

For several months now, we've been unpacking each of the character virtues listed in 2 Peter chapter 1, considering how they can be developed and applied in various areas of our lives. As Peter says, "[God's] *divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The virtue we're studying currently is godliness. God's power has given us everything we need for "a godly life", says the text. The goal of our life, therefore, is godliness. And this passage suggests that this goal is very much within our reach so long as we avail ourselves of everything God has given us for a godly life. Remember this statement? "Without God, we can't; without us, God won't."

But what do we mean by godliness? To answer that question, it might be best to start off by remembering what godliness is *not*. Last week, Pastor Andrew made clear that godliness is not about strict adherence to religious rules and regulations. It's not about keeping up religious appearances. Godliness is not about being a killjoy, a party-pooper, a prude. A godly person is not someone who has a "holier-than-thou" attitude. Godliness has nothing to do with spiritual elitism. Neither does it have anything to do with being so heavenly-minded that you're of no earthly good. These are common but false notions of godliness.

So the question remains, what is godliness? Andrew shared the following definition with us last Sunday. Godliness is: "**A vibrant, personal relationship with God that manifests itself in actions consistent with who God is and with what He is doing in the earth... a lifestyle that is distinctive from the world, and useful to Christ**" (Jim Berg, *Essential Virtues*).

I grow in godliness when I walk with God so closely that I begin to reflect his character in all aspects of my life. It's about having a genuine consistency between the faith I profess, and the way I actually live. Godliness, as the Apostle Peter says in his first letter, is about, "[Living] *such good lives among the pagans that... they may see [our] good deeds and glorify God*" (1 Peter 2:12). A godly life is therefore a winsome and attractive life. It is distinct precisely because it is wholesome, full of integrity, down-to-earth, and most of all, pervaded by the presence of God.

"Therefore," says Peter, "*make every effort to add to your faith... godliness.*" Last week we saw that godliness is a "bridging" virtue. In other words, the virtues that Peter lists before and after "godliness" cease to be virtues apart from godliness. Without godliness, faith becomes self-centered religiosity. Without godliness, goodness gives birth to pride. Without godliness, knowledge denigrates into hearing God's Word, but not doing it. Without godliness, the virtue of self-control morphs into self-help. Without godliness, perseverance generates bitterness and resentment. And without godliness, we will never get to the later virtues on Peter's list—mutual affection and love—and these are the crown virtues, apart from which our lives will amount to nothing. Godliness, therefore, is a "bridging" virtue.

The question we want to consider today is, **how does the virtue of godliness relate to our work life?** What does it mean for our daily work to flow out of a vibrant, personal relationship with God? How can you approach your work in a way that is consistent with who God is and what he is doing in the earth? How can our work become part of a lifestyle that is distinctive from the world, and useful to Christ?

Let's warm up to this topic by doing a reflection exercise together. I'd like you to pause and think about your work life for a minute or two... Think about your job or jobs, whatever they may be, whether paid or unpaid... Think about the rhythms of your typical workday... Think about the tasks involved... the people you associate with... your work environment... the product or service you provide... Think of what you like about your job... Think of what you don't like about it... And now here's the key question I'd like you to consider:

What is it about your work life that really matters?

Some of you may find that question a bit tricky. We all know that work pays the bills. That matters, but isn't there more to work than that? Most of us can rattle off a list of our daily work routines with little effort. Most of us can readily speak of what we enjoy about our jobs, and perhaps even more readily about what we don't enjoy. But identifying what really *matters* in our work—what is of genuine significance—is often a harder question—albeit it a critically important one.

To better get at this question, let's further engage our imaginations. In your mind's eye, fast-forward through your work life, all the way to the end of your career. Can you see it? You're about to retire, and your work associates are hold a special dinner party in your honor. Look around the banquet hall... Who's there? Who is speaking with whom? What's the mood in the place? Are people enjoying themselves? From across the room, you notice a co-worker glancing in your direction and leaning over to whisper something to a friend. Lots of people are talking about you tonight, because this is *your* night. What are they saying?

