

Introduction: Pg. _____

“Work Speaks”
1 Corinthians 7:17, Matthew 22:39, Psalm 147:13-14

Your life speaks. The decisions you make, the places you go, the actions you take, how you interact with people all say something about you when you are not saying a word.

Because this is true every moment of every day, the work you do on the job says a lot about you, your view of the world, and your relationship with God.

The word *vocatio*, from which we get the word vocation (or calling), can also be translated voice. “By our work, our lives speak. (HT: John Comer, *Garden City*)

FCF: This morning I want you to consider what your work is speaking to those around you. Are you clearly communicating the values of God’s kingdom? Does your work say what you want it to say, or are there areas for improvement? Perhaps you need some amplification?

Pic: Speakers... one tiny speaker (phone speakerphone - illustration) ... or fill up a room (thumping...)

Today, I want to encourage us to...

The Point: Raise your voice at work by reflecting God’s work.

Let me give you three ways you can raise your voice by reflecting God’s work.

I. Do what God has made you to do (1 Corinthians 7:17).

Vocation

- God has uniquely SHAPed each one of us to play a specific role in the world he’s made. When we talk about SHAPE, we are talking about how our gifts, passions, abilities, personality, and experiences collide to position us to fulfill a particular job in our respective vocational callings.
- We see the idea of vocation in 1 Corinthians 7: “**Only let each person lead the life that *the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.*” (1 Corinthians 7:17)**
- Throughout this chapter Paul refers to the different vocational callings of marriage, singleness, and work.

- But let’s focus on work.
- Everyone (yes, everyone!) has a specific assignment or calling from God in a given place for a given time, WHICH is WHY I’m VERY EXCITED to EXPOSE the Sacred/Secular Myth, which says...
 - Some work is really sacred and spiritual while other work is really second-class and secular.
 - Pastors, missionaries, and “Christian leaders” do God’s work, BUT everyone else’s work is less significant.
- Here’s you bury that line of thinking six feet deep:
 - Oh, you’re telling me putting food on the table is not important to God? Keep doing your thing farmers, grocers, baristas, and chefs.
 - What about developing children’s lives and minds? Then let’s give it up for teachers, coaches and everyone in the field of education.

- And how about those helping the marginalized, broken and sick? Doesn't that reflect the heart of God? Go ahead social workers, counselors, doctors, nurses, anyone serving in pharmaceuticals, and health care.
- How about God's concern for a just and safe society? Thank you public servants, politicians, police officers, lawyers and those in the criminal justice system.
- You want me to keep going?
 - Thank you, Mr. Mechanic, for keeping our vehicles on the road.
 - Thank you, Mrs. T-Worker, for helping us get to work.
 - Thank you, Mr. Waste Management Worker, for keeping the bubonic plague out of Boston!
 - Thank you, Dance Instructors, Musicians, Non-Profits, Engineers, Construction Workers, Software Developers, Bankers, Investors, and Businessmen and women for building our city and enriching our lives.
- Who'd I miss? You deserve to be mentioned, because all work has dignity in God's world.
- There is no demeaning work out there unless it is explicitly distorting the good world God has made. Some work is blatantly sinful and inherently destructive to those participating in it. Think Hugh Hefner, Bernie Madoff, and Whitey Bulger.

T: We all have an assignment, but how do we discover that assignment? Here are a few questions to help you... (Adapted from Comer, *Garden City*)

Finding Your Voice

- **What do you love?**
 - Dorothy Sayers says: "**The Christian understanding of work . . . is that work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's [abilities] . . . the medium in which he offers himself to God.**"
 - Pursue work you enjoy and you will find more joy in your work.
- **What are you good at?**
 - How has God gifted you? What skills do you have? What skills could you develop?
 - When I visit a museum, I get inspired and start thinking: I could do that. Can't be that hard..., but my Rembrandtian dreams dissolve quickly when my pad and pencil produce kindergarten level stick men. And most of the time, they are crooked at best. :)
 - Work takes our *God-given talents* and transfers them into useful *skills* and *competencies*.
- **Where can you do the most good?**
 - Fulfilling work makes our world a clearer picture of the coming kingdom of God.
 - We should shift our questions from, "How can I utilize my skills and gifts to maximize my own comfort?" to, "How can I leverage my life for the good of others and the glory of God?"
- **What do people who know you well say?**
 - It is wise to receive confirmation and wisdom from those who know you well.
 - Story: Dr Akin & Dwayne: Do I have what it takes?
- **Where are the open doors in your life?**
 - We should not be surprised to look back and say, "Oh yeah, God gave me an opportunity to take that class, work on that project, be mentored by that person, to help me discern the path I should follow in life."
 - Look for the doors God opens through the various experiences and opportunities in your life.
- **What is God stirring you to do?**
 - Seek God in prayer.
 - Then follow the dreams he places in your heart.

Now, let me sound a warning. Though many of you are still trying to discover your voice, others are so locked in that your work never stops talking. [You are vocationally loquacious! :)]

That's a metaphorical way of saying: some people are addicted to their work.

In Boston, work has become: *The Acceptable Addiction...*

- One popular magazine [Men's Health] ranked our great city near the top of the list for "City that Need a Vacation."
- Though we live in the land of freedom, Americans are probably more enslaved to their work than any other nation.
 - Some claim that in order . . . "To get ahead, a seventy-hour work week is the new standard." (Boswell and Olsen-Buchanan, *Journal of Management*)
 - One survey shows 80 percent of 1,000 U.S. workers work after leaving work. P.
 - How often do you pick up your phone for work when you're off the clock (yes, even during meals and family time - let's be real - let's talk about this during Group this week)?
 - How many hours through the year do you spend working after work?
 - Here's some pastoral advice: STOP IT! (How much would it benefit you and those you love if you reduced the number of times you picked up your phone or the amount of time you spend working after work by 80%).

