

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORK

WEEK 5: HOW DO I BALANCE WORK, CHURCH, FAMILY AND LIFE?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The overall goal of this six-week class is to give a broad overview of how Christians are to view work with a Biblical worldview.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - Week 1: What is a Biblical theology of work?
 - Week 2: What is a Biblical work ethic? How can I work for God's glory?
 - Week 3: How can I tell when work has become my identity and/or an idol?
 - Week 4: Are some jobs more spiritual than others?
 - **Week 5: How do I balance work, church, family, life, etc?**
 - Week 6: Should I quit my job / take a new job / retire?

INTRODUCTION

- One of the more popular questions we hear is *how can I balance my life?*
- Does God really give us multiple assignments and expect us to pick the one he wants us to fail at? If not, how do you balance it all without failing? How do you remain fruitful and faithful at work when you also need to be fruitful and faithful as a spouse, parent, neighbor, and church member? How do you do it all in the mere 168 hours that comprise a week?
- The area of balancing responsibilities is tightly related to the issues we've been discussing so far. On the one hand, we don't want to be idle at work. We can't throw up our hands and decide work doesn't matter. After all, God intends us to work, and he intends us to work *for him*. Whatever we do, we should do it with all our heart. Failing at our jobs isn't the solution.
 - On the other hand, we can't declare that our jobs are of the utmost importance and be content to fail in our other responsibilities. We can't sacrifice God-given responsibilities on the altar of work.¹
- There is no one magic answer that is going to quickly put all things in their proper place.

¹ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

- We have some principles that we need to keep in mind and put into practice so that we are able to serve the Lord in all areas that He commands and do so joyfully.

HOW TO VIEW OUR WORK LIFE AND OUR NON-WORK LIFE

- We tend to think of our various responsibilities as somewhat unrelated to each other, like a set of balls we're trying to juggle. Sure, we may see some relationship between them. For example, our jobs provide money for support of our families and our church, and we take our families to church with us.
 - But we also tend to see our responsibilities as being in competition with one another, especially for the limited amount of time and energy we have in a given week. And so we will often set our various responsibilities against each other, which leads to a feeling of constant tension between them instead of viewing them as working together in harmony.²
- Remember the parable about the bad servant who spent too many hours at the office and the good servant who had a flexible work-from-home telecommuting arrangement so he could spend more time with his kids? No? Jesus didn't tell any parables like that. You would think the Bible has a lot to say about work/life balance. But it is hard to find passages that speak directly to the issue. There is no verse that tells me when I'm traveling on the road too much and neglecting my family.³
- The Bible doesn't make a dichotomy between work and life because in the ancient world, work life and family life were often integrated. Families worked together in their family trade, whether in agriculture or commerce. For much of human history, people worked on the family farm. Or your home also served as your butcher shop. Jesus probably didn't have to leave the house to do his carpentry with Joseph; they likely worked together within their own house. It wasn't until the industrial revolution and the rise of factories that more people worked outside the home.⁴
- The problem with the work-life *balance* concept is the image of two competing forces: one always prevails over the other, except for those rare moments when our non-work life and work life are in perfect unison.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

- Like everything else we do, we want to make sure that we are anchored to the text.
- The Bible doesn't depict the responsibilities of life as a juggling act. In fact, Scripture is clear that we have one primary assignment and that everything else is subordinate to it...our calling to follow Jesus.⁵

² Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

³ <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/blog/jesus-didnt-teach-us-juggle>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

