

# Work and the Man in the Mirror

## If Work Is a Blessing, Why Does It Feel Like a Curse?

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men. How's everybody doing today? How many of you have had one of those weeks? Anybody had one of those weeks? You know the kind of weeks I'm talking about. We got a couple guys that have had one of those weeks where it just seems like it goes on and on there's so many things happening and decisions are having to be made and pressure is there and changes and conflict. Sometimes we come to an end of a week like this and we just want it to be over with. We're just ready for the weekend, ready to be done with all this stuff, put it behind us for a few minutes because it feels relentless.

We are in the middle of a three week series on work and I want to just mention a couple of things before we get started today. The first one is we do have some copies of this book, of Pat's book, A Man's Guide to Work. We brought some extra copies for you. They're at the back of the book table. If you're interested in this book, take a look at it. It could be a great resource that might be very helpful to you in your journey.

The other thing that we want to do at Man in the Mirror is we want to keep you informed about what's happening in the ministry. We know that most of you are very invested in what's going on as a part of this Bible study here in Orlando and those of you around the world watching by video. We have, on the tables today, some of our annual reports. You're welcome to take one of these and take one for a friend if you know somebody else that might be interested. It's a great encouragement. God is really giving us a wonderful story about what he's doing. This kind of presents that story. It shows some of the ways that your prayers and your encouragement and your investments are being used.

Just one thing I would mention to you all and also to all the folks watching. Just one quick story. I was in Maryland. We now have 90-something field staff around the country. I was in Maryland and we met with a church and it was a classic situation. They had been through our training. They had gotten the draft plan together. They had a group of laymen who had come up with their ideas about what they were going to do but they couldn't get on the same page with the pastor. The key layman was so frustrated that he almost didn't come to this meeting that our field staff set up with me. There was going to be eight guys there and he said, "Well, maybe I just shouldn't go." Guy's like, "You have to go. You've been leading this whole process." "Well, yeah, but I don't think we can work it out."

He convinced him to come to this meeting, we had the meeting. An hour and fifteen minutes later, everybody is on the same page. Everybody is excited. The pastor's completely on board. They have a six week plan to get together to actually implement what this team had come up with. The layman is on cloud nine. As I left there that morning, I thought about the fact that we've seen this hundreds of times

around the country. Without a field staff on the ground in that community to connect with that pastor and that layman, what probably would have happened and what's happened so many other times is that layman would have drifted away because he was frustrated and disappointed, he would have ended up at some other church, it would have taken him two or three years to get connected there and try to get something started. This church would have stayed where they were, not really doing much intentional for men. There would have just kind of been this just falling apart. Instead, because we have a field staff now, because God has used your prayers, your encouragement, the resources that you've invested to help make that a reality, now that church is unified. They've got a field staff helping them with this implementation.

We know that within the first year of the average church who works with one of our field staff, moves fifteen new men into discipleship. Now, this is a much better than average church. I mean, it's a bigger church. It's a more active church. It's a more vibrant church. Could be 25 men, could be 50 men. Who knows in the next year how many marriages are going to be transformed? How many dads are going to be transformed? Why? Because there was a man standing in the gap in that community through our ministry together at Man in the Mirror. I just want to hear that study, let you know about the annual report, and tell you how much we appreciate your partnership in what God's doing through the ministry.

Last week, Pat talked about a Big Idea. He said, "My work is not just a platform for ministry, it is ministry." He talked about the fact that work was created as a good gift from God, that we are called to work, and that work is not just something that we do so that we can witness on a coffee break or so we can give somebody some money who needs some money or something like that but that the work itself is holy, the work itself is sacred, as we do our work well, as we do our work with excellence.

This week, what I want us to look at is this idea that if that's true, and of course it is, it's from the scriptures, what he taught us. If that's true, then if work is such a blessing, why does it feel like a curse? If work is a blessing, why does it feel like a curse?

I'll tell you about a guy. I'll call him Ted. You probably know a guy like this. In the middle of the last downturn there at 2008, sometime around 2010, Ted's company was in the throes of their last round of layoffs as they were trying to survive. Ted, although a long time employee, finally was one of the ones that was let go. He's a professional and has a training in a particular type of business. He could not find, at his age at that time, another job. Everybody else was laying off guys like that too. He couldn't find another position and so now for the last basically six years, he's been looking for work in what he's trained to do. He can't find it so he's been doing all kinds of odd jobs. He's driven buses. He's done manual labor. He's done late shift work. He's done some consulting projects. He's doing whatever he can while he's going to interview after interview and putting in resume after resume. He's in his late 50s now and he's wondering, "Am I ever going to be able to find a job doing what I was trained to do, doing what my profession is?" Every day, he's feeling beat up. He's feeling like there's something fundamentally wrong with me. What's wrong with me that I can't get a job doing what I was trained to do?

