

# Growing Spiritually While at Work.

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 November 2009

Preacher: Dr. Paul Stevens

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Thank you. It's very nice to be back a second time, and nice that you're here a second time. I'm always gratified that people didn't disappear for the second shot. But this one is quite different from last week, namely growing spiritually while at work.

Now, looking over the group, I realize quite a few of us are retired. And maybe you think, I don't work anymore. Retirement is simply defined as twice as much husband, half as much money.

But actually, we all work. I define work as energy expended purposefully. We expend energy in athletics, but not purposefully.

Whether manual, mental, or both. Whether remunerated or not. I think we're supposed to work until we die, to be honest. But it doesn't necessarily mean that we have to work at the same stress level.

Something in our hearts today, as some of us read the parish notes. But at the same time, I think we are meant to expend energy purposefully.

[ 1 : 0 7 ]     Even as our energies wane, we can still work. Some of us are working preparing meals. Some of us are working as volunteers in the church.

Some are working as volunteers in social agencies and in neighborhood and helping friends and enemies and folks like that. And so, we're all working.

And for those of us who are working for money, perhaps even in a high stressful situation, this will have perhaps special meaning, growing spiritually while at work.

As was mentioned, I'm actually the professor emeritus of marketplace theology. And I even found a Peanuts cartoon strip that kind of legitimates my role.

I've decided something. If I ever get to be a theologian, I'm going to be what they call a theologian in the marketplace. So you can reach the people.

[ 2 : 0 4 ]     No, that's where the lettuce is. Well, actually, there's no extra remuneration for being a professor of marketplace theology. But I was undertaking a pilgrimage on Mount Athos, which is the Orthodox monastic peninsula in Greece.

And I had a wonderful soul friendship with the English-speaking guest master who said, What do you teach at Regent College? I said, Marketplace theology. He said, What's that?

I said, Well, it's the integration of Christian faith with work in the world. He said, It can't be done. That's why I'm a monk. So I had a very good, I hope, helpful conversation to set him straight that it is possible.

In one sense, that's why we're exploring this subject this morning. Spirituality today, though, is a kind of growth industry. And to my great amazement in my lifetime, I never expected the Berlin Wall to come down, which we've commemorated 20 years yesterday, the day before.

But I also never expected spirituality to be taught in business schools. And that's what's happening today. However, the word can mean almost anything, including human transcendence, which is a kind of oxymoron.

[ 3 : 21 ] Oxymoron is like fried ice. Or it could be worshipping the divine person within. But biblical spirituality is shaped by Scripture, responsive to the God revealed in Scripture.

And it's really the seeking Father, God himself crossing the infinity of time and space and seeking us constantly, taking the initiative with us that is the basis of our spiritual life.

I find this definition of spirituality by a South American liberation theologian very searching and wonderful. He says, All spirituality springs from this fundamental fact of a God who loved us first.

If Christian spirituality is, before all else, an initiative by and a gift from God who loved us and seeks us, spirituality is then our recognition and response with all that entails to this love of God that desires to humanize and sanctify us.

This path, this is Segundo Galileo, this path of spirituality is a process, if you're from the States process. Concrete, but never finished.

[ 4 : 52 ] By which we identify ourselves with God's plan for creation. Because this plan is essentially the kingdom of God, here's where work fits in, by the way, and its justice or holiness, spirituality is identification with the will of God for bringing this kingdom to us and to others.

That is one magnificent definition of Christian spirituality. But lastly, I think most people think that work is a hindrance to their spiritual growth, that if they could just get out of work.

You know, perhaps you've had some, looking over the group, I don't know whether this has happened with anybody, that you've come from such wealthy parents that you never had to work at all.

You know, would that be a good thing, spiritual, if you never had to work? Well, William Perkins, of course, very strong words, and I can see J.I.'s face lighting up at this point, because he's the last living Puritan, actually.

But Perkins said, damnable are those people who live on wealthy estates and don't have to work at all. And it's perhaps quite true that work is very important for our relationship with God.

[ 6 : 05 ] I'm briefly going to deal with three aspects of this. One of our students, Alvin Ung, and I have written a book, the outline and synopsis of which I've left at the back, as well as last week's outline, which I forgot to give you.

But essentially, I'd like to look at spirituality for work, which we're going to call the mixed life, spirituality in the context of work, or disciplines that can be undertaken while we're actually working, and then how work itself, or spirituality through work, how work itself is a place of spiritual nurture.

Starting with that first theme of spirituality for work, or the mixed life. And so Archbishop Hume once said, no person can afford to live in the marketplace who does not also live in the desert.

Now it's interesting. It doesn't mean necessarily a physical desert. In fact, I know somebody whose desert is a shopping mall where he goes every day and seems to be window shopping, but actually he's gone where nobody knows where he is, and nobody knows him, and he's praying and contemplating.

So it doesn't have to be a physical desert, but it can be, as I was mentioning last week, the rhythm of engagement and withdrawal. Now at this point, the story of Mary and Martha in Luke chapter 10 is so familiar, I hardly need to read it, but you know the story, that Jesus was being entertained, interestingly, if you read the text carefully, in the home of Martha.

[ 7 : 45 ] In the home of Martha. No wonder she was concerned about the food. While Mary was sitting at his feet, listening to him, communing, Martha was very busy with preparations.

And she did a lot of things in a very interesting way. What was so wrong about Martha's action, preparing a nice meal for Jesus and his friends? Not very much was wrong with that.

And what was so wrong with Martha's attitude? Well, there's lots wrong with Martha's attitude. She felt overcommitted. Don't you care, she said to Jesus.

And then she felt unsupported. My sister has left me here to do this alone. And then she blamed God, in effect, for her situation and spoiled the party for the disciples, for Mary, who was rebuked in front of the friends, and also for Jesus.

It seems the issue was that she had high expectations for her hospitality. Because in the footnote in the New International Version, a legitimate translation, it doesn't just say, only one thing is needed.

