

# Work-Ship Lesson 10: Taking God to Your Work

**Ice Breakers:** *(Use one or more of the following topics to begin a discussion.)*

1. Name a Christian Athlete, Christian Actor, Christian Rapper, Christian Engineer, Christian Politician or a Christian “insert job.” What does it mean to be a Christian in each of these professions? Is there disagreement between what does it look like to be a public Christian in a certain profession? What does it mean to be a Christian in your profession?
2. Find and read several company’s purpose, mission and/or vision statements. Could you in good conscience pray that these companies are successful in fulfilling these statements? What is the purpose of the company you work for? Can you pray that it is successful? Why or why not?
3. Tell us a story of where you were Christ-like in your work environment.

## **A Story**

Matt and Deb work at the same company and go to the same church. Matt tries to represent Christ at work in the best way that he knows how. He works hard. He works well. He does what he is asked of by his supervisor to the best of his ability. Often Matt goes above and beyond what is required of him. He tries to work with a Christ-like attitude. He tries to treat his co-workers as Christ would treat them. He cares about them. He engages them in genuine conversations around life. Many of his co-workers are his friends and he has often been able to talk about his faith with them individually. Matt doesn’t hide his faith, but he thinks that some of the more ostentatious displays of faith are ingenuine and showy. At times he finds himself shaking his head at some of his Christian co-workers. They seem to be more interested in letting everyone know they are Christians than in working in a Christ-like way. He tries not to judge but if one more Christian meme invades his office email he may scream.

Deb is a little bit different. She is not ashamed of her faith. She wants anyone and everyone at work to know that she is a Christian. She tries to incorporate her faith into every aspect of her life, every conversation, every relationship, everything that she does. She wants Jesus to drip out of her so that it is easy for others to see the difference between her and the rest of the world. She is so in love with Jesus that she just can’t keep quiet about it. Her work is just another way for her to show her love for her savior. She often feels like she is being judged because she is so outspoken about her faith. That doesn’t bother her much. The world just doesn’t understand. But when her supposedly Christian co-workers ignore her, don’t support her or even advise her to “tone it down,” it makes her want to cry. How can they know Jesus and not be willing to make him known?

## **Discussion:**

1. Which of the two characters in the story above do you most identify with and why?
2. If you were to give either of them credit for doing something right, what would it be?
3. If you were to give either of them advice, what would it be?

4. St. Francis of Assisi is credited with saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” How often is it necessary to make verbally explicit what is theologically implicit in the way we work?
5. When is it necessary to use words to explain the motives behind our work?
6. How do we share our faith at work in an appropriate way?

## **Praying**

Allow us to begin answering those questions with the short passage of the prayer of Jabez found in 1 Chronicles 4: 9 – 10.

**1 Chronicles 4:9-10 Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother named him Jabez and said, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez called out to the God of Israel: “If only You would bless me, extend my border, let Your hand be with me, and keep me from harm, so that I will not cause any pain.” And God granted his request.**

When we look at Jabez it is important to note that Scripture refers to him as honorable. The only thing he is noted to have done is call out to the God of Israel. So Jabez is honorable and prays. Based on these two observations it would be safe to conclude that there is some positive spiritual quality to Jabez’s life. He was to some extent concerned with God and God’s blessing on his life. He was to some extent on speaking terms with God. He was in some way connected to God. Given this assumption when he asks for God’s blessing and success it can be assumed that those actions he is asking God to bless are within God’s will. In other words, from previous lessons Jabez is not actively engaged in something that would violate God’s general call for Christians today.

Going a little bit more specific, I want to show how this passage applies to work. In the context of an agrarian society, land was the key to wealth and success. The more quality land you possessed the greater amounts of crops you could produce and the larger herds you could tend. Land ownership was the key to prosperity. Jabez’s petition to God to extend his borders was a request for occupational and financial success. He asked God to make him successful and rich. God granted this request. There is nothing absolutely contradictory between occupational or financial success and the will of God. You can be successful and in God’s will. However, I want to quickly remind us that success is not a measure of faithfulness. The stories of Job, the man born blind and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus clearly show that success and faithfulness are not always connected. Based on our work in the previous chapters about determining God’s will for our work, if we are confident that what we are doing is within God’s will for us it would be entirely appropriate for us to pray for success.

