

What Went Wrong With Work?

May 10, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. This morning we continue our study called Work Matters to God. In this series we are learning what God says about where we spend most of our time, that is in the factory, office or field. We spend most of our time at work.

Last week we learned why God created work. God created work for more than a paycheck. Last week we learned work is the way we reflect God's image in the world. We are workers because our God is a worker. When we work, we do a good job because work well done is practical worship of God and the most common sense way to love our neighbors. We also learned that God gave us work as a way to experience joy from doing a job well, and it is one of the most practical ways we spread joy to others when we do our work well.

The problem is work doesn't always represent what God intended. Instead of work being a joy, sometimes work is a pain in the neck. Instead of work being fulfilling, it is a source of suffering. Instead of seeing purpose in our work, work can feel meaningless.

Something went wrong with work. Today, we will find out what happened.

The Bible tell us us that after Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden of Eden by disobeying God and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, part of the consequence of their rebellion is our work lives were touched by the curse of sin.

Let's read about this in Genesis 3.

And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
Genesis 3:17–19 (ESV)

The curse of sin twisted work, changing it from a good thing to a good thing that is also a painful thing. There are three ways the curse twisted work.

The curse guarantees pain will be part of my work.

...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life... Genesis 3:17 (ESV)

While there is still joy in work, the curse of sin guarantees there will be pain and suffering in our work. The word for pain means actual physical pain that comes from intense activity over a long period of time. I call it Boston Marathon pain. It is endurance pain.

For example, last week we learned that studying is the way to have a great high school career. While the work of studying is good work, it is also painful work. When you study hard you can't play video games. You can't spend as much time with your friends. You need to stay disciplined.

If you work in concrete, as my oldest son used to, that is hard work. Once you pour the concrete you need to work hard smoothing it before it sets. There is no rest. It is endurance pain.

If you are a farmer, you may enjoy planting and harvest season but because those windows of time are small and there is so much work to be done that the joy of planting and harvest work becomes painful work. That is the curse of sin.

If you work in retail, you might enjoy the challenge of your work and the people that work with you. The problem is that some days the customers are a pain in the neck. They are irritating. They can be disrespectful. The curse transformed the joy of your work into the pain of your work.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Genesis 3:19 (ESV)

This reminds us that work will continue to be painful as long as we live. It doesn't matter how good you get at your work, it will always be painful. Even if you retire from your work, you won't escape the pain of work. You will just experience different pain from different work. The Bible says we will face the pain of work until we die. As people get older I think the pain of work increases. When you were younger the pain of work began once you went to work. When you are older the pain is simply trying to get out of bed in the morning. That is painful work.

The work God intended to be a source of joy has become a mixture of satisfaction and suffering. When work is hard, the problem with work is usually not the work, it is the problem of the curse of sin upon our work.

Younger adults are always looking for the perfect job. For the most part, that is a new unique privilege of the younger generation. In previous generations people were happy just to have jobs even if it wasn't the job of their choice. Thankfully younger adults have the opportunity to find work that is more in line with their natural gifting. One of the unintended consequences of having a generation of young adults looking for the perfect job that matches their gifts is

when work gets hard, which it will, they think something went wrong. It is easy to think you have the wrong job when work is a pain.

Reality is that no matter where you work or what you do, work will always be a pain, not just a pleasure. That is a Bible promise. That is part of the curse of sin upon work. Don't be disillusioned when work is hard. Don't be quick to leave a job because you aren't fulfilled. Remember work will always be hard. It will have the constant dull ache of an endurance sport. That is the nature of the curse of sin upon work.

The curse guarantees problems will be part of my work.

...thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you... Genesis 3:18 (ESV)

Sin didn't just curse work making it a mixture of pain and pleasure but sin cursed work by making sure we always face problems in our work. The example given is gardening. This spring, when we plant our tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots, you can guarantee that a bunch of pointless scrub weeds will crop up and attempt to choke out our vegetables. We didn't plant them there. They just show up on their own. We need to give constant attention to weeding our garden because while the earth helps our vegetables grow, it fights against us. There will always be a problem at work. It is part of the curse.

