

Experiencing God in our Work
Isaiah 28:23-29, Exodus 31:1-11

Friends, do you ever notice that when we meet someone for the first time it's inevitable that we ask them what they do for work?

Hi I'm so and so, nice to meet you. What's your name? Oh nice to meet you Dave... what do you do for work Dave?

We do this of course because work is a big part of our lives.

In North America we usually spend about 40hrs a week at work. However if you add in your lunch breaks and the time it takes to commute to and from to your job, we're probably spending at least 50 hours a week at work.

And if you own a business and are self-employed, or you hold a management position, then your work week can easily increase to 60 to 70 hrs a week.

So if we are awake for approximately 100 hours out of the 168 hours we have in a week – we are spending at least half of our waking hours working.

And we've also spent some time preparing to be in the work force as well.

Most jobs require education of some sort. So start with 3-4 years of High School, and then at least 1 – 2 years of post secondary training which can increase to a 4 year bachelor's degree. Follow this up with another 3 years in Seminary for a Master's and another 2 years required credentialing and I finally completed all my studies to be a minister....

But we don't have to be finished our education to start working, do we? We can work part-time as teens and we encourage our youth to get part-time jobs – so they can get job experience, learn good work habits, and earn some extra money to save or spend.

And since our capacity to earn money is tied into our work – for most of us our work is our lifeline. It's our source of income, health and dental benefits, a company pension plan for when we retire...

If we lost our ability to work, or we lost our job it could be disastrous for us, because we need work to earn money to pay the bills and survive and preferably thrive... and one of the most common prayer requests our prayer team receives is to pray for work.

Our work is very important – in fact for most of us our work forms our identity.

Who are you? We'll I'm a minister, an engineer, a lawyer, a doctor, a teacher and so on.

So we will put up with a crazy work schedule, do work that is menial, do work that is dangerous because work is necessary and it is so much a part of who we are.

Work is important us, and we give it much of our time, and energy and focus, and if we would contrast this with how much we give towards our relationship with God... well, it would look a bit imbalanced wouldn't it.

50 plus hours a week vs. maybe 2 hours at worship, and 1 hour of bible reading and 1 hour of prayer per week – and that's if you attend church every Sunday and spend time reading your bible and praying each day.

It would look like our work is more important than our relationship with God – and in some cases that is true.

Very often, when our work life gets busy or our career starts to take off one of the first things to get put on the sidelines is our relationship with God and our attendance at worship.

It would seem that work comes first and God doesn't even come second - and this is true for many of us. And maybe we're feeling a bit convicted about this.

We look at the pie-chart which shows how much time we spent on other activities contrasted with the times we spend at church or in spiritual activities and we might conclude we are not very faithful Christians.

If we were good Christians then the chart would show that we would be spending a greater amount of time investing in our relationship with God.

And yet we have a limited amount of hours in the week – and an increasing amount of demands on our time – not the least of which is the need to earn a living to make ends meet...

So we can become trapped in this tug-of-war between our “spiritual life” and our “everyday life” and as the scriptures say *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”* (Matt 6:24)

Do you see how this can happen? Maybe some of you have experienced this a bit?

Now the key to getting out of this false dichotomy is to realize that our relationship with God isn’t just one piece of the pie... separated from work, school, sports and confined to the piece of pie called “spiritual life.”

The truth is that our relationship with God is the dish that holds the entire pie.

So while it’s obvious that the pieces of the pie called “church attendance, bible study, and Christ Care groups” and so on have a direct impact on our relationship with God many people don’t realize that is possible to develop and focus on our relationship with God in the other areas of our lives - especially our work.

And if we are spending half of our waking hours at work – we should definitely be learning how to experience God at work!

This is why we are focusing on Green Spirituality; and how we can experience God through his creation revelation.

If we want to grow in our relationship with God – it doesn't necessarily mean that we have to increase the amount of time we are at church and church related activities.

