

The Jesus Box

Our Work

Colossians 3:17

1. The problem of work.

- Ecclesiastes 1:1-3; Luke 12:20

2. The purpose of work.

- Genesis 2:15, 3:19; Galatians 3:13; 1 Corinthians 10:31

- Your work has eternal implications even if it has no apparent eternal value
- How you perform at work is as important as where you work
- How you perform at work is as important as how you behave at work
- Putting your heart into your work allows God to bless your work

3. A work of purpose.

- Colossians 3:17; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:20

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The Jesus Box: Part One

We spent most of this last week in the hospital with my 90-year-old dad (we moved him up here five years ago to assisted living after my mom passed. Shortly after my mom was diagnosed with brain cancer, we learned that dad has dementia, and then he had a stroke). We moved him up here where we could supervise his care. On Monday evening we spent the night in the ER with dad for pneumonia and they removed almost 2 liters of fluid from his right lung. He was discharged on Thursday and returned to his apartment and hospice is now directing his care. The doctor estimated that we've got maybe months left with dad.

I'm very proud of my dad – some might remember that my dad is a retired Lt. Col. in the Oregon Army Guard, and he retired from the Oregon State Police as Commander of Communications for the State. He started out in the early 1960s patrolling as a state trooper, and during that time he went through a lot, including being shot at and having to shoot a criminal that resulted in that person's death. He's been at the scene of many gruesome things. Of course growing up, my brother and I never heard about those things – he managed to keep all that from us. Some of you also know that years ago, before I became a pastor, I worked for a little while for the Oregon State Police, patrolling out of Newport and then Eugene. It wasn't until I started patrolling that I learned those things about my dad's duty experiences, and that was from other officers on the force.

Shortly after I started working with OSP, I was talking to my dad and he said, "Now I can talk to you about things that I could never tell your mother. You are going to go through things and see things that other people will never understand." And he was right. Thankfully I was never shot at or had to shoot anyone, although I did have to chase bad guys and had knives pulled on me. But many times I was called to the scene of DOA's and vehicle accidents where I had to literally pick up pieces of people and stabilize severely wounded people until the EMT's arrived.

Honestly – I learned I was good at police work because I could keep my head under that kind of pressure, and I was good at compartmentalizing. Do you know what that term is? It means you can keep things boxed up. So once I stepped away from a gruesome scene, I could put a lid on that box and step back into civilian life. I must have gotten that from my dad, because that's what he was able to do, too. I think I'm too good at that.

Compartmentalization is a good emergency self-defense mechanism, and it helps with that line of work, but it's not good for you in the long run. It's why so many military and first responders and trauma victims have PTSD. Those things don't ever stay in the box; sooner or later they come out, one way or another.

But beyond trauma response, the truth is, when it comes to many of our Christian lives, we are all too good at compartmentalizing. It is a problem for any true Christian, because all of us do this in our lives to some degree. If I can press you a bit – or maybe a lot – I'd say there are likely many of us Christians in this room that will behave differently tomorrow than we are this morning. When we get to work tomorrow, we talk and act in ways that we never would in church. When we get to school, we act around our friends in ways that we know are not consistent with our Christian life.

Here's why I'm spending so much time setting this up for us today: today we begin a series called "The Jesus Box," and this is the point of it (listen to me now): if you are a true follower of Christ, then your life does not consist of having a church box and a family box and a job box and a school box and a dating box and a Friday night box...you only have ONE box and that is the Jesus Box. You don't step out of that box and then step into a different one tomorrow: **EVERYTHING IN YOUR LIFE** goes in ***the Jesus Box***. Jesus is your primary and only life, and you live the Jesus-life at work or on duty or at school or on a date or... there are no separate boxes; there is only the Jesus Box.

So for the next several weeks we are going to look at some of the main areas of our lives that we tend to compartmentalize. I'm praying that the Holy Spirit will convict us if needed. But we are also going to see what that part of our lives looks like when it *is* lived in the Jesus Box. Make sense?

So let's get started. Have you ever heard the term, "a call to ministry"? That's what we use to describe why people become pastors – they've received a "call" from God, or a sense of a divine purpose for their lives. The problem with that language is that it automatically divides people into two groups: those who are "called," and those who are not. Over the years, the church even came up with other words to describe the difference – "Pastors" and "laymen" or "laywomen." A lay person is considered someone who doesn't have expertise or higher levels of education and preparation. It's where we get the phrase in English, "Layman's terms" – "explain it to me in laymen's terms," which means putting something in simple language.

