

Happy Work

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- [0 : 00] Well, today we are going to talk about happy work. Happy work. Happy work. Isn't that almost an oxymoron in the world's thinking?
- ! Happy work. Yes. And it's so important for us to understand that, to get this, because work is a great deal about what this life is, what we spend our days, a great deal about what our life is all about.
- If a man will not work, what? He shall not eat. So, hi-ho, hi-ho, off to work we go.
- And that's what we spend most of our days doing. A year or two ago, I guess now, we did a whole series on work, and the Bible's surprising and world-defying ratio for what it means to flourish at work is to have six days of work and one day of rest.
- It's good for man to work. God made us to spend most of our time working. Every chapter has an equation, a greater-than equation in this whole series, and this week is exactly that.
- [1 : 21] Work greater than, more than, play equals positive. It means more positive, more happiness. But what do our hearts, most of our hearts, come out of the womb thinking that it's the exact opposite, it's the other way around, that it's the more play, the less work.
- That is the good, that's the good life. Or we even dream of play minus work, without any work at all.
- Now that, that would be ideal, where I can just spend my days having fun. On the other hand, some do the calculations completely differently.
- And they think that play is a waste and it's bad, and so there's no time for that. They spend their whole lives working. That's the end-all, be-all.
- And in doing that, they make a horrible miscalculation. The biblical equation is work greater than play equals happiness.
- [2 : 30] Now, there are times for both. But work is in the first place. And rest is in an important second place. Now, today we're going to talk about your work.
- Your work. Your good work. You're fixing cars. You're selling saddles. You're selling corn. You're accounting. You're managing factories. You're working maintenance. You're changing diapers. You're homeschooling. You're, and fill in the blank, whatever you do.
- Even the work of retired people. Just because you've retired from your main career, so to speak, doesn't mean that your days of labor are over. We, as parents, are so glad that there are grandmas and grandpas who love our children and make life easier for us and help us in so many ways.
- And so, from all of us parents, we thank you, grandmas and grandpas. You have an important work to do, and you're doing it. But I am talking about your work.
- [3 : 42] And I always really love talking about your work, your careers, your time that you spend, the goodness of your work.
- It's God-given. It's God-glorifying. It's God-pleasing. Your God-given, God-glorifying, God-pleasing work. I probably don't have a lot of Martin Luther's emotional makeup in me.

I don't think God would have picked me. Obviously, he didn't to do what he called Martin Luther to do. But I do have a big chunk of his disdain for pretentious clergy, for pastors who have such high opinions of themselves and such low opinions of everyone else's work, for that idea that pastors and priests and people who do church work are special and everyone else is just doing something that's going to burn up.

It's meaningless. I really can't stand that. And I can't stand pastors who think they're better than everyone else. 1 Thessalonians 5 says, Hold them.

And then he's talking about elders and pastors. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. There is a verse that says you should regard us with high esteem, high regard because of our work.

[5 : 12] And you do that in love. But I do want to point out the fact that you do it in love. It's much more about you being gracious to us as pastors than giving us some sort of like our due.

Your esteem for us is a grace. It's a gift. And I think I could speak for Pastor John.

I can definitely speak for myself that we are just ordinary, plain men. And our work is a gift from God, but it needs a lot of blood covering it.

It needs a lot of blood. Marilyn Robinson wrote a book called Gilead. Has anyone here read Gilead? Nope.

I thought someone might have. She wrote a book called Gilead, and it's written from the point of view of an old pastor as he writes to his son. And what she puts in this pastor's mouth is so true.

[6 : 19] And this old pastor is writing to his son, and he says this, And then this, Now, that resonates with me.

I'm sure it would resonate with Pastor John. In your kindness and your love, you think better of us than what you probably could. what we deserve. In grace, you hold us in high esteem.

And I just want to say, if that's how you feel about me and Pastor John, I feel the very same way about you and what you do. God gave pastors their work, and the same God gave you your work, your good work.

So God means for you to find fulfillment and enjoyment in your work. That's much of what Ecclesiastes is about. Finding enjoyment in your work in this short life that you have.

And that happens when you approach your work with a sense of God's grace. a sense of God's grace to you in particular. A sense of privilege.

[8 : 04] A sense of purpose. If you're miserable at your work, then find God's purpose for you in it.

How is God using you in it? Not what you want, but what he wants. What is he doing in it? How is he using you in it? We sing, help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us all your purposes for your glory. Do you want to be happy in your work? You want to be satisfied and content?

Then you need to get this perspective. God has a plan. God has a purpose for you in your work.

He's using you in your work. It's not just my work. It's your work. A major pharmaceutical company asked a researcher, the researcher's name was Lisa McLeod, to shadow hundreds of its salespeople.

