

Intro: Happy 4th of July. I'm grateful to live in a country like ours where we can gather together and worship Jesus freely. I know America's not perfect but I also think it's worth acknowledging the blessings it is to live here.

Garrison Lead Team Deacon. If you've got a Bible go to Genesis 3.

If you missed last week we're taking most of the summer to look at what the Bible has to say about work. How our culture gets it wrong and how God gives us a better way to approach our jobs, professions or whatever work looks like for you.

Let me start with a quote tonight. Pretty famous. "Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life." Amen? We've all heard this right? I actually googled who originally said it. No one knows. Like Confucius, Winston Churchill, and the 1990s pop superstar Marc Anthony are the top search results. Inconclusive, but far reaching. Where it came from is ultimately besides the point. What I want to ask as we get started is:

Is it true(slow)? If you work your perfect, ideal, never have to worry about money again, passionate about it, lines up with all your skills and strengths, dream job, will you never have to REALLY work a day in your life?

I have bad news for us. The Bible says very clearly: Not true. If you got the dream job, you'd still be annoyed. Still would be frustrated. Quite possibly if you got the dream job you would forget that it is the job you dreamed of altogether because of the normalcy and annoyances of it. If you were able to do the thing that you are most passionate about 9-5, 5 days a week, it wouldn't be enough to keep you from hating your job.

Tonight we'll see why. **Gen 3.** Little set up for Gen 3. God creates the world, puts the first man and woman in it, commissions them to work and to keep it. They are told they can eat everything in the garden except for one tree, lest they die. But Adam and Eve are tempted by the devil, fall into sin, rejecting God's authority, instead choosing their own and God is laying out for them what is now going to happen because of their choice.

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Look at the phrasing and see if you can feel this:

- 'Cursed is the ground'
- 'In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life'
- 'Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth'

He says, now the creation I gave you to cultivate, to work, is cursed. We said this last week-work is cursed. It is not a curse, but it is cursed. That's a big distinction.

Essentially, creation now pushes back against our work.

In other words, our relationship with work is now a mixed bag. While work is meaningful, it doesn't always feel that way. It's not always as fruitful as we'd like. We feel like we're not accomplishing anything. Or we put in a ton of time and effort and we find ourselves having to do more to keep up with deadlines and expectations. **We experience thorns and thistles, regardless of what the job description is.**

- Accountants get to tax season, and the work to life balance goes out the door as you drown in the numbers.
- Business owners or managers have to deal with employees who cheat or don't care or don't perform.
- Many of us dream of being in full time vocational ministry. You want to bless others and care for them. But what happens when what you meant as a blessing is received as a curse. And your desire to care isn't well received at all.
- If you stay at home with the kids. You literally cannot stop working all day. No breaks. Nap times are barely a break, cause you gotta tune into your favorite TV show, the baby monitor. You've got to deal with melt downs and meal plans, dirty dishes and dirty diapers. All day.

Regardless of what the job is, there will be thorns and thistles.

And part of why this is so frustrating is not just the tangible thorns and thistles themselves but also because of our expectations. We've bought into the ideology of 'finding your dream job'. We think if we can just find work that we love, like really love, then work won't feel like work.

The burden of it will be gone, the stress and the frustration of it will be gone, the monotony of it will be gone. Google search stats affirm the trend: Since 2010, internet searches for "passion at work" have more than doubled, with workers in the United States the most likely to be interested in the topic.

But the Bible is clear: There is no such thing as uncursed work.

If you boil it down, our culture says **'the problem with your work is that you're not doing what you're passionate about!'** And the Bible very clearly says **'the problem with your work is that you're a sinner working a sinful broken world.'**

So what do we do? The Bible is going to help us out a lot here. I want us to take a look at 1 Cor 7. And we're going to see that it is possible to love your work, AND the ability to do so has very little to do with what you do. (repeat)

Flip to 1 Cor 7:17.

"Let each person lead the life the Lord has assigned to him, to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let

him not seek circumcision. 19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.20 Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

The answer to our work problems starts with an understanding of the word 'calling'.

Calling. That word comes with some baggage. It can get overused and it's meaning gets lost on us. In the Greek, 'call' comes from the word Kaleo. It can mean a simple call, or an invite. But whenever you see God and Kaleo together... it means 'to be summoned by your king'.

When the king summons you, it's not an option. You don't have many choices other than responding to the summons. So if we parse through this text, we see there's two types of summonings.

The call to salvation. V 18 . *Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised?... Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.* The summons of the king to salvation. He repeats this throughout the text. How were you when you were called? Remember your condition when you were called. He's saying that God has done a work in you in which He's called you, summoned you, to salvation.

