

# Back to Work

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, at the start of every week, God calls us to come to worship him in the name of his Son and in the presence of God the Holy Spirit. And we are so thankful that we can respond to that invitation from God as we come together to worship.

And we're going to begin by singing from Psalm 100 on page 362. Psalm 100, and we'll sing the first version of the psalm.

And one of the things I love about this psalm is that it speaks about all the nations gathering to praise the name of God.

And I think it's so exciting for us to start a new week together, knowing that it's not just us that are praising Jesus. There's people all across the world gathering to praise his name today. And we can add our voices to that great multitude as we sing these words together.

All people that on earth to dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Let's stand and sing together. O people that on earth to dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

[ 1 : 21 ] And we'll sing with you, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

O people that on earth to dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. And we'll sing with you, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. And we'll sing with you, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. And we'll sing with you, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. walk he doth us be and for his sheep he doth us take enter then his gates with grace and broached with joy his course and truth praise God and bless his name always are it his soul to do for why the Lord our God is good his mercy is forever sure his truth at all times he is good and shall promise to his death do let's pray together dear God our Father we are so thankful that as a new week begins that we can come together publicly to worship you to bow down before you our God and to come rejoicing in the reality of the resurrection of your son our saviour

Jesus we thank you that as we come together you have promised to be with us by your spirit we thank you that you are building your temple the people of God where your spirit dwells and we thank you so so much that we have this time where we can come together knowing that you are with us and knowing that we can hear your voice speaking to us so we want to start our week bowing down before you our God Father Son and Holy Spirit the only God the awesome God the God who has been so so good to us and so we come today rejoicing we thank you so much that you have not abandoned us we thank you so much that you are a God full of mercy and compassion because we are so aware that we on our own we have no right to come before you we've sinned against you and in so many ways we have turned away from you and we have followed after idols and we have made many many mistakes and there are so many things that you have commanded us and made us to do and yet we've failed to do them and so we come confessing our sin before you we are frustrated by our sin we're sorry for it but we are also so so thankful that in

Jesus we can have full and free and perfect forgiveness and we just come rejoicing in the reality of the gospel that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin that all who come to you you will never cast out that if we confess our sins you're faithful and just to forgive them and oh these and so many other gospel promises are so good and we're so thankful for them and we pray that the reality of that gospel would just fill and enrich all of our hearts today and that it would shape every part of our lives we pray that as we come together we will be drawn closer to you and closer to one another and we pray that we will be prepared and equipped for the week ahead we want to live this week for you and so we come today with repentant hearts we want to turn away from sin and we want to refocus on you and follow you in every part of our lives in the week ahead thank you for everybody who has come here today those gathering in the building those joining us online thank you for the privilege of being able to worship together we pray father that you would help each one we all come

with different circumstances maybe some of us have had a really good week maybe others have had a hard week maybe for some it's been a mixture of both you know lord and so we come and we lay our hearts open before you and we pray father that you would meet with all of us that your word would speak to us and that that you would nourish us and heal us where we're bruised and that you would teach us and guide us where we need to be led by you that you'd encourage us and strengthen us where we feel weak that you would challenge us where our hearts are hard and that you would enable us by your grace to live this week and every week of our lives for your glory we pray for the work of this congregation we thank you for all the work of the gospel that has been done here over many years and that continues at the moment we pray that you would bless abundantly bless the congregation here we pray for

