

SUNDAY August 31, 2025 “Purposeful Work”

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Luke 14:1, 7-12

On This Labour Day Sunday, we conclude our summer series “At Your Request” with our focus today on “Purposeful Work”.

Just how do you view “work”? We know that this is an important part of today’s culture not because we know work is essential for everyday living. Just think about that acronym--TGIF- Thank God it’s Friday which refers to the relief and excitement many people feel when the work week is completed. After the weekend, sometimes you might hear people say, “it’s back to the grind(stone)” or “the weekend’s too short”. Pension or retirement plans have been named Freedom 55- with the hope that people may be free from their job at age 55 or sooner. But why do we portray ‘work’ so negatively? Are we merely putting in time to retirement? Yet for many of us, we will spend or will have spent much of our waking hours working. Shouldn’t work have more meaning or purpose?

We should be thinking about the work that one does is based upon the kinds of tasks completed. For some people cleaning one’s house is considered chores, yet to housekeepers or cleaners this is their work- not just something to be done in the home but ‘work’ for pay.

So how does one define work? Winston Churchill was quoted as saying” If you find a job you love, you’ll never have to work again.”

We too must consider how we define work. Some jobs are considered luxurious, dangerous, thrilling and others are considered thinking or processing jobs. Some people work with computers and some people get right out and out dirty in construction or cleaning up messes. But whatever one does as work we need to remember that it is God who deems it important. One definition of work is this: *It is anything meaningful we do that God equips us to do and that can be done for His glory, for the help of our neighbours and as part of the coming of His kingdom.*

Any work that is meaningful- now might we understand this?. Remember our reading earlier this summer from Ecclesiastes where the writer stated ‘everything was meaningless?’ Just what kind of work may be considered meaningless? Work that does not have a purpose in glorifying God may be considered meaningless but only if the type of work is destructive and immoral. So what gives work its meaning?

We live in the world God created. Each opportunity is a gift from God to bring change in to the world. Every talent, skill and interest we have is part of how God made us unique in body,

mind and spirit. God has filled the world with people in the past who gave meaning to learning and education; they had an amazing array of skills and interests and so do we. For we can build on what occurred in the past to move us to working towards understanding of God's creation. But we must choose to use these gifts, talents and skills well in order to offer God the thanks he so deserves.

The composer J.S. Bach wrote some of the world's most beautiful music. One of the things about Bach is that he signed every piece of music he wrote with the three letters, "S.D.G.," an abbreviation for the Latin phrase "Soli Deo Gloria," which means "For the Glory of God." For hundreds of years, Bach's music has been sung and played in worship for hundreds of years.

But how do we find purpose in our work? When God created the world, it took a great deal of work. God did the work for the joy of it. It was not a bad thing! When Adam and Eve came into existence God instructed them to take care of the Garden by working and tending to the needs of what they saw. God also asked them to name and rule over the animals and birds as they cared for these elements of God's handiwork. This was while they were in Eden, they worked.

However, when they sinned they were moved from Eden into a new area, the work they did was out of necessity. Eve was also told that in giving birth there was to be pain and there would be intensive work which we call labour. Work was considered healthy and helpful to fully understand what is important in relationship with God. Work is was not punishment but what gives people reason to get up each day and to claim dignity as being. God worked, created us and we in turn are to do work-for Him-- but do we?

God calls us to work in many areas- childrearing, writing, art, landscaping, engineering, medical, legal work is meaningful which shows that there is something that leads to next steps and clarity. And there are work placements yet to be determined as technology changes but what we need to understand is that the kind of work one does is because of God's gifts to us and that our work can be for Him, for others and for community good.

Our reading from Hebrews 13 gives details to what we are called to do. Love, show hospitality, remember those in prison, those tortured. Work at marriages for the sanctity of all involved and do not focus on money. We are to be content with what you have knowing that God will never leave us alone. We are also to remember those who spoke the word of God to us and to imitate their faith. We are to also offer praise to God confess his name. We are to do go and share with others what we have for this is what pleases God.

Would we consider this work? Or do we seek God's blessings in every part of our life or just certain ones? Just what does it mean to work for God? And what makes work purposeful?

