

Work as Worship | Don't Worship Work

October 6, 2019 | Matthew McNutt

We are in the final week of our series, **Work as Worship**, in which we've been exploring how our faith intersects with our occupation, whether it's as the stay at home mother, the CEO of a large company, a student in school, a retiree, the teller at the bank – whatever it is that is your occupation. **[Work as Worship Summary] God created mankind to work for the glory of God, according to our divine design, in ways that benefit the world.**

Over the last few weeks we've come at this from a few different angles; Pastor Todd challenged us with the idea that we were created for work. Pastor Nate challenged our work attitude and ethic, and explored what it means to have your faith at work. **We've also had several Facebook Live Conversations during the week on this topic; join us on Thursday at 7pm for our last Facebook Live Conversation.** It will be with Vicki Gregg and Kendra Young about motherhood, a high and holy calling from the Lord. It will conclude our Work as Worship series.

Today we're tackling the topic of worshipping work. Is it possible to make our occupation an idol? What does that even mean? Check out this video put together by the Skit Guys;

Video: Skit Guys – Idol Worship

[Don't Worship Work slide] Idols are a big deal! Idols are so much easier to spot in other cultures and in other people, aren't they? The football fans right now are squirming and muttering about Taylor Swift and Beatles fans – I'm not equating them, just trying to hit different generations.

Exodus 20:3-5a (NIV) ³“You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.”

The first two of the ten commandments deal with our responsibility to give our first love; isn't it fascinating that they are both variations of the same thing – do not have a god before the one true God. Do not put anything ahead of Him in your affection, do not create anything that is ahead of Him in your affection.

God designed us to worship; it happens naturally. It's why no one has to force you to cheer for your team, to sing along at the concert, to give your focus to your occupation. There is something in that longs to give praise, honor, attention, affection, focus,

following to things outside of ourselves. This isn't wrong; and those aren't bad things. The danger is that they can become idols.

Webster's Dictionary defines an idol like this: "any object of ardent or excessive devotion."

כבוד Kabod: Weight / Heaviness The Hebrew word used at times for 'worship' is kabod; it literally means weight, or heaviness. It communicates importance, honor, majesty, glory. And it makes sense, doesn't it? When we love something, we are giving weight to it.

Idols aren't the golden calves of thousands of years ago that are blatantly a false god. In 2019, they can be good things that take on too much weight.

Work isn't the problem; even before the fall, Genesis 2:15 says that,

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

One of the first things God did was give humanity work to do; we are meant to have an occupation. The danger becomes when we give that occupation too much weight.

Psalms 127:1-2 (NIV) Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. What does that mean? God doesn't literally build houses, does He? Talk about taking over the construction market; who could compete with Him? When He says it's good, it's goooooood. It's talking about the focus of the builders; are they giving the credit for their labor, their occupation, the quality of their work, their reputation – are they crediting it to God? Or are they building their own pride? Are they taking the credit for the success they have had? Do they believe they have accomplished this on their own efforts and terms? If so, it's in vain! It means nothing! It has no real purpose.

What is an indication of where you are putting weight? "For He grants sleep to those He loves." Do you lose sleep over your work? Does your job keep you awake at night? Rethinking interactions, running the numbers, stressing about solutions? I'm not talking about having a stressful moment on occasion, I mean regularly consuming your thoughts. That's a red flag for misplaced worship.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 (NIV) ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people,

eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

When we think of worshipping work, money isn't the only factor, but it is a factor. The trap is that we can put our hope in wealth instead of God. We can depend on it instead of God. Wealth in and of itself is not bad; Abraham and many of the other Old Testament figures were wealthy. But if it becomes an idol, if it becomes our source of security instead of God, then it can be the cause of wandering from the faith.

Being consumed to have more can lead to a wasted life. Paul writes that it is a trap; it's a trap some of you have felt the weight of! The pursuit of money can ruin relationships, destroy friendships. We know this, but we still fall for it.