This means it is normal to go from one crisis to another at work. That is the way the fallen world works. Just expect it. This means we may build a house but a tornado will knock it down or a fire from faulty wiring will burn it down. There will always be a problem where the world fights against our productivity. This means we can be typing on a computer and the screen will go blank

because the hard drive crashes. Don't be shocked. Expect it. This means we may have great plans but not enough resource to accomplish them. Expect it. We will plant our crops but a hail storm may knock them out or a drought will dry them out. Our minds may conceive of great ideas but the tiredness of our bodies or the weakness of our minds will not allow us to accomplish them. That is part of living in a cursed fallen world. We may spread concrete but an unexpected rainstorm may ruin it.

We typically call this Murphy's law. Murphy has nothing to do with it. It is called the law of the curse. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong. I am not being a pessimist. That is what the curse of sin promises.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:22–23 (ESV)

The Bible describes all of creation groaning under the curse of sin as creation is frustrated by its own lack of productivity.

Here is a practical application. Expect problems in our work and stop freaking out when they happen. At Polaris, expect an assembly machine will break. Expect your boss will misunderstand. If you are working on a farm, expect your equipment will break. Expect bugs will attack your corn. If you are working in an office trying to put together a spreadsheet, expect you will have a headache and have a hard time organizing your thoughts. Don't be shocked by it. Don't freak out over it. It is part of life in the fallen world where the earth fights against its God-intended productivity.

What should we do? Pray about it. Ask God to help you get around it and restore the productivity that was intended. Also let it whet your appetite for eternity.

Later in this series we will see how God intends us to be workers for all of eternity in the new creation when heaven and earth are combined. Work in the new creation will be different than work in our fallen creation. The curse of sin against productivity will be lifted in the new creation. When you farm, you won't need to spray for weeds. Round Up won't be needed. When you conceive of things in your mind, you will be able to get them done because scarcity of resources won't be a problem. Fogginess of thought life or the inability to remember won't happen. All of eternity will be filled with the joy of productivity without the curse against productivity. Won't it be great?

Don't freak out when problems are part of work. Turn to God, ask him to carry you through them and think of eternity when we won't experience them.

The curse guarantees I will struggle to find purpose in my work.

I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun... Ecclesiastes 2:18–20 (ESV)

The separation from God that happened with sin also separated us from purpose in our work. Without purpose, our work feels pointless. I recently read about the predicament of Chinese factory workers in what is the world's largest computer parts manufacturing plant in China. For many of the workers, their jobs are repetitive. They live a mindless life of doing the same tasks over and over

each day. To end the mind-numbing tedium some workers were throwing themselves off the top of the high-rise apartment buildings they lived in.

Do you want to guess how the plant manager at the factory put a stop to their suicides? It wasn't by improving their work conditions. He simply spanned nets between the buildings to catch people that jumped. After the nets caught them he sent them back to work.

What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 2:22–23 (ESV)

Work can become mind-numbing tedium. It seems like all we do is spend our lives working, then we die. What is the purpose of it all? You may get rich through your work, like Steve Jobs did with Apple computer, but then you die and you can't take it with you. His hearse wasn't pulling a U-Haul of Apple products. I checked.

Just as sin separates us from God, it separates us from the purpose of work, making it feel pointless.

Jesus restores us to the purpose of work. Remember what we learned last week — work is the way we worship God. Work is the way we love our neighbors. Work is the way we give and receive joy. The curse of sin robs work of a greater purpose. Jesus restores work's greater purpose. In two weeks I will give an entire message on how Jesus changes the way we work. Without that purpose, all of us would be jumping off buildings.

The curse tempts me to make an idol of my work.

Does anyone know the names of the four tallest buildings? No. 1 is the Burj Khalifa in the United Arab Emirates. It is 2,717 feet tall and has 163 floors.

