

## Session 1 A Theology of Work

### I. How Do You Spell Success?

#### A. Three snapshots of “work”:

##### 1) From the White House to the prison laundry room.

From childhood onward, Charles Colson was obsessed with living a life of significance. So he joined the Marines, got an education, entered politics and worked his way up the ladder finally becoming an aide to President Nixon. When he was sent to prison for his crimes in the Watergate scandal, his world was shattered. The trauma brought him to repentance and faith in Christ. Working in the prison laundry room, Colson had the opportunity to think clearly about the true meaning of life.

*My anxiety in prison, I see now, stemmed from confusing power and fame with significance. Living a life of significance does not depend on the prerogatives that belong to high position; it depends even less on others' esteem and praise.... The workbench, the kitchen counter, the computer station, or any other workspace is **an altar**. There is intrinsic meaning to work well done – and when we fail to grasp this, we become hollow persons (The Good Life. p. 83).*

Moral: Until we learn to think Biblically about work, we too, like Colson, will likely spend our lives in searching unsuccessfully for **significance**.

##### 2) The sacrament of cooking an omelet.

Brother Lawrence was a cook in a 17<sup>th</sup> century monastery. Though he devoted himself to many “spiritual” duties during the day it was in his kitchen that he especially found God. Here he learned how to “**practice the presence of God**.”

*The time of action does not differ from that of prayer. I possess God as peacefully in the bustle of my kitchen, where sometimes several people are asking me for different things at the same time, as I do upon my knees before the Holy Sacrament... I turn my little omelet in the pan for the love of God. When it is finished, if I have nothing to do, I prostrate myself on the ground and worship my God, who gave me the grace to make it, after which I arise happier than a king (The Practice of the Presence of God, pp. 84f.).*

Moral: the real point in life is not to do great things, but to do **ordinary things** in a great way!

##### 3) All Christians are priests!

One of the most revolutionary doctrines of the Reformation was Luther's rediscovery of the biblical teaching on the “priesthood of all believers” which dealt a death-blow (at least in theory) to the non-biblical division between **clergy** and **laity** that had crept into the church. Though some feared this teaching would diminish the role of those who served in the church, what it really did was elevate the role of those who labored in fields and shops.

*The works of monks and priests... do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.... Indeed, the menial housework of a manservant or maidservant is often more acceptable to God than all the fastings and other works of a monk or priest, because the monk or priest lacks faith (Martin Luther, quoted in LifeWork, p. 59).*

Moral: In the eyes of God, there is no distinction between **secular** work and **sacred** work. All work is holy and all workers are “priests.”

B. Are you willing to work at thinking about work?

Most of us will spend 50-75% of our waking hours and 60-90% of the years of our lives working. Yet few of us have taken time to develop a **theology of work**, a Christian understanding of what we do from Monday to Friday. The focus of DMM this year aims to help each of us understand how God wants to be intimately involved in our lives every day of the week. Hopefully, this study will enable us to stop saying T.G.I. Friday and start saying **T.G.I. Monday**.

Because our study is going to examine the way we invest our lives throughout the week, we are of necessity going to be touching on the most basic questions of human existence:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- What is my calling?
- How can I discover my calling?
- What is significant? How does God spell success?
- Is Sunday more important than Monday? Is worship more important than work?
- Should I quit my job so I can do something significant... like go into “the ministry”?
- What is rest? The Sabbath?
- What does God think about retirement?
- Are all forms of labor equally valid?
- What is the difference between a Christian plumber and a non-Christian plumber?

Whether we realize it or not, all of us have a theology of work. It may be conscious or unconscious. It may be coherent or incoherent. It may be good theology or bad theology. It may be based in the Bible or based in our own twisted imagination. But all of us have a theology of work. It is the purpose of this year’s DMM:

- 1) To help each man become **conscious** of his current theology of work, then to correct what is bad theology and develop what is biblical theology.
- 2) To enable each man to **think biblically** about his work... what he does with his time and resources during the week.
- 3) To challenge each man to know his **calling** in life and to give himself to it 100%.

C. What is your working concept of work?

- 1) **A paycheck?** I work so I can have money to provide the things I need (food, shelter, etc.) and make possible the things I want (vacation, college, new car, etc.).
- 2) A source of **identity?** When people ask me who I am I say, “I’m a doctor,” or “I’m an electrician”, or “I’m a teacher.” My work defines me. I am what I do.
- 3) **A curse?** When Adam sinned, work became a bad thing. The earth began to produce thorns and thistles. Adam’s work became toil and labor. Work was now a burden to be borne. He worked by the sweat of his brow. This gives birth to the notion “T.G.I. Friday.”

