

“Working 9-5”  
(What a Way to Make a Living)  
March 26, 2023

I have horrible news. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but the weekend is almost over, and tomorrow you have to go to work.

I don't know what your job is like, but I do know there is nothing that can make time go by as slowly as being at a job you hate.

When I was in college, I worked at a biochemical engineering company. They designed absorbable sutures that functioned as controllable drug releases. And I ran viscosity tests.

I don't know how boring all of that sounds to you, but what I can tell you with confidence is that you cannot fathom how boring it actually was. I HATED it. I have never felt time moving that slowly. If I found out I only had 10 minutes before I died, I would go back to that job so that 10 minutes would feel like an eternity.

In our series, we are working to get our financial houses in order. In my very humble opinion, it is not possible to have your financial house in order unless you have a healthy relationship with your work. For one, because of the sheer amount of time we spend there. Almost  $\frac{1}{3}$  of our waking lives, or closer to  $\frac{1}{2}$  if you factor in commuting, chores, cooking, grocery shopping, errands, yard work, and laundry.

But even more importantly, thinking well about work is necessary to get your financial house in order because our work is the primary means by which God provides for us. And if your relationship with your work is a mess, then you are going to have all sorts of problems and issues as you pursue overall financial health.

Now, in order to relate in a healthy way to our work, then we have to know the story. It's the only way we can know how to approach work. The only way to understand the meaning of work is to know the story of work.

Pastor Tim Keller uses a great illustration to explain this. Let's say you are at the park, and a total stranger comes up to you and looks you right in the eye and says, “The women have the sandwiches,” and then walks off. You will instinctively put that interaction inside of a story in order to give it meaning. You will think to yourself, maybe this person is mentally ill, and that's why he said that to me. Or maybe there are some very kind women across the park giving out free sandwiches, and you should go get one. Or maybe that gentleman is a secret agent, and he thought you were his contact and their code is, “The women have the sandwiches.” The story you put the statement into completely determines your interpretation and response. You will react entirely differently based on the story you place the statement into. In the same way, you will relate to your work entirely differently, based upon the story you place it into. So what is the story?

Turn to **Genesis chapter 2** for the origin story of work.

**Genesis 2.**

**5** When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, **6** and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— **7** then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

The first man, a living creature. I don't want you to gloss over that word, creature.

You and I are creatures who are entirely dependent on resources to survive. We need food, water, shelter,

and clothing to make it in this world. This is how God created us.

Notice, back in verse 5, we are told that there was no man to work the ground. And now, let's pick up that topic in verse 8:

**8** And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. **9** And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

Skip down to verse 15: **15** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

So God creates these creatures who need resources to survive, and out of the ground he creates every tree that is pleasant and good for food; he creates a garden teeming with life-sustaining resources. So we have the creatures, and then we have the resources those creatures need to survive. And God puts the man in the garden to “work and keep it.”

God puts them in a place full of the resources they need to survive, but he doesn't plop them down on a plate for them. Instead, he says, “Those berries are delicious, but they are not gonna pick themselves. That cow's milk can be turned into ice cream, which you guys are going to love. But you're gonna have to go milk that cow. And just wait till you find out how good that cow tastes!

Of course, eventually, humans come up with forms of currency we can exchange for resources, but even then, we have to work to accrue the currency. Working for the resources we need to survive is totally baked into the creation.

It's part of God's created design, even in paradise. If your mental image of the garden of Eden is Adam and Eve laying in a hammock sipping margaritas, you've gotten it wrong. Work is not a product of the fall of Adam and Eve. It was the plan from the beginning to have us work and cultivate the Earth. Work was made frustrating by the fall, but not caused by the fall.

So here is what that means, there are only two ways to gather the resources you need: you can work (or be supported by someone else's work), or you can steal. Those are the two options for you to get the resources you need, through work or through theft. These two things are diametrically opposed. Work is taking on responsibility to accept God's provision for you by gathering resources you can share with others, and stealing is unfairly taking someone else's resources.

And wouldn't you know that, in a way, the first act of human rebellion was actually a theft? These creatures that God put in the garden, he surrounded them with bountiful resources. Things pleasing to the eye and the needs of our bodies. But he placed one tree off limits for them, and in Genesis 3, these creatures went and took from this tree that did not belong to them, stole resources that did not belong to them, and this started the tragic fall of humanity.

Because at the end of the day, creatures can either work for the resources they need to survive or they can steal.

