

A Perspective on our Time at Work

Psalm 90, Ephesians 5:15-17

This past January and February we taught a sermon series entitled “Faith @ Work.” The goal was to learn how to think biblically about the work we do. For our purposes, your work is the main thing you do each week whether you get paid for it or not.

- * If you go to an office or a job site each day, that’s obviously your work.
- * If you stay home and care for your children, that’s your work.
- * If you’re in school, your work involves going to class and learning.
- * If you’re retired, your work might involve any number of things, depending on your family situation, your health, and your gifting. Some would say that in their later years their primary work is praying. Others would say their main work is mentoring.
- * I asked one couple who is retired to describe how they view their work. Among other things, their work involves volunteering in various places around town (where they serve and have conversations), hospitality (hosting people for meals and overnight stays), encouraging their 10 grandchildren spiritually and personally. They are very intentional about this season of their lives.
- * One friend realized that her “work” during a season of her life was to get well. The main thing she did for about a year was get treatments, rest, and take care of herself. That was her assignment from God for a season.

Since our work has such a prominent place in our lives, will return to this topic periodically. Today we are going to look at a couple of Scriptures, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, that give us a perspective about how we use the limited amount of time we have on earth. We will be applying this perspective to our work since we spend the best hours of our week working.

But I first want to give a three-minute synopsis of workplace theology as we discussed it earlier this year. Genesis makes clear that we were created to do meaningful work. But because of “the fall” workers have become sinful and work has become toilsome and difficult. But the gospel can transform us and our approach to work. Paul was writing to slaves (who definitely didn’t have their dream job) when he wrote in Colossians 3:23-24:

23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Because they were followers of Christ, they were to do their work **heartily**, instead of going through the motions. Consequently, their work was to be an expression of their devotion to Jesus. As we serve Christ we also love/serve our neighbors through our work. We provide services and products that promote the common good and human flourishing.

In light of this basic theology of work, let’s consider a couple of Scriptures that give us a perspective on the way we should think about time. We’ll apply these Scriptures to the topic of work.

“Teach us to number our days . . . confirm for us the work of our hands.” (Psalm 90)

Psalm 90 gives us a priceless perspective on our mortality (the reality that death is a certainty). The tendency is to compare ourselves to other people in terms of age, wealth, strength, looks, status; we feel pretty good about ourselves if we deem ourselves to be above average. But Moses very skillfully shows us how to compare ourselves to God - not for the purpose of self-condemnation, but for the purpose of wisdom. If we are wise we will view **God** and **ourselves** rightly.

In the first half of this psalm Moses reflects on how **eternal** and **permanent** God is and how **time-bound** and **transitory** humanity is. He says this of God:

- * God is our refuge in all generations (v. 1). You may remember that the introduction to the book of Psalms mentioned, “Blessed are all who take refuge in YHWH” (2:12).
- * God is from everlasting to everlasting (since before the mountains were formed; v. 2).
- * The passing of a thousand years would be like “yesterday” to God (v. 4).

In contrast to God who is eternal and permanent, Moses says this of humanity:

- * When we die, we return to dust (v. 3).
- * Our lives are like a dream, like the grass which withers and fades (vv. 5-6).
- * The end of our lives are “like a sigh” (i.e., rather anticlimactic; v. 9).
- * We live 70 years (or 80 years if we’re especially strong), then we’re gone, and then we “fly away” (v. 10).

Moses’ observations are informed by his experience of God in the wilderness; for forty years they experienced both the provision **and** the discipline of God in light of their sins. Like each of us, Moses experienced the painful consequences of his own sin. And like everyone who tries to lead others spiritually, Moses experienced painful consequences because of the sins of the people. Listen to verses 9-11:

9 For all our days have declined in Your fury;
We have finished our years like a sigh.
10 As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,
Or if due to strength, eighty years,
Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow;
For soon it is gone and we fly away.
11 Who understands the power of Your anger
And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?

I doubt many of us would disagree with Moses about our own mortality: our days on earth are few, and they are filled with hardship due to our sin and the sin of others.

