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**Takin' Care of Business - Podcast 1**

*PLEASE NOTE: These are direct transcripts of spoken sermons.*

Work is a big deal to us. It really is, it’s a BIG DEAL to us… when you think about it. A study done in 2003 revealed that Americans work more than *any other* industrial nation on the planet. We’re all about work. Now, when I use the word “work” or “work life” I’m not just talking about those people who go to an office. I’m talking about everybody that works. That would include students, studying in college or high school or junior high, even elementary. That’s your work, that’s your job. I’m also talking about stay at home parents, people that put time into raising kids and do it from their home or people that are managing their household and their schedule and their finances. When we talk about work, we’re talking about work in every arena of life. Whatever you are giving yourself to, whatever your industry is, that is your work life. And that’s a big deal to us. You know why?

From the earliest times, what is the first question you ask a kid that you meet? “What are you going to be when you grow up?” Right? “Are you going to be an astronaut? Are you going to be the President of The United States? Are you going to be a firefighter? Are you going to be a nuclear physicist?” And then in high school, what do we ask the kids? We say, “What’s your favorite subject? Oh you like math? Oh you’ll make a great engineer then, or a great programmer.” And then in college, what do we say? “What’s your major?” In other words, “What are you getting a degree in so that you can get a job and get off mom and dad’s nickel? *Quickly.”* And then when we meet an adult, what’s the second question we ask, right after “what’s your name?” It’s, “What do you do?” And when we ask that question, in our world, it is because work is such a big deal to us that it identifies a whole bunch of information about that person, information that’s important to us, because work is a BIG DEAL to us.

Do you know the average American now spends 100 hours a year *commuting* to and from work? *100 hours.* That’s your two week vacation right now. As much time as you spend with your foot in the sand, you’re spending with your foot on the gas pedal, just getting to and from this place called work. Only, a lot of you now are just getting up and making your own Starbucks. I was talking to some folks this week and found out that in the IBM work force stateside, 1/3 of those employees at IBM actually do not have an office to go to, they work out of their home, their car, or the local Starbucks. That’s what they do. It’s a big deal. This work-world is a *big deal* that we’re all involved in. And the question this morning is not if it’s a big deal to us, because it is a huge deal to us. The question is: “is this a big deal to God? Does God care at all about our work? Is God interested more in what we do on Sunday morning, or in our bible studies or in our prayer time or family time? Does God have an interest in what we do? We’re interested in taking care of business, but is God interested in that?”

 In order to answer that question, we’ve got to go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible so I would encourage you to open to Genesis chapter 1, where I want us to discover the origin of work. Where did work originate in the first place? If you go back to Genesis chapter 1 you find the first verse of the bible. What does it say? It says *In the beginning,* God what? God *created the heavens and the earth.* What we see around us, what we know, that was God working. If you don’t think that’s a big deal, for God to *create* the heavens and the earth, then *you* try it. Man, I had a project in my backyard moving some rocks this year, and that just about killed me. I can’t imagine creating the *Rocky Mountains*.

In fact, the psalmist says it this way in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies demonstrate and display the work of God’s hands.” In other words, **creation is God’s *work****.* So, I was thinking about that this weekend and I asked our church plant residents to take some to time to just think about all of the skills, all of the professions, all of the jobs involved in creation. Just think that through, that would be a fun thing for you to do in your quiet time as you ponder God. A fun thing to do as a family is you talk about it and just sit down and think about all of the skills and professions and occupations that God had in creation. I mean some obvious ones are things like: *architect, engineer, plumber, builder*. You also have other ones you see as He created plants, *botanist*. As he created animals, *zoologist*. As he created marine life, *marine biologist*. **You know a lot of the jobs that we do today really have their origin in God himself who was the creator.** God also took Adam and Eve and began to instruct them*: teacher*.

