

“What Makes Our Work ‘Christian’?” // *Homewreckers, #2* // Genesis 2:15; Exodus 31:1– 5; Colossians 3:22–4:1

We’re in the 2nd week of our *Homewreckers* series and we’re going to take a 2nd look at work, because a lot of our stress that we bring home originates in the workplace. If we ever got our work lives balanced, some issues at home would resolve themselves.

For most of us, the majority of our adult lives will be spent at work, and I’ve explained to you that the church has done a pretty bad job of preparing you to follow Jesus where you spend the majority of your time.

- Many of us talk about following Jesus as if it was mainly “be involved in your church” and “get involved in a small group,” and “give money”... and those things are all important, of course, but I really want you to discover how to serve and follow Jesus in the 40–60 hours a week you spend at work.

Serving Jesus in the workplace is not an afterthought in the Bible.

- Last week I told you 37 of 40 miracles in workplace. I was wrong. It is 39 of 40 miracles that take place in the workplace.¹ As a pastor who works in the church all week, I have even less access to the power of God than I thought I did!
- Of the 52 parables Jesus told, 45 had a workplace context.
- None of Jesus’ 12 apostles that Jesus chose came from the religious seminaries today; and none belonged to the religious establishment. They were all, basically, businessmen.

I had the privilege of having a strong model of this growing up. Growing up, my dad was the strongest Christian I knew, and he and my mom were my first real models of what a follower of Jesus looked like.

- And he was not a pastor; He managed a Sara Lee plant in Winston-Salem, and my mom taught biology at a local college.
- So my first thinking about Christianity was from people who were applying it to so-called “secular” disciplines.

So here’s my question today: “*What makes our work ‘Christian’?*” What makes a business a ‘Christian’ business?

First, let’s go over this: **There are A LOT of BAD answers to that question.**

- A lot of people think making a business Christians means attaching some bad, cheesy Christian theme or name to your business:
 - Like having a restaurant called “the Garden of Eat’n,”
 - Or, a hair salon called “His Clips;” or “A Cut Above;”
 - Or, a coffee shop called “Holy Grounds;” or “He-brews”
- Some people think it means that you force awkward evangelism moments into work situations:
 - Article from Feb 7, 2004 about an American Airlines Pilot who, in his pre-flight announcements, asked all the Christians on board the plane to raise their hands, then suggested that the other

¹ <http://www.hodm.org/work.aspx>

passengers on board talk to them about their faith, and then said that he'd be available after the flight was over to talk with anyone who had questions. (he'd just gotten back from a mission trip to South America). You have to admire that guy's zeal, really... American Airlines did not admire it—freaked a lot of people out, of course, your pilot talking to you about whether or not you're ready to meet Jesus?² But some of you think, while I admire the guy's zeal, "I just couldn't do that and keep my job."

- Some people just don't think really think of business or work as Christian.
 - You do your job as a necessary evil to provide money.
 - I heard a preacher tell a story one time about a janitor... "I just do this to pay the bills." So your job is a way to make money but your real ministry is somewhere else; what you do at your church.
 - Some people think, "What God wants from my job is for me to make some money and then give it to the church."
- And you know I don't want to discourage those things—volunteering or generously giving your money to God's work here.
 - What we do here at the church is vital in reaching our community. Last week we had to turn kids away in one of our services. So we need volunteers.
 - And I want you to be generous; there's a lot of people in our city who need Jesus and your gifts help us do that. That's the reason why God gave some of you a lot; so you could invest it in His Kingdom.
 - So I don't want to discourage those things, but that's not the whole answer of serving God in the workplace.

I'm going to give you 5 things from Scripture this weekend that make your work "Christian." (my habit is to be in 1 text... this morning, all over).