No. 2 is the Shanghai Tower in China. It is 2,073 feet tall and has 128 floors, which means it is one long elevator ride. No. 3 is Abraj- Al-Bait Clock Tower in Mecca Saudi Arabia. It is 1, 971 feet tall and has 120 floors. The United States finally gets on the map with One World Trade Center in New York as No. 4. It is only a mere 1,776 feet tall with 104 floors. That is approximately 1,000 feet behind the No. 1 building.¹

What is amazing is all those buildings were built in the last four years. There is a worldwide race to see who can claim the fame of having the tallest building in the world. Everybody wants the title. It is almost like they are trying to make a name for themselves. The Bible tells us a story about trying to make a name for yourself by the greatness of your work.

Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” Genesis 11:4 (ESV)

In the story of the tower of Babel, the work of their tower was the way they were trying to make a name for themselves. They wanted the world to remember them because of their work. The tower of Babel was a way people were making an idol of their work. They were worshipping their work and using their work as the way they found significance in the world. They were trying to memorialize themselves by making an idol of their work.

The curse of sin tempts us to make an idol of our work, to worship what we do. The problem is our work is a bad God to worship because it will always disappoint us.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_buildings_in_the_world

I ask you, have you given into the temptation to worship your work and assigned work a place of importance in your life that should be reserved for God? Here are a few questions to help diagnose if your work has become your idol.

Am I using my work to make a name for myself or as a way to serve God and others?

It is not wrong to do a good job and want to work hard. That is God-honoring. If your claim to fame in this world are the accomplishments of your work, you are probably making an idol of your work. In social situations, do you casually mention your accomplishments so people know about your work success? If you do, that is a hint you are using work as your identity. Are you comfortable in competition or do you try to eliminate the competition? For instance, if you are on a sports team and somebody shows up that is better than you and they threaten your spot on varsity, is your identity rocked because you may not be on the starting lineup? You may be using your position on varsity as a way to make a name for yourself and prop up your identity rather than using your sport as a way to serve God and serve others.

What am I sacrificing on the altar of work?

Work requires lots of time and energy. It requires sacrifice. That is not wrong. That is natural. We will always have competing priorities with demanding work. Sometimes work will ask us to continually sacrifice things that only we can do, like be a spouse or be a parent. Some people are willing to sacrifice their marriage because their work is more important to them. That is because work has become the idol they worship. Sometimes work will ask you to consistently give up parenting your children because work calls you to be constantly gone on

travel. You realize you are sacrificing your children on the altar of work. God may be calling you to take a lower-paying job to be at home with your kids because you are sacrificing them on the altar of work.

There is no easy answer in these situations. I trust the Holy Spirit is working in your heart today and telling you if you are worshipping the idol of work because you are consistently sacrificing on it things that only you can do.

When I look in the mirror, do I see what I have done or what God has done?

Let's be honest on this. God has allowed some of us to be successful, very successful. Success can be intoxicating. We can become inebriated with pride and delusional with our own importance. We don't see our success as a gift of God. We see it as something we did on our own strength with our own wisdom. Who gave us our intellect? Who gave us the opportunities? If we see success as a product of our own choices, who gave you the doors of opportunity? God. God gets all the credit for any good thing we do.

Success tempts us to insulate ourselves from the pain of real life and it can kill our compassion for others. Sometimes God, in his compassion on us, lets pain in our lives to keep us from becoming self-absorbed, worshipping ourselves and the success of our work. Sometimes God allows pain in our lives to keep us soft to him so when we look in the mirror we don't just see what we have done and worship the idol of work but we are filled with thankfulness for God's grace and we see our success as a God-given gift.

The curse tempts me to be idle in work.

Just as we can over-identify with our work and make it the idol we worship, the curse of sin also tempts us to be idle and expect others to provide for us. The curse leads us to finding excuses to not work or to do just enough work to get a paycheck. This violates the very image-bearing essence of our nature since we are created in the image of God and we are created to be workers.