Now what I’m suggesting is that God himself is a worker and when we were created in the image of God, God created us as workers. And as we look at our professions and our professional life, we can see parallels between what God did and what God does and how he created us and what we do. So that’s our first principle this morning: **God is a worker and he created us as workers also.** In fact, if you’ll turn over to Genesis chapter 2, the creation of man and woman, notice what it says in verse 15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *work it and take care of it*. “ Not to hang out in the garden, not to eat the fruit, but to work. You mean, **before the fall of man there was work**? Yep. Adam is placed in this beautiful garden, and as the representative of the God who just made it all, who just created it, who just did the work. Now Adam is responsible to be involved in that work, to take care of it, to keep it up. To protect it, to prune it, to work with it. You know it’s very interesting though as you look carefully at the passage. The words “work” and “cultivate” or “work” and “care for” are the two big Hebrew words for “worship” and “keep God’s commandments”. In other words, in the very nature of creation God, the worker, creates us to be worker, places us in his world, and tell us that when we work, when we do what God has created us to do, when we use the gifts and abilities and skills to do things that are industrious and make a difference and make things beautiful, when we do that we’re actually doing that as an act of worship and obedience. **We worship and obey God in the Monday through Friday day to day activities of our very work life.** What was the question? Does God care about your work? *Absolutely.* God cares intimately about your work, God created you as a worker, and God blesses you in the course of working.

Now there is a little bit of an edge to work and we see that in chapter 3. In chapter 3, after sin (this is our second principle) or because of sin, **God gave work an edge**. After Adam and Eve sin, God changes the world, he changes the composure of the world and he creates futility in the world and in chapter 3 starting in verse 17 he says to Adam, “Because you listened to your wife and you ate from the tree which I commanded you ‘you must not eat of it’ cursed is the ground because of you, through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you. You will eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you turn to the ground since from it you were taken, dust you are, and to dust you will return.’” Because **of sin there is an edge or a harshness to work.**  There’s a futility, there’s a struggle. That’s where we get the concept that work is a “four letter word”. It’s *hard*. Because of that, often times people see work not as a blessing or a gift from God. They see work as a toil, as a struggle, as a difficulty, as a grind, as something that’s hard. And our view is that if we can escape from work life would be easier, if we can escape from work to fun, to those kinds of activities, then we’re really blessed and we’re really enjoying ourselves. **But the thought is that God created us as workers (that took place before the fall), and even though it does have an edge, it’s hard, it still has value to God. In fact, Christ came to redeem us from the effects of the curse, not only in our soul, but also in our *activity*. And in our activity God wants to change our concept of work from something that is a drudgery to something that can be *offered to him* and a blessing or as an act of worship.**

 In fact, I’m going to take you to the New Testament now and show you God’s plan for our work. Turn to Colossians chapter 3. In Colossians chapter 3 we see the plan for our work as given to us by God. This is a passage that we all really need to memorize. This is a passage I would challenge you to commit to memory because this passage gives you the Christian perspective as a Christ follower, this is what work ought to look like to you. Starting in verse 23, He says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” Isn’t that an unbelievable passage of scripture? Because in those two verses, he lays out a Christian understanding of work. He talks about our motivation, our boss and our paycheck. Let’s start with our motivation, our effort. He says in verse 23 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.” What kind of effort am I supposed to bring to the job? I’m supposed to bring ***my best effort***. **Whatever I’m doing, whatever kind of work I’m in**, I’m supposed to **bring my best** to the table when I come.

**That phrase “work at it with all your heart” means that you have an intense focus in your work, you’re paying attention to what you’re doing. It also means that you’re energized by it and you’re bringing energy to it. It’s not something that you’re passive in. And finally, it implies *passion***. **In other words, you care about the product of your day.** It makes a difference to *you* how the customer is served, it matters to *you* whether the design is a good design, whether the creativity is good when the music is played, with finesse, on key. Whether your studies are done to the best of your ability. {Whether you put your best effort into your job search.} It matters to *you* to bring your passion and focus your intensity to the job. You’re not just working to get through the day, you’re working to bring your best to each and every project that you’re assigned to do. You work at it with all of your heart. You may say, “Well, if you knew my company, and if you knew my boss and the customers and so forth you may understand that I don’t have a whole lot of motivation to do that.” Well, God knows that, and so He keeps talking and tells us who our real boss is here, he tells us in verse 23 that working with all of your heart is working for whom? **Working for *the Lord*, not for men**, since you know you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward for it is the lord Christ you are serving. Who is my boss? My boss is none other than Jesus. That’s who I work for, I work for Jesus. In fact he says it 3 times in the passage. He says “you work for the Lord” “you work for the Lord” “you work for the Lord, Christ.” Just in case your boss so looms in your mind that you can’t get his or her face out of your head, that’s not who you work for as a believer. At the end of the day, *your* work is done for *your* Lord, Jesus Christ himself.