Anthropologist David Graeber's book "Bull* Jobs: A Theory, 2018" book by describes the existence of meaningless jobs and analyzes their societal harm. He contends that "over half of societal work is pointless and becomes psychologically destructive when paired with a work ethic that associates work with self-worth." But what are these jobs? These are the workplaces which has little lasting impact on others and fulfills only the need to be paid. There is little to do with achievement and is mostly repetitive and seen as mundane. Yet others may disagree with this assessment of this type of work because it is still necessary jobs being done!

In our reading from Luke 14 Jesus attends a dinner party at the house of a Pharisee leader. He is being closely watched but Jesus is also watching them. He noticed how the guests chose the places of honour and during dinner he tells a parable.

The parable is about being invited to a wedding banquet. When invited one is not to sit down at the place of honour in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host. The host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place," and then in disgrace you would be moved to a lower place. But instead, when invited, go to sit down- usually the furthest away from the 'head table' so that when your host comes, he moves you up higher. This way you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. The point of this parable is? All who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

How does one get to be honoured or distinguished as a guest? It depends on the gathering but often it is due to work connections. Jesus taught this parable because the Pharisee leader hosted it and Jesus saw people clamouring to sit near him. But in Jesus story they learned differently. For it is not your work which distinguishes you, but how you bless others whatever you do.

Jesus continued his story by stating that when you have a lunch or dinner, don't invite your friends or family because they would only repay you in return. But when you give a banquet, open the doors to those who are poor, crippled, lame and blind. These people are unable to repay you. But you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. But you will be repaid due to your righteousness.

When studying about work and what the people did to serve God we read many about many occupations- shepherds, farmers, fishers. Jesus' disciples came from different work experiences and using their God-given talents and skills they served well. Our work as people includes the ideas that we were created to have families, share in the work of raising children,

build bridges, farm the land, write and protect laws. God created us to make something of the world He created.

Timothy Keller's thoughts on work as written in "Every Good Endeavor" states: "Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work, we sense significant inner loss and emptiness. People who are cut off from work because of physical or other reasons quickly discover how much they need to work to thrive emotionally, physically and spiritually."

God intended people to work for several reasons. But we are to do the work of God in whatever job we have had and whatever we consider your work today-- whether paid or volunteer. God has enabled you to function in many tasks- with the skills, talents and training you have received in your life. Work has evolved through the years because technology has enabled people to do more tasks in less time and to do so more efficiently. But it is because of this more/less and efficient quotient that people are deciding more and more about the work itself and whether it is worth time and effort.

This past summer we were eating in a restaurant. When the food was ready we received the meal delivered to our table by a robot. Yes the server was there to place each dish on the table to the individuals who had ordered them, but the robot enabled the server not to worry about tripping, falling and dropping the food everywhere. The value in having this robot do this task was apparent. The server was more relaxed, friendly and willing to take the time to speak with us not just about the robot but about our visit to the area. For the servers in this restaurant, technology plays a role in their work which is somewhat out of the ordinary. But there seems to be disconnect about what the limitations of technology should be and what is needed. This leads us to ask questions about artificial intelligence and its role alongside our ability to think and do work that has meaning and that has truly been written by humans.

Maybe what we really need right now is to build up the relationship between our Creator so that we as God's creatures may seek and find our role in work. What our daily work should include is the need for praying in finding what the limits are to where technology is used and where our human creativity should lie. We might also pray about what purposeful work means. For how often have you washed a floor and see it clean and shiny. Then in a few minutes mud is tracked in? The purpose of cleaning is there, but the work is needed again.

God does not give up on us as He continues to work on us as well. God is working on us to make us what we need to be to do His work. To serve him and give him the glory. Each task we do helps us to get to where God wants us to be. We are not finished products of God's hands but ever changing and evolving. To have purposeful work, means to accomplish,

achieve and to do what God calls you to do with the education, skills, talents and abilities He has given. It means, doing what is needed now and preparing for what the next task will be as you continue to seek your place in the world no matter how old you are. God still has work for you to do. One of the key tasks, is to pray.

God of grace and love we praise you and thank you for the gift of work. We thank you for the ability to do so many different things- with our hands, machines, toys and books. We praise you that you are still working on us and not giving up because we are your children in faith and you call us to serve and work for you to share the good news of Jesus. Be with us O God and help us to discern yet again our purposeful work in this time. Hear our prayers. <SILENCE> Amen.