

FOUNDATIONS FOR
LAITY RENEWAL

Transforming Daily Life

719 Earl Garrett Street
Kerrville, TX 78028

Three Sermon Outlines on

Work and Faith

**“Thank God It’s Monday:
A Biblical Theology of Work”**

Rev. Corey Widmer

SERMON NOTES

*The
High Calling
of Our
Daily Work*

*Making a real living connects you to a bigger picture,
a grand design, an abundant life.*

*Each of us has only a small part to play, but what a part!
It’s the high calling of our daily work.*

– Howard Butt, Jr., of Laity Lodge
TheHighCalling.org

Thank God It's Monday: A Biblical Theology of Work

Introduction to the Sermon Series

A seminary professor of mine once suggested an interesting practice that I still follow today. He advised that when meeting a parishioner, try to arrange to meet him or her at their place of work. After doing this a few times, I was surprised and amused by the reactions. Usually the person is initially confused at why I want to meet them at their workplace. After explaining that I like to see where they are called to live out their discipleship in their everyday life, I am usually met with either pleasure (“No one has ever wanted to see my workplace before!”) or embarrassment (“I don’t think this is the sort of place that preachers would like to see.”). But overall, it has cemented my belief in the pervasive presence of the sacred/secular divide among contemporary Christians. The majority of our laypeople have no idea how their faith connects to the substance of their everyday work, and the alarming invasion of their pastor into their place of work exposes that disconnect: religion stays at church, work stays at work. This is not their fault; it’s ours. We have done an adequate job at equipping our people for the private, spiritual parts of their lives, but an abysmal job at equipping them for the public, secular parts of their lives. Of course, it is the latter parts where they spend most of their time.

This set of three sermons is a suggestion for a three-week sermon series that surveys a simple biblical theology of work. It draws from the Old Testament creation narrative, Old Testament wisdom literature, and a New Testament epistle.

Sermon 1: The Goodness of Work

Sermon 2: The Problem of Work

Sermon 3: The Redemption of Work

May God give us all the grace to equip our people to see how the Lordship of Jesus Christ extends to every area of their lives, especially their work!

Grace and peace,
Corey Widmer

Corey Widmer is Co-Pastor of East End Fellowship in Richmond, VA, a multi-ethnic city congregation. He is also Associate Pastor of Preaching at Third Presbyterian Church, Richmond. After serving as Study Assistant to the Rev. Dr. John R. W. Stott, Corey earned his M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. He can be reached at coreyjwidmer@gmail.com.

Sermon 1: The Goodness of Work

Texts: Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 2:15

Dominant Thought: The nature of work is good and the purpose of work is love, both of which mirror the loving creative work of God himself.

Introduction

You have probably attended a worship service in which all the Sunday school teachers are acknowledged, thanked, and prayed for. A friend of mine told me about a teacher in one church who was offended by this experience. Surprised, my friend asked her why. She replied, “I spend an hour a week teaching Sunday school, and they haul me up to the front to pray for me. The rest of the week I am a full-time teacher, and the church has not prayed for me once.”

What this teacher is articulating is a common experience that many of you may have felt. Many times it feels like that the church “blesses” those parts of your life that involve the church and your faith-related responsibilities. This communicates that the things that really matter to God are the church-related things you do: Bible study, prayer, church activities. But when it comes to what you spend the great majority of your time doing during the week, we’re just not really sure what that has to do with your Christian life at all.

Dorothy Sayers wrote, “How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?” If the gospel only has an impact on your prayer life, your spiritual life, but not on who you are during the week, in school, at your job, in the home, who you are in the great majority of your life, then the gospel really is irrelevant.

We’re going to be spending the next few weeks demonstrating that this isn’t true. The gospel is utterly relevant to all parts of your life, including your work. So we are going to do a big survey of the Bible, from beginning to middle to end, to see what it has to say about our work and how the gospel impacts our everyday lives. Let’s turn to our text.

Point 1: The Nobility of Work

The most obvious note we must make from this Genesis text is that work is a part of creation and not an evil product of the Fall. This may come as a surprise to some of you! We see in both Genesis chapter 1 (vv. 26 and 28) and 2 (v. 15) that work, specifically the cultivation and care of the created order, is something we were created by God to do. In fact, even before humans go to work, God has been at work. God plants, God builds, God digs, God creates. And then, God calls humanity to join him in the work.

Illustration: My wife loves to garden. As she is out gardening, she often invites our daughters to join her in the work. They have no idea what they are doing and often make a mess. But it is beautiful to see them mirroring the motions of their mother, reflecting her own creativity through their childlike and lovely creative work. God is creating, cultivating, sustaining, renewing the face of the earth, and he invites us as his little children to be a part of that good and beautiful work.

