

WORK

Week 6: Faithfulness at Work¹

“A gifted chef rightly aspires to lead a kitchen, no matter how well she washes pots, chops onions, or concocts potato soup” (114). Everyone has the ability to honor God in his or her work, but not everyone has the same ability to do strategic work. **Should Christians be known for settling for less? Should all Christians expect to rise to the top of various careers?**

WHAT IS THE RIGHT PLACE FOR AMBITION?

The truth is, leadership is harder work. It will require longer hours, dealing with difficult personalities, opposition from established powers, training of followers to disseminate and spread ideas. These realities might easily deter a talented individual from pursuing leadership roles in favor of simpler work. To these, Jesus admonishes: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” (Luke 12:48).

“Trailblazers and organizational leaders ought to steward their rare gifts. Nations need the best possible governors, and corporations need the most talented and virtuous executives. Therefore, it is sensible for people with high energy and gifts to strive for leadership” (115).

Consider:

- A surgeon can improve the lives of dozens, but the one who pioneers a surgical procedure improves the lives of thousands
- A grocery manager improves an individual store, but the regional manager of a grocery chain has the ability to improve multiple communities
- Mayors affect local policy, but a governor the entire state

“So then, if opportunity for wider service never comes, we serve cheerfully in our place. But if we are qualified for a strategic task and it finds us, we should be open to it” (115).

Food for Thought:

What is the prime challenge as you strive to be faithful at work, paid or unpaid? Distractions? Devaluation of your job? Longing for a different job?

Do you have friends who think their work is meaningless? How could you encourage them?

An aspiring writer wrote to an advice columnist: “I’ve always wanted to write, and I have some—but all the wonderful, inspiring, labor-of-love type things I want to do I can’t, because I seemingly can’t keep myself from wasting hours of my day on Instagram.” **Share a distraction that has the ability to keep you from being faithful at work.**

Faithfulness at work looks different depending on whom you ask. Romantics might say to be faithful to your personal dreams and passions. Pragmatists would instead encourage the steady pursuit of marketable skills within reasonable career goals.

Consider four young believers grappling with pursuing faithfulness:

- **Abby:** Hired out of college at a large retail company. Working in a fast-paced corporate environment, she crunches numbers to maximize profits on a clothing line she considers frumpy.
- **Kyle:** Working as a financial planner, he recently landed a major client with sizeable wealth. However, the husband and wife have no children, and she insists that the majority of their estate be donated to a large abortion provider. Committedly pro-life, Kyle is faced with the prospect of growing a portfolio that will fund abortions.
- **Lisa:** Although she likes her job well enough as a grocery cashier, she wonders whether she ought to aim higher. She’s also worried that automation will soon make her job obsolete.
- **Ryan:** Driving a bread truck pays the bills, and he occasionally delivers portable restrooms to outdoor concerts, fairs, and events. He knows these are essential, but sometimes feels work is meaningless: “I never create anything. I just deliver things—*calories and toilets.*”

How would you encourage each of these to pursue faithfulness?

¹ This study is a distillation of Daniel Doriani’s *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity and Transformation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019). It is meant to be taught in conjunction with the book, not as a replacement.

- **Abby** visited a retail store and overheard two middle-aged women trying on a sweater she marketed—and hated. One remarked how well the clothing was made, and the other shared how excited she was to debut the piece at the Christmas party. Abby realized faithfulness was not about her: “My work makes life a little better for these women if I provide sweaters *they* like.”
- **Kyle** decided to sit down with his new clients and explore their values. When he asked why they wanted to give to an abortion provider, they responded that they wanted to help women in distress. Seeing common ground, Kyle pointed them to scholarships that funded job programs for poor women and a center that rescued women from sex trafficking.
- **Lisa and Ryan** needed to expand their definition of faithfulness...

“Many people have trouble seeing the value of their work. In truth, work is the chief place where we love our neighbors as ourselves. At work, we have the greatest skill and training, we spend the most time, and we can bring the greatest resources to bear” (107)

GOD VALUES ALL HONEST LABOR

We often think of *service* as something we render to God and neighbor for free. Is it really service if I’m getting paid to do it? However, the reason someone is willing to pay you for your work is because that work is *valuable*. **In what ways does your paid labor provide essential resources or service to your community?**

- We’ve been made stewards and princes over various realms and responsibilities (1 Cor. 4:2)
- Our work is entrusted to us by God himself (Matt. 25:21)

What we must realize is that we do not serve God and neighbor when we are “off the clock.” Rather, a heavy responsibility falls on us to use God-given experience, talents, opportunities, and resources to serve him and others *in and through our work*. This is faithfulness.

EVERY CONTRIBUTION IS SIGNIFICANT

When people lament about the meaninglessness of their work, the cure is often a wider perspective. **How many jobs are required to supply food to a community? What does faithfulness look like for:**

- Farm equipment manufacturers
- Seed & Fertilizer salesmen
- Farmers
- Truck Drivers
- Grocery Managers
- Shelf Stockers & Cashiers

“By God’s grace, we do more good than we know” (110).

Our author Doriani explains, “We pray, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ and God calls farmers, truck drivers, and cashiers to collaborate to bring us bread...We tend to think that we feed the hungry when we volunteer at a soup kitchen, but that is short-sighted. We serve most effectively in paid positions (and in the home) because we work so long and skillfully there . . . At work we have the greatest capacity to meet legitimate human needs” (111).

What role do you play in encouraging others to be faithful in their God-given roles and places? **How can trying to supplant someone in their role harm their ability to be faithful? Consider:**

- Spouses
- Bosses
- Pastors
- Contractors
- Coaches
- Grunt Laborers
- Ministry Leaders

ARE ALL CALLINGS EQUAL?

“There is a paradox in Christian rhetoric about work. . . . On the one hand, we stress that all work is honorable and has equal value in God’s sight. On the other hand, we exhort people to do work that matters, to work strategically. And that implies that all work is not equal” (113). **What’s your initial response to this statement?**

Certainly, all work in one sense is equal in that it can be equally consecrated to the Lord, and he who sees all will reward it:

- Genesis 15:1
- Psalm 28:4
- Matthew 16:27
- Colossians 3:24

“Every morally good task has dignity, whether the laborer sweeps floors or runs a company” (113). Indeed, the worker who sanitizes the scalpel can please God as completely as the surgeon who wields it. Suppose, however, that a surgeon also excelled at scrubbing scalpels. **What would you say to the doctor who wants to abandon performing surgery to clean medical equipment?**

“The goal, the ideal, is to serve God with our highest and rarest gifts” (115).