This idleness is seen in college students who spend their college years partying because they know mom and dad are footing the bill. This idleness is seen in retirement adults who retire early to live long, leisurely and self-indulgent lifestyles that focus on serving themselves instead of others.

The Bible commands us to work hard.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men... Colossians 3:23 (ESV)

Sin inclines us to be lazy workers. The Bible calls lazy workers sluggards.

I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man. Proverbs 24:30–34 (ESV)

You know someone that is inclined to be lazy by looking at his yard. He lets it get overgrown and refuses to do the hard work to fix it. For the fun of it, and for practical help for all of us, I did a little skating through the Scriptures to see how we can recognize a sluggard, someone that has let the curse of the fall make them idle at work. See if these questions help you determine if you have become lazy.

Do I neglect to plan ahead?

The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing. Proverbs 20:4 (ESV)

The first way you recognize a sluggard is they don't do the hard work of preparing for the future and planning. They don't put money away for their kids' retirement funds. They don't save for their own retirement. One of the reasons people don't think ahead is because it takes hard work and discipline. The curse inclines us to be lazy and simply live for the moment. We need to ask ourselves if a lack of future planning reveals a streak of sinful laziness in our lives.

Am I unwilling to get up early?

How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? Proverbs 6:9 (ESV)

Some people have a good reason for not getting up at the crack of dawn. More often than not the reason we can't get up in the morning is because we putter away our time late into the night so we are exhausted when our alarms go off. We end up sleeping in and missing the most productive hours of our day.

Many times we are too undisciplined to turn off the television and go to bed at a reasonable hour so we can get up at a reasonable hour. The honest reason is we do this is because we are lazy. We are letting the curse of work make us idle in our work.

Am I known for being all talk and no action?

The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. Proverbs 21:25 (ESV)

Am I a person that always talks about what I am going to do but I never get around to doing it? Not only is that a character flaw but it is also sourced in laziness. It is sourced in being a sluggard.

Do you make promises and not come through? I know there are occasionally extenuating circumstances that make it almost impossible to always keep our word but the truth is people that are all talk but no action are usually that way because they are simply lazy. The curse of work is that they don't want to work.

Do I make flimsy excuses to avoid work?

The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!"
Proverbs 22:13 (ESV)

We all makes excuses for why we don't do things. The curse inclines us to make flimsy excuses to avoid work. The reason we are avoiding work is ultimately because we are lazy. What excuses do you have for avoiding work?

Am I painfully unreliable?

Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. Proverbs 10:26 (ESV)

I love this proverb. I can just picture somebody wincing in pain as they give tasks to people that prove unreliable. When mom asks you to take out the trash, do you get it done right away or is she wincing like there is smoke in the air an hour later because she asked you to take out the trash but you still haven't done it? The reason the trash isn't out is ultimately because of laziness. You have let the curse of sin make you an idle worker. That is something we can repent of this week.

Is my life littered with unfulfilled desires?

The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied. Proverbs 13:4 (ESV)

Are you a person who has plans but you never accomplish them? One of the reasons we have a life littered with unfulfilled desires is because we are by nature lazy workers. The curse of sin makes us idle.

Idleness is rampant in today's workplace. Many people have a sense of entitlement from work rather than a sense of responsibility for work. If you are a hard worker, it is hard to stay a hard worker. There is a lot of peer pressure to be lazy. If you are honoring God by being a hard worker your peers will look down on you in school because your hard work makes them look bad. The same thing happens in the workforce. Your peers will look down on you for high productivity because your hard work exposes their laziness.

Conclusion

Last week we saw God's good design for work. This week we saw how sin changed work to fill it with pain, problems and a lack of purpose. Sin didn't just change work but it changed our hearts toward work so we either worship work as our idol or we avoid hard work so we can be lazy.

Is there any hope for the problems of work? Next week Pastor Stephen will teach on how to find a job as I will be moving my father's stuff from Philadelphia. The following week I will pick up where we left off and we will see how Jesus restores work to its rightful place and how Jesus redeems and transforms our work.



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