The problem with that is, it creates the **WRONG** idea that what a pastor does is divinely driven, or godly, and what anyone else does isn't as important. Again: *that's wrong*. Because the Bible didn't make that kind of distinction. Yes – there are those who are called into ministry, but the Bible considers *every* job as divine. In the Latin translation of the Bible, the words "to call," "to summon," or "set apart" use the word "vocare" – what we get our English word "vocation" from. And the Bible is clear that every believer has a vocation – every believer is called to follow God and set apart by him. Therefore, *everything* that the Christian does is a calling; a "vocare" or a "vocation." I want us to see that as a Christian you don't just have a job or work – it is a vocation; your work, whatever it is, is a calling.

That's why the Bible says:

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17, niv)

That means that everything you do is to be done in the name of Jesus, as a representative of Jesus, as Jesus would do it.

So our work matters, no matter what it is! And by the way, this is true whether we are talking about the work you do at a job or the work you do at school. So if you are a student, this applies to you too.

So what's...

1. The problem of work?

One problem we run into when we consider our work is that we don't see the inherent value in it. Anything that we do repetitively begins to lose its interest for us, and we begin to treat it like it's mundane, or worse yet begin to resent it or even hate it and it becomes a grind.

I've told you before how the treadmill was invented; it was in 1818 by British engineer Sir William Cubitt. It was made to be a harsh punishment device for prisoners. It was a large wheel with steps that prisoners climbed for hours to grind corn or pump water. In the 1960s we turned it into an exercise machine. I'm not sure what that says about our exercise regimens, but it sure says a lot about our attitude about work.

The Gallup organization once did research on employee engagement across 142 countries, measuring things like job satisfaction, if they thought their work was important, and whether they felt like their job helped them learn and grow.

Worldwide, only 13% were engaged in their work, 63% were not engaged, and 24% were "actively disengaged." Their conclusions: "The bulk of employees worldwide...lack motivation and are less likely to invest discretionary effort in organizational goals or outcomes."¹

Even pastors aren't exempt from falling into the trap of meaningless work. Some pastors begin to resent the demands that are constantly placed on them. Other pastors are so unmotivated that they easily get away without doing much work at all. Both those types of pastors give the rest of us a bad name. I have a friend who jokingly tells me, "You sure are busy for a guy that only works on Sundays." He says that because he knows me well and knows how much is involved in a pastor's job. I say all that to point out that no one is exempt from treating work as meaningless.

Go back and read the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes; it's all about how meaningless things can be if we don't have the right perspective. The first few verses say this:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3, niv)

So one problem with work is that we don't see its value.

¹ Uri Friedman, "7 Ways to Find Meaning at Work," *The Atlantic* (7-4-16)

The other problem with work is that we do it for the wrong reasons. We might be doing it just to make money to buy more material things. We might be doing it to boost our fragile egos and self-esteem. If we are doing work for any other reason except God's reasons, then soon work will lose its value and become meaningless to us. Remember the story we talked about last week?

When Jesus told the story of the rich fool who built barns to store his growing acquisitions of grain, he said that the guy thought he could take it easy – eat, drink, and be merry. And:

“Then God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’” (Luke 12:20, nlt)

Working for shortsighted ambition is just as bad as having no ambition at all.

Those things can happen when we keep work in its own box. But if we are going to place our work into the Jesus Box, it means that what we do at work – no matter what job it is – really does matter. So then what is...

2. The Purpose of work?

God knows that work is a good thing; he created it into the rhythm of life from the very beginning. Look at what the Bible tells us in the book of Genesis – the book of beginnings, where we are told that God “worked” at creating the world and then he rested. Work and rest are part of the divine rhythm. When it came to creating man and woman in his image, we are told:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15, niv)

Told him to what? To work it. You might think that work wasn't a part of the picture until *after* Adam and Eve sinned and they were cursed with work, but that verse describes what happened *before* our fall into sin. It was only *after* the Fall into sin that work became toil. God said that one of the results of sin was this:

“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.” (Genesis 3:19, niv)

Here's what's cool: please understand that when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, he made it possible to redeem *all* things – including work or school. That's why the Bible says this:

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” (Galatians 3:13, niv)

Redeeming us from the curse of the law involves all the things the law curses as a result of sin – including work. So as Christians, our redeemed lives means our work has value. That's why the Bible tells us this:

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31, niv)

What you do at work matters! If you have a bad attitude, if you are cheating the company or the Government, if you are not giving your work your best, you are falling short of that verse.

Let me quickly point out:²

Your work has eternal implications even if it has no apparent eternal value.

In other words, what you do at work can have eternal implications in your life and the life of people around you, even if the work itself does not.

If you are flipping burgers, sure – turning out a two-dollar hamburger doesn’t have eternal value, but – the person you are and the way you do your work DOES have eternal implications, especially on the people around you.

