
OFFICE HOURS

6 Week Devotional for our Work Lives



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**Note: The concept for this series we first published on www.seedbed.com "Sermon Series - Office Hours: Ministry in the Marketplace"*

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Introduction

From the seedbed.com “Office Hours” page:

I was once at an empowering laity for ministry seminar at a large church. The leader shared that she teaches lay people that their jobs are their work but their volunteering through the ministry of the church is their calling. I thought to myself, “That doesn’t really sound right. You mean that God intends forty to sixty hours of your life each week are intended just to pay the bills and whatever few hours a lay person spends volunteering for the church is their ministry?” This plays into a common mindset among American Christians, that work is morally inferior to “doing good.” Also, many of the people we preach to on Sundays feel that their work is something to be endured, survived, and hurried through until they’re off for the weekend. In some circles, work is even thought to be a result of the Fall.

How can we help people view their work as a gift from God that taps into their deepest aspirations, talents, and strengths and that fulfills God’s calling on their lives, not only to excel but to see their workplace as their primary mission field?

Shifting Focus

“...there was evening and there was morning, the _____ day.”

What is the first thing you do at the beginning of the day? Usually what we think about first thing in the morning is where our daily priorities lie. This thought has been convicting to me because I will plan out the day to see what I will accomplish during the day. So, my priorities, at times, are all about accomplishing tasks and work so it's done and done the best I can do it.

Every time I think about these words from Scripture in Genesis 1, I begin to meditate on the concept that we have our priorities backwards and it's time we shift focus to what is most important. So now the question we all need to answer is, "what is really the most important aspect of your life?" Being able to truthfully and passionately answer this question answers the "why" or the motivation of why we do what we do.

Relationships are the most important part of life for me; at least this is what I hope to demonstrate on a daily basis. I believe the Jewish faith and culture has the beginning of the day correct. The days begin at 6:oopm and go through 6:oopm the following day. With this in mind, what we do in the evening of the day is crucial.

Imagine rethinking how we view our day, and the time our days begin. Let's truly shift our focus to what really matters in this life. It all begins from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. From this relationship we show others how much they are valued. Our motivation to work each day should include providing for our family and to give God the glory because we have the opportunity to do this work.

Now, let's think about another way we can arrange our day to keep the real focus of our lives as the "why" of what we do. After coming home in the evenings from a day of work, we have the opportunity to spend time with our family. Then we rest and go back to work the following day. This is different from how we normally think about how our day goes: get up, go to work, then spend time with the family or our friends. Relationships in this way of thinking are put on the back burner in our minds and get the least amount of attention.

So how would our day go, and how much more fruitful would our relationships be if we shifted from thinking work was the most important part of our day to relationships being the most important part? I am beginning to believe more and more that "...there was evening and there was morning" is how we should live our lives. Develop relationships first. The evening time (which includes dinner) is a great time to cultivate and nourish our family and friends. Then we take the time to rest at night in order to prepare for the final part of the day, work.

This also means that our relationship with God through Jesus Christ should be the most important relationship to develop first, then the relationship with our family and friends. Without the grace and love of Jesus Christ it will be difficult, and impossible for many, to be able to show our own family and friends how much they are truly valued and appreciated.

I am continually working on this concept daily. It is challenging; but shifting our focus is important and healthy for all aspects of our lives.

Week One

Eternal Hours

Have you been to a seminar to help you become more productive at work? Have you ever read books or articles on how to lead better at work? Many of us work hard to do better at our job. Yet, there is also a great number of people who do not find satisfaction in their work or think having to work is a kind of a curse for us. When we think about work it is almost as if we think our only purpose is to focus on doing a good job just to provide so we can get what we want and for our family. Then at the end of the day, we don't have enough time or energy to "do good" in our community, in our world.

