us? Again, good questions.

We once had the furnace replaced in our home by Oliver Heating & Plumbing. I met with the project manager, he was professional, polite, taking time & giving attention to detail to make us comfortable. I didn't expect it, but at the end, he stated the owner of the company is a Christian, and that many of the employees were as well. Not all mind

you. However, in light of this fact, everyone was expected to work within an ethic which represents values & beliefs reflective of his faith. He wasn't trying to convert me, and didn't know I was a Christian. He simply explained, due to their faith, they expected their company to do solid work at a fair price, and with utmost care. The thought occurred to me, this guy answers to something higher than just the customer which makes me trust them all the more.

A day later the owner of the company left me a short message saying he appreciated my business & if there's anything I needed, I could call him directly - a company with thousands of customers, and I got a personal line to the owner! This was a man whose company represented well - and even if I weren't a Christian, I would've been left with a good taste in my mouth, no matter my response to the Christian nature of it. I was impressed. A man who confidently sees his work matters in the grand scheme of the kingdom of God, finding joy in proclaiming where his allegiance falls, and doing a good job in light of that allegiance.

Colossians 3:2 & 17 say, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ...And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." My heating/plumbing friend did that very well.

In light of our work we're called to carry Jesus into our world - be it work, family or otherwise. Carrying Christ into the world of work is always an adventure! Is your work a joy coming from an internal realization, or an external circumstance? Sometimes God speaks to our hearts giving us divine insight in how pleased He is with our work; how important it is. A private moment between you & Jesus both encouraging & sustaining. At other times, there are external circumstances which give us great joy in our work - times of interaction, where we have the opportunity of witness & worship with others.

I was a small business owner, turned missionary, turned pastor. I owned an art gallery & live music coffeehouse. So, I've spent my years in the secular work world on display. I speak out of experience, not just the pulpit. Pastors are sometimes nervous about calling people to represent Jesus in the workplace, since they've never held a secular job as a Christian. I'm glad not to have that guilt. Granted I was owner, so I had freedom an employee wouldn't, however, the owner's boss is the client. And I would urge us to remember, it's *not* the pastor calling you to this, rather Christ himself. There's a dynamic in certain professions calling for you to refrain from speaking of faith. We must be wise in how we approach situations. However, you always have influence beyond just words, and at times it may be that we take risk given a divine opportunity to speak in a very personal way about our faith without coming off as proselytizing others.

There's a promise in these verses. If we worry too much about the reaction of others to our Christian faith, paralyzing us to inaction or silence, remember, your life's hidden with Christ in God - He's got your back! He's your first & foremost concern in life, and will see you through any difficulty your public faith may bring. Yet we know that means willingness on our part to submit & possibly give up what we think we need, in light of glorifying Him - in the end it's a matter of trust, allegiance & character development.

I've never held a contradiction, or separation in my heart between work & witness. My view, naturally has always been, I'm a Christian first & foremost in whatever I'm doing - I'm always a minister of the gospel. Hence the phrase, *everything's spiritual*. It jazzed me to have my customers happy with our product & service since over & above serving them, I serve Jesus. Like a child trying to please their father, I wanted always to do everything to my best given it represented Jesus. I often prayed good business would open doors to good conversation of Jesus. It often did. That's what the verse means to us. Our faith isn't something we can set aside like a hat we take on & off with our varying roles in life. Jesus is our primary identity at all times. Which leads us to our first point today...work has it's place...**we work to live...**

1 Tim. 5:8, *"Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith & is worse than an unbeliever."*

Why is providing & caring for ourselves & our families so important in God's eyes? Is the meaning of our work, the reason for it, different than that of the rest of the world? If so, How? Work is what we do, because we must. To eat, keep up our homes & care for the people we love. We work to live. But what happens when we live to work – instead of working to live?

Some of us live to work, drawing too much identity & personal worth through what we do for a living. Work becomes an escape, instead of a way to better, sustain & love those entrusted to us. When work becomes a selfish pursuit of money, power, or prestige, it's overstepped its boundaries of being a healthy life-giving pursuit. When work-life becomes our primary identity over Jesus, it's gone too far. It's an idol. When family & relationships are neglected due to work, it's become something it wasn't meant to be.

Work's a divine directive, but with boundaries. It should be something which enhances life & relationship with family & others, not detracts from it. We've talked before about the idea of Sabbath rest in our *Sacred Rhythms* series. Too much work makes Jack a dull boy! Work's to be in balance & proper perspective in what it brings to life. If it's overtaking your thinking to the point of neglect in the greater picture of life, then adjustments are made & boundaries are set.

Yet, conversely, we're also called to work well & hard. To avoid laziness & sloth, to prepare ourselves well in work to provide life-giving necessities to our loved ones, as well as to be a regular ongoing blessing to the faith community in financial & other ways of service. We're not only to provide the church with monies to do kingdom work, we're also called to use our talents for the sake of God's Kingdom work.

I think of Moses doing electrical & construction work for the church. Others, in their skills of design for different church events. Mike & Lindley, or Donna & Dave in their counseling gifts used in preparation of couples to be married. Jesse doing sound, video & tech work for the church. Maria & Chuck, using their talents as lawyers to develop our 501c3 status, or work on lease development. Kathleen doing a bang up job as Admin

Assistant. Albert in using his accounting skills in serve. God's pleased & glorified in those skills utilized.

