

Your Work is Your Ministry

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Preacher: Tobin Miller

- [0 : 0 0] As Eric mentioned earlier, Tobin continues his series right now on gospel and work. And as he's been preparing for this, he's been asking for some feedback from us as a family.
- What does that mean to us? And we've gotten several letters about that. And so this morning, we just want to share a couple of excerpts from those letters. This first one reads, Dear Tobin, thanks for talking about this topic.
- I always feel like it's something, as a Christian, I should be dealing with. But I tend to get so busy just performing at work that I really have no time to get involved in an office outreach or a Bible study or a mission trip.
- What should I do? Dear Tobin, my struggle is this. If I do what I really want to do or feel a passion to do, then there is no way I can live the lifestyle that I live now in Hong Kong.
- In fact, it could mean that I give up some things and actually move away from Hong Kong. Am I being selfish? Dear Pastor, I actually feel very discouraged by what I do in my job.
- [1 : 1 3] I feel like my job has very little redeeming value in society. And that instead of trying to make society a better place to live in for the many, I'm actually taking resources away from the many who could use them and giving them to a minority that already has more than they could ever use in this lifetime.
- Help me see how to redeem my job and my life. Dear Pastor Tobin, My job and profession seems so broken that I actually do not know where to begin as one person trying to make it all right.
- It used to be that people entered my profession because they were idealists and wanted to help people and make life and society better. Now, it seems like the main reason people enter my field is to make money.
- Then if it happens to also help people and make life better, it's purely by happenstance. How can one person fight for change in the midst of the craziness?
- Thanks for any thoughts that you might have. From God's word, we find this passage in Genesis 2 and 3, which you will find in your bulletin. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them.
- [2 : 3 7] And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done. And he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.
- The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.
- The serpent said to the woman, You surely won't die, for God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.
- When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

[4 : 11] Then the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? He said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself.

And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I command you not to eat? Then God said to Adam, Cursed is the ground because of you.

In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you. And you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you will eat bread.

Till you return to the ground. This is the reading of the word of the Lord. How are you guys doing? How is everybody doing this beautiful day?

Good, good, good. Wow. Well, we are continuing a sermon series on the gospel and how that impacts our work.

[5 : 23] What does it look like for us to be followers of Christ in the workplace or wherever God has us go? My fear is sometimes as you hear us up here talking that you'll find out a lot about us.

And you'll find out, oh, our quirks and all these things. And, you know, it's just interesting as you come up and present things and just trying to figure out what are people thinking as we do this and how they're responding to this.

And we've said before that we have no illusion that just after one talk you'll say, oh, yeah, I totally agree with all that. And so we've been basically just kind of putting out some thoughts and ideas about work and what does it look like for us to deal with that.

I am a sixth-generation German farmer. So always when we get to passages about the farming, it's something that kind of I pick up and go, wow, I can understand that.

I can relate to that. My dad is 100% German, I think, five or six generations here in America. My mom is Norwegian, Scandinavian, and American Indian. So we have all the minorities and all the free schooling captured there.

[6 : 33] And we grew up on a ranch, especially in the summers. My family has a ranch in Montana and we'll hopefully go see that in two weeks and hang out with our kiddos there. And I learned a lot about farming and ranching in my summers in Montana and hanging out with my grandparents.

I learned a lot about plants and how they grow. There's a thing called plant competition. There's certain plants that come in and they're introduced into your granary or your harvest or your field.

They compete with the good crops and they take away things that are needed for those crops like moisture and nutrients and space and root space. And I learned a lot about weeds and I learned a lot about thistles and I learned a lot about thorns.

One day it came time to mow the yard. My dad said, hey, let's go out and mow the yard. And so I was put in charge of that and they were going to go to town to buy some supplies. And he took me out and he walked me around the yard.

And as he walked around the yard, he showed me these little patches of dandelions. I don't know if you ever know what a dandelion, have you ever seen those? They're a little beautiful yellow flower that kind of sprouts up in your yard and they look really cool.

[7 : 41] There might be things your kids would collect and give to mom as a present. But what happens with dandelion after it is fertilized is it kind of looks like it dies. It kind of closes up. And then in a little time, it opens up and it's this white flower.

But it's not really a flower. It's full of all these seeds. And these seeds spread everywhere. And so the dandelion is a weed. It's a bad plant. It's a competitive plant for all the things that you would harvest, like wheat and barley and rye and things like that.

