

SERIES: MONEY, POSSESSIONS & SUCCESS

WORK AND SUCCESS

Work. Is that a bad word? What is your attitude towards work?

For some of us, work is something we have to do between weekends, with breaks for sleep and eating! Eyes on the weekends, eyes on leisure, and you definitely don't see work as pleasure! For others of us, work is who we are and we can't begin to define ourselves outside the work we do or the jobs we have. Some people lose their jobs and they break apart, their world seems to collapse—not because they have a crisis of survival, you may have put plenty aside, but you can't understand who you are anymore! Now that you seem not to have impressed this employer you feel a complete failure—because you defined yourself by your job, by your competence! Men, this is especially true for us. The women seem to easily flow back into being a wife and mother or an aunty or someone generally helpful in society and find meaning in that.

For other people work is a place of escape from failure as a person in relationship with others. For some of us work is a means to get all the things we want—power, things, status, get ahead of your neighbour in these things, etc. We work for the money and money calls the shots. We take jobs we don't like; we do work that does not go with our beliefs and goals in life, all in the pursuit of money. Money, you need. I need it. But as we shall see, while earnings should be part of the outcome of our work, God doesn't want us to work simply for money. He wants us to work for Him.

Now, there's no place for idleness and laziness in God's plan of things. Work is good; it is even a part of what we are called to as human beings. The first thing God did when he made Adam, even before He gave him a wife, was to put him in the garden to work it. **Genesis 2:15** *"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."* And when it comes to poverty or wealth, work is a key ingredient. Listen to what the Bible says in **Proverbs 6:9-11**.

⁹ *How long will you lie there, you sluggard?*

When will you get up from your sleep?

¹⁰ *A little sleep, a little slumber,*

a little folding of the hands to rest—

¹¹ *and poverty will come on you like a bandit*

and scarcity like an armed man.

If you want poverty, choose not to work! Suddenly, *pow!* And you are down.

Proverbs 13:4 has something to tell us as well: *The sluggard craves and gets*

nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied The sluggard desires... the diligent gets.

And here is the clear teaching of the New Testament for the Christian:

2 Thess. 3:6-12 *“⁶In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ... ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”*

¹¹We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹²Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.” Does this need any clarification? If someone won't work, they should not even be allowed to eat! And on top of that, the rest of the Christian community should shun them. Idleness is not an option. And by the way, having a job and working are two different things. Very different. A wife at home works. I have a friend whose business collapsed and for a long time he had no means of earning. He took over the tuition of his children—they ended up with A's and a deep appreciation of their father. He did not eat the bread of idleness, and his life and marriage did not collapse.

There is another reality that we must remember when we think about work. Not all work is productive. Frustration will be a part of it. When Adam and Eve sinned, one of the outcomes was that the ground, the place of work, was cursed. In **Gen. 3:17** God says *“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.”* God wants us to be fruitful, but because this world is broken, sometimes we will have to put in more effort than we would like in order to get the work done and earn our food.

But for many of us the truth is different. Our problem is that we work too much. Enslaved by what McCarragher refers to as the “Work Ethic.” We can get so caught up in our working that we cannot look up and evaluate where we are actually going. The world around us is always push, push, push. Faster, faster, faster. Listen to what McCarragher has to say in his paper “The False gospel of work.”

... the "flexible," "infomated" office of today, where "multi-tasking" and "empowerment"—"enabled" by cell phones, head sets, Palm Pilots, the new hardware and wardrobe of indenture—"permit" you to Get More Done.

What have these labor-saving devices achieved? More work for everyone. (That was always the purpose behind the technology: save labor on one task so you could perform some more.) Imprisoned in the free market,

Americans now work longer hours, are more harried, tired, and distracted, and dislike their jobs and bosses more than they have in a generation. According to Juliet Schor, the average worker now spends a month *longer* at the job than in 1970. And that job follows them everywhere: as one executive proudly crowed to Jill Fraser in *White-Collar Sweatshop*, "I want my employees to have telephones in their bathrooms."¹

Sound familiar?

- Kairos and Chronos are two Greek words used to reflect the concept of time
 - Chronos refers to the chronological passage of time—in fact that is where the word Chronology, chronometer, come from. Tick, tick, tick—time is going. Time happens to you, and hopefully as it goes along, you grow wiser. In Greek Philosophy—they relate this also with the god/titan Kronos who ate his children so that he could fulfil what he thought was his destiny. Time as driver, almost swallowing everything of true value. Is that what our hectic schedules sometimes do to us? As driven people we run to this and the next thing and that conquest, and we're so afraid of losing time that we hardly realise that in the process we are destroying those near and dear—our children, our spouses, our friendships. They need you more than they need your money! Controlled by the watch!
 - Kairos, on the other hand, is time as the opportune moment. It can be long, it can be a short moment, but it is the opportunity not to count your time but to make your time count. It can be that moment when you notice the beauty of a sunset, listen to the birds sing and enjoy and wonder at God's creation. It can be that moment when you dive into your work, seeing the opportunity of making the result you want. It must be taken as it comes, because once it has passed you by, it is gone forever. The Greeks pictured it as a man with a large lock of hair at the front, and completely bald at the back, running fast. You have to catch him by the hair at the front of his head, and when you have him you make the most of the opportunity. Time is more about its purpose than its length
- Kairos vs. Chronos—which one reflects your life? I realised this week as I reviewed myself, that Chronos is something I have to do battle with, and

¹ McCarraher, "False Gospel of Work."

be more alert and grasp opportunities. Both will always be part of our lives, but the key is to get where Kairos, the opportunity that time offers, is your central perspective. Are you clock driven or opportunity focussed?

