

The Christian Man

Work: How Should I Think About My Work?

Rough Transcript

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Good morning men. Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter two verse 24. For my first job after college, I had decided that I wanted to go into commercial real estate. My life philosophy was that money will make me happy and success will solve my problems. So, I thought, okay, where is the biggest money available? And I thought that the biggest money I could make would be earning big commissions, selling commercial real estate. So, I interviewed at a prominent company here in Orlando, the company who had assembled the Disney property and they had a tremendous reputation. And when I interviewed the owner of the company, the president of the company said, "I really like you and I think you have a lot of potential, but you're just too young to make it in this business." Well, you know what that did, right? I was so amped up to prove him wrong. I did, I spent the next five years, basically wanting to show him that he had made a huge mistake by not giving this young 24 year old a chance.

Well, the reason I wanted to work there and for him is I had figured out that, and I'm sure most of you have figured this out early too, that the one thing that would probably most determine success or failure would be if I could find a mentor, someone who'd take me under their wing and show me how it works, show me how I should think about work. So, I was able to find that man. I remember one day we were at a lunch with someone, I can't remember if he was trying to buy or sell property or whatever with this other man, but there were three of us sitting at the table. After we had finished the meal, the waitress brought the check and put it in the center of the table on one of those little poles that has a little ring at the top and somehow she put the check right there. So it was, the check was right in the center table almost eye level between my mentor and the man that he was meeting with. And of course I'm the gopher. I was doing the gopher jobs, but I was learning this as we went.

So, the meal had long been over and these two men were going back and, and suddenly comprehension spread over me. They were trying to outdo one another to not pay the bill. And this went on for, it seemed like half an hour. It probably wasn't, but I was really getting a lesson in how not to do my work. Finally, my mentor in a moment of brilliance slid back his chair and started to get up and went like this and then he sat back down. Well, the other person made his feigned effort to reach out for the bill, but of course he was going to be too slow to pick up the bill, right? And there he was all by himself out in the open with his hand, like a few inches from the check and he was forced to go ahead then and take the check and pay it. And my mentor won.

We're going to look at work today. We're going to look at how we should think about work today. And of course, one of the ways we learn how we should think about our work is by learning how not to do it from worldly people. But we're going to be looking at a more, let's just say spiritual approach this morning, but first we're going to give a couple of shout outs. Today's area director shout out, goes to Nate Flynn, he's in Southern Indiana, and he is just ... What a good looking guy, right? All of our guys are just so incredible. And so Nate, we're really honored to have you to be part of the team. So if you're in

the Southern Indiana area, South of Bloomington a nature man. Then also a shout out today to the "Guys Night Out" and Mike Pratt, leads this group in South ... Pronounce it for me, somebody from Massachusetts. Chatham. That's what I thought. Mike Pratt leads this group in South Chatham, Massachusetts. 10 to 12 men and they've been meeting with us for a couple of years on the second Wednesday of the month. They meet in the evenings in South Chatham and their sentence is, the men of South Chatham gathering to learn more about God. So I wonder if you'd join me in giving a very warm, rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to Nate and then also to "Guys Night Out". One, two, three. Hoo-rah. Men, we're honored to have you as part of our Bible study. Welcome.

GOD'S DESIGN IS FOR YOU TO FIND SATISFACTION IN YOUR WORK

Okay, so the series is **The Christian Man**. Today's message work. How should I think about my work? We're going to begin by looking at God's design. It's for you to find satisfaction in your work and so you should be at the Ecclesiastes chapter two verse 24. The Bible teaches that it is normal, it is the normal human experience to find satisfaction or enjoyment in your work. Verse 24, "A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their toil. This too I see," is from where? "The hand of God. For without him who can eat or find enjoyment." And by the way, this word, enjoyment in verse 25, it is a feeling. It is a feeling.

And then the next verse we want to look at is chapter three verse 22. Chapter three verse 22. "So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work because that is their lot." And then in chapter five verse 18, so Solomon, now he's been thinking over riches and so forth. He comes to this conclusion, "This is what I have observed to be good. That it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and define satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them for this is their lot." And there's some more you could read there too as well if you want it to.

So basically, men are created to work. So, Mike Rowe started a TV show called Dirty Jobs. How many of you have ever seen Dirty Jobs? Truth is, I've never seen it, but I did see him on an interview. It was Meet The Press. I tape, Meet The Press, and then usually watch it on Monday or Tuesday. And it's the most fascinating interview that I've ever seen on that show. Basically, what he did was started this show and then he found that these men who were doing these dirty jobs, to his surprise, to his initial surprise, they love what they're doing, because they are able to see an immediate result for their work. So, you might see somebody mowing a lawn or doing a menial task, maybe collecting garbage, but you should know that many of these men understand that their work is a calling, that what they are doing is making a difference. Anybody who's ever lived through a garbage strike understands how important it is to remove the trash. And so, there is this feeling that comes, this emotion that comes from doing work that you really enjoy.