The time comes for the obligatory short speeches—commemorating, thanking, roasting you (in my own picture I'm getting roasted by Jeremy, and he's in it for payback because of all the grief I've caused him over the years). But back to your own picture... One by one, different people come to the microphone to share stories about you, to raise a glass. Some comments are funny, some

touching, some merely polite. The time comes for the main speaker—a surprise speaker whose been slated to say a few words summing up your career, your contribution, what you meant to the organization.

You wonder who this surprise speaker will be. What will this person say? What will this person think really mattered about all those years you worked—all that effort you put in? The identity of the guest speaker is revealed. It is none other than Jesus himself. You had no idea he had been invited to speak at this shindig, but there he is, sandals, scars and all.

Unlike those who had previously spoken, Jesus slips the microphone out of its stand, walks over to your table, and sits down right next to you. The room has fallen silent now—all eyes are on you and Jesus. He looks at you, and knowingly says your name. A smile comes across his face. You can see the care and friendship in his eyes. He begins with these words: “I’m going to tell you folks what my friend here did at work all these years that really mattered.”

You listen with rapt attention at what is chronicled over the next several minutes. Everyone in the room is captivated by just how different this speech is from all the others. What Jesus sees as important is quite unlike what had been emphasized by the other speakers. As you listen, you begin to think to yourself, “Had I only realized what mattered about my work in Jesus’ eyes... I would have seen certain things... *differently*... I would have done certain things... *differently*.”

I adapted that reflection piece from an article by Dr. Michael Zigarelli, who’s an Associate Professor of Management at the Regent University Graduate School of Business.

What matters most about your work is often not what matters to the world. What really matters most is what the “man with the microphone” thinks—what *Jesus* thinks. For many of us, this is not a startling revelation. In fact, we’ve been talking all year long about what it means to reflect Jesus in all of life, and without a doubt, most people spend the majority of life’s waking hours *at work*.

The problem is that all too often, when we cross that threshold from Sunday to Monday—from worship hall to workplace—the good intentions we had to connect our faith with our work often fade away quickly. Powerful realities both on the job and in our minds create obstacles that hinder our pursuit of godliness in our daily work. Chances are by the time Tuesday rolls around, the thought of connecting our faith with our work has become a distant memory.

Many Christians find a certain frustration in this. Maybe you’ve made some efforts along the way to bridge the gap between your faith and your work life, only to give up due to distraction or discouragement. The question of how we can pursue godliness in our daily jobs is admittedly a challenging one. You might even be thinking, “Steve, how can you even really know what it’s like? You’re a pastor! What I want to know is how my work as a financial advisor, or a child-care worker, or a data entry clerk, or a lawyer, or a salesperson, or a stay-at-home mom, relates to godliness. How could I possibly learn to see *my* job as aligned with who God is and what he is doing in this earth? How can *my* daily work become distinct and useful for Christ? Well, it all begins with understanding what “the man with the microphone” thinks. **Godliness in work begins by embracing God’s perspectives about work.** That is what we’ll explore for the remainder of this teaching time. Today’s message will actually more on what we need to *know* rather than what we need to *do*. Because until we know and embrace God’s perspectives about work, all the practical tips in the world about what we can do to foster godliness in our work lives will not get us very far.

In exploring God’s perspectives about work, we begin in the beginning—Genesis—the first book of the Bible. Genesis chapter 1 has just described God’s creation of the heavens and the earth, and chapter 2 starts off with these words:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had been doing.

Notice that this passage says explicitly, not one, not two, but three times, that when God was creating the world, he was doing what? Working. God works! Ever ask yourself what God does all day long? He works! In John 5:17, Jesus says, “*My Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working.*” Not only does God work, but he also takes enjoyment in his work. Genesis 1:31 says, “*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*” Sometimes, after a day of yard work, I’ll sit out in the back yard with a cold drink, put my feet up and survey the results of my labor with a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment. God does the same thing. You see...

Work is good, because God works.

The very idea of work has value and dignity because God himself is a worker. But for many people, the statement that work is a good thing will come across as quite counterintuitive. After all, folks say TGIF, not TGIM. In his groundbreaking book about work, American historian Studs Terkel wrote these words:

This book, being about work, is by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all) about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us. The scars, psychic as well as physical, brought home to the supper table and the TV set, may

have touched, malignantly, the soul of our society... There are, of course, the happy few who find savor in their daily job... but for the many, there is a hardly-concealed discontent.