Believe me, I know that there are a lot of bad bosses out there. I read recently the story of a boss who had to give a speech at a convention coming up so he called Poindexter in and he said “Poindexter, I’ve gotta give this speech and I know you’re a good writer so would you write me a speech?” So Poindexter wrote him a speech and he got up and delivered the speech. It was supposed to be a 20 minute speech and the boss got up and delivered a speech. However, he was so furious afterwards he said to Poindexter “I can’t believe it, I told you to write me a 20 minute speech and you wrote me and *hour* long speech!” In fact, after the first 25 minutes people got up and they started leaving, they kept leaving through the whole thing and I was just so frustrated by the time I finished with that hour long speech, everybody was gone.” And Poindexter said, “Sir, I don’t know what happened” he said, “You know I wrote you a 20 minute speech, I typed it up and I provided two extra copies of it for you.” I thought that was funny.

That may be your earthly boss, but you know what? You don’t work for that person. Your work is for Jesus Christ. So at the end of the day, when you plumb that toilet, and nobody cares, nobody notices, Jesus Christ cares, it matters to him. And you’re doing it *for him*. What does it look like for a person to approach their work life, and in their heart, working for Jesus Christ? Let me show you what it looks like. It looks like an ordinary guy, a guy named Dan Murphy. Watch his story:

My name is Dan Murphy, I own Foundation Auto Repair. I want to be able to provide an honest automotive repair facility that people can trust because the reputation of the industry that I’m in is very bad when it comes to honesty, and trustworthiness. Now I’m not saying that there aren’t really good honest automotive repair services out there, but you really have to find them. Well throughout my career of 20 years I’ve worked with several people and it’s been very awesome in the last 10 years to have been able to work with certain people that are very Christ oriented. One of the owners of the shop that I’ve worked with for 5 ½ years was an example of an extremely honest ethical automotive repair facility and it was Christ centered. The name Foundation Auto Repair has brought people in, and they have asked why I have named it that. And it allows me to share with them my beliefs and why the business statement is “complete honest automotive repair services done with integrity.” I view my spiritual life and my work life as one, because it was God that offered me the opportunity to take over this shop and own this shop to be able to be a light for him. And I start my days off praying, and I go in and go to work and I will treat people with integrity and respect when they come in. I’ve been really complimented on the fact that I take the time to talk to them and to elaborate on what we’re doing and explain it to them where they can understand it. And that’s just God bringing me into their lives to be able to use my knowledge to allow them to make educated decisions on the repairs that they need to make. My spiritual life and my work life have also offered me the opportunity to be able to be a mentor with my employees, and with one in particular that has an alcohol problem. It allowed me to use my experiences as a recovering alcoholic to be able to mentor him or minister to him and show him how his addiction can affect his life and work. I discover God at work each and every day, it’s awesome how He just opens my eyes and opens up the opportunities and just opens the doors. I never once imagined I would physically own the land of the building, but God has just been there and opened the doors and taken care of me.

Isn’t it great to think that you can take your car to a person that woke up in the morning and prayed that God would use that day to demonstrate Himself, who came to fix your car not to your specifications but to higher specifications, to Jesus Christ’s standards? That really had an attitude that his serving you is an act of worship and obedience and doing his best job is the most important thing, not just to make you happy, but to make Jesus Christ happy? Can you imagine what it would be like living in a community that was filled with people, Christ followers, who all approached their work that way? That’s an awesome thought, and that’s Gods plan for us. That’s his plan for your work. And it’s not simply about how much money you’re going make at the end of the day or what your paycheck is. It’s *a lot* bigger than that. In fact he tells us in this passage that our paycheck is really eternal reward. **My paycheck** is really bigger than what I can earn, it’s really my **eternal rewards**. Look again at verse 23, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” He says that we should know this. He says that we should know that whatever we do, whatever that may be, when we work at it with all our heart, working for Christ, not simply for humans, that we will be rewarded for that. There is an *inheritance* awaiting us. As Christians we should know that what we do with this precious life that has been given to us by God, that we’re going to stand before Him on the judgement seat of Christ one day, and we’re going to give an explanation. We’re going to have our life reviewed, we’re going to stand before God, and God’s going to look at what we did. Not just what church we went to, or how many hours we put in to our ministry, but he’s going to look at every aspect of our life and he’s going to look at our work life. And this passage tells us that God himself is going to give us eternal rewards and eternal inheritance for how we took this time and invested it with our best, to demonstrate and reflect this workmanship that God built in us and did it to serve other people, as we serve Jesus Christ. We’re going to be rewarded in eternity for how we do our work right *here and right now.*

***Your work matters to God****.* Now most of the time we think about the wrong things. We think, “My work matters because of what I do.” Or “My work is important because of whom I work with.” Or “My work is important because of where I work.” And you know what? God is not so much interested in that; God is interested in *how* you are doing your work. How are you going about doing it?

