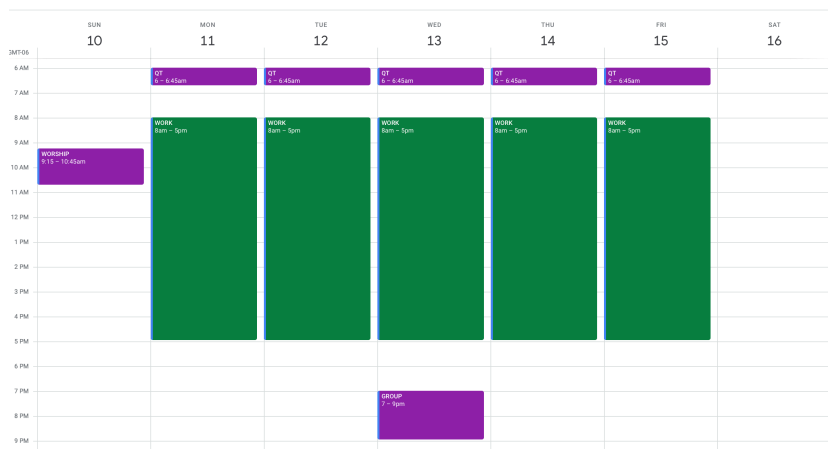


Faith @ Work (Part 1)

1 Timothy 4:16

This week and next our messages will focus on the topic of “work.” Here at Faith we talk about “work” as “the main thing you do each week whether you get paid for it or not.” Your work the main contribution you make each week. You might work as a teacher, mechanic, farmer, nurse, soldier, campus pastor, administrator, small business owner, artist, etc. Your work might involve raising kids (or grandkids). If you’re a student, your work is your school. You might be in the stage of life where your work involves volunteering (here at Faith or with an agency or another organization). I’ve known people who’ve said, “At this stage of my life, my main work involves prayer.” Keep in mind your specific work this morning.

You might have your “dream job” or you might currently be working in some capacity that doesn’t suit you at all. Whatever your work, what we’re going to talk about today will be relevant.



Take a look at this example of weekly calendar. Your work week may look very different from this, but this weekly calendar illustrates a point. The green denotes this person’s time at work; this person works from 8 to 5 Monday through Friday. The purple represents the time this person intentionally

devotes to seeking God: gathering with others to worship on Sunday morning, spending time with God at 6 a.m. every morning, and meeting with a life group/Bible study on Wednesday nights. These are times when this person intentionally seeks God.

Here’s my question: What is the relationship between the purple and the green on your weekly calendar? What is the relationship between your times of seeking God and your work? Perhaps you’ve never thought about the relationship. One possibility is that you don’t think the two have anything to do with each other. Maybe you have the opinion that God doesn’t really care about your work (the green); what God **really** cares about is the purple times (explicitly “spiritual activities”). It is true that God cares about the times when we seek him (we’re doing a sermon series about that after this one). But it would be strange indeed if God didn’t also care about the best hours of our week.

The other possibility is that the purple times and the green times have everything to do with each other. Our intentional times of seeking God help ground us and establish us in our relationship with God; and our work is an **expression** of our relationship with God.

This morning and next Sunday morning we are going to look at two passages of Scripture that encourage this second perspective. In the passage I read earlier, 1 Timothy 4:11-16, Paul instructs Timothy how he should do his “work” as a pastor in the city of Ephesus. This morning we are going to use Paul’s instruction to Timothy as a template for how **all of us** should approach our work. As we go along I think you’ll see that this is a legitimate way to apply this passage.

In the last verse (verse 16) Paul makes a summary statement and tells Timothy to pay attention to two specific things. Listen again to 1 Timothy 4:16.

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 a core responsibility as a pastor). Paying attention in these two areas was to be an ongoing focus. It wasn’t enough to think about them once and then move on to other things; these two areas were so important that they needed to be an ongoing focus. Let’s consider each of them separately. We’ll first see the application for Timothy as a pastor; then we’ll talk about the application for everyone in every type of work.

Pay close attention to yourself.

The main thing Timothy brought to his work as a pastor was **himself**. In 1 and 2 Timothy Paul often mentions ways Timothy needed to pay attention to himself. For example, earlier in 1 Timothy 4, Paul wrote this in verse 12:

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”; he was probably in his 30s when he received this letter. Since it would have been easy for some to dismiss Timothy because of his age, Paul tells him to have the type of life that people cannot ignore. He mentions five ways that Timothy could excel and set an example for others. These were virtues that Timothy was to cultivate and integrate into his work as a pastor. Let’s consider the first thing Paul mentions, his speech.

Both the Old and New Testaments stress that our words flow from our hearts. We live from the heart; the heart is the command and control center of our lives. Whatever is in your heart will eventually come out of your mouth. If you are combative and critical in your heart/thoughts, you will say angry and critical things. If you are generous and kind in your heart, you will say generous and kind things.

Paying close attention to his speech was essential for his effectiveness. Notice, for example, in 2 Timothy 2:24 what Paul wrote about speaking.

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. . .

Instead of being the type of person who loves to fight and argue, Timothy was to exhibit kindness, skill at teaching (so that people would learn), patience when wronged (as opposed to being hotheaded and aggressive), 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. He needed to be aware that his words could nullify his influence/effectiveness as a pastor. I have to say that some of my deepest regrets as a pastor involve what I've said or how I've said it.