Colm and for all the office bearers and for everybody involved in the different ministries that are undertaken week by week we pray that you would bless all of these bless every family here every individual and we pray especially for the opportunity to invite people to a back to church Sunday in a couple of weeks time father we pray that you would give everyone the courage to share an invitation and we pray that you would be pressing it onto people's hearts to return and we pray that over coming weeks they would see both people coming back who may be drifted and also new people coming who've never been before and we pray that you will be building up the work of the gospel here and also across the town and all the congregations we pray that you would bless all the work of the gospel that's been undertaken here in Stornoway and may the weeks ahead be a time of great blessing and a time where all of your people shine as a bright and a beautiful light in a town that so desperately needs the gospel so we just commit the congregation and everybody here to your care and we pray father for your help as we continue on worshipping you just now we also want to remember those in need and in difficulty throughout the world praying for those who are suffering especially those caught up in conflict and we pray for those in authority and those who have power and influence that they would use that power for good and that they would seek to find solutions to so much suffering that we see around us we thank you father that as we are so often grieved by the broken world that we live in we thank you that we can come to you and see that in Jesus you have provided healing and restoration for every individual for the whole of humanity and ultimately for all of the creation how we thank you for the gospel and may our time together just now fill us anew with the joy of the gospel as we learn more about what you've done for us and may we be equipped to go on from here looking to Jesus serving you led by your spirit all to your glory we pray it in

[ 9 : 31 ] Jesus name Amen well boys and girls it's really nice to see you all here today I hope you're all well I hope you've all had a really good summer holiday so I'm going to need your help today I know you're a wee bit far away from me but I'm going to need your help and I'm actually I'm glad that you're far away from me because today we're going to play a wee game it's called hearing test so I'm going to test your hearing okay and so you have to listen very carefully to what I'm going to say so I'm going to say some words very quietly and you have to tell me if you can hear them now you guys are the only people who can play this game the old people in here they've got no chance they're not going to hear anything but you guys can hear the words and so you have to listen really carefully and if you hear the word you have to put your hand up and tell me what I'm saying okay so do you understand the game yeah you ready listen really carefully tell me if you can hear what I'm going to say it's going to get harder and harder so I'll start off with an easy one okay sausages did you hear what

I said let's say it again did anyone hear what I said what was it well done that was very good how did you hear you're so far away okay right I'll have to step back a wee bit okay make it harder let's see if you can hear what I say this time bananas did you hear me again what did what did I say bananas I said bananas very good right I'm going to have to make this even harder right I'm going to I'm going to stand further back I'm going to put a book in front of me okay let's see you can hear me this time tomatoes tomatoes how did you hear that that's so good right last all right I'm going to make it really hard I'm going to go right back here stand right here see if you can hear me now okay fish and chips you're nearly right it was fish and chips very good oh well that was fantastic you guys have got really really good hearing that was so so good well I'm very impressed that was very very good for the older people in here that was just silence but you guys have got really good hearing well done do you know who's got the best hearing of all

God does the best hearing of all is God's he hears everything never misses a word nothing is too quiet for him in fact even when we don't open our mouths and speak quietly in our hearts he hears us and I want you all to remember that today and to never forget it because what it means is that every single time you talk to God he hears you he never misses anything never misses a prayer your voice never ever goes unheard and so every time you pray to God whether it's in church here or at home as you lie in bed or maybe at school when you're finding it difficult and you even pray a really short prayer and a really quiet prayer and maybe you don't even open your mouth God always always hears you he has the best hearing of all and I want you always to remember that because it means that if there's ever a time this week or in any time in your life when you are having you're finding it hard when you're worried about something or maybe something's happened at school that's upset you or maybe you're going to bed at night and you've got lots of worries God's always listening and you can pray to him and you can talk to him about it and he will always always hear you because his hearing is perfect so please remember that it's reminding us of what a wonderful privilege it is for us to be able to pray to God we can pray to him every day thanking him for the things that are good and telling him about all the things that are hard and he always always listens so please remember that this week and please remember it for the rest of your lives that God's hearing is perfect so you can always talk to him he'll always always listen and so we're going to pray to him just now together and we're going to pray the Lord's prayer that you'll find on the inside page of your bulletin and we'll pray this together and afterwards we'll let the boys and girls who are heading out make their way to the hall our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever amen you see information on your bulletin sheet about the provision for children during the holidays so please feel free to make your way through the hall if you'd like to do so but also children are so welcome to stay in for the service as well if you'd rather remain here we're going to sing together again from psalm 57 and we're singing the sing psalms version which is on page 75 psalm 57 singing from verse 7 my heart is steadfast lord with music I will sing awake my soul wake harp and lyre my song the dawn will bring these words down to the end of the psalm just express our praise and thanksgiving to God recognizing that as we live out our lives among the nations of the world we want to honor and praise and glorify him at all times so we'll stand and sing these wonderful words together my heart is steadfast lord with music I will sing awake my soul wake our hello my know my The Lord of the earth, my songs of you I'll raise.