But there's a second way we see the word 'call'. *"Let each person lead the life the Lord has assigned to him, to which God has called him.*

Paul connects work to a calling. Paul's key to enduring work, loving your work, is to view it as a calling. You've been summoned by the King to salvation and you've been summoned by the King to the life you're living right now.

The life you have has been sovereignly assigned to by God and is His calling for you. Let that sink in. Your life and circumstances are the way they are because He intends to do something through them. And the default seems to be that it's whatever the condition or role or place in which you find yourself, is what you're called to.

So pretty normal thing: we all want to know what our 'calling' is. Or where we're called to be. Who we're called to be around. Do you?

God has called you to be where you are right now. (repeat)

Generally, in my opinion, the idea of a calling gets over-spiritualized. We tend to think about calling only in super-spiritual terms where God audibly speaks and maybe tells us to go be a missionary in the Middle East. And don't get me wrong, that is possible. And to be clear, that is a good thing.

But a calling is not just about religious work. Just because you are growing in your faith doesn't mean you should start working for a church. Or go to seminary. It actually may mean that you work in insurance. Or start a company. We need solid Christians in the marketplace.

From her essay, "Why Work?" author and poet Dorothy Sayers - "The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him to not be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sunday's. What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables."

What the Scriptures are saying is that in light of the sovereignty of God, the job you find yourself in - regardless of whether or not you love what you do - **is God's calling for you.** And it might not be for forever - **but it is today.**

Simply put. Your calling is where God has put you right now. **And what this does is it gives your life purpose.** It gives your work purpose. Because it means that where you're at was planned. It was intentional! And there is a reason for it.

Pastor Tim Keller, "Every Good Endeavor" says it this way - "We must recover the idea that all human work is not merely a job but a calling...Our work can be a calling only if it is reimagined as a mission of service to something beyond merely our own interests. In fact, thinking of work mainly as a means of self-fulfillment and self-realization slowly crushes a person and undermines society itself... Something can be a calling only if some other party calls you to do it, and you do it for their sake rather than for your own. Our daily work can be a calling only if it is reconceived as God's assignment to serve others."

This is the key that Paul gives to us. This is how you deal with thorns and thistles and give yourself to our work, even work we don't like; **by seeing that all human work is not merely a job but a calling.**

This is what the Bible is inviting us into. **To view work as a calling from God for the sake of His glory and for the good of our neighbor. Regardless of whether or not it is your dream job. It is your calling.**

You are not where you are on accident. It is possible, in Christ, for you to give yourself fully to your work - with your whole heart - if you actually believe that God is in control and knows what you need better than you do.

And this is why giving yourself fully to your work - whatever that work may be - is ultimately a faith issue, not a job issue.

You have to ask, Do you have faith to see (1) God has put me here for a reason and (2) that ultimate reason is love for Him and love for neighbor, and not ultimately about me?

Now, you may be thinking - that's easy to see with my friends job. But my job doesn't feel like a Kingly summons, a calling, a divine commission from God. It doesn't feel like God is using this for His purposes. It feels like I'm serving coffee. It feels like I'm just putting numbers into a spreadsheet. It feels like I'm changing diapers. It feels like a Tuesday."

A helpful example I've heard that gives some vision of how work is a calling comes from Martin Luther, pastor during the reformation. He had a great way of explaining how work is a calling. He said that God intends to fulfill some of his promises through our work.

Luther says to consider the Lord's prayer. In it, Jesus says we should pray for our daily bread. That God would provide for our daily needs. **Think of all the people that means you are praying for God to work through when you recite that - even if you're just asking for bread?**

- The wheat farmer.
- The baker.
- The packaging and delivery company.
- The grocery store worker who places it on the shelf.
- The car mechanic who just fixed my car so that I can drive to the store.
- The gas station attendant who helps me have gas to drive my car.
- The men who work on the roads so that I can drive on them.
- The Department of Transportation workers who arrange stop lights so that traffic isn't just mass chaos. We could probably go on for a while at this

. You see that God is using all of these people. It all matters.

It takes all of these people and many more faithfully doing their work to enable you to have food on your table tonight. All of these people, in their work, are God's appointed means of answering prayer. And yours is, too. What he wants us to see is that your work - whether you see it or not - is God answering someone else's prayer.

The truth is, far too often when we think about our work we only think about what is right in front of us and we fail to see the larger picture in how God uses it.

This is what I want you to get tonight: As you do your work, God is moving, working through you to fulfill some of His promises. God is using you to love, serve and care for the world He made.

You pass his blessing on to people who know him and to others who don't. Your work is your calling.

So for many of us, the push from this passage is to step in faithfully and work hard where God has us, but there's another part to 1 Corinthians 7 too. Look back at 21 with me.