Then, there's another guy that I know. Let's call him Blake. You probably know somebody like this. He's in his late 20s, early 30s. He did so well in his first job with his first company. I mean, was blowing it out. He was on the fast track. He was the young superstar. Competitor took notice, much larger competitor. They came in, gave him a great offer, almost more than he could imagine or he could believe that young in his life. Now, he's switched over and he's doing great in this new job. He wakes up in the morning early before anybody else is up. He's handling emails. He's laying out his tasks. He's making sure he understands what he needs to accomplish that day and that week. At night, after the baby goes to bed,

he's pounding it out for another hour or two, taking care of things, making contacts, networking, doing everything he needs to do to be successful. Everyday when he gets up, he feels like a winner. He feels like this is the greatest thing in the world. He can't even believe that he gets to do this.

Here, you have these two extremes and you probably know people like this in your life. These two extremes where work has such power to define who we are men and what we feel about ourselves as men. One of the questions that we want to ask is: Why is work so powerful? Why does it have such control over what we believe about ourselves, what we believe about the world, what we believe about where meaning comes from, how we relate to other people?

One of the things, as Pat mentioned last week, that work is so fundamental because it comes in that very creation time when man was created in the garden. God says, "Till the garden and subdue the earth." These are the tasks. This is the work that was given to men. There's something fundamental about in the very creation of a man that he is meant to work. He is meant to create. He's meant to produce. He's meant to shape. He's meant to move. He's meant to make a difference. We see this really through the whole Bible. This is a Bible study so I'm going to read a bunch of verses to you now.

Work is talked about through the whole scriptures. It's one of the most dominant themes. For example, Deuteronomy 28:12, "The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its seasons and to bless all the work of your hands." Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 9, "The Lord, your God, will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand and the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of the ground." Even to the new heavens and the new earth, work is talked about. Ezekiel chapter 48, as Ezekiel is seeing this vision of the new temple and the new Jerusalem, he talks about the length of the land and he says this, "Its produce shall be food for the workers of the city and the workers of the city from all the tribes of Israel shall till it." Even in the new heavens and new earth, there's work. Work is a blessing. Work is good.

The Bible gives us lots of practical advice about work. If you want to learn about how to be a good worker, the Bible is a great place to go. It says, for example, in Proverbs chapter 12 verse 11, "Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense." You know that guy that's kind of chased this thing and then this thing and this thing and then this scheme and this infomercial and this deal and all that stuff? Proverbs says, "Hey, just work the land. Just work the land. Work what's put in front of you slow and steady." Proverbs 18:9, "Whoever slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys." Proverbs 22:29, "Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before obscure men." Being skillful, being excellent at what we do.

There's also teaching in the scriptures that work is going to cause a lot of problems. Because it's so central to who we are, it's going to cause a lot of problems. Deuteronomy chapter 31, Moses says, "For I know that after my death, you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you and in the days to come, evil befall you because you will do what is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands." Through the work of your hands.

The passages that we're going to look at for today, one of them is Hosea chapter 14 verse 1. Hosea chapter 14 verse 1 in the Old Testament there in the prophets section there at the end of the Old Testament if you want to look it up. Hosea's talking about the repentance that the Israelites need to bring before the Lord. It says, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to him, 'Take away all iniquity except what is good. We will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us. We will not ride on

horses and we will so no more 'Our god' to the work of our hands. In you, the orphan finds mercy.'" You see what he says there? We will not say anymore, "'Our god' to the work of our hands." We're not going to worship the produce of our work. We're not going to worship what we work.

Then, Ephesians chapter 4 verse 28. Ephesians chapter 4 verse 28, "Let the thief no longer steal but rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

What we see as we look at the scriptures, work is vital, work is fundamental to who we are as men, work continues even into the new heavens and the new earth, and work is going to be confusing and frustrating. This is basically the testimony of the scriptures. It's going to be a struggle.