And so as we're mowing the yard, my dad said, okay, I want you to come out and mow the yard. But before you mow the yard, you've got to pull these weeds up. Because if you don't pull them up, if you just mow over them, it's going to be a bad idea, a bad thing.

And then he left. And as any 10-year-old boy did, you know, I walked out there and I bent down and I pulled the first weed up and the tap roots are like that long, right? And I was like, man, this is going to take forever.

And I got to mow the yard. I got to get it done before they come back. So I just ignored my dad's instructions. And I figured, well, if I just run across it quick enough with a lawnmower, it will just chop up everything.

[8 : 47] And I don't have to worry about the seeds or anything like that. And so that's what I did. I took out there and I ran through the yard and I was trying to suck up the dandelions and everything and making sure that nothing got on the grass. And at the end, I go, well, this is really good.

I finished the job. My parents came home. Great job. You did a great job. You mowed the yard. Great thing. About four days later, my dad and I are sitting at the kitchen table and we're looking out into the yard and there's hundreds of little flowers budding up all over the grass.

And my dad looks at me and he goes, did you pull up those dandelions before you mowed the yard? Well, he knew the answer to that, right?

The answer was no. And because of that, the weeds grew up and they took over everything. And my job the next time became harder and harder.

And this passage is about weeds in our life. Last week, we talked about what the gospel means in our work. And we said that when we come to our workplace, that our ultimate boss is God.

[9 : 57] He's the one that we work for. He's the one that we're to please. He's the one that we're to work hard about. And he's the one that we're to trust for our future. As we got in all these emails and people asking these questions, it seemed as I looked at them or prayed about them, that they seemed to have these same common themes.

The themes were brokenness. The themes were frustration with their work. The themes were things aren't as they should be. The themes were what really is work as a Christian?

How do I approach it? The things were that things are not perfect in my work life, in my world. The themes continually were of brokenness, in chaos, in weeds, in thorns, in thistles.

So I wanted to look at this passage because this passage today takes us back to the very beginning because I think that as we talk about the gospel in our workplace, we need to continually redefine terms and ideas and what does it mean and how does it all begin.

And we need to think about what does it look like in the very beginning. If you look in your bulletin, you see the story of Genesis. And in the story, you see that God created everything and then it was good and God was actually working in the Bible.

[11 : 13] At the very beginning, we're told that God works, that work is a good thing, that God is working. And he works and he hands over the work to you and me. He puts us in a garden and he says, I want you to take everything that I've left there and I want you to build it.

I want you to fix it. I want you to tweak it. I want you to make something useful and good for society out of it. And he gives a man and a woman one thing. He says, but all these things, I don't want you to do this one thing.

I don't want you to eat out of this tree. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Well, you know the story, right? Because it's in there and you've heard it a billion, gazillion times, they do that.

They think that, well, you know, I know God said don't do this, but I know better than that. I can do these things. I'm just as smart as God. I've been around for a long time. I can get these things done.

And so instead of picking up the dandelions before they mow the yard, they act as God and they go and they eat the fruit. And you know what happens because chaos ensues.

[12 : 16] Things start to break because of their choices. And this place called Eden, which used to mean pleasure and goodness and providing this place of our work, this place where we live, all of a sudden became a curse.

And it became broken. And it wasn't as God meant for it to originally be. And so we see that these thorns in verse 18 come out and these thistles grow and they take over and they compete and they compete with our lives and they compete with everything that's going on.

And in the thorns and thistles in Hebrew, actually the idea is this strong idea of hardship. That where the ground used to be good, now it's going to be hardship. Now it's going to be disappointment. Now you're going to go to work and you're going to feel frustrated because there's so many things you want to do and you wish you could do.

And if you only had the right resources, you could do it. Or if you got all the right resources in place and all of a sudden the right people move right before that big project and you get frustrated and you're not in the position that you want to be because if you were in the best position you could really help the company but your boss just doesn't seem to understand that.

And instead of pleasure and happiness you feel frustration and pain and toil and work and setbacks and hardships.

[13 : 35] and it doesn't just happen with creation. The Bible says the same thing happens in our mind and how we look at things around us.