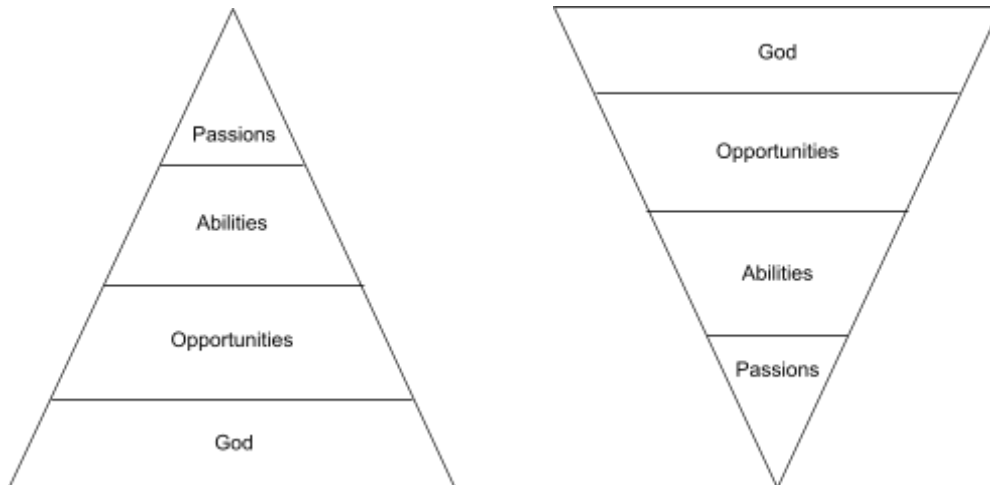
21 Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. 24 So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Paul says to these bondservants, remain in the condition in which you were called. That you should fight for contentment. That we need to see where we are is not an accident, but a calling. And for others he says if you can gain freedom, do it! Take the opportunity.

The truth is you do live in a society that offers you choices. If you lived a thousand or so years ago you'd be pretty locked in on what you did for work - whatever your parents did, but as a 21st century American you get afforded the luxury of having options. So yes, wherever you are is where you're called, you should definitely fight for contentment, and you do have options because of the time and place you live, and its not a bad thing to consider those.

So I want to give you some wisdom in how to discern this. Not Bible. Not a command. Just some wisdom that our teaching team put together to help you discern what your calling may be. (Briefly explain chart, left vs right. Culture vs what we would say. Negotiable vs non negotiable)

- **Start with God.**



This is counter to how the world tells you to start. The world will say, "Start with what you love or what you're passionate about." But, "Following your heart" is often pretty bad advice. Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I don't want you to follow your heart. I want you to follow Jesus--- your heart will only get you into trouble and lead you astray.

Plus, your passions change. You wanna know what I care most about right now?

Mortgages and puppies. A year ago a didn't think about either of them ever. And today it's my entire life. Give your passions some time, they'll probably change.

So don't start there, start with what God would call good work. Here's some questions to ask:

- Does it lead to human flourishing?

- Are the poor and under resourced to be served?
- Do people to hear about Jesus?
- Does it take the raw materials and cultivate them. Serving the greater good?
- Is it good for you? The earth? Your neighbors? Your city?

Any work that pressures or tempts you to redefine good and evil based on favoring yourself at the expense of other people or other groups or the planet is not good work. That work means you are working in the wrong direction. You aren't joining God in His work on the earth. Second piece:

- **Look at your Opportunities** - Who do I know, what access do I have, what sort of job can I actually get, what has God put in front of me? Life stage? Maybe even ask, what do you need right now?

Maybe not the best idea to go get paid 20k a year at a startup when you have 5 kids when you're being offered something with better pay. What are your needs? What are your families needs?

What does God seem to be blessing? What does the world need? What do the people around you need? These are all how we look into opportunities.

- **Consider your Abilities** - I don't know about you but in my home growing up, I was told: Garrison you can do anything you put your mind to. If you work hard enough, if you believe in yourself, if you're patient, you can do anything. Sounds great right? It's actually so unhelpful. It doesn't matter how much I believe, or if I think I'm called to be in the NBA. Doesn't matter. The jumper ain't there. And the height. Here's my point:

Learning what you're good at is a valuable pursuit. If you try something and find that you aren't good at it, then that's actually progress. You've taken another step towards clarity. There's value you learning this.

- **Consider your passions.** Now, let's say after you've processed through those 3 things you're still left with a few options on the table, consider what you'd most like to do. Now, consider what you're passionate about. What energizes you or the type of work you love to do. What's the type of thing that most days you'd love to get up out of the bed and do.

