



GOOD JOB

YOUR WORK MATTERS

Most of our life happens outside of church, and for many of us that means it happens at work. Some have careers in the workforce, others have work to do at home with family or volunteering in retirement. Your work matters to God. Your job can be glorious if you glorify God in your job.

GOOD JOB • Titus 1:1–9 • Tim McConnell • January 19, 2020

“Good job.” We are looking at faith and work right now, recognizing that we were made by God with certain gifts and talents, time and energy we are meant to use to His glory in this world. We were made to work. Work is a bigger category than a paying job. Work is whatever you are doing regularly with your time—raising kids, keeping home, volunteering or plugging away at a paying job. Your work matters. Your work matters to God. And your work, your job, can be glorious if you glorify God in your job. We all long to hear “Good job.” We love that, and even more we want to hear what Jesus said in Matthew 25: “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” (Matthew 25:21). So, we were made by God to work; it’s part of our makeup. But work is cursed, so it’s frustrating and difficult, and we can get confused about what it means. We either think too much of it and wrap too much of our identity into it, or we think too little of it and see it as the necessary curse to get a paycheck. The bottom line is this: Work can be redeemed by the Gospel. The Gospel can change how you work, wherever you work, and your job can be glorious when you glorify God in your job.

What our passage teaches us today is that the first proving ground for all of this, the first place we attempt to use our gifts and make a difference, the first venue for all of our confusions and false expectations, and, therefore, our first and most important opportunity for redemption through the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the work, the job we do, in family. Good job, at home. We long to hear that. The family picture. Here’s ours. [McConnells on screen] Many of you got it in the mail. What we don’t show you is the work that went into getting there. The perfect family photo. It doesn’t always work out. [Beach Struggle on screen] It’s hard to get everyone on the same page sometimes. [Take1] You have to take what you can get [Take 2]. Sometimes not everyone is interested [One-Person]. Or kids are not all that happy about it. [Kids]. Photoshop isn’t always the answer [PhotoShop]. But a theme can help [Theme] to finally get that perfect family photo. Boy, it’s not easy to win at that one! Hard work. Hard work. But it can be redeemed.

Let’s open Titus. A short letter to a young church in Crete, and to its pastor. Titus probably came to Christ when Paul and Barnabas were sharing the Gospel in Antioch (Acts 11). He shows up again and again in Paul’s letters, having traveled with him on missions to Ephesus, Galatia and other places. He was probably the courier for Paul’s letters to Corinth, and apparently he was with Paul when the church got started on the island of Crete. Paul moved on, but left Titus behind to get things in order, and the first

order of business was to find and appoint elders, leaders who could listen to Christ and obey His voice, who could shepherd the church and keep it from getting off track. “Elder,” by the way, is the Greek word *presbuteros*, which is where we get our name Presbyterian. We have elders to keep us on track with Jesus. I hope you pray for them. I’m one of them.

The opening verse sets the context. “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness” (Titus 1:1). To further faith and knowledge. Faith, trust in God, because if we trust in this world or in our own work, or performance, or anything else, we will be disappointed. And knowledge, awareness of the truth that leads to godliness, because bad theology hurts people. “In the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2). God who does not lie. Non-lying God. Context. Crete was famous for lying. In verse 12 we get a quote from one of Crete’s own philosophers, who said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12). He’s talking about his own people! Does that sound bad? Research indicates today that 60 percent of us tell two to three lies in a 10-minute conversation. You hear somewhere around 200 lies per day, and that’s not including the lies you tell yourself. In a lying world, we need to hear from a non-lying God. The letter is to Titus, a true, genuine, legitimate child of the faith. “To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (Titus 1:4).

