



$$W_3 \times O + R = K$$

Happy Labor Day Weekend! This is the time of the year when we celebrate how much we love and are passionate about our work, right? Or is it rather, a day we get to escape from our work?

What was your first job? Mine was a janitor. I worked all 4 years of High School, most of my college years, and a year at seminary taking out garbage, cleaning restrooms, and moping floors.

What was your first job?

Labor Day Weekend started originally out of the labor rights movement. It began more than 100 years ago, as a day to honor the rights and dignity of the American worker. Unions were just being started, and they held picnics.

Let's be honest though, how many of us really want to think about work this weekend? This holiday weekend has over the years become a last chance to take the family camping, go to beach, or go boating. This has become a long weekend to goof off before the Fall season officially starts and it's time to buckle down to business again.

Let's read this passage together from Colossians 3:17, ***“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”***

Today I'd like to talk about this Word from God's Word, using this formula:

$W_3 \times O + R = K$ Don't worry, there will not be an algebra quiz!

We start with **W**. There are 3 key words that start with W in this equation. The first W word is the first word of the Scripture passage. It's the word **WHATEVER**.

This is one of the most powerful of truths. **WHATEVER** we do can be offered unto God. In fact, whatever we do, wherever we are, whoever we are with, can all and always be offered to Christ, when we ***“do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”***

Today you happen to be with us here at St. Paul. We are part of a movement that stretches back 500 years to Martin Luther. What Luther discovered, and the movement he started, has a lot to do with work.

Back in the 1500's the Church was teaching the people that you had to do certain things – you had to work – to get God to love you, to forgive you, and to get to heaven. If you wanted to avoid suffering forever in hell, you had to work, perform. If you didn't do enough in this life, they were taught, you would spend millions of years in purgatory until you did do enough to get into heaven.

Martin Luther came along and said, “No, that's not what God says in the Bible at all! Those teachings aren't God's at all.” You can't EARN God's love or forgiveness or heaven. Those are free gifts from God. God GIVES those because only Jesus COULD earn them, and Jesus DID earn them for you! They are free gifts to you because God loves you and He sent Jesus to give His life to earn forgiveness and heaven FOR you when you couldn't on your own. And God GIVES these gifts to you because He loves you more than you know. God wants to be WITH you NOW, and YOU to be with Him FOREVER.

God says clearly, ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** *Ephesians 2:8-10*

On top of that, the Church leaders back then said there were certain jobs that were holier than the average person's job. They said there was a difference between “sacred work” and “secular work” and secular work that most people did, was not as good as the sacred work of priests and monks.

Martin Luther upended society then by saying that since forgiveness and heaven are God's gifts to you, earned for you by Jesus, THEN certain jobs (like priest or monk) aren't BETTER at EARNING forgiveness and heaven. No jobs earn anything from God. Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus MEANS that all people are EQUAL before God. We're ALL sinners in need of God's grace. So all work is on a level playing field.

Martin Luther could use pretty colorful language at times and he said the guy whose job it is to shovel the horse poop out of the barn [Luther used different word for "poop" though] -- the guy shoveling out the barn was doing just as holy of work as the priest standing at the altar. BOTH are good, holy work. Both are pleasing to God.

Friend, if you are the President of the United States, a CEO, or a janitor, a ditch-digger, an assembly line worker, a retiree, you're not better or worse than any other. All jobs, all work, is good and holy, if it uses the skills God gave you in an honest way.

"The works of monks and priests, however hard and arduous they 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, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone. Indeed, the menial housework of a manservant or maidservant is often more acceptable to God than all the fastings and other works of a monk or priest, because the monk or priest lacks faith."

~ Martin Luther, *From The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*

It is your faith relationship, your trust in Jesus as your Forgiver, that makes you right with God – not your works. And any work you do – **WHATEVER** - if you do it in faith and love to God – it's all good! Whatever -- ***"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus...."***

Second key word is **WHO**.