- Driven by the wrong things
 - Work and achievement related to it as an end in itself
 - Working to get 'things' or to buy experiences

Do you ever ask yourself what you really need? Where are you going and how is what you are doing helping you get there? I hope most of us by now are developing a vision, a personal statement of what you want your life to be measured by. And I hope that your vision is based on being ready to be evaluated by God and not just get the better of your neighbour!

The Key: Driven by vision—what do you see as the most valuable product of your life? Then how does what you are doing serve that?

- A tourist struck up a conversation with a man at the coast. They were lying on the beach under a mango tree. Obviously the man was not on holiday so the tourist asked him: "You've got a beautiful, rich ocean here, do you fish." "Sometimes." "Sometimes! You don't know the opportunity you're missing! You need to work hard and get more fish and make more money." "What for?" "If you have more money you can buy another, bigger boat with an engine, go further out to sea and catch more fish and use the money to pay off the loan and start earning even more money!" "And then?" "Then when you've worked hard for enough time you'll be able to save enough for a comfortable retirement and have time to yourself to relax on the beach like me." "Why should I do all that when I can enjoy the beach right now?" Asked the Coasterian. What do you really need in order to attain your vision? Are you chasing a mirage when what you need is right near you?
- Illustration: One of our small group members is looking for a job, and is ready to take a significant pay cut. Why? Because having looked at their purpose in life and finding a big part is the family, it means whatever he or she does, it must serve the family! And absence does not serve the family, and it must be limited. Once they are gone, they are gone.

Work as worship

Our attitude to work, as stewards, managers of God's world, of which we are a part, is to recognise Him as the owner and to serve looking for His pleasure.

What is success? Success => winning in the race of life. It is getting to the end and hearing the Ultimate judge say “well done good and faithful servant, come in and share the joy of your master.” It is hearing Him invite you to take the prize!

Col. 3:22-4:1 is the key passage for this week.

²²Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. ^{4:1} Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Tell me, what do you think of when you hear the phrase “The Lord’s work?” For sure most of you are thinking about something like what I’m doing right? But this passage turns that idea on its head! Everything is the Lord’s work! You just have to set your eyes right and see it. Not every one is called to be a preacher or an evangelist or pastor—but everyone is called to serve the Lord. No matter what it is you do—except, of course, if your work involves hurting society, like a thief or assassin or prostitute. It’s unfortunate that so many of us have had such a narrow view of what it is to serve the Lord. Then what happens? You think of work simply as a drudgery that you have to do to survive, and then Church as the place you serve the Lord. Some of us see work as somewhere you can make money and then you give to the Lord’s work. No, it’s all the Lord’s work! And we bring our tithes and offerings to Him because we love Him and we want to give to Him and to expand His kingdom.

God is not a god of the spiritual only—He is God of the spiritual and the secular, and He made you for worship. And you, Christian, you know what the Bible says about you? **1 Peter 2:9** says, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* Is this only the pastors? Only the preachers? No, it is all of us. A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. This is what you are, and our call is to live for God and worship Him in everything we do. It is the Lord, Christ, we are serving. If we are holy, then everything we do is holy. It is not having a special task like preaching that makes your work holy—it is your attitude, your choice to set apart yourself and all that you do as unto the Lord, as holy.

So how does this work out?

Servants: work with eyes on the Lord

Ultimately, it is He we are serving

He shall evaluate the work as a fair and all-seeing judge. He sees the short-cuts you are taking, as well as the special effort and attention to detail that you put in. Are you a mason? Fit that block of stone right. Lawyer, banker, teacher, mother, father, cleaner, accountant—is the work you do something you can bring before the Lord with and thankfulness, an offering of praise to Him?

NB. All work is hallowed by God. What is important is who you are serving. It becomes holy when we also consciously set ourselves to worship Him in our work. Make it Kairos, rather than Chronos.

Employers:

You have a master—you are servants too! So everything that relates to the servants relates to you. Ask yourself that question—can I present the product of my effort, my business, my home, to the Lord and expect His joy?

Do what is right and fair for those serving you. This is important. If your worker has done an excellent job, pat him on the back, affirm him. If he deserves a pay-rise, a promotion, give it to him. So that even in your management of people you can present it to God and look for His approval.

I want to finish with an important principle found in the Scripture, throughout.

The Sabbath principle: Work cannot be allowed to become the all in all. We must learn to stop, regularly, weekly. **Deuteronomy 5:12-14**

¹²“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do.

- Work. Did you notice that? “you shall labour and do all your work.” In fact, the Sabbath loses meaning when there is no work. If you don’t have a job, find some work to do!

- Stop and focus on God. Keep perspective on the Provider. The New Testament tells us that there are those who value one day as holy above the rest, and there are those who see every day the same (Romans 14:5-7). Whichever way you are, the principle is the same. Set apart time (Kairos) that you can make holy—set your eyes on God and remember all that He provides. The opportunity to work, and even so many things without the need of work. Remember what Jesus said about the lilies of the field—they neither toil nor spin but yet the Lord has clothed them more beautifully than the richest man in the world (Solomon)! God gives so much that we sometimes forgot or hardly notice. Salvation is huge! And there is much more—the air we breathe, the beauty of creation, these wonderful bodies, people we love... So much! Remember that God is the giver of everything good and re-set your eye on Him.
- Take rest. This is for everyone. You, your workers, your animals, etc. Rest. Last year during the elders retreat the Elders noticed how often we pastors were talking about tiredness and one of the things they required for us this year was that every one of us take a proper, complete leave.

You want to make wealth—laziness and idleness cannot be blessed by God. Work.

You want to live a successful life—work as unto the Lord—in everything you do.

²³*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,* ²⁴*since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*