

Lesson 1

WALKING WORTHY OF GOD'S WORK MANDATE

Perhaps you've heard it said, "No man when he comes to the end of his life is going to say, 'I wish I had spent more time at the office.'" As I listened to Steve tell me about his problems and his lifestyle, I thought this may be the man who negates that quote. Working 16 hour days seven days a week was not unusual for him. Steve typically worked as late as his boss—as did most of the men at his level in the company. The compensation for such dedication was certainly beyond what he needed. He obviously loved his work—too much.

Somehow Steve rationalized his work philosophy and practice in spite of the fact that his relationship with his wife and children had deteriorated to the level of old college buddies who hadn't seen each other in fifteen years. No, it was worse than that—more like a log in an eye! What little time he had at home he spent thinking of work or indulging himself in some activity to relieve the stress. What was more important but neglected was his relationship with God. Worship, fellowship with other believers, Bible study, and prayer had also been crowded out by his quest for financial security, significance, and the pleasures of this life. Steve's life was unraveling at the seams from the stress of an unbiblical work ethic. The amazing thing was that he was oblivious to the cause of the problems. I think he was willfully blind to what his compulsive working was doing to destroy his life.

On the other side of the work spectrum was Phil. He visited the church in Southern California of which I was the pastor. After the worship service, I introduced myself and proceeded to discover what I could about this unusual man. He wasn't a normal visitor. By that I mean he was unkempt, smelled, and obviously walked in off the streets. I was glad he came. This was the kind of man who needed the gospel desperately.

However, it wasn't the gospel that he wanted. Phil wanted a handout. Having been a panhandler for fifteen years in Southern California, he had no interest in changing. I'll never forget his answer to my inquiring if he wanted to get off the streets and become a responsible citizen in the community. He almost took offense at my question! "No, sir," he replied. He had been sleeping in back alleys and freely roaming for all those years, and life was good, in his opinion. He told me he made a fairly decent living on the kindness and generosity (I mentally added, "and naivety") of people. In the weeks to come, I saw Phil at numerous intersections with a sign asking for help and declaring, "God bless you." His attitude was: Why fix something that isn't broken?

The problem with Phil was that his lifestyle *was* broken. He just didn't recognize it. Some people are blindly willful, but Phil was willfully blind. There was nothing stopping him from working; he preferred to live off of others working for him. He didn't want to talk about his responsibility to God, his family, or to others.

Probably few of us have met anyone like Phil. They tend to be loners and usually don't socialize with people who are responsible providers and hard workers. However, could there be something broken in the way you live as a provider to your family and others, to which you are willfully blind? My guess is most of us can relate more to Steve. Our WORK, family, and worship are out of order and causing big problems.

Obviously, Steve and Phil were walking in darkness when it comes to understanding God's plan for men to be workers and providers for their families and the needs of the poor in the world, but how about you? The purpose of this series of lessons is to put you on the same page as God's Word when it comes to work and providing for your family and others. Is your work a calling of God, or is your work a way you express your calling as a son of God? Let's consider how a man's work relates to his calling as a son of God.

YOUR JOB IS NOT YOUR CALLING

Perhaps it would be helpful to review the definition of a *calling* that I used in the first book of this series. Biblically, a calling is an irrevocable act of God that establishes a special relationship with responsibilities, privileges, and promises that provide hope for the future. Neither work nor ministry fits this definition. Providing for a family is not an irrevocable act of God. Throughout a man's life, God may direct him to various jobs and ministries. Furthermore, a man may also forfeit either his job or ministry through foolishness, lack of skill, or unfaithfulness. However, according to the above biblical definition of a calling, a man can-

not change his callings. One may run from God's callings or act unfaithfully, but God still holds him responsible to the calling as He established it. Instead, work and ministry fall under the category of the biblical responsibilities of a man's callings as husband and father and as a member of the body of Christ.

WORK IS GOD'S MANDATE

From the very beginning of man's history, God expected and directed him to work. Consider the implications of these verses from Genesis.

God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (Genesis 1:28-31).

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it (Genesis 2:15).

God didn't spoon feed Adam and Eve. He created a world designed for man's good, and work was one aspect of God's goodness. The requirement to work didn't come with the fall of man. The entrance of sin and death, as a result of Adam's and Eve's sin, infected man with a desire to be spoon fed and to avoid working for the Lord. Instead, fallen man primarily works for himself. The new birth places a new disposition in man toward work—he works as unto the Lord. This is explicitly taught by the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Colossians. "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (Colossians 3:23).

In a sense, we might think of ourselves as stewards of God's creation. He has placed us in a world with resources to sustain our lives. Food and the materials for shelter are readily available, but to enjoy them, we have to work. If we don't work, then we don't eat. Again the Apostle Paul weighed in on this truth. "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Although there are many other scriptures affirming work as God's mandate for mankind, I think the above is sufficient to make these points.