That’s because:

How you perform at work is as important as where you work.

The person you are, and the fact that you are doing your work to the best of your ability with the best of attitudes – that’s what is important, whether you are turning a wrench in an engine or inoculating children in the Amazon. And that is because:

How you perform at work is as important as how you behave at work.

The way you perform your job is a reflection of your character, and your character is to be the character of Christ. If your desired behavior is to be like Christ, but you perform your work half-heartedly or poorly, then you are negating your behavior and reflecting a negative character.

But also:

Putting your heart into your work allows God to bless your work.

God can work through you and for you if you put your heart into it. If you want an example of that, look at Joseph in the Bible. He was in an Egyptian labor prison. Talk about a menial job with no possibility of advancement! You don’t do your work, you will be put to death. You do your work, you remain in prison. That’s it. But Joseph did his work wholeheartedly and reflected all these things I just said. And what happened? God blessed him and Pharaoh ended up giving him the second highest position in the land. God can bless your work if you understand the purpose of work.

If you haven’t figured it out yet, we are talking about much more than working hard or having a good attitude. We aren’t just talking about the purpose of work; we are talking about...

3. A work of purpose.

² Andy Stanley, *Taking Care of Business: Finding God at Work*, Multnomah Books, 2005

Please hear me when I saw this: when you are a Christian, you are here to make a difference in this world for Christ. Your life has eternal value and what you do with it has eternal value. You matter. Your life matters. God has made you uniquely you, and no one can make the difference in this world that you can. If you don't do it, it won't happen. If you don't live a life of purpose; if you don't do your work with Christ-like purpose, the world and the people around you miss out. Therefore your work matters. Sometimes your work *is how* you make a difference for Christ in the lives of others. This is especially true if you are in the helping professions or if you are a first responder or an educator or pastor or counselor or many others. But also your work *is the means* to make a difference for Christ in the lives of others. In other words, *how* you do you work is an example to others. The kind of person you are at work or school causes others to notice that there is something different about your life; there is a purpose to it. And everyone innately wants to know that their life matters for something. When they see you living a life a purpose – doing your work with purpose – they will want to know how and why you are doing it.

For all of us, work gives us *the means* to make a difference; you earn money to provide for yourself or others, and you now have something more to *give*. God calls us to be generous people, so the skills and the income you receive from work enable you to give it away to others who need it. You can do that first hand as you see the need, or you can do it through organizations you trust that are doing good work, like West Valley Church, or Love INC., or the Union Gospel Mission. Your work is how you make a difference and the means to make a difference. So do it in a Christ-like way.

This is what that verse means that I read earlier – here it is again:

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
(Colossians 3:17, niv)

As a Christian, we don't have a “work” or “school” box that is separate from the Jesus Box. Our work goes into the Jesus Box, and we do our work out of there.

With that in mind, look at these verses in a new way:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, nlt)

Living a life of worship glorifies God, and that means that the way we do our work and school matters. It makes a difference. As we said earlier, it is why Jesus died and rose from the dead for you: to redeem you, or to buy you back from a life of sin and purposelessness into an abundant life of purpose and meaning. I love how one Bible translation says 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 –

Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body. (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, tmt)

Or to put it simply in verse 20:

You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.
(1 Corinthians 6:20, niv)

My friends, everything you do matters. Put your work life, your school life, in the Jesus Box. Start doing things that matter by doing them in ways that matter.

Do your work for the Lord.

If you are not a Christian, I've been praying that God has been speaking to you. Because my guess is that, somewhere inside you, you are realizing that your work hasn't mattered much. You've been struggling to find purpose in what you do. It has felt like drudgery, and you think, "Why bother? It doesn't matter anyway." I'm telling you, through Christ it *can* matter!

Maybe you're just getting by. But if you will accept what God has done for you through Christ, then *everything* you do has value and worth and purpose; it matters! You can be set free from a life of purposelessness. A life of drudgery. In a moment, I'm going to invite you to pray and start working out of the Jesus Box.

If you are a Christian, I've been praying that you and I would be convicted about the areas of our work and school that we've compartmentalized. It's time to put our work in the Jesus Box. Surrender it to him and let him start redeeming it. God will show you how your work can make a difference. But you've got to put the whole thing in the Jesus Box. No holding back. Surrender it all.

Let's pray.

Show of hands: Christian who wants to surrender your work or school, want to put it in the Jesus Box.

Not a Christian but today you want to become one.

Benediction: (Adapted from Psalm 34:1-3)

(May you) extol the Lord at all times;
(May) his praise will always be on (your) lips.
(May you) glory in the Lord;
 let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
Glorify the Lord with me;
 let us exalt his name together. (niv)