

**GET REAL:
REAL WORK
COLOSSIANS 3:17-24
SEPTEMBER 1, 2013, LABOR DAY WEEKEND**

It's Labor Day weekend.

Are you celebrating your labors?

It's Labor Day weekend, and you're celebrating three days away from work!

Attitudes about work are not generally the stuff of sweet dreams.

Many people today go to work just for the paycheck, benefits.

They don't really care much about the work itself.

They go through the motions, do the required minimum.

There's not much loyalty toward employers.

And from employers there's not much loyalty toward employees.

Everyone's always looking for better deal.

But that should not be our way as followers of Jesus.

If we are not different, how can we expect the world to be any different?

We ought to get real about our work.

From a biblical perspective, work was not assigned us as a curse.

In the creation story in Genesis God assigned human beings the duty of

subduing the earth, ruling over it, being stewards of God's good creation. (Ge.1:28)

Humans were to work the ground, tending God's creation. (Ge.2:6)

Work was given us because we bear God's image,

we are God's representatives in his creation.

We were designed by God with work in mind.

And so, to engage in work is to fulfill part of our purpose for being.

Work only became a curse as a result of human sin.

Because of a broken relationship with God and blatant disobedience against God's will,

Adam was told,

"Cursed is the ground because of you;

through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you.

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food." (Ge.3:17-19)

What was work became grinding toil.

But we've come a long way toward reducing and even eliminating "toil" from most jobs.

And God did not release humanity from the necessity of work.

Working is how we provide for ourselves and our families.

Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic priest

who helped launch the Protestant Reformation.

He said, "God gives every bird its food, but he does not throw it into the nest."

Even the bird has to do some work.

Long before him, the apostle Paul wrote to a church where

some apparently presumed Jesus was coming back just any minute,

so they quit their jobs and then tried to live off those who were still working.

Paul wrote, "Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good,

in order that they may provide for daily necessities

and not live unproductive lives." (Titus 3:14)

"If someone will not work, let them not eat." (2Th.3:10)

As in, don't enable their laziness by feeding them.

If they cannot work, that's one thing.

Help them out.

But if they're able to work, they need to get to work.

Working is how we provide for our needs and the needs of our families.

And work is also how we make money so we can provide for others who are in need.

And how we make money that we can give to the work of the church and other ministries.

But work is about more than making money so we can pay for stuff.

There's something in us that finds fulfillment in doing something constructive,
in adding value to this world.

With people out of work in the recession, many have experienced depression.

Not just because of losing their income,

but because they lost a sense of purpose.

They don't feel good about themselves.

When a person retires,

as much as they might have thought they were looking forward to it,
many people experience a sense of emptiness.

They're at loose ends.

To those of us who are working too many hours,

we'd love some time with nothing to do.

But when it's forced on you, and when there's no end in sight...

To retire well, you need a plan for what to do with yourself,

how you can continue to make a contribution to this world.

God shaped us to do meaningful work,

to add value to his world.

However that may be, the dominant cultural attitude about work has not sweetened significantly.

There are still those frequent Facebook posts about "I hate Mondays."

And there's still the popular restaurant TGI Fridays.

There's no restaurant called TGI Mondays,

but there's TGI Fridays.

How do you feel about your work?

The sad truth is, attitudes about work among church folk and non-church folk are not noticeably different.

We moan and groan about it as much as anyone else.

And apparently ours is not the first generation to see that.

The apostle Paul had to write some instructions to the church in the first century.

COLOSSIANS 3:17-24

Whatever you do,

at home or at work,

in family relationships or with your employer or employee,

do it all in the name of Jesus.

Work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.

Even when you're working for HEB, the school, the insurance company,

the military, or USAA,

it is ultimately Jesus you are serving.

No matter where you are or what you're doing,

so long as it's legal and moral,

as a Christian you are representing Christ to the world.

You are working for Him.

So what might that look like?

I can tell you what it does not look like.

A reporter once asked Pope John XXIII, "How many people work here in the Vatican?"

The dear, old Pope answered, "Oh, about half, I guess."

If we're working for Christ,

whether in the church or outside of the church,

we ought to be really working at it!

Not half-heartedly going through the motions.

Not doing bare minimum to stay out of trouble and get the paycheck.

But really pouring ourselves into our work.

A downtown businessman became fond of the little boy who shined his shoes every day.

He did such a good job that one day the businessman asked him,

"Son, how come you are so conscientious about your work?"

The boy felt complimented and said,

"Mister, I'm a Christian

and I try to shine every pair of shoes

as if Jesus Christ was wearing them."

If you're working for Jesus, he's your boss!

You serve him!

A strong work-ethic will please your boss.

A strong work-ethic makes an impression on other people.

And it's just good business.

If we're working for Christ,

it's a ministry.

Your ministry is not located just within the boundaries of Northwest Hills UMC.

Your ministry can be lived out everywhere you go,

including at your workplace.

How you relate to people in our workplace can open or close doors to ministry.

My dad was a businessman, executive vice president and then president of the company.

Because of how he related to his coworkers and employees

he had opportunity to counsel and pray with some,

and even did at least one burial service.

I know public school teachers who had opportunity to

quietly speak with students about spiritual matters.

Don't tell the ACLU, but they did it all within the bounds of the Constitution.

Because of their manner with students,

the students knew there was some spiritual grounding there.