Work is not just something we endure so we can get ready for the weekend or vacation. Our work actually has a purpose. It is not a curse. It is God-given. This six week blog series is going to look at the eternal aspect of work. This blog will be published each Tuesday morning. Maybe we can gain a clearer focus so we can discover our purpose in work is actually to live out a life that gives glory to God in all we do and to steward the gifts we've been given.

This week, I invite you to read Genesis 2:5-15. Here is the passage as written in the Common English Bible:

"before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the LORD God hadn't yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land, though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land— the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed. In the fertile land, the LORD God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit, and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides into four headwaters. The name of the first river is the Pishon. It flows around the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. That land's gold is pure, and the land also has sweet-smelling resins and gemstones. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It flows around the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris, flowing east of Assyria; and the name of the fourth river is the Euphrates. The LORD God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it."

What is the first thing you notice (besides the strange names that are difficult to pronounce)? I also have a picture of the Garden of Eden as a place of perfect paradise. This is a quiet, peaceful, joyful place because the presence of the Living Lord is tangible and fully experienced.

This passage opens with the idea that there was no being created to take care of the garden. God formed out of the earth, a human, who was created to take care of, to work the land so it can continue to produce fruit and for people to live in perfect harmony with God Himself.

All of this happened before "the fall" in Genesis 3 meaning that God gave humankind the gift of work so we can partner with Him to take care of the land. Apply this to your setting. Your work is actually a gift from God. You and I have been given gifts and talents to do our work. We do not do this work alone. God is with us. When we think about partnering with God to work and steward the resources and people around us, how does this change your view of work?

Did you notice something else in the passage? Read the passage again.

"a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land" I find this very interesting. if we think about this, the water is coming up and nourishing the fertile land all around. Water brings life. Where in scripture does it talk about water bringing life? All throughout the New Testament! Jesus Christ is the Living Water in the world (John 4).

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead (John 20), Mary Magdalene thought He was the...gardener! Not only does Jesus Christ (Emmanuel - God in flesh) nourish the world, but He is also working to restore the earth back to the original state of paradise. We get to participate in the redemption of the world with Him!

Everything we do at our work has eternal consequences. The way we treat those around us has eternal consequences. Our work is not just about getting the job done in order to play. Our work actually has a purpose. So whatever it is you do for a living, know this, you have partnered with Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world. Each person we come in contact with in the workplace should know they also have the chance to partner with Jesus Christ in the restoration of the world.

How has your view of work changed now?

"Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him." ~ Colossians 3:17 CEB

Week Two

Good Hours

Last week, we focused on work being God given and how we have the opportunities to join Him in the restoration and redemption of the world. How has your week been different? Have you felt a greater sense of purpose for the work you do?

Our passage this week comes out of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. Again, this translation is from the Common English Bible:

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.” ~Matthew 5:13-16 CEB

What are some of the things you notice? This is one of those passages we seem to hear a lot, or at least I do. The part that is focused on is the final line, “In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.” We also hear about being the “salt of the earth.”

How does this apply to the workplace? We’ve already established we have been given the gift of work and we should do it to the best of our ability to give God the glory in all aspects of our life. Work is where we spend the majority of our time each week. We will go through highs and lows, frustrations and joys, separation and team work. This is the time of our week we have the opportunity to share the love and light of Jesus Christ to our co-workers (even if we work in a church). Not everyone at our work knows the joy, peace, and grace of Jesus Christ. So we get to show them by our actions, our words, and even how we think.

When I was younger, I used to love to put salt on my food. It didn’t matter what it was. Today, I have learned to cook the salt into the food to help the meat tenderize better and to give more flavor from the inside out. This is how I believe we should live out our work life as well. The joy of Jesus Christ in our lives shining through from deep inside us. This is how we let our light shine, how we can be the right kind of seasoning in the workplace. We not only do a better job because we are working to show the Kingdom of God; but our co-workers will also see a difference and seek to discover the joy of Jesus Christ in what seems to be the mundane and tedious work day.