When we go to work, we don't go alone. We bring the King of the Universe in the door. The most important who in the equation isn't us. It's God. Galatians 2:20 reminds us that, "***Christ lives in us.***"

God goes with us when we go to work. God goes with us to work so that we in turn can work for God, regardless of who your boss is or the name of your business.

Here is a wilder thought even yet, if we do whatever we do...for God, then what we do is not just work. What you do for God is in fact considered **WORSHIP**. Worship – that's the 3rd W word in our equation.

Did you know work and worship actually come from the same biblical word? Whatever we do can be filled with a whole lot of worship, when we turn it to God. Our Monday through Fridays can be just as meaningful as our Sunday Mornings. No more dull drudgery or just living for the weekend. No more working for the weekend, or TGIF. Instead, when whatever you do is for God, then it becomes worship. That means, TGIM! And TGIT! Thank God it's Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday and Thursday as much as Thank God it's Friday.

In the same chapter in the Bible, a little later in Colossians 3 God through Paul tells us this: ***Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*** *Colossians 3:23-24*

Whatever work you do, do to serve God. Do it to say "thanks" to God.

So if you're putting in windows, or looking for employment, or volunteering in the community – if you're doing it from your heart to serve God, it's good. It's worship.

Maybe today, you feel trapped in a job, or working with a difficult person or a bad boss. It's a bad situation. You may be saying, "That's nice, Pastor Paul, but you don't know what my work is like. There's no way I can do my work with the attitude and heart that I'm serving the Lord."

You may be in a bad work situation. Yet, God guided Paul to write this verse in the Bible to *slaves*. Talk about being in a bad situation with an awful boss! Talk about a dead-end job with no promise of career advancement! They were *slaves*!

Paul wrote to these people because many came to faith in Jesus, and they said, "I now want to live my life to serve God." Paul said, "You **ARE** living to serve God, even as a slave, if you do it from your heart, to respond to God's love. If you work from a heart of gratitude for God's love, you **ARE** serving Him. Work becomes an act of worship.

Maybe these days you are caring for an ailing parent and it seems so hard. Whatever you do, do it for Jesus Christ, *then* your work becomes worship.

So far in our equation we have 3 W's: Whatever, Who, and Worship. Next come an **O**. **O** is for Opportunity. Look for the Mission **OPPORTUNITY**



In Dearborn, Michigan sits Greenfield Village. Henry Ford created this historic place and moved his friend's, Thomas Edison's, laboratory and workshop there. Edison invented the light bulb, the

movie camera, the record player, and 1100 more innovations in that place. Yet, the bottom floor has just plain machine shop tools, and the top floor has jars of chemicals that you might find in a high school chemistry set today. No sophisticated computer-controlled equipment. Out of those very basic things, Edison changed the world!



If Thomas Edison's genius can do that with simple stuff, what can God's genius do through YOU? God's genius is unlimited.

You are an amazing masterpiece. Doesn't that raise the lid on the expectations of what is possible through you?

Everything job has the potential to be turned into a God-thing.

If you're in a medical job, you have -a front row seat to see Jesus' healing power every day. If you are in Education, through you God is raising up the next generation of servant leaders. If you are in the Service Industry, your job is named after the same word that appears all throughout our Bibles. Being a servant means you truly put others first. You can put the serve back in service.

It used to be clearly understood that our "PROFESSions" were the jobs we did to most "PROFESS" our faith in Christ in word and deed.

Just think of the opportunity God's given you to share your faith in Jesus through your job!

Paul, shows us this in the Bible: Acts 18 says: ***"... Paul ... went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them."*** Acts 18: 1-3

Paul's job was he made tents. Pretty important back then. No motor homes back then so they used tents a lot. Paul was at work making tents and an opportunity, a mission opportunity happened. He met Priscilla and Aquila. And they hit it off.

So Paul takes them with him. They leave the city of Corinth and head to Ephesus. Paul is sharing his faith in Jesus with them all the time. Then when Paul leaves Ephesus, Aquila & Priscilla stay behind.