At this point we might be tempted to throw up our hands and think, “Life is so brief and so hard that it really doesn’t matter what I do with my life.” Moses says that nothing could be farther from the truth. Instead of viewing our time on earth as insignificant, we should learn to view our days on earth as precious! And so Moses asks God to teach him:

12 So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

Moses wants God to teach him (and his community) how to number their days, treating each one as precious since life is so brief. If they genuinely learned to view their days this way, they would have “a heart of wisdom” instead of foolishness. This way of viewing their time on earth informs the petitions found in the last two verses of Psalm 90. Moses first asks that they would see and understand the Lord’s “work” - the things He is doing in their midst:

16 Let Your work appear to Your servants
And Your majesty to their children.

Moses didn’t want them to go through their brief lives oblivious to the things God had done and was doing in their midst. And he wanted upcoming generations to know about God’s track-record of faithfulness.

After mentioning **God’s** work, Moses next appeals to God concerning the “work of **our** hands” - the things that we do during their short time on earth.

17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us;
And confirm for us the work of our hands;
Yes, confirm the work of our hands.

To “confirm” means to establish or make firm/stable. They didn’t want to look back on their lives and have nothing to show for it. The expression “work of [someone’s] hands” is found 74 times in Scripture (70 in the OT and 4 in the NT). Sometimes it refers to idols as “the work of man’s hands” (e.g., Psalm 135:15); sometimes it refers to “the work of God’s hands” (e.g., Psalm 102:27 - “the heavens are the work of Your hands”). Here it refers to the efforts of the believing community. And so the request is, “Show us Your favor so that the work of our hands matters, counts for something, makes an impact in the lives of others.”

Again, Moses wasn’t only praying about his “work” in the sense that we’re talking about it this morning; but “confirming the work of our hands” would certainly **include** making our work count for something.

A graphic we used earlier this year illustrates why it only makes sense that we should pray as Moses did when it comes to our work. This represents a normal work week for many people. The green represents your time at work; the purple represents your spiritual time commitments such as worship on Sunday morning, meeting with God in the mornings, and participating in a life group on Wednesday nights.



It would be strange indeed if we thought that being disciples of Jesus mainly implied to the purple blocks of time on this schedule and not the green. The purple is important:

worship, meeting with God, and experiencing concentrated times of community with others are **vital** for our walk with God. But our discipleship should never be reduced to a few spiritual activities during the week. We have to learn how to follow Christ in the work we do.

Based on Psalm 90, we pray, “God, teach us to number our work days! Show us Your favor so that our work counts for something! We want our work to promote the common good; we want to serve people through our work; we want those w/o Christ to see Him in us and in the way we do our work!” I think that we naturally, instinctively want our work to matter; we don’t want to look back and conclude that the best hours of our week amounted to nothing.

“ . . . making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-17)

You may remember that in the first half of Ephesians (chapters 1-3) Paul describes the grace that has been lavished upon those who believe in Jesus: we were dead in our sins but we have been made alive in Christ and have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly places. In the second half of Ephesians (chapters 4-6) Paul pleads with us to “live/walk in a manner worthy” of our salvation. In chapter 5 Paul writes that one aspect of living consistent with our salvation involves making a clean break with our past way of life. Instead of walking in darkness, we should now “walk as children of Light” (5:8).

When we come to verse 15, Paul addresses the issue of how we spend our time. As we read these verses, we almost get the impression that Paul had been reading Psalm 90. In light of the fact that we should walk in the light, Paul writes:

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

This is the eighth time in Ephesians that Paul talks about how we should (or shouldn’t) “walk.” He’s talking about our way of life, our behavior. Here in verses 15 and 16 Paul is concerned that we understand the will of God (what God wants and therefore expects of us) so that we walk wisely, not foolishly. Like Moses before him, Paul understood that we are responsible to cultivate wisdom and let it guide our lives.

Therefore, Paul writes, “**be careful** how you walk.” The term translated careful has the sense of *being mindful or deliberate or accurate* (as opposed to being careless; see Acts 18:25-26). Instead of living life by trial and error, hoping that we’ll stumble upon a way of living that works, Paul urges us to be very deliberate about how we live.

Specifically, Paul writes, “making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” It could be translated “redeeming the time” in the sense of buying back or fully utilizing. The Greek word Paul uses for time is *kairos* which has the connotation of **opportunity**. The sense is that we should fully utilize every opportunity we have to do the will of God. The opposite would be to squander the opportunities God gives us.

Paul isn't advocating a type of frantic urgency that squeezes every ounce of productivity out of every minute of the day; we don't get the sense that Jesus was ever frantic. But he is advocating a type of purposeful urgency about the way we use our time.

