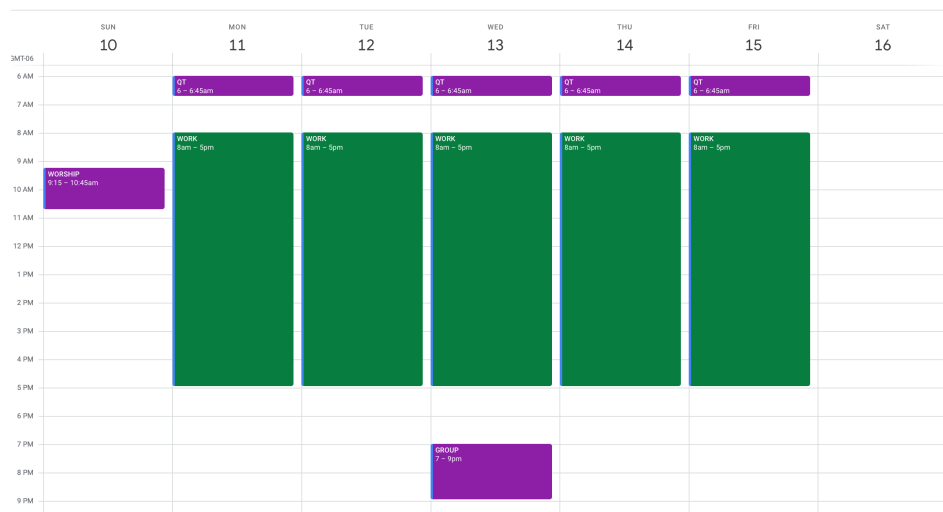


Faith at Work *Work and Spiritual Formation*

So far in this series we've established (I hope) a couple of foundational perspectives. First, we saw two weeks ago that we **serve Christ Himself through our work**. In Colossians 3 Paul wrote, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."

Second, Sam taught last week about how we **serve/love our neighbors through our work**. The work that we do promotes the common good. Our city, state, nation, and world benefit when we do our work well. For example, this room is conducive to gathering and worship because hundreds (if not thousands) of people did their work well: architects and engineers, crane operators, concrete workers, heavy equipment operators, loggers and mill-workers (doors and trim), people in the textile industry (carpet and wall coverings), carpenters, painters, carpet-layers, code inspectors, etc. This room is conducive to worship because many people have done their work well.

Today we are going to build on these foundational perspectives (that we serve God and our neighbors through our work). We are going to discuss how God uses our work (if we let Him) to form us spiritually, to conform us into the image of Christ. The Scriptures make clear that **we are meant to experience God in all of life**, which certainly includes our work. It would be an odd thing indeed if the best hours of our week were excluded from our relationship with God.



This calendar gives a visual depiction of what I'm talking about. Let's say this person works from 8 to 5 Monday through Friday (in green). Your work week may look very different from this (mine does), but think along with me on this. The purple

represents this person's "spiritual activities": gathering with others on Sunday morning, time with God at 6 a.m. every morning, and a life group/Bible study on Wednesday nights. These are times when you intentionally seek God. You seek to understand His will, you listen for His voice (what He is saying to you).

What is the relationship between the purple time and the green time? Are they completely unrelated to each other? Or should they fuel each other? I think you'd agree that it would be wrong if said goodbye to God when we leave worship on Sunday

morning and say hello again when we meet with Him on Monday morning. It would be wrong to say goodbye to God when we're done meeting with Him on Monday morning and hello again on Tuesday morning. Rather, the vision given in Scripture is to set apart times to seek God corporately and individually, and then to **continue paying attention** to God **the rest of the week**. Of course, this would include the hours we spend working. We remain teachable and attentive to God as we work. To do anything else is to push God to the margins of our lives, saying to God in effect, "You've got my attention for 8 hours a week; the other 160 hours are mine. . ."

The Big Idea: Since our work is such a core part of our lives, we should expect that God desires to use our work to refine us and to conform us into the image of Christ.

Of course this requires that we be attentive and teachable (or we won't notice and learn when God is doing in our lives) and that we submit to God's refining process (or we'll become hardened to His will).

