

Work as Service (part 1)

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[0:00] Well, we've been looking at the book of Genesis to understand the design and the dignity and the pattern of work. But it is in the New Testament that God provides purpose, some purpose for our work by calling us to serve the world.

And so today's lesson is entitled Work as Service. And we're going to be looking at work as service for this week and the next week. And we're going to do that from the New Testament primarily. So today we have just two large points that everything fits under. And the first one is called and assigned. The first point is called called and assigned.

Now, the Bible uses the word call or calling or called in a number of different ways. Romans 8.30, those God predestines, he also calls.

Calling there is a calling to salvation. It's a calling to be in, to belong to Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul says that God has called us to holiness.

[1:18] He's given these Christians who he's called to Jesus Christ an assignment to be holy. God calls us into one body.

So not only an assignment, but a place. The Greek word for church, ekklesia, means the called out ones.

Called out from the world, called together into one group, into one congregation. To be called is to be put in a certain place or to do a certain task.

Jesus called the disciples in order that they might become apostles. He sent ones. So he calls them out of their work as fishermen.

And he says, you'll be now fishers of men. But now look at 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 17.

[2:17] 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 17. And this is what the Apostle Paul says.

Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him. And to which God has called him.

So in the context, Paul's point is that whatever situation God called you in. Or called you when you are, whatever situation you were in when God called you.

Stay in that situation. You don't need to change your marital status, your job status, your social station. In order to live a life that pleases God.

And so if you're married, you don't have to become single. If you're single, you don't have to become married. If you had a certain job, you don't have to change your work. Unless it was an unlawful work.

[3:18] If you were called to be a slave, you don't have to become free. In order to live a life that pleases God. Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him.

To which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Now, did you see those two fantastic words that the title of this first point comes from?

Called and assigned. The Lord assigned to each person a certain place. Even before they were saved. And God called them to a certain place before he saved them.

And so Paul uses these two words to describe ordinary work. In other places, Paul uses these same words to describe spiritual gifts.

Done to help the spiritual community. Used to build up the church. But here he's talking about ordinary work. So he's talking about common, ordinary, social, and economic tasks.

[4:26] Being a mom. Being a dad. Being a husband. Being a wife. Being an ordinary worker in the workplace. Those tasks are called and assigned to you.

God's assignment for you. It's not just pastors that get to enjoy a sense of calling and assignment from God.

Just as God equips Christians and calls them to certain tasks for building up the church community. He also equips and assigns people to do various kinds of work to build up the human community. So you can find your work here in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Whatever your work is. Whatever your work is. Whether it be a wife.

A husband. A mother. A father. Doing some ordinary job. Remember how we started this series. Where we went through and we talked about what we do for a living. Remember what you said.

[5:35] Those kinds of jobs you can find here in 1 Corinthians 7. He's assigned you work for building up the human community. Now, there's a couple of lessons that we can just learn from that right off the bat.

And here's one big lesson that we can learn from that. That your work isn't about you. It's not about you. It's not about you. How do we normally think about work?

Or how does the world normally think about work? It's about me and it's about mine. It's about making me happy. It's about making me self-fulfilled. It's about advancing me.

It's about my power. My money. It's about earning money for me and for mine. And so we go to work. And we primarily think of what I can get out of this job for me.

But a vocation, a calling, is something that someone else calls you to. And you do it for their sake rather than your own.

[6:42] And that's why I say if you have been called and assigned to something by God like we see in 1 Corinthians 7, then that calling, that job, that work is not primarily about you.

But it's about the person who called you to it. Now, the most familiar example, and maybe this will help you understand what I'm saying, the most familiar example is the call to be a pastor.

Now, do pastors take that role on on their own? Just because someone says, I feel like I want to be a pastor, I want to be a pastor, does that mean that God or the church has called them to that?

Do pastors take that role on on their own? Does one day one of you just suddenly say, I've decided I want to be a pastor here? Well, you're not supposed to.

I suppose sometimes things like that happen in bad situations. But Paul says, we have this ministry because of God's mercy. God is merciful and he gives people this ministry.

[7:52] So being a pastor isn't about me. No, God calls men to ministry, to service. And then the church calls men to ministry or to service.

And the reason that the church would call a man or God calls a man through the church is in order that that man might serve them.

So the role, the work of a pastor exists for the sake of the people to which he is called.

