

Connecting to Church Part 26
The Ministry of Competence
Honoring God with a Job Well Done
Ephesians 6:5-9
November 14/15

Worship, Prayer and Healing Night recap

Together Campaign plug

Take out your Bibles and open the Bridgeway app...

On February 24, 1989 **THIS PLANE RIGHT HERE** United Airlines flight 811 took from from Honolulu on its way to New Zealand. You can probably already guess that it did not fly through the air without incident and land in New Zealand, because if it did I wouldn't be talking about it over 30 years later.

What happened was it climbed to 22,000 feet when the forward cargo door of the jet blew open, tearing a huge hole in the side of the plane. Nine passengers were immediately sucked out of the plane to their deaths.

The right two engines were damaged by the flying debris and rendered non-functional, and you don't need a degree in aerospace engineering to know that is bad. At this point, the plane was 100 miles from land, and the captain, David Cronin who had 38 years of flying experience was faced with the most difficult challenge of his career.

Because he wasn't getting any thrust from the right two engines, he had to operate some instruments with his hands while controlling others with his feet in an effort to stabilize the plane.

He then had to figure out how fast to fly. He slowed the plane down to a near stall speed to try to keep the air whizzing by the plane from making the hole bigger, but because the hole changed the aerodynamics of the plane, he actually didn't know what speed would result in a stall...he just knew that if it did stall it was going down.

If that weren't enough, the plane was loaded down with 300,000 pounds of fuel for the long flight, so it was 60,000 pounds heavier than the maximum stress load for the landing gear. And oh by the way, the wing flaps used to slow down the plane were not working properly so he had to try to land the plane going about 195 mph, 25 mph faster than the recommended landing speed.

Despite all of that, Captain David Cronin made a nearly perfectly smooth landing, amid, as you can imagine, raucous cheers from his passengers. Airline experts who examine the plane later called the landing a miracle. **HERE IS WHAT THE PLANE LOOKED LIKE WHEN IT LANDED**

A few days later, an interviewer asked Captain Cronin about his first thoughts following a loss of the door. He said, ***"I said a prayer for my passengers momentarily and then got back to business."*** And in the end the death toll for that day was nine, which is a terrible tragedy, but thanks to Captain Cronin hundreds of lives were saved.

Question for you, and you don't need to answer it out loud: What does it mean to be a Christian airline pilot? What does it look like to serve and glorify God as an airline pilot?

What does it mean to glorify God as a Christian social worker, or police officer, or architect, or Franchise Tax Board agent, or fill in the blank with your own profession.

I've wondered this about virtually every job I've ever had. I remember as a teenager who was new to faith, tucking in my teal green collared shirt and walking into my first job at Round Table Pizza wondering what it meant to make pizza for the glory of God. I thought about that as I worked as a soccer referee throughout my adolescence.

I've thought about that while working jobs I've enjoyed a great deal. I think about it in my current job as Discipleship Director of Bridgeway Christian Church. I've thought about that as I've worked jobs that were boring. What does it mean to serve and glorify God when you're the sucker who sits

behind the reception desk in the lobby of your college dormitory from midnight to 6:00 am. Sadly, for two semesters that was a very practical question in my life.

This weekend is the second of a two-part miniseries talking about the connection between our faith and our jobs.

Last week Pastor Lance shared that if you are a faithful church attender during your adult life, meaning you attend on most weekends, then between the ages of 25 and 65 you will spend approximately 2500 hours in church, plus or minus a little depending on how long the sermons are. If you participate in a Missional Community or smaller group then you could double or triple that number so that you're spending up to about 7500 hours during your working years engaging in church programs.

During that same time, the average person spend between 50,000 and 100,000 hours at work. You and I will almost certainly spend more time working than we will spend engaging in any other singular activity in our adult lives. Most of us will spend more time working than we will sleeping. Sorry if that is depressing to you.

But that means that if you are a follower of Jesus the primary place that you will live out your faith will not be your church. The primary place you will live out your faith will be your workplace. That means your work life and mine is of immense value to God. So we're taking two weeks to talk about the connection between faith and work. **Last week Pastor Lance talked about what it means to honor God as a boss or a supervisor. If you find yourself in a leadership role anywhere you need to go back and listen to that message. This week I want to look at what it means to honor God as an employee or as a worker.**

The passage that is serving as our jumping off point is Ephesians 6:5-7, so if you have a Bible I'd like to invite you to go there. It's in this passage that Paul is speaking to slaves and masters in his context. And as Pastor Lance mentioned last week, slavery was very different in the ancient world than it was in American history. We don't have time to get into the details, but I'd be happy to recommend resources for further study if you're interested, but

the big idea is that the slave/master relationship in New Testament times was closer to an employer/employee relationship, so we can derive some principles for how we do our jobs as employees by looking at Paul's words. He says,

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.”