- God put man in a world that needed to be “worked.”
- Man’s work ethic is an expression of his relationship to God.
- If a man won’t work, he should go hungry.

YOU WORK IN GOD’S PRESENCE

To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord as a provider for your family and for others, you need to view your work from an eternal perspective. Here’s what I mean by an eternal perspective: you work in God’s presence. God is not in some distant throne room way out past the moon. He’s as close to you as the air you breathe. You live, move, and exist in Him (Acts 17:28). As you work, keep in mind that you are before Him with whom you have to give an account (Hebrews 4:13).

How should this influence your attitudes and actions at work? For the traveling man, it means you live with an awareness that all you do while away from home, you offer as an act of worship before the Lord. There is no “private” time in the hotel, restaurant, or airport. Your words, facial expressions, attitudes are important because they convey your relationship with God. Remember, those things done in the flesh will be burned. They are fruitless and vain. However, those things done in the name of Christ, for His sake, will last.

YOU WANT GOD’S PRESENCE IN YOUR WORK

Not only should you work with an awareness of God’s presence, but as a son of God you should also want God’s presence in your work. Isn’t God glorified when the people with whom we work have an awareness of God’s presence? It’s one of the mysteries of the Christian’s walk. Although we live, Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20). Jesus’ wisdom, love, creativity, joy, and power should be evident as we work. If we’re connected to heaven by the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, then it makes sense that His kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth in our work.

We want Jesus to get all the glory He deserves for purchasing us to be His own. That’s what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. He should get His “money’s” worth! We are not our own, says the Apostle Paul. Having been bought with the price of His blood, our bodies are not our own. They are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are to glorify God in our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19). God gave you a body in which to work. He lives in it. So with your mind, emotions, and body members, you manifest His presence at work.

YOU WORK FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

There is another consideration implicit in God's work mandate: you have the privilege and responsibility to work for the glory of God. People of this world system work for their own glory. The more money they make, possessions and assets they can accumulate, and ease of life they can facilitate through their work, the more accomplished and successful they feel. James wrote about this kind of motivation in life. He called it "selfish-ambition", and considered such "wisdom" to be "earthly, natural, and demonic." (James 3:14-16).

In contrast, men who have a longing in their hearts to walk in a manner worthy of their calling as sons of God live by totally different principles—heavenly ones! As they work, their prayer is, "Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name." We might say, "Make your name great as I work." Such a mindset keeps us thinking about things above instead of things on the earth. Much wisdom comes from asking ourselves as we work and make daily decisions, "Will this decision, these words, or this action cause others to glorify God?" Can you think of times you wish you had asked yourself this question?

While contrasting the "earthly" and the "heavenly" views of work, I think it important to debunk a common misconception. The idea that a man in full-time ministry has a higher calling than the man who holds a secular job is an "earthly" view. In God's eyes, every man is called to work to provide for his family. It's a part of his calling as a husband and father. When we view work from an eternal perspective, there is no difference between the dentist, lawyer, carpenter, grocery clerk, and the man in full-time ministry. All are serving the Lord for His glory in their work. God's presence is as much needed in the business office as He is needed in the minister's office or pulpit. Why each man works and for Whom he works should be the same.

A man's work is an important part of his life and worship to God. In this series, you will hopefully discover how to walk in a manner worthy of the name of Jesus Christ which is stamped on all of your work. As I write this book, I'm assuming that you have been born again by God's Spirit, that His life is in you, and that you desire to glorify God in all that you do. If such is not the case with you, then I am also assuming you haven't read the first book in this series entitled, "Walking Worthy As a Son of God". I encourage you to go through that initial study as you continue this one. Without having experienced the new birth, what you read in this study will seem out of step with the world around you and perhaps crazy. From this world's perspective, it is! When viewed from an eternal perspective, you'll discover the wisdom of God.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. When you think of working in God's presence, what do you think God has seen in these areas of your life?

Your motivation for work: _____

Your actions at work: _____

Your words at work: _____

2. Define success from the world's perspective and God's perspective.

3. What evidence is there in your work of God's presence?

4. What changes do you need to make to unleash His presence as you work?

5. This week, practice praying, "Make your name great as I work. May your will be done today on the job, just as it is in heaven." Then journal below the effect such a mindset has had on your work.

6. Tell a work associate that you are involved in a project which you hope will make you a better worker/employee/boss. Invite him to do you a favor and truthfully tell you what he sees about your motivation, actions, and words at work. (This takes a lot of courage and humility, but perhaps God will use it to open the door for further conversation about the Lord or even an invitation to join this study!) Write below what you were told.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Choose two verses to memorize this week and write them below.

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,

2Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.

1Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

GROUP INTERACTION

1. Introduce yourselves to each other in this way: “My name is _____, and I work for the Lord at _____.”
2. Share the verses you memorized with a group member.
3. Share and discuss Personal Application #1, 4, 5, and 6.
4. Close with a time of prayer for God’s presence in your work the following week and blessing as you continue the *Walking Worthy As a Provider* study.

