

Worship (38)

Worship in the World – Work

Someone once did a calculation of the amount of hours we spend on average on various activities and then worked it out in terms of a 75 year life. It looks like this in the average life. Of your 75 years – you will spend 6 years travelling, 6 years eating, 7.5 years dressing, and personal grooming, 9 years watching TV, 0.5 years worshipping and praying, 23 years sleeping, 19 years working. That's over a quarter of your life!

Now I would hope we would be above average and bump that figure of half a year of worshipping and praying up to a more respectable figure. But even if we did, we would have to admit that it would still be dwarfed by the figure of work. And, if we cannot worship God in our work, we are going to be worshipping Him for just under a year of our 75 years. Conclusion – we need to learn how to worship God in our work.

This is the third way we worship God in the world. The first is evangelism and missions. The second way is mercy. The third is work. We are to worship God in our work.

There is a misconception out there about work. Many Christians think that work is part of the curse of our sin in the Garden of Eden, and when we get to heaven, our work will be done. This is a very serious error.

Firstly, God gave Adam work before He sinned. He told Him, 'Tend the garden of Eden.' He told Him, 'Take dominion over the earth.' He told Him, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'

Man was working in His innocent, unfallen state. What did the curse bring? Not work, but frustration in work. God said, 'The ground will no longer be as fruitful – it will bring forth thorns and thistles. The labour will now be exhausting and sometimes painful – by the sweat of your brow you will eat bread.'

Secondly, work is not an evil since God Himself is a worker. Countless times in Scripture we read of the works of God. Jesus Christ in the flesh said, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working'.

Thirdly, we are going to work in heaven. The Bible tells us in Revelation that those around the throne, who have been redeemed, serve Him night and day.

So work is not an evil. It is something fundamental to our nature and God will be glorified much in it.

The second misconception is that there is sacred work and there is secular work. Now we use that term, 'secular job', and it can be innocent enough. But we have to be careful lest we fall into the error of saying being a pastor or a missionary or a travelling evangelist is sacred work, while being a plumber or a lawyer or a secretary or a nurse or a teacher or a consultant, is secular work. The New Testament goes a long way to emphasise every believer is a priest of God. **1 Peter 2:9** says, 'We are a royal priesthood'. That means as we perform our daily functions, whether as a full-time pastor or a full-time housewife, our work is sacred. It is an offering that goes up to God.

The reason we sometimes think that way is that it is easy to see how a missionary's work is worship. Their 'daily tasks' include preaching the Gospel and discipling people, praying for people, leading the churches they plant – it is obvious this is revealing God, magnifying God's glory.

How can a job which is not ‘Christian work’ be an act of worship?

It can be an act of worship in three ways:

Firstly, your work allows you to support yourself and your family, which is a Biblical command (**I Tim 5:8**). Work is simply submitting to God’s order. So it is an act of obedience, which is worship.

Secondly, your work allows you to support your local church and its intensified work of evangelism and discipleship (**Gal 6:10**).

Thirdly, your job is the most sustained and consistent evangelistic opportunity you will get. Your interaction with unbelievers at work is probably their greatest exposure to a believer. You are the brochure they will read advertising the riches of Christ. You are the ambassador of Christ and His Word to them.

We are to work in a way that reveals Christ. If worship is magnifying the glory of God through the lens of our entire being, then we should do our jobs in such a way that people see something of Christ reflected through us in the way we work.

Paul called the Corinthians living epistles read by others. You may be the only Bible people will ever read. And they will read it day after day after day. You can worship God in those 19 years of your life by revealing the nature of God to the people you work with in the way you work.

How? Let’s see five ways that the Bible teaches us to work so as to magnify God’s glory in the workplace.

Firstly, work as if Christ Himself is your employer.

Colossians 3:22-24 *Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. ²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*

Notice the last part of verse 24. Slaves – you actually serve the Lord Christ. So, he says, ‘Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.’ Who is a Christian to regard as the ultimate recipient of your work? The Lord Jesus Himself.

So, Paul says, ‘Don’t obey with eye service. Don’t do the basic minimum, don’t do your job only when under scrutiny, when held accountable by your earthly boss, but consider Christ to be your continual audience. And because you love Him, do everything heartily.’

Whether it be typing a memo, or preparing a report, or presenting a sales pitch, or holding a meeting, who should be the one you do it for?

