**Christians in the Workplace**

**Class #5: Motivation: Faithfulness Changes Why We Work**

**Introduction**

Can people tell that you’re a Christian by how you work? I hope so—but the differences are probably pretty nuanced. You’re honest; non-Christians are honest too. You care for your co-workers; non-Christians do that too. You work hard; non-Christians work hard too. The differences in *what* you do will hopefully come out over time. But they are rooted in something much more profound, which is *why* you work. If your co-workers had a window into your heart, hopefully they would see the difference Christ makes immediately because of how he’s changed your motivations. Why you work: your motives, desires and ambitions, are profoundly shaped—or at least, should be—by the Lord you serve.

That’s what we’ve talked about the last three weeks. We talked about the fact that no matter what you do for your job, you’re ultimately working for Jesus. Colossians 3:23-24, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.” And we saw that no matter your boss’s goals for your work, your overarching goal is the one you’ll someday give account for to Jesus. 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Work is worship. That is, it is not ultimately about what you produce—because if God was finally about that, he’d have done it himself. No matter what you do, he can do it better. No: work is about showing off the excellence and goodness and glory of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” So last week we saw that all wrapped up in the idea of faithfulness. We work so as to be counted faithful on that Last Day. Because faithfulness, as we saw in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25—making the most of the opportunities God gives us out of obedience to Christ—faithfulness shows God to be good. It shows him to be the faithful one who keeps his promises, the faithful one whose ways are good and delightful for us. Our standard is faithfulness because God has designed our work to be worship.

Today we’re going to break that down further in answer the question “why we work.” *How* exactly can we work so as be counted faithful? Before we get there, though, I want to see what you made of last week’s class—because that’s the foundation for what we talk about today. **How has the concept of faithfulness affected your work?**

**Love of God, Love of Neighbor**

Great. So let’s get on to the nitty gritty of why we work. Our assignment from Jesus is to be faithful—to obey him in the workplace in such a way as to show off the excellence of *his* worth. Our work matters mainly because of how it shows off his work in us. But what does that obedience look like? Well, what did Jesus say the first and greatest commandment was? [wait for an answer]. That’s right: Matthew 22:37, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Quoting from Deuteronomy 6.

Your love for God should motivate you to work, no matter the particulars of what you do, “with your whole heart” as we saw on Colossians 3. If you are a mother, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord. If you are a student, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord. If you make cars, close sales, litigate, or medicate, do it as if you were working for the Lord himself — because you are! You love God; so work with all your heart!

And then Jesus said the second-greatest command is like the first. Also about love. Quoting from Leviticus 19: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” A second reason we work—and a second way that work can be counted as faithful by Christ—is that we work to love our neighbor. That could be loving things we *do* at work—like making a cup of coffee for your assistant. Or more broadly it can be our work itself—since all legitimate work is (ideally) beneficial to society.

In a moment we’re going to drill down into more specifics about various motivations for work. But we’re pausing here on Jesus’ discourse about the greatest commandment just to note that these two are what encompass all of our obedience. They encompass all of our faithfulness. And so they encompass all of our work. All of our God-honoring motivations at work ultimately come back to these two commands: Love your God; love your neighbor.

So then, what are all those other, underlying motivations? Let’s start with working for enjoyment.

**Motive #1: Work for Enjoyment**

I start here in part because this is the one that our society most understands. Our culture has come to glamorize working for the love of it. Now, most people in this city work to put food on the table. As simple as that. And yet our society there’s this sense that in the ideal job—and in the life that many strive for—you would do what you love. You’d work for enjoyment. Much of this comes down to our culture’s idolatry of work—the so-called “Protestant distortion” we talked about a few weeks ago. But before we shove that aside entirely, let’s just observe for a moment that enjoyment *is* a legitimate, biblical motivation for work.

In God’s kindness, we can enjoy our work. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:17 that God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment,” and Ecclesiastes 5:18–19 even states, “It is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink, and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor . . . to accept their lot and be happy in their toil — this is a gift of God.”