1. Creation-fulfilling (Genesis 2:15; Exodus 31:1-6)

- First, look at **Genesis 2:15**, "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*"
- This is before the curse of sin, so you're seeing God's original plan for man. He gave him a job. It was not a curse, like, before then, he would lounge around playing the harp and have angels feed him bon-bons.
- God created you to work and to enjoy it. It was how He designed the creation.
- Do you remember the word used over and over again for creation? God saw it and it was **good**. Good. Now, "*good*" is good, but "*good*" is different than "*perfect*." Perfect means "cannot be improved upon." Good means that the essence is good, but there's still some work to be done.
 - When you guys see my wife at church, her hair and make-up exquisite, all dressed up—she is perfect. When I see her in the morning right after she's woken up, she's good. The raw materials of beauty are there, but there's a little polishing to be done.
 - God put us in a world that was good; which means we are to take the raw materials of the earth and develop them for His glory and for the benefit of other humans.
 - **I've heard it compared to the difference between a stockbroker and a security guard.** I give a security guard 1K; come back in 10 years, I expect that 1K to be given back; not a penny less; I can't expect a penny more. Stock broker... Eric C: If I give him 1K, I come back in 10 years and expect it to be 4K. **He takes my money and cultivates it; develops it.**
- The **farmer** takes the raw materials of soil and seed and cultivates them into crops. The **architect** takes the raw materials of sand and cement and creates buildings for us to live in. The **artist** takes

² <http://www.travelkb.com/Uwe/Forum.aspx/air/2002/American-Airlines-Preaching-Pilot>. Found in Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*.

the raw materials of color or music and arranges them into art pieces we enjoy. The **lawyer** takes principles of fairness and justice and codifies them into laws that benefit society.

- This is God's plan. This is how He cares for us, through the skills he's given to different ones of us to take His creation and develop it.
 - Martin Luther says this: *'When we pray the Lord's Prayer we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal.'* **Martin Luther**
 - Gene Edward Veith, in a great little book called *God at Work*, adds "We might today add the truck drivers who hauled the produce, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the warehouse men, the whole sale distributors, the stock boys, and the lady at the checkout counter. Also playing their part are the bankers, futures investors, advertisers, lawyers, agricultural scientists, mechanical engineers, and every other player in the nation's economic system. All of these were instrumental in enabling you to eat your morning bagel... though God could give it to us directly, by a miraculous provision (as He once did for the children of Israel when He fed them daily with manna), God has chosen (normally) to work through human beings, who in their different capacities and according to their different talents, serve each other."³ **Gene Edward Veith**
 - That means that God is present in the world through your secular vocations (both in believers and non-believers alike), providentially caring for mankind.
 - Your secular, 'ordinary' work of farming and building and teaching math and making drugs is spiritually significant. God is at work in those things loving people.
- Here's a quick example: **Exodus 31:1-6**
 - [1] *The LORD said to Moses, [2] "See, I have called by name Bezalel... [3] and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, (why? To preach? To write God-songs?) [4] to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, [5] in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. [6] And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab... And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you.*
 - Two fellows called out by name by God, that He gave *secular* gifts to—these guys weren't preachers or choir leaders—that brought God glory through their skill in building.
- Some of you have felt this. When you're doing something at work that you're good at, you feel something strange, almost supernatural. You may not have known how to put it into words, but it is God's glory in and through you.
 - E.g. Old 1970's movie, that's one of my all time favorites. *Chariots of Fire*. "When I run, I feel His pleasure." Some of you have something that when you do it, you feel the pleasure of God.
- God gave you that gift—to run, to do business! And here's something maybe even cooler: You'll probably be doing some form of that job in heaven. I love Tim Keller's thought on this: *"When we get to heaven, ministers and doctors will have to have new job training, whereas architects and artists will not."* **Tim Keller**
 - You're not going to need somebody healing your body or yelling at you each week to live right. How many people in here in the medical profession or ministry profession? **Bad news:** we're going to have to learn something new in heaven. I don't know what mine will be yet. I'm **going to lobby** for a management position of some kind or to be a **stunt man** for Vin Diesel. You're not going to need me up there preaching the word of God to you because you'll be in the presence of the Word of God Himself.
- Some of you need to rethink your job, and think about it as a gift given to develop creation in a way that glorifies God and benefits other human beings. **And you need to have the attitude of serving other people in that job, not just making money.**