**Ephesians 4:28** makes it just that simple:

**28** Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

God has a vision for the kind of humans he wants us to become. He wants to take creatures who, by our sin natures, have become thieves and turn us into God-honoring, honest hard workers with something to share—working to accept God's provision for ourselves and others.

There is so much to say about the topic of work. We've done entire series in the past, and if you want more on this topic, I'd recommend them to you. I'll keep it straightforward today. Let's just talk about God's design for work.

So let me show you a chart, and we're going to spend the rest of our time talking through this chart in hopes that it helps us put our work into the correct story.

	<b>God's Design for Work</b>	
<b>Acedia (slothfulness)</b>	<b>Hustle</b>	<b>Workaholism</b>
Work keeps me from life	Work provides for life	Work is life
Laziness	Honest diligence	Cut "throats" & corners
Work is a necessary evil	Work is a calling	Work is an idol

So you can get a feel for the different columns. We have two extremes. God designed us to work, and taking from Genesis and Ephesians 4, I think "Hustle" is an appropriate word for what he intends for us. He intends for us to work hard and gather and cultivate the resources we need to survive. He intends for us to have godly ambition, a righteous drive in our work.

There are sinful postures on both sides of this. On one side, you have the sinful posture of acedia, or slothfulness. We don't really use the word "acedia." Let me quickly define it. It's a Greek word that attaches the negative prefix a- to the word for "care or concern." So it literally means "no care." In the Bible, it's called slothfulness or being a sluggard.

This is where people are just there. They are at work. Doing the bare minimum to not get fired. And that's the best thing that can be said about them.

A friend of mine recently told me, at his job, "everywhere you look, it's bad attitudes with no initiative." I don't really care. I'm punching the clock. I'm there to get as much as I can while giving as little as I can.

On the other hand, you have a Workaholism culture. The polar opposite of acedia, this is where work defines us. My productivity is my identity. It's a game that you want to win with no thought or regard to what it might cost others or how your work affects your family or the world.

So let's just walk line by line down the chart and talk about how God designed all of this to work.

### **Work Provides for Life**

Christians are called to hustle because God has designed the world in such a way that work provides for life. It's the way that we creatures gather the resources we need to survive and honor the Creator who put them there on the Earth to gather.

Genesis 1:28 is something biblical scholars call the cultural mandate. Which is a fancy way of saying, here we find God giving mankind a mandate for what he created them to do:

#### **Genesis 1:28**

**28** And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

“Dominion” is another word for “rule.” And this hints at the role God designed us for. In the ancient world, kings would often have governors who ruled over smaller parts of their kingdom as representatives of the king. So we are made to represent God and rule the Earth on behalf of God. To “rule” by doing what he’s entrusted us to do.

Nancy Pearcey, in her book *Total Truth*, remarks on this verse:

*“The first phrase, ‘be fruitful and multiply,’ means to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, ‘subdue the earth,’ means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers and compose music. This passage is sometimes called the Cultural Mandate because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations—nothing less.”*

Create cultures and build civilizations. Harness the natural world. Build bridges, design computers, and compose music. Build families, churches, and cities.

This holds true all the way from the CEOs to sanitation workers. Because do you know how unsafe our world would be if it were not for them?

I once had someone talk to me about his job and how he was unsatisfied with it. He worked in tire manufacturing, and he was struggling to see how his job mattered. And I could see where he was coming from. As we were talking, I said, “I get it. Your day-to-day tasks are mundane and repetitive. That’s a hard situation to be in. But when you say your job doesn’t matter, I need you to think again about that. Because my family drives our car on tires. And my family is precious to me. And if my wife and kids are going somewhere and a poorly made tire blows out...that puts them in danger. So I actually think your job matters a great deal.

The person who has helped me understand this the most is Martin Luther. He had a great way of explaining how all work is a ministry of service to others. The way that he talked about it was, “God intends to fulfill some of his promises through your work.”

So, for example, he looked at **Psalm 145:16**. “God feeds every living thing.”

How does God feed? Through farmers and bakers and ranchers. They are the means by which God fulfills his promises.

Luther says, “God milks the cows through the vocation of the milkmaids.”

God says that he provides for our daily needs. So a person who milks cows and delivers milk, giving to a family who needs it, is quite literally being used as the hands of God to provide. In milking a cow, he is participating with God in what God wants for human beings to do on the earth. They are the fingers of God. God is caring for creation through our work.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus says we should pray for our daily bread. Think of all the people that means you are praying for God to work through.

