

**PRACTICAL MATTERS:
MAREKTPLACE MATTERS
SEPTEMBER 2, 2012
LABOR DAY**

Well, it's Sunday.

Tomorrow is.... Monday.

Tomorrow is Labor Day, so many of you have the day off.

But usually it's back to work and back to school, right?

Groans all around.

Weekends, how many people live for the weekend.

Everybody know that TGIF means.... Thank God It's Friday.

Time away from work, time away from school.

But tomorrow is back to the grind.

But did you know that's not how God designed it to be?

You might be surprised to know God has a design for your life at work in the marketplace.

A few years back one of the common criticisms of Christians was,

"They're so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good."

Sadly, some church folk would lead you to the conclusion it's all about getting to heaven.

It's just a supernatural escape plan for when this life is over.

But if you spend any time in the Bible you find it is also about living a new life in this life.

Christian faith in biblical perspective has innumerable applications

to very practical matters of everyday life.

So, for the next few weeks, I'm going to talk about a few specific practical matters.

I'll talk about what the Bible says about

managing your money, your family, intimacy issues and, today, your work life.

Let's take a look at how God originally designed this thing we call "work."

GENESIS 1:26-28

Part of being made in God's image means ruling over his creation.

Subdue it, rule over it.

God gave us stewardship over his creation.

When we hear that word "stewardship" we usually think of giving money.

And that's certainly part of it.

But it's not the whole thing.

It's not even the main thing.

Stewardship means much more than that.

It is to tend and take care of God's creation for him.

We are his representatives on this earth,

his image,

tasked with managing what belongs to him.

In the next chapter, Genesis 2:15, we get a bit more detail.

God created the human and placed him in the garden "to work it and take care of it." (Ge.2:15)

We were created in the beginning for work.

Work was not given as a curse,

but as part of our God-given design for living out God's image in us.

That's why, when someone gets laid off, the crisis is not just financial.

It's also an emotional crisis, a crisis of identity.

For some people the same thing can happen when they retire.

If I'm not a worker,
 if I'm not teaching or selling or managing, or whatever,
 who am I?

Some people go into depression.

Some, shortly after retirement, see their physical health break.

Many retirees find value and meaning by working as
 volunteers in the church and elsewhere.

We've got members who serve in senior citizen centers,
 serve lunch to wounded warriors,

 visit shut-ins, and transport people to their doctor appointments.

If you're looking for opportunities, we've got them.

 Just check in with Kelly at the Connections Center.

For the follower of Jesus it's brought back fresh.

 Paul wrote to the Ephesian church,

 "We are God's workmanship,

 created in Christ Jesus to do good works,

 which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ep.2:10)

We were created in the beginning, and made a new creation in Christ, for work.

 What you do Monday through Friday matters to you because it matters to God.

 It is an expression of your God-given role of stewardship over his creation.

Of course, your work world is the place where you spend the bulk of your time.

Have you ever thought about your work as a calling from God?

 Sometimes people refer to a pastor being "called by God."

 And certainly a pastor *should* be called by God.

 If they're not, they're likely to be miserable doing the job.

 And they might do serious spiritual damage to other people.

But I want to suggest to you that *you* are called by God to *your* job, too.

 "Calling" is not just for pastors and church staff,

 but for all of us.

God wired you up in a particular way, with particular talents, spiritual gifts, and passion
 so you can do particular things that contribute to the well-being of his creation.

Athletes talk about finding the "sweet spot" or "getting in the zone."

 Think of when it was all working for Tony Parker or Tom Brady.

 It's when everything is just right,

 and their effort seems to just flow and soar naturally.

When you find yourself in a job, a career, that fits the way God shaped you,

 that's your sweet spot,

 and there's nothing quite like it.

You can see it in a gifted teacher.

 They just know how to engage the student,

 how to communicate content and get them to think.

You can see it in a true salesman.

 They have a way about them that you to *want* to buy from them.

The gifted musician,

 the counselor who uncovers things so quickly,

 the manager whose people really want to please them,

 the yard man or housekeeper or carpenter who clearly takes pride in their work.

When you find your sweet spot,

 you know.

And you can be pretty sure that is God's calling for you.
 If you haven't found your sweet spot yet,
 work is not nearly as fulfilling.
 But in this economy, beggars can't be choosers.
 Even if you've currently got a job that is just a job for the paycheck,
 do your best.

The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Colossae,
 gave a word of advice even for slaves,
 "And whatever you do,
 work at it with all your heart,
 give it your very best,
 work as to the Lord and not to men." (Col.3:23)

As you bless God with your efforts, God will bless your efforts.

And while you're doing that,
 keep praying and seeking out what God has in mind for you as your calling.

Have you ever thought about the difference your work makes in the lives of other people?

Whatever your work,
 you are making a positive contribution to someone somewhere.
 Otherwise, no one would pay you to do it!
 Your work, unless it's immoral or illegal, can be a ministry of sorts
 because of the blessing it brings to others.
 A child receives an education,
 and everyone who works at the school system had a part in that.
 Someone whose car got banged up gets it fixed
 with the help of that insurance claim you processed.
 A family will be fed
 with the groceries you stocked on the shelf or bagged at the checkout.
 Someone's day had a bright spot
 because you rented them that DVD or mixed that Starbucks drink just right.
 The community is a little safer because you are on patrol with a badge or in the military.
 A company is organized to produce and deliver a service or product that is needed or wanted
 because you are there in the office working in the administration of the business.