[16:52] Great is your steadfast love, which reaches through the sky.

Your constant faithfulness, O Lord, extends to heaven high.

Above the highest ends, O God, exalted thee.

And over all the earth, O best way, your majesty.

Our reading this morning is from 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2, it's just nearly at the very end of the Bible.

[17:59] It's on page 1220 of the Bible I have, but it might be different page numbers in yours. 1 Peter chapter 2, and we'll read the whole chapter together.

1 Peter chapter 2, and we'll read the whole chapter. 1 Peter chapter 2, and we'll read the whole chapter. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up to salvation, if indeed you've tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture, So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

[19:40] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds, and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him, to punish those who do evil, and to praise those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

Honour everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows, while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure?

[ 20 : 56 ] But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins on his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Amen. This is God's word, and may he bless it to each one of us. Well, before we come back to the passage, we're going to sing again, this time in Psalm 61. And we're singing from the Scottish Psalter version on page 293.

The first two Psalms that we sung have spoken so much of praising God, rejoicing in his goodness, and celebrating all the wonderful things that God has done for us.

[ 22 : 17 ] But we know that that is always just half of the Christian's experience. As we follow Jesus, life also brings many challenges and bruises and struggles. And the amazing thing about God is that as we come to him, we don't just come with our joys and thanksgivings, we also come with our sorrows and our struggles.

And that's captured so powerfully in this Psalm. We're going to sing verses 1 to 4, and these are a great reminder that we can come to the Lord for shelter and protection in all the times when we feel like we are struggling.

So for those of you who have had a tough week, and who are here feeling like your heart is overwhelmed, this Psalm is just a wonderful opportunity to pour all that out before the Lord, and to cast yourself into his loving care.

So we'll stand and sing verses 1 to 4, Psalm 61, to God's praise. O God, give thee unto my cry, unto my prayer at end, from God's voice corner of the land, my guide to thee I'll say, What time my heart is overwhelmed, and in perplexity, who thou believe unto the Lord, that higher is the night. For thou hast for my refuge been, a shelter by thy power, and for defence against my foes, thou hast been a strong turn.

[ 24 : 46 ] within thy tabernacle I forever will abide, and under cover of thy wings, with confidence behind.

As we turn back to 1 Peter, let's just pray together for a wee moment. Father, as we come to your word now, we pray that our ears and our minds and our hearts would be open to hear from you.

We pray that you'd help us to understand your word, help us to apply it to our lives. May it be written on our hearts, and may it shape every part of our lives this week, and for the rest of our lives.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to turn back to this passage, and I'd like to read again a wee section in the middle, from verse 11 down to verse 16.

Peter writes, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

[ 26 : 28 ] Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil, or to praise those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

At this time of year, many of us are getting back into the routine of work and school. Summer is nearly over, although this year in Lewis, we're asking the question, did it ever even start? But certainly, according to the calendar, summer is nearly over. Most of us have had holidays, or those of you who still have holidays, they're going to be over soon. School has started. Many of us are back to work again. And for some of us, that might be exciting. For others, it might be depressing. For many of us, it's probably a mixture of both.

[ 27 : 30 ] Whatever, however you feel, getting back to routine, there's no denying that work and school are a massive part of our lives. It's always important to remember, we spend far more time at work or at school than we do at church.

And apart from sleeping, it's the thing that you're probably going to spend the most time doing in the week ahead. And that's true even if you're not in paid employment, or if you're retired. You still have many, many duties that you have to attend to this week. Lots of responsibilities to carry. There's always going to be things that you need to do. And all of that still work. And for those of you who are retired, I remember speaking to a friend of mine who has had a very busy retirement.