We see brokenness. We see things that don't work the way they should be. We don't understand work anymore. We have different words for work. Work isn't valuable anymore.

It's not anything good. All we can think about sometimes is just it's a necessary evil. And if I can get it done with then I can do the things that I really want to do.

And we all play those games don't we? Kind of. And we create new terminology, right? We have the sacred and we have the secular. We have the weak and then we have our weekend.

Some of us if you're like me like Eric said we divide our lives into sections. The first half of my section is for success. I want to make power and money and position.

[14 : 42] I want to provide for my family. I want to be secure. But then in the second half of my life I want significance. I want to do something with eternal meaning. I want to do something that's transcendent. I want to do something that's spiritual.

I want to do something that is considered ministry. ministry. And I got to come to you right now and apologize to you guys because I feel like the church has done a terrible job talking about these things.

I mean the reason we have this confusion I think sometimes is because pastors in the church don't understand it. They don't want to stand up. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want to hurt people's feelings.

but it shouldn't be like that. We shouldn't be thinking this is the secular and this is the sacred.

This is necessary but this is best. But the scripture says that it is all to God's honor. It's all to God's glory.

[15 : 46] Sometimes I talk to people in Hong Kong business people and they say things like this to me. You know sometimes I just feel like a bank. That Christians and Christian groups come to from around the world and they just ask for money.

And so all I am is a bank and I feed people and I do funds and that's all I do. That's what I'm good for. That's my work. One day I can retire and I'll stop being a bank and then I can go ask people for money also. But sometimes I just feel like a bank.

Some people have a hard time understanding ministry in their workplace. What if I ask you the question we're having coffee this week and I said so tell me about your ministry in your workplace. How is God using you?

How would you answer that? What if I ask you the question how do you see your workplace in relationship to church? Do the two work together?

Or is the workplace just something you do during the week and churches just something you do on the weekend and they hardly ever, ever collide? In the ten years that I've been in Hong Kong so far and listening to people in the business world I've heard comments like this I can't wait to go into ministry but then I can do something significant.

[17 : 02] You know I feel guilty I feel guilty because I'm working in the secular and I know that the sacred is the most important thing and I'm not doing much ministry in my work and I feel really guilty.

I can't wait to retire and then I can do something significant with my ministry with my gifts and my talents. My only hope is if I can just live long enough that someday I can get to a point where I can leave all of these things behind and I can do something eternal and significant.

I don't know if you've ever heard people say that. I don't know if you've ever said that. but I have and I'm in the ministry whatever that means.

The passage says that because the choices that our parents made because of open disobedience because they thought they could be God better than God could be God in their life sin came into their life and thorns and thistles grew up everywhere and for the rest of our lives we're going to struggle with this and many of us are going to have a hard time understanding the difference between the intrinsic goodness of work and the extrinsic goodness of work.

Most of us get the extrinsic I work and it provides me food it provides me education it provides me housing it provides me money to give the missions trips it provides me all these things most of us get those things but very few of us understand the intrinsic value of work and the intrinsic value of work is this that God made you to work whatever you do and as you're a doctor and as you're a lawyer and as you're a teacher and as you're a pastor and as you're a mom and as you're a helper and as you're a politician all of those things according to God's word have ultimate value and worth the problem is we start to think of things as sacred and secular and those two words bifurcate all of our life and what does that mean you come into church today and you're in the sacred and all of a sudden somebody hurts your feelings maybe they ignore you maybe they've had a bad day maybe they're just upset and you look at them and you go how can a church person do that this is the sacred we're never supposed to act that way but then you go to your workplace and you expect everybody to do that because they're all jerks but the passage says no the passage says that we're all broken if you expect me as your pastor to be perfect you're going to be incredibly disappointed really quickly if you expect your community group or the people in your group to be perfect you're going to be incredibly disappointed right away and all of this comes back from the garden all these thoughts all of these programs come back from the brokenness the thorns and the thistles and if you think anything else but that your work and what you're doing has ultimate intrinsic value you're lost in the weeds does that make sense it's taken me a long time to get my head around that