Or for God's sake, ultimately. So a calling exists for the sake of others, not for the person who's called. So that's the most familiar example, I think, in our setting.

But the same principles applies to whatever job that you have. In the same way, your daily work is a calling. God calls you to serve him in it.

[8:52] And your fellow man calls you to serve them in it. So our work, whatever your work is, it exists for the sake of others.

So our work exists, our calling exists, because we can serve others through it. And if we don't serve others, if we can't serve others, no matter how much we feel like we are called, we aren't.

So if we're totally useless in our workplace and we do no good for the company, what happens to our job? Do people just take you on as a charity case?

No. You don't serve. You don't do good for others in your work. Generally, you lose a job. If you're self-employed and you do no good, then you're not going to have work to do for very long, are you?

Well, so if a man can't preach, can't teach, and he can't lead, he might feel like he's called to the ministry, but if the church isn't helped by him, then he isn't called.

[10:01] And in the same way, if a man can't cut hair and can't shave beards, no matter how much he might feel like he's called to be a barber, he's not going to be called for very long.

If his customers aren't helped by him, then he isn't called, because a calling exists to do good to others. And so, do you see what I'm getting at?

Your calling, your assignment, might bring you great joy. And it usually does. It usually very much can.

But your calling and my calling doesn't exist for my happiness, for what I can get out of it. It exists primarily because it's a way that I can serve others, serve my family, serve my customers, serve my employers, serve the wider world of society.

And so, no longer is the question, what will make me the most money? Or give me the most status? The question must now be, how, how, with my existing abilities and my existing opportunities, how can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I know, knowing what I know about God's will and of human need?

[11:25] So, how do my existing abilities and opportunities, how, with those things, can I serve other people, knowing what I know about God's will and about human need?

So, as we think about our jobs, as we pursue new jobs, my orientation is outward.

It's toward others, and it's toward God. So, where does motivation to work come from? Or where should it come from? If the point of my work is to exalt me, to raise my status, or raise my financial, my checkbook, then my work inevitably becomes more about me than about my work.

And so, my aggressiveness, my assertiveness, will become abuse. Because there's no boundaries. If I want something, and I'm going to go get it, and it's about me, then there's no boundaries to what I'm going to do. And so, it will become abuse, and my drive will become burnout, because I'll have no way of stopping myself.

[12:37] If it's about me, if I have to work in order to feel good about myself, and my self-sufficiency will become self-loathing pretty soon.

When I see how and what ways I don't measure up, I'm going to start hating myself, because I think it's all resting on me. And so, selfishness, selfishness at work, becomes its own destruction.

It becomes its own punishment. We're going to talk about how sin changes and warps work, and makes it into something that God never intended it to be. And we do it to ourselves.

But if my purpose in my work is to serve someone or something beyond me, then I actually have a better reason to use my talent, and my ambition, and my creative energy.

And in the long run, we're likely to be more successful, even by the world's standards, if we're doing it to serve others. So, seeing our work as a calling, that someone that God has called me to, or the human community has called me to, changes everything.

[13:51] It gives me the right place to start, where I'm not inward-facing, instead I'm outward-facing, and it fills me with the correct motivation. So, in the long run, I'm going to even be more successful, even by human standards.

And I'm certainly going to be more successful by God's standards in my work. So, calling an assignment. I think that's a very exciting idea. Just to think that whatever place you have, whatever job you have, God has called you to that.

And God has said, serve me in this way. And yeah, it might not be a pastor, or be a deacon, but that's a calling, and an assignment from God.

And I think that's an exciting thing. To know that I can serve the Lord, and I can serve my fellow man, by doing a good job.

So, the second point. The second point, we're going to call the masks of God. The masks of God. And you're going to see what I mean by that in a moment.

[15:02] The masks of God. Now, very few people took 1 Corinthians chapter 7 as seriously as Martin Luther did.

Martin Luther, by God's grace, almost single-handedly destroyed the medieval social order that the Roman Catholic Church had imposed on Europe.

And this is what I mean. Well, I mean, he almost single-handedly destroyed it. He was, the Reformation was not just a religious Reformation. It was a social Reformation because the gospel had these profound effects, not just on the church, but on work, and how people related to each other.

And so, when the Pope, he wrote the Papal Bull, which is this accusation, this paper, against Luther, he said this. His very first words was, Oh, Lord, have mercy, there's a wild boar in the vineyard.