We work to live, not live to work. We work to develop others, in order to further the kingdom of God in whatever opportunity afforded through it. Work's to be done well, taken seriously, but to have it's boundaries. We seek first His kingdom in all that we do & everything else falls into place. Is our reason for work different than the rest of the world? Sure. We answer to the highest of callings, work's God-given, ultimately we answer to God in what we use it for, ourselves, or the betterment of those around us in order to further the kingdom of God in all. Which leads us to our second point...**we work to influence...**

Matt. 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds & glorify your Father in heaven."

Are there ways God has given you to beautify, or heal the world through your unique work? The meaning of work for the Christian is quite different than the meaning of work for a person who doesn't acknowledge Christ as Lord. God's people have a call to beautify & enhance the world through our fruitful labor, guided by the teaching of Jesus. We're looking to see others loved, served, encouraged, reached & provided for through the spending of our energies. We aren't after money, rather the pleasure of God.

Are there careers which you can't hold as a Christian? Of course. A porn monger has no place in the kingdom of God. Human traffickers, or any criminal, or unethical behavior which devalues life & dignity. Does your work make the world a better place? Your job may seem rather innocuous, such as making parts for computers, or working a checkout counter at an auto parts store, but you have influence over others, and being a contributing part of a healthy local/global economy is a blessing.

There are grey areas in this conversation as well, areas which we can disagree on. For instance, when we think of an economy which is partly undergirded by child labor - what does it mean to take those jobs away & what does it do to a local economy in an already impoverished country? There are no easy answers to issues of that sort.

There are careers too in which you may be required to teach something contrary to your values & beliefs as a Christian - again, we must be wise in how we speak & we often can voice things in ways which present material without advocating ourselves. But suffice it to say, does our work bring something good, if even just a paycheck for someone to live? Are people blessed by your vocation or career? Does it bring life to the world? Even if in small ways, these good deeds are worth it.

Likewise, are we hiding our faith in the workplace, or allowing our light to shine? Not that we have to be spouting Jesus left & right, but like it says in 1 Peter 3:15, *"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness & respect..."* Do we do our jobs well enough & with such a good attitude others would

notice & ask why? And when they do, are we more afraid of their reaction, than we are of squandering a divine appointment? Your life's hidden in Christ, and in my experience people respect strong, healthy, polite conviction, especially when it's backed up with good deeds. We're called to represent everywhere, at all times...everything's spiritual. We do this with gentleness & respect of others, which brings us to our third & final point today...**we work to serve...**

Eph. 6:7-8, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free."

When you get up each day, either going to work, working at home, or attending school - for whom do you do it? Just like last week when we said we love our families for the sake of Jesus - we're great employees because we love Jesus first. Wouldn't you want an employee to feel answerable to God, rather than just you - how great & trustworthy would that employee be? When I choose leadership in the church, one thing I look for isn't people who want to please me, but those who desire to please Jesus. Who serve out of the conviction their service to the church is service to the head of it, Jesus, not the pastor. Because in that, they're people who realize the need for obedience to human authority Christ has placed over them.

Not all of us have a job situation we love, we may even hate our job. Yet, God calls us to see our work as an act of thankful worship - bringing glory & fame to Jesus as we express Christ-like attitudes, words & work ethic in the world. We work to serve those whom God's placed before us. If you hate your job, then pray for an open door to change it, you have choices. But while there, do it to the best of your ability, having an attitude you're working for Jesus, not only your boss.

If you have a difficult boss, I'd recommend a small book called, *A Tale of Three Kings*, by Gene Edwards, where he examines two relationships in the life of David with Saul & Absalom. From them he draws insight which believers can apply to their own relationships with authority figures. Remember, situations change. People come & go in the workplace. Where you are today isn't where you were 5 years ago, and won't be where you are 5 years from now. Pull back, looking at your life from above through a spiritual Christ-centered worldview, knowing Jesus sees all this & is pleased with your efforts throughout it all. Don't expect reward to come from those around you, seek rather the reward Christ gives - it's about trust, allegiance & character development overall. God's building something in you, even through a difficult work environment.

In conclusion, ask yourself, "Do I love the work I do, or resent it? Why?" What's God doing in you & others through your work? A good spiritual practice is to ask the Holy Spirit, each day to turn your energies towards fruitful work - some which serves to provide for you & others around you, and some which serves to enrich your life in other ways. All successful people go back to that first job they usually hated. They recall, it's there they learned great lessons - even the most menial or difficult task is worth doing well. There are lessons to learn, and opportunities to worship & witness within them.

We work to live, influence & serve...ask the Holy Spirit that you'd work to live, instead of live to work. That you'd recognize the influence your work can have for the sake of Christ. Ask for a servants heart, knowing it's Christ who ultimately rewards you in great ways. Ask for eyes to see your current work from His perspective. Ask that God would receive your work as an expression of worship & witness, that He'd show Himself to you & others within it.

We're ending each sermon with a testimony from someone in our crowd. Today, that's Jesse Ridgeway...let me pray as he comes up.