And I said, you seem to be as busy as ever. And he said, yes, the only difference is now I don't get paid and I don't get holidays. And so, everyone's busy. Everyone's working. It's all work.

And so, the title for our sermon today is Back to Work. And we're going to use that title to think a little bit about what the Bible teaches about work.

[ 28 : 37 ] And I hope that that will help us all as we go into the week ahead and as we head back into routine. We've got two main headings, The Theology of Working, The Opportunity of Working.

So, first of all, The Theology of Working. The biblical theology of work can be summed up in three short statements. Work is brilliant.

Work is rubbish. Work is being renewed. Work is brilliant. Work is rubbish. Work is being renewed.

And so, the first of these, the fact that work is brilliant, is something that we learn from the very start of the Bible.

And in so many ways, work is a wonderful thing. It's an immense blessing to be employed, to be involved in our community, to have a home to look after, to be able to use the gifts and abilities that we have for a purpose.

And we must never forget that that's always been part of what God has intended for us. When God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, he placed him there to work it and to keep it.

[ 29 : 43 ] You see that in Genesis 2, chapter 15. And so, it's reminding us that we're all created to be workers. Paradise, in Eden, includes work.

And of course, that makes perfect sense of the experience that so many people have and maybe some of you have had at times in your life when we are unemployed or we're incapacitated through illness or some other reason.

And when we have those periods in life when we can't work, it's so hard. And for many people, that's debilitating, frustrating, and depressing.

And all of that makes sense from a biblical point of view because work is part of what God has created us to do. In fact, working is part of how we bear the image of God.

So if you think about God, God's always active. He's always utilising his attributes. He's always accomplishing his purposes.

[ 30 : 40 ] He's always fulfilling his responsibilities. God's never bored. God's never wandering aimlessly. God's never thinking, I don't have anything to do. I don't know what to do. God never experiences that.

He's always active, always working. And as his image bearers, we're to do the same. And that's one of the extraordinary privileges we have as image bearers.

He's given us capacities, abilities, gifts, to do that. And, you know, we can see that there have been so many amazing things achieved through humans getting up in the morning and working.

And, likewise, school is the same. To have an education is brilliant. We have been created by God to learn and to grow and to understand. And so, I know that some aspects of school are rubbish.

There was lots about school I didn't like. But, as a general principle, to be educated is such an extraordinary privilege. And it's really important for children, young people, to remember that throughout history and even still throughout the world today, there are so many people where their one dream in life is to get an education.

[ 31 : 58 ] education. And that's part of what we're made for because we're made to learn and grow. Education is an extraordinary privilege. Teachers and school staff are a precious, precious gift from God.

There's so many ways in which work is brilliant. But work is also rubbish. And experience tells us that work and school can be really, really hard.

And sometimes it's Monday to Friday that brings the most bruises and struggles in our lives. And again, the Bible gives us an explanation for this.

Adam was given the mandate to work and the Garden of Eden is an environment of harmony and fulfillment and purpose. But sin has brought a curse.

And as you come into Genesis 3, as Adam and Eve sin against God and bring a curse onto all of creation, part of that curse is to turn work into toil.

[ 33 : 09 ] Let me read from Genesis 3, 17. To Adam, God said, because you've listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you're taken for your dust and to dust you shall return.

And ever since then, ever since Genesis 3, sin has had a devastating effect on work. And so, we can work our socks off striving to accomplish something only for it to come to nothing.

We can face hostility, criticism, and animosity from the colleagues that we work with or from the members of the public that we're trying to serve.

We can go into a new day hoping to do our best only to be hit by disappointments and discouragements again and again. We can constantly be under the crushing pressure of expectation, stress, to make sure we achieve and do things at work even though all the time it's pushing us to breaking point.

[ 34 : 19 ] And at the opposite end of the spectrum some of us could go to work and really struggle with boredom and a lack of satisfaction feeling like we've never quite done the thing that we really longed to do.

And for these and for many other reasons work can be really, really hard and going back to work or going back to school after the summer holidays can sometimes be a real thought.