[ 8 : 53 ] It says, few things are needed, but really only one. Few things are needed, but really only one. And Mary has chosen the better part. In other words, we don't need a five-course gourmet meal, but I'll tell you what the really essential thing is, communion with me.

Which leads us to three typical and common phrases. Anything worth doing is worth doing well has probably murdered as many as it has motivated.

Anything worth doing is worth doing simply is probably often the case and true. Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly. Sometimes this is the right thing.

So, what was right about Mary's inaction? Well, perhaps very little. But the concern of Jesus was, it's more important to let God minister to us than for us to minister to God.

And he calls us, wonderfully in John 13, friends. No longer call you my servants, you're my friends. Everything the Father has said to me, I'm passing on to you.

[ 10 : 04 ] It's not an equal friendship, but it's a friendship. And friends spend time together. So, as Haddon Robinson said so wisely, sitting at Jesus' feet is preparation for getting on our feet.

All of this, though, leads us to say, as I think quite a number of Christian leaders have said through history, every disciple of Jesus should have the hyphenated name Mary-Martha.

That is, we need to mix those two persons. It's a mixed life of action and withdrawal. And I think Jesus, as I mentioned last week, did not model a balanced life, but rather a disciplined life.

And in Matthew 14, 22, immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side. And we could interpolate here and say, after everybody got healed and people drifted off to their homes very happy that everything was so wonderful and he was left all alone, he thought, well, I think what I'll do now is go up in the mountain and pray.

No, it doesn't say that. It says he dismissed the crowds. That's a very strong word. And I can only imagine him saying, I'm sorry, I can't do anything more today. I must be alone with the Father.

[ 11 : 25 ] He went up on the mountainside by himself to pray. And when evening came, he was there alone. I think he lived not a balanced life, but a disciplined life of engagement, sometimes so intensively that he couldn't eat.

And yet withdrawal. Engagement, withdrawal. The mixed life of action and reflection. Now it's a 12th century Augustinian canon, I'll summarize this rather, paraphrase it rather than reading every word, had a business person write him in the monastery and say, I'm thinking of leaving business and going into the monastery.

And he says, no, don't leave business, but change your way of life. Go deep. He said, you ought to mingle the works of an active life with spiritual endeavors of a contemplative life.

In other words, be Mary and Martha both. And then he goes on to explain that in your Martha life, you're going to be ordering the care of your household and children and employees and tenants and neighbors and bringing comfort and help and so on.

And all of this is good. On the other hand, he goes on to say, you should be like Mary to leave off the busyness of the world, sit down meekly at the feet of our Lord, there to be in prayer, holy thought and contemplation of him as he gives you grace.

[ 12 : 48 ] and so you should go from one activity to the other in maintaining your stewardship, fulfilling both aspects of the Christian life. And in so doing, you'll be keeping well the order of charitable love.

Walter Hilton and his letters to a layman in the book with the title *Toward a Perfect Love*. Just to overwhelm us all, and nobody can do all of these things at once and perhaps not even at the same time in your life.

But some of the disciplines when we have withdrawn include such things as the technical term through history in Latin has been *Lectio Divina*, which is spiritual reading of the Bible.

It's crawling through Scripture. It's meditating on Scripture. One of the things that I learned by going to university was how to read fast. In fact, I remember one of the first books I bought in university was how to read fast.

I don't think I ever really learned how to read the way they taught. But I think this is one of our problems. The more education we get, we tend to read more quickly.

[ 13 : 57 ] And *Lectio Divina* slows us down so we can drink it in and pray our way through a particular Scripture. As I did, for instance, on Galatians 2.20 for one year, kept in my pocket on a three-by-five card.

*Lectio Continua* is the continuous reading of Scripture, which can be, as some do, using a lectionary that takes you through the Bible every one or two years, or perhaps, as I do, reading an Old Testament chapter every day, one chapter, a New Testament chapter, and one psalm.

Fasting, I'm not great at this, and repentance, perhaps I'm not great at that either. Journal-keeping is writing your prayers and thoughts out, and then waiting prayer, and one of the disciplines of the merry life that is perhaps most neglected is Sabbath.

And you say, well, I go to St. John's every Sunday, so I have Sabbath. Well, perhaps that's true. It may not be true of people who have a meeting after the service to decide whether they're going to have a new organ, and then in the afternoon, a special meeting to deal with Sunday school teachers, and then in the evening, and on and on you go.

Sometimes very involved, not professional Christian-stated workers don't have much rest on Sabbath, which led my friend William Deal, who wrote the book with the lovely title, *Thank God It's Monday*, to...

[ 15 : 28 ] I shouldn't tell you this story, but I will. But anyway, I said, Bill, where did you get your title? He said, I thought it up. I said, Bill, it's been around a long time.

In the Middle Ages, there was a category of Christian books called the penitentials, in which everything was regulated, your eating, your sleeping, even your sexual intimacy with your spouse, which included the restriction not on fast day, feast days, not before the sacrament, after the sacrament, not on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, or Saturday, or Sunday, which led to the medieval phrase, *Thank God It's Monday*, at which point, at which point, he almost fainted.

But Bill says, the biggest gap between our confessed theology of Sunday, that we're saved by grace through faith and not by works, and our experience of Monday is works righteousness.

Our actions betray a belief that our identity and worth are based entirely on what we do and how well we do it. Folks, many of you are involved in volunteer activity.

It's the same as when you were, if you were, employed in a business or a corporation or an organization that was evaluating you all the time. Now, I do think we absolutely need a special day weekly Sabbath, which, I believe in Scripture, has three dimensions of play, peacemaking, and I mentioned this, as well as prayer.

[16:59] I think some people would say only prayer, but I would say there's the playful dimension to Sabbath as well as a peacemaking dimension. And I gain this largely from Scripture again.

Of course, much to be said about prayer, communion, worship with God. Peacemaking, though, in Mark chapter 2, where Jesus brings wholeness to a man with a withered arm and then gleams in the field to provide food for himself and his disciples, right in the middle he says the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And there's a playfulness as well in Scripture, I believe, in the Song of Songs. And Israel's festivals, which were really fun.