This morning we are going to use Paul's instruction to Timothy as a template for how all of us should view our work. Timothy's work involved being a pastor teacher in the church at Ephesus. Like all churches (then and now) the church at Ephesus had its problems; but we get the impression from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that it was essentially mature and healthy. Paul wrote letters to Timothy (which we call 1 and 2 Timothy) to explain how believers should "conduct themselves" in the church (1 Timothy 3:16). In that context Paul also stressed how Timothy was to pay attention to his own spiritual formation as a pastor. He was supposed to avoid some habits and to cultivate others. Paul gave Timothy very specific instructions based on his understanding of Timothy, his understanding of the church at Ephesus, and his understanding of spiritual formation in general.

Pay close attention to yourself and to your work. (1 Timothy 4:16) In 1 Timothy 4:16 Paul tells Timothy to "pay close attention" to two things:

16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

He needed to pay close attention to **himself** and to his **teaching** (which was his work). These two areas were to be the ongoing focus of his attention; he was to persevere in these things. The two were related: as he paid attention to himself (whether or not he exhibited the fruit of the Spirit, whether he cultivated his spiritual gifting, etc.), he would be more effective as a teacher. As a result, Paul said that Timothy's "progress" should "be evident to all" (1 Timothy 4:15).

I won't take time to discuss the second half of the verse in detail; if you want to read my thoughts about what Paul is saying you'll find them at the end of the manuscript of this message on our web site (posted tomorrow morning). Basically I think Paul is saying that if Timothy persevered as a teacher, his own salvation would be confirmed and

those who accept his teaching will experience salvation since he was teaching the gospel. Paying attention to himself and his teaching would have life-or-death consequences. [See NOTE #1 at the end of this manuscript.]

My premise this morning is that Paul's challenge to Timothy has application for every Christian in his/her work. All of us should pay attention to **ourselves** and to **our work**. If Paul were writing a general contractor, he would say, "Pay close attention to yourself **and** to the houses you build/remodel." If he were writing someone in retail, he would say, "Pay close attention to yourself **and** the customers you serve and the sales you make." What Paul tells Timothy can serve as a template for all Christians in their work.

To stimulate our thinking, let's first consider an example of how Timothy was supposed to pay attention to his work; then we'll consider an example of how Timothy was supposed to pay attention to himself.

Paying attention to your work:

This is what we've been talking about the past two weeks: seeing our work as a way to serve God and to serve others, as a way to love God and our neighbors. Paul urged Timothy to approach his work as a pastor this way. 2 Timothy 2:15 is representative of how Timothy needed to do his work of teaching the truth.

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Not surprisingly, Paul tells Timothy to think of himself as a workman/laborer who was accountable to God. As is the case for every believer, it was "the Lord Christ whom [Timothy] served." Since his work involved teaching the Scriptures, Paul told him to be diligent (as opposed to lazy) and accurate (as opposed to sloppy and careless) in the way he studied and handled "the word of truth" (the Hebrew Scriptures and the truth of the gospel he had learned from Paul). Instead of being lazy and sloppy in the way he taught the Scriptures, Timothy was to be **diligent and accurate**.

Again, this is a template for us. There's a sense in which every one of us should be diligent and accurate in our work, right? Nobody wants their dentist to be lazy and sloppy ("Oops, I sort of pulled the wrong tooth. . ."). Nobody wants their cashier to be lazy and sloppy ("I charged you too much, but it's too much trouble to give you a refund."). Nobody wants their plumber to be lazy and sloppy ("It was too hard to fix that leak, so I put a bucket under your sink. . ."). In every type of work we should be diligent and accurate. [See NOTE#1 for further thoughts on applying this verse.]

Since Timothy's main work was studying and teaching the Scriptures/writings, diligence and accuracy were vital in order to love God and love people through his work.

Paying attention to yourself:

It wasn't enough for Timothy to be diligent and accurate in his teaching. He also needed a life that illustrated and confirmed the goodness of what he was teaching. And so Paul wrote, "Pay close attention to **yourself**."

16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

If he neglected himself it really didn't matter what he taught. If he neglected himself, what Jesus said (somewhat tongue in cheek) about the Pharisees would apply: ". . .so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. . ." (Mt. 23:3 ESV).