We need to **fight against being a workaholic?**

- **Hit a priority reset.** Make God and your family your treasure, not work. When worship is right, work will be right.
- **Practice proper boundaries.** As much as possible, leave work at work. Along with that...
- **Learn to say, "no."** This may mean having some hard conversations and making some hard decisions. Say no to good things so that you can say yes to what is best.
- **Schedule rest.** Like actually put it in your calendar. Family Time. Devotional Time. (Show my phone?)

T: We should strive to do what God has made us to do, but here's a question: What if you haven't found your voice? Can you still find fulfillment in your work? YES!!

Because our **work is arguably the greatest context** to fulfill the second greatest commandment Jesus gave us: "**love your neighbor as yourself.**" (Matthew 22:39)

II. Serve who God made you to serve. (Matthew 22:39)

What are some of the most common responses to the question: Why do you work?

1. "I gotta pay the bills. Gotta put food on the table."
 - According to a [Salary.com \[2013\] survey](#), 73% of those surveyed work strictly for the paycheck.
 - And most of them would probably agree with the words of Steve Allen: "All I ever wanted was an honest week's pay for an honest day's work."
 - Now, I'm not saying wages should not be a motivation. We gotta get paid! :) I'm saying it should not be the primary factor.
 - How often do people pursue certain jobs for the salary it pays rather than the service it provides?
2. "I gotta feel good about myself."
 - Yes, we should find satisfaction in our work (I think we've established that), but we should not work for status and how we look in the sight of others.
 - The King was a Carpenter (that'll preach!).
 - If we are not careful we will think some work is beneath our dignity, but I can tell you this: Three of my favorite people from childhood were named Gary, Tony, and Reba. They took

a sincere interest in my life and did their work with excellence. Gary & Tony were custodians and Reba was my elementary school bus driver. Thank you, God, for the Gary's Tony's and Reba's of our world.

3. "I gotta hurry up and put my 30-40 years in so I can retire."
 - Life is more than eating out, playing golf, and collecting sea shells.
 - We should measure our retirement goals against the goals of Scripture. Let this book drive your vision for everything, including retirement.

Do any of these resonate with why you work? Salary, self-satisfaction, sitting pretty for retirement?

Here's a better reason: to enrich the lives of others.

- God gives us work to worship him and to serve others, to love your neighbor as yourself.
- Our God-given vocations and callings are about serving one another.

- I love how our work also exposes the myth of autonomy.
- Think about how many people are connected to the chair you are sitting in right now?
 - Not just manufacturers
 - ...and everyone who makes the factory go, but
 - Engineers and designers... but not just them,
 - Everyone who educated them. We could be talking about hundreds of thousands of people connected to that little chair.
- As much as Americans crave independence, we are incredibly dependent on one another.
 - "Self-sufficiency is an illusion." (Veith)
 - And once we realize that, maybe just maybe, that will help us learn to be more dependent on God.
 - Many people resist God because they don't think they need him.
 - But Jesus came and died and rose again, precisely because of our deep need to be brought back into a real relationship with God. Have you received the gift he offers you by faith?

Since our work is primarily about making our selves useful to others, here's what I want you to do: You're going to love this! **Demand a raise!**

- Not a monetary raise for you, but an intention to raise the level of your work, so that your work can add more value to those around you.
- Let your work contribute to a better Boston.
- Let your work be driven by the benefit it can bring to others!

Here's a challenge for you this week: consider the people you are serving, pray for the people you are serving and LOVE THEM by doing good work.

T: Let your work speak by doing what God made you to do, serving who God made you to serve, and finally...

III. Watch God work through your work. (Psalm 147:13-14)

Behind all our work is God's work. We can do our work because God has done and continues to do his work.

- This is what Mark Noll says in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*: "Who, after all, made the world of nature, and then made possible the development of sciences through which we find

out more about nature? Who formed the universe of human interactions, and so provided the raw materials for politics, economics, sociology, and history? Who is the source of harmony, form, and narrative pattern, and so lies behind all artistic and literary possibilities? Who created the human mind in such a way that it could grasp the endless realities of nature, of human interactions, of beauty, and so make possible, the theories of such matters by philosophers and psychologists? Who moment by moment sustains the natural world, the world of human interactions, and the harmonies of existence? Who maintains moment by moment the connections between what is in our minds and what is in the world beyond our minds? The answer in every case is the same—God did it. And God does it.”

But not only is God behind all of our work, God is working in all of our work... (Read Psalm 147:13-14)

- Martin Luther’s “Exposition of Psalm 147” explains this.
- Focusing on verse 13, Luther says, “By the word ‘bars’ we must understand not only the iron bar that a smith can make, but . . . everything else that helps to protect us, such as good government, good city ordinances, good order, and wise rulers . . . this is a gift of God.”
- Luther says, God gives us lawmakers, govt. leaders, and civil authorities to strengthen our bars of our gates.
- *In one of his most quoted sections... “What else is all our work to God—whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government—but the work of children, by which He wants to give His gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.”*
- It’s as if God is hiding himself in our vocations. He is in the workplace, our families, our church, you name it working in and through us.
- It’s amazing to think that God is accomplishing his purposes to care for people through our everyday work.
- This should radically transform the way we look at our daily lives. At the same time, that does not negate our responsibility to be instruments in his hands.
- Luther goes on to say: *“God is the giver of all good gifts; but you must not fall to take the bull by the horns, which means you must work to give God an occasion and a mask.”*
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Conclusion:

What does your work say to those around you?

Lord’s Supper...

Prayer:

Need work.

Want new work.

Want to excel in your work! Demand a raise.