I don't think any pastor would dare preach on. It's actually Deuteronomy 14.26, which says, if you're a long way from Jerusalem and you can't bring your animals and birds to the festival in Jerusalem, convert it to money, and when you get to town, buy wine and good food and have a party.

Now that's a paraphrase, but that's basically what it says. Playfulness. That silly dog spends hours chasing a little ball. You're actually faster than I've known some people to be.

[18:20] I think there must be some golfers in the midst here. And then our eternal Sabbath, really the new heaven and the new earth, is this threefold rest of God, creation, and humankind.

A rest relationship between God and creation, a rest relationship between creation and humankind, and a rest relationship between God and human beings.

So Eugene Peterson has said so succinctly, if you cannot afford to take one day a week for rest, you are taking yourself too seriously.

When I was a pastor, I found Monday was not a good day for me. There's so much follow-through from Sunday. You're exhausted. You've just come from Korea.

Pastors, I think the number one problem in Korean pastoral life is fatigue. They have prayer meetings at five every morning of the week, then morning meetings, afternoon meetings, evening meetings.

[19:15] Some of the big churches have suites with bedrooms in it for the pastoral staff. It's that bad. So Monday is terrible because you've got follow-through and you're absolutely exhausted.

I took a Jewish Sabbath of sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, which left me Saturday night to prepare my heart for the kind of thing we're doing this morning. Well, I've talked a little bit about the mixed life or spirituality for our engagement in work, but I would like to spend just a few minutes on spirituality in the context of work and whether there are spiritual disciplines that we can undertake while we're working, whether it's sweeping the floor or working with a spreadsheet or whatever it might be, and to do so in such a way that we don't become inefficient or distracted.

Now, that's a very interesting comment because I have often asked Christian CEOs of large corporations if their Christian workers are good workers. I'm sorry to report that almost universally I get the response, no, they're bad workers.

They're not really interested in their work. They're really interested in the church meetings, the Bible study, prayer meetings, this and that, so on, but they don't really get their heart into their work, which, of course, is what Paul said to the slaves in Colossians 3, work at it with all your heart and not just with eye service when your master's eye is on you, but you're working for the Lord, he says twice in that passage.

Get your heart into that work. So, without being distracted, what can we do while we work? Well, one of the things we can actually do is pray through the day.

[ 21 : 04 ] Whether it's homework or housework or neighbor work or corporation work, business work, medical work, or teaching work, or instructional work, to pray before, during, and after.

And there's lots of help for us in the history of the church and the history of Christian spirituality on this, including the famous little book by Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God, which was given to me just a few days after I became a Christian and was perhaps the most formative book besides the Bible in my early Christian life.

As you know, he was, some of you will know at least, he was the cook in a monastery kitchen with the pots and pans clanging and everything else and people demanding this and that, you know, quickly, let's get the soup going and so on.

And upstairs, people were praying, but they came down into the kitchen and said, Brother Lawrence, we don't understand this. We're upstairs praying. You're downstairs working, but you know the Lord.

You know, you're close to him. He's close to you. How come? And he says, my greatest business does not divert me from God. I simply go to God through everything I do.

[ 22 : 16 ] Before I have a task, I say, Lord, I can't do this unless you enable me. And then if he makes a mistake, he says, God, I'm always going to do this unless you mend what's amiss in my life.

So his greatest business did not divert him from God. Then we have the famous arrow prayer by Nehemiah, who was, as a believer, the most trusted position in the empire of Persia.

You know, because in those days if you wanted to assassinate a king, you couldn't shoot a bullet. You poisoned the king. So the cup bearer and food taster, if he passed out at the first draft of the wine, the king would say, well, I guess somebody's after my life.

Too bad for Nehemiah. But he's expendable, you see. And Nehemiah was sad-faced because he had had news about Jerusalem.

And the king said, how come the sad face? And he said, my city's in ruins. And then the king said, what do you want to do about it? Now most of us would just quickly say, well, really what I'd like to do is go and rebuild the wall.

[ 23 : 24 ] And he said, I prayed to the Lord and I answered the king. It's like shooting an arrow to God in prayer. One of the very best prayer books besides the prayer book, boy, that's a politically correct statement if ever there was one, eh?

Boy. You know, I think if I said that enough I could become an Anglican. Anyway, is the Orthodox Prayer Life by Matthew the Poor who recently died.

By the way, he was living in a cave somewhere in Egypt. Constant prayer leads to a state of perpetual spiritual sobriety and a permanent feeling of the presence of God.

And the spirit of persistence springs from an inward conviction that life, this is not just worship life and prayer life, but life is but one single way that leads to the kingdom of God.

The problem today is no down time. It's really not as bad in Vancouver as I have found in Asia where people have not only their cell phones with them and on, but they are buzzing all the time.

[ 24 : 31 ] And it used to be if you're driving to a meeting or even driving to church, you at least have a few minutes, maybe 30 minutes of quiet reflection. Chris, did you have the CD player on in your car this morning?

I see. There's a holy man. But the fact is that today you have the radio, you have a CD player, and you might even have some other interruptive things that are constantly assaulting your consciousness.

And so there isn't much down time today. You even get into an elevator and it's sound coming through a hole in the ceiling. And in the dentist chair, now you look at the ceiling and you're watching television instead of communing on your pain and reflecting on how you're identifying with the suffering.

No, excuse me, I'm not going to say that. And most work today, unlike Brother Lawrence's in the kitchen, does demand pretty intensive attention.

My work does. And then, I think we can, though, say that there are some gifts of routine work. For me, it's filing. I just love filing. And why?

[ 25 : 39 ] It's relatively mindless and it allows me to commune and to reflect a little bit. Then we can discover and create time in our days.

The day will easily fill up with constant activity. But we can build into it patterns. My former colleague and friend, Charles Ringmuth, Regent, used to come to the college at about 7 in the morning before the doors were open.

