

Have you ever heard this popular saying? "**No one on his deathbed ever says, 'I wish I had spent more time at the office.'**" This modern proverb is on its way to becoming a classic; a timeless truth of life. The only problem is that **It's not true.**

In point of fact, many people on their deathbeds do regret not having spent more time at the office.

- Albert Einstein's last words to his son were: "If only I had more mathematics!"
- The French composer Ravel's final utterance was: "I still had so much music to write!"
- American engineer and inventor James Eads departed this world with: "I cannot die! I have not finished my work!"
- Charles Darwin voiced only one regret as he lay dying: "I am only sorry that I haven't the strength to go on with my research."
- And who can forget one of Jesus' famous last words on the cross, "It is finished." Yes, Jesus came to accomplish a certain task – to work until he finished his work.

Paul expressed the same joy and satisfaction over his life: "*As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. **I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.** And now the prize awaits me – the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. **And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return.***" 2 Tim 4:6-8 (NLT)

Sadly, for a lot of people the joy, the meaning, the blessings, the sense of fulfillment that should ensue from work, is missing. Instead, they view work as something to be endured, not enjoyed, work is considered only as a necessity of being alive. **You work to live. You live to work.**

And when they talk about work, it is often with a sense of drudgery and even despair. After all, it seems that our work is never done. Many times it is repetitive, time consuming, boring and never seems to bring in the reward we anticipate. And **we blame the fact that we have to work on the fall of humanity into sin.** But this is also not quite true. It is true that our work was made more difficult as a result of the fall since God promised Adam that he would now have to work harder to achieve less with the whole of creation having been corrupted by his rebellion. But it was the planet that was cursed, not the idea of work. Since Adam had first been created in God's image for the purpose of doing God's work.



(pause to look at picture)

By the way, there is something wrong with this picture, which I will point out a little later.

You see the need to “work” did not come with the fall, it was actually a pre-fall gift and responsibility that had originally been given to us for both God’s as well as our own benefit and fulfillment. Having completed his creation, God left Adam and Eve to carry on with His work, continuing the task of creating, taking responsibility for the planet that God had left in their charge. This is how Adam and Eve were to be fruitful and dominion.

So today let’s explore what we might call a theology of work.

1. What is it in work that makes us like God
2. What is it in work that fulfills our charge to live as God’s stewards
3. What is it in work that for us can be an act of worship.

These are just some of the questions we will try to answer today.

First, What is it in “doing work” that makes us like God.

Because, it is God’s basic nature to work. In fact, God was the first person who worked; at the very beginning creating our universe and world. Doing constructive work is just a part of who God is. And while God rested the seventh day – both creating the concept of rest and giving us a divinely appointed seven day cycle to follow (six days to work and one day to rest) -- on the eighth day, you can bet that God went back work and has been working ever since.

God’s continual work in our behalf is one of those aspects of His deity that we don’t often consider. But when Jesus was once again being challenged for healing on the Sabbath, he simply replied

‘My Father is still working,
and I also am working.’
John 5.17

Writing to the Church in Philippi Paul informed them ...

for it is God who is at work in you,
enabling you both to will and
to work for his good pleasure.
Philippians 2:13

Think for a moment about what this verse is saying: that God is working to help you both want to and have the strength to continue working for His glory.

You might ask, if God has all these other individuals working for Him (Jesus, the Holy Spirit, angels, pastors, believers), why He doesn't now just kick back and take it easy?

Well, the first answer that we have already noted is that "doing work" is just a part of God's nature. God just isn't one of those people who can sit back and take it easy.

A second answer is that God's continual work and care for His creation is one of the ways that He reveals Himself to us. Romans 1:19 declares that, *what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* So those people who are truly searching for God can first find him by seeing his hand at work in our world.

Thus it is no surprise that Jesus holds the same work ethic. While at the cross he may have "finished" his arduous task of obtaining our salvation, sitting down at the right hand of the Father was merely a metaphor for that victory. To this day our Bible assures us that our world continues to function only through the continuous work of Jesus. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians...

There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and **through whom we exist.**
1 Corinthians 8:6

Third, God apparently enjoys the work. Several times while creating our world and its inhabitants, God remarked "this is good, this is very good." As another wiser, truer, saying goes, "*If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life.*" God loves what He is doing, so work for Him is never a drudgery.

