

Work Life Balance

I recently was asked to go through a series of classes at work that were there to help us figure out a good work life balance. While I thoroughly appreciate the thought behind my employer wanting to be sure I have a good balance in my life between work and life outside of work, this training series just seemed particularly empty to me. It was put on by a “pop” psychologist that would probably remind a lot of us of Dr. Phil, or someone like that. I think the best example of the class as to why I found it really empty is the happiness meter. The happiness meter was this silly prop that had 5 faces on it, going from extremely unhappy, moderately unhappy, neutral, happy, and extremely happy. There was then a pointer that you could move around and adjust after you evaluate whether you were happy or not after performing some change or deliberate act in you life. Basically, through these silly tools, you were supposed to be empowered to make yourself happy, and in making yourself happy in all the areas of your life you chose to focus on, this would help you to evaluate and find the right work life balance mix. Personally, I found this incredibly simplistic, and just lacking in a solid foundation for living life with.

So, if the classes were so empty, I thought it would be worthwhile to look for guidance in the Bible for this modern society for maintaining a proper balance between work, and life outside of work? I recently went through a “Truth Project” session that focused on the labor sphere, and thought that would be an excellent starting place. What are we taught about work? The starting place we will use is the 10 commandments. The fourth commandment is:

Ex 20:9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Ex 20:10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

Ex 20:11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, ^t the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

So, as we see in verse 9, this commandment isn't only about keeping the sabbath, but it is telling us that for 6 days we should labor and do all of our work. So, work seems to be something that God thinks is important for us to do, and has modeled Himself for us in creation.

The Sabbath commandment steers us to Genesis for a look at the creation. We remember that God created everything on the first 6 days of creation, and rested on the 7th day. We are created in God's image, so it is logical that if God found it beneficial to both work and rest, we should to. So, from the beginning of creation, there has been a plan for balance between work and rest. So, this provides a great starting point for us in our study that we should have some balance in our life, but that work is also a really important thing in God's plan for us.

What was work really intended to be? Does this fit with the modern view of work where work is just a means to survive, or a way to fund our playtime, but drudgery to get there? The first mention of work in the Bible is in Genesis 2:2.

Ge 2:2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

We've already looked at that above. The second mention is:

Ge 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

So, we see that part of Adam's purpose in being created was to work in the Garden of Eden. So, part of how we are created is to do work – it is one of our purposes. Why then do we find it hard to work sometimes, or not want to work, or for that matter, why is work sometimes difficult? This all comes out of the fall – all comes down to sin.

Ge 3:17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Ge 3:18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

Ge 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

All of creation fell with Adam and Eve's disobedience and the original sin. We see that with the fall, “by the sweat of your brow” we will eat, and that the ground will produce thorns and thistles that we'll have to work around and overcome. So, work went to being something harder and more difficult. So, in this fallen form, and for someone who doesn't have a Biblical worldview, you can see that work is difficult, and can be seen as just the means to get from Monday to Friday and where some of the modern views of work come from. But, this is not how God created it.

So, what else does the Bible tell us about work?

Eph 6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

Eph 6:6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

Eph 6:7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,

Eph 6:8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

Eph 6:9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Paul is speaking to more relationships here than just slaves and masters. This is meant for owners and workers, or bosses and workers as well. It covers anywhere there is a position of authority and a worker. Paul instructs us to “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.” It instructs the worker to obey their boss as they would obey Christ. This instruction tells us that we should work hard and do our best at all times, remembering who our ultimate authority is, and who we are working for. That is Jesus. By working hard and doing our best at all times, we serve Christ best, and hopefully reflect some of His glory and His values to our customers, and to those we are working around. God establishes all authority, and working hard as His bondservant in the world shows your ultimate faith and love of Him, and His promises and glorifies Him as creator of you – who

gave you your unique talents and abilities to best serve and glorify Him. We see this best exemplified in the example of Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus:

Ex 35:30 Then Moses said to the Israelites, “See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah,

Ex 35:31 and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts —

Ex 35:32 to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze,

Ex 35:33 to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship.

Ex 35:34 And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others.

Ex 35:35 He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them master craftsmen and designers.

Ex 36:1 So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work just as the LORD has commanded.”