So, we're going to spend most of our time on this question of, how do we glorify God at work? If we're not connecting what we do on Sunday to the places where we spend a huge percentage of our waking hours during the week, we're missing a huge opportunity. This, like last week, is going to feel a bit more topical - instead of tearing apart the passage we're going to talk more generally about faith and work.

And then I also want to talk about the practical implications of this idea that when we go to work as Christians, we are instructed to work as if we are working for the Lord and not simply for an earthly boss.

Work has been part of human existence since the beginning. Adam and Eve worked in the Garden of Eden. God created a world where we cultivate its beauty and goodness through our work. Work will be part of eternity, as we reign with God in the new heavens and the new earth. And for most of us, as I mentioned earlier, work takes up a substantial of our earthly lives.

I would even take that a step further and say that work in some form is vital for our well-being. A life of pure leisure sounds great in theory, but it can and likely will quickly become unfulfilling and destructive. Our work doesn't need to be paid employment, but some form of service to others or contribution to society is, again, very important to our well-being. All sorts of studies have shown, for example, that those who retire from their jobs and then focus entirely on leisure don't remain happy for very long and

satisfaction in retirement is found in a balance between enjoying leisure and some sort of meaningful service to others.

And that brings me back to my big question: What does it mean to glorify God at work? Think about this for your own work, and this can include paid employment, I believe it can include work in the home and the raising of children, I believe it can include volunteer work.

There are, of course, a number of different ways to glorify God at work:

-We can glorify God at work by being kind and honest and sharing our faith.

-We can glorify God at work by working for causes that make a positive difference in the world.

-We can glorify God at work by doing whatever gives us the greatest joy and passion.

-We can glorify God at work by making as much money as possible and giving as much as we can away, or by making enough to live on as quickly as possible so that we can free up our time for other things.

These are all generally true statements, and if this was a longer series we could do a teaching on each one and find ample biblical support.

But I want to focus on one particular way we can glorify God at work that is often overlooked when we talk about connecting our faith to our work.

Pastor and author Timothy Keller has a wonderful book about the connection between faith and work called *Every Good Endeavor*, and in that book **Keller says that one of the best ways that you and I can love the world and serve God through our jobs is through what he calls 'the ministry of competence'**. Often in church world when we think about ministry we think about prayer or preaching or music or healing, and obviously those are all powerful expressions of ministry. But have you thought of your competent job performance as a ministry? I don't mean

have you thought of your job as a mission field where you evangelize and share your faith. That's all great. But I'm asking, have you thought of your job, like the actual work you do, as a form of ministry?

I want to make the case today that one of the best ways to serve God at work is by doing your job well. Through performing your job - whatever it is - with competence, you actively participate in God's good work in the world. **In fact, if you're following along with the app here is the fill-in-the-blank: God is glorified by good work.**

And, I want you to know that while we talk all the time about God moving at church on the weekends through the preacher or the worship leader, God can move through you as you do your job during the week.

So what does it mean to be a Christian airline pilot? It means you land the heck out of that plane. Whether it's got a hole ripped in the side of it or not.

See, during Flight 811's moment of crisis, the best gift Captain Cronin had to offer his passengers was his experience and his competence. In that moment, no one on that flight was thinking, "I sure hope this captain plays Christian music in his workspace." There's nothing wrong with that, of course, but it was certainly not what mattered most in a crisis. What mattered was, could he land the plane?

And here's the deal, in our working lives we innumerable opportunities to honor God, and please do not hear me saying that competence in the *only* way to honor God in your work because it's not, but do hear me saying that when you, regardless of your profession, do your job and do it well you are not simply completing a task, you are participating actively and meaningfully in God's creative work in the world.

We serve a creative God who invites us to join Him in His creative work and whether you are drawing blueprints for a building or writing computer code or cooking a hamburger or making laws you are participating in that work.

And you and I, we rely on the competence of others every day, don't we? I thought about this as I was preparing this message. But we all rely on the competence of others, and we may not think about it, but we really care a lot about other people being good at their jobs.

Think about it this way, when you've got a health crisis, what if your greatest hope for your doctor? Not that they keep a Christian trinket on their desk. You hope that he or she knows what he is doing.

When you are driving over a bridge, what is your greatest hope for the people who inspected the bridge and determined if it's safe for vehicles? That they know what they are doing?

What is your hope for those who determine environmental regulations and seek to keep our air breathable and water drinkable? That they know what they are doing.

You and I, in a thousand ways big and small rely on competent people to help meet our needs and keep society moving. When people come to you at your job, they have a need, and what they're hoping for from you is competence.