- 4) **A necessity?** One study revealed that 63% of the respondents said that they received no satisfaction from their work. They worked because they had to. As the bumper sticker says, “A bad day at the beach is better than a good day at work.”
- 5) A **means** to some other **end?** I work so that I can achieve some other purpose: esteem, financial freedom, comfort, prestige, provide for family, the weekend, retirement, etc.
- 6) A place to go where I can be a **good witness** of Christ? My employment is insignificant. What matters is witnessing for Christ there where he placed me.
- 7) A **calling** from God? Just as God calls some into missions or the pastorate, so he calls others into medicine, or carpentry, or administration, or politics, etc.

Illustration: Centuries ago a visitor was walking through a city in Europe where he came upon three men hard at work on a construction site. Each one was chiseling at stone. The visitor asked each one what they were doing. The first one responded gruffly, “Can’t you see? I’m chiseling a rock!” The second answered, “I’m earning a paycheck.” The third one looked up smiling and said, “I’m building a cathedral for the glory of God!”

Moral: Three men doing the same thing are not necessarily doing the same thing.

### TABLE TALK

1. How do you define success?
2. What is your conception of work?
3. What do you do? Let each man at the table explain his “job,” “profession.”
4. Is your work a joy or a burden? A blessing or a curse? Why?
5. If you could have one question answered about work, what would it be?

## II. God Works.

### A. Creation.

Unlike the gods of Greece who viewed work (manual labor) as something that was beneath them and should be avoided, the God of the Bible is a **worker!** From the first page we discover that he is creatively at work – speaking, fashioning, designing, sculpting... working to make the universe (light, space, time, heavens, earth, sun, stars, seas, land, birds, fish, animals, and human beings).

- *And on the seventh day God finished his **work** that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his **work** that he had done (Genesis 2:2).*
- *When I look at your heavens, the **work** of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:3-4).*

In fact, the Bible is rich in terms that describe God as a worker: Builder/architect (Proverbs 8:27-31), Metalworker (Isaiah 1:24-26), Garment maker (Job 29:14), Potter (Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:1-6), Farmer (Hosea 10:11), Shepherd (Psalm 23:1-4), Etc.

#### B. New creation.

In the Bible, God's act of redemption is also spoken of as a "work." Just as with the first creation, this new creation demanded planning, designing, speaking and actions.

- *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his **work**" (John 4:34).*
- *But Jesus answered them, "My Father is **working** until now, and I am **working**" (John 5:17).*
- *Then they said to Jesus, "What must we do, to be doing the **works** of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the **work** of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:28-29).*
- *We must **work** the **works** of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can **work**" (John 9:4).*
- *I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the **work** that you gave me to do (John 17:4).*
- *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good **work** in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).*
- *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work** out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who **works** in you, both to will and to **work** for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).*

#### C. God's strange work.

When God works, it is always to accomplish something good. Everything he makes and does is "very good" (Genesis 1:31). However, the presence of sin and rebellion in the world has caused him to work in ways that are "**alien**" to his basic nature. The Bible speaks of God's wrath and judgment as his "strange work."

*For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim; as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused; to do his deed—strange is his deed! and to work his work—alien is his work! <sup>22</sup> Now therefore do not scoff, lest your bonds be made strong; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord GOD of hosts against the whole land (Isaiah 28:21-22).*

#### D. God's work (all of it) is a masterpiece! To contemplate his work brings **joy** and **praise**. All that God does, he does with excellence. There are no flaws in his work. His work is perfect (Deut. 32:4).

- *I will **ponder** all your work, and **meditate** on your mighty deeds (Psalm 77:12).*
- *For you, O LORD, have made me **glad** by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for **joy** (Psalm 92:4).*

### III. Man Works.

Man is created in the **image of God**. God is a worker so by definition man will be a worker too. The types of work God does are intended to find their reflection in the types of work man will do as well.

#### A. Work before the fall.

It is a mistake to imagine that work was part of the curse that came because of sin (Genesis 3). Though sin certainly had an influence on work, the Bible makes it clear that work was a huge part of what God originally intended for humans. To dream of a workless paradise is to dream of something God never intended. All that God created was “very good” (Genesis 1:31) – and this included work! Notice, especially, the verbs associated with man in Genesis 1-2.

