

Living the Life 5: God in my work

18th October 2009

Equip @10.45

Stephen Partridge

Work, work, work - Paul has lots to say about work in our reading today but what do we understand by work?

Homework, housework, school work, voluntary work, craftwork,— Are we working now? I don't know?

I would like you to spend some time on your tables discussing what work is, and also telling each other what work you do...

(Roving mike for ideas)

Actually the Concise Oxford dictionary has 15 definitions for the word 'work' taking in many examples that you have suggested.

The bottom line of my talk is:

For God to be fully in our work – we need to do our work for God.

Martin Luther King jr once said:

“If you are called to be a street sweeper, sweep streets as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, Here lived a great sweeper who did his job well.”

Work has been around since time began, God worked creatively to bring our world into being. The word 'work' first appears in the bible in Genesis chapter 2 verse 2 –

'By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.'

I wonder how God felt when the alarm woke him on the morning of the first day...

I wonder how we feel when the alarm wakes us up on Monday morning...

Monsters Inc scene 4 – 4:08 – 5:15

Quite an impressive preparation for the day, I wonder if God got into some training – knocking up a few practise worlds first before starting on his great masterpiece?

Starting from Genesis and all through the bible we see people working – using their God given talents to make a difference around them – In Exodus **Jocheved bore Moses**, cared for him in secret for 3 months then set him adrift in a reed basket – only for God to guide him back so she could complete her work. Later on in Exodus a guy called **Bezalel was given a special job by God** – not to say special prayers, prophecy, perform miracles or lead worship, – no - Bezalel's job was to make fancy stuff for God – Exodus 31 says "God spoke to Moses: "See what I've done; I've personally chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur of the tribe of Judah. I've filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him skill and know-how and expertise in every kind of craft to create designs and work in gold, silver, and bronze; to cut and set gemstones; to carve wood—he's an all-around craftsman.'

without Bezalel - the special tent and all its trimmings where the Israelites worshipped God in the desert would've looked like something off Blue Peter and that's without any double sided sticky tape. His gifting was craftsmanship and he used this gift for God. Also in the mix is **Samuel - as a small boy he**

studied, prayed, did his homework and even heard directly from God, he grew into an anointed prophet and kingmaker who had great influence over the nation of Israel. Later there was David working as a shepherd boy then a soldier and king. In the new testament we read of **Mary working as a faithful mother of Jesus**. There were James and John working as fishermen, Matthew the tax collector, Luke the doctor, Paul the tent maker and even Jesus the carpenter – legend has it that he made the best Ox-yokes in the area and people would walk for miles just to buy a yoke from him. These people were chosen by God but not to hide away doing nothing but commune with God and being holy, they were out there working and living for God - All through the ages people of God have worked for God – not just the prophets, priests and Kings but the mothers caring, the children studying, the craftsmen crafting, the fishermen fishing, the teachers teaching, the doctors doctoring?

So lets turn to Paul's warning – for that's what this passage is – it is a series of commands from Paul written in military language – not just friendly advice. I want to highlight 4 challenges for us in the passage:

Firstly in verse 8 Paul commands us not to be a burden – The Bishop and author Tom Wright describes our lives together as being like an intricate dance – when one member of the dance falls out of step or out of line so the whole dance is damaged. Paul is talking to a close knit community, perhaps our work communities are not so close knit, but we can still play our part, we may be a small cog but without that cog the machine would not function properly.

Monsters Inc scene 8 – 12:00 – 15:01

Elsewhere in the bible we are described as different parts of the same body where each has to perform his special function in order for the whole to function properly. This can apply to the home as well as the work place. I recently read of a Christian leader who was not happy with his children so he sat them down and lectured them about their lack of respect for their mother in not lifting a finger to help around the house. He was quite proud of his fatherly speech until one of his children said ‘Dad you never do anything to clear up in the kitchen either!’ He was well and truly put in his place. Paul is challenging us to play our part as best we can, among our fellow dancers or workers or family members.