It is through the ministry of competence - the practice of doing our jobs and doing them well - that we can serve God and serve the world.

I love what an author by the name of Dorothy Sayers said writing not long after World War II, she writes, ***"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 Sundays."***

And maybe you've had that experience. Maybe for most of your life as a Christian you've felt like that was the message you've heard: Be a good person, show up on Sundays, volunteer your time, and give some money. But Sayers goes on,

“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.”

I love that. Is that the first ‘demand’ our faith makes upon us? I’d quibble with that a bit, but I know this, I’d want every carpenter in our church to know that when they make a good table they’re doing God’s work. I’d want every carpenter in our church to know that God is just as present in your life when you’re building on Tuesday as He is when you’re singing on Sunday.

Competence brings credibility. We respect people who do good work.

When you and I do our jobs the best we know how, regardless of our job title, it brings glory to God. Maybe you’ve seen the old movie *Chariots of Fire*. There’s a beautiful line in the film where Eric Liddell’s father says to him, **“You can praise the Lord by peeling a spud, if you peel it to perfection.”** And if you can praise the Lord by peeling a potato, you can certainly praise the Lord by doing your job and doing it well. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10, **“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”** So whether you build or sew, instruct or supervise, trade or negotiate, invest or write, run errands or serve food, make laws or fix cars, do all to the glory of God.

And I want to show you another side of this: it is through your competence that God ministers to others and meets their needs. In other words, God uses you to deliver His blessing to the world. There’s this obscure passage in Psalm 147 where God is speaking to Israel and listen to what He says in verse 12: **“Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise Your God, O Zion! For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. He makes peace in your borders; he fills you with the finest wheat.”**

God strengthens the bars of your gates, Israel, the psalmist says. But let me ask you this? How do you think He does that? Do you think He just drops bars out of heaven. Doubtful. He does it through the people who build the gates.

God fills you with the finest of wheat, Israel. But how does he do that? Through the farmer, through the miller, through the baker, you get the idea.

God is taking credit for these things, but how is he accomplishing them? Through people! God could accomplish these tasks by himself but he's using people to get the job done. And so today, God is providing for others through your work. In my family when we sit down to dinner and pray we thank God for the food and we recognize that it is a gift from him, but just think about how many people God worked through to get that gift to us, from the delivery drivers to the grocery store workers to the people that make sure our gas lines work so we can cook it. God involves people in delivering his blessings to the world and when you do your job I want to encourage you with the reality that you are part of that blessing.

And you might be hearing this going, "Yeah, that might be true for other jobs, but not mine, I'm just a _____."

And I want to tell you that's not true. Your job, no matter how menial or unimportant it might seem, can be used by God to bring blessing to the world. In my early 20s I worked for about a year at a speciality running shoe store in Los Angeles. And what we would do at the store is customers would come in and we'd watch them walk and analyze their feet and then we'd help them pick out shoes that would work for them. And I was always surprised at how much gratitude people would show to me and my coworkers once we were done helping them. I got a lot of handshakes and even some hugs from people after spending about half hour with them helping them sort through their running shoe needs. I remember thinking, "I'm just helping you pick out shoes, man. You've still got to run in them. It's no big deal."

But here's what I came to realize, and this is so simple but it's so important. I had knowledge and skills that people who walked into the store didn't have. And I completely took my own knowledge for granted. And I was able to use my knowledge and skills that I totally took for granted to bring blessing to those who didn't have it. Let me ask you, what knowledge and skills do you have that God can use to bring blessing? What do you take for granted that the rest of us can't do or don't understand? I love what

Pastor Lance said last week, “Part of your blessing is your brain.” God gave you skills and knowledge and expertise and when you take those things and put them to work you become the means through which God is blessing the world.

You’ve got skills that are normal to you because you use them every day. They are exceptional to people who don’t have them.

That means every job has dignity.

That means that we don’t worship our work but we can do our work as an act of worship because we’re doing it for God and for the blessing of the world.

That means that you can represent Christ in your workplace by coming in and doing your job well. Pastor Lance ended last week’s message by saying that a loud Christian with a lousy work ethic is like nails on a chalkboard, and I couldn’t agree more.

But a humble Christian who works hard, serves others, and does their job to the best of their ability with a good attitude will have the kind of credibility that a loud Christian with a poor work ethic never will. When we commit ourselves to the ministry of competence, we take the gifts God has given us and put them into practice to bless the world.

Now, I want to be careful to be clear about what I’m not saying. I’m not saying that we should become workaholics in the name of being competent. If anything, what our faith teaches us about the important balance between work and rest can be a witness to a workaholic world.