Thus having been created in God's image, we were also created at first with an inclination to work: being fruitful, multiplying, and having dominion – though I think we have multiplied enough by now – this is what God designed us to do; our work is another way of displaying God's image in our lives. As Paul would remind us

For we are what he has made us,
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.
Ephesians 2:10

Note two important points from this verse:

- first that having fallen from our original relationship with God, when we are recreated by faith in Christ we are also restored back to being able to better accomplish our original purpose: “doing good works.”
- And this doing of good works had all along been a part of God’s plan for our lives.

So both God, Jesus, and I am sure the Holy Spirit as well, continue working in our behalf and when we rejoin God’s family we are expected to also rejoin them in this task— to once again be fruitful in all our work, which is just one more way that we show ourselves to be God’s children and to become more like Jesus.

This brings us to the next question: **What is it in work that fulfills our charge to live as God’s stewards?**

Did you notice from our Scripture today that even before God created Adam and Eve, He had already created work for them to accomplish? Once again bringing the two creation stories together as part of the same, we can read that before blessing them and telling them to be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion, God had first planted a garden for them to take care of. As we learned a few weeks ago, this was not our typical vegetable patch but a complete world in itself, like the ancient walled private gardens of nobility. This garden contained all the trees, and all things good to eat along with all the animals. And Adam and Eve were placed in that garden to serve as its caretakers, working in and protecting what He had created. living as a steward, as a caretaker of God’s garden, this is how God expected Adam and Eve to be fruitful.

And by leaving it up to Adam to name the animals this is how God gave him “dominion” over all His creation. We don’t often think this way anymore but to know another’s name and even more so being the one who bestows that name, gives us a certain kind of power – dominion - over that which we have named.

We have seen this act of naming often illustrated in our scriptures while perhaps never quite having understood its real power. The power inherent in naming is why when the exhausted Jacob demanded to know the name of his all-night wrestling opponent, he never got that name, but instead got his own name changed. Only after his name change did Jacob now called “Israel” (meaning he who contends with God) realize how often he had fought with his creator.

This is also why the angel telling Joseph of Mary’s pregnancy also told him what to name the baby. By this, Joseph knew that he would only be the caregiver for someone

over whom he would never have dominion. The name Yeshua literally means "the salvation of God."

The Lord God took the man
and put him in the garden of Eden

to till it and keep it.

Genesis 2:15

Another interesting point of our Scripture lesson is that most modern translations have failed to fully communicate Adam and Eve's actual status as caretakers of God's garden. Our Bible says they were put there "to till it and keep it." Other translations use such words as to "to cultivate it" and "take care of it".

So first, realize that while cultivating and tilling are fairly easy tasks to understand, this also tells us that Adam was always meant to be a farmer: to be planting and harvesting his own crops (*he was never meant to just lay around under the trees eating what fell to the ground*).

And as we learned from the first creation story, that in those very first days God was also establishing God honoring occupations such as farmer, shepherd, fisherman, along with the domestic plants and animals that he created for their care; but until humans were created there was no one to do these tasks. That is another reason why our second creation story notes that certain plants and herbs were not yet growing, *because there was no one to till the ground* (Genesis 2:5). Adam was always meant to do farm work, his fall just made it more difficult.

But these next words "to keep it" to "take care of it" do not do justice to the Hebrew word they are attempting to translate. **This is a word which usually signified the duties of a priest working in God's Temple.** So caring for God's garden – a place sacred to God – was also Adam's and Eve's religious duty. This made Adam and Eve the very first Priests of God charged with the care of all of His sacred creation; this is what made their fall into sin even more grievous.



Which brings us back to the problem I find with this picture – not in their fall but in their caring for God's garden. Did you figure out what was wrong?

Remember that Eve was created to be Adams “helper” in all of this. Together they were to till and take care of the garden..... So why is Eve sitting there under the tree playing with the animals while Adam digs away in the potato patch?

And perhaps now you realize that even though Adam and Eve were expelled from God’s sacred garden, their purpose for existence, their religious duties were never taken from them or from us. As both the Garden back then, and all of creation now, still belong to God who made it, we are still charged with being fruitful and having dominion, thus we still remain responsible to live as both God’s stewards and His priests; it is still our religious duty to care His creation; all of it!