Now this isn't an excuse to skip out on weekly worship or daily prayer and bible reading – it's the opportunity to take what you learn and receive in those activities into another area of your life and experience God working in a different way.

It's growing in your experience of God as Creator by learning how to experience Him in and through our work – and specifically looking at doing that in a way that goes beyond being honest, and ethical, and having good character in our work.

And we start to get a sense of what that might be like from the scripture passage that we read from Isaiah this morning when we read vs. 25 which says *"His God instructs him and teaches him the right way"*

So who is God instructing, and what is the right way that God is teaching this person?

It's the hard working farmer... and God is teaching the farmer about the right way to plow, plant, harvest, thresh and grind grain.

Now when we typically think about farming and how a person learns to farm - what we observe happening is that it's passed from father to son, or it's studying and learned at agricultural college.

But this scripture passage reveals to us that in fact this process of learning the right way to farm – even though it may look like it's a human endeavor – is in fact one of the ways that God is at work in people's lives through His creation.

Vs. 29 says *"All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, whose plan is wonderful, whose wisdom is magnificent."*

So experiencing God in our work friends, starts by recognizing that the tricks of the trade, the knowledge and skill required

to do the work that you do correctly... is in fact “from the Lord Almighty – whose wisdom is magnificent”

King David knew this, that’s why he wrote “*Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.*” Ps. 144:1, not just once... but three times! Ps 18:34, 2 Sam 22:35.

This passage in Isaiah could just as easily read about how God teaches the mechanic the right way align your wheels and tune your car, or how He instructs the engineer to know what is structurally safe and what is not, and guides the doctor to diagnose whether you have a virus or a bacterial infection.

Friends what you have learned and what you know that allows you to do your work, and do it well and with skill is in fact God at work in your life.

Now this may be a little hard to believe – after all, it probably didn’t feel very “spiritual” when you studied for this stuff. You

didn’t get any visions or supernatural manifestations when you did your on the job training – so how can it be of God???

Well that’s faith, right? – believing that it is from God even when you can’t see, or feel, or prove that it is. It’s taking what the scriptures reveal to us at their word and accepting that this is God at work in our lives.

Friends that part of what it means to live by faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

The scripture assures us that even though we can’t see God teaching us this stuff- it most definitely is in fact, coming from Him.

So, do you want to grow in your relationship with God outside of church and bible study – then start by accepting by faith that your skill and knowledge of your work is from the Lord Almighty, even though you might not see or feel how that is quite possible... but we believe it anyway.

And the first benefit you will experience from this faith is the assurance that what you do is pleasing to God because Hebrews 11:6 goes on to say *“without faith it is impossible to please God.”*

We all appreciate it when other people commend us for a job well done at our work – and when we have faith that our skill and knowledge actually comes from God, that faith allows us to experience God’s pleasure for the work that we do.

And that certainly makes even the most boring and mundane tasks that we have to do for work a lot more tolerable.

And friends we can’t talk about work without acknowledging that for many people work has become toil.

It is not something they look forward to doing, it’s not something that is fulfilling or enjoyable, instead it has become something to endure from Monday to Friday while anticipating the freedom of the weekend. [Stay strong weekend is coming soon!]

And friends, while there are many contributing factors which turn work into toil and make it burdensome for us – the underlying reason why this happens is because of Sin.

Once Adam and Eve disobeyed the conditions surrounding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the consequences affected the entire creation – including work.

In Gen 3:17-19 God says to Adam *“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

Friends, God originally created us to enjoy the work of taking care of this creation, of developing it, stewarding it, working with it - but the consequences of sin means that this task will become toilsome and painful for us now – it can even cost us our life.

Has anyone here ever had to do work that they hated, have you ever had a job that was horrible and unfulfilling? Well friends – you have experienced the consequences of sin affecting you're your calling to work.

And think about people who lose their lives or limbs to workplace accidents, or who develop cancer or other diseases because they've worked with materials that are hazardous...