- Colossians 3:16–24 “**Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you**, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷**Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** ¹⁸**Wives, be subject to your husbands**, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹**Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.** ²⁰**Children, be obedient** to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹**Fathers, do not exasperate** your children, so that they will not lose heart. ²²**Slaves, in all things obey** those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³**Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men,** ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ **whom you serve**. ²⁵For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.”
- Let’s break this down and see what we can pull out for our how we can balance our life:
 - **First command in verse 16** “...let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...”
 - We can say that in order of priority, we need to make sure that we are taking care of our own spiritual state. If we are not getting the Word of God into our hearts and minds, we are not going to be able to live a life that is pleasing to God.
 - We are going to be out of balance, not between work and non-work, but between our own motives/desires and what God has for us.
 - We have been saved by Jesus; we are given to Jesus; and now we are called to live for Jesus. Discipleship to him must be our primary, overarching, undergirding assignment. It happened before every other assignment, supersedes every other assignment, and will last long after every other assignment is complete. ***Your discipleship to Jesus is not just one more ball flying around in your life.*** It is not in competition with other responsibilities. It is your first responsibility, and all others are defined by it.⁶
 - **Then in verse 17** is where we get our main thrust for work, all that we do is for Christ, and we should be thanking Him.
 - Notice the natural flow from verse 16 to 17...as the Word of Christ is richly dwelling in our hearts, we are going to be thankful. This is our effort that we are putting into our Spiritual life, we are allowing God’s Word to be in our hearts. As it is, thankfulness abounds.
 - Then in verse 17, as we are doing *anything*, we are to be giving thanks to Him.
 - This means that our thankfulness has a theological foundation, it is when we come to the proper understanding of the Word of God as it is dwelling in our hearts.

⁶ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

- **I want to skip ahead briefly to verse 23.**
 - Something to take note of here. Verses 17 and 23 sandwich some of the main text that we have for how a family is to function.
 - The verses sandwiched in between those two verses are all about healthy family relationships. Wives and husbands are to be in loving relationship to one another. Fathers are not to embitter or exasperate their children. **In other words, good work situations and healthy family relationships go hand in hand.** This would have made perfect sense in biblical times when your coworkers were probably also your family members.
 - Even today, unhappy family situations can prevent you from doing good work, and problems at work can cause conflict at home.⁷
- Let's look at the family dynamics that Paul talks about here:
 - Command one in verse 18...wives be subject to their husbands.
 - Command two AND three in verse 19...husbands love their wives and do not be embittered (angry, irritated, grieved) against them.
 - Command four in verse 20...children be obedient to your parents.
 - Command five in verse 21...fathers do not exasperate (stir up or provoke) your children
 - Command six in verse 22...slaves are to obey in all things.
 - Then in verse 23 we have the final command in the sandwich...do your work heartily.
- What is the importance of these commands being where Paul placed them?
 - If you are a husband, wife, child, father, mother, or worker, you are to do all things heartily unto the Lord. There is nothing that we do outside the scope of serving Christ.
 - These commands are, as I stated earlier, based upon, and grounded in **verse 16**. If we are not in the Word daily and we are not allowing it rule in our hearts, we are not going to be able to fulfill the commands that Paul has set forth.
 - This is why our personal discipleship is not something that we can put off, but something that must take *the* priority in our life.
- Compare this with **Ephesians 2:10** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
 - We were created in Christ for the purpose of doing good works. These good works were prepared for us before we were created in Christ for the purpose of us doing them.

⁷ <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/blog/jesus-didnt-teach-us-juggle>

- These good works that Paul speaks of are not confined to one area of life but should be characterized as what our whole life looks like.
- What is the significance of where verse 10 is placed? It is after one of the greatest sections of Scripture regarding our salvation.
- We were dead in our sin and through God's mercy and gift of Christ, we are now saved. Verse 10 is a turning point in the practical life of the believer. Before you were saved, life had no purpose, nor did it have the aim of serving and glorifying God. Now that God has saved you, you have purposes and goals that God has laid out.
- These things are not arbitrary, but meaningful. Our whole life as one unit is about Christ. Whatever good work you are doing and wherever you are doing it, do it heartily unto the Lord.