Now, why is that true? Well, the first thing that we need to see is that we are doing broken work in a broken world. We're doing broken work in a broken world. We know that in Genesis 3, sin comes into the world. As part of the curse, Adam is told, "It's by the sweat of your brow that you're going to bring forth food. You're going to have to fight against the thorns of the ground." The work that was meant to be easy and a pure blessing now becomes this mixture of blessing and pain, of joy and pain, of triumph and disappointment. All of us have experienced that.

The issue that we need to recognize is that sin warps fundamental things at a fundamental level. What do I mean by that? Well, let me say it a different way. Sin works the essential things of our lives in an essential way, in a way that actually changes them. For example, think about some of the core aspects of who we are as men. Work is one in the creation. Sexuality was another. "Be fruitful and multiply." We know that family relationships, marriage. "The two shall become one flesh." Right there in creation. What happens in sin? When sin enters the garden, now Adam and Eve are ashamed of being naked. Work is going to be a struggle. Childbirth is going to be painful. All of these fundamental aspects of our personhood have been twisted and warped. This is why these things are so powerful. This is why men can get so off track in these areas of their lives.

You know, it's hard to have a disagreement with your bowling team that completely wrecks your life. Anybody in here ever had an argument with your bowling team and twenty years later, you can't sleep at night? No. It's just not that big a deal. You have an argument with a brother who never wants to talk to you again or you have a dad who abuses you verbally and talks about what a loser you are or in your marriage relationship, you or your wife do something to violate that trust in a very, very significant way, boy, that will absolutely transform your life. Why? Because those things are so fundamental to who we are as men. Work is in that same category. That's why we can end up investing so much of our identity and so much of our desire for significance into our work.

If I told you that the paint on this building here, we found out that at the factory when they mixed it up, they actually used a slightly bad formula and during rainstorms if someone brushes up against it, the paint is actually going to rub off, you guys going to like run out of the building screaming or anything at this point? It's not that big a deal, right? What if I told you that they found out that the steel that they used, they've done some research on the batches for the girders and the supports in this building and they found out ... I don't know exactly how old this building is, 30 years, anybody know? Something like that. Let's say 30 years. They found out that several of these buildings have actually had the roofs cave in at 28, 29 years. They were used with the same batch of steel that's in this building. Thank you. That's a big deal because that's a core aspect of what it means to have a building. If the girders don't work,

nothing works. That's why sin twists these essential parts of manhood. It attacks these essential things where it can cause greater damage.

I felt this in my own life. I remember an example when I was a younger man and working. We brought some vendors in. I think it was insurance. They were talking to myself and a coworker. They were explaining about this product they had and the opportunity. We were trying to solve a problem and so as they were going through it, they got about five minutes into it and they had said something and so I wanted to kind of get a question answered about that. I said, "Okay. I heard what you said. Tell me about this." My coworker misunderstood my question. She said, "Well, David, they just said blah blah blah." I kind of looked at her and was like, I didn't say anything but I was like, "That's not what I asked." I just let it go. A few minutes later, they were kind of on the same kind of topic. I said, "Let me just clarify." I asked the question again and I asked in such a way that I thought it precluded the idea that she had given me the answer I was looking for. I was very careful in the way I worded it. She jumped in and said, "David, I already told you blah blah blah." I'm looking at her like, "What are you doing? I want them to answer my question. You're not even answering my question." I didn't say anything.

Finally, we get to the end of the meeting. There's like three of them and me and my coworker. I say, "Okay. Great. I just need to get this one question answered." I word it again in a way that I think is very obvious that what she had answered was not the question I was asking. I finish my question and she starts to say, "David." I just looked at her, I said, "Would you please be quiet and let them answer the question?" Now, I don't know how many of you have done like management, leadership, executive seminars or whatever. Pretty sure that's not the way that they teach you to lead in an organization. Oh my gosh. It was one of the most humiliating moments. I mean, it was one of those things where I felt so terrible for her. She's crying. These people are like, "What in the world just happened? Where am I? Am I in the Twilight Zone or something?" I'm apologizing to them. I'm apologizing to her. I mean, it was a disaster. One of the lowest points of any business thing I've ever been involved in.

The Lord helped me to think about that afterwards and say, "What in the world happened? How could that possibly have gotten to that point? I mean, I could have sent them an email. I could have called them on the phone later. There's all kinds of ways for me to get the answer to this question." What I realized was going on as I began to think through it is that it really wasn't about the answer to the question. What happened was that she was making it look like I didn't understand what they were saying. Because I'm competent and because I know what I'm doing and I've got my act together, I had to make sure everybody knew, all five of us, really a big deal, everybody knew that I understood what I was doing, she was the one that was wrong. Heaven forbid they think that I was making mistake because I don't make mistakes. My identity was so bound up in my own being right and my own competence that I was willing to emotionally run over one of my coworkers in order to validate that. That's how twisted work can get. It gets into those deep crevices of what's going on in our hearts and where we're looking for meaning and purpose.

