

When I was growing up in New Jersey, school always started the Wednesday after Labor Day. It was a bittersweet holiday. Here, kids (and teachers) get a Monday holiday off, which I imagine would make it a much happier holiday! Tomorrow though is Labor Day, not a day to dread the start of school or a day off from school, but the day we celebrate the contribution that everyone who works makes to the good of this world. It’s not a church holiday like Easter, but it is a day the church celebrates because we recognize that the work that the Christian does is also their calling and vocation from God in the world. It wasn’t always that way in the church. Before about 500 years ago, the church only considered the full-time church work of a monk or a priest or a nun as the kind of work God would have any interest in. Anything else God looked down on, or so it was thought.

But then Martin Luther came along and began teaching that all of our work, when done trusting God, when done in faith for God is pleasing to God. He wrote, “...the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks...all works are measured before God by faith alone.” (in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*). Erastus was a believer in Jesus, he was also the Corinth city director of public works. The Apostle Paul earned his living making tents. Bezalel and Oholiab were artists in all sorts of materials who helped build the Tabernacle for the glory of God. All worked, and all glorified God in their work. We can, too.

Our work is something that can bring glory to God and advance the Kingdom of God. In light of that I thought I would make the word “work” into an acrostic, having each letter represent a word that tells something about our work as it relates to God and to others. Let’s jump right in.

The first letter in work is “W,” and what might that represent? I thought of a number of different possibilities but I finally settled on the word, “Worrying,” but not the kind of worrying that we’re called not to do. It’s a different kind of “worrying,” the worry that means attention to fine details: you “worry” at something until you get it just right. Paul was a tentmaker—and if you want to make a waterproof tent you have to worry about the details of your stitching. Bezalel and Oholiab were involved in the making of another tent—the Tabernacle when God met his people in their desert wanderings. In Exodus 31:3ff we read that they were “filled with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship,” and they served God in what they did. Erastus had to be sure to get all the fine details of managing the grand city of Corinth or people would suffer. In your work, do you work worrying at your work, paying attention to detail and making sure that everything is right, as Paul and Erastus and Bezalel did, or do you just let it slide, doing just enough to get by? Which do you think God wants you to do?

That question leads right into the next meaning coming out of the spelling of work—the “O,” which I see can remind us that our work is our offering to God. What kind of offering might we give that would honor God? Abel and Cain both brought offerings to God: Abel of the *best* of his flocks and Cain of *some* his harvest. God was pleased with Abel’s offering but not with Cain’s. Malachi 1:8 reads, “When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty.” God isn’t pleased with offerings that aren’t representing a heart full of love for him. If our work is seen as an offering to God, then it should be the best work that we can do.

How can our work be an offering to God? Remember Jesus said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). If we help someone we’re helping God. On the other hand, Numbers 5:6: “Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way and *so* is unfaithful to the LORD is guilty and must confess the sin they have committed” (Numbers 5:6,7). Whether we help or whether we hurt, God considers that we’re doing it to him. Every bit of our work can contribute to the larger good of our world. What we do for a paying job helps our company (that’s why they pay us) and the pay helps us, to be sure, but it also helps our families, our communities and our world, and in helping them we are blessing and glorifying God. Many people are retired from some paying job, or perhaps never worked at a paying job, but all of us have worked and I hope are still working for the good. My mother told me about one time when my older brother was sick and stayed home from school. He told my dad, “Boy, Mom has it easy. All she does is watch TV and talk on the telephone!”

My mom would roll her eyes at that! I thank God for the work that she poured into my life, and she never got paid a cent for it. So our work, whatever it is, is an offering pleasing to God when we do it knowing that we are helping others as well. Do you realize that your work, whatever it is, touches the world?

The next letter in work is the letter “R:” represents two things: RE-creation that leads to REC-reation.

If our work is an offering from God, it’s an offering that God has first given to us in creation. All that we have comes from God, and by using our skills and abilities we get to work alongside of God in the task of making this world a better place: RE-creating our broken world into what it should be. 2 Corinthians 6:1 calls us “God’s fellow workers.” God works in the world and we’re co-workers with him. When I worked as a chemist people would sometimes ask me, “How can you be a chemist—a scientist—and be a Christian? They thought, as many people do today, that science disproves Christianity, but I would tell them that I believed that God created the universe, and that what I do as a scientist, as a chemist, is simply discover ways of putting things together that God had already made possible through creation. I *get* to discover what is in the mind of God. I think it was the great scientist Isaac Newton who first said that, but it’s something that still speaks to both my heart and mind. Our work, all of it, is a participation in God’s work in the world. We get to worry at our work until it’s right, as God made all things good; we get to serve others through our work and so glorify God and we get to realize that God hasn’t abandoned us but is working right alongside of us to fulfill God’s good and perfect will. What could be better?

But without the hard determined worrying work of RE-creation in honor of God we wouldn’t really be able to enjoy the rest of REC-reation. Tomorrow is Labor day, celebrating the contributions of laboring people, and we don’t celebrate it with more work but with REC-reation and rest. God worked for six days and then rested – not because he was tired but as a celebration that he was ruling over all creation and that all of creation he made was “very good.” We’re made to work (more about that in a minute), but we’re also made to rest as well. We get in trouble when we don’t do both. As the saying goes, “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” But on the other hand, “All play and no work makes Jack a dull boy,” too. In the past men were particularly susceptible to the idea that work is what defines them as individuals, though in more recent years that mistake is becoming more common among women as well. One big trouble with that is that when a person retires they don’t know what else they can do with their life other than work, except maybe to die, and that is what too many people do within the year after they retire. Work is a good thing when it is about doing the best that you can for the glory of God and when you make it your offering to God. But we lose out when we forget that work and recreation are *both* on God’s agenda for us. We might quit working for a paycheck, but I hope that none of us ever quit working—using our skills and abilities for the glory of God RE-Creating, restoring the world, and even then, when we work, I hope that we always remember that God wants us to add to the mix of work the blessings of rest and REC-reation.

I struggled with finding a word that would go along with the letter “K” in work. I finally decided that since I wasn’t a very good speller in the first place I would use the word “Kultivation” spelled with a “K” even if the spell checker on my computer had “Konnections” (*I told you I couldn’t spell!*) about it. Kultivation points back to the Garden of Eden where God made everything “very good.” Now you might think if everything is “very good” then to change something is to make it worse. But God gave the man and the woman a task to “subdue” the earth—to tame it, and to “rule” over the fish, birds and animals. We often think of rulers are benefiting themselves, and often that’s their goal, but the ancient Israelites, and I hope us, today would see the duty of rulers to Kultivate those they rule, to fertilize and water the worn-out soil where they live so they might grow. That’s what God did in the garden, giving them a model to follow. They didn’t, and look at the trouble that came from it. We as God’s redeemed people can Kultivate the world around us by our work, turning the soil by our attention to details, planting the seed by caring for those around us, and by preparing to reap the harvest that God causes to grow. We might not think that our work will result in anything that will last into eternity, but the world is, as Jesus said, “God’s harvest field.” He told his disciples to “Ask the Lord of the harvest...to send out workers into his harvest fields.” And then in answer to their prayer, Jesus sent them out into the world, and we are the result. You are already stationed in the midst of the people who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. God has put you in your work, whatever it is, to work for the glory of God. Will you pray, “Lord, send me?” Tomorrow is Labor Day, and the day after can come the answer to your prayer.