[20 : 37] I'm still getting my head around that I still make mistakes I still say things like I can't wait to do ministry I can't wait to go on a mission trip but the bible says our mission trip is everywhere the ministry and mission and work and calling all those are the same thing and if we don't see it like that we'll never experience the joy that God created you to have in your workplace in this sermon series I've asked people to come up and share some of their stories and so I've asked Ian to come up and share with him so Ian is on the hot chair today and Ian come on in Ian you have to come up Ian has been serving and he and his wife Shireen have been serving in the church and other things in their life and so he's usually on the back of the sound board and Shireen is helping with the kids and I promise not to beat him up too much we had Bernard up here last week and so

Ian I just wanted you we gave some questions or some thoughts ideas that go on and then I'm going to ask you two or three incredibly hard and difficult personal questions that you don't know about okay right okay so but the first question we just talked about was just share a little bit about you know where you're coming from on this journey of work and what has God been teaching you maybe a little bit about your history right I am Ian I've been in Watermark since it started practically and I was born in the UK grew up in Hong Kong spent a lot of time in the UK I was a medical doctor for about 14 years and then I have a wonderful wife Shireen over there and she's a corporate lawyer she used to be a corporate lawyer and a while back we were blessed by God and we were very privileged to be able to stop doing our profession professional work and started our own investment company and here we are

I told Suzanne is here today Suzanne is supposed to deliver her baby and so she's here in church and so I told her up here that if she starts happening right now it's okay because Ian is OBGYN and I worked two years in a trauma unit so we got it made and Katie is a nurse so we got all the things here so I thought what a great day we have Ian up here just in case he goes into delivery and it'll be a church service you'll never forget right you'll just hear boil water get clean cloth right or things like that so I thought Ian all joking aside but it is joking can you just share a little bit about as you as a doctor in London what are some of the things that were tensions for you the question we talked about was what do you feel like when you experience the thorns and thistles in the medical field what were some of those you had to deal with when

I first graduated I was very naive I thought that being a doctor clearly doesn't really have any kind of moral conflict as such compared to some other jobs because you're only there to help people who are ill and they trust you because they're your patients and they don't know anything about their condition and it's one of the most one side in terms of information regarding a job is concerned maybe with the exception of iBanking I think yes so I didn't think that I would have to deal with too many moral issues or conflict I was already a Christian I was very happy going to work and I think that my first real challenge come after I finish being a health officer so there will be for Americans out there there was a grade in the UK between internship and residency so I started my first job in gynecology and in the first week

I got given my timetable and there was in it there was a TOP surgical list and I didn't really know what that means so I went and asked my colleague who are more senior than I am and they told me that was a termination of pregnancy list so in UK since the legalisation of abortion in the late 60s that has in all national hospitals in the UK there are these kind of surgical lists and and and when I saw that I thought this is not very good this is clearly something that I feel that I shouldn't be doing and but at that particular point in time I just feel that okay I am here to do a job and also that I need to keep my bosses happy and if I don't do it who is going to do it and I briefly for a sacred part of life and since my patient is not going to meet my church friends maybe nobody is ever going to know but

[26 : 02] I didn't feel very good about it and also that I I guess I was angry myself that I allowed myself to be in that position that I didn't really research very carefully about what I have to do in work at the end I pray about it but it was a good result because I met another colleague more senior than I am and she is a very devout Christian and she explained to me you don't really have to do that you need to find another doctor that does that but you need to do his or her clinical duties in place of that person so I was very relieved but that was a moment in time that I clearly stepped into a gray area or maybe a black area even and that I didn't think beforehand didn't find out beforehand so almost if you had talked about that maybe in your church beforehand with people with other doctors and they were able to give you a heads up that would have been a good thing that would have been very good yeah yes yeah

I think that again that's one of the reasons we're doing this series is because we feel like sometimes we don't talk about that very much in church what does it mean to go out into your workplace and honor the Lord and what's happening there okay so the hard question one of and sometimes I known all my friends who went into medicine they sometimes go through periods of being lost and they get lost within their profession and the things that their profession can buy and all that I mean was that how did you deal with that in your life and that struggle and things I think that I was already a Christian really helped me a great deal but I certainly do see it is a profession that a lot of people see that defines them