"Cursed is the ground because of you..." The hard truth is that work has been warped and twisted by sin.

So friends, another aspect of experiencing God in our work is recognizing that the toil and pain which can come from work are the consequences of Sin... but that these consequences ought to make us turn to God for help and redemption.

The good news is that God has provided Jesus Christ to undo the consequences of sin in our world, in our lives – and especially in our work.

And friends when Jesus Christ said *"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."*

This includes the restoration of our original calling to develop and steward this creation and do amazing things with it – to God's glory because we have been given the Holy Spirit.

You see friends; the work of the Holy Spirit isn't limited to producing the fruit of the Spirit, or giving Spiritual gifts - as important as those are.

As we read in Exodus 31 the Holy Spirit was given to Bezalel and Oholiab and other skilled workers to produce the Tabernacle and all that went with it.

The tent covering and its collapsible structural framework, the ark of the covenant with the atonement cover, the golden lamp-stand, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the bronze basin with its stand, all the

woven garments for the priests, the incense and the anointing oil...

The Holy Spirit gave skill to these craftsmen to produce all these beautiful furnishings to create the Tabernacle - a place where God would meet with His covenant people and they could worship Him.

But God's original intention was that this whole world would be the Tabernacle, a Temple where people would meet with Him and worship Him in their work of caring for and developing His creation.

Now that Jesus Christ has restored us to our original calling- the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon Christians to empower us to produce new "tabernacle" furnishings... greater things...

Great works of art, of music, of architecture, of commerce, of industry, of culture – all made to give glory and praise to the Creator in the original temple of His creation.

And the work that we do on a day to day basis is supposed to be a part of that – and through faith... and by the power of the Holy Spirit – it is a part of that!

So friends, we need to be more intentional about experiencing this in our day to day work –whatever our work may be.

So the third way that we can experience God in our work – and be more intentional about it - is by regaining a sense of wonder and marveling at whatever part of God's amazing creation it is that we work with.

King David wrote *"I praise you God because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."* (Ps 139:4)

Friends, we need to confess that we have allowed God's amazing creation to become mundane, routine, even boring and we need to ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to so that

we can see its awesome wonder again and so that it would cause us to praise God.

So...

Do you work in the sciences and technology? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you marvel at design and the physics of how God made this world work and we can use that to do amazing things.

Do you work in the service industry? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you marvel at how a good host and good service can lift people spirits and make their day a little easier.

Do you work in the arts and entertainment sector? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a sense of wonder for the way stories can be told, how art is made and how it can communicate without words.

Do you work in the education system? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wonder and awe for the capacity to learn and study and the way in which this shapes who we become.

Do you work in the health care system? Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of how amazing it is that healing is even possible and for the privilege of helping to facilitate that.

Do you work in the legal and political system? Ask the Holy Spirit to make you marvel at how good law-making and law enforcement help to protect and guide and govern our society in an orderly manner.

Do you work in business and banking? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you admiration for bounty of God's creation and how it can be used to create to wealth and resources to bring blessing and prosperity.

Friends, may your time spent working with God's creation cause you to say to Him *"your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*

And these wonderful works are also used to teach us more about God – how many times does the bible use references from agriculture, from business, or from government to teach us a spiritual truth?

So as we work with God’s creation we may come across other examples in the arts, in health care, in science that can serve as good analogies to help explain and teach more about who God is, what He has done in Christ and how the Holy Spirit wants to transform our lives.

Like the cleaning lady who said “when I’m sweeping floors- I say Lord sweep the sin out of my life, when I’m washing dishes – I say Lord wash away whatever wrong things have entered my mind today, and when I’m done cleaning for the day and I can sit down and rest - I say Lord thanks for just a little bit of heaven’s relaxin!”

Friends, keep your eyes open for the wonder in creation, keep your hearts open to what the Spirit might teach you from

creation – and you will experience work in a whole new way because you will be experiencing God. Amen.