"²⁴ Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately." Acts 18: 24-26

Paul teaches Priscilla and Aquilla about Jesus. Priscilla and Aquilla teach Apollos about Christ. Apollos is probably the guy who wrote what we know today as the Bible book of Hebrews. So this is all coming out of Paul's mission opportunity at work.

Later, Paul writes a letter back to Corinth, where he met them at work. He says: ***"Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."*** 1 Corinthians 16:19b
Now Priscilla and Aquilla have a church meeting at their house!
Wow!

Friends, at work you get to know people, diverse people. There is an opportunity to share God's love with them. Just look for the opportunity. Pray for God to create the opportunities.

If you're a business leader and owner, you and God have enormous potential to use your business as a platform to influence and multiply God's good in the world.

For you retirees, you've got time. Maximum opportunity is yours. Wherever you look is potential. Don't settle for just busyness. I hear so many say I'm busier now than when I was working. Instead of busyness, look for purposefulness. See and seize the opportunity.

The next letter in the equation is **+ R**

The biggest opportunity involves the **RELATIONSHIPS**. Relationships develop and grow between you and coworkers while you are at our workplace every day. This means that in a way, you get paid to share the love of Christ. How good is that?

My wife, Sue, is really good at building relationships with coworkers where Jesus gets shared. At her last job, one co-worker came to the funeral visitation when Sue's dad died. This co-worker stayed the whole night just watching and listening in awe as our family casually spoke words of faith in Jesus and about the hope we have of heaven. She had come from a really messed-up family and see faith in Jesus in action in our grieving family really made a big impact on Sue's co-worker. It would not have happened without the relationship Sue had first built with her.

Who are the co-workers that you can share your life with? Did God bring a name to your mind? Got one in mind? Invite that person to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter with your family. Invite him or her to special events here at church. In October we will be starting a series called “The Serving Challenge.” The Serving Challenge is about learning to do acts of compassion, mercy, and love for other people. In our world where loneliness and rudeness reign, invite someone to join you on an adventure of showing mercy, and compassion to hurting people. It will be life-changing. Just build relationships with co-workers and then invite them, and let God do the rest.

Our Scripture passage again says, *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus”* *Colossians 3:17* **W3** Your **Whatever** can be **Worship** when you know **Who** it is who is with you in your work, **+ Opportunity, x Relationships =** and this may sound so counter-intuitive, but when it’s all said and done, it **= K** the **KINDNESS** of God. Just hold that thought for a second, because I know it’s not natural.

It seems to me that work is the thing that we love to hate. People who have a job complain about it. People who are unemployed **NEED** a job, and complain about that.

On Friday afternoons at 5, radio stations play songs that celebrate the end of the work week. We talk about TGIF – finally the drudgery of work is over and I can have a day or two to enjoy. We talk about Wednesday as “hump day” – meaning, “I’m half way through the awful work week. Half way to having some joy.” We love to hate work.

The **K** in work stands for the **KINDNESS** of God.

Philippians 4:19 says, “My God shall supply all of our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ.” God uses my job to provide for me and bless me in so many, different ways. God gives you food and clothes and homes, cars, and all kinds of electronic gizmos. And we get those things through our work. We use the time and

energy and abilities God has given to us, and trade those at work for a paycheck to get so many blessings from God.

Our work is one of God's major gifts. We know this. When we sit idle, it just doesn't feel right. God made us to *DO*. Work isn't just about making money. You may be retired, laid off, or for some other reason you don't have a paying job. Still you work. God designed each of us to use creativity, intelligence, experience, and energy – to accomplish, to be outward directed. It is a GIFT of God – the kindness of God.

W₃ x O + R = K is the winning formula.

Work is God's blessing to you. Let's get that in our minds. We are blessed with work.

Each day we wake up we can say, "God, what is the work You have for me today? I'm going to do it as though I'm doing it from my heart for You."

"God, I believe in You. I'm forgiven and heaven-bound. Now, in response, let my work be a blessing to me, to others, and to God." No matter what that work is, done for God, it's good.

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Colossians 3:17

Amen.