³ Gene Edward Veith, *God at Work*, 13-14

- One of my favorite business authors, Patrick Lenconi... not a Christian, as far as I know, wrote a new book recently called *3 Signs of a Miserable Job*. Says one of the ways work becomes miserable is when you disconnect it, mentally, from those you are bringing help and happiness to through your job. The whole book is built around a fictional story of a guy who takes over a small pizza parlor near bankruptcy. All the workers there have bad attitudes and do their jobs poorly. He teaches them, in part, how to see how they are making people's lives better. He shows the delivery guy how getting people's orders right and on time helps them have a great evening. He shows the cashier how smiling as she rings up the check helps people feel like they are having a good experience at the restaurant. And this all contributes not only to the success of the restaurant, but to the enjoyment of the employees as well.
- **Lenconi says there is a natural joy we find in serving others. That's because God designed you that way.**
- So when you see your work connected to God's creation mandate—to develop the earth to His glory and the good of others—you'll start to get a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction out of it. (*Love it when I feel like...*)

2. Excellence-pursuing (Colossians 3:22-4:1)

- Work that is "Christian" is done according to the highest standards of excellence because it is done, first and foremost, for God.
- Colossians 3
 - [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him... [22] Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.
 - Now, some of you say right there: "Hey - Is Paul condoning slavery?" No. **First** of all, this is a little more like an indentured servant (that's still not a great system, but not what you think of as slavery); and **Second**, he's simply speaking to people in the condition they are in. What Paul is saying here would sow the seeds for the eventual dismantling of this unjust socioeconomic system.
 - But the point you should notice is this: he is telling people, even within a bad working condition—right, can't get worse than slavery (Some of you feel like your boss owns you; for these people, their boss literally did own them) he's telling them that even within that system they are doing their work first and foremost for Christ. And the point for you and me is that if even SLAVES should do their work as unto God, we definitely should. We have no excuse to not apply what Paul is saying to our situation.
 - [23] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, (our work first and foremost is for God) [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. [25] For the wrongdoer (or read that, 'slacker') will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.
- In every job I do; every assignment I complete; every chore I do at home; every paper I turn in in school, I am doing first for Christ.
 - **C.S. Lewis:** Talks about explorers who go into a valley that, as far as they know, no human eye has ever seen. There, they find beautiful *flowers* in the valley, which you assume have been there for years before we discovered them. Lewis question: Who did God put those flowers there for, if nobody would ever see them? Answer. God beautifies some things just for Himself, for His enjoyment. Lewis: ***Even our work that nobody sees should still be done as an offering to God.***
 - You really want to get the world's attention? Do a great job for a boss who is a jerk who won't give you a raise for your hard work. That's why most people do good work, right? Possibility of more money! When you say, "Yeah, but ultimately I'm doing this to love and

serve God, not just to make more money,” that gets the world’s attention... and when they ask you why you think that way you can tell them!

- Let me play papa here for a minute: Some of you, your job performance is a TERRIBLE testimony to Christ. Your mouth says ‘Jesus is Lord’ but your job performance says ‘I do whatever I feel like.’ Your mouth might say ‘Jesus is Lord’ but your job performance says ‘I am Lord.’
- The best thing you could do at work is keep your mouth shut about Jesus because your job performance is so poor and your attitude is so bad. **Well, that’s the 2nd best thing.** The best thing would be to obey this verse and do your work so diligently that it brings glory to the God you’re serving.