Which brings up our third major question: **What is it about work that can be for us a form of worship?**

Very simply, working as God’s steward and His priest – being fruitful, multiplying, and having dominion - is our primary way of displaying God’s image in us and giving Him the glory as we continue God’s creative work in His world. Thus working in a godly manner becomes a major way of worshipping God (giving God the glory in our work).

Yes the Fall has made some work harder. And yes some work now because of our fallen world can be a form drudgery, but if we dedicate even our drudge work to God – working as if for God - that will change the way we view our work. This is why our Bible instructs us...

Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord, not for your masters ... since you serve the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23-24
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Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. Because that is what Christ saved us to be doing, those good works that God had long ago planned for us to busy ourselves with (cf Titus 2:14).

So the reason why we work is because it is part of the image God that he designed into us, it is in fulfillment of our stewardship role in caring for God’s creation, and it is our priestly way of offering glory to God. Which brings up one final cautionary question.

Just as happened to all creation can there also be some forms of work and some ways or attitudes of working that with the fall have now been corrupted and cannot bring glory to God?

When you think about this, the answer is YES.

- There are now some types of work that are obviously not God honoring.
- There are also types of work that may or may not be God honoring depending on the way they are accomplished.
- And perhaps what could make any job God honoring or not also depends upon the attitude we have while doing it.

Certainly such immoral work as enslaving or prostituting other people, robbery, drug dealing or racketeering can never honor God.

Then there can be those jobs that may or may not honor God depending upon whether in doing so we are abusing or neglecting our charge for planetary stewardship; Such jobs as oil or mineral extraction without concern to the environmental damage done or failing to restore the land after the particular project is completed does not live up to our stewardship responsibilities.

I remember that when we first moved to Midway Pennsylvania in the heart of coal strip mining country, one day as our young family walked down a country road near our house, I looked over a shallow earthen bank right beside the road to stare in shock down into a massive pit mine, with steep walls dropping 40' straight to the bottom, that had been simply left there for many years after the mining had been completed. It took several more years for that pit to eventually be filled in and even so I think it was as a result of a lawsuit brought against that company.

So pay attention to this careful distinction. Contrary to what some environmental groups proclaim, it is not immoral for humans to exploit the resources (coal, oil, natural gas, uranium) that God has built into the planet for our use. It is immoral to do so with regard for our stewardship responsibility to care for the rest of the planet while doing so and to remediate our worksites after we conclude. This principle also applies to all form of manufacturing that also leave a waste product.

And finally, whatever work we are about, no matter in how many other ways it is moral and proper, that which determines if it honors God and fulfills our stewardship responsibilities depends upon how and with what attitude we go about our work.

We can do the right thing for all the wrong reasons and God will not be fooled. We can also go about what would otherwise be God honoring work with a bad attitude and it will win no points with God because He is always monitoring our hearts (cf. 1 Corinthians 13).

Thus there is no work that is too humble to be done for God as an act of worship.

In the 1600's retired soldier Nicolas Herman entered a monastery as a lay brother, meaning that while the monks studied and prayed, he was assigned to the kitchen as their cook with little time to participate in their religious practices. No one remembers any of those monk's names but Brother Lawrence (Nicholas's monastic name) gained world renown that continues to this day because he dedicated himself to being a cook for the glory of God. Late in life at other's request, Lawrence wrote a little book about his efforts at holy living. One bit of advice which he offers in his book is, *We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed*

And one of his now famous prayers is...

*Lord of all pots and pans and things
Since I've not time to be
A saint by doing lovely things or
Watching late with Thee
Or dreaming in the dawn light or
Storming Heaven's gates
Make me a saint by getting meals and
Washing up the plates....*

*Warm all the kitchen with Thy love,
And light it with Thy peace
Forgive me all my worrying and make
My grumbling cease.
Thou who didst love to give men food,
In room or by the sea
Accept this service that I do,
I do it unto Thee.*

Let us follow Brother Lawrence's lead in fulfilling our God designed purpose, responsibility for stewardship, and religious duty in working at everything we do for God's glory.

Let's pray about this.