

Why Is Ordinary Work Important Work?

June 7, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. This summer we are in a series of studies called Work Matters to God. In the last four messages we gave the big picture of work. We looked at the creation of work by God, the fall of work through sin, the redemption of work through Jesus and the restoration of work in the new heavens and earth. Today, we move beyond the big picture questions of work to look at some of the common questions we ask about our work every day.

Maybe you had this experience. You attended a Bible conference and the speaker left you with the clear impression that what you are doing with your life in the workforce isn't that important. If you want to do something important with your life you will become a pastor or a missionary, because pastors and missionaries are the heroes of the Christian faith. You notice that every speaker at the conference is either a pastor or a missionary. There is nobody from the business world.

You are left with the impression that if you want to make a difference you need to be in full-time ministry because the business world is unimportant. If you are a janitor or a teacher or a mechanic or a realtor, you need to get serious about your faith.

Sometimes speakers will even say work in the business world is like rearranging chairs on the Titanic. The people in the business world are just rearranging chairs on a sinking ship while those in ministry are trying to save people before the ship goes down.

If you are a business executive, you may attend a men's breakfast where former executives speak about their mid-life career change where they moved from a life of success to significance. They left the business world for full-time ministry, and they are challenging you to do the same.

This leaves the average Christian that processes loans, that works road construction, that changes diapers or makes dinners for his or her family feeling like his or her life's work is insignificant. Is that true? Is some work for Jesus more important than others? Does God play favorites with full-time pastors and missionaries while the rest of us he tolerates? Is ordinary work important work? This morning, we will learn the Bible's answer. I think the answer will surprise you. Let's begin with a little history.

The reformation rediscovered that God's work was not just church work.

The medieval church was nothing like church today. The church kept separate from society. The church developed hierarchies and sacramental systems to separate church work from real work. They even developed the monastic movement to keep God's people separate from real people. The medieval church viewed itself as God's kingdom on earth, so only work in and for the church qualified as God's work. To do God's work you needed to be a priest, monk or a nun. Every other vocation was considered a demeaning necessity.

Martin Luther was one of the great voices in the reformation. One of his rediscoveries was the priesthood of all believers. This meant you didn't need a priest to come before God but everyone had equal access to God. We didn't need a special priest to confess our sins before God. Everyone could confess

their sins to God directly and ask for forgiveness. There is no middle man needed.

In Martin Luther's writings, he saw the priesthood of all believers not just applied spiritually but also applied vocationally. The medieval church taught the only way to please God was by pursuing vocational church work. Martin Luther pointed out that all vocations that were benefiting others and society were equally pleasing to God. A priest, a monk or a nun was not a higher spiritual job than a farmer, a blacksmith or a shopkeeper. God approved of all forms of work that did good for society.

One of the ways Martin Luther showed this was from 1 Corinthians 7:17.

Only let each person lead the life that **the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.** This is my rule in all the churches. 1 Corinthians 7:17 (ESV)

Paul used religious words to describe ordinary work. In Romans 12:3 and 2 Corinthians 10:13, Paul talked about God *calling* people to salvation and *assigning* them spiritual gifts. Here, Paul used those same words to talk about ordinary work. Every Christian should remain in the work God has *assigned* them and to the work God *called* them. This means God assigns people to places of ordinary work and God calls people to secular vocations. Our secular job is part of God's calling for our lives. This means that just as God equips and calls Christians to work in the church for building up the body of Christ, he also equips and calls people for the building up human society.

Martin Luther also illustrated this point in his sermon on Psalm 147:13.

For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. Psalm 147:13 (ESV)

This verse is talking about how God protects a city. Is the only way God protects a city supernatural? Martin Luther pointed out that often God protects a city by calling and equipping people to ordinary work. God gives a city good iron workers to make strong iron bars for the city's protection. God protects a city by giving it good government workers and good city workers. He protects the city by giving it faithful and courageous police officers. God protects a city by calling and equipping people in the city to do the very ordinary work of protecting the city. God often answers the prayers for a city's protection by the natural work of the people. Ordinary work is important work.