[9 : 12] So she's a drug rep. To find out what makes the difference between an average salesman and an average salesperson and a top performer. She went into it not knowing the figures because if this is going to be any sort of reliable study, she has to be somewhat blind to what the figures are.

She didn't know the figures, but after two days with one woman, she was sure that she had found the secret, at least one of the secrets, between a top salesperson, a high achiever at work, and just an average person.

When this woman walked into the doctor's office, the receptionist stopped doing what they were doing, and they ran and got the doctors.

So that's not a common reaction to most drug reps if you were to go into the doctor's office. So when they parted at the Phoenix airport, Lisa McLeod wanted to get inside this woman's head, and she asked her, what do you think when you go on these sales calls?

What are you thinking about? How are you viewing this? What are you thinking about when you do this? And the sales rep, this lady, she sort of looked around the car like she's getting ready to hatch some sort of conspiracy, and she says this, I'm going to tell you the big secret right now.

[10:38] I don't tell many people this, but I always think of this one patient. When I first started this job, I was in the waiting room, waiting on one of my doctors, and this little old woman comes up to me, taps me on the shoulder, and says, excuse me, are you the rep that sells this drug?

Yes, yes, yeah, yeah, I am. And this little old woman turned to me and said, I just want to thank you. Before I started taking this, I didn't have a life.

I couldn't travel. I couldn't go anywhere. And now I can go visit my grandchildren, and I can get on the floor and play with them. The sales rep started crying and said, I think about her every day, and that's my purpose.

Now the researcher, when she was originally called to this assignment and started working on it, she was really focused on data and stats and the sort of, you know, how many sales calls you go on and all that sort of thing.

But then she realized that she just stumbled onto the magic ingredient. It's a noble sense of purpose. Not just a sense of purpose, but a noble sense of purpose.

[12:05] A sense of purpose that's driven by serving and loving and caring for other people. So she went through hundreds of interviews, and she found seven reps who talked about a noble sense of purpose, about the sense of a call to help others.

Like a call to serve them. And at the end of the study, this pharmaceutical company said, okay, now can you tell us who are our top seven salespeople?

Who's our top seven reps? And she was able to say, these seven, the seven that she had to put her finger on, that they have a noble sense of purpose. And she was 100% right.

And Lisa said, you know what? I can tell you who your top salesperson is too. And it was that Phoenix saleswoman. She had been that company's top salesperson for three years in a row in the whole country.

Now, I'm sure that that lady was making lots of money. I understand pharmaceutical sales is a very lucrative business.

[13:18] I'm sure she was making plenty of money. But you know, it wasn't the money, and it wasn't the perks that got her up in the morning and helped her to do a great job. It was serving others.

It was a sense of calling. So my question is, what's your calling? Your vocation. What God has called you to do.

The place where he has called you to be. God has that woman selling drugs. The good kind. But think about what he's doing through her.

He's getting little old grandmas on the floor to play with their grandchildren. He's giving her life back. He's making families happy.

So he has a plan and a purpose for that lady. To do good. And he's doing good through her. I mean, I have no idea what...

[14 : 19] Is she a Christian or not? That's really beside the point. The point is, is God using her? And the answer is yes. So my question is, what about you? What does God have you doing?

Where's the place that God has you? What's your post? And it is knowing that. Figuring that out. Getting used to that.

Wearing that. That sense of call that will give you joy in your work. They've done research. And what they found is that when you have a positive attitude toward your work, a sense of purpose, a sense of calling, a sense of this is where I belong and I'm doing something useful, that it has all sorts of wonderful side effects in your life.

It stimulates creativity. It increases skills. It strengthens resilience. Because even the best jobs with people with the best attitudes have setbacks.

And you have to get used to that and get over those. So it strengthens resiliency. It boosts health. It multiplies relationship. It increases income. It maximizes job security.

[15 : 32] It maximizes job satisfaction. So having that noble sense of purpose has wonderful ramifications for your whole life.

And so my question is, what about you? What about you? If you're missing this grander sense of God's purpose, then what I want to do with the rest of our time is just go back and think together what God says about your work.

your work and see maybe what you're missing, what you're not thinking about, what you've forgotten, what you haven't considered. Listen to Romans chapter 11, 36.

Romans 11, 36. You don't have to turn there. It's a very familiar passage. For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.

Amen. Amen. All things, including your work, are from him, through him, and to him for his glory, including your work.

[16 : 42] And it's not just my work. It's not like my work is from God and your work is just an evil necessity. Your work, all things. So your work is from God.

God. Comes down from the Father of the heavenly lights with every good and perfect gift. He gives it to you from God. The need to work, work just in general, is from God.

The need to work, the desire to work, work in general, is from God. So God made Adam and Eve in the garden, put them in the garden to work it, to guard it, to keep it, to till it, to spread it.

And it was part of that very good. It was part of the very good that God pronounced on his whole creation.

Tim Keller said this, Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality.

