

Your JOB brings glory to God

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Today, I want to remind you of what you may already know but we so easily forget – that is, the significance of the seemingly insignificant. Or said differently: The glory that goes to God in the ordinary.

When I “retired” after 40+ years as a Pastor, I went to work for a friend. A typical day included 30 minutes of working out with some free weights before showering and dressing for work. I’d scramble a couple of eggs and my wife and I would read the Bible and pray together before I drove about 20 minutes to the shop where I worked. My day was filled with cleaning equipment, filling customers’ orders using that same equipment and delivering it to them in a van. Getting gas, driving in traffic and anxiously seeking parking places in downtown Denver and grabbing take-out lunch at a fast-food place were all part of the routine. After work, I’d head home to start or complete one of those seemingly endless number of home-owner projects – as in fixing a leaking water faucet, changing out a garbage disposal, or painting a bathroom. Then I’d answer emails, have dinner, do some prep for a weekly Bible Study I lead, watch a Netflix show with my wife or read and go to bed. Not very exciting but, best I can tell, that’s a fairly ordinary experience.

Most of life is made up of the ordinary, the routine, the unspectacular. It is easy to fall into thinking a lot of life is maybe even pointless. It’s even easier to think of some JOBS that way or some TASKS that way – as having little or no meaning.

Isn’t it true that we have, without thought, divided life into the **sacred and the secular?** It’s **sacred** when I teach a Bible class, or preach a sermon, or visit the sick, or write a devotional, or pray a prayer. It’s **secular** when I take out the garbage, answer an email, go to a Rockies game, make phone calls for my job, or do the accounting for the registration of students.

If that dichotomy between sacred and secular is accurate, consider what it means for every one of us. As I see it, it means that whether it is a missionary, a secretary, a college professor, a truck driver or whatever we do – we all spend 90% or more of our time alive doing “secular” things.

We recently honored the life of Billy Graham. But think about it: He spent most of his days for most of his life doing what by our earlier definition were just “secular” things – going to meetings, staying in hotels, eating meals, answering letters, enjoying friends and the like. Was it only sacred when he was preaching?

What many Christians are missing in their lives, I believe, is a sense of calling; now a calling is not the same as a job. I think today we confuse calling and job – we say some are called to be a pastor or missionary, or called to be a teacher or doctor. It is “telling” isn’t it, that we don’t often hear someone say they were called to be a receptionist or custodian or called to do data entry.

I contend that whether our JOB is custodian or college president, our CALLING as Christians is all the same calling.

I want you to hear again, that high calling, common to all of us, as given to us in the Bible: It is in the **CREATION MANDATE** given in the book of Genesis; it was given by God to his people and it is still in effect. It was given before the Fall **and after** Adam sinned; it was not nullified by the Fall. Remember the mandate? They were to be fruitful and multiply and steward the earth. In what tasks/jobs did Adam and his offspring fulfill the mandate? Adam's first job was to tend the garden and his second was as a zoologist and after that they were farmers, eventually metal workers, artisans of all kinds. To be certain, we do have a legitimate "beef" with Adam because Adam's sin and the curse God pronounced did make the work harder but it did not nullify the sanctity of labor. In the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply and steward the earth, I hear the ordinary, I hear marriage and parenting and working with our hands and minds – the everyday tasks of life.

Now this is important: God said, in that Genesis text, that they were created in his image. What this means is that as they obeyed God in the ordinary occupations of life, they were reflecting his image – they were displaying his glory. The ordinary gives glory to God.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31 I find a further explanation of that calling in the ordinary activities of life. God says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." We are to reflect the image of God in us in our most common activities of life. Glory to God in our eating and drinking? What is more ordinary than that? We live most of life in the "ordinary" and in that "ordinary" we live out our calling.

Most Christians for most of history have NOT been pastors, missionaries or teachers of Bible in Christian schools. Most Christians for most of history have been farmers, laborers, technicians, accountants, salespeople, clerks, secretaries, and the like. Sometime, early in Christianity, and it seems ever since, we have thought of at least four classes of people on **a false sacred-secular continuum**: **First** on the "sacred" end of the continuum we have pastors, missionaries, Bible teachers, and maybe Christian counselors, seminary presidents, and a few others who have "spiritual" jobs.

The **second** class of people are those whose "secular" jobs directly or indirectly support those who have "spiritual" jobs. This second class were those who worked in the home office of missions' agencies, registrars and accountants, custodians and secretaries in Christian schools or churches. Their jobs were close to "spiritual" work because they were supporting the "spiritual" work.