He did have a key and he would read his breviary before anybody arrived and prayed. But then at about 10 o'clock, he put on his black leather jacket and head out.

and everybody thought he was going to a meeting on the UBC campus. But actually, he was going to a local coffee shop, bought a cup of coffee. But he chose a chair facing the wall so he wouldn't just be watching people and have 15 or 20 minutes of communion and prayer and reflection.

We can build this into our day and then have a prayerful spirit lifting all to God. The people we meet perhaps undertaking the direction of I'm not going to talk to anybody or meet anybody that I don't pray for.

[ 26 : 51 ] You know, all of our activities, engagements, and contacts with people can become prayerful. which led Emily Grifton, who is a marketing manager, to say some things in her wonderful book *The Reflective Executive*.

In the act of life, she says, prayer could take on a huge variety of forms, whistleblowing, upholding ethical decisions, treating employees with dignity. Prayer also sustains us with hope when we find ourselves tempted to despair.

And it's hope that gives us courage to yank out the hidden roots of institutional sin. Prayer, I now see, is one way out of this deep disenchantment, providing, as it does, the way into a new childhood, a second naivety.

Here, in the kingdom of the blessed, the child may confront even the wicked institutions with his or her most confrontational questions, says Emily Griffin.

While prayer is important, I think we can also celebrate during our work days. Having some object in our workspace or on our person that could remind you of God is one way that we can actually be reminded to commune with God as the day goes on.

[ 28 : 12 ] I have a friend who's been developing 3D software for medical diagnosis. As you know, all x-rays and MRIs are two-dimensional with black, white, and shades of gray.

And he's developed a 3D software. Undoubtedly, it'll be used in India before it's used in North America. But it changes it into mountains and valleys, so you can actually define the perimeter of a tumor more exactly than you can with a two-dimensional plane.

But you can imagine trying to persuade medical officers and hospitals to change radically the way in which all diagnostic work is done with images is not easy.

So he has a stone in his pocket when he's talking to a medical director of a hospital and he's reminding himself that God's with him. He's with God. Not that that guarantees a sale.

And meditation itself, and I'll reflect on this a little bit more later, but meditation is something without becoming inefficient. meditation. I, as you probably guessed from last week, I love kind of solo sports that are not competitive.

[ 29 : 24 ] I'm only competitive in relationships. But in high school, I lasted one day on the football team and I was all padded up the whole bit and I was right in the middle of the field.

But my problem was I was standing there meditating on the meaning of the game. So I got kicked off in my first game. That's not the kind of meditation I'm talking about is, you know, you come down to somebody's workplace desk and they're sort of lost in nirvana.

But rather, using all the opportunities of a work day, whether it's a contact with a person or a problem or a crisis or a situation or an opportunity to celebrate as an opportunity to meditate and reflect.

And then hospitality, which is a wonderful ministry to undertake in the workplace, so much like our God who is hospitable to us and creates a welcome for us, or as the three visitors to Abraham and Sarah and Genesis were welcomed by Abraham and Sarah and in turn welcomed them.

There's a kind of mutual homecoming involved whenever we actually engage in hospitality, creating space for people in our lives. And that's very, very important in the workplace.

[ 30 : 51 ] My father was president of a steel company and I had the privilege of working in that company in everything except being president. And so I had a chance, which many people don't, of watching their dad at work or their mom at work.

Most people get to see their mom at work, but not so many their dad. And I realized that his office door was always open and he really did receive people in a most wonderful way.

As a matter of fact, we met the sweeper, my first cousin did, I should say, a few months ago and my dad passed away in 1985, so this was a long time ago. But the sweeper had been retired for a long, long time.

Oh, he said, Ernest Stevens, he said, he made me feel dignified and valuable and important in the company and so on. So, but our Canadian mother, Teresa, Jean Vanier, and I really use that term rather carefully, I think he is a most remarkable Christian person in our country and in our history, Jean Vanier, who started the L'Arche Homes for Intellectually Challenged People.

He said, sometimes when people knock at my door, I ask them in and we talk, but I make it clear to them in a thousand small ways that I am busy, that I have other things to do.

[ 32 : 12 ] He said, the door of my office is open, but the door of my heart is closed. Now, I'm sure it's not always closed, but I think he's speaking so eloquently and clearly about our own challenge of really opening our hearts to people in the workplace.

Now, the third part of this brief presentation that really deserves and is in fact a whole course at Regent, sorry about that, but this way you don't have to pay any tuition, so that's pretty nice, eh?

But it'll be a longer part on spirituality through work or to see work itself as a means of spiritual growth. And one of the desert fathers, and there were desert mothers as well, Amaz as well as Abaz, said, Father Antony, by the way, Abba Antony, it should be A-N-T, not T-H, was considered to be the founder of monasticism.



He really wasn't. He was more of a hermit than a monk. Monks mean it's more communal. However, he was a founder of that movement that in some ways was reacting to the worldliness of the church and going into the desert to recreate a garden.

And so, someone asked Abba Antony, the founder of Eastern monasticism, what must one do in order to please God? Now, many people say until the Reformation, nobody really knew the scriptures or considered the importance of hearing the word of God.

[ 33 : 50 ] But listen to this from the early centuries of the church. The old man replied, pay attention to these three things. Whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes whatever you do.

Secondly, do it according to the testimony of Holy Scriptures. Some mumps memorized the entire New Testament and some the entire Bible.

And then, thirdly, in whatever place you live, do not easily leave it. What he's going to say about that third one is, and there's a long tradition of amplifying this phrase, stick to your cell, it will teach you everything.

Stick to your calling, stick to your occupation, stick to the commitment that you've made, it will teach you everything. What he's saying here is, if you really want to grow, don't flit around as soon as the going gets tough, but stick with it.

Well, we can experience God in the context of work and we need to know where he is, what he's doing, and how we can be a part of it. And I have some suggestions here that we are with God when we're doing work that reflects and embodies the creative work of God.

[ 35 : 12 ] Now, were I to have more time, I'd go through this more completely. But God not only redeems, but he creates and sustains and he brings things to conclusion.