And once a student asks, a teacher can answer.

And so, with appropriate caution, they did.

Your relationships with coworkers can

open or close doors to such opportunities for ministry.

However, your work is not just a place where

you can minister to others by prayer or sharing your faith.

Those things are certainly valuable and valid.

But please remember that your work itself IS a ministry.

We need to see the value in what we're doing.

We need to see how what we do benefits another person.

A teacher points the way to learning,

which can have long-term benefits to the student.

Like critical thinking skills and a diploma which opens doors to jobs.

An insurance claims adjuster makes sure
 your post-accident car repairs are paid for,
 your roof is replaced after the hail storm,
 your hospital and surgical bills are covered without bankrupting you.
 The auto mechanic keeps the car safe and efficient
 so you can get the kids to school, buy groceries, get to work and back.
 The data entry job provides the information others need to do their jobs.
 The police officer works to keep our streets safe,
 and the military person is part of
 a great machine that aims to keep our nation safe.
 Think about how your job blesses the lives of others,
 how it adds value to our world.
 And on those days when it just seems like a burden,
 remember.
 Remember the contribution you make.
 Think of the blessing that comes to others.
 And give thanks to God that he uses you in that way.

Your work itself is a ministry,
 because it blesses other people; it adds value to their lives.
 Seeing your work as a ministry can help you
 see the difference that might be made by doing just a little extra,
 going above and beyond the official call of duty.
 A room-service waiter at a Marriott hotel learned that the sister of a guest had just died.
 The waiter, named Charles, bought a sympathy card,
 had hotel staff members sign it,
 and gave it to the distraught guest with a piece of hot apple pie.
 The guest later wrote to the president of Marriott Hotels,
 "Mr. Marriott, I'll never meet you.
 And I don't need to meet you.
 Because I met Charles.
 I know what you stand for.
 I want to assure you that as long as I live, I will stay at your hotels.
 And I will tell my friends to stay at your hotels."

Seeing your work as a ministry often ends up
 blessing others, satisfies you, and is good for business.
 And it certainly provides a sense of satisfaction.

Like any other relationship, your relationships at work can provide a venue for pointing people toward Christ.

I'm going to read from an email that was
 sent by a company president to every employee with a company email address.

Subject: Memo from the President (of the company not the country :-)

Dear fellow employees,

A couple months ago I was diagnosed with cancer.

(Then he gave a medical update of his situation and the surgery that was to come
 the day after this email went out.)

Even though I have known about this for nearly two months,
 I chose to delay the surgery until after I had completed
 a previously scheduled trip to the Holy Land.

My wife and I participated in an Easter sunrise service at the garden tomb in Jerusalem!
 How cool is that – talk about being spiritually prepared for surgery –

spending 10 days walking the grounds that Christ
walked, prayed, preached the Sermon on the Mount, was crucified etc.

For a Christian it doesn't get any better than that!

I have waited to inform you of these developments until now
because I didn't want you to be influenced by my cancer
in any interaction you may have had with me.

If you will indulge me for a moment,

I want to share with you my perspective on this dreadful disease.

I have a real peace about the whole situation.

Those of you who know me personally know that I believe in the God of the Bible
who is omnipotent (all powerful) and can heal me if He chooses.

God is also sovereign and either causes or allows all things to happen
and He is good and loving and wants what is best for me.

I certainly want to be healed and don't mean to be flippant or buoyant about this cancer,
but first and foremost my prayer is to understand His purposes in this for me.

He is under no obligation to reveal His purposes for all things
but I pray that He will in this case so that my family and I can be encouraged.

Secondly, I pray that He will be revealed to others through this cancer.

He has already begun to answer that prayer
in that this cancer has provided me a great forum to share my faith
with a few employees, strangers, friends and medical staff –
including my doctor.

Finally, my prayer is that He would be glorified and not questioned
by me and those who are close to me.

The most important thing to me is to be with my family, employees and friends
worshipping our Lord in heaven together.

That will be the case for my family because all my children and children-in-law
trust Christ and His death on the cross
as the means whereby their sins are forgiven
and the gates of heaven are opened to them.

I hope that will be the case with my employees and friends as well.

I am so grateful that our assurance of heaven is not based on
how good we are or what good things we have done on this earth.
Because it is Christ's work not ours,
it is never too late for any of us to trust Christ.

Although I would like to live on this earth a lot longer,

I accept that if our omnipotent God chooses otherwise,

I will be in heaven (a far better place)

and one day will have a reunion with many of you at the feet of our Lord.

I take great comfort in that.

If you are a praying person, I would be very grateful if you remembered me in your prayers.

May the Lord's best be yours.

Your grateful President, Don.

You don't have to wait for a diagnosis of cancer to share your faith.

And you don't have to be the CEO to share your faith.

Just get real about your work.

On Tuesday, when you go back to work, work as for the Lord.

Because it really is for him.

SERMON NOTES:

God created us for work (Genesis 1:28; 2:6)

Work only became grinding toil because of sin. (Genesis 3:17-19)

Work is how we make money to provide for our needs and the needs of others. (Titus 3:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:10)

Work provides a sense of fulfillment because we are adding value to the world, blessing other people.

Work as if you were working for the Lord, because you are! (Colossians 3:17-24)

- A positive work ethic

- An opportunity to minister to others

- Your work itself is a ministry.