

“For the City: At Work” Genesis 1-Revelation 22

Introduction: Pg. ____

Here's a newsflash: Most people spend most of their waking hours at work. I want you to think about this. The average American worker now puts in roughly 45 hours a week. That means over the next 40 years, you will spend roughly 90,000 hours at work. Who's excited?! Over that same time, let's pretend you are here 50 Sundays a year for our worship services for the next 40 years, you will spend roughly 2,500 hours right here.

Now, this is what gets me absolutely fired up! There is an assumption in most people's minds that these 2,500 hours in here have very little to do with those 90,000 hours out there. That is maddening to me and that is my fault. At least as someone who represents pastors around the world, I do not believe most pastors and most churches help people connect their faith with their work.

But I love what the people of the Center for Faith and Work in NYC talk about when they say Faith & Work are about “integrating the inseparable.” Did you catch that? That's good! I am passionate to see people connect all of the dots of their lives to the DOT of God's design.

The spheres are not separate. They are in sync. That is what we have been trying to communicate at Redemption Hill, and we are going to do so increasingly as we move into the future!

As we begin our “FOR THE CITY” series, it's obvious to me that one of the greatest ways we can impact our city, and promote the good of our city, and help our great city flourish is through putting in a good day's work, and a good life's work! That's what I want us to take away this morning.

The Point: Promote the Good of our city by putting in Good Work.

How can we do that? Let me give you four ways...

I. Be who God has made you to be (Genesis 1:1-2:15)

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- Who has God made you to be? A worker! Check this out...
- **Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”**
 - We are made in the image of God, but who is God?
 - The first words of the Bible tell us that God is the Creator, the Divine Worker. Jesus confirms this in the Gospel of John when he says: “My Father is always at work, and I too am working.” (John 5:17)
 - God beats us to work, every day.
 - He is a working God, and he made us in his image to be like him and reflect him in our WORK!
 - So consider: In the beginning, when life was perfect, we were working and God made us to work forever. There are indications of this all throughout the Bible [from the

- prophets (Beat your swords into plowshares) to the teaching of Jesus, all the way to the last book.]
- But look at what it says next...
 - **Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**
 - So here’s the summary...
 - “Be fruitful and multiply...” pretty straightforward: Make beautiful lives! Enjoy. And...
 - “Subdue [the earth] and have dominion” is perhaps less straightforward but an equally important assignment from God, and that is to: Make life beautiful.
 - That’s it: make beautiful lives and make life beautiful.
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 - Let’s breakdown that second assignment.
 - SUBDUE [the earth]: refers to taking the raw materials God has given us and developing into something true, beautiful and good. “It can also mean to tame something that’s wild” (Comer). If people begin quitting their jobs one by one, society would progressively turn into a wilderness.
 - HAVE DOMINION: refers to reigning over and having responsibility for something. I really like how one Hebrew scholar said it’s “actively partner with God in taking the world somewhere.”
 - This is what some theologians refer to as the cultural mandate. We are commanded God’s creation and then create things and cultivate them for his glory. Then...

Genesis 2:15 says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

- We are to work in God’s world and “Keep it:” which often translated “take care of.” It means to watch over and protect.
- Christians should be on the front lines of caring for the world God is made. We should be the “Greenest” people in our city. April 30th... clean up Medford Square!
- For the City: This is one of the ways our work contributes to a greater Medford and a greater Boston.
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- But behind all our work is God’s work.
- Mark Noll speaks of this in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. He writes: **“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.”**

T: Be who God has made you to be, that’s #1. #2...

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

God has uniquely SHAPed each one of us to play a part in the world he's made. We find fulfillment in our work as we discover how our gifts, passions, abilities, personality, and experiences collide to be deployed in a particular kind of job. This is the idea of vocation or calling.

- We see the idea of being called to a particular kind of assignment 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)**
- Did you know: "Your job is your voice."? In my research this week, I discovered that... "The word *vocatio* can also be translated voice. The Quakers have a saying about calling that I love: Let your life speak. Finding your calling is about finding your voice" - John Comer, *Garden City*
- Everyone has a special assignment or calling from God in a given place and time. WHICH is WHY I'm VERY EXCITED to EXPOSE the Sacred/Secular Myth... Some work is really sacred and spiritual. Other work is second-class.
 - Pastors and Missionaries and those in some form of "Christian" work are doing the real work of God, and everyone else's work is less significant.
 - Oh! So God's over here but not over there? That's what we call BAD theology. No, not bad. Horrendous. Abysmal. Asinine!
- Here's you beat that down:
 - Oh, you're telling me putting food on the table is not important to God? Keep doing your thing farmers, grocers, baristas, and chefs.
 - So you're telling me developing children's lives and minds is not God's work? God, doesn't really care about that. Do your thing, teachers and those in education.
 - You're telling me helping the marginalized, broken and sick doesn't reflect the heart of God? Oh, you can't. That's right. So go ahead social workers, counselors, doctors, nurses, anyone serving in pharmaceuticals and health care.
 - You're telling me God doesn't give a rip about a just and safe society that promotes human flourishing? Public servants: politicians, police officers, lawyers and those in the criminal justice system, thank you.
- You want me to keep going?
 - Mr. Mechanic - Thank you for keeping our vehicles on the road.
 - Mrs. T-Worker: Thank you for helping us get to work.
 - Mr. Waste Management Worker: Please don't go on strike. We *thank you* for keeping the bubonic plague out of Boston!
 - Dance Instructors, Artists, Musicians, Coaches, Construction Workers, Bankers, Investors, thank you for building lives and building our city.
- Who did 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 tearing down and distorting the good world God has made: So people like Hugh Hefner, Whitey Bulger, and Bernie Madoff need their destructive, evil work and find a real calling.