I spent a whole summer actually reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and underlining every word that described God working. I got hundreds and hundreds of words, everything from imagining to beautifying and so on, including destroying.

I was in Singapore a few years ago and I said, how many of you have jobs that involve organizing? A few people put their hands up and I said, you're doing the work of the Lord.

How many of you have jobs that involve beautifying and improving, embellishing? And a couple of hairstylists put their hands up. I said, you're doing the work of the Lord because God does that.

And he invites you into that work. I said, nobody here is doing destroying work. And a guy at the very back, he said, that's me. I said, who are you and what do you do? He said, I'm in the Singapore Navy and I'm on a destroyer and my job is to destroy.

[ 36 : 20 ] I said, you're doing the work of the Lord. But you see, the full range of what God is doing, not what he did sometime before the five billion light year universe was started to be made, is incredible.

And he invites human beings in good work to continue that. the fact that we're working at all is something that should draw us to God. And in our co-workers who are image bearers, they bear the image of God, even most difficult people with whom we have to work, twisted, perhaps distorted, but nevertheless, they are in the image of God.

And in our relationship with co-workers, and these can be stressful, they have been with me, but those relationships also are ones in which God is present.

And God is sustaining the factory or the office or the enterprise. And then you may have, and here's where most people think this is the only place that God is involved with us in the workplace, but you might have a charismatic event.

When I was a carpenter, I kind of moved from the pulpit into a carpentry job, and people said I'd left the ministry, and I said, no, I haven't. But anyway, that's another story.

[ 37 : 33 ] But I was, I think I thought, I think I thought, how's that? I thought, let's make it simple, I thought that probably I'd have an opportunity to put in a word for Jesus, you know, maybe twice a day.

I only had once a week opportunity as a pastor, but maybe twice a day. Well, it was six weeks into a job, and the drywall taper, it's the guy that takes the panels of gyprock and puts what we call mud and tape over it and smooths it out so you cannot see, this is probably a plaster wall rather than gyprock, but you can't see the join.

I can do it, but I can't do it as well as these guys. And he turned to me and he said, Paul, what happens when we die? I don't know why I awakened or evoked that question, but that was a charismatic event, and God gives us from time to time in our workplace charismatic events.

I think the story of Abraham and Abimelech is illustrative of this principle of God is ahead of us in every situation where we are.

Abraham had a beautiful wife, as I do, but I didn't do what he did. You men just don't follow Abraham. Not a good model, because he said to his beautiful wife, if you really love me, boy, talk about manipulation, if you really love me, wherever we go, tell people you're my sister, not my wife, because that way they won't kill me.

[ 39 : 06 ] You see, they would normally kill me to get you because then you're a widow. But this way, I'll save my life. Isn't that neat? He's a godly man, full of faith and trust in God and everything else.

So they go down to Abimelech's place and he says she's the most from coast to coast and takes her into his harem. Now you have to imagine what she was thinking the night before he slept with her and what he was thinking outside the harem, having got his wife into this predicament, and he did this twice in the story.

And in the middle of the night, Abimelech has a dream. In which God says you're a dead man because this woman is not his sister but is his wife. There was a half truth, by the way, in his saying she was his sister, related.

And so he confronts Abraham in the morning. I don't know whether you've ever been confronted by a not-yet Christian about your lack of integrity. I have.

But this is what was happening. You have a not-yet Christian or a not-yet believer confronting this patriarch. And Abraham explains why.

[ 40 : 15 ] He said, I thought there is surely no fear of God in this place. And of course there was. But that's how people regard the marketplace, multinationals, secular hospitals, the university, which is really a multiversity today.

There's no fear of God there. well, there is. You know, God's previous in every situation. And what he's doing is creating and sustaining and providing and instructing and shepherding and giving justice, making covenants and building community and redeeming.

And so we need to ask how we can join God in what God is doing, which leads me to these four lovely songs of the servant in Isaiah called the servant songs.

where sometimes God says my servant, same word in Greek and Hebrew as minister, so my minister or my servant, has a different ring when a young man or woman says, I think I'm going into service, not going into the ministry.

But it's, the essence of it is being a servant of God. And sometimes it's the Lord's servant or the servant of the Lord.

[ 41 : 31 ] Lord. And there are three ways under the Older Testament and under the New Testament. But under the Older Testament it was only a few people that became prophets or priests or princes.

And unfortunately many people equate the call to pastoral leadership to the calls of the prophet or the calls of the king. And in fact under the new covenant with Christ, the whole people of God, the laos of God, is in fact called into the prophethood of all believers and the priesthood of all believers and the princely rule of all believers.

Now the Protestant Reformation emphasized the priesthood of all believers. Martin Luther did actually have some writings about the princely rule of all believers but not much emphasis on the prophethood of all believers.

Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit has poured out on all flesh, made servants and men servants, men and women, and the old and the young will prophesy, speak God's word with immediacy and directness.

And so we have very wonderfully this select group of people under the Older Testament has now widened out to include all of us. Some of us will be naturally stronger in one than the others but nevertheless.

[ 42 : 54 ] And just to again very briefly outline, prophets discerned, exposed, they bring justice and they reveal. Now when you say that, you realize, oh, that can happen in society.

It's happening today. It happens when people speak up, when people deal with things, when people call something an injustice or something's not fair. And that's where we can join God in what God's doing in the workplace.

And priests are people who bridge build, pontifix, that bridge is two-way traffic, lifting everything to God in worship, prayer, and intercession and bringing God's will and purpose into our situations, mediating and blessing and bringing grace.

I had the privilege on this long trip I've just returned from of speaking in the first church we served in Montreal. It was their 100th anniversary. history. And the person who's pastored it for more than 25 years now is a young man that I disciplined when I was there as pastor with Gail, 1961 to 67.

That's before most of you were born. I want to see if you're still listening. And he's a tent-making pastor. He actually, boy, this will test your age, his business is a niche business of repairing vacuum tube electronic instruments.

