

Q&A on Work and Faith

July 12, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. If you are a visitor, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are excited to have you. As a church, across both our Spirit Lake and Spencer campuses, we are in a series called Work Matters to God. In this series we are learning the importance of our faith in our daily work.

This is the last week of the series. Next week, Pastor Gerhardt from Urban Impact Ministries in New Orleans will be sharing. We will also hear from Katy Northey, one of our own that is now a missionary in Spain. After that, Pastor Jordan and Pastor Stephen will fill the pulpit while I am on vacation. I will return in August to teach a small but very important four-week series called, “What does the Bible say about heterosexuality, homosexuality and transgender?” After that it will be September and we will launch into a study of the book of Genesis that will take us about a year.

This morning we are having fun as we finish up our series on work. During the series you submitted your questions on the relationship between faith and work. Some of your questions were answered during the series. We saved your five best questions for today. Today, you wrote the sermon. You wrote the questions.

Let’s get started. The first question came from a woman (or a man with really nice hand writing). I don’t know who wrote it.

1. What do you do when a father puts his work above his children?

Every father can relate to this question. Work is consuming, and it is easy to let your work consume you. It is easy to unintentionally neglect your wife and

children. When I read this question, two men of Scripture came to mind. The first is David.

David was a man after God's own heart. He lived a storybook life that most of us only dream about. He went from tending sheep, to slaying a giant and becoming a national hero overnight. Then he lived as a fugitive from justice until he became king of a nation. The Bible says David was a man after God's own heart.

While David was wildly successful, he was a disaster as a father. He masterfully led a nation but neglected to lead his home.

One of his sons, a man named Amnon, was attracted to David's daughter Tamar. David should have talked about the birds and the bees and controlling lust with Amnon but he didn't attend to his home. Amnon's lust eventually gained so much control in his life that he raped his half sister. Rape is not cool, especially when you rape your own sister. This was a terrible tragedy in David's home. Do you know what David did about it? Nothing. He kept on leading the nation but skipped out on the hard work of leading his home. Amnon need a father that was involved in his life to help him deal with his lust. After raping his sister, he needed the discipline and love of his father, but David stayed at work and ignored the problem at home.

Another of David's sons, a man named Absalom, was Tamar's full brother. Seeing his father do nothing, he determined to get revenge for his sister. The Bible tells us Absalom didn't say a word to Amnon for two years. Imagine how awkward this was at the family table every night. Imagine how dysfunctional

things felt over the holidays. Everybody knew trouble was brewing, but David ignored it. He pretended it didn't exist and he devoted himself to his work while neglecting his home. Absalom needed a father in his life that could help him deal with his anger. David was an absent father.

Absalom eventually murdered Amnon. Absalom ran from David and the family. Do you know what David did about it? Nothing. He let it ride. Once again it was his work over family. "Dad, if we ignore problems at home, they don't go away."

Absalom eventually led a coup d'état which led to Absalom sleeping with his father's concubines, and he almost successfully took the kingship from his David and had his father murdered.

What an incredible picture of a man gifted by God for leadership but David neglected to lead his home and it resulted in disaster. Men, if we neglect our children it will only lead to disaster.

Incidentally, we should notice this is not just David neglecting his young children but this is David neglecting his adult children. It is easy to step away from our children when they hit age 19 and let them do their own thing. Fathers, we still have a responsibility to wisely parent our adult children, especially when they are making sinful choices. This is a great reminder for all of us with adult children.

The second example that came to my mind comes from the book of 1 Samuel. The man's name was Eli. He was a priest that pursued church work to the neglect of home work. Eli's two sons were also in the priesthood. Their

names were Hophni and Phinehas. These guys were scoundrels. One of the reasons they turned into such brats is because dad ignored them instead of correcting them.

And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. 1 Samuel 3:13 (ESV)

Eli prioritized his work above his children. He let his boys run wild. He didn't take leadership in his home. I think ignoring his sons and letting them run wild started when they were young, and he let it continue when they were old. 1 Samuel 2:12-17 tell us his sons were so self-serving that rather than following the tradition of plunging a fork into the pot of boiled meat to get a random piece, they came to the people before they boiled the meat and took the best parts. They took the tender loins and the back straps. They refused to eat them boiled but they insisted on cooking them on the grill because meat always tastes best on the grill. If people didn't give them the best meat willingly, they took it by force. They used their position of leadership to serve themselves and stuff their stomachs rather than serve others. They were selfish little brats in an adult body that needed a good smack-down. In 1 Samuel 2:22, we find they were sleeping with the young women that worked in the sanctuary. They were having affairs with the church secretary. Dad knew about this but did nothing to stop it. He let them be child-gone-wild. Brats with beards is what they were. 1 Samuel 2:25 tells us that when their father tried to correct them, they wouldn't listen to him. God finally took the strong hand of leadership that Eli refused to provide and he struck Hophni and Phinehas dead on the same day. That would break any dad's heart to have both your sons die on the same day.