I mean they give them a different title some doctors even have like doctors so and so on their credit card printed on their passport they would be very fast to admit that they are a doctor except when they are called upon to do some emergency things on an airplane or something is there a doctor here yes I did have a colleague that was on a plane and they asked for a doctor and he said surely there must be another doctor and they make another announcement and nobody stand up and they make a third announcement and suddenly five people stood up so that's that's kind of like the totally opposite of lawyers right if you say I need a lawyer you have like 50 lawyers come to you because they expect some big pay out but I think that it is also very true that they see their patients at their most vulnerable like I mentioned earlier on that the information is so one-sided a patient put a lot of trust in their doctor and the doctor likes to quite a lot of doctors feel that they are doing something good for the patients sometimes they might mistake that they are instrument of

God for they might think that they might have a God like complex they fail to or they might have forgotten after a while that it is a privilege to be in that position to be able to help and interact with patients in that kind of way one of the stories we talked in community group you shared that you had the frustration of sometimes not even being able to give people the best care and some of that led to you there was a national health service so the Americans out there this is a country where you just walk into the hospital have all your illness treated have all the operations that you need and then you just walk out and you don't have to pay anything but because of that there is a huge funding issue and a lot of hospitals are hugely underfunded there's not enough hospital beds there's not enough medicine there's not enough everything and

I used to when we have to see patients we need to look at their address and see which health authority comes in and some health authority will fund the treatment and some health authority will not so when you see a patient you say well the best treatment that is available for your condition is this but if you were to live on the street next to yourself then you can have something better and that's not very good also that we often have to lie about certain things like our patient may be in a more serious condition than they really are so that we can get operating theater time OR time sorry operating room and that kind of thing so one shouldn't really have to lie about things in order to do the best for your customers or clients or patients or whatever but that seems to be the case so I did become quite disillusioned about it as well but of course no job is perfect

[31 : 30] I'm sure a lot of people face similar difficulties in their job as well so now what is God what is the work you're doing for the Lord right now in your life Shireen and I are very privileged we have God has blessed us a lot and we also during our time in London when we were serving in our church we encounter some missionaries that either they have come back from mission work or they're going to mission work or in between mission work we also encounter children of missionaries when they were growing up their parents suddenly become full time working for the Lord and quite a lot of them feel very even like many years later feel that their lifestyle basically have to change their parents used to have a high paying job and suddenly they have nothing so go from they go from living in a big place to a small place even the clothes they wear has to be different some people wear second hand clothes and that is like their main childhood memory and we feel very

Shireen and I feel very sad about that because we feel that just because your parents decided to serve God doesn't mean that you should have a bad memory about this so we feel very moved by that and since then we've been trying as best as we can to finance missionaries or finance mission work in different countries we don't really have like a definite donation every year but whenever we can we will try our very best to help and God has led us down very good paths and we meet some amazing incredible people that really is on fire for God and it is a privilege that we were able to help for someone sitting out here and they're maybe struggling or in their profession with some of those things that you struggle with and you still struggle with what would be some of the advice you would give them or what would be some words of encouragement that you would share with them yeah like I would tell my kids that in life there are often situations that you need to make a decision that you need to be doing the right thing even when no one is watching and I think that one of the things that comes with that that

I find that helps me is that you really have to spend time with God a lot in order to know what he thinks is the right thing so that God's preference becomes your preference and then when you face another moral dilemma in work then it will be much easier for you because you know that this is the right thing to do and if God's preference is also your preference then there'll be less difficulty achieving that second thing that I would say is that I think serving God is important like the example that Eric gives and also that you mentioned just now a lot of people feel that okay I'm very busy right now maybe if I am in a more stable condition then I will go and serve God more maybe when I meet my fiscal year's target next year I'm going to do this for God or when I have more money then I can donate more then I would say based on my experience based on our experience although quite accidental

I think that it is actually a huge privilege to be able to serve God even when you don't have time when we were more junior Shireen used to have long hours as well she works till 11 most nights and for me like 100 hour weeks is the norm and 120 hour week is not uncommon we still help out in church and we were teaching the teenagers back then they do have children now they're still my Facebook friends I'm quite happy to say and also that I met one of them serving coffee in Ireland a couple of years ago I was very pleased that he's still in church that no harm was done but in this kind of service it doesn't matter what you serve it is always a blessing we feel that it is a blessing they ask difficult questions they ask should we be dating non-Christians what is the origin of the