**1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.**

We have been discussing God’s relation to our work for several chapters. We discussed our work being in the image of God. We discussed how we are created as human beings to work. We discussed how to work with a healthy work/rest balance within the limits of work. We spent

time looking at how to be within God's will for our work. If we have been diligent throughout this study to not only to think about these things but to also start applying them, then our work should align with God's will on a much greater scale than when we started. Since we have made considerable effort to make sure our work, in some way, coincides with God's will, then praying about our work should be praying according to God's will. If you are reluctant to pray for your work that may be a sign from the Holy Spirit that your current work is not God's will for you.

### **Discussion:**

1. Is it acceptable to pray to God for success at your job? Is it acceptable for you to pray for the success of your co-workers? Is it acceptable for you to pray for the success of your company?
2. Do you think God wants your company to be successful? Would the success of your company somehow inhibit God's kingdom on Earth? Would your success require you to compromise your relationship with God and/or others?
3. What would God honoring success at your job look like?

### **Philippians 4:6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.**

Recently there has been considerable conversation in the NFL about the Christian faith of a specific quarterback. His openness about what he believes has led others to make connections between his faith and his success, his leadership skills, his work ethic, his ability to deal with pressure, his reaction to failure and many other things. This has also led to many comments on the role of faith and prayer in their profession. This quarterback has been a decent example of a Christian trying to have everything he does be rooted in what he believes. Philippians 4:6 directs us to pray about everything. Our job if its football or even something less public is included in the term everything.

### **Ways to Pray for Your Work:**

1. Pray that the image of God is on display as you work creating, sustaining, redeeming, communicating, empowering, and convicting.
2. Pray that others see the image of God on display in your work.
3. Pray that the image of God on display in your work draws you and others into the worship of God.
4. Pray for godly unity with your co-workers.
5. Pray that your co-workers and company are successful and blessed.
6. Pray for trust to develop between you, your employer/employees, co-workers, customers and/or other stakeholders.
7. Pray for your success at work.
8. Pray for proper work/rest balance.
9. Pray that your work helps to overcome sin instead of perpetuating sin in you, the creation, and the community.
10. Pray that your work is good for you, the creation, and the community bringing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.
11. Pray that you can love God and love others through your work.

12. Pray that your work helps you make disciples.
13. Pray for God's direction in your work through the scriptures, His voice, the Holy Spirit, the Christian community and/or your own God-directed choices.
14. Pray that you are faithful to God's direction in you work.
15. Pray that your work creates serious questions in the hearts of those around you.
16. Pray that you are able to highlight the Gospel as you answer the questions your work produces.
17. Pray for joy in your work.

## **Talking**

If our Christian faith is intimately foundational to our work (what we do, how we work, how we make decisions at work, etc.) then discussing our work with others should naturally involve discussing our faith. When necessary to talk about the motivation behind actions and decisions at work, discussing the underlying spiritual motivations as well as others is a matter of openness, integrity and honesty. If my motivations are important at my job, and my primary motivator is what I believe, then being forthright about my faith with my co-workers is essential for them to understand and relate to me. If I regularly include my job, my co-workers, my company in my prayers then it is okay to make that known. If I draw spiritual significance from my everyday work routine, then it is okay to make that known. If there are results at work that I attribute to the blessing of God, then it is okay to make that known. In the movie "The Big Kahuna," Kevin Spacey describes workers as functions and not persons. Who they are is not important; only what they do in regard to the job. But as we more fully integrate our faith with our work it becomes increasingly more difficult to separate who we are from what we do.

As we integrate our faith and work in the spirit of Work-Ship everything about how we work will begin to appear distinct from those around us. Working in such a way that the image of God can be seen through us is quite different. Acknowledging how we can be creative and sustentative at work like God the Father will contrast to the way most people work. Being redemptive and working hard on our communication will set us apart. Working in a convicting and empowering manner is unique. We will begin to experience ourselves differently as we come to realize just how we were created by God to work. We will exist comfortably balanced between work and rest that few others achieve. We will work confidently knowing that what we are doing is God's will for our lives. Through prayer we will rely on God's blessing for our success and trust in God's will during our failures. We will become very conspicuous at work. This will bring a plethora of opportunities to explain to others what we believe. Be prepared to share what you believe at work and how it connects to the way you work.