There's someone just tearing this place up. Lord, have mercy on us. And he was this wild boar, and he tore up the social order that the Roman Catholic Church had placed, had blanketed Europe with.

[16:13] Now, the church at that time understood itself as God's kingdom on the earth. And therefore, only work for the church, in the church, could qualify as God's work.

So get that. Only work in and for the church counted in God's eyes. The only way to be called by God into service was as a monk, a priest, a nun.

They were what the people called the spiritual estate. You had a spiritual job. And everyone else's work was worldly.

It was of this world. And so it was sort of like that demeaning necessity that we talked about.

Remember how the Greeks thought work was just this demeaning necessity, and the best thing that you could do was get away from it.

Well, this is pretty much like that. All this other kind of work is you just have to do it. But if you could be a priest or a nun, well, then that was doing God's work.

[17 : 24] And Luther stormed against this idea. And he did it because, well, for a number of reasons, but one was 1 Corinthians chapter 7. And this is what he said.

It's a pure invention. It's a pure invention that Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate, while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate.

You see what he's saying? He's like, this is a pure fiction. It's a pure invention that these people get the spiritual status, and then lords, and nobles, and artisans, merchants, farmers, everyone else is just temporary.

This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need to be intimidated by it. And that, for this reason, all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate.

And there is no difference among them except that of office. We are all consecrated priests by baptism. As St. Peter says, you are a royal priesthood.

[18 : 39] So Luther is arguing that every Christian has an equality before God, an equality to their work, because we are all equally called to be priests, to the priesthood.

We're all royal priests, regardless of our work in this world, because my temporal work has nothing to do with my status in Jesus Christ.

And in Jesus Christ, I am made to be priest and a king before my God. And so that means you don't have to be in the clergy.

You don't have to be a pastor. You don't have to be a deacon or a priest or a nun or any of those things in order to be in service of God. God uses all kinds of work to bless people.

He calls men to different arenas. Yes, he does call some men to be pastors and deacons and whatever, but he uses all work to do his work.

[19 : 48] And Martin Luther went to Psalm 147 to show this, to defend that. So can you please turn there to Psalm 147. And can someone read verses 12 through 14?

Extol the Lord, Lord Jerusalem, raise your God, O Zion, for he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. He grants peace to your brothers and satisfies you with the finest wheat.

Thank you. Now, I have a question for you. In verse 13, it says, for he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you.

I have a question. How does God strengthen the bars of your gates? how does God strengthen the bars of your gates?

How does God defend a city and make it strong and safe and a peaceful place to live? Mark? Construction. Construction.

[21 : 00] Construction workers. Okay. Construction workers. Quite literally. Right? Right? What else? Law enforcement.

Law enforcement. What else? Good churches. What else? Military.

Military. Good. What else? Good rulers.

Good rulers. Good laws. Military. Police. All those sorts of things. This is how, this is what Luther said.

How can, how does God defend a city? How does God make a community, a society, a civilization strong and safe? Luther's answer.

[21 : 56] By the word bars, we must understand not only the iron bar that a smith can make. So not only the construction work. That's true. But everything else that helps to protect us, such as good government, good city ordinances, good order, wise rulers, this is a gift of God.

John Calvin himself even said that a tyranny is better than anarchy because at least they can keep law and order in some fashion.

So how does God give a city security? Well, isn't it through lawmakers and police officers and the military and people working in government and politics?

God cares for the civic needs through the work of others whom he calls to that work. So do you see what Luther is saying?

Psalms 147 says that God strengthens the bars of your gates. This is something that God does. Well, how does God do that? Well, through the work of construction workers and police officers and government officials, God does those things through those people.

[23:17] to whom he calls that work to that work. Or think about the Lord's prayer. Think about the Lord's prayer.

We ask that God provide our daily bread. Daily bread. Maybe you've never thought of that. But when you pray for your daily bread, you're praying for everything that contributes to you having food on your table.

you're praying for flour in the flour jar and an oven that works. You're praying for fields and farmlands.

You're praying for farmers and tractors and bakers and bread truck drivers and stock boys and checkout ladies. You're praying for the entire process.

bread. When we ask God, please provide me with my daily bread, we don't expect magically bread to appear on our table.

[24:26] So how does God feed us today? Isn't it through the farmer and the baker, the checkout boy, the retailer, the website programmer, the truck driver, everything else that contributes to my food?