What a realistic and wonderful way of looking at our work! True, our work can be “toilsome,” there’s no doubt about that! Yet at the same time, God also graciously uses our work to bring us satisfaction and enjoyment. Think about how astonishing a mercy of God that is. Our work is toilsome because God cursed it, and he cursed it because of our sin against him! Yet in his love, God has decided we can have some measure of enjoyment even in what has been cursed!

Do you ever experience satisfaction or enjoyment in your work? If not, it might be worth thinking about why you don’t. Is it because you expect too much from it? Like the kid we talked about a few weeks ago who angrily kicks his bike to the curb because it can’t fly? Maybe because you’ve never seen God’s purposes for your work—and how bringing glory to him can give you enjoyment of your work. If that’s the case, pay special attention to our next motive for work—because it is often a path to real enjoyment of work.

Enjoyment of work can be a real distraction from our discipleship of Christ. But when we see enjoyment of work as the enjoyment of God’s gift—and ultimately, enjoyment of God—it because a wonderful way in which we can show off God’s goodness. That we can be faithful.

**Motive #2: Work to Reflect Gods’ Character**

Now, that label on your handout—work to reflect God’s character—might sound highly theoretical to you. But it’s actually the path to some of the godliest, most satisfying joy that you’ll find in your work. Remember: God made us in his image. And one of the ways we image him is in the workplace. We image him by acting like him. I’ll give you an example: I remember going home one day after a particularly difficult day at work. To sum it up, there had been a conflict between two of my employees and I’d had to lean hard on my political capital with them—and somewhat on my authority as their boss—to clean things up. But everyone had emerged happy at the end of the day. And so I was elated. Not in a proud way—which I’m certainly guilty of at times. No: I was elated that the authority I’d been given could solve a problem as difficult as that—and leave everyone better off. Then in that moment, I realized that my day had given me insight into God’s delight in being God that I’d never fully appreciated. He, of course, knows everything about using authority well, and the delight it brings him. If I’d never been a boss, I might never have experienced that bit of what it’s like to be God. In a sense, I’d spent the day play-acting God, saw how wonderful that was, and could glory better in who he is. Work often does that. Like a little kid at the beach trying to jump from one of his dad’s footsteps to another, we get to imitate in our work what God does—and that teaches us more of what is so delightful about him. Working to reflect God’s character is a blast—and it glorifies him. It glorifies him to us—as we see how amazing he is. And it glorifies him to others when they see some of him in us. Sometimes we may have opportunity to directly connect God’s image in us to God—like when someone asks you why you don’t grumble and complain about your bad boss. Sometimes we don’t have that opportunity, but we can still vindicate things God says are good—like honestly and contentment and hard work—over and against this world’s opinion that there’s a better way than God’s. And who knows how God will use that vindication of his character once it’s finally connected to the word of the gospel. But either way, working to reflect God’s character is honoring to God.

So how do we work to reflect God’s character? Let me give you four ways:

*We reflect God’s character by bringing order out of chaos*.

In one way or another, your job somehow involves the work of bringing beauty out of ugliness, order out of chaos. Perhaps unassembled pieces are pulled together to make a widget used to create a product that people use. Or natural products are identified, isolated, and harvested to create something new. Sickness is treated; injustice is rectified; broken windows are repaired; cracked sidewalks are fixed. Even if your job is operating a wrecking ball, you probably aren’t doing this just “to watch the world burn.” You knock down old buildings for a purpose — to eventually make room for new ones!

I’m sure you can remember first learning this satisfaction as a kid. Maybe it was surveying with pride the kitchen you’d just cleaned, or the garden you’d weeded. One of the great services we can provide our kids is to show them the satisfaction of a job well-done—and then connect that to God’s satisfaction in bringing order out of chaos. Before God created the world it was “formless and empty (Genesis 1:2). Then God brought order and beauty and said it was good—even *very* good. And so it’s no accident that when he placed Adam in his garden, he told Adam to work, to continue creating order and beauty in the world.

*We reflect God’s character by exercising authority well*

Consider King David’s last words in 2 Samuel 23. After having lived the amazing life that he did, what were his final thoughts?