We're doing work in a broken world and we're also working with broken people. In Exodus chapter 5 is a great example of this after Moses and Aaron talk to Pharaoh. I'm sure they didn't expect this. Pharaoh says to the Israelites ... Anybody remember what happened? Pharaoh says, "Hey, these guys obviously got too much time on their hands. If they can think about leaving us and leaving us high and dry. Let's keep them making the same number of bricks they've been making but instead of delivering straw to them, let's make them go get their own straw." Same quota, not as much resources. Now, they got to make the same number of bricks but before they can make the bricks, they actually have to go and harvest the straw to make the bricks.

We live in a broken world. People make unrealistic expectations on us. They ask us to do things that sometimes just can't be done or they ask us to do things that are very difficult that put all kinds of stress on us. It can feel incredibly difficult to manage those kind of relationships and those kind of systems. Some of you guys are work areas right now. It may be for two months. It may be for six months. It may be for five years. You're thinking, "I don't know how I can do this anymore because the way my boss treats me, the way he treats other people in my organization, the types of things we're trying to get done. I just don't see how this is ever going to happen." It's tough to work with broken people in a broken world but that's where we are.

The other truth though that we see in the scriptures is that work can be redeemed. Work can be redeemed. That's what that passage in Hosea talks about is that we can move from worshipping the work of our hands to the work of our hands being an expression of what God has done for us. Ephesians, this passage in Ephesians is great because it says, "Let the one who steals start to work." Now, you realize stealing is work. I don't know how many of you have stolen much in your life. Maybe we shouldn't have a show of hands on that. Stealing is work. I mean, you got to figure out how to do it, how not to get caught, you got to lie to people, you got to do it on the sly. It's a lot of work to steal. This person who was working in a way that was inappropriate, in a way that was taking things from people that didn't belong to him, that was defaming the image of God, the exact opposite of what God asked to do. God asked us to produce, to create, to till the garden, to make it more bountiful, and instead, this person is going and taking things from other people that they don't deserve. Look what Ephesians says. Because the gospel, that person can go from a taker to doing productive work and become a blessing, to have resources to give away to other people. The exact opposite.

In my case, I can go from a guy who feels like the only reason I have value is because of how smart I am or how right I am or how competent I am. I can go from that, because of the gospel, in my best days to someone who's willing to appear wrong, be wrong, step back, let somebody else take the front, let somebody else have the credit. How does that happen? That happens because Christ redeems us and he redeems our work. We can live in a world where work does not have to be a pure curse but it can also become a means of obedience and a means of blessing.

David Greusel is a Founding Principal of Convergence Design. It's an architectural firm. He was the lead designer on Minute Maid Park for the Houston Astros and PNC Park for the Pittsburgh Pirates. In a recent interview, he said this. He said, "In Genesis, we clearly see God as the master builder of the world, planning and designing the universe and the world, our home. In the same way, though on a much smaller scale, I mirror his image when I design buildings, districts, and other pieces of land for the flourishing of communities." You see what he's doing? He's anchoring his vision of what it means to be an architect in his understanding of what God is doing in the world. He even goes on to say that there's some designs, there's some projects that he's rejected because he feels like it's not going to be a blessing for that community. He's fought for changes in things with investors because he felt like it wasn't going to be a blessing for a community. The gospel transforms us and then it allows us to be a part of a transformed work that transforms the world.

The third point this morning is that work is a blessing for surrendered men. Work is a blessing for surrendered men. You probably experienced that sometime when you were in the zone, when you felt like, "Man, this is just going really well." All your experience was coming to bear, everything you've learned, you solved this problem, you've seen it 50 times before and the customer was so excited that you were able to do for them what they needed to be done and you knew it was going to really make a huge impact in their business. That's a blessing. That's a time and a place that God has ordained for you,

as a surrendered redeemed man, to be a blessing. This is what the Ephesians is talking about from a man who steals to a man who gives by abiding in Christ, by turning from those idols that have attracted our attention, by turning away from asking work to do things for us that it can never do. So many men get in trouble because they ask for work to support their whole identity, their whole sense of themselves. I'm only as valuable as how much I produce. I'm only as valuable as how much money I make, how many sales I make, how many promotions I get. That's not true. We are so much more than just workers. Work is very important but we're so much more than that.