Me having food. So God could easily give us food without plowing and planting and trucking, but he doesn't want to do it that way. Right? He provided manna in the desert and the Israelites weren't trucking and plowing and farming.

He provided for them. But generally, God wants us to be a part of that work. He involves us. Well, how come? Well, why do it that way?

Well, think about it this way. I think this is very helpful. Parents, why do you give your children chores? Why do you give your children chores? Because you want them to be diligent and conscientious and responsible.

The work itself is good for them. And God wants to do us good. And one of the good things for us is to give us work to do. And so, even with your children, you don't want to just give them everything they need.

[25:38] You want them to be wise and responsible people. And so, you give them what they need. And what they need is work. And so, you give them work to do.

Now, a lot of times, you probably don't absolutely need your children's help, especially if you have little children, right? Most of the time, you could do a better job than they could do.

Most of the time, you could do it faster than they could do it. But you don't do that. You don't just do it because they need to learn to work.

The work itself is good for them. Now, sometimes when you have to do something really fast, and it's beyond their ability, then what do you say?

You say, get out of the way, I'll do this myself, and you sit them down, and then you do the job. And sometimes God does that too, doesn't he? It's too big for us, he sits us down, and he goes to work.

[26:40] But most of the time, God works through us. Now, this is what Luther said. What else is all our work to God, whether in the fields, in the garden, in the city, in the house, in war, or in government, but just a child's performance, by which he wants to give his gifts in the fields and at home and everywhere else.

These are the masks of God behind which he wants to remain concealed and do all things. So, this is what Luther is after.

This is what he's trying to say. God takes our work and he blesses us through it, but he's doing it all. He's involved in it all.

He masks himself, but yet it's still him. And so, behind my job, God is at work blessing people, blessing my family, blessing me, blessing society.

He's still at work in your job. So, look at verse 14 in Psalm 147. How does God grant peace to your borders and satisfy you with the finest of wheat?

[28:00] How does God bless you with a life that is enjoyable and restful? Isn't it through good neighbors who are honest? Just honest neighbors who aren't stealing your stuff, who aren't destroying your things?

Isn't it through marriage and family? Doesn't God bless you and give you peace in your home through a wife, through a husband who loves you, through moms and dads that do their work, and through police officers and soldiers?

Isn't it through people working, doing their called assignment, doing what God has given them to do, doing their ordinary jobs?

When people do their ordinary jobs, the Bible is teaching us that that is how God blesses us. And so when God gives a man a vocation, a calling, it's God at work.

God at work blessing and helping. God doing good to the sons of men. and that cheers up your heart, doesn't it?

[29:12] To think that I'm not going to work all by myself. God is in this with me. God is taking my work and using it to bless mankind. My work is God at work for good.

And God is not too proud to use the lowest of jobs. So do you have a menial, low job that no one looks up to, that doesn't get you much respect or status?

Luther said this, God milks the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid. A job, a small job, no esteem, no one knocking on their door for their autograph, but God milks the cows through the vocation of the milkmaids.

No job is too small, and no job is too big either. You might be a milkmaid, or you might be the president, and yet you need God's help, you need God's blessing, and if he's not in it with you, your job will be a terrible waste.

So whether you're a milkmaid or a president, whatever job you have, whatever it looks like, it fits into God's work. Now, in the last couple of minutes, how can we apply this?

[30:38] How can we apply this? First, go to work with a sense of assignment. Go to work with a sense of an assignment.

You're doing whatever you are doing because God in his providence has called you there, and that should give you a sense of ownership, a sense of stewardship.

You are in that place, you've been given that task because God has given it to you. You're there to do more than collect a paycheck. You're there to do more than witness.

Even those, both of those things are good. You're called to serve God and to serve your fellow man with your work. So, own your job.

Accept it from God. Whatever it is, it's an honor that he would give you that work. You're on assignment. So, that's number one. Go to work with a sense of assignment.

[31:43] Number two, go to work with open eyes. See how God is looking for how God is using your work to bless mankind.

others. So, the stock boy, there he is, stocking the shelves at the grocery store.

He's part of that long line of chain where God gives bread to the righteous and the unrighteous. God is using his work to bless others.

And when you see that, that should make you rejoice in the Lord. Your job is a manifest, an apparent blessing of God to other people. It's a sign of God's goodness.

It's a sign of God's goodness, not only to you, but to others. So, go to work with open eyes. Look to see how God's blessing people through you.