I can tell you firsthand that it is much easier to pay attention to **your teaching** than to **yourself**. That's why Ezra 7:10 is such a go-to verse for teachers; there we read that the good hand of God was upon Ezra because he had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to practice it, and to teach God's statutes in Israel. It wasn't enough to pay attention to his work of teaching; he also had to pay attention to himself. As a follower of Christ the two go together. The same thing is true for every one of us in our work.

So what did Paul have in mind when he told Timothy to pay close attention to himself as a pastor? Throughout 1 and 2 Timothy Paul mentions various ways Timothy should pay attention to himself. We have several examples earlier in 1 Timothy 4. Look at verse 12, for example:

12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

Paul mentions Timothy's "youthfulness"; Timothy was probably in his 30s when he received this letter (he was still a young pup). Since it would have been easier for members of the church at Ephesus to dismiss him because of his age, Paul tells Timothy to have the type of life that people cannot ignore. He mentions five ways that Timothy could set an example for the believers in Ephesus. These were virtues that Timothy was to cultivate and integrate into his work as a pastor. Let's consider one of these, how Timothy might be an example in relation to his speech.

Both the Old and New Testaments stress that our speech - what we say and how we say it - is an accurate indication of the condition of our hearts. And our hearts reflect who we really are. Angry people say angry things; kind people say kind things (even when they're saying something that might be hard to hear - such as correction). Timothy needed to pay close attention to his speech. In 2 Timothy 2:24 Paul wrote this:

24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. . .

The goal was to lead people to the truth and to repentance. Instead of being the type of person who loves to fight and argue, Timothy was to exhibit kindness, skill at teaching (which is different from quarreling), patience, and gentleness. Learning to speak this way would take practice over time. In the course of his work as a pastor, Timothy would need to be on the lookout for his tendency to quarrel and a lack of kindness, patience, and gentleness. When he sinned with in his speech, he should apologize, examine his heart, and prayerfully move forward. His work provided him weekly (if not daily) opportunities to learn and grow in terms of being an example when it comes to speech.

As Timothy paid attention to his speech, God would reveal impatience, pride, harshness, etc. If Timothy remained teachable, he would become skillful in teaching people and in correcting those who opposed him. The same thing is true of **your** work. You will be more effective in loving God and loving your neighbor through your work if you pay close attention to yourself. You will progressively become the type of person who can represent Christ well in the workplace.

Examples. This past week I asked three people to think about their work and how they need to pay attention to themselves. I asked them to tell me 1) one thing God has taught them through their work - perhaps a virtue or a skill, and 2) one thing their work has exposed that God needed to change or refine. As I read their responses, think about yourself in relation to your work.

A Physician:

“As a physician, God gives me opportunities to treat everyone with compassion and grace. One patient may have a common cold, and the next patient may have cancer... and both deserve compassion and grace.”

“I have struggled with job dissatisfaction for years. I really don't like my job. But God has given me certain gifts that allow me to be good at what I do. I have even had people communicate to me that they feel blessed by the work that I do. Over time, I have come to realize that I am where God wants me to be, even if I don't want to be there. Submitting my life to God in this capacity has proven to be difficult and confusing, but I do see how it has borne fruit in my life and in the lives of others. At this point, I believe that learning to be content in a job I dislike is simply part of the sanctification process. God is teaching me to be content in all circumstances, and though I may be a slow and reluctant learner, I am making progress.”

An architect:

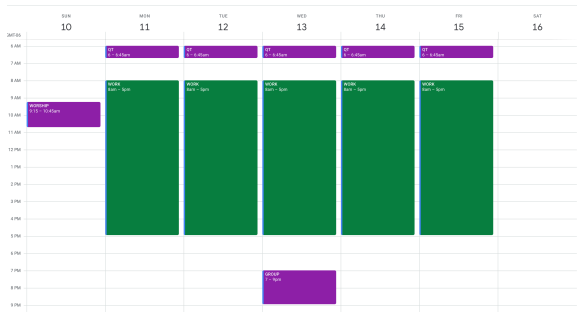
“God has taught me to have a heart of Thanksgiving about my work. I'm more and more thankful each day for the people I can influence and the community I can support through design and community outreach. Architecture is an amazing field because my reach is broad and I can touch a lot of lives I would have no business reaching otherwise. This thanksgiving also really allows me to fully engage my work as to the Lord and be joyful even in the minutiae of the day to day. It's definitely been an evolution (I always thought I never wanted to be an architect), but here we are.”