- The wheat farmer.
- The baker.
- The packaging and delivery company.
- The grocery store worker who places it on the shelf.
- The car mechanic who just fixed my car so that I can drive to the store.

- The gas station attendant who helps me have gas to drive my car.
- The people who work on the roads so that I can drive on them.
- The Department of Transportation workers who arrange stop lights so that traffic isn't just mass chaos. We could probably go on for a while at this. You see that God is using all of these people. It all matters.

All of these people, in their work, are God's appointed means of answering prayers for provision. As you do your work, God is working through you to provide.

When you go into your office each day, when you sit at that same old computer punching in another string of numbers, as you make your child's lunches, and cart them to school, as you unclog plumbing and prescribe medicine, and manage the technology of your company... God is wearing you as a mask to love, serve and care for the world He made.

This allows you to approach your work with the correct posture. Where work doesn't keep you from life, and it isn't life, but it is the means through which God provides life to you and others.

### **Honest Diligence**

When I say that, really what I mean is that we should do a good job at whatever it is that we're doing.

You guys wanna know one of the biggest shockers and frustrations of my adult life? It's how many people are horrible at their jobs. It's wild to me how many people want to get paid for doing something that they are not any good at doing. It drives me crazy.

How many of you have hired someone to do something, only to realize they aren't any good at that thing at all?

How often do you go somewhere and immediately recognize the people there are not competent and don't want to be doing what they are doing? I find myself frequently thinking, "Why do I feel like I have to help you know how you should do your job? When it's your job, not mine. I need you to be the expert."

A while ago, we hired someone to turn our deck into a screened porch. And the contractor was there working, and he said, "Ok, I think I'm done." And I walked outside and looked, and the doorframe, where we were supposed to hang a screened door, was like this....

And I said, "I don't know a lot about construction, but I don't think that's the shape of a door. What do we need to do to fix it? And he said, "Yeah, I dunno, that's just how it ended up. What do you think?" I was like, Oh no, no. I hired you to know how to handle this. I don't know anything about this stuff. I just know what shape doors are., You'd better find some Youtube instructional videos or something. This is your job.

I absolutely love how Dorothy Sayers puts it. She says...

"The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him to not be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sunday's. What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables." - **Dorothy Sayers**

I've told you guys before that when Jesus was a carpenter, I guarantee you he made good tables. They didn't wobble. You didn't have to fold up a napkin and put it under one of the legs. He made door frames that doors could actually fit inside of.

A few years ago, we had a residency program. It was something like a gap year program for after college. And a former resident got a job here in town after it was over. His boss actually called our office to say that he was such a good worker with an awesome attitude, and he wondered if we had more people like him he could hire at his company.

I think that all Christians should be like that. We should be the most diligent, honest, hardest-working employees with the best attitudes that leave such an impression it's hard to forget. Because work is the opposite of stealing, and we work hard.

So that when companies are hiring, the HR department says, "Are there any Christians who would fit here? They believe some stuff we don't like, but man, they work hard and you can trust them. And they do good work."

Parents, you have tons of things to think about as you raise your children. This should be one of them. Are you raising your children to be good employees when they are adults? You are training them to be a certain type of employee—a certain kind of worker. If a little whining gets them out of having to do hard work at your house...you are setting your kids up for serious problems in their future.

If your kids learn how to do hard things with a good attitude, it will pretty much serve as a superpower for them for the rest of their lives.

Pastor Ant Frederick was telling us last week that he has introduced the term A+ work at his house. He said, around age 10 he said that began to be his expectation. I'm looking for A+ work out of you. Don't do some half job on your chore and try to play me like you did the whole thing. He said the other day, his son put in serious work cleaning and organizing his room. His son came and said, "Ok, Dad, I think it's done and it's A+." He walked in to inspect it, and my friend said it was spotless. Just absolutely pristine. He said, "Where do you want your milkshake from, my guy?"

And lastly, let's talk about work as a calling.

### **Work is a Calling**

A while ago, I was driving home, and I got stuck behind a garbage truck. I couldn't get around it, and, at first, I was frustrated; but then I noticed the guy on the back. He had earbuds in, and he was dancing on the back of the truck. He would hop off to grab the bins he...was...getting...it. he pranced to the trash bins, dancing with the bin all the way back, dancing as the truck lifted the can, with gushing joy all over his face, and I thought that is the freest human I have ever seen.

Now I'm about to say something that most of you will not agree with. It is not going to fit with how you've been taught to see the world and see yourself.