God gave them the skill, knowledge, and ability to do work, and in their case all kinds of work.
Some other teachings on work:

Pr 14:23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

Pr 10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.

Pr 28:19 He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.

So, these verses reinforce that it is good to work. One thing we should be a little careful about after reading these is materialism. We've already seen that we should work for God as our ultimate authority, and treasure Him above all else:

Mt 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

God promises to meet our needs, so we need to remember that we will be rewarded so we don't need to focus on money:

Mt 6:25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

Mt 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Mt 6:27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Mt 6:28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

Mt 6:29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Mt 6:30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Mt 6:31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

Mt 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Mt 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Mt 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

We see that we should work, not for the material rewards, but as stewards of what God has provided to us and focusing on God as the provider of both our material needs, but also the skills, talents, and ability to work. We recognize this, and reach out in faith that God will always provide for us out of His great mercy and grace.

What about charity for those who do not have much? I'm not sure modern society has this quite right and the government has stepped into a larger role than they should be in. The Bible teaches us:

Lev 19:9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

Lev 19:10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

So even in this case, God is still planning for the people who do not have much to work and to pick up their own food. Do we follow this teaching well today? I don't believe we do in many cases. Work is intended as a very enabling thing and a blessing for everyone who performs it. I think we should as a society look to this model of providing and enabling the downtrodden to work and reap the benefits, but still be provided for. Teaching someone to fish is much more beneficial to them in the long term than just giving them a single fish every month. Paul taught in Thessalonica:

2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

I don't think that any of this scripture implies that we shouldn't have compassion on the poor or hungry. The greatest compassion is going to be to help them to work and learn how to gain their own food, and to provide the gleanings of the field that make it possible to support oneself and get someone back on their feet. That is an interesting thought for a bank – is there an equivalent to the gleanings that we could be providing? I'm sure there is – but I'm at a loss to come up with it in the information technology field. But, certainly in areas where tangible goods are produced, I think you can see the potential. But, where then does this leave charity. Should it only be the gleanings? I think that is the long term solution. Short

term, out of love, and out of much scripture we also know that we are to treat our neighbors in need with love and compassion:

Mt 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

Mt 25:32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Mt 25:33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Mt 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Mt 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

Mt 25:36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Mt 25:37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’

Mt 25:38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

Mt 25:39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

Mt 25:40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

Mt 25:41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Mt 25:42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

Mt 25:43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

Mt 25:44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

Mt 25:45 “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Mt 25:46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Eph 4:28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

1Jn 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

I don't think the Old Testament and New Testament are contradictory here. Someone who is hungry needs love and compassion, and fed so that they can be strong and work. It is the cycle of depending only upon charity alone where the problem lies. The greater love we can show someone is to teach them the value of work, and how God has always valued it and that ultimately the worker benefits from having done the work. So, feeding the hungry is

necessary out of love as we are taught in the verses I have highlighted above, but part of the solution also involves providing the “gleanings of the field” as well, so that someone who is hungry can also work and achieve those benefits as well and not always depend upon charity.

So, this establishes that God values work, and that His intention when creating it was to have some type of work life balance. How do we determine how that balance should exist in our lives? We have guidance that we should work 6 days, and rest one, but that doesn't give us a “prescription” for the days on which we work? I think we'll find in the values that we are taught in scripture that there are life parts that God finds very important as well.

I'll start with the family – first marriage and then children. First, we know that:

Ge 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Pr 18:22 He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.

Heb 13:4a Marriage should be honored by all

God created marriage and planned for the bond between husband and wife to be of one flesh. God intends for this relationship to be extremely close. Any relationship requires time together, so there needs to be some time primary to this relationship, and primary to your spouse. In Ephesians 5, Paul equates the marriage relationship to Christ and the church's relationship. So, we see that God places a great deal of emphasis on marriage. So, a marriage definitely needs to work into one's work life balance, and time made for your marriage.

Children are also very important. God gives us a great deal of instruction in scripture about maintaining relationships within the family:

Dt 11:18 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Dt 11:19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

God here talks about the importance of teaching your children while you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. This is an important thing, and something surely that should take part of your time on a daily basis. Paul teaches:

Eph 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

So, we see that work, marriage, and family are all very important things. But, how do we balance all of them and see that appropriate prioritization is given to each one at the right times? The only answer I have is to turn the problem over to the Lord in prayer and have faith that God will guide you, and rest in God's peace and the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes:

Ecc 3:1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

Ecc 3:2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
Ecc 3:3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
Ecc 3:4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
Ecc 3:5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to
refrain,
Ecc 3:6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
Ecc 3:7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
Ecc 3:8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecc 3:9 What does the worker gain from his toil?