[ 44 : 21 ] Now, do you know what a vacuum tube electronic instrument younger people do not even know since transistors and integrated circuits. But his niche business is because audio fills say you get smoother sound with vacuum tubes.

It's an envelope of glass with grids inside than you do with the digitalized integrated circuit. And so I was asked to speak at his ordination quite a number of years ago.

And in the middle of the service, his two teenage children rushed up and grabbed the microphone unannounced, not on the program, and said to everybody, the place was packed, we just want to tell you what it's really like at home.

Now, there was a kind of a strange silence. And then they said, Dad's not perfect, but he's the same person at home as he is in the pulpit. And so here's a person who, wherever he is, including his store, interestingly enough, mediates the presence of God and brings blessing.

And thirdly, King's rule, plan, provide, solve problems, integrate, and judge. So we have a way of participating in what God is doing in the workplace.

[ 45 : 38 ] workplace. But further, work provides an opportunity for active contemplation. And again, please don't think of this as standing in the middle of a football field meditating on the meaning of the game.

But work itself invites us to be contemplative and to be found by God. And all the experiences of work really become invitations, failure, probably even more than successes.

Competition and loneliness, delegation, creativity, get a bright idea, where'd that come from? Change, yes, and then succession planning.

[ 47:00 ] And then I had to clean up. But that says something about me, you see. And so Cardinal Wyszyński, who was the primary mentor of the late Pope John Paul II, which some Protestants say was the best Pope they've ever had, that is Protestants, would say that the internal life is revealed by the external life.

It's all nerves. But since becoming dean at Regent, I have thick skin. No, I shouldn't tell you that. Why do I fill up the gaps in my date book? Why do I find it hard to give up places and positions and ministries?

Always seem to need people. And why am I so discontent? Those aren't all my questions, some of them are, but some of them may be yours. And work does reveal our Achilles heel, which is our point of vulnerability, which oftentimes is one of the three things.

And in work, we also engage the principalities and powers. And interestingly, we deal with these things every day, all of us. But mammon, by the way, if you're in a prayer meeting and people are falling asleep, when it comes to the end of anybody's prayer, don't say all men, say mammon.

And so, and even have the choir sing, mammon. I think everybody will wake up. Economic globalization and greed and power and the demonic, even, innovation and technology.

[illegible]

But technology has become a power. Scripture uses a lot of different words for what we call the powers or principalities and powers. It uses words such as rulers and authorities, spiritual forces and thrones, powers and angels and demons and Satan and the world and the elements of the universe.

But if we translate these into, you might say, common everyday experiences, they are political, financial, judicial and ecclesiastical rulers, thrones.

There are traditions that bind us. There are images and institutions, ideologies, capitalism, communism, socialism, democracy, structures and organizations, mammon, death, which holds people in lifelong bondage, and the demonic.

[ 51 : 05 ] So it's a range all the way from structures through to invisible spiritual beings. But work is where the seven deadly sins.

In the tradition of the church, you could say the works of the flesh in Galatians 5 have been largely expressed in what are called the seven deadly sins.

And they do find expression in the workplace. Pride, for example. Egotism, where status is all important. You know, I presided at, on a committee, one of the worst evangelistic rallies that Vancouver's ever had.

We hired an evangelist from Australia. we rented the Coliseum, and we planned on 3,000 people coming. And only 200 people came. It was just an absolute disaster.

It was embarrassing to be associated with this flop. Nobody got saved, and I don't think any Christians lost their faith, which was the primary concern. But the chairman of the committee, who did a terrible job being chair of the evening, we wanted to have somebody else a second night.

[ 52 : 15 ] If you're going to preside at a disaster, you at least need to have a good chair. And we tried to persuade him to step down and let somebody else chair. And he absolutely refused.

I said, I can't believe that anybody would want to even chair with this disaster. And he said, you don't understand. Being chair of this committee is everything to him.

So there's pride. It can happen in a not-for-profit just as easily as it happens in a profit. Being concerned with yourself and being a control freak.

Covetousness is acquisitiveness, being defined by your possessions or by acquiring and finding your meaning in things, seeing people as consumers.

Lust is treating persons as bodies or objects or using people as instruments for personal gratification, not treating people as image-bearing creatures.

[ 53 : 12 ] others. Envy is constant comparing yourself with the performance of others and wishing you had somebody else's gifts and talents and opportunities, somebody else's callings, something William Perkins deals with in his treatise on callings.

Gluttony, in a little over a week now, will be actually in Singapore. I've never heard a sermon in Singapore on gluttony. The reason is, they love fruit.

Living to eat rather than eating to live. I've also never heard a sermon on Sabbath, by the way, in Singapore. Living to eat rather than eating to live, which could be as well living to work rather than working to live.

And I think we can see a parallel, perhaps, in that. Anger or wrath is emotional manipulation, using anger to control. I'm thinking of a husband who controlled his wife.

She knew that when his upper lip started to quiver, now if you start to do this with me right now, I'm going to be scared, because she knew it was a prelude to an outpouring of terrible wrath.

[ 54 : 19 ] And so she would submit at that point, really comply, not submit. It's a lack of self-control, and you can create submission and compliance through fear.

Here's a very interesting Puritan definition by Baxter of sloth. Sloth signifieth chiefly the indisposition of mind and body.

That's mental. Idleness signifieth the actual neglect or omission of our duties. Sloth is an aversion to labor through a carnal love of ease, or indulgence to the flesh.

And he says, sloth is easily identified. Now here's where we can all repent, eh? When the very thought of labor is troublesome. When ease seems sweet.

When the easy part of some duty is called out. You know, you've got a thing to do. There's a hard part and an easy part. Well, I'll do the easy part, see if we ever get to. Hard part.

[ 55 : 17 ] When you work with a constant weariness of mind, and when you consistently offer excuses or delays, and when little impediments stop you.

you've got to do the same but I want to conclude more with the positive, which is the suggestion that matching the seven deadly sins, which do get expressed not so much in a prayer retreat as actually in everyday life in the context of our work, but also the spirit fruit, and they're not fruits actually, but singular, the sort of nine fold fruit, the nine ways that the spirit works through us, actually happens in life, and can be nurtured even in the workplace itself.