Ephesians 6:5-9 *Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.*

Notice the special word for those believers at the top of the management chain – ‘Remember you also have a Master, and He isn’t going to be impressed with your position or judge you on a different standard from how He judges those under you. You too must work as if Christ is your employer.’ He tells you to give up threatening and, in **Colossians 4:1**, to treat people fairly and justly.

To work for an unseen Boss is simply – faith. And faith in the workplace glorifies God and magnifies Him.

Secondly, work the way Christ Himself Worked.

How did Christ work when on earth?

Firstly, He worked diligently. It goes without saying, Jesus worked hard. He got up early to pray. He sometimes laboured from morning till evening. The enormously wearying work of dealing with crowds and crowds of people needing help – but He kept on working.

Mark 6:31 *For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.*

Jesus was not lazy. Jesus did not make excuses to not work. Jesus did not procrastinate. Jesus did not try to take cheap shortcuts. Jesus did not start something and not finish it. Jesus did not overindulge in comfort and ease. He worked hard. The reason he worked so hard was that He was our model – He recognised He was imitating His Father.

John 5:17 *But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."*

John 5:19 *Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."*

Secondly, and this goes without saying, Jesus worked with integrity. Someone has said – integrity is who you are when no one is looking. Jesus himself said in **John 18:20** - *"I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing."* That is, Jesus worked without hidden selfish agendas. He was not using His work to get ahead, to climb a popularity or power ladder. So He did nothing in the dark, so to speak.

Paul said the way believing slaves would ‘adorn’ the Gospel is by not pilfering, but showing all loyalty.

Titus 2:9-10 *Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

That’s integrity – it is truth in the inward parts. It is not stealing time, stationery, phone calls from your company. It is not exaggerating or fudging the truth in your reports. It is being up front. It is not abusing the Internet. It is not cheating on your travel allowance – exaggerating your petrol miles. It is working like Christ – absolute honesty and transparency.

Thirdly, Jesus balanced work and rest.

Though Jesus was God, He was also man. And as man, He could get tired. And He knew the truth of **Psalm 127:2** - *It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.*

Jesus knew the vanity of burning the candle at both ends. And at certain points, the Gospel writers record Jesus seeking to be hidden from the crowds. Jesus was wildly popular, and He had to tell His disciples, 'Come ye apart, and rest for a while.' Do you know what that meant? It meant saying, 'No', to work at certain times. He knew his limits, humanly speaking, and the limits of those He loved and worked with.

To worship God at work is to work like Christ did – with diligence, with integrity and with balance.

But up to now, we might be able to argue that an unbeliever could be this way. There are unbelievers who are extra diligent. There are unbelievers who work with integrity, with balance. There are unbelievers who work even when the boss isn't watching, for a sheer personal work ethic. And yet they do not magnify the glory of God.

But now we move to the last three categories which are unique to redeemed hearts.

Fourth, respect authority as God-given.

We saw in Colossians the command, 'Servants, obey your masters in all things,' and in Ephesians 6, 'Be obedient with fear and trembling.'

1 Timothy 6:1 repeats this – *Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.*

Follow instructions. Carry out your boss's orders. The only exception to this is if an employer asks you to lie or steal or sin in some way. Then we must obey God and not men.

But otherwise, obey. And, as those verses told us, obey from the heart, with sincerity. Paul says in Titus, 'Don't answer back. Show genuine respect for the position, though you may not respect their character or their behaviour.' I am certain men like Joseph and Daniel and Nehemiah did not have much respect for the lives of the heathen kings they served, but they respected the position.

What God emphasises when it comes to the workplace is authority and submission. In fact, that is what He emphasises in the home and in the church as well? Why does He hammer home, 'Submit, submit, submit?' Because the fundamental nature of sin is, 'I will,' 'I will not submit, I will go my own way.' And if you know God, then you know He has wired the whole universe to function under authority. And to reveal God to a dying world is to show your agreement with God's plan – submission, not rebellion. The point, as far as God is concerned, is not the quality of the authority – it is the concept of authority.

1 Peter 2:18-19 takes us by surprise – *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.* ¹⁹ *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*

Now we are revealing Christ. We are saying to an on-looking world, 'I believe in authority and submission to God-given authority. I trust in an unseen power to vindicate my submission. I submit to His laws, and trust His hand to fight my battles and work on my behalf.'