Sometimes it just puts that kind of tension down the back of your neck and it makes your heart sink. Everybody experiences that from time to time. If you're experiencing that this week or if you experienced it last week or whenever it is you return to work or school please remember, please remember that God knows that.

please remember that Jesus cares for the burdened. And that's that's the amazing thing about Jesus.

He never ever comes to us expecting us to be strong and capable and confident because he knows we're not. He expects us to come to him acknowledging the fact that oh man Monday morning's a thought.

[ 35 : 33 ] My email inbox is a nightmare. I don't want to go to school today. I am feeling crushed by the pressure I'm under. You can bring all of that to Jesus.

Tomorrow morning and every day that is hard you can lean on him. He knows that work is now rubbish. But we also need to know and remember that work is being renewed.

The Bible gives us a coherent explanation why we all have that desire to work and why it brings so much fulfilment to us. The Bible has the explanation for why at the same time going to work on a Monday morning or going to school is really hard.

We must never forget though that the great goal of the gospel the great goal of God's redemptive plan is to put right what went wrong in Genesis 3. And so so much was broken in Genesis chapter 3 work included and the gospel has come to restore and heal all of that.

And so that means that God's redemptive plan and the goal of the gospel includes your job and your education that the renewal of the gospel should affect all of these things.

[ 36 : 46 ] And that applies now to our lives. So that means that following Jesus and living for him should make a massive difference to how we find work and school and the influence of the gospel should shape the way that we live and behave and approach all of these things.

So going to work today going to work this week the gospel comes with us. We don't leave it at church on Sunday. It comes to us and should come with us and should shape the way we live and behave in all the responsibilities and duties that we have in Monday to Friday.

So it all applies now but like everything in the gospel there is a now and a not yet because the fulfillment of all of this restoration lies in the future in the new creation when once again work will be restored to being work without toil and the curse of the sin will be undone and as we serve Jesus in the new creation we will enjoy that incredible fulfillment of using the gifts that God has given us to serve him to work together to accomplish.

I'm sure you've heard this many many times but we must never think of heaven as playing harps on clouds. It's a new creation a restored universe where we will live and serve together with purpose and with all the curse of sin gone forever.

And all of this is reminding us that God's word is teaching us that work is a key part of the theology that the Bible presents to us and so we can go through the Bible and we can find explanations for all the experiences that we have in our jobs or in our school.

[ 38 : 34 ] The theology of work is incredibly important but one of the massive lessons that the theology of working in the Bible teaches us is that work gives us amazing opportunities and that means that for the Christian if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian that means that a biblical understanding of work makes Monday morning exciting and that's so important for anybody who is not yet a Christian.

One of the mistakes that we can make this is probably easy to misunderstand so please don't get me wrong when I say this but one of the big, big, big mistakes that we can make when approaching the gospel is to think that it just fixes eternity.

Now it does fix eternity and Jesus does mean trusting in Jesus does mean that we are going to be safe on the day that we die and he will take us to be with him and we will enjoy eternity with him in his new creation and with all our brothers and sisters and the eternity he has for us is absolutely amazing but that is not just what the gospel does.

The gospel doesn't just fix eternity the gospel makes a massive difference now and there are many, many people who are Christians who think that life now is rubbish but at least I've got my ticket to heaven.

That's a really, really truncated understanding of the gospel that's only half the gospel because following Jesus actually makes such a massive difference to our lives today and so as we go into a new week having our eyes on Jesus having our hearts filled with the truths of the gospel makes a massive difference.

[ 40 : 23 ] The theology of working in the Bible teaches us that work gives us amazing opportunities and so I want to unpack that a little bit more the opportunity of working and what I want us to see is that 1 Peter chapter 2 gives us two clear reasons why work and why the opportunity of working is so important.

First of all your work and when keep reminding when I say work I don't just mean the thing you're paid for work employment school or whatever responsibilities you have in your home or your family or your community your work is an opportunity for Christian contact.