Ecc 3:10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men.

Ecc 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts
of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Ecc 3:12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they
live.

Ecc 3:13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift
of God.

Ecc 3:14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and
nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

There is a time for work, a time for your marriage, and a time for your family. All are
important and need prioritized. Only by faith and obedience to God's leading, can we get this
balance right. I know that I way too often still try to follow my own will, and that we all try to
follow our own way. When we do this, I believe this is when we get out of balance and get
led into a problem and make things way too difficult on ourselves. But, God has provided the
solution for us here too:

Isa 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Isa 55:2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the
richest of fare.

Isa 55:3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting
covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

Isa 55:4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the
peoples.

Isa 55:5 Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will
hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he
has endowed you with splendor."

We all have a problem with sin, where we place something at a greater priority than God's will
or commandment, just as we saw with Adam and Eve. Paul tells us in Romans:

Ro 3:9 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better ⁹? ⁿ Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ^o

Ro 3:10 As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;

Ro 3:11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

Ro 3:12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; **there is no one who does good, not even one.**” ^{10 p}

Ro 3:13 “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” ^{11 q} “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” ^{12 r}

Ro 3:14 “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” ^{13 s}

Ro 3:15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

Ro 3:16 ruin and misery mark their ways,

Ro 3:17 and the way of peace they do not know.” ^{14 t}

Ro 3:18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” ^{15 u}

Ro 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, ^v it says to those who are under the law, ^w so that every mouth may be silenced ^x and the whole world held accountable to God. ^y

Ro 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; ^z rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ^a

Ro 6:23 For the **wages of sin** is death, ^o but the gift of God is eternal life ^p in ²⁵ Christ Jesus our Lord.

God in His grace gave us the solution in Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us in John 14:6 –

Jn 14:6 Jesus answered, “**I am ^d the way ^e and the truth ^f and the life. ^g No one comes to the Father except through me.**”

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians and Romans:

1Co 15:1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel ^w I preached to you, ^x which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

1Co 15:2 By this gospel you are saved, ^y if you hold firmly ^z to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

1Co 15:3 For what I received ^a I passed on to you ^b as of first importance ⁴³: that Christ died for our sins ^c according to the Scriptures, ^d

1Co 15:4 that he was buried, ^e that he was raised ^f on the third day ^g according to the Scriptures, ^h

1Co 15:5 and that he appeared to Peter, ⁴⁴ ⁱ and then to the Twelve. ^j

1Co 15:6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ^k

1Co 15:7 Then he appeared to James, ⁱ then to all the apostles, ^m

1Co 15:8 and last of all he appeared to me also, ⁿ as to one abnormally born.

1Co 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles ^o and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted ^p the church of God. ^q

1Co 15:10 But by the grace ^r of God I am what I am, and his grace to me ^s was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them ^t—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ^u

1Co 15:11 Whether, then, it was I or they, ^v this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Ro 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation ^g for those who are in Christ Jesus, ^{29 h}

Ro 8:2 because through Christ Jesus ⁱ the law of the Spirit of life ^j set me free ^k from the law of sin ^l and death.

Ro 8:3 For what the law was powerless ^m to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, ^{30 n} God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man ^o to be a sin offering. ^{31 p} And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ³²

Ro 8:4 in order that the righteous requirements ^q of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. ^r

Ro 8:20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, ^u in hope

Ro 8:21 that ³⁷ the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay ^v and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ^w

Ro 8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning ^x as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Ro 8:23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, ^y groan ^z inwardly as we wait eagerly ^a for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ^b

Ro 8:24 For in this hope we were saved. ^c But hope that is seen is no hope at all. ^d Who hopes for what he already has?

So Jesus paid the death penalty for our sin on the cross, a holy and blameless sacrifice in our place. Christ also rose on the third day. In this power, God restores creation and us to Him. Only through prayer, and surrender to the will of the One who created us, will we be able to find the appropriate work life balance.