3. God’s character-reflecting (Colossians 3:22–4:1)/

- Our work should make it obvious that we serve a God of justice, fairness, and kindness. Our work should reflect that, and so be done to the highest standards of ethics. Don’t know all the answers here, because each field has it’s own ethical issues, but **what I do know is that our work is to reflect the equity, justice, and kindness of His character.**
 - “A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.” **Prov. 11:1**
 - “Masters, treat your servants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” **Colossians 4:1**
- In every work interaction, you have a Master in heaven to Whom you will report. You treat someone unfairly and you don’t worry about it because they either can’t do anything about it or won’t find about it... well, there is a God Who will always know about it and will always do something about it. He’s your first Boss; and you might be able to get away with cheating others; you’ll never get away with cheating God.
- Some of you have this disconnect... you cheat and cut corners at work while maintaining faithful church attendance, as if God is happier with your participation at His house than He is mirroring His character in your jobs. Listen to this again:
 - “A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.” **Prov. 11:1**
- Abomination: abomination in the Bible is used for things like homosexuality; exploitation of the poor.

4. Redemption-demonstrating (Luke 14:12–14)

- People who have been touched by the gospel think about **more** than fairness and equity in their jobs; their whole approach to life has been redefined by what Christ has done for them.
 - Advertising manager in NYC who took the hit for his employee
- **This also means also figuring out how to leverage your business to bless those in need and to take the Gospel where it is not known.**
 - A few weeks ago in a sermon on Luke 14 I showed you that Jesus commanded His followers to throw their parties for those who couldn’t pay them back. Don’t just invite people to your parties that will in return invite you to theirs; but focus the party of your life on those who can’t pay you back.
 - **I told you that that applies to your business by thinking about other bottom lines besides simply profit.**
 - You’ve got the **helping of the poor bottom line.**
 - You’ve got the **Great Commission bottom line.**
 - How can your job be used to bless those who can’t necessarily pay you back? How can you leverage your job to enrich not just yourselves but others? That’s how Jesus’ leveraged His life. *(I’m going to go a little deeper on that one in just a minute, but let me point out 1 other thing about “Redemption-demonstrating” before I do.*

- “Redemption-demonstrating” means that for those of you God has blessed with much you give away a lot to Great Commission work.
 - **Listen:** *That’s why God gave you lots of money.* Not just so you could ratchet up your lifestyle, but for the sake of people around the world dying body and soul without Jesus. What God gave you was grace. You don’t deserve any of it. You say, “No, I earned all my money myself.” OK. Where’d you get the talent from? Why were you born in America where you could make lots of money versus parts of India where nothing you could do would change your poverty situation? And the fact that we are not in hell as it is, is grace. So be serious. All that we have is grace. So share it.
- Guys, listen: **Leveraging your life for the GC is not the calling of a sacred few, but the responsibility of every disciple of Jesus.** “Well, I just don’t feel called to use my skill for missions or give away my money.” Uh, what? The call to give away your life and leverage your talents for the Great Commission was the call to follow Jesus. You cannot really follow Jesus and not be living, primarily, for His Kingdom and the Great Commission.
- *Sometimes I think we invented this whole language of calling to mask the fact that most people in churches are not really living as disciples.*
 - ***They’re fans of Jesus, not followers.***

5. Mission-advancing (Acts 28:14)

- I make this point with you a lot... but throughout church history, the gospel has gone forward on the wings of business. Even in the Bible, **merchants seem to be able to carry the gospel around the world faster and more effectively than the apostles could.**
 - Here’s your example: Acts 28:14. The trajectory of Paul’s life is to take Christ where He has not been named. So he wants to go to Rome, a natural place from which to establish a church-planting center. Rome is the capital of the world. But when he gets there, **Acts 28:14, “There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for 7 days. And so we came to Rome.”**
 - Paul’s in a rat race to take the gospel around the world to places he’s never been named, and when he gets to Rome, he is greeted by other Christians, who were not apostles, but had beaten him there.
 - So, I say it again: **Merchants seem to be able to carry the gospel around the world faster and more effectively than the apostles could.**
- **Stephen Neill**, in fact, said this in his *A History of Christian Missions*:
 - *‘But in point of fact few, if any, of the great Churches were really founded by apostles. Nothing is more notable than the anonymity of these early missionaries... Luke does not turn aside to mention the name of a single one of those pioneers who laid the foundation. Peter and Paul may have organized the Church in Rome. They certainly did not found it...’*⁴ He goes on to say that not one of the major Christian centers (Antioch, Alexander, or Rome) was founded by an apostle.
- And today, the unreached mission field seems to be custom-designed by God so that kingdom-focused business-men and -women will have to be the ones who take the gospel into the most lost parts of the world.
 - For examples, most unreached peoples are found in something missiologists refer to as the “10/40-Window.” These people are primarily Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist.
 - These are also countries – where you find the greatest concentration of the world’s poor.
 - You have unemployment ranges between 30 and 70%.
 - One source said that 50% or so of the population in those areas is young, under 20 years of age, and that unemployment rates are likely to soar in coming years.