PRACTICAL STEPS REGARDING PRIORITY⁸

- The chaos of balancing our lives begins to clear up when we understand we have one primary responsibility. Our various callings and duties in life are no longer in direct competition with one another because they are all subsumed under that overriding responsibility of following Christ. But this doesn't mean the pressure is gone. We will often feel the pressure of our secondary responsibilities bumping into one another, even when we understand they are subservient to this primary goal.
- So, for example, how should we spend an unexpected free afternoon? Should we finish a work project early, spend time with the kids, or do some kind of ministry at church? There are no pat, simple answers to these questions. In fact, the answers will be different for different situations and different individuals. Instead of answering this question definitively, we want to suggest some principles that can help you manage the jostling demands of family, church, and work.
 - For every assignment in your life, you will find in the Bible both a minimum standard for *faithfulness* and principles for pursuing further *fruitfulness*. By a minimum standard for faithfulness, we mean the basic requirements Scripture gives in an area of our calling. If you are failing to live up to these basic standards in one of your assignments, then you are not being faithful in that area. ***Most of the time, this means you need to double-down on your attention there before looking anywhere else.***
- By principles for pursuing further fruitfulness, we mean those ways in which we can grow beyond this minimum expectation of faithfulness. ***Once you think you're meeting the Bible's standard of faithfulness in all your assignments, you are free to dream and consider how you can best invest your extra time and energy.*** On either side of faithfulness and fruitfulness we will find the two pitfalls that tend to define the sinful patterns

⁸ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014)

associated with our work — idolatry and idleness. Fail to meet the minimum requirement of faithfulness, and you fall into idleness. Push beyond fruitfulness, and you fall into idolatry.



- Simply put, we want to be those who are pursuing faithfulness in what God is calling us to do (all the things listed in Colossians 3:16–22) which will lead to fruitfulness in our lives.

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Faithfulness in the Family

- We have already looked at the commands which have been given to fathers, husbands, wives, mothers and children. The standard of faithfulness in each of these areas is very high.
 - Command one in verse 18...wives be subject to their husbands.
 - Command two AND three in verse 19...husbands love their wives and do not be embittered (angry, irritated, grieved) against them.
 - Command four in verse 20...children be obedient to your parents.
 - Command five in verse 21...fathers do not exasperate (stir up or provoke) your children
- Beyond discipleship and filling your hearts and minds with the Scriptures, what are some other practical ways to invest for the purpose of faithfulness?
 - Some husbands and wives invest time in retreats with each other or getaways with the kids. Some spend extra money on family experiences; others spend it on other equally valuable things. The fact is that nothing in Scripture commands us to take family vacations or schedule regular “family days.” As long as we’re being faithful to Scripture’s already-high standard of faithfulness, those kinds of things are not strictly necessary. They’re investments of extra

resources into our families with the intention of maximizing fruitfulness in that arena of our lives.⁹

- We should not be idolizing family vacations or family days or getaways with our spouse. These things are nice, but not necessary. They also do not fit into everyone's budget or flow of life.
- These good things become idols if we neglect the life that is in front of us, become discontent, and fanaticize about a life that could be.
- We should never elevate the importance of family above Christ.
 - There are two ways this can happen. First, if your investment of time and attention into your family causes you to fall below the Bible's standard of faithfulness in other areas of your life, you've wrongly elevated the importance of your family. If you simply declare you're not going to work at all because you want to spend every waking hour of your life with your kids, you're not being faithful in the arena of work. Similarly, if you decide to take two Sundays a month to skip the gathering of your church and play soccer with your kids, you're not being faithful in your responsibility to be committed to a church.¹⁰

Faithfulness in the Church

- According to the Bible, the minimum standard of faithfulness when it comes to church seems to be that every Christian should be meaningfully committed to the life of a local church community.¹¹
- **Hebrews 10:23–25** “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”
- What is the minimum stand of faithfulness according to Hebrews?
 - A commitment to a local church which then leads to meeting regularly and being active in encouraging and loving one another. Why...the end is coming.
- Depending on where you find yourself in life, the Lord may call you to greater service in the church or you may be in a season where faithfulness is simply being an active participant on Sundays and staying in touch with fellow members throughout the week.
- You don't have to give up an extra night each week to lead a ministry in order to be a faithful member of your church, but it could be a very good thing for you to do in order to maximize your fruitfulness in the life of the church. Every Christian needs to be a member of the church, but we aren't all the same member with