It's an opportunity for Christian contact. Look again at verse 11 and 12 Peter says Beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

I want you to notice three crucial words in that passage in verse 12 among the Gentiles so Peter is writing to Christians who are spread all across Asia Minor which is what we would call Turkey today you see the place is listed at the very start of the letter and he describes the people he's writing to as the dispersion the Greek word there is the word diaspora it's describing people who are scattered across various locations in the ancient world and as the result of that dispersion these Christians are not living in a Christian nation or in a Christian community they are living in a predominantly non-Christian society and that of course explains why Peter describes them as sojourners and exiles they were living in a world that at first had no interest in Christianity Christianity but over time during the first century became more and more hostile to the Christian

faith and in which Christians were not at home in other words it was a world where they did not fit in and as we think about that situation we would maybe expect Peter to say cut yourselves off keep away from there's a ton of terrible influences around you keep away from them flee from any interaction with that society so that you're not exposed to unhealthy influences and so many Christians throughout history have done that and if you read about the early church in like the second and third centuries one of the things that you'll often read about there is sometimes people who became hermits so went to live completely on their own others who would maybe form communities often as monks or as nuns communities that were kind of cut off isolated from all the negative influence in the world around them and that pattern has continued maybe not to the extremities that you see in the early church but even in our own island culture

I think that it's true to say that we are often drawn to that mindset where we are conscious that the world around us is becoming less and less shaped by the bible and our instinct is to retreat and to keep away and to cut ourselves off from those who are around us and I understand why people feel like that and there is an aspect in which part of that can be helpful but it's dangerous because it can leave us with very little contact with the world around us and all the time Peter is saying to us Christians must be among the Gentiles indeed the whole of the second half of this chapter that we read is teaching us about the Christian's place in society we're to honour those who are in authority we're to be subject to human institutions we are to respectfully serve our employers and of course this is just emphasising what

[ 44 : 42 ] Jesus himself said we said render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God and the crucial point I want us to notice is that here and elsewhere in the New Testament we're seeing that God wants us among the Gentiles in other words God wants us among unbelievers among people who don't know anything about the Bible among people who don't really care what Christian ethics are among people who have got very little interest in honouring God in their lives God wants us among them and that's exactly what Jesus himself taught if you go back to the Sermon on the Mount let me read from Matthew 5 verse 13 Jesus says you are the salt of the earth but if salt has lost its taste how shall its saltiness be restored it's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet you are the light of the world a city set on a hill cannot be hidden nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a stand and it gives light to all the house in the same way let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven and so our work what we do

Monday to Friday is an opportunity for Christian contact and what's the purpose of that Christian contact well there's a key word that appears in both the Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5 and in 1 Peter chapter 2 it appears in verse 16 in Matthew 5 it appears in verse 12 in chapter 2 chapter 2 of 1 Peter it's the word see God wants you as a Christian to be seen in society not hidden seen and the most outstanding example of this is Jesus himself he worked with people he walked with people he spoke to people he went into the towns he went into the villages he went into the streets he went into the public areas he went into the temple oh he was seen he was constantly seen in the society in which he lived and it's all reminding us that your job or your school class or whatever you're going to be doing this week is an amazing opportunity for Christian contact with the society that we live in so whatever you are going to be doing this week you are going to be making contact with people who are not yet Christians and as you make that contact you are a key participant in God's purposes in fact we've always got to remember we believe in the sovereignty of God we believe in the providence of God we believe that wherever you are on Monday morning tomorrow is where God has placed you and why is he doing that it's because you can fulfill his purposes and he can work in and through you and by you being there you can connect with people who are not yet believers and this is where your role is so important because one thing I can absolutely say is that I used to be an engineer before I was a minister I had far more contact with unbelievers as an engineer than I do as a minister and in so many ways it's harder now to reach people because my work doesn't give me that immediate contact with those who aren't believers same with those of you who have to go to school those of you who are doing the school run tomorrow morning you're going to meet if you're going to start with primary you're going to see hundreds of parents who aren't yet believers by five past nine tomorrow morning you will have had contact with more unchristians than I'm going to have for the rest of the year and so it's an amazing opportunity for Christian contact and it's a vital reminder that whatever you're doing this week your role there as a