I think we'd all agree that it's important for those of us who are pastors to pay attention to our speech, right? You don't want pastors to speak angry words from an angry heart or impatient words from a judgmental heart or careless words from an apathetic heart. When we do, you want us to get alone with God, confess to him, apologize to the appropriate people, and do better. No arguments, right?

Guess what? In the same way, your coworkers, your boss, your employees, your clients, your kids (or whoever is affected by your work) all want and need you to pay attention to yourself. The main thing you bring to your work is **yourself**. You need to pay attention to yourself in the same ways that Timothy did. If you do, you will notice important, valuable things - both virtues and vices.

This past week I asked a couple of people here at Faith to share some reflections about their work - how they pay attention to themselves and their work. What they've shared is very insightful. One person (who works in a medical profession) wrote this:

* Speech: "What is coming out of my mouth at work can sometimes be difficult and challenging. A lot of topics of conversation can be rude, degrading, offensive, inappropriate, etc. . . . but also can be enticing to join. I have made a conscious effort of not engaging [in such conversations], which people have respected." That's a great example of someone paying attention to their speech. Convictions he gained while seeking God are informing who he is at work.

Another person (a mom who cares for her young children at home) wrote this:

* Fear: "As a mom, I have felt myself naturally begin to fear for my children and what the future will look like. Thoughts like: "Will something happen to them? Will something happen to me or my husband? The world just seems to be getting so dark and more evil, I wish I could shield them from so much!" Fear as a parent is almost paralyzing. It's my full time job to **care** for them, so I do believe there is a place to be cautious and careful as a parent, but I don't believe fear and anxiety are our burdens to bear or what God wants for us." If she hadn't been paying attention to herself, her fear and anxiety would go unchecked. But she noticed it and named it. She goes on to talk about how she's been seeking God's perspective which leads her to trust him and to surrender her kids and husband to the Lord, and to have hope for the future.

I hope those examples stimulate your thinking. This week if you pay attention to yourself at work God will show you important things about yourself - both virtues and vices.

Pay close attention to your work. Look again at 1 Timothy 4:16.

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.

A core aspect of Timothy's work was teaching (communicating Scripture). Throughout 1 and 2 Timothy Paul urged Timothy to pay close attention to what he taught and how he taught it. 2 Timothy 2:15 is representative.

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. 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**. If he did, he would experience more fully his own salvation; and those who received his teaching would also experience salvation (since he taught the gospel). There were life and death consequences.

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? I could give you a few examples of people who are lazy and sloppy about their work. But I could give you many more examples of people who pay very close attention to the work they do; through their work, they love their neighbor as themselves. A few examples: my dental hygienist, the plumber who worked on our bathtub two weeks ago, the customer service rep who went above and beyond to make sure I was satisfied, my doctor who checks up on me weeks to see if treatment is working, the contractor who replaced some windows, the mechanic who told me, "If I were you I'd go with the less expensive option. . ." There are many, many people who are diligent and accurate in their work. And we all benefit from it. Next week we'll add a distinctive Christian motivation to this when we look at Colossians 3.

A hundred years ago Dorothy Sayers made this memorable statement (Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos*, pp. 56-57):

"The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him to not be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sundays. What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables."

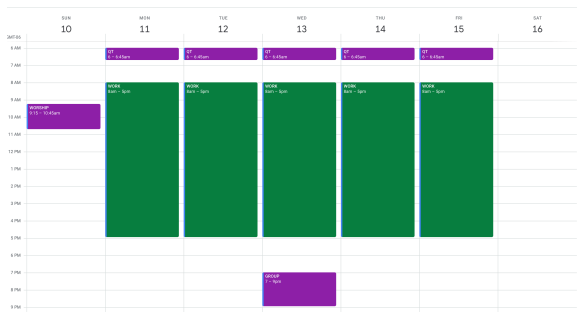
Of course the carpenter shouldn't be "drunk and disorderly" in his free time. Of course worshipping with others is important. But just as a pastor should preach biblical, heartfelt sermons, a Christian carpenter should also hone their craft and make good tables. Pay attention to **your work**.

Returning to the examples that were shared with me this week. . . The man in the medical profession told me about opportunities he has to serve people in his work:

- * He said that he takes the time necessary to really listen to his patients. He wants to treat their physical issue; but sometimes he listens and discerns a mental health issue (suggest ways to get help for that). He said that he also serves at work "through the things that I don't necessarily get paid for. Specifically by giving co-workers my time. Time to listen to personal difficulties, investing in other people's careers, etc." He pays very close attention to the work he does. Consequently God gives him tons of opportunities to serve others. Many of you would say the same thing: by being concerned and by listening to people, they open up their lives to you.

The stay-at-home mom wrote this:

- * "I was a teacher before I decided to stay home this year with the kids. My time at home this year has truly been such a JOY for me. I spent the past 6 years investing and teaching other people's kids and while I am certain God used me in that role... it has been such a blessing to be the one on the front lines of my own kids' life getting to teach, guide, forgive (and ask for forgiveness from them!), watch them grow, and just do life together. Absolutely some days are easier than others... but it's been really fun and fulfilling for me to serve my family in new ways this year. From changing diapers to preparing meals to hearing my toddler begin to understand prayer and who Jesus is... it's ALL significant and brings glory to God. I'm grateful God has entrusted me with such an important work." She's paying very close attention to her work; her kids will benefit 10, 20, 30 years from now.



Let's take another look at the weekly calendar. Discipleship involves experiencing God in **all** of life, including our work. I think you will find that if you pay attention to yourself and your work (the green times), your times of intentionally seeking 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 and to your work, you will have plenty to talk about with God; you will have issues that you want to explore in the Scriptures.