Me. Went to college for religious studies. Worked at a church for 5 years. Felt like God was calling us to help plant a church in CLT. As it turns out, religious studies majors from USC don't have the most lucrative job options. So I ended up with the obvious choice, mortgages. Sounds ridiculous, but these categories were really helpful for me. We wanted to follow Jesus and have the ability to move up here, so the job was going to have to be flexible and allow us to get here, so in light of what we felt like God was calling us to do, what were my opportunities? Had a few. Mortgages. The abilities can be flexed into as you learn and grow in your field. **And hopefully you will be passionate and love your job. But ultimately we need to be praying for our**

deepest passions to be in line with what Jesus is passionate about. His glory and loving other people.

Let me give us some final thoughts. "Now my hope is that this chart would be a blessing and help you find something you love. But the truth is that we still live in a Gen 3 world. Work is cursed. There will always be thorns and thistles. Even with the best advice and wisdom, we will still run into trouble. So when you face the thorns and thistles tomorrow morning, here's 3 things you do:

***Colossians 3:22-24* 22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.**

When you feel the curse.

1. Work Heartily.

The greek word for "heartily" here is the word "psyche" (psu-khay) or how we transliterate it "psyche". **In the greek, it means the breath of life in you.** Your total essence. Your life or your soul or your heart.

So, Paul is saying "Put your everything into your work. Put your whole self into the work that you do. Give it your all."

Think about it. How on earth can Paul say 'work heartily' about a servant's job? Is there any work that could possibly be easier for the worker to hate? Is there any work that could feel more like a curse and unfilling than the work of a servant?

But Paul says, "No, you can give yourself to that work. You can pour yourself into it." And notice why: **because ultimately this is not about the work you do, but who you do that work for... and ultimately you don't work for your master, or your boss or your company, you work for Jesus.**" Which leads me to the second.

- 2. See your work as discipleship.** Paul connects their work to the Gospel. He gives them a new story to reframe their work. That Jesus' redemption of your life frees you from having to have the weight of your hope rest in your career. The most important thing about you is not the job you have, or don't have or even the one you ideally want. **The most important thing about you is that you belong to Him and long after your days of work have come and gone, you will still be His.**

Your work is the means by which God is going to grow you in love for Himself. We do get to discern the nature of our work with community. But the Bible is much more concerned with the how than the what of our work.

- 3. Remember Jesus' work.** Jesus Himself experienced the thorns and thistles of work. Literally. He was given a crown of thorns. We see Him in the night leading to His crucifixion in the garden, sweating blood, asking for the cup to pass from Him. Yet we know how He endured. Hebrews 12 says it this way:

who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

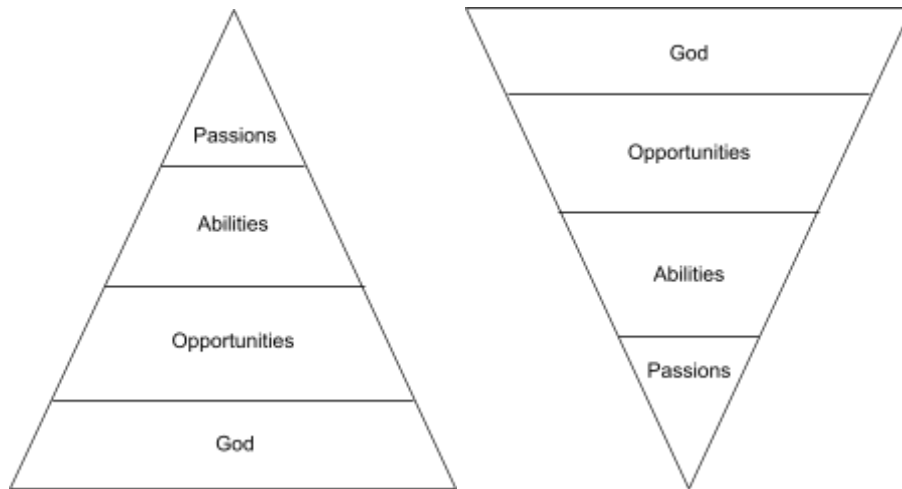
Jesus Himself experienced the curse. He didn't always love what was set on His plate. Yet He was the perfect worker that we never could be. He experienced the curse. The thorns and thistles of work, and He endured until the end. So that you and I, can stumble and fall as we fight to try to obediently live out the calling God has put on our lives.

Pray.

CG Questions

Read Genesis 3:17-19, 1 Corinthians 7:17 and recap the sermon.

1. What stood out to you? What comforted you? What convicted you?
2. How do you tend to view the problems with your work? Primarily about passion? The job itself? The hours? Spiritually?
3. Do you view your work as a calling? What would change in the way you approached your work if you viewed your work as your calling?
4. Take a look at the following diagrams. When approaching how you go about your work, which of the triangles do you choose? How does this need to shift and what will that look like in your day to day life?



5. Pray that as a church we would seek to embrace our work as a calling. That we would see that wherever we find ourselves is the will of our sovereign God and that we would respond by working like it was true.