I’m going to close with four principles. I believe this passage is revolutionary in nature. These principles didn’t originate with me. Andy Stanley in his work life series put these four principles forward and I believe that they’re so powerful in redirecting our thinking about our work life. The first principle is this: **your work has eternal implications even if it has no apparent eternal value**. *Your work has eternal implications even if it has not apparent eternal value.*  Some of you would say, “I am making widgets all day long, how can God care about widgets?” Or, “The technology I developed three years ago is now outdated, how can God care about that technology?” Or, “The landscaping job I did for that woman’s yard is now all overgrown. She didn’t take care of it, how in the world could God care about that project?” How could God care about those things? You know what? He cares about *you*. It’s not so much what you’re doing that matters, it’s how you’re doing it. Eternal implications for how you do your job. Your reward? Your “well done”? That’s part of what you’re doing. You know what? God is smart. He didn’t design a stupid system. So think about it this way: if you’re going to go and do an 8 hour job, if you’re going to go and invest 8 precious hours of this life on Monday morning, God’s giving that *value.* And you can go and work at it in such a way that your attitude, your strength, what you bring to it, your wisdom, your effort and your energy can actually be something that God is pleased with as He watches you from Heaven. God your Father can enjoy as he watches you work. You know, some of us are just burning our lives. We go to work with a bad attitude, we do our worst, we get by with what we can. It’s just like taking 8 hours of our life and taking a match to it and watching it fizzle away. It’s just gone, it’s just lost. God cares about *how* you do it, it has eternal implications, even if the task itself seems dumb, seems unimportant, seems silly.

The second principle is: **How you *perform* at work is as important as *where* you work***. How you perform your work is as important as where you work.* We have a tendency to grade work in our culture. So if you’re a neurosurgeon and you work at the hospital, it’s a big deal. If you’re a ditch digger and you work on the road, not important. But you know what? How you perform your job is *as* important as where you do it. And so, a lazy CEO, in the sight of God, who is not performing his work with excellence, is less valuable and less important than a very committed brick-layer that does an excellent job of building a wall. It doesn’t matter so much where you work. We’ve got so many people that say, “I’m in a dead-end job, it’s not a big deal, and nobody cares about this job, so why would that be important to God?” Because *you’re* important to God, so how you do your job is important.

Third principle. This is the one that gets me. **How you perform at work is as important as how you behave at work.** *How you perform your work is as important as how you behave at work*. Being nice is not a good substitute for doing a good job. So if you’re a nice person, but you do a cruddy job at your work, you are performing poorly. There is no compensation for that. And please, please, do not put up an Ichthus fish in your cubicle and have a “Jesus Saves” screensaver on your screen and then go in there and figure out ways to do the least amount of work you possibly can and think to yourself, “Well, because I’m a Christian and don’t swear or yell at people in meetings, then that’s enough.” When you think about it, the word integrity means to *integrate*. It’s to take what I say and what I believe and to integrate it with my behavior and with my actions. So if I give my employer a resume that says “I can do certain things because I have certain training and certain skills and experience” and after giving them that and being hired into and working in that role and I don’t live up to what I presented as myself, that’s a lack of integrity, that’s dishonesty. In other words, my performance has something to do with my *honesty*. If I see the job and I see the job responsibilities and then I don’t fulfill those responsibilities, that’s being dishonest. How I perform in my job is significant because it says something about who I am, what I believe, what’s true. How I perform is as important as how I behave. Now that doesn’t mean that just because you’re a great performer that you can behave like an idiot, and some people think that too. We’ll talk about that in a later message.