“The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me;  
    his word is on my tongue.  
**3**The God of Israel has spoken;  
    the Rock of Israel has said to me:  
When one rules justly over men,  
    ruling in the fear of God,  
**4**he dawns on them like the morning light,  
    like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,  
    like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

Authority used well is a great blessing. That’s true on a small level—like your work team of three, and on a large level—like leading a country. And using authority well shows God to be right about authority. Remember, from the very beginning Satan’s argument has been that we cannot trust authority to be good for us. That God cannot say “no” and really love us. Our world says authority can never be trusted, that it ultimately corrupts. But keep in mind that to become a Christian you need to come to a very different conclusion about God’s authority. To repent and believe means to trust that God’s authority is good for us, as we saw last week in the parable of the talents.

So when you use authority well—using it to serve the people under you—you’re launching a counter-attack against Satan’s lie. You’re showing that authority *can* be good. That it *can* be trusted. Sometimes you’ll have the opportunity to tie that to the gospel. Like when your assistant asks you, “why don’t you push people around like the other bosses do around here.” To which your answer might be something like, “well, you may not realize it but for me that’s a very religious question. Is it OK if I give you a religious answer?” And then explain what it means to work as unto the Lord. Sometimes you won’t be able to tie it in explicitly like that. But even then you’re showing off the truth of God’s claim that *his* authority is good for us. Beyond that, you may unwittingly be doing pre-evangelism in someone’s life. Like the person who, abused as a child, needs to see some profoundly different uses of authority before she can even begin to take her Christian friend seriously when she talks about the gospel.

This all holds true whether you’re the one holding authority or the one under authority. Choose to live well under the authorities God has placed over you. If you are an employee, respect and honor those who are in authority over you. Don’t communicate to people around you a spirit of rebellion, a sense that authority is somehow illegitimate or burdensome, a necessary evil to tolerate. Let them know by your actions that you consider good authority to be a blessing from God and that you understand all authority to be derived from him. In that way, you will reflect God’s character, not only to your coworkers, but also to those who have authority over you. Think of that famous verse in 1 Peter 2. “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that even when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (v. 12). What kind of good deeds will make for that kind of provocative life? Well, Peter focuses the rest of his letter mainly on how we submit to authority—and especially to unjust authority. The kind of good deed in particular seems to be provocative and winsome, drawing others to Christ.

*We reflect God’s character by being creative*

Why does it feel good to be creative? Why does it feel good to paint a beautiful painting? To be the one who came up with that ingenious legal argument? To be the one to figure out how to get those two people to get along? It feels good because it feels like God. Again, we’re retracing God’s footsteps, and learning how delightful creativity is teaches us how delightful God is. Even beyond that, we’re also discovering his wisdom. You weren’t the first to discover that legal argument, after all, right? God knew about it since before time began. Think of a proud dad watching his kids figure out the treasure map he left them, pointing the way to their Christmas presents. That must be some of what God feels when we do something totally out-of-the-box creative. “Yes! So glad you discovered that. Isn’t that cool? That’s a part of my creation no one’s seen yet.” Creativity is a wonderful way to glorify God.

So in your job, be creative. See that as part of your following Jesus. Did your boss give you a process to follow? Figure out a way to make it better. Don’t come to her with just problems; give her the best solution you’ve got alongside the problem. To work as unto the Lord means to be creative in whatever outlet your job provides.

*We reflect God’s character by providing*

Before I became a pastor, I worked with division presidents at large corporations. I had dinner with small groups of them more times than I can count. And often at dinner, I’d talk about what they enjoyed about their jobs. I noticed how, regardless of what business they were in, these men and women pointed to one thing more than any other. They loved taking care of their people. “I’ve got 10,000 people working for me. That’s 10,000 jobs. 10,000 families. 10,000 opportunities to build a stable safe-haven in a crazy world. If I mess this thing up, I’ve got 10,000 families looking for work.”

Just like God provides—and loves doing it—we also can take satisfaction in using our work to provide for others. That should be through the money you get from your job. We’ll talk about that in a bit. It should also be from what your job does for the world. God’s chosen to order the world in such a way that our food isn’t just miraculously zapped into our refrigerators each day. Clothes don’t grow on trees, nor do our houses assemble themselves. The trash we produce doesn’t just magically disappear each evening. And human society doesn’t naturally remain ordered. All of this happens through the process we call “work.” And we love other people by helping make all of these things happen.