[32:51] Now, number three, if these things are true, if you're called, and you're assigned, and you're there to serve others, and you're there to serve God, and your work is meant to be a blessing to others, then strive to do a good job.

Strive to work hard as unto the Lord. You have every reason to work hard. There's going to be plenty of difficulties. There's going to be plenty of frustrations at your work, and all sorts of reasons to be down on your job, to give up, to lose heart, but here's your motivation.

Your work might not be appreciated, your work might not be well paid, but you're working because God has called you there. You're God's servant, and he's called you to be a blessing.

And if you are faithful in what you do, and how you do it, and you're working diligently as unto the Lord, and you're doing it diligently in love toward others, then you're going to be a blessing to other people.

And if you are faithful, then in the end, you will hear, well done, good and faithful servant. Well done. You don't have to be a pastor to hear those words.

[34:14] You don't have to have some special job in the church to hear those words. Your work and your place and your assignment, your faithfulness will reap that reward.

Well, we have a couple minutes. Are there any comments or questions at this time? Dave? It would be good to, for our children, who are students, to be able to hear this and to be able to apply it to their studenthood.

can you comment on that? Yes, what I would think is that they're in time of preparation for the future when their work will be a service to others.

maybe right now, technically, their schooling isn't benefiting mankind in that sense, but it still can be used, still can be a service to God in their studies, in their classroom, at home, or wherever they're doing their schooling.

I think, yeah, did you have something to add to that? Just to pick up on that, even before that age, even when they're little kids, like you said, we give them chores, but sometimes they lose sight of the big picture of what this chore is.

[36:09] The little kids can do it just for their allowance or the money, and, again, sinfulness acquired immaturity, lack of knowledge, they don't understand the big picture of God's design for work, and there's so many opportunities through the day.

I was out working with the kids the day before yesterday, loading brush and logs, and one of them took off the play. There's an opportunity right there that I had with one of them to help them understand the benefit of his work to the rest of us, the bigger picture.

So doing that throughout their growing up years, and the other point I wanted to make was just coming out of a manufacturing situation, doing one of the, what would normally be a menial job, it was a task going in and approaching that work each day with that mindset of the bigger picture. And even for a Christian, of course an unsaved person, they don't have that spirit of God and the truth dwelling within that will assist them. But the other thing that I found interesting was even in that kind of setting, those in leadership didn't take the opportunity to help us see the bigger picture even in what we were doing.

So many times work did become a, just a meaningless process of making one part for whatever reason we don't know. But even leadership as a parent or employer, helping employees or kids see what's the bigger picture here.

[37:55] There's a bigger purpose than you're seeing for what you're doing. And as we understand that and apply it, there's joy to the work beyond what we could have following some other mindset.

I guess if I could put those two things together then, I'd say, yes, while technically their schooling is not this direct service to mankind yet, if we show them the bigger picture of why they are doing their schoolwork, why are they doing their math, why are they learning how to read, that gives them a reason for working hard at their schoolwork with a bigger picture.

But also, I think no child is just doing schoolwork. They have other jobs that we can teach these lessons to them in and show that this is part of one big stream.

You not only serve at your work, but you serve at home and you have other roles than a primary economic role, whatever that might be, going to your job, is what I'm saying.

You have other roles besides that role that we're trying to train our children up into embracing. Yes, Derek. Not just formal occupations, but I think it's a tired people.

[39:22] I know when our kids around were asked, I thought, what do I do now? And yet God caused his people to work, if that's doing the important work, praying more intensely for his work, or if you don't know what he wants you to do, ask him, and he shows you.

It is so exciting that we are never retired. Right. And I think that's something that I want to bring up. This idea of calling an assignment, it gets me out of the mindset of just thinking that that job, identifying me in that job.

So as long as I have this work, that's who I am, and then all of a sudden when I've lost it, now I've lost every reason for existing, or whatever, you know, you go through this period of despair and mourning, where I see, you know what, life changes, and God gives different assignments at different times, and when I see myself as primarily on assignment from God, that frees me from putting all my eggs into that one basket of, I do this job, and then now that that job's over, I have nothing to do.

There's always, like you said, there's always more work to do. There's always another assignment, and it might look totally different than the previous assignment, but just to realize that I am called and assigned, my time and my place is decided by God's providence to embrace that from his hands.

That's all the time we have. Thank you for your comments. We are dismissed.