Why such urgency? “. . .because the days are evil.” This is simply an acknowledgement that in the drama of Scripture, we are living after the fall and before all things are made new; we are living in an age in which evil is prevalent. In Galatians 1:4 Paul said that Christ “gave Himself for our sins” to “rescue us from the present evil age.” In Ephesians 6:13 Paul will urge us to put on the full armor of God so that we might “resist in the evil day.” The reality that there is evil all around us (and sometimes within us), demands that we make the most of our time, not wasting our lives. Certainly this applies to the time we spend doing our work.

On Tuesday the pastoral staff went to lunch at a local fast food restaurant; it was packed - probably because they're selling a new chicken sandwich. But something went terribly wrong and it took over 45 minutes to get our food. There were twenty-five or thirty people just standing/sitting waiting for their orders. If you were working the cash register that day, your attitude and your words might go one of several ways. You might get frustrated with customers and co-workers, and you might say things that weren't very helpful. But if you were a follower of Christ, you might recognize this as a God-given opportunity to do the will of God. Instead of returning insult for insult, you might give a blessing instead; you might be a peace-maker instead of making things worse.

Each of us needs to learn how to make the most of every opportunity to do God's will in the context of our specific type of work. This is an ongoing process that requires thought, prayer, and discussion. We hope that our teaching is helpful for you, but there are aspects of your work that we don't understand and that we've never thought about. And so I want to let you know about three opportunities at Faith that we hope will help you learn to number your days and redeem the time in relation to your work.

The first opportunity is to form **Workplace Affinity Groups**. These are groups of people that are all working in the same field or the same cluster of fields. The main purpose of these groups is to apply various aspects of workplace theology to your specific work so you can (over time) learn to “number your days” and “make the most of every opportunity” to do the will of God in your workplace.

We currently have exactly one of these affinity groups up and running (with a couple more in the works): the “Design Affinity Group.” The focus is upon designing buildings, so it is comprised of architects, engineers, and interior designers (around 8 people). Not surprisingly they worked up a well-designed flyer that describes how often they meet, their purpose, the agenda, and the responsibilities/expectations. They'll discuss both the challenges and the opportunities that they have to do the will of God as they design buildings. I hope you can see how valuable it might be to discuss these things with others who face the exact same issues as you.



Possible affinity groups:

- * Teaching (at various levels) - preschool, elementary, middle and high school, college/ university
- * Entrepreneurs
- * Small business owners
- * Military - officers, enlisted, civilian employees
- * Medical - nurses, doctors, technicians, etc.
- * Administrative work
- * Parenting (younger kids, older children, etc.)
- * Retirees . . . those who preparing for retirement.

If you are interested in being part of an affinity group, check the box on the back of the connection card and give us your occupation/field. The plan is to start these groups at the beginning of 2020.

The second opportunity involves **Workplace Mentoring** in which we pair up someone who is preparing for a career with someone who is already established in that career. An elementary education student might be paired with someone who'd taught third grade for twenty years; someone who wants to pursue a career in building trades might be paired with a contractor with experience.

We are currently doing a pilot program involving ten K-State seniors and ten mentors. These pairs are reading "Work Matters" by Tom Nelson and meeting to discuss what they're learning; the mentors will invite the students into their workplace and into their homes. The goal is to help them make the transition from college to the working world with a basic understanding of workplace theology. This pilot will last until next April.

We hope to learn from this pilot program and then in the fall of 2020 offer this Workplace Mentoring Project church-wide to college seniors and others who are transitioning to specific careers.

The third opportunity involves **Workplace Visits** (a.k.a. "Take Your Pastor to Work Day"). This is an opportunity for our pastoral staff to connect with you in the context of your work. You can invite one of us come visit your workplace to see firsthand what you do. And we'd like to see what you do, hear what you find satisfying and what you find frustrating about your work, and learn how we can pray for you. If it's not possible/ appropriate for us to visit your work, we can still meet and hear about your work.

We've had a great time doing these workplace visits this year. I did a workplace visit with a photographer in the church; once a month he flies over NBAF to take photographs documenting the progress that's been made on the building. Some of us have sat in on lectures and heard about your areas of expertise. Last spring I got to eat at the Kramer Dining Hall and tour Wefald Hall with a bunch of RAs who go to Faith; holy cow, that was pretty different from my college experience!

So if you want to sign up for a Workplace Visit, check the box on the back of the Connection Card and let us know where you work. Depending on how many of you sign

up, it may be several months before we're able to visit you; we each plan on doing one of these per month.