[17 : 52] It is not simply medicine, but food for our soul. Have you ever found that? When you are feeling down, maybe the thing that you need to do is just go to work and do something.

It is medicine. But it is not just medicine. It is food. It is as necessary and as building up for you as food is.

He goes on, People who are cut off from work because of physical or other reasons quickly discover how much they need work to thrive emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

So work in a general sense is from God. It is one of God's good gifts. We need it. You need to find something productive and useful and helpful.

You need to work. You need it. Not just for the money that it gives you, the very activity itself. not just what you get out of it but the thing itself.

[19 : 07] So just think about, I mean, just think about your particular career. You need to be doing that. You wouldn't be doing so well if you couldn't do that.

So work is from God. Your work is from God. Whatever your work is, it is from God. And so, I have a question for you.

Which would you rather live a month without? Which would you rather live a month without? A pastor or a garbage man? Which one would you rather live a month without?

Now, maybe you're all sweet and you'll tell me to my face. You'd rather have me than that garbage man. In your house of two.

Yeah. In my house it needs every week. If you said, definitely a pastor.

[20 : 14] My answer is, well, we'll see how spiritual you feel when you have a huge pile of stinking garbage in your kitchen and out front. We'll see how you're doing then.

Your work is from God even if it's a garbage man. Jesus was a carpenter. A lot of that righteousness that is in heaven that has been applied and accounted to me, a lot of the righteousness that is my only hope and plea, the righteousness that I am going to get into heaven with is carpenter righteousness.

Building good chairs. Building good tables or whatever he did. he was a, the term is just, he's a workman.

He's a carpenter, a stonemason. He was something like that. He did that kind of thing and whatever he did, he did a good job at it. He was a holy carpenter and he did holy work.

So he wasn't, Jesus wasn't sort of like a pilot waiting 30 years for the plane to land as he circles the landing strip.

[21 : 31] Waiting for the real stuff to start. No, tables, chairs, doors, houses, whatever he was working on, it was the real thing. It was the real thing.

He really meant it. He was doing a really good job. That's what God had called him to and that's what he did. William Wilberforce was a Christian politician but when he was first converted, he thought he needed to leave politics and go into the ministry.

And John Newton, he was an old pastor by this time, took William Wilberforce aside and he helped him to realize that God was calling him to a public life.

God had called him to a public life. And Wilberforce said this, My walk is a public one. My business is in the world.

I must mix with the assemblies of men or quit the post which Providence seems to have assigned me. Or quit the post which Providence, which God seems to have assigned me.

[22 : 40] Some of you have to do what you're called to do. Mix with men. Or if you don't do it, you're quitting what God told you to do.

So what post has God assigned you? It's from God. Martin Luther wrote, The work of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, 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 all works are measured before God by faith alone. If we had time, we could talk about that. About how a lot of sermons are a lot less faith-filled and spirit-led than some of the things that you do.

Work, faith working through love. Faith working through love. That's righteousness at work. So God called you to that post.

Get a feel for it. Appreciate it. Get a sense of the divine calling on your life. Recognize it. Enjoy it. Your work is a gift of God to you. You need it.

[23 : 55] It's good for you. It's part of His kindness and mercy to you. And it's one of the things that He has called you to do. So your work is from God. Your work is through God.

You do it in the strength and the grace that He gives you. Who gives you those abilities that you have? God does.

God does. And so who upholds you day after day? It's the Lord. And I know He does.

I've been where you are. I've been, I remember just all the time like being in the bathroom. Lord, help me. Help me to get through this. Help me to do this.

But He gives more grace, doesn't He? He gives more grace. And He gives the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of wisdom and counsel.

[24 : 54] And we need Him. It isn't just public preachers who need the Spirit's filling. filling. The very first person to be described as being filled with the Spirit was a man named, I'm not going to be able to pronounce this, it's Bezel Lel.

He's in the Pentateuch, the Old Testament. And this fellow, he was definitely more Larry Martin than Martin Luther. He was a craftsman, skilled in his work.

And Moses says he was filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. It's through Him. But we don't only work, we don't, we don't work only through God, but God also works through us.

Through us. And this is what I was talking about earlier, the sense of purpose, this plan for us. God doesn't just have you where He has you haphazardly.

And He doesn't just have you like on a bookshelf, just doing nothing. He has a purpose, and He's using you. You're more like a tool in His hand than a book on some bookshelf that's just gathering dust that no one reads.

[26 : 09] It's through Him, and He's working through you. That sense of purpose. Maybe you've seen the movie Chariots of Fire.

It's about Eric Little, and in that movie, in his own life, he said this, I believe God made me for a purpose. He made me for China.

He knew that God wanted him to go to China and work as a missionary. God made me for a purpose, to go to China, but He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure.