Now, here’s what Titus is going to do. He’s going to find leaders ready to shape the household of God by looking for leaders who have shaped and influenced their family well. In the middle of the Cretan culture, here comes the ideal leadership type to help promote the Gospel and maintain the church in every town. Get ready for some sting here. Remember, this is not setting the outer limits of leadership, but setting the central ideal. Understand? It’s not saying every leader will be all of these things, but that the ideal leader should demonstrate these virtues over these vices. Here it is: “An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (Titus 1:6–8). Oof! That’s a high bar.

A few notes here. First, “a man.” Should all elders be men? Many churches believe this, but at First Pres wom-

en serve in all offices of the church. I can only say this quickly and I know it won't satisfy every hearer, but we don't believe this passage was meant to limit leadership to men forever. That would be inconsistent with Acts 2 where the Spirit is poured out on women to prophesy; Luke 8 where the women supporting Jesus' ministry are listed by name; John 20 where Mary Magdalene is told by Jesus to proclaim his resurrection; and the citations of women leaders like Lydia, Priscilla and Phoebe found in Paul's letters. Scripture interprets Scripture, and you have to let the clear places clarify the foggy spots. Not all Christians agree, and we are patient and humble with one another, but I sure want you to know, we do not ordain women in our church believing the Bible says not to. We wouldn't do that. We ordain women to all offices of the church believing that a good understanding of the Bible allows for and promotes that as part of the redemption of Christ over the curse of the Fall. Honor, dignity and equality for women, they are found in this Scripture, not in an argument against it. Honor, dignity and equality for all races, like the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King we celebrate this weekend, they are found in these Scriptures not against them. Big topic. Send your letters and emails to Jennifer. Moving on.

Here's the standard. The proving ground of home and family provides an indicator of leadership. Blameless. Faithful to one spouse, literally a "one-woman man." Not a statement against remarriage or divorce, but against polygamy and adultery. Faithful. Whose children at home believe, have faith, and aren't running wild. Not overbearing, not violent or abrasive or quick-tempered. Not given to drunkenness. It's just one word, and it means literally "alongside wine." Where they go wine goes, and where wine goes, they go. Tied to alcohol. Bound to addiction. Or after dishonest gain. Instead of these vices, they should have these virtues. Hospitable. Literally, "a lover of strangers." Lover of good. Not just a hater of bad, but a lover of good! Self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. In the middle of a cultural stream where it was very hard to find and stand on what is right, Scripture gives us these virtue and vice lists. This, not that. Believing that truth is in order to goodness, that faith and knowledge lead to godliness, that what's inside will spill out to the outside, and that our leaders need to be found solid in faith at the core.

In all of that, I hope you picked up on the family stuff. Marriage is solid. Kids are okay. House is in order. Even just reading that can be a sting, can't it? Why? Well, it's because we have placed so much expectation and hope on ourselves that this, rather obvious, standard in Scripture can come down like a ton of bricks on our hearts. Good job. I want to do a good job. And if there's anywhere at all I want to hear, "Good job," it's at home.

I remember when I was a new parent, and some good friends of ours had their first child. We came over to visit and I asked him, "Hey, new Dad. How do you feel?" "Tim," he said, "two things have just happened to my heart. I love more than I ever thought I had capacity to love, and I am more frightened than I have ever thought I could possibly be." Parenting is a huge deal. Enormous. The expectations and hopes we have can be crushing. Why? Because even if you do everything right, things still go wrong! But you won't do everything right. There will be mess. Jim Daly, President of Focus on the Family, says in his book, "When Parenting Isn't Perfect," "God does his best work in the mess. ... And families have the blessing of mess. It's thrilling and frustrating and frightening because it's real, perhaps the most real and most powerful thing we'll experience in our mortal lives. It's not perfect. We're not perfect. But maybe, even in the midst of its imperfection, family reflects something better. We see the heart of God in it." No one can guarantee the salvation of their children, or take lifelong responsibility for the choices kids make. There is no perfect parent. There is no perfect child, or sister, or brother. God bless the mess.