Ouch. Maybe that's a bit overstated. Regardless, let's have a show of hands: How many do indeed encounter difficulties and frustrations in your work with some regularity? Okay, that's 97% of you, and the other 3% are lying. Scripture teaches that the difficulties and frustrations we experience in our work are a result of the curse of human sinfulness and rebellion against God. Until Jesus returns, work will have its frustrations, so don't be surprised when it does.

But here's the thing. All too often people—Christians included—tend to think of work as a curse in itself, a necessary evil for making a living in a fallen world. People fantasize about winning lotto so they can live a work-free life. And just so you know, we're not the first people inclined to think that a perfect world would be a work-free world. In their religious mythology, the ancient Greeks believed their gods to be above having to work. One Greek writer named Hesiod said that to live like a god was to be free from cares, free from *labor*, and free from grief.

The Bible, however, gives us a completely different picture both of God and of work. The God of the Bible worked, not only in the beginning when he created the heavens and the earth, but he continues to work, even this very moment. The Psalms, for example, speak of how God never slumbers nor sleeps but is always at work, watching over his people. That's good to know, isn't it? *Work is good, because God works.* It'll be hard to grow in godliness in your daily work if you don't understand that.

"Okay, fine," you say. "I can accept that the concept of work has value and dignity because God himself works, but how does that translate into my own personal work situation?"

This is where it's important to understand that you and I are made to work, because **we're created in the image of the God who works.** Please turn back one page in your Bible to Genesis chapter 1, verse 26-28.

Then God said, "Let us make [human beings] in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living creature that moves on the ground."

Because the God who works made us in his own image, it's in us to work. It's part of our makeup; part of our DNA; part of who we are. Psalm 104 speaks of the natural rhythms of the day and night that order the activities of human beings. It says, "*The sun rises... Then people go forth to their labor until evening*" (22-23). The fact of work in our lives is as much a part of the way God designed things as the rising and the setting of the sun each day.

This is probably why there's something about not having enough work, or not being able to work, that just doesn't feel quite right to us human beings. It feels... unnatural. I remember when I first came to Canada from the US, and I had to wait about 9 months for my immigrant status to come through, so I could work here legally. In those days I did my best to fill my time... I took a correspondence course, I did chores around the house, I tried to teach myself how to cook... but I just didn't have enough work to keep me occupied throughout the day. I had this nagging feeling that something wasn't quite the way it should be, that my life was missing something. When we *can't* work for whatever reason, we often *long* to work. Certainly, we all need our rest—I'm sure many of us in this room, including myself right about now, could actually do with less work and more rest. But once we've rested, there is something within most of us that gravitates back toward work—both paid and unpaid.

Jan and I decided that she would stay home until all three of our kids were in school full time. As of this month, they are. And so, now that the demands of being a stay-at-home mom have lessened somewhat, Jan is has begun looking for part-time paid work. Yes, there are financial reasons for this. But there's also something within most of us that seeks work out by virtue of the fact that we're made in the image of the God who works.

Indeed, it's interesting to note that many people who really don't need the money choose to work, just the same. The richest American of his day, Andrew Carnegie, had enough money for twenty or thirty lifetimes. But he said that meaning in life for him came not from his fortune, but from his work. He kept right on working throughout his life, because he, like all of us, was created in the image of the God who works.

When God created human beings in his image, his command to them was to "subdue the earth" as we saw in our Genesis 1 passage. The work God gives us is to subdue the earth. What does that mean? It certainly does *not* mean to conquer it with violence or to abuse it in any way. Rather, it means that **we are God's co-workers in caring for the world.** We are God's co-workers in looking after creation, and that includes serving the needs of others, and helping society function as it needs to.

This means is that **all legitimate work can be seen as an extension of God's work.** By "legitimate" I mean work that somehow contributes to what God wants done in the world, and does not actively contribute to what he does not want done. So we can partner with God in caring for the world through housekeeping or construction; secretarial or medical; accounting or custodial; teaching or engineering, and on and on. All of these jobs actually matter to God. They make a difference to how the world functions. Some of you may object: "Through *my* job I can participate with God in caring for this world? Steve, you don't understand... I have a *secular* job." Or, "My job is so *ordinary*, so mundane. I just can't see how my job could have *anything* to do with God's work in this world."