So we all have an assignment, but how do we discover that assignment? Here are a few questions to help you find fulfilling work: (Adapted Questions from John Comer, *Garden City*)

- **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 that you enjoy and you will find more joy and satisfaction in your work.
- **What are you good at?**
 - How has God gifted you? What skills do you have or could you develop? We need to discover of our *God-given talents*, then hone them into *skills* and *useful competencies*
 - When I visit a museum, I get inspired and begin to think... I could have made it with the great painters and sculptors of the Renaissance and produced masterful works of art. The only problem is that my Michaelangelonic dreams, when put on paper, only produce kindergarten level stick men, and most of the time, they are crooked at best.. That’s not how God has wired and gifted me.
- **What does your world need?** [Does it make the world a more Garden-like place?]
 - Where can you make a contribution? Fulfillment comes when we give for the good of others.
- **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?)
- **What are the open doors in your life?**
 - *Our experiences and opportunities* often lead us to pursue particular fields of work. We should not be surprised to look back and say, “Oh yeah, God gave me an opportunity to take that music class, work on that project in school, be mentored by that teacher, to help me discern the path I should follow in life.”
- **What is God stirring you to do?**
 - Pray about this. Seek godly counsel. Watch how God is working in your life.
- Let me give you two provocative thoughts from this idea of discovering our calling and finding fulfilling work:
- Some of you hate your jobs and you know what you should probably do? QUIT!
 - Work should be enjoyable. It should give us life not suck the life out of us.
 - NOW, 99.9% of the time, you won’t want to quit your job until you have another one lined up. Word to the wise. :)
 - But take the courageous step of asking those questions and praying through if a new assignment is what God wants for you.
- Here’s another one: Let’s stop asking kids: “What do you want to be when you grow up?”
 - John Mark Comer: “We usually ask little kids, What do you want to be when you grow up? I wonder if we’re setting them up for failure with that question. Maybe a better question is, Who are you? What do you think God made you to do when you grow up?”
 - You hear that? At one level: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” is really an awesome question and really fun! But let’s at least follow that up with... You know, God has made you special. There is divine potential in your life. God made you for a

purpose, and I'm convinced you're going to discover who God made you to be and how he made you do serve those around you.

T: Now, let's pretend you can't get to what you love, and what you're really good at quick enough. Can you still find fulfillment in your work? YES!! Because life is more about them than us. Our work is designed to make other people's lives better! Work is perhaps the greatest context to fulfill the second greatest commandment Jesus gave us: **"love your neighbor as yourself."** (Matthew 22:39)

III. Serve who God has made you to serve: your neighbor (Matthew 22:39)

- That's a GREAT reason, one of the fundamental reasons we should punch the clock. To enrich someone else's life!
- The wasted life is the life that contributes no value for the good of someone else.
- BUT IN OUR WORK: that's exactly what we do.
- Work is transformed when we focus more on how it serves their needs and desires over my own needs and desires.
- What are some of the most common responses to the question: Why do you work?
 - "Gotta pay the bills. Gotta put food on the table"
 - According to a [Salary.com 2013 survey](#), a whopping 73% of those surveyed work strictly for the paycheck.
 - And most of them, probably wish the words of Steve Allen were true when he said: "All I ever wanted was an honest week's pay for an honest day's work."
 - Wages can actually be a good motivation **"A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on."** (Proverbs 16:26), But is that all?
 - Money is a factor, but it should not be the primary factor. The dignity of work is not dependent on the salary it provides.
 - "Gotta feel good about myself."
 - There is fulfillment in work (I hope we've established that), but it should not primarily be about our status or how we look in the sight of others.
 - When we consider the humility of Christ, what job could we legitimately say is beneath us? Three of my favorite people from childhood were named Gary, Tony, and Reba. They were people who took a sincere interest in my life and from what I could tell, did their work with excellence. Gary & Tony were custodians and Reba was my bus driver.
 - Do you work to be viewed as better than others, or do you see work as a primary way to love and serve others?
 - "I gotta hurry up and put my 30-40 years in so I can retire."
 - The rush to retirement will not satisfy if your idea of retirement is a self-absorbed pursuit of self-pleasure. Why? Because God made us for more!
- Why do we work? Lester DeKoster says: **"Work is the form in which we make ourselves useful to others."** - Lester DeKoster
 - What if your work contributed to a better Boston? I'm convinced it does
 - What if your work was primarily driven not by the benefit it can bring to you but the benefit it can bring to others!
- Everyday life exposes the myth of autonomy we often live under...

- Our work is much bigger than we know. 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, but everyone who educated them. We're already up to hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, for that chair.

Our work is primarily about making our selves useful to others, So 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 the lives of those around you.

T: Be who God made you to be. Do what God made you to do. Serve who God leads you to serve, and finally...

IV. Let Your Work be motivated by his Work (John 17:4; John 19:30).

OR

Let your Monday-Sunday be motivated by Good Friday

"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." (John 17:4)
"It is finished." (John 19:30)

Be motivated by Jesus and Reflect Him in HOW we Work?

- **Work hard.**
 - "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart," (Col 3:23, NIV)
 - "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might," (Eccl. 9:10)
- **Do excellent work.**
 - "Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men. (Prov 22:29)
- **In his strength**
 - "For this I toil, struggling with all of his energy, that he powerfully works in me." Colossians 1:29

Be motivated by Jesus and Reflect Him in WHY we Work?

- It's all about him.
- "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Colossians 3:17

Conclusion:

- Listen: We were made to work, not for work. (3:1-19)
- The Gospel is what frees to enjoy our work and to do excellent work for our neighbor and the glory of God.
- PRAY