Martin Luther also commented on the way God answers our prayers for daily bread. God does not usually answer our prayer for food by providing manna from heaven. He answers our prayers for daily bread by calling a farmer to a field, by calling processors to transform a harvest into flour. He answers the prayers for daily bread by calling a baker to transform flour into bread. He answer those prayers by calling a merchant to sell the bread to the people who need the bread. Ordinary work is important work. All ordinary work that builds up society is God's work. God provides for the needs of his people by the ordinary work of others.

Church work is one of one of the ways God calls people to work. It is not necessarily better work. It is just different work.

Jesus gave value to ordinary work

An amazing verse on the value that Jesus gave to ordinary work is Mark 6:3.

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Mark 6:3 (ESV)

Jesus’ full-time ministry lasted less than three years. What was Jesus doing prior to his preaching and healing in the Palestinian wilderness? He was an ordinary carpenter that worked in a small town business. He worked with his hands. He sanded wood. He cut wood. He built tables and chairs. He framed houses.

Remember, Jesus didn’t suddenly have an epiphany experience with a flash of light that supernaturally empowered him and catapulted him into ministry. The book of Luke tells us Jesus was baffling the rabbis with his knowledge of God and biblical insight at the age of 12. Even though Jesus was fully aware of his identity and was able to teach at a very young age, he spent most of his teenage and adult life doing ordinary work, not cloistered in a monastery like a monk. I love this. Jesus gave value to ordinary work by spending most of his life doing it. I think there is something to learn. If Jesus didn’t think running a labor-intensive business in a small town was beneath him, neither should we.

Think about Jesus’ true identity and contrast that with his life as a carpenter.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15–17 (ESV)

The one who fashioned the universe and spun the planets in their orbits, the one that created every sea creature and animal on the planet plus every

angelic being was now taking some of the trees he created and helping people frame their homes. Jesus developed callouses. Jesus knew the thrill of a good day's work and what it meant to be exhausted at the end of the day. Jesus understood the problem of not enough sales. He understood the problem of irritable customers. Jesus understood the problem of making something and having it break. Jesus understood the pain of needing to maintain laser-like focus for long hours of work to do it well.

Ordinary work, and lots of it, was not below the life of Jesus. Ordinary work is important work. We shouldn't be afraid of it.

Ordinary work was the center of God's will for most of Jesus' life.

Sometimes I hear people say they are unsure of God's will for their lives. She is just a line worker at Polaris. He is just a truck driver for Pure Fishing. She is just a banker for 5/3 Bank. They are just working in a small town doing ordinary work. They feel they could do more but they missed God's calling.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he was baptized by John the Baptist. In his baptism, God the Father's voice showed up and this is what he said:

And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:11 (ESV)

God the Father was pleased with how his son lived his life prior to his ministry. God the Father's will was for Jesus to be a simple carpenter in an obscure town off the radar of society. Jesus pleased his father by doing the ordinary common work of a carpenter even though he was capable of so much more. Jesus' ordinary work was important work.

In a similar way God has called many of us to the ordinary work of serving others in a simple small town business. Maybe you make school lunches.

Maybe you are a secretary. Maybe you sell tractors. Maybe you drive tractors.

Realize you probably aren't missing God's will for your life. The center of God's will for most of us is to do ordinary work, just like Jesus. God may eventually call us to a different place or to a place of prominence, like he did his own son, but right now we are doing the work he has for us, even if that work is not glamorous. That is OK. Jesus did lots of ordinary work because that was his father's will for his life.

Ordinary work is the way Jesus served his neighbor.

The Bible tells us the most important commandment is to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. The second most important commandment is to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus loved his neighbors from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. by simply doing his work and doing it well. I am sure he made great tables and chairs. I am sure the quality of his work was good, and he blessed his customers through his work. I am sure he stayed late after work helping others in need. Maybe a lumberjack needed an ax handle repaired during the night so he could go back to work in the morning. Jesus loved his neighbor by staying late at his work so his neighbor would be ready for work the next day.

I am sure Jesus dealt with irritable customers. He loved them with patience and kindness. When we do our work and do it well, we love our neighbors, just like Jesus.

Ordinary work was Jesus' training ground for greater work.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.
Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)

While this verse is talking about Jesus' death on the cross, I think it also applies to the rest of Jesus' life. While Jesus is fully God, he is also fully man. That means he went through the experience of learning. Jesus didn't just learn obedience to God in his suffering on the cross but he also learned how to love people through his work. I am sure Jesus had difficult customers. Jesus needed to learn how to love them.