This brings us back to another misconception about godliness that Andrew mentioned last Sunday. He told us that **godliness is not vocationally defined**. Pastors and missionaries do not automatically have more godly jobs than other Christ-followers do. Cornerstone's ministry theme for 2011 is "Reflecting Jesus in all of life." That is a calling for each and every one of us, not just the pastors. Jesus is to be the Lord of every aspect of our lives, including our work lives, regardless of what our particular work assignment happens to be.

I appreciate that for many of us, the way our jobs connect with God's purposes in this world is not such an obvious thing as it may seem to be for us pastors. Part of the reason why it's difficult to see how our jobs connect with God's purposes is that many Christians labor under pervasive myths about what kinds of work really matter to God. I'd like to take the rest of the sermon time to touch on two of those myths:

Let's call the first myth **the spirit-body hierarchy**. This myth assumes that God is much more interested in the things of the spirit than the things of the body; that the inward and spiritual is far more relevant to God than the outward and physical. Because of this myth, some Christians subtly rank careers according to the extent to which they involve soul-work. Careers in ministry come out on the top of the list, because people like us pastors are said to have given ourselves to soul-work. If this view were true, I could stand here and say to most of you, "My job is better than your job."

After those in ministry careers would come those in the so-called "helping professions"—counselors, teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, stay-at-home moms, and the like. These jobs are not as much about "soul-work" as we pastors and missionaries, but they involve the inner life more than the third group, whose work deals quite directly with the material or bodily matters. In the third group you have engineers, architects, farmers, truck-drivers, builders, technicians, and the like, along with bankers, brokers, accountants and others who work daily with the stuff that is the root of all kinds of evil—*money*.

Friends, this way of looking at things is seriously flawed, and not at all biblical. Notice how scripture speaks of the way God made human beings: "*Then the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being*" (Gen. 2:7) God does not deal with you just as a soul. When he created you, he created all of you, body *and* spirit. The Apostle Paul, himself a tentmaker by trade, urges us "to present [our] *bodies* as a living and holy sacrifice" as a vital aspect of our worship to God. Scripture in no way advocates a spirit-body hierarchy. God cares about the full range of human needs. If he were only interested in soul-work, then he needn't have created a physical universe; he needn't have sent Christ in a human body; he needn't have resurrected his body after death, nor would he be planning on resurrecting our bodies either. But he is.

So if you work as a clothier, a dietician, a coach, a cook, a physiotherapist, a manufacturer, or in any other "physical" occupation, take heart. Your work is not spiritually inferior because it concerns itself with the body or with material goods. Remember, your Lord was a carpenter. Your work is an important part of God's work in looking after many very legitimate needs in this world. Have you ever asked yourself this question: *Where would the world be without people who do what you do?*

The second myth that often keeps people from seeing how their work matters to God is the **eternal-temporal hierarchy**. Listen to the following testimony from a man named Chuck. How would you evaluate what Chuck is saying about his faith and his work? "For ten years I worked as an architect in a large city. I worked my way through the ranks and had a very good position in the firm. I enjoyed my work, but as I thought about it, my work seemed insignificant. For example, I helped design some office buildings downtown, and some homes on the outskirts of the city. But I realized those office buildings would last 50, 75 years at most. Then they'd be pulled down. Those houses would become tomorrow's boarding houses and slums. I wanted to do something more significant with my life, so I quit my job as an architect, went to seminary, and am now working on the mission field. Now, when I share the gospel, I'm building truth into people's lives, truth that has eternal significance. I'm not saying everyone should become a pastor or missionary. But we really have to think about what it means to live our lives for God. For me, it meant turning my back on what is passing and giving my life to what was eternal."

Chuck, like many Christians, assumes that the things that matter most are the things that pertain to eternity, that what happens here and now has meaning only in light of forever. So to give one's career to auto mechanics, or the advertising of toothpaste, or the buying and selling of real estate, or the preparing of financial statements, is in essence to give oneself to something which is not all that... significant... at least not in God's eyes.