⁹ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

the same level of commitment. Each of us plays the role God has given us — whether as an eye, an ear, or a fingernail.¹²

Faithfulness in Your Vocation

- We have discussed this in earlier classes. Our faithfulness in our work is not based on anything other than laboring in the power of the Lord for the glory of God.
- You can always invest more time, energy, and attention into a job in order to maximize your talents and abilities for the glory of God and the good of others. You can give a few more hours or spend a little more brain space strategizing and planning. You can offer to travel for your employer or take a promotion that utilizes your gifts better but also requires a little more time. None of that is strictly necessary to be faithful in your job, no matter what the world may tell you. But those things may be a great way to invest some of the extra resources of your life.
 - *Work becomes an idol when our investment of resources runs out of extra and starts encroaching on our other areas of responsibility.* The threshold of idolatry when it comes to work is well-defined by Solomon **Proverbs 23:4** “Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it.”¹³

STEPS FOR CONSIDERATION

- We should not deceive ourselves into thinking that there is a “one-size-fits-all” answer to how we are going to balance everything that we do in our lives. It is unwise and unfair to try and compare your life with other people’s as we all have different good works that the Lord has set before us.
- With that said, here are four ways we can generally help our thinking on this topic¹⁴:
 - **You must be the one to determine what it means to be faithful in each of your assignments.**
 - If you are married, it means that you and your spouse need to communicate with one another (and kids if they are there) on what this looks like. You need to evaluate the time, energy and resources spent on each assignment.
 - You need to determine what a faithful life in the family, church and work looks like.
 - The place that we all need to start is with our spiritual health. Are we implanting the Word of God in our hearts so that we can accomplish the tasks that have been set before us with thanksgiving?

¹² Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ These are loosely taken from *The Gospel at Work*.

- **Honestly evaluate yourself in each of the assignments.**
 - Ask yourself some hard questions. Why do you have so much free time or no free time? Why do you put off tasks that you could be doing? Do you say yes to too much or find excuses as to why you cannot do something?
 - Are you faithfully resting as God commands or are you working for idols?
 - Ask your family what they think about your schedule and time spent with them.
- **Be quick to repent if you are living in sin.**
 - When I say *living in sin*, this means a life that is not fulfilling Biblical standards. If you find you have idols or that you are neglecting something because of laziness, repent and then make the proper changes.
 - You must identify areas in your life that have become infiltrated with wrong or sinful thoughts, repent of those areas and then strive for godliness in them.
- **Consider where you might press forward in fruitfulness in one of the areas.**
 - Do you spend more time or money on your own habits and hobbies than you do on being faithful as a Christian?
 - Can you identify areas in your life that you can increase some time and energy for the purpose of being more fruitful in that area?
 - Maybe it is having more time now to lead a Bible study or take some classes.
 - Maybe it is some flexibility in your schedule that you can spend some more time with your wife and/or kids.
 - Maybe you can try for the promotion at work.
 - Maybe you are totally maxed out and simply need to maintain. This is the purpose of evaluating your life and faithfulness.
- **Remember, life comes in seasons...both abounding and lean.**
 - Where you are now is not where you were before. We all have different seasons of life and the better you are at recognizing what season of life you are in, the more fruitful your life is going to be.
 - God has given you grace for the season you are in now...not in the season you want to be in, not in the season someone else is in...*the season you are in*.
 - **Ecclesiastes 3:1 “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.”**
 - Our goal should not be to rush the Lord or be apathetic towards our responsibilities.

Is it summer? It will be winter. Is it winter? Stay a while, and it will be summer. Every purpose has its time. The clearest sky will be clouded ... Joy succeeds sorrow; and the most clouded sky will clear up ... The sun will burst from behind the cloud. Those things which to us seem most casual and contingent are, in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, punctually determined, and the very hour of them is fixed, and can neither be anticipated nor adjourned a moment.¹⁵

¹⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 3, Job to Song of Solomon (New York: Fleming H. Revell, (1935), 995.