Now that is something the world hasn't seen. That is faith. That is revealing the glory of Christ's meekness.

Fifth, respond to criticism and unfair treatment like Christ did.

When Christ was placed in the hot water of betrayal, arrest, desertion, slander, humiliation, abuse and a torturous death, what came out of Him were kindness, meekness and forgiveness.

It is inevitable that when goats and sheep plough together, the differences are going to become conspicuous at some point. Your co-workers will want to cut corners and you will refuse. They will laugh at dirty jokes or pornography and you will not. They will talk about certain films and TV programmes you don't watch. They will talk about their god – Friday night, with great relish, while you look forward to Sunday. And, over time, the divide between you and them becomes clearer.

At some point, the hot water of criticism, conflict, unfair treatment, exploitation and even persecution for your stand will come.

And what reveals Christ most, is when you are with Him on the Calvary road of unjust suffering. When what comes out of you under this pressure resembles what came out of Him, it magnifies His glory.

1 Peter 2:12 *having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

1 Peter 4:14-16 *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*

When Christianity doesn't work under pressure, it doesn't show forth the glory of God. But it does when you are treated like He was, and you respond like He did – that you worship God in the world.

Sixth, make your priorities clear.

The world does not have any priorities above this one – 'Serve myself.' So, when that is the chief goal, the profit motive will be like an insatiable beast. Modern companies are like certain spiders. They inject a poison into the victim caught in their web. That venom actually dissolves the innards of the creature. The spider then sucks that 'soup' out, leaving just a shell of a creature. Many companies suck the life and soul out of their employees in the name of progress, growth, competitive edge and profit motive. They demand time that belongs to time with God, time with one's church, time with one's family, time in personal exercise and rest. They demand each individual be salaried for the job of three or more people, they create a culture based on 'Don't be the first one to clock out if you want a raise.' And, as people get caught in this, their soul and life are dissolved by the machine of big business; and very little except a shell is left behind.

That might sound like extreme language. But remember, very few companies are run by believers, with ethics other than bottom line profits. And to worship God in the workplace is to make your priorities clear.

Our Lord Jesus kept His priorities clear all along. When He was twelve years old, He was telling His mother, as recorded in **Luke 2:49** ... *Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"*

And through His life, He kept reiterating His priority. He came to do the will of Him who sent Him. He did not come to do signs to entertain Israel. He did not come to defeat the Romans. He did not come to be a crowd pleaser.

As Christians we will have to, by our lives and our lips, make clear what our priorities are. Our priorities should not be to simply earn more money, to climb a ladder, though there is nothing wrong with progress in your career.

That means making it clear when you will not work. It means turning down work if it is encroaching too far onto home and church. It will mean explaining where you will need to be on certain days and times. You cannot neglect work, but you also cannot neglect your responsibilities to your church.

The enormous pressure we face is – ‘How do we say no to the people who are paying us. How can we state our priorities in a dog-eat-dog world where jobs are scarce to begin with?’

Daniel and his friends are our example here.

Daniel 1

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. ³ Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴ young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵ And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. ⁶ Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷ To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. ⁸ But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ⁹ Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. ¹⁰ And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king." ¹¹ So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." ¹⁴ So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. ¹⁵ And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. ¹⁶ Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. ¹⁷ As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah;

therefore they served before the king. ²⁰ And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. ²¹ Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

Daniel and his friends, although they depended on the eunuchs for survival, knew that obeying the general rules would put them out of the will of God. At that point they chose to draw the line and trust God. God honoured them for it.

Christian, if the book of Daniel teaches us anything, it is that a sovereign God pulls the strings of the most powerful empires on earth. Whether it was about bowing before the image, or no longer praying to God, the lesson is, ‘Believers are not at the mercy of the world. When we seek to please God, He will honour His children for His own glory’s sake.’

The matter of priorities is something we must address not only on the job, but when facing a possible promotion or even a career change that might involve a move of location.

- i) Will the responsibilities destroy what God is building in your life?
- ii) If the job will require a move, is there a suitable church where you will be?
- iii) Will the pressures of the job (time commitments, travelling) be detrimental to your family life, your devotional life and your involvement in a local church?
- iv) Are you running away from something that needs to be faced and corrected?

Work, like Christ, is your employer. Work like He worked – with diligence, integrity and balance; respect authority, respond to unfair treatment like He did, and make your priorities known.

In this way – those 19 years of your 75-year life will bring much glory to God.