Number four. **Putting your heart into your work allows God to bless your work**. *Putting your heart into your work allows God to bless your work.* That’s the formula for blessing. In this passage it tells us, work at it with all your heart because that’s where you’re going to receive a reward from the Lord as an inheritance. When we do what God asks us to do we set ourselves up as partners with God so that He can bless our work. *God can bless our work*.

Now, as we move into these principles and begin to embrace them as a team, I just want to give you the genesis of this series. Where did we start with all this? Well about a year ago, one of our staff members submitted to me a plan for work life ministry and really challenged my thinking. And what I came to understand through the process of looking at what he presented and interacting with him in this whole process is that the church tends to spend a majority of the training teaching you how to do ministry. Most of the training we offer is training about your personal life and your personal ministry: how to have a quiet time, how to share your faith, how to pray. We also train you in how to do specialized ministries: how to teach a children’s class, how to lead a small group, how to work with youth. And you know what? Most of us don’t spend our time in the volume of those things, we spend our time in our work place. And I became very convicted that we offer very little training about things such as ethics in the job place, how to perform with excellence, how to build significant relationships with people, and how to reach people through our work. But that’s how we spend a majority of our time and the church does very little to equip you. And so, we have decided to change that. In fact, we took one of our pastors, Paul Carlson, and moved him into WorkLife Ministry and he’s been working in the last year to build an infrastructure of networks in our church and in our city to equip you, to encourage you, to support you in your work life. And the sermon series is just kind of laying out the principles that will culminate when we get to the end of the six weeks in helping you connect with other people and giving you training and tools to live out your work life.

 In order to get you started in this, I want you to have something to do tomorrow morning. And so if you reach into your bulletin you’ll find one of these cards. It’s called the WorkLife Challenge. And each week we’re going to give you a work life challenge: an assignment to complete during the week so that you can discover God at work. So this is your work life challenge. You may say, “Well I’m a student” hey, this is your work life challenge right here. You may say, “Well I’m a stay at home parent.” Well this is your work life challenge right here. You may say, “Well I’m retired.” Oh. Hey you guys work too; my dad told me since he’s retired he’s had less free time than he ever had before. Whatever you’re doing, this is your WorkLife Challenge. So now you’ve got the envelope in your hand and the “mission impossible” feel in the room, tear it open. Your work life challenge, should you choose to accept it, is actually 2 challenges. We’ve given you two so you can pick one, and if you’re a type A person you’ll probably try to do them both, if you’re not a type A person you’ll probably try and get out of both of them. But what we would like you to do is to try to do one of these this week, and the first one is: What is it you like least about your work, pray and ask God to give you a new perspective about it, write down what you can do differently and then do it. *See what happens.* The other one is to pray for your company, organization or employer to succeed and prosper even if you aren’t happy with your work life right now. So the second one is a little easier unless you really, really hate the boss. *See what God does.*

Now our goal is that each week, I’m going to give you a new work life challenge. So don’t get to Friday and say “hey I forgot about it, I didn’t do this, I’ll just do it next week” because next week we’re going to give you a new one. And our goal is to get everybody to do the work life challenge and then we want to talk about it. And so, we’ve established a blog spot on our website where you can go and record what happened, and tell other people what happened, and we’ll have a chance to talk about it and have a dialogue and get a conversation going. And we’re going to discover God at work! Because we’re all going to be talking about it and sharing about it, and seeing what God is doing out there. We’re going to learn from one another. And in order to see that I want you to go to our website where there is a whole section on work life ministry. And you’ll go in there, you’ll click on the front page, you’ll click on work life ministry, and we’ve got all kinds of tools to help you in your work place, we’ve got articles, ideas, and help to answer questions such as “How do you deal with ethics violations?” and “How do I ask for a raise as a Christian?” All of these things are written from a Christian perspective to help you think through the things that you face on a day to day basis, and so there’s just tons and tons of information there to help you out. There’s also a place to get connected with people, there’s a devotional, and down at the bottom there’s a place you can click to log on to the blog.

I just want us to start a dialogue where as a group we can start talking about what we’re seeing out there, because here’s what we’re talking about: at the end of the day, if God is a worker and God has created us to work, and God is out there in our world, working, it’s our responsibility to walk in to our work place whatever that might be, and start asking the question, “God where are you? I want to discover you in my work.” Because this is going to be an exciting experience, to see how God is pleased with that. And we’re challenging each one of you. Begin to see your work life as a place to meet God and to see Him do incredible things.