⁴ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, p. 22.

- Some estimates indicate that up to 2 billion young people will be looking for jobs over the next 20 years.⁵
- For example, Iran (that's an unreached people, right (?) and a pretty scary place)... Iran has at least 10 million unemployed and in the next 15 years 20+ million more will be searching for jobs.⁶
- How will Iran be reached? From our perspective, probably through businessmen, not church planters.

Closing:

- Businessman or woman, for all these reasons, your work matters.
- I mentioned at the beginning of this message, I've seen this modeled through my mom and dad. My dad retired from Sara Lee about 2 years ago but was immediately hired back on as a consultant to help them set up plants around the world. Most recently he was in China... there dealing with businessmen. Had me praying for a guy that he was sharing Christ with and eventually led to Christ. He got into that place and obtained that audience through business, not seminary.

⁵ From http://www.lausanne.org/documents/BAMpaper_feb06.pdf

⁶ Ibid. p. 14.

Bullpen:

- This world is not a theatre in which to just save souls. God's purpose was to restore the creation. Individual salvation is one of the elements.
- **Samson**

From *God at Work* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr.

- 'When we pray the Lord's Prayer, observed Luther, we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal. We might today add the truck drivers who hauled the produce, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the warehouse men, the whole sale distributors, the stock boys, the lady at the checkout counter. Also playing their part are the bankers, futures investors, advertisers, lawyers, agricultural scientists, mechanical engineers, and every other player in the nation's economic system. All of these were instrumental in enabling you to eat your morning bagel.' 13
- 'Though He could give it to us directly, by a miraculous provision, as He once did for the children of Israel when He fed them daily with manna, God has chosen to work through human beings, who in their different capacities and according to their different talents, serve each other. This is the doctrine of vocation.' 14
- 'The priesthood of all believers did not make everyone into church workers; rather, it turned every kind of work into a sacred calling.' 19
- 'Again, Luther said that faith serves God, but works serve our neighbor. We often speak of 'serving God,' and this is a worthy goal, but strictly speaking, in the spiritual realm, it is God who serves us.' 39
- 'These neighbors constitute the relationships that we are in right now, and our vocation is for God to serve them through us.' 59

Story: Man sees 3 workers hewing stone. He asks the first one, 'What are you doing?' He replies, 'I'm hewing stone...' He then asks the second man, 'What are you doing?' The second, 'I'm making \$100/week.' To the third man he asks, 'What are you doing?' The third replies, 'I'm building a cathedral.'

Cheesy Christian Business Names:

- *Leaven and Earth* – (bakery)
- *Garden of eat'n* – (restaurant)
- *Cane and Able* – (mobility healthcare clinic)

39 out of 40 miracles:

- See [this site](#) for the 39 out of 40 miracles quote and some other info. It's all under the heading *Leaders in the Early Church*

Below are the stats that I told you about and how it seems that God has customized the mission field for business people to finish the task... The website is [here](#).

A. Most unreached peoples are found in the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist world. Most of them live in the so called 10/40-Window. These are areas and people groups where the name of Jesus is rarely heard, or if heard – seldom understood.

B. Here you will also find a large majority of the world's poorest of poor.

C. These countries – where you'll find most unreached people and many poor – also often have unemployment rates ranging from 30, 50 to 70 percent.

D. Often 50 percent or so of the population is young, under 15 – 20 years of age.