Christian is of utmost importance because God wants you among the Gentiles and maybe you need to think about that a bit more have you ever thought about how much your colleagues and your community need you around them and among them we live in a world that is so full of greed where there's brutal selfishness where the workplace is so often competitive hostile dog eat dog we live in a world of market forces where businesses are competing against each other one person can only get stronger if someone else is getting weaker we live in a world saturated by blame culture everyone's constantly looking over their shoulder worried that they're the ones who are going to be singled out for things that are going wrong we live in a world where the workplace is so often full of malice deceit hypocrisy envy and slander and as your colleagues grind out their lives in that world they desperately need you among them our society needs Christians everywhere and that makes your job and your routine this week so exciting because as a Christian if you are a Christian or if you become a

Christian you can be there as a Christian and that's a vital part of God's purposes it's an amazing opportunity to be in contact with a world that desperately needs the light that's within you our jobs our work whatever you're doing this week is an opportunity for Christian contact we must be among the Gentiles however being among the Gentiles does not mean being like them and that brings us to the second key point that Peter highlights your work is an opportunity for Christian conduct so we have Christian contact and we have the opportunity for Christian conduct go back again to 11 and 12 beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify

[ 51 : 10 ] God on the day of visitation Peter tells us that as we are among the Gentiles we are to keep our conduct honourable now the words here are fascinating the word conduct literally means you're turning about in a place and so it's conveying the idea of behaviour conduct way of life we would maybe say how you go about yourself and it's clearly a broad term and that's it means that it's encapsulating our whole behaviour as Christians so our attitudes our actions our reactions our speech our habits our day to day conduct so what that means is that this is a word that applies to the normal routine of life the normal everyday unexciting routine of life that means that for all of us as we go back to work back to school back into a normal week we are going back to day to day conduct to the behaviour that makes up a huge part of our weekly routine and God wants that day to day routine to be outstanding in its quality and that's what's highlighted by the word honourable again it's a broad term basically means good it's used in Galatians 6-9 let us not grow weary of doing good same word in other parts of the New

Testament it's translated noble right excellent beautiful it's all telling us that God wants his people he wants you and me as Christians he wants our daily routine at work at school in life to be a model of excellent behaviour of beautiful conduct and that inevitably involves avoiding certain habits that's why people Peter can say abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul so in order to have the conduct that Jesus wants us to have we need to avoid the behaviour that's going to arise from the passions that exist within us in other words what this means is that you have to fight really hard on the inside if you're going to behave with gentleness kindness and warmth on the outside a little later Peter gives more examples of what these passions of the flesh tend to involve you can see it at the start of chapter four

I'll read it out from verse three for time is past that suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do living in sensuality passions drunkenness orgies drinking parties and lawless idolatry with respect to this they're surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and they malign you now these verses are so fascinating to read because you know you read those verses and you can easily think oh man how depraved were those people in Asia Minor but think about the workplaces that you all have to go into today think about the conversations in the playground at school how often will people talk about sex or take their phone out and show a picture or a video that's got no restraint that's sensuality that Peter refers to here how often do you look at people and they've just got such deep cravings for the stuff that the world offers whether it's money or status or power or possessions that's the passions that

Peter is referring to how often do you see people and from Monday to Friday Friday they are just longing for the weekend so that they can go out drink to excess party without restraint that's what Peter's talking about he's talking about drunkenness orgies drinking parties exactly the same stuff that people today do all throughout the western world and how often do we come across people

who've got no thought of God and instead they're living for idols and as Peter himself highlights it was exactly the same then and Peter uses a very very vivid phrase to describe this he calls it a flood of debauchery and that's a phrase that could describe many aspects of our society today that's a phrase that could describe the place where you have to work this week or the school environment that you have to grind your way through over the coming days and you look at our society today our newspapers our TV programmes our film industry that phrase captures well a flood of debauchery and that kind of way of life that mindset where people have abandoned themselves to what is often reckless immoral behaviour it's actually seen as impressive it's seen as cool and this is where Peter's language is so helpful he calls it a flood of debauchery what's the key thing about a flood a flood is very very very very easy to get swept up in and that's what happens isn't it it's happened to me at times in my