Years ago, I remember reading an article; a man had a successful trucking business on the west coast, but it consumed all of his time and focus. His wife gave him an ultimatum; either sell the business, or she was leaving him. If you try searching online for the story, you will be overwhelmed with the number of articles describing marriages ruined by the pursuit of wealth. Here's why this particular story made national headlines; the man sold his company. People were shocked; how could he let her tell him to do that, how could he get rid of such a successful business, how could he throw away years of work – but his response was so great. He was mystified that people would think his business was more important than his marriage.

There is another trap with work. Not only can it become our security, it can also become our identity.

Galatians 2:20 (NIV) I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

When we become followers of Christ, our identity is to be based in Him, not our occupation. If you would be lost without your occupation, if you wouldn't know who you are, then that has become an idol, it has too much weight in your life!

To recap; these traps, working in vain, finding our security in wealth, finding our identity in occupation – deep down we know these aren't the things give life meaning and purpose. We can spend a lifetime saying we're too busy ... but when someone gets sick, really sick – we drop it all in a heartbeat, don't we? There are some of you who believe you don't have any margin in your life, but if your spouse, your parent, your child came down with a life threatening situation, all that business would be dropped.

Horst Schulze is one of the more successful business people out there. A true rags to riches story. At fourteen, he got his first job as an ash tray cleaner in a hotel. From there, he gradually worked his way up until he co-founded the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, a multi-billion dollar international company. He travels around the world

speaking and coaching on leadership and excellence. “Excellence Wins,” his book that came out earlier this year, integrates his faith with his occupation. He writes about a time, 25 years ago, when he was diagnosed with a form of cancer:

My high-flying career in the hotel world faded in importance. All the ambition, the strategic plans, the ego, the money, and the recognitions got stripped away. They weren't relevant anymore. When this kind of upheaval erupts in your life, it is easier to let God come and fill the vacuum. A Scripture from my boyhood confirmation class back in Germany returned to my mind: “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.” I recited that verse again and again. The Bible describes how when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, his mild manner reminded people of a certain prophecy: “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey.” That is how it felt to me. God was quietly riding into the center of my panic.

He goes on to share how he committed his life to Christ fully, and has made that identity his core in the years since. He then writes how it connects to his work:

The foundation of God's truth lies at the center of my life in business. Whether I'm interacting with an employee, a customer, an investor, or even a competitor, I am aware that this person is one of the “others” Jesus had in mind when he gave the Golden Rule about treating them as I would want to be treated. When disputes arise over contract terms, with opposing lawyers battling back and forth, I hear the familiar words of the New Testament epistle, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” More than once I've seen the deadlock melt away as I have done my best and trusted God to handle the rest. In retrospect, I think I was mostly a “Sunday Christian” until the onset of my cancer. This was a time when my business achievements lost all importance. They played no more role; they no longer sheltered me from my screaming need for hope. And hope at this point could only be found in Christ. So my decision for Christ (for hope) was a deep and permanent one. To tell the truth, I am today thankful for cancer—as well as grateful to have survived it.

[TITLE SLIDE] What is a simple test for whether or not work is an idol in your life? Matthew 19:16-29 records the story of the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he needed to do for eternal life; Jesus told him sell his possessions and give it all to the poor. Scripture records that he left sad because he had great wealth.

The wealth wasn't the problem; Jesus question revealed what his first love was – his wealth. Faced with the choice between God and wealth, he was sad, because he knew he couldn't choose God.

Where does work rank in your life? Would you choose it over your family? Would you choose it over God? Would you accept a promotion if it meant sacrificing key relationships? Is your identity so wrapped up in your occupation that you these questions make you uncomfortable?

Why do we have to get sick to realize what's important? Why do we forget when we get better? Why do we have to lose relationships before we realize what actually matters?

If work is an idol, then the answer is simple: repent. Confess the weight you have given it to God. Ask God to point your heart to Him. And tell someone; maybe your small group, maybe a couple trusted Christians. But bring someone into the conversation so that you can make decisions about work, about priorities, about the type of person that you want to be – and have the accountability to make it happen. Maybe you need to text someone right now and tell them you want to talk – so it will happen! Take action now before you rationalize it away.

Transition to communion.