One more story. I was taking my automobile in for some repair. Christopher and I had become friends. He's the service rep that I would see over a period of a few years. So, I asked him, "How's it going today?" And he said, "Well, it's going." And I said, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that." And then I said, "Well at least you have a job is going to make a difference in the history of the world." And he didn't look at me like I was some sort of a nut. So, I continued. I said, "Isn't it nice that you have a job that really does make a difference? Because when people bring their car to you for service, if they didn't have you to do that, then they wouldn't have automobiles to get to work. Where they earn money that allows them to buy groceries and pay rent and health care needs and pay for children's education and all of these things. And then think of all the mothers who need their cars to be serviceable, to get the children to school, to go to after school activities."

I said, "So it's just incredible. And by the way, if you weren't here then that means that people wouldn't be able to get to work. They wouldn't be able to do all of these things. It would be absolute chaos if you weren't here to do this work." He said, "Wow. You know, I never really thought about it quite like that before, but yeah, I guess what I'm doing really does make a difference." I'm sure that he already knew in his heart that what he was doing made a difference. But it's good to stop every now and then to just think deeply, a little more deeply about the impact of all of these intersecting jobs, or a limo driver, or whatever it is. And so, here's the **Big Idea** for the day. There is no greater feeling ... Remember that word in Ecclesiastes is a feeling, that enjoyment. **There's no greater feeling than to believe this is what I'm supposed to be doing right here right now, even if it's hard.** That's a long one, right? You might want to just take a photograph of that one. There's no greater feeling than to believe this is what I'm supposed to be doing, right here right now, even if it's hard.

BUILDING A "THEOLOGY OF WORK"

And so how do you get that feeling? Well, first for that to happen, we need to have a correct theology of work. So, let's build a theology of work. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to work from the book *The Christian Man*. I'm going to use that as, well to keep me on track, but I'm going to put up three slides for you that are the beliefs. 12 beliefs that are in the book about a theology of work. So here are 12 beliefs for a theology work. And again, you could write them down if you want. If it was me, I'd just take a picture. But that's just me.

So, the first belief in a theology of work is that you were created to do real work that makes a real difference. In other words, work isn't just something we do to earn money so that we can then go and do what we really want to do. There's this intrinsic value in the work itself. So if you work at Home Depot and a housewife comes in and she needs something that's up on the third shelf and you'll go get the ladder and get that for her, that's really making an actual difference in someone's life. It has intrinsic value, that act. It doesn't seem important, but if whatever she's getting, light bulbs that need to be replaced or whatever it is, there's intrinsic value in that work and this is what God gave to us and it's often taught, called in theology, the cultural mandate. You can find it at Genesis chapter one 27 and 28. Bottom line is we're created in his image and he's given us this command to rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and every living creature and so forth. So work is part of our DNA. We've been designed to do good work on earth.

Number two work is a calling for which you are ordained by God. I've told this story so many times, I just was embarrassed to put it in the book, but I want to tell you the story anyway. So we had a man come here one Friday morning and at the visitor's table where I asked the men to tell a little bit of their story, he said, "All of my life, all I ever wanted to do was to be a high school mathematics teacher. And then my dream came true. But after I'd been on the job for a few years, I realized that a couple of problems existed that I was not prepared for. Number one, my students were coming to school with problems that math can't solve. And then number two, the Christian teachers in the school didn't know each other."

And he said, "So God has given me a passion, not only for high school mathematics, but also he has given me this passion to help understand how we can give the students what they need that that math can't solve. And so I've been coalescing the Christian teachers together in the school and now we have a little community and so forth." And then he said at the end of all that he said this, he said, "Basically, I'm an ordained math teacher." Wow, what an incredible insight. And so whatever you do, maybe you're a lawyer. If you're a lawyer, you are an ordained lawyer. If you're a real estate salesman, you are an

ordained real estate salesman. If you're teaching Chinese language to online students, you are an ordained online teacher and so forth and so on. So work is a calling for which you are ordained by God.