Scripture does distinguish between the world that is seen, and the world that is unseen, calling the world we can see "temporary" and the unseen world "eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). So there do seem to be two sides, two aspects to reality. But the Bible shows that *both* time *and* eternity—*both* the natural *and* supernatural realms—are very real and very important to God. One is not "ultimate reality" while the other is "mundane reality." Yes, Jesus says we mustn't work for bread that perishes, nor are we to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth where moth and rust destroy. But does this mean that so-called temporal work doesn't matter to God?

When a Christian salesman dies, the heavy-duty drill presses he used to sell won't follow him into eternity. But to say his work had no value in God's eyes for this reason is nonsense. His work had all the value it needed for God's purposes in this world. Those drills may have punched holes for airplane engine parts, and thus help produce transportation for people and goods. They may have put holes in industrial air conditioners for use in schools, hospitals, businesses or churches. The sale of those drill presses probably even helped to create various jobs in other industries. It is simply not scriptural to say that the impact of someone's work has to last forever to matter to God.

Going back to Chuck, the architect turned missionary, there was certainly nothing wrong with his career change into ministry in and of itself. If that's what God calls and gifts you to, by all means, do it! Pastor Jeremy did it. He went from being an accountant to

being a pastor, but let's be clear: he did not leave a less noble profession for a nobler one. No! I mean, it's a real bonus for Jeremy that he gets to work with Andrew and Kevin and me... but the Christian accountant... or let's say the Christian *architect*... who stays in his profession and designs building with excellence, diligence, fairness, and integrity; who loves his wife as Christ loves the church; who raises his kids in godly wisdom and instruction; who radiates the love and message of Jesus to his coworkers—the Christian architect who engages in his work as a co-worker with God in caring for this world—a world which needs safe, well-designed buildings for people to live and work in—that architect will receive a “well done good and faithful servant” from God at the end of time. If that architect had a retirement dinner and Jesus were to show up as the guest speaker, our Lord would have much to say about what that architect did that really mattered.

The product or service of your work may be temporal, but the people who benefit from it are eternal. There's a scholar named Leland Ryken who has written extensively about work and the Bible, and explains that the Bible contains no hint of a hierarchy of occupations. In the pages of scripture, we come across soldiers, garment makers, shepherds, religious officials, artists, merchants, contractors, night watchmen, doctors, and judges, to name a few, and there is no sense that God classifies certain kinds of work as higher than others. All work can be done to the glory of God, if it is done with excellence, if it is offered to God as an aspect of your worship, if it is done with love and care for those you work with, and lines with God's purposes in this world—and his purposes in this world are much broader than we often think they are. His purposes include the ordinary, every needs of the world. So friend, I think there's a pretty good chance that your job has something to do with God's work in caring for this world. I encourage you to think about how it does in the days to come.

This morning we've been talking about how godliness at work begins by embracing God's perspectives about work. We've focused more today on what we need to *know* than what we need to *do*, because right doing proceeds from right knowing.

We saw that work is good because God works.

We saw that we are made to work because we're created in the image of the God who works.

We saw that we are God's co-workers in caring for the world.

We saw that all legitimate work we do can be seen as an extension of God's own work in this world.

And we debunked the myths of the spirit-body hierarchy and the eternal-temporal hierarchy.

Just taking these truths to heart is a tremendous beginning toward growing in godliness in our work— toward actually going about our jobs in a way that is consistent with who God is, and what he is doing on earth—toward approaching our work in a way that is distinctive from the world, and useful to Christ.

I'm excited to share with you that as a congregation, we will be taking this idea further next month during our missions emphasis. Christian mission, of course, is more than what happens in other countries. Mission is first and foremost about what happens locally, as we go about our daily lives. Work is a huge part of our daily lives, as we've said, so in October, we're going to set aside a special time to:

- Commissioning people to their daily work (we do this for pastors and missionaries; your work is just as much a part of God's mission as what he's doing through pastors and missionaries)
- Practical Cornerstone resource available in print and online: ***A Week of Faith at Work: Practical Ideas for Practicing Christ's Presence @ Work.***

http://cornerstonechurch.celect.org/uploads/files/0022/2907/a_week_of_faith_work.pdf