When we stop asking work to do for us things it can never do, then we're free to let work be a blessing for us as surrendered men. You know, making a sale, it's huge. Solving a disagreement between two people in your company, unbelievable. What a blessing that is for the kingdom of God and for your business. Treating a customer with dignity and respect.

I had a situation the other night that my wife was laughing at me with. I called an airline because my son's return trip to college, we got online to print out his boarding pass. Of course, he was doing it 11:00 the night before for an 8:00 AM flight the next morning. You know, he's in college. His flight's not there. It shows his flight down to Orlando. It doesn't show his flight back. I'm thinking, "Okay. Did he mess up and buy a one way trip instead of a round trip?" We look at his email receipt. No. There they are. This is one of those airlines that you cannot get customer support. We tried a bunch of different things and kept getting hung up on. Finally, I found a place to get on hold. I started at 10:30.

About 11:15, a human being started talking to me and she said, "Well, we canceled the return leg because your son was not on the flight." I said, "Well, that's really interesting because he's sitting in my living room right now. I'm pretty sure he was on the flight since he's here." "Well, he was not on the flight so that's why we canceled it so there's nothing we can do." "He was on the flight. We have his boarding pass. We show where you tore the barcode off of his boarding pass to scan it." "I'm sorry. He wasn't on the flight." I'm thinking ... Then, I say, "Can I talk to a supervisor?" It goes on and on. The story could go on forever.

About 12:40, they finally gave my son a seat on the plane. I said to her, "Look, we already bought this ticket. If you put him back on, you already have the money for it and you don't have to talk to me anymore. You're going to start saving money the second you put him on that flight. I'm staying on the phone until you do it so you're just going to keep spending money until that happens." I don't know that that worked but anyway. I'm thinking, "What universe are we in where ..." I said to one of them, "When you go on flights, do you check the airline's computer system to make sure that they registered you as on the plane or do you just get on the plane and fly home? What are you thinking?"

When you give somebody valuable customer support, when you come alongside them and listen to them and solve their problems, what a blessing that is. It's an unbelievable blessing. When you pay a vendor on time, some of you guys know what a blessing that is. You're not trying to be a bank. You're not trying to be a credit service for people. You have a business to run. When you pay a vendor on time, that's a huge blessing. When you communicate in the midst of a crisis, a wonderful lesson from Pat Morley. If you have a crisis going on, if you have a problem, communicate. Everything is easier if you communicate. If you're not going to be able to pay a vendor, call them. Call them a week before it's due. Do not call them a week after it's due. Communicate, don't run away and hide. Communicate. When you communicate with people in a crisis, what a blessing. People will be like, "I can't believe you did this. No one has ever done this for us. No one has ever told us what's going on." Communicate.

All of these little things, they seem little to us, they're huge. A smile, a kind word, asking somebody how their family is doing. You have no idea what these people are going through. You have no idea what a blessing it might be for them.

The Big Idea this morning is that **we glorify God in work when, in spite of brokenness and sin, we reflect his image to the world.** That's really what he's asking us to do. His image of love and redemption and creativity and productivity and care, he's asking us to reflect that because of the transforming work that Jesus Christ has done in us that we then can be a blessing to others.

God's called you and he's appointed you for your work. There's going to be a place in the next week, it might be today, there's going to be an opportunity for a man like you. There's going to be somebody that's going to come across your path, a customer you're talking to, a coworker, a situation going on, and it's going to be God ordained, a place where if you rely on Christ, if you stay a surrendered man, if you don't look out for your own interest but instead look out for the interest of others, in that moment, he's going to allow you to be a blessing. He's going to allow you to show the love and the grace and the peace of Christ. It could be a big thing that happens, it could be a small thing that happens, but it could also make all the difference in someone's life.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for your word and we thank you for this calling to work. Lord, I pray for each one of us that you would help us to see that even though work is broken in a broken world, working with broken people, that work can be redeemed because of your power. Lord, if we stay surrendered to you, if we abide in you, if we look to you for the meaning and purpose and hope in our lives, if we allow your holy spirit to continue to root out the distractions that are keeping us away from you, the idols that we're worshiping, that, God, as surrendered men, we can be a blessing, we can seize those opportunities that you put before us to make a difference, to make an impact, to bring you the honor and glory that you deserve and to see people's lives blessed and transformed by your power. That's what we pray for, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.