And you know that scene, if you haven't seen it, you ought to see it, that scene in that movie when he throws back his head and he runs, and the actor does a brilliant job of displaying the joy of the Lord in Eric's heart.

He was being used by God, filled with the joy of the Lord. God works through us. The Lutherans often speak of Christians at work as the fingers of God.

[27 : 18] The fingers of God. Does God have fingers in your place of work? Well, if you're there, he does have a finger at your company. Tim Keller says, we are agents of his providential love for others.

We are his representatives put here to steward his world and love people. To love people. Faith working through love.

That sounds religious, but that's exactly what your job description is. To be trusting God and loving people and using the gifts and the graces that he has given you to do that.

So, Rex isn't just fixing cars, he's loving people. Larry Martin isn't just laying brick, he's loving people. God's working through them.

Doesn't that change the way that you look at yourself? It should. Shouldn't that be encouraging? It ought to be. That pleasure of knowing that God made me for this, and when I do it, I feel his pleasure, that's not just for Eric Little.

[28 : 28] That's for you. That's for me. That's for us to be enjoying. So, your work is from God, and it's to God.

Colossians 3 talks to just slaves, to the common joes, to the working class, the everyday workers, and he says, whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

Now, I don't know about you, but something inside of me, when I read that, at least in this translation, it makes me kind of think, it says, work at it as if, as if you were working for the Lord, not for men, like you were.

You're really not, but just sort of like pretend that you are, because that's kind of how it can sound. Maybe you've never read it, maybe that's just me, but I just want to say, that's not what he meant. work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord.

Then he adds on, it is, it is the Lord Christ you are serving.

[29 : 39] you're not pretending. When you go to work and you're thinking, I've got to work as if not for men, but for the Lord, that's not just a fiction, that's not a religious fantasy that you're putting into your own mind.

No, it is the Lord Christ you are serving. Now, if you've read your New Testament, if you're familiar with it, you'll know that Paul doesn't often use that title for Jesus.

He has all sorts of other titles, but he doesn't talk about the Lord Christ very often. And I think this is where we need to pause just for a second and think about, okay, why did he use that term?

What is he trying to teach us? What is he trying to say? Well, we're used to that term Lord, but when he says Christ, what is he thinking about? That's not Jesus' last name. What does that mean?

Anyone? What does Christ mean? The anointed one? what's another word? What's the Hebrew word for it? Messiah.

[30 : 44] So when Paul, who is steeped in the Old Testament scriptures, who has this Old Testament perspective definitely in his mind, when he says the Messiah, what kind of thoughts is he thinking about?

from the Old Testament perspective, who is the Christ going to be? Well, he's going to be the one that he's the son of David.

He's coming to found a kingdom. He's come to into this world to begin the kingdom of God. You are serving the Lord Messiah.

You are serving the messianic king. your job is a part of his kingdom work.

Your job has just been co-opted into the kingdom of God. When you became a Christian, Jesus went into your workplace and said, now this is mine.

[31 : 47] This is for my kingdom. This is for me, and I'm going to use it to build my kingdom. I'm the Lord Messiah. And as the Messiah, you're now working for me and my kingdom.

We do it for him. We do it for our king. And so your job is part of his kingdom work. So we do it in his service.

And I think the important thing to realize is he receives it that way. He receives it that way. You serve him to him and he receives it.

Martin Luther again said, God and all the angels smile when a man changes a diaper. Now, not because it's funny, although it did take me a while to figure front and back and stuff teased me about that.

The point is, God is pleased when he sees men, women, doing ordinary, serving, little tasks like that. He is pleased.

[32 : 57] He smiles at that. And Martin adds the angels see it and they're pleased. Because an angel's heart is a servant's heart.

Aren't they all servants? And so when angels see someone doing an ordinary job, they see a servant heart like theirs.

And so we do it for him, for him. And that changes everything. Knowing all that we just talked about, it should make you happy at your work, despite the difficulties, despite the trials, despite the setbacks, despite the thorns and the thistles and the sweat and everything else.

Yes, it is part of the curse. There is some experience of that. But knowing that should make us happy at work. we're doing, we're giving, and he's receiving.

We're serving, and he's taking it to himself. So my question is, what is best, what is the most God-glorifying, God-honoring, God-pleasing thing to do?

[34 : 09] Well, carpenters need to make a good chair. Factory workers need to make a good truck. farmers need to grow good corn.

Moms need to take good care of their kids, and on we go. Everyday work done to the Lord can be a much more religious act than many sermons, many acts of charity, or going on some mission.

So do you want to be happy? Well, get a sense of God's purpose for your work. And if you're not happy at work, what are you missing?

Are you missing the which piece are you missing? Are you missing the it's from God? It's through God? Or maybe you're missing that it's to God.

If you're not happy at your job, in a big overall sense, then you're probably missing something there. So you need to think about that. We're dismissed.

[35 : 17] We're dismissed.