The **third** class of Christian was made up of those who used their secular job to do "spiritual" things – to witness to their co-workers or employees or the job gave the Christian enough money or time to do "spiritual" work on the weekends when their "secular" work didn't require them. They did "secular" work to give them time to do "spiritual" work. It is very true that the "spiritual" work was good to do but that misses the larger issue we are discussing.

The **fourth** class of Christian was made up of those whose “secular” jobs consumed them. They are Christians, but this “sacred-secular” way of thinking says they don’t have any time to do anything that matters to God.

It seems to me the Bible debunks that whole scheme of thinking! The Bible and the very lives of most believers of all history teach me that **it is the work itself, the very job, that is sacred.** It is **not just** what you do after the job, after hours or on the weekend. It’s **not just** how you witness on the job. It **IS the very work itself** that is a reflection of God’s call on our lives and thus it gives glory to God when we do the work he has given us to do.

Some might argue that the **Great Commandment** (to love the Lord our God and our neighbor) and the **Great Commission** (to make disciples) have superseded the Creation Mandate. Certainly the Great Commandment and the Great Commission do express explicitly what is only implicit in the Creation Mandate. And of course, whatever the job we have, we are also called to love God and neighbor and to make disciples **but that does not detract** from the fundamental truth that **the job itself, in and of itself,** is a way God’s glory is reflected in our lives.

Our calling is lived out in the ordinary – in marriage, in parenting, in working at the common or uncommon tasks of making a living (OUR JOBS) and in the everyday of eating and drinking.

What is unfortunate is that many men and women don’t think of themselves as participating in the work of God **WHEN THEY DO THEIR EVERYDAY WORK**. Immersed in the daily stuff of emails, meetings, computers or finance, and in the domestic worlds of household and family, it is hard for people to see how their lives have anything to do with the life of God. From “Vocation” By Barbara Brown Taylor Originally published in The Preaching Life 1993 Author Barbara Brown wrote (and I paraphrase), “If we believe God, we need to see the **EXTRAORDINARY** dimensions of an **ORDINARY** life, to see the hand of God at work in the world and to see one’s own hands as necessary to that work. Whether those hands are diapering an infant, assembling an automobile or balancing a corporate account, they are God’s hands, claimed by God (at our conversion) for the accomplishment of God’s will on earth.” Brown p26 That’s what we are called to remember, that this ordinary day matters, my ordinary work matters.

Even when you work in a Christian organization it is hard to see how answering phone calls has eternal significance, **but isn’t that what we just been thinking about** – It **does** have eternal significance, **not just because** it is done in a Christian University **but because the job is done as unto the Lord**, reflecting his image in us and living out his **CALL** on our live – The Glory to God in the Ordinary.

With this doctrine of “calling,” everyday life is transfigured. **The ordinary tasks of life matter; my ordinary job matters to God. As I live this day, in obedience to the Creation Mandate, working with diligence at the job given to me, and, in obedience to the Great Commandment, as I consider the way I treat those around me, and, in obedience to the Great Commission, as I desire to reflect the character of Jesus that God may be honored – it all gives glory to God.**

The Bible gives us a picture of a day in the future, when Christ returns, when something equivalent to a **public honors ceremony** will take place. Remember Jesus' parable of the Talents? One servant was given 5 talents, another two and the third, one. I have occasionally thought of whose lives will be most honored by the Lord when he returns. Will it be the people Christians have recognized the most – the great leaders, missionaries, pastors, evangelists? Or will it be the one to whom the Lord says, “You have been faithful in little” – You were faithful and grateful in the job, the ordinary job I gave you, the abilities you had, the resources I supplied, the place where I put you.” Then and there God will declare to the one talent Christ-follower the same response he gives to the 5 talent Christ-follower: *“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little... Enter into the joy of your master.”*

One of the Church Reformers, William Tyndale, wrote that if we look on the outward appearance of things, “There is a difference between washing dishes and preaching of the word of God, but **as touching how it pleases God, there is no difference at all between the two.** John Calvin wrote, “Provided you obey your calling in it, no task will be so (lowly) that it will not... be reckoned very precious in God's sight.” Institutes III X 6

In Christ the ordinary becomes the extraordinary giving glory to God!

Dr. Jerry Nelson April 6, 2018