When it came time for Jesus to wash his disciple's feet in John 13, I think the reason Jesus was a good servant then was, in part, because he learned to be a good servant on the job to others.

All work that builds up society and serves others is important work.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:3–8 (ESV)

This passage is speaking about the local church, but I believe the same principles hold true when we apply them to society at large. The best way to think about our jobs is to realize we are all part of a big body called society. God gives us different talents and calls us to different jobs so that the body of society can be built up. All of our jobs are designed to fit together into one harmonious

unit to make the body function. *Any work that builds up society and serving others in society is important work.* The best way to think about our jobs is not to determine which ones have more value than others but to realize all our jobs work together make society function and serve other people. All our jobs are important jobs.

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? 1 Corinthians 12:17–19 (ESV)

How do we decide which part of the body is more important? Which part of the body would you like to lose? Would you like to lose an ear? A brain? A heart? A hand? You can see my point. Just as God designed the physical body to be different parts that work together, he also designed and gifted members of the church to fit together and serve one another. In the same way, God puts people together in society together with different gifts and different callings to serve the needs of society. Everyone can't be pastors and missionaries. There needs to be police officers, teachers, carpenters, business people, sales people, inspectors, builders, waiters and lawyers. Just as the body needs different parts to serve others and function smoothly, so does society.

Ordinary work is more important than we realize.

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable... 1 Corinthians 12:22 (ESV)

While we may agree that all jobs are important for society to function, we often think some work as more important than others. Sometimes we think, "My job isn't that important. I am just a waitress," or "My job isn't that important. I am

just a mechanic.” We forget that it is often the most ordinary work that is the most important in society. What would happen if nobody did the job of being a waitress? I don’t think anybody would go out to eat. What happens if all mechanics went away? When a car broke down, it would never be repaired.

Some of you know I recently drove a trailer, with the contents of my father’s house, back from Pennsylvania to Iowa. It took us two days to pack the trailer. It is 24-foot long and 8.5-feet wide. On the return trip, while driving through Ohio on the turnpike at 70 mph, my truck took a sudden lunge to the right. A quick glance in my right rearview mirror let me know I had no wheels on the right side of the trailer. The bolts holding

both rear wheels snapped off while driving 70 mph on the turnpike! With no tires on the right rear of a fully loaded trailer, let’s just say God was very gracious that we made it to the side of the road. We were safe but we had a serious problem. What do you do with a fully



loaded trailer that has no right wheels and no wheel studs for new tires on the side of the Ohio turnpike? I did what you are supposed to do in an emergency. I dialed *990 for help. I had visions of needing to unpack the entire contents of my father’s house to the side of the highway. I had no idea how we would get out of the jam.

First they sent a flatbed tow truck, but the driver just chuckled. The trailer was bigger than his truck. Then he had an idea. He said, “I know just the guy for

you. I will call Delbert.” I was wondering who would have the name Delbert and how this guy could help? The tow truck driver told me he would show up in an old ambulance. I was suspicious. About 45 minutes later, Delbert showed up in his old ambulance that was retrofitted into a repair truck. It was old and dirty but Delbert and his ambulance were just what we needed. Using air jacks he lifted the trailer and pulled off the drums. Next he left and drove to a repair shop. He bought new studs for the drums. Using compressors in the back of his old



ambulance he replaced the studs in the drums and put the wheels back on the trailer. We were back on the road by evening.

As Delbert was working, we had a chance to talk. He is a Christian that loves his work of helping cars and trucks that break down on the side of the road. He is just a mechanic with an old ambulance, but his ordinary

work is important work or I would still be in Ohio!

Some of God's best work is done by people in ordinary work, not church work.

As we already learned, God doesn't just call and gift people into church work. He calls and gifts people for all kinds of ordinary work. Church work is only one kind of calling. As I was thinking about this, I realized the Bible shows us many people God called and equipped for ordinary work, and God did amazing work through their lives.

Think about Daniel. He didn't get a calling into ministry, but his calling was when he was taken into captivity in Babylon. He simply went the direction God

forced him to go. He didn't ask for the job but he found himself head of the magicians and enchanters. I am sure that wasn't the career path his good Jewish mother wanted him taking. Daniel focused on devoting his life to serving God in a hostile work environment. God did extraordinary work through Daniel's life. He led Nebuchadnezzar to God and introduced two other world rulers to the true God of the universe. He ended up with his own book of the Bible. He didn't do church work. He did ordinary work. God called him into ordinary work and equipped him for his ordinary work. He did great things for God with his life.