- *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> 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” (Genesis 1:26-28).*
- *And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.... <sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work it and keep it**.... (Genesis 2:8-15).*
- *Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man **gave names** to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.... (Genesis 2:19-20).*

Theologians call this collection of commands given to humans before the fall the **Cultural Mandate**. We will study this in more detail next month. For our purposes today, we might call it the first **job description**. Notice the main verbs:

- *Be fruitful and multiply (1:28)* The first “job” God gave to the first humans was to be a **family**. Just as God in his tri-unity is a type of family (Father, Son, Spirit) so humans made in his image are to incarnate his likeness in this world. *Let us make man in **our** image.*
- *Fill the earth (1:28)* – This command highlights God’s desire that man’s good influence be **extended** everywhere in creation.
- *Subdue the earth and have dominion (1:29)* – This command is not a license to exploit the earth for our selfish purposes but rather to be care-takers of all creation. It is a mandate to be good **stewards** of that which ultimately belongs to God.
- *Work the garden (2:15)* – The word has the idea of **cultivating** the garden, nurturing and husbanding it.
- *Keep the garden (2:15)* – The idea here is to care for God’s garden; safeguard, protect and **preserve** it. In asking Adam to *work* and *keep* the garden, God was inviting him to join him in the world of **world-making**. Here the call is not to renounce the world nor treat it with indifference, but rather to engage the world, shape the world, and ultimately help to change the world for the better!

- *Give names to the animals* (2:20) – If taking care of the garden was a form of manual labor (using Adam’s hands), naming the animals was a form of **intellectual** labor (using Adam’s mind and heart). The work here involved careful observation, rational thought, categorization, and creativity. Just as God created the universe by using words, so Adam now gets to use words in showing his dominion over all that God had made.

From this first picture of human work we discover some basic principles of God’s design for work:

- 1) Work is intended to be something **good**.
- 2) It is not good to work **alone** (Genesis 2:18).
- 3) When we work like God intended us to, we **reflect his image** to those around us.
- 4) Manual labor has **dignity** and value.
- 5) Eden was a worker’s paradise. And **heaven** will be too.
- 6) God **rested** on the seventh day (Sabbath) showing his intention for a rhythm of work and rest, work and rest.
- 7) God holds us responsible to care for his creation. We will one day give an account of our stewardship.
- 8) By using his hands (gardening) and his mind (naming the animals), Adam became a creator of **culture** by cultivating both the soil and the soul.

*Clearly, man was made to make culture. That is his primary task. The question is not, Will man make culture? The question is, will he make good culture or bad culture? Will culture be built on kingdom principles or counterfeit principles? Will it contribute to truth, justice, and beauty or to ignorance, corruption, and ugliness (LifeWork, p. 104).*

#### B. Work after the fall.

Sin spoiled everything! Not only did Adam and Eve’s act of rebellion affect their relationship with God, with one another, and with themselves, it also affected their work. What once was a source of joy and pleasure now had an element of pain and sorrow. Work had become **toil, labor, a burden**. Sin did not obliterate God’s original plan for work... but it definitely damaged it severely.

*To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your **pain** in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; **in pain** you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the **sweat of your face** you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19).*

The same word is used for the “pain” (labor, travail) associated with woman’s childbirth as that which is associated with man’s work.

*The implication is that because of the Fall, both of the central tasks of human life – making a living and raising a family – are fraught with pain and difficulty. Understanding this, we can be realistic about the agony and anomie of life in a broken world. Yet the sorrow that sin injected into creation does not cancel out the way we were originally made or the mandate to work. And redemption enables us to restore the original meaning and purpose of work. It gives us the power to carry out the task we were created for – to develop culture and civilization. Indeed, in our work, we cooperate with God in the task of redemption, helping free the world from the effects of the Fall. (How Now Shall We Live? pp. 384f.).*

### C. Work after Salvation.

In future sessions of DMM we will discover how salvation in Christ makes possible meaningful work. Jesus did not die on a cross and send his Spirit at Pentecost merely to forgive our sins so we could go to heaven when we die and sit on a cloud strumming a harp. Salvation is much bigger than that! His presence in our world and in our hearts now makes it possible for our work to be like his work! (Remember, Jesus spent 18 years as a **carpenter** and only 3 as a preacher!) Our lives can have purpose and significance as we align our interests with his and the Kingdom work he is doing in the world today.

In Session 4 we will focus on the subject of “**calling.**” Every follower of Christ has a vocation (from the Latin for “calling). Traditional Protestant theology teaches that every Christian has two callings:

#### 1) **General** Calling.

“Follow me.” This call is addressed to everyone. It is an invitation to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and follow him wherever he leads us. It includes the invitation to become “**fishers of men**” (Mark 1:17). Every Christian is by definition called not only into a saving relationship with Christ but is also called to become involved in his Great Commission to reach the lost with the Good News of salvation.