So what is all this about then? This passage. What I'm trying to get us to see is that we are called to make a difference in the world. We are called to work. Your work matters. The first place you strive to make a difference is your home. If you have kids, it's with kids. If you live with a spouse, it's that. If you are single, it's the home you make in singleness. This is the first sphere of influence in your life, and when you step out to exercise influence on the world, this is the first proving ground. That's why Titus was to look at this as an indicator in his search for elders. But watch this now, let's loop back around. The trouble with work is that it's cursed. We can't do exactly what we intend. Let's look at the work of home and family, the work of parenting. You can't produce what you intend to produce. And, here's the nub, if your identity is wrapped up in your success at making home perfect, at making perfect kids, you are doomed! Work trips us up, remember, because we either think too much of it and rest our identity in it, or because we think too little of it and see it as something to escape. The Gospel changes our work. The Gospel redeems our work. What does the Gospel say? It says your identity is not wrapped up in your success, and your contribution matters to God as it shapes you in the image of Christ, serves God and serves others.

So, this elder, this elder ought to ideally have all these indicator lights going off, external indications of internal spiritual health, right? Then, verse 9, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). Hold the trust-

worthy message. What's the trustworthy message? The Gospel. The good news of what Jesus has done to redeem our imperfect lives. That elder, that leader ... If you want to lead, you had better preach the Gospel to yourself, and hold onto it with all you've got, and believe it with all your heart, and rest on it with all your soul, to the point that you can preach it, teach it, show it, proclaim it to others, and tell it straight when someone else bends it. You better hold onto the Gospel if you want to move out and work in this world. The trustworthy message.

What is the trustworthy message? Roll back up the page. It's the faith of God's elect, God's children. The knowledge of the truth that leads to goodness. The hope of eternal life built on a promise of a God who does not lie. All given to your heart through the preaching of the Word, the proclamation given "by the command of God our Savior." You had better hold fast to that. When you look at your work. Your body of work. Your influence. Your leadership. Your parenting if you parent. Your governance of yourself, self-control. The shape of your home. When you look at all that, what do you see? See it. And run quickly to the trustworthy message: Your identity is not wrapped up in your success, and your work matters. You, like Titus, are a child of God. A true son. A true daughter. The true message you need, it's right here: "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." How do we hammer ourselves with regret and shame when we have a Savior who says to us from the very beginning, "I know you can't make it on your own. I know you can't achieve what you wish you could. I know you can't wield the perfect influence and write the perfect story for you and those around you. I know you can't. That's why I came. That's why I died. That's why I rose again." Grace and Peace. Receive the grace to know the peace. Your family isn't perfect, but you have been named part of the family of God in Christ. "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

Well, friends, I knew we were biting off more than we could chew this week. There's so much more to untangle. But we are jumping in. Hang on with us and we will find more insight. Let me close again with The Halverson Benediction: "You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. God has a purpose in your being there. Christ lives in you and has something he wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in the grace and love and power of Jesus Christ." Amen.

STUDY GUIDE

GOOD JOB • "At Home"

Titus 1:1-9

UP: UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Titus 1:1-9.

Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note any words or phrases that seem meaningful.

- 1) What qualities of a leader stick out to you in this passage? Do any of these qualities seem unnecessary or odd for leaders in the church?
- 2) Do you think it is important for church leaders to exhibit these characteristics? Why or why not?
- 3) Which of these characteristics is your greatest strength? Where do you have room for growth?
- 4) What sort of leadership did you see modeled in your home growing up?
- 5) What have you sought to do differently as you have created your own home? What have you hope to replicate?
- 6) How does this passage help you consider how your work and faith interact?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Reread verse 9. When have you been able to encourage others with the Gospel? When have you had to stand up for your faith?

IN: Connect with Each Other

Take a moment to consider which areas of your home life you may need to offer up to the Lord in this season. Is there anyone in your home that you need to ask to forgive you at this time? Lift these things up to the Lord in prayer.