Just as salt brings out the flavor of our food, we have the opportunity to generously share the love of God through Jesus Christ which seasons the atmosphere and souls around us and brings out the real person inside that God is working on.

Take this as a challenge: see how allowing the joy of Jesus Christ truly makes a difference in your life. Not just in Sunday worship. Not just at home. But when you are at work.

Be the salt and light in the workplace. It is possible because Jesus Christ is working in and through you.

Week Three

Investing Hours

This week, we are focusing on how we spend our time at work. Since this is where we end up spending most of our time during the week, how do we relate to those around us?

Yes, our families are the most important relationships; but the amount of time we spend with our co-workers is significant. This is an area of our lives that we can easily miss out on this incredible opportunity to be an influencer for Jesus Christ in the world, especially in the workplace. These are the people that really get us during the best part of our day. We have the chance to show people Jesus Christ everyday.

This week's scripture focuses on the Apostle Paul and him investing in his coworkers by sharing life together and sharing the love of God through Jesus Christ.

“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus. He had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul visited with them. Because they practiced the same trade, he stayed and worked with them. They all worked with leather. Every Sabbath he interacted with people in the synagogue, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.” ~ Acts of the Apostles 18:1-4 CEB

When you read this scripture, what stands out to you? I invite you to underline or mark the words or phrases that stand out to you either in your Bible or printing this page out.

Paul invested in the work life, which transcended into personal life, of Aquila and Priscilla. Think of how their bond grew over time, especially sharing in gospel message of Jesus Christ. The concept of investing in the work and personal life is convicting for me.

We will spend 40-60+ hours per week in the workplace. In a 168 hour week, this is a huge chunk of time. We invest in our family and significant others in a lesser amount of time. In our day to day work, this is the absolute perfect time to share the gospel message through our words and our actions.

So now, the tough question. How are you and I going to be the example of Jesus Christ transforming our lives with our actions, our words, and our thoughts?

Investing in the lives of our coworkers can change the workplace entirely. The purpose of work will be more evident because just maybe, God has placed you in your workplace to make an impact for the Kingdom of Heaven with the people you work with.

Week Four

Off Hours

We have been focusing on our lives during the working hours. This week, we have the chance to look at what it should look like when we are off work.

I am one of those people who loves my vocation. After all, I get to speak about Jesus Christ daily and do all I can to share his good news. This is a fascinating and joyful position to be in! There are times when I want to keep working on "church work" even in the evenings and nights. These are the times I have to force myself to stop and be sure to be fully present with my beautiful wife and children. This is the time of day when I should completely devote myself and attention to them. There are times when an emergency arises; but we take this in stride and still work to find a balance. To all the workaholics out there, including me, this week is especially made for you.

We live in a culture that makes access to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There is a great temptation to keep working and think everything has to get done everyday. We are constantly putting out fires. But I believe we all have to remember, the work will keep piling up. There will still be work tomorrow.

Sabbath rest is more important than we realize. We are more productive when we take at least one day off a week. This sounds like a contradiction, but it's true! If we constantly go and go and go, and work and work and work, our bodies and minds do not have the time to recover.

In Genesis 2, we find that rest from work was the first full day of our human experience. Our rest and our relationships are what should give us the energy to be able to do our work with higher quality and purpose. In the introduction is the blog I wrote called "[Shifting Focus](#)" on this very topic.

Take some time to meditate on this passage from Genesis and see how God views rest in our lives.

"The heavens and the earth and all who live in them were completed. On the sixth day God completed all the work that he had done, and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that he had done. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work of creation." ~ Genesis 2:1-3 CEB

May we all appreciate the importance of real rest and embrace it.

Week Five

Strong Hours

If you are doing well at your job, or rather want to do well, there are trainings and seminars an employee should go to. These often talk about the "weak" areas that should be developed in order to perform better.

Think back to a seminar or training you attended recently. How much of it was trying to get improvement in one area or another? Many "self-help" books talk about this very thing: make your weaknesses your strengths.