So Cardinal Wazinski, whom I mentioned earlier as the mentor to the late Pope John Paul II, very few books on spirituality of work. I think his is probably the best in the Catholic tradition, and it's interesting to me that as I try to keep up on all the literature related to work, I think there's very few books written by Protestants, but a lot of really deep stuff written by Catholics.

And he says the problem arises of how to arrange our work in such a way that it serves our interior life, and indeed becomes one of the means of our sanctification.

So our colleague, James Houston, so nicely, I think in his book, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, by the way, that was not his chosen title. As a matter of fact, when the title came about, he said he was really upset because it's the exact opposite of what the book is about.

[ 57 : 00 ] It's not saying prayer is powerful, it's just the reverse. Prayer is friendship with God. But in that book, he does outline the ninefold fruit of the Spirit in a most interesting way, that faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control deal with ourselves, our knowledge of ourselves.

Goodness, kindness, and patience, well, that's got to do with our relationship with others, and peace, joy, and love in our direct relationship with God. So self-control, this is internal now, helps us deal with work-life balance.

I find consistently that all surveys on what people are most challenged with, what they find most difficult in the workplace, almost always it comes out work-life balance.

Contrary to the expectation in the 1960s that by the 1990s, we would only have to work 30 hours a week, and people are working longer, harder, and smarter, and more stressful today than they ever have before.

And so the trouble is to actually have a life, and even children sometimes say to their parents, get a life, because they recognize that work is so easily all-consuming.

[ 58 : 16 ] Self-control is the answer for this. Or as Jacques Alol puts it so wonderfully in one of his commentaries, it's really living the tension well.

There will always be tension. We have to live with that tension, but to live that tension well. Gentleness is really meekness, but it's not weakness.

And a number of interesting business studies of excellent leaders come out by saying it's a combination of decisional capability, at the same time meekness.

They don't use the word meekness, but the kind of velvet covered brick by the person who is gentle. And that's quite remarkable, I think, because we often imagine that the really successful and wonderful leader is the person who is iron-willed.

And then faithfulness. My father-in-law, Dale's dad, used to be buying sunflower seeds and other things from China just after the Second World War, actually.

[ 59 : 22 ] And he said, one of the things I really like about dealing with Chinese people in business, and I know it's changed some, is you don't need a 30-page contract. You just shake your hands and your word is your bond.

That's changed a lot, but to be people whose word is their bond, who are totally reliable. That's the spirit of God at work in us. How does that get manifested?

Not so much in a private prayer retreat as it does in everyday life. Goodness is not treating the world and people as junk, but having God's view. And I think that text in Genesis where God made the sun and the moon, he made the earth and the sea, he made all the living things, and he said, oh, it's good, it's good.

And then he made you and he said, wow, it's really good. I don't think it's just morally good, I think it's aesthetically good. It's like God saying, it's beautiful. In fact, Karl Barth, in one brief three-worded sentence said, God is beautiful.

So it's aesthetic goodness as well as moral goodness. Kindness is not softness, but showing compassion, being essentially positive towards people, especially those in need.

[ 60 : 42 ] how does that come out? The context of our work. It could be volunteer work at home, or in a not-for-profit, or at a church, and many of you are volunteer workers in this church, and I commend you for that, but it's really no different.

In fact, church work is a little harder because it's harder to address sin as sin, because we often code it in religious language.

patience is one of the ninefold fruit of the spirit. The old English word longanimity, it's beautiful, it's one of those, is that onomatopoeia when a word by its very sound communicates something of its meaning?

And so here you have a nice long word just sticking with things for the long haul. And Wyszynski speaks about this. He says that the prime thing that we actually gain in work is patience.

patience. He said it's a ladder by which we actually grow, and the occupation itself is fraught with temptations against such patience.

[ 61 : 49 ] And he lists them. The longing for new work, I've known that. Unfaithfulness in the work we've already undertaken or has been entrusted to us, or the desire for a change of occupation.

And sometimes, he says, this for some trivial reason. And he said there's always a certain streak of betrayal in these feelings. Now, William Perkins in his treatise on callings has a wonderful sentence where he says, we should stick with our callings.

Remember Abba Antony? Don't easily leave whatever situation you're in. He said, we should stick with our callings. This is pre-anesthesia. as a surgeon continues to cut his patient even though the patient screameth much.

It's old English. It's actually from J.I.'s, I believe it's 1729 copy of 16. Boy, good for you.

You even know the dates of your own books. Well, you know, when I was a student I got an infected boil on my neck and it was really bothering me.

[ 63 : 06 ] Gail's family doctor, she was my girlfriend then, still is actually, but, well, I should say we're married, okay. But he's a wild sort of army doctor, never had office hours.

He would, you sit in his waiting room, his clinic was surgery, it was right next to his house. And when you heard opera in the house, you know within one hour he would be out there to attend to the patients.

Crazy. But he was a good doctor. And so I walked in there and waited, opera, then finally, he said, Mr. Stevens, what's the problem?

I said, I have an infected boil. It's really bothering me. He said, Mr. Stevens, are you really sick? I said, yes. No, Mr. Stevens, are you really, really sick?

And I said, yes, I am. I'll look at it then. So he looked at it and he said, ah, we've got to cut, cut, cut, cut, cut it out. Come back tomorrow, we'll cut it out. So I thought, oh, this sounds brutal.

[ 64 : 07 ] So I went back the next day and he had a little surgery behind his consulting room and he put me on the operating table and put in a local anesthetic. And he said, now, if it hurts when I put the knife in, if anybody has a tender stomach, you can just close your ears for a moment.

Because he said, if it hurts when I put the knife in, you know, just tell me. I said, ah! And then he swore. I said, damn, he says, it looks like the freezing didn't take.

So he put in another injection. He says, now, just tell me if it hurts. Ah! And he swore again. And this went on about three or four times and he finally said, we're just going to freeze and cut as we go.