Bible how do we know that it is trustworthy we have to do the research for them and I think that through that we also feel blessed by it because it helps us to understand God better and whenever you serve God you see a living God at work and you know that he's not just a fictional figure that's described in the Bible you begin to see the Bible a bit more like a blog or like a Facebook page of God that you get to know how he works I mean if I look at Millen's Facebook page I know what he eats with dinner last night right so I think it's a little bit like that that you find out more about God and going back to my original point which is like the Jesus observed the donation in the temple how the widows give actually more because she didn't really have I would say that even if you don't have time that you carve out the time to serve your God and get to know him better I think that will help you along a lot in your work life okay that's great can I pray for you guys by the way thank you for Ian and Shereen and the girls thank you that you brought them on this journey and you are not finished with the journey thank you for the experiences and for the testimony and I pray if there's anybody here that they have some of these same struggles to share and to help in the heads up and what's going on and to help us to meet you in community and help us Lord just to realize that our relationship with you is the most important thing so we thank you for this dear precious family that you would watch over them and guard them we pray these things in your son Jesus name amen thanks

[37 : 46] I'm gonna I have 10 minutes but I have like 80 minutes of content right so that's what always happens when you think and pray through these things because these topics are huge and we're just kind of throwing it out there and you can think about it you can argue with me we're going to do Q&A; next week we're going to have some questions answers after the sermon and so we want you to talk about these things but just a couple things in this passage that stick out and I want you to consider or think about as we go into it and the first thing is this the Bible says this that your work your business your calling and your ministry are all the same thing you're not separating I work here for this time and I do ministry here the Bible says that all of these things are offering to the Lord there's all worship to the

Lord if I were to talk to you at your workplace or after your workplace and I would say something like tell me about your ministry what's God doing in your workplace if you're like me when I was working I would say things like well I'm trying to share my faith with this person and I'm trying to lead this person in a Bible study and I'm trying to do a prayer walk around the office place and I'm trying to listen to people who are hurting in the office place I'm trying to pray for those people and encourage them to walk with the Lord and all of those things I would say this is what I'm doing in my ministry but I would never mention that I'm working in retail I would never mention my ministry is sales and I'm doing these things and the Bible says that is your ministry in fact the things often that we think are our ministries like sharing our faith and reading our Bible and praying and talking to people sometimes we do those things on our office hours right

Facebook or other things like that and the Bible would say that that's actually stealing from your employer I had a friend we were in college and he got fired from his job because he was reading his Bible at work and he was really proud that he got fired because he was reading his Bible at work and we talked about that I said dude what happened he goes I got fired I said why I was being a Christian I was reading my Bible at work I talked to friends in the office and he said yeah he was lazy he wasn't working he was stealing from the team and the scripture says that your work and your business and your calling and your ministry they're all the same thing and that your first responsibility is to be the best doctor that you can be to be the best lawyer that you can be to be the best teacher that you can be to be the best pastor that in your life that he's the ultimate one that that's your ministry so what does that look like on

Monday when you go into the office what does it look like for you to walk into the office and say okay my ministry is to be the best lawyer that I can be in this place my ministry is to take everything that God created in the field of medicine and start to shape it and mold it and use it to help and serve other people my ministry is to take the banking situation that's happening right now and understand that there's amazing amount of chaos and thorns and thistles and weeds and they're in all over the creation they're everywhere but my ministry is as a person who walks with the Lord is to walk into the bank and say okay God how should things be how are things what do you want me to do about it that's what business is in the gospel does that make sense everybody's really quiet and they're looking up here like I'm talking Spanish or Portuguese but I still think that

I have a hard time getting my head around that because for such a long time in the church we've said hey you're going on a mission trip and that's where you're going to do real ministry hey you're going to support these missionaries and that's where you're going to do it because you can't do it hey you're going to do these things at church and so we leave these separated lives and in these separated lives sometimes we go crazy but the passage says in the garden that everything is the same that we all work together that whether we're a banker or teacher or pastor all of these things bring honor and glory to the Lord now maybe you're sitting there and you're listening to it and say that's great for you but my job is impossible it's no redeeming value like that question that was asked I need to just escape well maybe you do but Paul wrote a book to a church in Corinth with a lot of people who are trying to escape they were new Christians they were trying to fit in and they realized it's just too hard I need to do something else I need to be something else I need to go someplace else and Paul's advice to them as