**1 Peter 3:15-16 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.**

Imagine being asked why you are so eager to do a creative aspect of your job. You will get to explain the creative nature of God using your work as an example and metaphor. Imagine being able to connect some redemptive aspect of your work to sharing the Gospel story of Christ's

redemption of humanity with a co-worker for the first time. Imagine describing life with the Holy Spirit in terms of how you try to empower others at your job. Imagine sharing your trust in God as you are able to describe your ability to rest in His hands and be recreated from the stress that work creates.

I often filter evangelism through the lens of five question areas that people are already asking. (You can a much more extensive treatment of this elsewhere on this site.) Those five question areas are relationships, lifestyle, purpose, belonging and beliefs. How we love God and others through our work, how we work together, the trust we need to work together, communicating, empower and convicting others are area of Work-Ship that might surface questions about relationships. The gospel of Jesus' life death and resurrection has great implications for relationships. Discussing relationships in the context of work could require you to share the gospel in order to explain to your co-workers why you work the way you do. The same is true for lifestyle. Work/Rest balance is greatly influenced by the peace you have found through the gospel. Hearing God's voice, working in light of the Great Commission and Great Commandment, and displaying the image of God through your work are all purposed-centered question producing invitations to invite others to know about the gospel that is foundational to the meaning behind you work. Overcoming sin through good work demonstrates how the gospel can help us find a temporary home where we belong in this fallen world. And finally, hopefully this entire series has shown you how you can have your beliefs drive your work. If anyone ever asks why you work the way you do, would it be possible for you to give them an honest answer without the gospel?

Michael Simpson wrote a book entitled Permission Evangelism. The book in its entirety is a recommended read for anyone seriously thinking about how to do effective evangelism in our culture. There is one point that he makes that is poignant for us today. We get asked questions a lot. Some questions we get asked often. If you get asked the same question repeatedly think through your answer to that question. Is there a way you can invite the asker into your spiritual story with your answer to that question? If we start working in the context of Work-Ship our entire lives will change especially our lives while at work. This will produce questions. How will we answer those questions? Your answer could be an invitation to a deeper spiritual conversation between you and your co-worker if you are paying attention.

Often, I get the opportunity to talk to others about the difficult questions that life produces. At times my teaching methods irritate those just wanting straight forward answers. I have been asked on numerous occasions, "Why don't you just tell us what to write down?" I have grown accustomed to answering in the following fashion, "Because God has created you with the ability to decide for yourself. I care more about developing your judgment than I do about you just agreeing with me. If I can talk you into believing my answer for that question then the next person that comes along can probably talk you right out of it. But I want to empower you to come to a good conclusion for yourself." They asked a simple question about how I work and it just opened the door for me to describe how the Holy Spirit empowers us to make good decisions when it comes to our beliefs.

**Discussion:**

1. If you were to start applying Work-Ship to your work experience, what is the most significant change it would make?
2. What question do you imagine someone would ask because of that change?
3. How could you answer that question in such a way as to invite the asker into a spiritual conversation with you?

Sally Morgenthaler wrote a book entitled *Worship Evangelism*. Her main premise was that non-believers cannot worship a God that they do not believe in but they can watch believers worship that God and become curious about what they see. Her idea was based on the large group worship gathering as the predominant experience of worship, however, if we work in such a way that it produces the legitimate worship of God in ourselves, would witnessing that type of worship produce the same curiosity in those who do not believe in God as well? Can our Work-Ship make others interested in the God we worship through our work? Hopefully, you have come to the same conclusion that I have. Our Work-Ship should absolutely produce interest in others to know the God we worship through our work.

As we conclude our time together, allow me to leave us with a blessing. This summarizes all I hope and pray to God that you might get from this study.

*May you work in such a way that the image of God shines through you.  
May that image connect you more intimately to God and may it spark curiosity in those  
around you who do not yet know God.  
May you be able to truly express the way God created you through your work.  
May you feel completed by it.  
May you be able to worship your Creator through doing what you were designed to do.  
May you know the limits of work.  
May you rest comfortably in God when work is not possible.  
May you learn to truly trust God by resting in Him.  
May you actively be seeking God's will in your work and through your work.  
May you have God honoring success at work.  
And may you know the joy of drawing others closer to God as you practice Work-Ship.*