And then the next belief is that every vocation has dignity. So, I told you about Mike Rowe. After I heard about this thing about Mike Rowe, I started watching some of the people who had dirty jobs that I was connected with. Well, our bug exterminator, Charles, who for 40 years, he just passed away, for 40 years he was the only person who ever took care of the house and took care of the bugs. But he loved what he did. He loved being an exterminator. And he brought joy wherever he was. He was the one of the kindest, most gentle and joyful people that I've ever known. And he understood that his vocation, that there was dignity. Any of you ever have a spouse who's freaked out with you because there was a live bug in your house? Well, of course you have. So, you know that this is a vocation that makes a difference and there is dignity in every vocation.

And then every vocation is sacred to the Lord. How many references do you think there are to the word secular in your Bible? Those of you who have a concordance, look it up. How many? Zero. If you look up the word secular, it's not even in the Bible. The Bible is basically a dripping with the holiness and the sanctity of our vocation next up. And what we're trying to do here is just overview a good theology of work. So work is hard because of the fall. So what's the big idea? This is what I'm supposed to be doing right here, right now. Even if it's hard and we know that all vocations are hard, why are they hard? They're hard because of the fall. I've always found the fall to be an offense to reason. The idea that that one man, because of the act of actually one woman who tricked a man. The idea that there's this federal view that because of that one deed that all men now have the ground cursed by the sweat of your brow. You know, you will eat from the fruit of the land and all that. And so, you have to do your work while feeling what? The prick of thorns.

The fall isn't an offense of human reason, but here's the thing, once accepted, it makes perfect sense of the human condition. And so we do our work against the fall. I remember Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, now CRU. I asked him one day, I said, "You travel all over the world. What percentage of your job is just hard?" He said, "Well to tell you the truth, about 90% of it's hard, but it's just what needs to be done." And then one afternoon on Oprah, I had taped it. Okay. But I heard her say there was somebody on there that I was interested in, but as a sidebar, she said, "It's true that I have a very famous and glamorous life, but you should also know that about 80% of it is just hard." And this is a good theology of work. Work is hard because of the fall.

And then next, work is not just a platform for ministry. It is ministry. So, when you go to work in the morning, you're not just enduring the hours from 8:30 to 12:00 so that you can go out with a coworker and share Jesus over tacos with them, as interesting as that might be, but the work itself is ministry. In other words, if you do not do excellent work from 8:30 to 12:00 you're not going to be a person who has really credibility to say anything from 12:00 to 1:00. The work itself is ministry. This is one of the biggest parts of this message that I want to get across.

In first Corinthians 10:31 Paul said this, he said, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it for the glory of God." Everything we do. Everything we do. Every single thing we do, we should be doing for the glory of God. So, whether you're an airline gate agent or a barista in a coffee shop, you should be doing that. We should be doing that for the glory of God. We should be seeking to demonstrate the character of Jesus Christ, the example of Jesus Christ in every interaction that we have.

So, because there is this intrinsic value in the work itself, work is ministry. Colossians three, verse 22 ... Well, I'm just going to drop down to verse 24. Colossians 3:24, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for human masters. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." So work is not just a platform for ministry. It is ministry. And next, every interaction is an opportunity then to bring glory to Christ. Look, just say you're a waiting tables at a restaurant and a couple comes in and sits down on your station. You know nothing about them, but they may have just gotten the news that they've had a miscarriage or they may be celebrating a 10th wedding anniversary, or it could be a weekly date night. You just don't know exactly what's going on. Or maybe who knows? Maybe they haven't gone out for 20 years and this is their first time out.

Every interaction, each of those situations is an opportunity to bring glory to Jesus Christ. So how do you do that? Good evening. My name is Pat. I'm so happy you've come to dine with us this morning. I hope you have a lovely evening. You don't have to say God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. In fact, that would be a little weird. But by doing that, by raising the bar on your service you are bringing glory to Christ. You don't have to actually use ... Or whether it's maybe you're delivering an appliance to someone or maybe you're putting four tires on someone's car. You can do that and should do that as working for the Lord Jesus, because it is the Lord Christ you're serving when you do that.

Next, there is always a higher purpose to the work that you're doing. So, what's the main thing that's happening in the world right now all the time? The main thing that's happening in the world is what God is what? Sovereignly what? Orchestrating what? All human events. Even the seemingly random circumstances arise. Why to bring us- To bring us into the right relationship with him and right relationship with each other. And you've heard me say many, many times, but if the Bible were to have a subtitle, it doesn't, but if it were to have a subtitle. A good subtitle for the Bible would be what? Loving father relentlessly pursues a relationship with his children. Loving father relentlessly pursues a relationship with his children. So that's what's going on in the world. So how does work fit into that? Well our jobs become his venues of reconciliation. And so, when we do our work with excellence and when we do it with grace and we bring glory to him, then we become venues of reconciliation. We become people that are ... People want to know exactly what is making us tick. Why are we acting with such dignity and such joy? Why are we acting with such excellence when maybe somebody else that they have encountered in a similar situation isn't living up to that standard? Well, it's because we understand that we can be venues of reconciliation with God and with each other.