Did you ever consider Esther's work? Her calling was to be queen of the Persian empire. The way God equipped her for that calling was to make her stunningly beautiful so she could win the Miss Universe pageant to marry the king. God gave her this ordinary work so she could save the Jewish people from the genocide planned by Haman. She wasn't in church work, but she was used by God for a great work. She also ended up with her own book in the Bible.

Did you ever consider David? He had a circuitous career path. He started out in an obscure shepherding business in a small town. He simply visited his brothers and ended up in the Octagon with the reigning MMA champion known as Goliath. To everyone's surprise, David destroyed the guy. David then went from a career in MMA to life as a professional musician giving concerts for the king. He eventually ended up as part of the king's personal body guard. Later his career was a fugitive from justice and eventually the king of the nation. David never went into ministry. God moved David's career all over the map. Some of God's best work is done by people in ordinary work, not church work.

Did you ever consider the story of Joseph? God's career path for him was that his own brothers would sell him into slavery. That is something you don't see every day. He didn't spend his days in Egypt whining about homesickness and claiming he was out of God's will for his life and he was meant for something more than slavery. He simply served God in the job God placed him. At first, that was with Potiphar, and he was a raging success. When Mrs. Potiphar made a pass, he honored God and avoided her but found himself treated as if he had done the wrong thing when he actually did the right thing.

It looked like his life was spinning out of control. It looked like his career path was ruined. He continued to serve God faithfully in the dungeon. At just the right time God moved him from the dungeon to the throne to be in charge of Egypt so he could save a nation and his family.

Some of God's greatest works are done by people who honor God in ordinary work.

Conclusion

In 1689, parliament forbade the importation of liquor. The Irish and the British began making their own. Parliament unwittingly unleashed the Irish gin craze. The entire nation found itself living in a drunken stupor.

The vast majority of the Irish drank whisky or gin as their primary beverage. Why did everyone drink so much alcohol?

Water was considered unsafe. Not knowing about micro-organisms, when people drank water from the rivers they became mysteriously sick. To avoid

sickness, people drank alcohol. Statistics say that one in every six houses was a gin house. The entire country was a drunken mess with no way out.

Arthur Guinness was infuriated by the drunkenness and depravity of his country. He constantly prayed to God, asking God to help him do something about alcoholism in Ireland. Arthur eventually sensed God calling him not into church work but into ordinary work. As a business man, God was calling him to “Make a drink that men can drink that will be good for them.”

He developed a dark stout beer called Guinness Beer to give his country something to drink that wouldn’t ruin their lives. The key is Guinness beer has so much iron that people feel full before they can drink another pint. The alcohol level was much lower than gin and whisky.

The quality and success of Arthur Guinness’ beer helped pull a nation out of drunkenness. With his success, he chose to do practical good. He began the first Sunday schools in Ireland so people could understand the gospel. He worked hard to create a family culture that focused on generosity and investing in people.

One of Guinness’s grandsons became a famous evangelist. Another descendant worked hard to eradicate poverty in Ireland. Another descendent went into politics and passed laws to outlaw dueling. In that day, when people had a disagreement, they simply shot each other until somebody died.

The Guinness legacy was particularly amazing when it came to its investment in employees. In 1928, the year before the Great Depression, if you worked for Guinness Beer, you had free 24-hour medical care, free 24-hour

dental care and on-site massage therapy. Your funeral expenses were paid. Your company pension was paid without you needing to make contributions. Your education, your wife's education and your children's educations were all paid for by the company. The company had libraries, reading rooms and an athletic complex. That was 1928, not 2015 working for Google.

What is amazing is how a Christian business man incorporated his faith into his business to help lift an entire nation out of drunkenness by giving men something they could drink that was good for them. He changed the lives of thousands of workers by being a company that invested in workers instead of taking from workers. Ordinary work is important work. Sometimes God does his best work by people called to ordinary work, not church work.

This week, know church work is not better than ordinary work, it is just a different calling. God does some of his best work through ordinary Christians working in ordinary jobs. That is us.



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