Consider the wisdom of Martin Luther on this subject: “When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And he does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal.” Do you see what Luther is saying here? God provides for our needs through the work he calls us to do in and for the good of society.

Provision can honor God by being one way that we obey him—obeying the command to love our neighbor. And it can honor God as we take satisfaction in providing for others—tasting a bit of the delight he has in providing for us.

**Questions?**

**Motive #3: Work to Adorn the Gospel**

In Titus 2:10, God tells slaves—even *slaves*—to serve their masters well. Why? “So that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

The way we live will never fully communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to anyone; we must use words to share a verbal announcement of what God has done in history in the person of Jesus Christ. Yet the way we live does communicate something to people. It can either confirm or undermine what we say with our lips. People are pretty good at recognizing those who are more interested in themselves than in serving others, who care more about getting ahead than about loving and caring for the people they work with. If that’s the aroma you are giving off at your job right now, then you are destroying your witness to Jesus long before the gospel message ever crosses your lips. Be the aroma of Christ in your workplace. Adorn the gospel; don’t sabotage it!

**Motive #4: Work for Money**

There is no reason to beat around the bush on this one. One of the main reasons we work is so we can provide for ourselves, our families, those we love, and others. We work so we can eat. Paul addresses this motivation in 2 Thessalonians 3:10: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” Solomon writes in Proverbs 12:11, “Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.” And Paul writes in Ephesians 4:28, “Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”

This summarizes much of what Paul means when he states that Christians should “lead a quiet life” (1 Thessalonians 4:11). If God has called you to do your job simply to provide for your own needs and the needs of your family and to have opportunities to bless others and support the work of the church, then he has given you a valuable blessing and called you to do a very good thing.

Talking about money is important because we Christians often denigrate it. Like it’s base and vulgar to work for money. But why else would Scripture tell us to work for money? Frankly, all the motives I’ve given you so far apply to all work we do in life—in our families, our churches, and so forth. The only one Scripture gives specifically about the workplace is money. Work for money. I don’t mean be greedy. Work for money so you can provide and be generous, as we saw in Ephesians 4:28. But do work for money.

Why’s that important? Because working for money can protect us against all the silliness that our world works for. Consider idolatry of work for a moment. Walk into an office over on Capitol Hill and ask people what they’re there for. What do you hear? A whole flood of idolatry, that’s what. “I’m working to change the world. I’m working to make a name for myself. I’m working to get a fancy title. I’m working to get the attention of that famous politician.” With money as a motivator, we’re protected from working for significance, which should be found in Christ. We’re protected from working for the praise of men, and can instead work as unto the Lord. We’re less likely to complain about our work—since at the end of the day we have what we came for: a paycheck. And not complaining, Paul writes in Philippians 2, makes us “shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the world of life.” It makes the gospel attractive. And, of course, working for money protects us from idleness. As Paul said in that verse in 2 Thessalonians, no work? No eat. You see how working for money actually helps us pursue all the other motivations I’ve mentioned so far with greater purity and focus—to the glory of God.

And why is money satisfying? Not because we can accumulate it and spend it on ourselves. But because of the good we can do with it. Listen to Jesus’ wisdom in Acts 20: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35). As you excel in the grace of giving, you will find that working for the money can become a very godly thing—for the glory of God and your everlasting good.

**Conclusion: Faith**

So we’ve talked through a number of different answers to the question, “why do you work?” Enjoyment—to the glory of God. Reflecting the character of God—both to ourselves and to others. Adorning the gospel. And working for money—to the glory of God. Remember, though—these things are all about being *faith*ful. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” These motivations matter in as much as they are done by faith. That is, in as much as they bring us down paths we wouldn’t follow unless we trusted God’s word more than what this world says. It’s a useful exercise sometime this week to look through these motives and ask yourself, “how do these require faith?” If none of these require faith, then your motives are no different from the world around you.

Instead, let’s strive for faith. Let’s work in such a way that our lives only make sense if Jesus really *is* coming back, as if faithfulness really *is* all that will matter.