“Work has also brought out greed in my life just because it's hard to balance the line between having a successful business and one that takes advantage of people.”

A Resident Assistant (in a dorm at K-State):

He realized early on how much he dislikes confrontation. Yet confronting people is a part of his job because there are standards and rules that protect people and make the experience of living in a dorm better. Through Scripture and prayer God showed him that he sometimes cares too much about what people think about him. God is teaching him that it's okay if people dislike him *if* he is doing what is right. He is learning how to love people even when he has to confront them.

This week my encouragement is to pay attention to *yourself* at work. What is God teaching you? How is He refining you? What is He exposing in your heart that requires repentance? Consider again the calendar of a typical work week:



Discipleship involves experiencing God in *all* of life, including our work. I think you will find that if you pay attention to yourself and what God is doing in your life through your work (the green times), your times with God (the purple times) just might be more substantive. If you are bored in your times of study and prayer with God, it may be that you aren't bringing the most important things in your life to God during those times. But if you pay attention to yourself at work, you will have specific things to talk about with God; you will have issues that you want to explore in the Scriptures.

For example, if you notice pride in the context of your work, you talk with God about those things when you meet with Him. And you search the Scriptures to understand God's heart and mind about pride. And you go to work the next day anticipating that God will remind you of the things you've discussed and learned from Him. And as you experience God more fully in every area of your life, you may just find that your times of worship are sweeter and deeper. The green times fuel the purple times (and vice versa).

If you have been pushing God to the margins of your life, basically ignoring Him during the best hours of your week, this perspective could be life-changing for you. Pay close attention to *yourself* and to *your work* this week.

NOTE #1: The second half of 1 Timothy 4:16 is rather sobering: *persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.* A more literal translation would be, “as you do this you will save yourself and your hearers” (as in the NIV). Of course, in an ultimate sense we are saved by grace (it’s a gift) through faith (we believe that Jesus died for our sins and was raised on the third day).

First, Paul is saying that if Timothy perseveres in paying attention to himself and to his teaching, first of all, he himself will experience salvation. We’re told in numerous places that “those who persevere to the end will be saved.” Those who abandon their faith are not saved. The term “believer” in the NT is a present, active participle: “those who are believing.” If Timothy perseveres as someone who believes and lives the truth and who teaches the same, he will prove himself to be a genuine believer and will experience salvation. In Scripture, authors speak of salvation in past, present, and future senses: believers in Jesus have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved.

Second, those who hear him will experience salvation since his message is the gospel that is backed up by a credible life. It’s not just words; it’s the truth of God spoken and demonstrated. [Note: Some understand “save” in this verse to mean “keep from harm”; yet the term save always refers to one’s ultimate salvation in the Pastoral Epistles - 1 Tim. 1:15, 2:4, 15; Titus 3:5; 2 Tim 1:9, 4:18).

NOTE #2: As an aside, there was a time when I would have said that 2 Timothy 2:15 applies to every believer as it applied to Timothy. But early in my tenure at Faith I had a rather humbling experience that changed my thinking on this verse. I was going through the process of being ordained in the E Free Church. Ordination is the process in which a council/panel evaluates whether or not you’re fit to be a pastor both theologically and personally. During one of those interviews I was waxing eloquent about how every believer should read and study the Bible, using Bible study tools and different translations and such. I was laying out a picture of how every believer should study the Bible with a desk full of reference books. When I was finished one of the guys on my panel raised his hand and asked how my conviction squares with the fact that many (if not most) believers in the history of the church have been illiterate and haven’t had their own personal copy of the Bible. Long pause. . . .

I’ve come to the conviction that this verse applies directly to teachers in the church (pastors and others); if your main gifting and ministry in the body of Christ is teaching, you should be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” Studying and teaching the Scriptures constitutes your work. The broader demand given to every believer is found in places like:

- Psalm 1: How blessed is the person who delights in the law of the Lord and in His law meditates day and night.
- John 15: Jesus said, “Abide in Me and let My word abide in you.”
- Colossians 3:16. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.

All believers are to have a deep, rich, moment-by-moment experience with the truths of Scriptures. I would never discourage anybody from studying the Scriptures using all the

amazing resources available to us at this time in history and in this culture; but I am now a bit more nuanced in applying 2 Timothy 2:15.