#### 2) **Particular** Calling.

Beyond the General Call is a specialized calling from God that focuses on the unique **personality, passions** and **gifting** of the individual. God has a plan for everyone. Every life has a particular purpose. Through faith and obedience, all Christians have the assurance that God will lead them into his perfect will for their lives. This particular call may be to education, medicine, family, art, the pastorate, science, technology, tent-making, missions, etc. In Session 4 we will discuss this topic in further detail.

### D. Work in **Heaven!**

The notion that heaven will be a place of inactivity where we sit on clouds and strum harps is surely one of the most destructive heresies the Devil has ever foisted on the human race! Who wants to go to a place like that? No! Heaven will be a place of work even as the pre-Fall Garden of Eden was a place of work. In heaven we will be finally freed of all the obstacles and hindrances on earth that kept us from accomplishing those tasks and goals that we knew we were created to achieve. In heaven we will finally be able to: Play tennis like we know we should, write that book, build that house, play the piano, sing like Luciano Pavarotti (no, better!), win at Scrabble, or do relationships like they ought to be done.

#### IV. God @ Work.

We often get the impression that the goal of the Gospel is to get worldly people **into the church**. We think the most important day of the week is Sunday. But in reality, the real goal of the Gospel is to get church people **into the world**. The most important day of the week is Monday.

##### A. Me @ work.

As we close this session, think about your work (what you do from Monday to Friday). Take a moment and answer the following questions.

1) Why do I work? (The motive question).

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2) For what end/goal am I working? (The purpose question).

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3) Who am I trying to please? (The boss question).

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4) What is my reward for working? (The remuneration question).

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5) Is my witness for Christ (words *and* actions) a positive thing (people are drawn to Christ through my presence)? A negative thing (people are rebelled)? Or do people even know I am a follower of Christ? (The integrity question).

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##### B. God @ work.

Keeping in mind how you answered the questions above, let's look at a passage in the New Testament where Paul gives revolutionary counsel to Christians living in the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Most were slaves. Some were masters. The counsel Paul gives is truly mind-boggling and world-changing.

*22 Slaves (read, employees), obey in everything those who are your earthly masters (bosses), not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving*

*the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters (read, employers), treat your slaves (employees) justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven (Colossians 3:22-4:1).*

Let's highlight some basic principles from this passage that God wants us to grasp so that we too can become agents of the Kingdom in the place where we work Monday through Friday.

- 1) We have a **new master**... Our real boss is Jesus Christ. He is the one we aim to please. This means, of course, there are some jobs a Christian simply cannot do (for example, work in industries that promote abortion, pornography, alcohol, gambling, cigarettes, etc.).
- 2) We have a **new motive**. My passion at work is to please my new boss so that my attitudes and actions put a smile on his face. This has two huge implications at work:
  - a) Work gives me the opportunity to obey the second commandment: **love your neighbor**. I can show love by how I treat those around me and by how I serve them in a meaningful way. Whether I am an employee or an employer, work is a place that gives me the chance to show people how much I care.
  - b) Work will therefore be done with **excellence**. I will not seek to do the minimum, only enough to "get by." Paul says we are to work "with sincerity" (v. 22). The word has the connotation of being "without wax." In Paul's day, damaged pottery was sometimes repaired by filling the cracks with wax, thus deceiving the purchaser. Even if no one else is looking, God sees our work... and will hold us accountable.
- 3) We have a **new compensation package**. *From the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward* (v. 24). What really motivates me at work is not the salary but the sheer joy of serving Christ and others through what I do.

C. A few questions for self examination. When I think about my work:

- 1) Am I doing what God created me to do? Redeemed me to do? Gifted me to do? Is this what God has **called** me to do?
- 2) Is God **glorified** in what I do? (Matthew 5:16; I Corinthians 10:31).
- 3) Are my "neighbors" (colleagues, clients, supervisors, vendors, etc.) **served** and **loved** by what I do? Being a Christian at work often begins with how I treat other people!
- 4) Is my **witness** clear? It is one thing to have a fish symbol on my car and a Bible on my desk. It is another thing to walk with integrity in all that you I do (and don't do).
  - Honesty in contracts, on expense reports, in promises I make, etc.
  - How I behave at the office Christmas party.
  - Punctuality.
  - Showing respect for others.
  - Keeping my commitments.
  - Etc...

Many Christians destroy their witness at work by living inauthentic lives. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Who you *are* speaks so loudly. I can’t hear what you’re saying.”

**TABLE TALK**

1. What is the main thing you have learned from today’s lesson?
2. What are you going to do differently next Monday morning?