I’m not saying that we need to lament the limits to our competence. Some people will be better at our jobs than we are, and that’s ok. I preach from a platform where Lance Hahn preaches regularly. And I can’t preach like he can. And I’m ok with that. I praise God for the gifts he’s given Lance and I praise God for the gifts he’s given me and there is not one ounce of jealousy or self-loathing. I do the best I can with what I’ve got and I celebrate people who are better than me. That’s what you can do, too.

I'm not saying we make work an idol and that we always prioritize workplace concerns over our families or other important elements of our lives. Balance and proper prioritization are critical.

I'm not saying that we look to our work to give us a sense of identity and self-worth. Too many people, please hear me on this, too many people are miserable at work because they are stuck trying to prove themselves so that they can feel significant. What makes you significant is that you are a child of God. You get to go to work with nothing to prove, and instead you can focus on bringing blessing.

But I am saying we do our work in a manner that when we're on the job our co-workers are glad to see us. I'm saying we do our job in such a way that when we finish an interaction with a customer or client we've made a positive impression. I'm saying we do our jobs in such a way that we can know in our heart of hearts that we've done the best we can with what we've got, and that we have, as Ephesians 6:7 says, ***rendered service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.***

Now, I want to look at one other concept we can take into our workplaces that can help us connect our faith and our work, and it's right there in the Ephesians passage. The text says to work for your bosses as you would work for Christ. And it goes on to say to do your work as a servant of Christ.

In a similar passage in Colossians 3 Paul says to **work heartily as for the Lord and not for men.** Both of those passages contain some really good news for us. I don't know what your earthly boss is like...maybe they're wonderful, maybe not so much, but what the New Testament shows us is that if you're a Christian you actually have the best boss ever, because if you're a Christian, your boss is Jesus.

Now, I've had so many different jobs over the years and I've worked for a lot of different bosses. Some of them were awesome and really inspired me to work hard. Others of them, were the opposite of that. I'm sure you can relate. But the Scriptures teach us that our ultimate boss is Jesus.

You are responsible and accountable to your earthly bosses just like I'm responsible and accountable to Pastor Lance and our Elder Board, but you and I, don't miss this: We are called to be people who honor and respect authority, the Ephesians passage shows us that, and we're ultimately called to base the effort and love we put into our work not on our desire to work for your earthly boss but by your desire to serve your eternal, heavenly boss.

And working for Jesus comes with a number of benefits, but I just want to share one with you and I hope you'll find this helpful if you struggle to connect your faith with your work. We've been talking about competence today, and here's what I know: If you work for Jesus you have a boss that is supremely competent.

In his classic book *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard says, **“Jesus lived in a way that showed his cognitive and practical mastery of every phase of reality: physical, moral, and spiritual. He is Master only because he is Maestro...He is not just nice, He is brilliant. He is the smartest man who ever lived. He is now supervising the entire course of world history while simultaneously preparing the rest of the universe for our future role in it. He always has the best information on everything and certainly also on the things that matter most in human life.”**

Jesus is not just nice, He is brilliant. Think about this: Who knows more about real estate than anyone who has ever lived? Not Phil Dunphy, Jesus Christ. Who is the most skilled electrician? Jesus again. Who is the best animal board and care supervisor, the best third-grade teacher, the best accountant and the best mechanic? That would be Jesus, Jesus, Jesus and Jesus. Who would be the best Chick Fil-A manager? Jesus, and it would be His pleasure to serve you.

Your earthly boss might be a bumbling fool, but I can assure you that your heavenly boss is not. He's brilliant. He knows your industry inside and out. He delights in you and wants what is best for you.

He is aware of your limitations. In His eyes you have nothing to prove. He's an expert in your field and He invites you to rely on Him through the day-to-day ups and down and in the crises. Your work matters a lot fo Him. Your work isn't just something you do to earn a paycheck, it's a way that you partner with the greatest boss in the world to bring blessing to the world.

And if your earthly boss is less than great, maybe there's an opportunity for you to shift your mindset, and say Jesus, You gave everything for me, and if you're my boss now it's my joy to give it my best at work to honor and serve you. That can be an absolute game-changer for you.

I think it's fair to say that most of us will never face a situation like Captain Cronin faced on flight 811, where everything is falling apart at our jobs and we have to act quickly to save a bunch of lives. But here's what we will face every single day: We'll face a choice. We get to choose to view our jobs as just jobs - something we do because we have to to pay the bills. Or we can partner with God and use the competence that He's given us to bless the world. We can commit ourselves to the ministry of competence to meet needs big and small which will infuse our work with purpose and meaning and will bring glory to God because God is glorified by good work.

Let's pray (prayer team reminder)