Your work makes a contribution to the lives of others.

Sometimes it is direct and visible, and sometimes it is indirect.

But it's there.

If you made no worthwhile contribution,
 they wouldn't pay you to do what you do.

I need to add a side note here.

There are those of you who work and do not get paid one red cent.

You are called "parents," most often stay-at-home moms.

Your work is the most valuable of all.

You are shaping young lives in ways that no one else can.

That is the most vital ministry of all.

And while you don't get paid for it here and now, remember...

The Bible promises us heavenly rewards for the things we do here.

The work you do, paid or unpaid, makes a difference in the lives of others.

And at work you have opportunities to touch the lives of people who are not part of your church family
 or, for that matter, any church family.

Quite probably people who do not have any relationship with Christ.

Your work is an opportunity to be a witness for Christ.

Before Jesus left this earth he gave his followers a job to do.

“You will be my witnesses.”

(Ac.1:8)

You can let your faith be known,

not in preachy ways,

not cornering a coworker with a big Bible in your hand

and insisting they're going to hell without Jesus,

but in more natural ways.

You can make casual mention of things going on at church,

what you are learning in your personal Bible reading,

or what God is doing in your life.

You can be noticeably different in the way you behave around your workplace.

Display the Christ-like character the Holy Spirit is growing up in you,

what the apostle Paul called the fruit of the Spirit:

Love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, and self-control.

(Ga.5:22-23)

How about not using the same foul language that others do?

Not engaging in the racist or sexist jokes.

Treating coworkers, subordinates, your boss, the way Christ would.

You could be true to your word,

completely honest even if it costs you or the company.

Not caving to the pressure to engage in creative bookkeeping

or shade the truth to make the sale.

You could stand out by working hard and working smart at your job.

Not wasting company time or taking home company materials.

And offering your help to others when you can.

Or when you know a coworker is going through a tough time,

offer to pray for them.

And, if they're willing, pray for them on the spot.

And when things are going well for you at work,

when your hard work is paying off,

don't get all puffed up.

Stay humble.

Be sure to give thanks to those who work with you for their part.

And above all else give thanks to God.

Remember the Bible says,

“Not that we are competent in ourselves

to claim anything for ourselves,

but our competence comes from God.” (2Cor.3:5)

My dad was Executive Vice President and later President of his company.

He had to set the course, make decisions, make some tough calls, and oversee everything.

No matter what happened anywhere in the company,

the buck stopped on his desk.

He worked out of a nice office.

But he made sure to stay in touch with what was going on throughout the company,

visiting other offices, visiting the company's warehouses and stores.

He knew the names of store managers and warehouse workers.

He knew what was going on in some of their personal lives.

So much so that he was asked to do a funeral for an employee's father.
 He's been retired for a number of years, now,
 but he still hears from the people he used to work with.
 There's a way to be a Christian in the marketplace that does not turn off people,
 but shines the light of Christ in a way that attracts others.
 It can be done.

Chuck Ripka felt God calling him and a coworker at the bank to one day go start their own bank,
 a different kind of bank.

The day came when they opened the Riverview Community Bank in Otsego, Minnesota.

Like every other bank,

you could go there to open up checking and savings accounts,
 take out a loan or even a home mortgage.

What's different about their bank?

It's a Christian bank.

Both men are Christians.

There is a Bible buried in the foundation

and the words "In God We Trust" engraved in the cornerstone.

And they have published, explicitly biblical principles for how they do business.

You don't have to be a Christian to work there,

to open an account there, or to take out a loan there.

But you do have to agree to abide by those principles.

On a typical day, a young couple walked in to talk with Chuck
 about taking out a mortgage to buy their first home.

He didn't just talk money.

He asked them about their hopes and dreams,

their housing needs now and in the future.

It's the biggest financial decision they've ever made,

so naturally they're nervous about owing so much money.

He listens to their concerns,

shares his own insights,

and then he offers to pray with them about it,

to seek out God's guidance regarding the mortgage

and regarding their entire future together.

They are financially qualified for the loan.

But he encourages them to wait for clarity and peace from God before signing anything.

Another bank employee receives a call from a customer in financial trouble.

She's near tears because she bounced a check and the next paycheck will be short.

The bank employee offers to look at her books

and help her figure out how she can better make ends meet,

gives her the option of paying her due to the bank over time,

and prays with her for God's help in a tough time.

Sound like a place you'd like to bank?

Sound too good to be true?

It was a real bank, until the real estate crash took it down in 2009.

Too many mortgages that went bad.

This bank was not considered too big to fail.

But what if all of us, in our various places of work,

did what we could to bring Christ into our workplaces?

Think of the things that might change.

TGIF might not be on everyone's mind.
Instead, we might occasionally think TGIM:
Thank God It's Monday.

SERMON NOTES:

We were created for work. (Ge.1:26-28; Ep.2:10)

Think of your work as a calling from God. (Col.3:23)

Think of the difference your work makes in the lives of other people.

Think of your work as an opportunity to touch the lives of those outside the family of God. (Ac.1:8; Ga.5:22-23; 2Cor.3:5)