What does this mean for you? That your life is far more meaningful than you ever imagined. God has called you into the work of partnering with him in caring for and cultivating his creation. He has made us deputies, agents, stewards over his World, delegating to us his authority. This does not mean simply recycling and using energy efficient bulbs—although it certainly includes that! It is more broadly speaking the work of holding creation itself together. The work of a mother with her children, the work of a business person with her clients, the work of a student with his books, the work of a doctor with his patients. Whether you are changing diapers, studying algebra, sweeping floors, managing portfolios, painting a wall: you are partnering with God in sustaining his creation, our God who is a parent, an artist, an investor, a preacher, and a servant. Work is good because it is at root partnering with our God who creates and sustains the earth.

Point 2: The Purpose of Work

Why do we work? What's the point? If we are honest, most of us would say we work for money, status, and security. We work to take care of our families. We work to build our reputations. Though there is some good in these motivations, these are mostly self-focused purposes. And the church has not helped you in this either. The church often subtly suggests that your work is either for occasional evangelism opportunities, or to make money to give to the church. None of these reflect the true purpose of work, as we see in the creation narrative.

What is the biblical purpose of work? Love. Simply put, to lovingly contribute to the common good of the world in service to others. The work we witness God doing in Genesis 1 and 2 is the most generous, loving, and beautiful work done for the sake of the humanity he loves. He creates light, he creates vegetation, he creates diversity and coloration, he creates beauty. He does all this for men and women to enjoy. Even after humanity rebels, God continues to work and sustain his creation (see Psalm 8) even for those who do not acknowledge him (Matthew 5:45). God is constantly and lovingly at work for the common good of the world.

Our work has the same purpose. The two most basic commands, to love God and to love our neighbor, can be simply expressed through our daily work. There are innumerable ways we can daily give, serve, and contribute to others and the common life of society in ways that make us useful and beneficial to others.

Now immediately you may be thinking of the “helping professions” that are explicitly serving felt needs. But that only scratches the surface.

Illustration: Think about the chair you are sitting in right now. Somewhere someone drilled holes in the metal that constitutes that chair. There is a guy sitting at a drill press somewhere that drilled those holes for you. Is that not a work of love? Is he not serving you this morning, is he not making your experience this morning more comfortable? Or consider the breakfast cereal you ate this morning. To get that cereal to your table, farmers cultivated wheat, scientists checked the food for purity, bankers arranged for financing, engineers created farm equipment, operators operated the farm equipment, loaders loaded it on to trucks, truckers drove the trucks, construction works laid the roads, grocers stocked the shelves, cashiers checked you out: All this for your bowl of cereal! All different kinds of work express service and love, not just nurses and social workers.

Work is contributing to the common life of the world, joining with God in sustaining creation. And this is all the more true for Christians, for we know the God who creates and sustains, and our own work mirrors the loving purposes of our creative and loving God. So don't work just to make money. There are many jobs that are very profitable and legal, but are not strengthening the fabric of our world or bringing more value to those around us. Indeed, there are some forms of work that could very well be negatively impacting the world, the poor, or the environment. Instead, work to love. Work to serve the common good—out of love for the world and the people God has made. Like God, use your work to bring order out of chaos—making the world orderly, livable, beautiful: reflecting the God who made you.

Summary and Conclusion

Today we have reflected on the Creation narrative and what it speaks to us about work. We have drawn from it two simple lessons: that the nature of work is good and that the purpose of work is love. Both of these aspects of work reflect the holy nature of the loving God who made us.

The gospel is the good news that through Jesus Christ, we may be reconciled to our Creator and restored to our intended purposes. So many people are wandering aimlessly wondering what is the point of their lives, living in a ground-hog-day-like cycle of meaninglessness as they run the rat race of our world. Family of God, see this amazing hope we have to offer to the world! Through Jesus Christ, not only is God offering eternal life but also hope for our daily existence, an invitation to know the God who created you and to know the reason for your existence! The gospel is not just an eternal hope for heaven, but a temporal hope for our daily workaday lives. There is more meaning to your life than you ever imagined, to join the work of a loving God in sustaining creation. What a purpose, what a calling. Thanks be to God.

Sermon 2 The Problem of Work

Text: Selected Proverbs 12:1, 13:4, 15:19, 19:5, 21:25, 24:30-34, 26:13-16

Dominant Thought: Though God has created our work to be good, it is cursed and distorted principally by our sinful self-absorption. But there is hope in the gospel, not just for our souls, but also for our work.

Introduction

My first job was as a maintenance worker at a summer camp. It felt exhilarating to be personally responsible for my own paycheck, and I was excited and idealistic about the duties before me. However, over the next few months, I realized how ill-equipped I was for the job. Over the course of the summer, I managed to damage a truck, crash a maintenance cart, lose many tools, rip a door off a shed, and set a patch of grass on fire. Needless to say, I was not asked to fill that job again. My idealistic expectations about the work crashed into the reality of my own incompetencies.

Last week we looked at the Creation narrative and discovered two fresh lessons about our daily work: that the nature of work is good and that the purpose of work is love. But we all know that the story of work does not end there. At some point, our ideal visions of work crash up against the reality of what