What started this disastrous situation? An absent father. A dad that let his kids run wild and refused to correct his children at home. He was too busy at work to invest in his home, and it ended in disaster.

One of the things I was told as a young father was to make sure you discipline a child when they are young because it is much harder to discipline a child when they are old. In both of these situations we find that was true.

Deuteronomy 6 also reminds us how we are to teach God's Word to our children. While every wise man hopes and prays his wife does a good job teaching the children the word of God, it is not her responsibility. Before God it is his responsibility. Here is how a dad finds time to teach his children about God.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. Deuteronomy 6:6–8 (ESV)

A dad talks with his kids about the Bible when the family sits in the house. Dinner time is one of the few times an entire family sits in the house. Dads, it is our responsibility to bring up God conversations at the dinner table with our children. It also says we are supposed to bring up God conversations as we walk by the way. That is called a family road trip. When you are driving someplace, you teach your kids about God. It says we are to teach our kids God's Word when they lie down. That is called bed time Bible reading and prayer over our kids. We are to teach them God's Word when we rise. That means you have the summer memory verse at the breakfast table and talk about

it with your kids over breakfast. We teach our kids God's Word as we do the natural rhythms of life with them.

2. What should our response be to someone that refuses to work or sees no reason to hold a job?

This question was submitted multiple times by multiple people. Apparently this is something many of you are thinking about.

The first thing we need to do is separate the issues in the question. We need to distinguish between those who can't work and those who won't work. There are those who can't work and are on disability for physical or psychological reasons.

My heart goes out to those who can't work. Work was intended to be a joy. If you can't work, you don't have a sense of purpose and fulfillment that comes with work.

At one time, I was unemployed for nine months. It drove me nuts. The one thing I don't do well is sitting at home doing nothing. I needed structure in my life to keep me productive and sane. I created a rigid schedule of exercise, Bible reading, book reading, prayer time, writing and job hunting. I put myself on a rigid diet and lost 25 pounds in four months. I corresponded with 170 churches in nine months as I looked for a job. Not having work was a terrible feeling.

Another category we need to consider is those who fall into the governmental grey area. They earn more money sitting at home than they can earn by going to work. That is not good. There is no incentive to get a job. Without a job, there is no experience of joy in work. There is no experience of the joy of contributing to society rather than receiving from society. Anyone living

in this situation is in a tough place. Don't be jealous of them. Feel bad for them.

There is no incentive to improve!

There is a third category. Those are the people that can work but they are too lazy to work. If you are a Christian in this situation, it is not just a practical issue, it is a spiritual issue. God created us to be workers. When we work hard, we properly image our heavenly father that is a hard worker. Christians should have a reputation for hard work and productivity. That is how we adorn the gospel with our lives. Look what Paul said to those that refuse to work.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 (ESV)

Paul gave us three steps of dealing with the lazy man or woman that won't work. The first thing we do is we refuse to hang out with them. They will have plenty of free time. They want you to waste time with them. You don't have that much free time. Refuse to waste time hanging out with them, watching reruns of the "Love Boat." That is a gentle way of rebuking them for doing nothing productive with their lives. If they want to be idle, they need to be idle alone

while everyone else goes to work and does something productive with their lives. That sounds harsh but it is biblical.

The second thing Paul did was work very hard. Even though Paul had the right to a free lunch for all the work he did teaching the Bible in the Thessalonians' church, he didn't take advantage of that right in that town. He worked hard teaching the church, but he was bi-vocational and he worked day and night so he could pay his own way on everything. Nobody needed to give Paul a free lunch because he didn't just do church work, he did extra work to cover his costs.

This was another way of rebuking those that were lazy. Everybody wanted to be like Paul. If Paul was a hard worker that didn't live on handouts, they wanted to become hard workers that didn't live on handouts. Paul was careful that his lifestyle didn't encourage a free-loader mentality.

Let me review. First, if you have somebody that is lazy, you rebuke them by refusing to hang out with them. Second, you work really hard around them and show them that you work for a living, you don't survive on handouts for a living.

Paul had one final corrective measure for idleness and it is one of my favorites. If you don't work, you don't eat. Cutting off someone's food supply motivates people to get a job in a hurry. This doesn't mean we literally starve people to death. It means I have no trouble eating a steak and baked potato from Minerva's and when the guy that refuses to get a job looks at my steak and his mouth is watering and he asks me to buy him one, I have no trouble telling

him that I keep a loaf of Wonder White Bread and a jar of peanut butter in the car and he is welcome to make himself a sandwich. If you don't like my limited menu selection, get a job and buy your own steak. Some of you think that is harsh. It isn't harsh. It is biblical. Sometimes the only way to motivate people is with their stomachs.