[42 : 59] Christians where God has you right where you are he has you for purpose and for meaning and that your ministry is to around you don't leave don't give up don't think that there's better pastures or better ministry positions someplace else where the grass is always greener because the scripture says that that's not true and where you are is where God wants you to be and sometimes we have a hard time understanding that and seeing that because we're surrounded by thorns and thistles in your bulletin I wrote out or we wrote out some thoughts here take it out and look at it really quickly as we close we prayed about what does scripture say about us as Christians as we walk and as we serve and as we do things in the place of thorns and thistles

God is glorified when we put our whole selves into our work with a view towards pleasing God not men we do our work excellently in the garden of thorns and thistles when we are honest even when it hurts us or prevents us from getting ahead we do our work well to God's glory when we honor our superiors and submit to their authority God is glorified when we treat our work associates with kindness and respect God is glorified when we expose fraud and dishonesty and unethical behavior God is glorified when we approach our work prayerfully God is glorified when we avoid complaining or grumbling even in less than ideal situations God is glorified when we refuse to make work and money or idols it's one of the things I learned about work really quickly is if you want to know what your idol is what that thing is you cling to more than God there's two things that will bring that out quicker than anything else the first thing is marriage and children and the second thing is work

God is glorified when we refuse to make work and money our idols God is glorified when we plan diligently for the future God is glorified when we live simply and give generously God is glorified when we trust him to provide to trust him to provide today what we need for today and tomorrow God is glorified when we rest from our work all of these things scripture said this is what it means to be in full time work for the Lord in our workplace that ministry and calling and vocation are the same thing one final thought you're going to walk into work on Monday and there are going to be people who are living in the thorns and the thistles and the briars and they're going to be living and working and killing themselves for meaning and purpose in their life and work for identity who are they really and why are they here for significance for success and recognition for self worth for security for finances to gain face to have a future for validation for redemption and what I found mostly people work for is for hope in the workplace and you're going to walk into your workplace and people 95% of those people in

Hong Kong are going to be living and working for those exact same things and the Bible tells us that Jesus was crucified on a cross with a crown of thorns which I think is symbolic of this curse that was put on nature crushed on his head and on that cross he died to give you all those things everybody in your office is looking for identity significance purpose meaning value security the Bible says that when Christ died he took the curse and he gave us all those things and the question is do you believe it will you live like that or will you choose to walk back into the briar bushes trying to find those things that

Christ has already given you the amazing thing about walking with the Lord isn't that you're perfect but you realize that God has given you everything that was lost in the garden with our father and mother and because we have those things now you and I have the freedom to walk forward and to serve people to love people to care for them to do all those things we are afraid of doing and that they would never do but we have that assurance of what Christ has done my prayer for us as a church is that we would understand the gospel more and more and we would walk in freedom instead of bondage does that make sense it always comes back to Christ it always comes back to the cross it always comes back to what we lost in the garden he gave us back on Calvary it always comes back to what we were looking for in the garden significance and being our own

[48 : 45] God he comes back and he gives those things to us again and the question you and I have to ask is are we going to accept that or are we just going to mow the yard over thinking that if we do it quick enough all the dami lines get picked up most of us know by experience that that's not going to happen father we thank you for this day we thank you for your goodness we thank you for your mercy we thank you for this topic which I think is just a topic we are going to talk about it's fearful and we wonder what people are going to think and how we're going to handle these things but we know that as we're in relationship with you as we walk with you as we trust you that you will make all things right what I realize that there's some people in here right now who are living in the briar bushes that they are covered by thorns and thistles and work has no meaning or purpose and Lord

I pray for them we pray that they would see your word they would see your son they would see that he's taking this curse that they feel every Monday and he's given them freedom and I pray that they would come to know that freedom through your son Jesus Christ and Lord I pray for those of us who are in here who've had that freedom but we slip away from that freedom I pray Lord that you would just continue to show us mercy and grace and how the gospel changes us and renews us Lord help us to surrender to repent of our wrongdoing we have to be repenting over and over and over because we just tend to run back into those thorns and thistles because we look for something you've already given us so Lord we're so thankful that you're a God who never gives up on your people that you're the God of second and third chances and this is a journey that we're on and we're trusting you for this journey so we come before you as a church as we walk out today realizing that there are not just clergy and normal people but that we are all ministers that we all hold sacred jobs and we're all called to point people to your son so they might have the freedom that we have

Lord we love you we pray all these things your son Jesus Christ holy name amen