All right, so then the next one. So that's eight, I guess of them, huh? How am I doing on time, by the way? What time is it? 29, okay. So, I'm going to speed this up. So, doing your work well is a testimony in and of itself. First Thessalonians 4:11 and 12, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. Mind your own business, work with your hands so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody." Next, it is good to enjoy your work and find it's satisfying. We've talked about the verses enough for that. We do need to take our work seriously.

So, we had a woman in our office. I asked her for some input on, she's in her mid 30s, she's a brilliant person, and asked her for some input on the men in her circles and she wrote this incredible treatise. Actually, it was so impressive. I decided I couldn't change a word in it. I didn't try to paraphrase it and put it in my own words. I just reproduced it right here in the book, but one of the points of this is that there is a cultural phenomenon now to think that because of the way corporations and companies and businesses are turning over employees, that there is a cultural phenomenon that people are not taking the work that they're doing as seriously.

I'm oversimplifying this, but there is less pressure. Men are feeling less pressure to be breadwinners. Women are working. Ambition just looks different today than it looked say 20 years ago. Bottom line is for many of this woman's friends who are married to these men, it's not working for them. Okay. It's not working for them. She says this, "Very rarely have I had a girlfriend share that she was struggling because her husband worked too much or was too fixated on making money and being successful." So there is a place where the scriptures talk to us. Paul says we ought to follow his example. He gives us a model to imitate. He labored and toiled so that we would not be a burden on any of you. Second Thessalonians chapter three verses six to 12, some people might need to hear that and then finally, "Work as a place to make plans and build for the future, but always in prayerful submission to God's will."

So James four verses 13 to 15 say, "Now listen, you say today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city. Stay there for a year. Carry out business and make money. Why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow? What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears. Instead, you ought to say, if it is the Lord's will, we will do this or that." So is the Bible saying that you should not make plans? Actually it's saying the exact opposite of that. The Bible is saying that you should make plans. We will live and do this or that. What is that? That's making plans, but you ought to say if it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

And so, make plans, be aggressive, pursue them. Be goal oriented. If you're goal oriented, or if you're a problem solver, go for that approach. But do make plans, but make them in submission to God's will. So everything you do, one way to do that is to pray about every plan that you have before you actually execute it. And by the way, I think it's a good idea to come to God with a blank sheet of paper and pray and say, God, what is it that I should be planning? Rather than develop a plan and say, God, here's my plan. Please let me have it. I've talked about that before. Again, the Big Idea for today is this; **There's no greater feeling than to believe this is what I'm supposed to be doing right here, right now, even if it's hard.**

IF YOU'RE NOT SATISFIED, CHANGE YOUR THEOLOGY OR CHANGE YOU JOB

And then finally, if you're not satisfied, what should you do? Well, you should change your theology or you should change your job, or maybe you should do both. And so these action steps here are out of the coaching guide. Everybody either should have already a copy of the coaching guide or if not, you can download it at christianmanbook.com. It's free. And so this is the action step in the coaching guide. So if you are doing the coaching guide in a one on one mentoring relationship or in a small group, then you would be asked to answer these questions. How are you wired? What does that tell you about yourself and the types of positions that would satisfy you in the long-term? What are your social needs? For example, if you don't like people, I mean, well that's probably not the right way to say it. If people wear you out, you probably don't want to be a customer service rep. You know what I'm saying?

And then what are your health stress needs? Some people thrive on stress, most don't. You know, what's your long-term vocational goal? Where would you like to end up? And then here's the big ... Here's the wildcard. Assuming time and money were no object, you've probably heard this before, but assuming time and money were no object, what would you do if you could do anything you wanted to do? What is it that would make you feel the kind of satisfaction where you could exclaim the big idea here today, there is no greater feeling than what I'm going through right now. There's no greater feeling than to believe you know this, this is what I supposed to be doing right here, right now, even if it's hard.

If you can identify what that might be. And you're not doing that now, why not do it? What's holding you back?

All right, you can talk about that in a moment. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, our dearest Father. So work is something, Lord, that you've given to us. It's, it's a gift. It's a calling. It's a mission. There's intrinsic value in it. Lord, I pray that you would help each of us to have a right theology of work so that we could find the satisfaction that comes from doing the work that we have. And if we're not satisfied with the work that we are doing, that you would give us the courage to lean into that and find the vocation that would bring us the satisfaction that you have for us. In Jesus name. Amen.