I like the way the Old Testament handled this situation. If you were poor, the government didn't send you a check. While there were offerings for the poor and gifts given to the poor when it came to eating, the poor had the dignity of working for their food. In the book of Ruth we see the poor went in the fields after the harvest and picked up the leftover grain from their food. They worked for their food. We also see that on the Sabbath year fields were to take a rest. Whatever grew on a field in the Sabbath year was for the poor to take. If you were poor, you had the dignity of work. If you didn't work, you didn't eat.

3. Please deal with the false idea this teaching on work has no application to retired folks.

This is another popular question that many of you submitted. Some of you thought this teaching on work wouldn't apply to you because you are retired. As you learned, that was not true. Let's think about retirement from a biblical perspective.

The only place in the Bible where we find age-specific retirement is when the Bible talks about the Levitical priests. They were to serve in the temple from age 25 to 50. They retired at age 50. That is a pretty scary because I am almost age 50. I don't feel ready for retirement. Thankfully, when you read the fine print, you learn this means the Levites retired from the heavy lifting of the animals on

the altar but they were still to assist their brothers in the work. They were just not allowed to do a clean-and-press of the the hundred-plus pound sides of meat on the altar.

Apart from the Levites, the Bible is silent on the issue of age specific retirement. There is no magical age when we stop working. There is no age where we move from work that serves others to a life of self-indulgence.

Instead the Bible tells us that our job is to serve the Lord for all of our lives, and we are to do that until we close our eyes in death, not until retirement.

...for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:20 (ESV)

How should we think about retirement? The best way to look at retirement is to remember that we don't retire from something. We retire to something. That is a favorite saying of Dan Foote, one of our elders. Retirement is a time where you move from one form of work to another form of work. The pace we work may be slower. The work may be different. All we do is change the way we work. When we retire we move from a job that was needed to provide our daily needs to having our daily needs provided for by our pensions. Now, we are free to work without needing a paycheck.

Let me take a moment to tell you how thrilled I am with many of our retired men and women. They didn't retire from work to self-indulgence but they retired from vocational work to using their leadership gifts and skills in the church. CrossWinds wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for the gifts of the retired men and women that redeployed their skills in service to Christ's church when they retired.

A lot of the leadership behind our multi-campus movement came from retired, godly men. The Commons was redone this winter by retired men and women that didn't have to work for income. They didn't sit home and live a life of self-indulgence. They came to church and rebuilt the Commons to bless us and to honor Christ with their gifts. I am so thankful they redeployed. If it wasn't for the way they use their gifts, very little would be done around here.

Most of my elders are wise, retired men that give their time to serving Jesus in a way they couldn't during their full-time employment. All of us are filled with thankfulness for the leadership and the wisdom they are pouring into Christ's church.

In addition, godly retired men have the opportunity to take under their wings younger men and mentor them.

Finally, when we think about retirement, we must remember the doctrine of eternal rewards. God promises not just to save us through Jesus but to reward us for how we live. Retirement is a great time to move from investing financially for the rest of our earthly lives to laying up treasure in heaven by good works and investing in our eternal lives. In retirement we can do all kinds of practical and spiritual good.

Is it wrong for those in retirement to enjoy an extra round of golf or to take a trip? Of course not. The issue is the orientation of our lives. As Christians, we are never to orientate ourselves toward self-indulgence. We just reorientate our lives from one form of serving to another. Maybe the pace is slower but our work never stops.

4. What does the Bible teach about profit? How much profit should a Christian make?

Some Christians are anti-profit. They think all Christians should work for free. They believe everything should come as a gift and Christians should give deep discounts. They are anti-profit.

This may shock you but God is not against profit. Christians shouldn't feel guilty for making one.

Profit means you created something that has value. Profit means the work you do is recognized as valuable. For example, if you bake 100 loaves of bread and it costs you \$100 to make the loaves, but you sell them for \$200, that is \$100 profit that you receive for your work.

In Luke 19, Jesus endorsed making a profit, even large amounts of profit. Luke 19 has the parable of the 10 Minas. One servant was given 10 Minas and he made a 10-fold return. He had a 1,000 percent profit margin. He wasn't condemned for it, he was commended for it. In that same parable, another servant made a profit five times over what he was given. He had a 500 percent profit margin. He was commended for it. The guy who was condemned was the guy who didn't make a profit. God is not against profit. He is not against a healthy profit if that is what your work is worth.

One thing we must remember is that profit doesn't just represent take home pay. It also represents manufacturing costs. Let's go back to our loaves of bread illustration. The \$100 profit for making the 100 loaves of bread also covers the rent of the bread facility and the payment on the machines to make the bread. It also covers the cost of employees. If there was no profit, the

employees wouldn't have a paycheck and there would be no bread to buy to bless us with food.