The teaching of the Bible is that it is possible for you to put love into your work, even if you don't love your work. Your ability to do your work faithfully, heartily, dare I say happily, and with a smile on your face actually has very little to do with what you do. No matter what you do, your work can be a calling, not a necessary evil, and not an idol.

**Colossians 3:22-24** **22** Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. **23** Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

This is a word to bondservants, who were normally people indebted to someone else and working for that person in order to pay off the debt. After they did, they could move on to do whatever they wanted. But in the meantime, it was not exactly glamorous work. It was usually filled with mundane tasks, cleaning the floor, washing dishes, weeding around the house, and working in the field, with very little, if any, control over what you do or don't do every day.

So this is the question. How on earth can Paul say this about a servant's job?! Is there any work that could possibly be easier for the worker to hate? Is there any work that could feel more like a curse and unfilling than the work of a servant?

Notice why. Because it's ultimately not about the work you do, but instead, it's about who you do that work for.

Paul says whatever you do, give it your very best because you're actually not working for your human employer; you're working for Jesus himself.

What Paul just said is, so long as your work is done as an act of worship to God and service to others, it is able to be done with your full heart. Even if it's work that we don't necessarily like.

As one pastor says, "Our daily work can be a calling only if it is reconceived as God's assignment to serve others. And that is exactly how the bible teaches us to view work."

Part of the good news of Jesus' rescue and redemption of your life is that he rescues you from having to have the weight of your hope rest in your career. The truest thing about you is not the job you have, or don't have, or even the one you ideally want. The truest thing about you is that you belong to Him, and long after your days of work have come and gone, you will still be His.

This means that our work can stop just being about what it provides *for us* and also become about how God is providing for others *through it*. Way too many people think of our jobs as a way that we are gaining. We're not looking to give and contribute something in our work. We're only looking to get something out of our work.

What you need is not necessarily work that you love, but work that you can put love into. You need to reimagine your work as a calling.

You don't have to be passionate about your work for you to put love into it.

You don't have to gain a sense of fulfillment from your work for you to put love into it.

You don't have to always have upward mobility in your work for you to put love into it.

You don't have to be appreciated or noticed in your work for you to put love into it.

Those are blessings, not requirements. In Christ, whose finished work on the cross is about redeeming us from the curse, we actually have resources to put love into our work, even if it's not work that we love.

### **Martin Luther King Jr -**

"If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep the streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music; sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will have to pause and say "Here lived a great street sweeper, who swept his job well."

### **Conclusion**

I don't know what side of the chart you might naturally find yourself on. I imagine most of us lean more in one direction or the other, and can probably look at the spirit of our career field and workplaces and see a preponderance of one or the other; either a culture of slothfulness or one of workaholicism.

The Christian view of work falls into neither trap. We hustle, because work is how God provides for life and brings about human flourishing. We work honestly and diligently as a calling because we know that, ultimately, we are working for the Lord, not for our bosses or even ourselves.

With all that vision and knowing what I am saying and what I'm not saying, here's a potential takeaway for some of us to learn how to rightly walk in a righteous, biblical hustle.

**Earn as much as you can. Save as much as you can. Give as much as you can.**

When I say earn as much as you can, I don't mean greedily or unrighteously. But as a righteous, diligent steward. As a creature to whom God looked at and said, "Work and keep this garden." Bring forth resources from the bounty I've placed around you as a means of accepting my provision for you and others.

Don't cheat your family for work. And if you HAVE to, then keep it tightly contained to a season that has a beginning and end. That sort of thing happens with all sorts of jobs, where there is a stretch where you will have to work more. Just make sure that season stays a season and not a lifestyle.

So don't cheat your family, and make sure your work is work that moves creation forward and blesses others. And as long as that's the case, climb that ladder. Build an empire. Get that side hustle locked in. Make as much as you can.

Then save as much as you can. Money is essentially opportunity. So by saving, you are saving up for future opportunities for you and others. For future needs of your family, or for meeting the future needs of others. Saving allows you to bless your children with the opportunity to take a fun vacation, make memories, and enjoy this incredible world God has given us... Saving also allows you to resource another family to go on a vacation they can't afford, to bring about strategic blessing to others because you see your money as God's provision for you and not your own.

And then, lastly, give as much as you can. We cannot miss the connection from Ephesians 4, that we are called to work hard so that we will have something to share. Work is a prerequisite to becoming people of generosity. More on that next week.