And I thought of William Perkins. To stick with your calling as a surgeon continues to cut his patient, even though the patient screameth much.

Now, you may forget everything I've said. I know you'll remember that God wants to bring patience to you, the fruit of the Spirit, in the context of your work. Peace is the threefold rest of God, humankind, and creation.

[ 65 : 15 ] Vocational contentment, or as Perkins puts it, laboring to see your own particular calling as a single person, as a married person, as a volunteer worker, as a person in society.

To see your own particular calling as a gift of God and finding that God is your portion, not your calling. And then joy is much more than happiness.

It's a sense of equilibrium, even in difficult and untoward circumstances, not letting your situation determine your well-being. And finding your delight, mainly in God.

And love is carrying loyalty for people, places, and structures. Seeing the best in people. Some of you will know there's a Greek word in the New Testament, agape, which people say is love for the unlovely.

Can you imagine a husband saying to his wife, you're not lovely, but I have agape love in my heart. Love for an unlovely person. Well, you know, I think agape love makes a beloved lovely, sees them even as lovely, draws out the best in them, and so on.

[ 66 : 27 ] And so that's what love does. It cares actively, not just for people, but situations, and even for structures. And when scripture says God is love, it's not merely describing an attribute of God, but describing the way God is God.

So, in conclusion, Jacques Alol, and I'll read this, because I think it's so helpful to us. He, that is God, has sent us into the world, and just as we are involved in the tension between sin and grace, so also we are involved in the tension between these two very contradictory demands, the kingdom of God, and at the same time our involvement in this life and this world.

It's a very painful and a very uncomfortable situation, but it's the only position which we can be fruitful for the action of the Christian in the world, and for his or her life in the world.

And to be honest, we must not simply accept this tension of the Christian or of the Christian life as an abstract truth.

It must be lived, and it must be realized in the most concrete and living way possible, or the phrase that I used earlier, we have to live the tension well.



[ 67 : 51 ] Now we have a few minutes for questions and comments. I believe we're to end at approximately 20 after, and we have at least five minutes for comments or questions you'd like to make.

Harry. I went to morning prayer in Starbucks this week at one day. I thought it would be a good idea if you planned that. Morning prayer in every Starbucks.

Very good. Thank you. That's good. Thank you. Yes? Thank you.

Oh. Okay. I realize it was quite dense because I've compressed a lot of things which really constitute a complete 35-hour course. But the book that's coming out in about three or four months, we hope, I think the title will become Work in Progress, Growing Spiritually While at Work.

But it's got an interesting structure. The first third of the book are what we call the nine deadly sins. We had to add two for reasons of order.

[ 69 : 06 ] The nine deadly sins of the workplace. The second section are the ninefold resources that we have in the Holy Spirit for our work. And they are, of course, the ninefold fruit of the Spirit.

And the third section is the nine outcomes of what we can anticipate to be the outcomes of that connection. So, written very happily with a Malaysian.

So, it's east and west together. And we got the brilliant idea, I think it was from God, actually, of starting every chapter with a dialogue between us. Because, you know, the problem with multi-authored books is you're always trying to figure out who wrote what.

And, in fact, we wrote each other's chapters. We rewrote, rewrote, rewrote. But we started each chapter with a dialogue between us, which, on the subject of that chapter, and it's been quite exciting to do it.

It takes three times as long to write a book with somebody as to write your own. So, yes? Is there what is, if there is, our work in heaven?

[ 70 : 12 ] Absolutely, yes. If I had more time, I would give you ten biblical reasons as to why we will be working in heaven. It won't be stressful work. It'll be restful sabbatical work.

But, still, it'll be play. You know, children, in a very amazing way, work and play, are totally united in them. Through the dreadful process of growing up, we separate work and play.

But in heaven, work and play, I think, will be once more reunited in our second childhood. That's not what happens when we lose it.

That's what happens when we get to heaven. But, I think, for instance, the text like, the kings of the earth bring their glories into the holy city. Chapter 14 of Revelation, deeds of Christians follow them.

1 Corinthians 15, 58. Your labor in the Lord is not in vain. And on you go. There's continuity as well as discontinuity between this life and the next.

[ 71 : 09 ] And so, I believe we will be working in heaven. It's going to be wonderful work. But I don't think we're going to be sitting around playing guitars and singing worship hymns 24-7.

Of course, there won't be a 24-7. But I think it's going to be a wonderful, wonderful... You know, Martin Luther had an amazing sermon on one Easter Sunday in which he described the kind of life we can anticipate having in the new heaven and new earth.

We keep dropping the new earth, you see. If we're only saved souls floating around the ether of heaven, then there's no work. But if we are fully resurrected people, all of us with hair, in the new heaven and the new earth, a totally renewed creation.

A transfigured creation. Then, I think this is going to be really wonderful. And Rudyard Kipling has a great poem about that, but that's not scripture.

But it is a wonderful poetic expression of the work that we will do in the new heaven and the new earth. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[ 72 : 15 ] Can I pray for you? Thank you. Let's pray. Thank you. Gracious God, I thank you so much. You're a worker and you are still working, as Jesus said.

And Jesus is still working. We thank you so much for that, that you're not just sitting back and watching. And we thank you as well that you've invited us, all of us, whether in volunteer work, whether remunerated or not, to participate in some little way, perhaps, in your ongoing work.

And we bless you for that and pray that somehow, as Paul said to the Colossians, to the slaves even, and the masters as well, that we might do this for you, since it is the Lord Christ that we are serving.

And so, dear God, as we go through this day and through this week, please grant that we will also recognize that you are at work in us and that you want to grow us and bring us to greater maturity in Christ, not around the work that we do, but even through it.

And we pray that you'll do that. Please do that. And God, grant that for the rest of this day, too, we will walk with you. And please be especially with those we know that are in very great stress in the workplace and perhaps have succumbed.

[ 73 : 42 ] And we ask your grace for them, especially. In Jesus Christ's name, amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. No. Very cool. Very cool.