Profit covers risk. Every day our imaginary bread baker bakes 100 loaves of bread. He bakes them in faith that 100 customers will walk in the door to buy the bread. What happens if only 80 customers show up? Who eats of the cost of only selling 80 loaves. The baker eats the cost, and it comes out of his profit. If the baker didn't have a profit, it would only take a few days of bad sales to put him out of business.

Profit is a deserved reward. Profit is the reward the baker gets for risking his money and time trying to try to bless others in society by making their daily bread. Shouldn't the baker be rewarded for taking a risk to bless us with bread so we have something to eat?

God has no problem with a profit, even a large profit, if that is what a product is worth. As Christians, don't feel bad about making a good profit if your product is valuable.

The problem is when a profit doesn't come from meeting the needs of people but it comes from exploiting people. When a company gets a monopoly on a necessary commodity then jacks up the price, that is extortion. That is sin. Imagine our bread baker is the only source of bread in town. He knows nobody else can come into town to make bread so he starts charging \$20 for a loaf of bread instead of \$2. If you had a car and could drive out of town to get it, all other bread is \$2 but our baker is taking advantage of people without a car and

making \$19 profit. The important thing to remember is that God is not against profit. He is even not against a large profit.

For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” 1 Timothy 5:18 (ESV)

5. How can I share the gospel at work?

This is another great question. It was submitted at the beginning of the series but I saved it for the end

Let me share some of the things I have learned about how to bring the gospel into casual conversation at work.

1. Nobody can stop you from talking about your weekend.

What is everybody talking about at the break table? What they did for their weekend. Some people went out on a boat. Some people had family over. You can share about your time on the boat and about having your family over but you can also share about what happened at church. Church was part of your weekend. In casual conversation tell your friends about the teaching series we have at CrossWinds on work. Tell them you learned about retirement and how to retire and become a man of woman that blesses others instead of a person of self-indulgence. You can also tell them you talked about the importance of a father staying involved with his children at home. Most of the people at your break table are struggling with retirement and parenting. Chances are they will want to learn more about church. All you needed to do was bring up church as casual conversation about your weekend.

2. Nobody can stop you from asking someone if they go to church.

Ask people about their churches. If they go to a church, they will start telling you about church. You might discover people you talk to are atheists. You might discover they have some strange beliefs. All you needed to do was ask people if they went to church. Eventually they will ask you about your church. You can tell them. You turn the conversation from church to God and you can talk about Jesus.

3. Nobody can stop you from inviting someone to an event.

Nobody can stop you from inviting people to an event. At work, people ask their friends from work if they want to join them at Arnolds Park for the concert. They ask you if you want to join them for drinks after work at the bar. It is completely natural and healthy for people to invite their friends to events. All you need to do is invite your friends to events at church.

A friend of mine was asking me how he could get a friend to church. I told him to just invite his friend to the July 19 cookout and carnival games after second service next week. Don't make the church service the lead-in. Make the cookout and the bouncy house the event you invite them to. Tell them the lunch is great. Tell them it is free. Tell them the carnival games for the kids are fun. Even adults enjoy the carnival games. Just invite people to church and to the meal and games afterwards.

When they come, introduce them to your friends. Have a good time. I will take care of talking about Jesus for you. Nobody is going to freak out if you invite them to a burger lunch with games for the kids. No pressure. No worries.

4. Nobody can stop you from doing good toward others.

Last week we looked at Titus 2:14 that tells us Christians are to be zealous for good works. That means we try to do all the good we can to all the people we can at all the times we can. At work, nobody can stop you from doing acts of kindness. You can bring Spud Nuts in for the office. You can provide coffee. You can bake cookies. When someone is going through a hard time, make a meal. Quintin Stieff from Valley Church in Des Moines has a great line that says, “Good works leads to good will which leads to good news.” Good works opens the door to the gospel.

5. Nobody can stop you from offering to pray.

Dr. Fox gave a great example last week of prayer evangelism. At work, he asks if he can pray with his patients before they go into surgery. Almost everybody says yes. When you hear of a coworker than is facing a tough time, ask if you can pray with them. They might say, “No” but I suspect they will say, “Yes.” Most people are open to prayer in a crisis moment. When you pray for them, pray to Jesus and include the gospel in your prayer.

Conclusion

As we close this series, I want to remind us of the importance of work. We were created in the image of God, to be hard workers just like he is. Work is the way we love our neighbors. Work is one of the most practical ways we worship God. Work is a source of joy. While sin brought pain and problems to work, Jesus redeems our work. We won’t just work for this life. We will work for all of eternity.

My friends, work matters to God. Let's go to work.



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