Secondly in verse 9 we are called to be a model to others – to our colleagues at work, to the other children we meet at school, to our family at home. Wherever we work we can set an example. We can be a witness to an effective way of living and working. This can sometimes feel like standing out from the crowd, saying or doing the right thing instead of what everyone else is saying or doing. In my life I find my Christian foundation gives me hope that others may struggle to hang onto. I find with a bit of work I can have hope in all sorts of situations and hopefully transfer that to others too – its a hope to look forward to a better future rather than grumble even when times are hard and ultimately a hope to join with Christ in heaven. If we muck up – we need to say sorry, and try again – we’re all human, we’re not perfect examples but we can seek to be the best we can do.

Thirdly in verse 11 Paul calls us to be busy not busybodies – Here Paul cites those who are not working, as causing disruption to those who are trying to work, poking their noses into others lives instead of sorting out their

own. The phrase that springs to mind is 'the devil makes work for idle hands.' Sometimes I imagine what I could do if I didn't go out to work, all the time I would have to live my life – but working whether it be at school, at home, or in a workplace – brings so much more to our lives than just money into our accounts or food on the plate. 1 Timothy 6 says: A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough.

– Our work gives us a sense of worth, it teaches us many lessons that we would never learn otherwise, it teaches us about ourselves, and how deal with others either as clients, colleagues, classmates, and people we meet and interactive with.

Having said that we must be busy for God, we must also be aware that work can take over and become our God, when we pursue more and more work, more and more approval, power and status. This is where our Work-life balance becomes important but that is another whole talk in itself.

Finally I want to look at the beginning of the passage where Paul says in Verse 6 – we should be honouring Jesus – not just on a Sunday morning but all through our lives – Janice has spoken about us living a milkshake life where God is part of the whole of our lives. To be able to do this properly we need to build a foundation on which to base our thoughts words and deeds – we need to study God's word and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in all we do – not just googling the bible whenever we have a problem. Jesus told a great story about 2 workers – both building a house – I sing a song at school about them too, the wise man with his feet on the firm foundation of Jesus, the foolish man on the shifting sands of the world. Over

the years I have worked I have increasingly tried to bring God into my day in different ways – initially it was a prayer as I cycled to school (up a particularly steep hill the prayer helped me forget the pain I was in) I prayed for those at home, and the adults and children I would be with at school, I hoped to feel God’s presence with me all day. As I cycled home I was always struck with the same thought – ‘oops! I haven’t thought about God all day from my morning ride to my evening ride.’ When I confessed this to a friend he explained that the act of opening up to God in the morning was enabling him to work through me whether I consciously thought about him or not – which was a relief. Now that I have a shorter ride and no big hills I have had to find a new routine – it involves me saying a few prayers on the way to school for areas I pass and then I find sanctuary on my knees in the quiet of the shower room I use at school! I manage about 5 minutes usually - sometimes in quiet, sometimes whispered prayers – thanking God for leading me to where I am, and to the people I am with and hoping that what I will do during the day will honour God through His Spirit encouraging and invigorating me. Prayer at work and for work is so important – praying for colleagues, clients, managers, teachers, class-mates can really help with our relationships. Often I find these sort of prayers do not change the object of my prayers but that the Holy Spirit helps me to see them differently through the lens of God’s love.

Mike and Sully were able to stand up for their beliefs and were able to see their work in a different light as they swapped screams for laughter.

Monsters Inc scene 30 – 1:18:05 – 1:20:10

So Paul has 4 challenges from nearly 2000 thousand years ago that still apply today:

1. Don't be a burden in your workplace, school or home.
2. Do be an example to others.
3. Keep busy doing good.
4. Build all your work on the firm foundation of God.

Paul is calling us to work with God and for God, our work in whatever form really is an opportunity to use the skills that God has given us,

As Martin Luther King Jr said:

“If you are called to be a street sweeper, sweep streets as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, Here lived a great sweeper who did his job well.”

Amen? Amen.