

Put your faith to work

2 in a series "Take this job and love it"

Sermon for Sunday, August 29, 2010
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Romans 5:3-4; Psalm 15:4;
Luke 16:10-13; Proverbs 22:1

I'm preaching a series of messages on work. Work occupies a huge amount of our lives, and so it's important to see how our faith connects with our work. The main theme of last week's message was that we should work as though we're doing it for the Lord – our work is part of our worship.

Today I'll continue on from there, looking at some specific ways that our faith and work come together.

1) Put your work to faith

I'm playing a little word game here. We're accustomed to hearing phrases like, "Put your faith into practice" or, like the title of this sermon, "Put your faith to work." That means that our faith influences how we do our job.

But it works the other way around, too. Our work can influence our faith. God can use the situations that we face on the job to help us grow spiritually. (By the way, this next section borrows largely from a sermon by Rick Warren.)

a) God uses problems to build your character

Friends, learn this: God is far more interested in your character than in your comfort. Rather than save you from your problems, God uses them to build your character.

Romans 5:3-4, New Century Version:

We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope.

The desert north of Tucson, Arizona is home to astonishing experiment: a miniature Earth. It's called a biosphere. It consists of a three acre greenhouse complex. It is split into compartments, each one a separate environment, including a desert, rain forest, even an mini-ocean. When it was completed in 1991, a team of scientists tried living in there for two years. They could create nearly every weather condition: scorching hot sun, freezing blizzard, torrential rain. There's just one thing they overlooked, or simply were unable to simulate: wind. And that caused a problem. Without the stress caused by wind, trees grew but had no strength. A number of trees growing there got to a certain height, then started bending over and finally snapped in two. When the wind pushes against a tree, it

forces the tree to grow stronger in order to stay upright. Without the pressure of that wind, the tree can't even hold up its own weight.

So your work has a lot of stress (and remember, I'm talking about all kinds of work: school work, house work, raising a family, retired work, as well as regular jobs). The demands and deadlines, the pressures and responsibility put upon you are enormous, but you can normally deal with it. Then something goes wrong and you're in a crisis.

James 1:2-4, Today's English Version:

My friends, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure. Make sure that your endurance carries you all the way without failing, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

I'll say it again: rather than save you from your problems, God uses them to build your character.

b) God uses people to teach you love

We all have a problem: we are all – every single one of us – we are born self-centred. God wants us to become like Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:2, New Living Translation:

Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ.

Now what's the best way to teach us to love others? By surrounding us with people who love us? No! When Jesus was talking about loving your enemies, he asked this rhetorical question:

Matthew 5:46, New Living Translation:

"If you love only those who love you, what good is that?"

We learn to love by being with people who are difficult to love.

So there's someone you deal with at work who really irritates you. That's an opportunity from God, to help you grow.

[Note: "irritate" is not the same as harrass or abuse. If your boss or coworkers are making life unbearable, you need to take action to deal with that.]

2) Put your faith to work: be a person of integrity

a) Be the same person on and off the job

A young man was being interviewed for a position in a small business firm. He had a neat appearance and made a good impression on the owner. He had also prepared an excellent resume in which he listed his pastor and his Sunday School teacher as references.

The owner of the business studied the resume for several minutes, then said, "I appreciate these recommendations from your church friends. But what I would really like is to hear from someone who knows you on weekdays."

b) Honour your commitments

Suppose you make a promise to do something for someone. This could be a little thing, like looking after a neighbour's pet for a couple of days while they're away; or it could be a million dollar contract. Then something else comes up. Looking after the pet has become inconvenient. Or you find out that your buyer was willing to go as high as two million dollars for your business. What does the Bible say about this?

Psalm 15:1-2, 4, Today's English Version:
Lord, who may enter your Temple?
Who may worship on Zion, your sacred hill?
Those who obey God in everything and always do what is right, whose words are true and sincere. . . .
They always do what they promise, no matter how much it may cost.

Proverbs 12:22, New Living Translation:
The Lord hates those who don't keep their word, but he delights in those who do.

Keep your word. Why is this important? Because people are watching you, to see if knowing Jesus makes any difference in your life. When you honour your commitments, you are honouring Jesus.

c) Be trustworthy

Jesus was teaching his disciples about the power of money – and he didn't mean the power to buy things, but rather the power to tempt people.

Luke 16:10-12, The Message:
"If you're honest in small things, you'll be honest in big things;
If you're a crook in small things, you'll be a crook in big things.
If you're not honest in small jobs, who will put you in charge of the store?"

That passage ends with this famous summary about choosing priorities:

Luke 16:13, New Living Translation:

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

How many of you have ever been tempted to steal something? (I'm including childhood here.) Everyone faces that temptation. Many of us have given in to that temptation; I have, and I regret ever doing that.

Whenever I'm tempted like that now, I think to myself, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I cannot cheat others like that, and still call myself a Christian."

3) Your name is worth more than money

I'm going to tell you a story which you might find difficult to believe. But I heard the same thing from two totally different sources who have no connection with each other. The people who told me this work in this field, and I have no reason at all to doubt the truth of what they say.

They've told me about two electrical contractors who are renowned for the consistent high quality of their work. They are so picky, even about the little details, even about the things that are hidden behind walls and will never be seen, that there are never any problems with their work. In fact, when it's time for the building inspector to come by and give approval to their work before the next stage of construction can go ahead, if the inspector is busy on other sites and won't be able to come by anytime soon, the inspector has sometimes just given the approval over the phone without even seeing the work.

When I heard that, I thought of this passage of Scripture:

Proverbs 22:1, God's Word:
A good name is more desirable than great wealth.
Respect is better than silver or gold.

What kind of name does your work give you? And just as important: what kind of name does your work give Jesus?

Theme for today: In our daily life, the people we work with may have no connection with Jesus. We may be the only "Bible" they ever see. Make sure that the "message" you give is true and worthy.