Our scripture for this week comes from the book of Ephesians. This verse comes right after Paul telling the people they are saved by grace, God's gift to us, which is something we could not have done nor can we boast about.

"Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives." ~ Ephesians 2:10
CEB

I have read several books and articles this year which talk about and teach leadership skills and management skills. Many employers and managers focus on what area of our work, our character, is not as strong as it should be. These are called "growing edges." If we are not careful, we will begin to focus on the things that are "wrong" with us and forget to nurture the aspects that are "right" with us.

Each one of us has been given different gifts and talents. We cannot be like everyone else, nor can we expect everyone else to be like us. The gifts and talents we have, work with another's gifts and talents. When we collaborate more using our strengths, we can, hopefully, find great harmony and see how much more will be done in a more joyful way.

I have a hard time continuing to work on what I am "weak" or "bad" at; but I love getting to work on and continue to nourish the areas God has given me strengths.

This week, I encourage you to take some kind of assessment to discover your Spiritual Gifts. You can also see what your strengths are. Some great resources for this are: www.spiritualgiftstest.com/test/adult
www.umc.org/what-we-believe/spiritual-gifts-online-assessment
www.strengthsfinder.com/home.aspx

Work in your areas of strengths and give God the glory because "we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives."

Week 6

After Hours

What are your plans after you reach retirement age? Are we only working now so we can play and relax after we retire? I have come to the understanding that we have misguided ourselves when it comes to retirement.

Retirement is not simply quitting work and spending the rest of our life relaxing and doing nothing. This time is actually a gift. This is not the time to think we have "served our part," or "I've done _____ for awhile, it's time for someone else to do it."

Growing older is a grand adventure. As we age, hopefully we are learning from our experiences and allowing God's wisdom to sink into our hearts. I imagine it is easy to say it is time for "new blood" or "someone younger is better." But this is the opposite of what we need to happen. The scripture focus for this week shows us, we should continue to respect and honor those older than us.

Take some time to read these words:

"Don't correct an older man, but encourage him like he's your father; treat younger men like your brothers, treat older women like your mother, and treat younger women like your sisters with appropriate respect. Take care of widows who are truly needy. But if a particular widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn to respect their own family and repay their parents, because this pleases God. A widow who is truly needy and all alone puts her hope in God and keeps on going with requests and prayers, night and day. But a widow who tries to live a life of luxury is dead even while she is alive. Teach these things so that the families will be without fault. But if someone doesn't provide for their own family, and especially for a member of their household, they have denied the faith. They are worse than those who have no faith. Put a widow on the list who is older than 60 years old and who was faithful to her husband. She should have a reputation for doing good: raising children, providing hospitality to strangers, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in distress, and dedicating herself to every kind of good thing." ~ 1 Timothy 5:1-10 CEB

Notice the first part, "encourage." So, to complete this series, I would like to encourage two groups of people: those who have retired, and those who have not.

First, to those who have had the opportunity to retire: Thank you for all you have done to pave the way for new generations to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ now and in the future. Your commitment to following him in and outside of your workplace has been an example to us all and we value you. We do not view you as someone who is obsolete.

Instead, we value your input, your wisdom, because God has done incredible works in and through you. God is still working and moving in and through you. Embrace this truth and continue to be beacons of light for us all.

Second, for those working people. You have been given an incredible gift also. You and I have the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ at work, at home, in the community, in worship. Take head of this special time. We do not work just so we can retire. We work to make an impact for the Kingdom of God here on earth right here, right now. We are able to do this because of the grace that God has bestowed. Look to the older people. Be sure to encourage and include everyone because you never know who God is using to connect with another person. Value the time you have at work and continue to foster growth in your relationships.

I pray God continues to be known all through your life. At home, in the community, in worship, and even at work.

Praise God for the incredible gift of work!

Amen.