Christian life I'm sure it's happened to you this kind of flood of whether it's language or conversations or whatever and it sweeps past you and before you know it you're in it getting swept along in fact people will think that you're crazy for not joining in Peter says that in verse 4 of chapter 4 he says people will be surprised when you join in they'll speak badly of you for not doing it and that's a very real problem that you may have faced in the past that you might face in the future you'll definitely face it in school those of you who are in school particularly high school you'll definitely face that people will be doing stuff you're like I don't want to join in with that and you get grief for it 1 Peter knows exactly what that's like and it's the same challenge that Christians have faced for centuries all of that raises a really important question what do we do when we experience that what's the right response to this kind of behaviour what do we do when there's a flood of debauchery all around us well first and foremost we mustn't join in and I know you'll know that you know that anyway and I don't really need to explain that but so that's the negative don't do it but what should we do should we avoid these people so people might say that you just keep away have nothing to do with them but yet we've just been saying that Peter wants us among the [ 58 : 05 ] Gentiles so cutting ourselves off isn't the answer is it to condemn these people and sometimes that can be a response you know we kind of are almost like we sometimes feel that we need to kind of be like a bit of a moral police force where we want to kind of draw attention to this this behaviour and we express a very firm judgement over it now there's an element in which that's important and too we do want to be able to speak out when there are things that are wrong but sometimes we do it in a way that actually very much creates hostility between us and those who think differently of us and we can I think we can all think of examples when Christians have used a tone that has been judgmental to a point where it's not been honouring to the Lord and it's not been helpful and the key thing we have to recognise is that avoiding people condemning people is not actually what the New Testament tells us to do so what does the New Testament tell us to do when you're going to work when you're surrounded by colleagues when you're facing a flood of debauchery what does the New

Testament tell you to do the answer is actually very simple it says show your good works show your good works now what that means is just behave in a way that is good that is unmistakably good that's what Peter talks about in verse 11 and 12 he wants us to keep our conduct honourable so that when people speak against us they actually see our good works and what do they do as a result they glorify God we are to respond to that kind of behaviour that we see in the world around us with a standard of conduct that is excellent and that's where that's the key to our place in society we're to be involved in our society we're to be respectful to everybody that we work with and for and we are to be a wonderful influence for good within our workplaces and it's all reminding us that as you go back to work as you go back to school as you're faced with many of these attitudes that think so differently from the way

Jesus thought and from what Jesus taught as you go into that you have an amazing opportunity to be different and in so many ways that describes the life of discipleship it's an amazing opportunity to be different not in a weird way in a really really good way and so when people are depressed going back to work this week you can go in with joy and enthusiasm and positivity when people feel frustrated and are clearly having a bad day you can get alongside them and encourage them when customers are difficult you can be patient when colleagues are selfish or harsh you can be a model of kindness that stands out beautifully when other people are gossiping or criticizing or moaning you can be self-controlled and show a different example and the key point is that all of this is such a powerful witness and I know

I honestly know as well as you do that going to work tomorrow morning and striking up a conversation about Jesus is not easy and it doesn't happen often and to be honest those moments of witnessing where we have conversations about Jesus are occasional we want to pray for them we want to be ready for them but they don't come that often that kind of witnessing is occasional there's another kind of witnessing that we do every minute of every day and that's through our conduct people can see you and the way you live your life if you have your eyes on Jesus and you're reflecting his goodness it is such a powerful witness and you see Peter talk about that he says by doing good you'll put to silence the ignorance of foolish people such an amazing opportunity it's another thing I have to say though in relation to this and this is a harder thing to say because when I say our

Christ-like conduct is such a good witness the opposite is also true when a Christian's behaviour at work is unchrist-like it's a terrible witness never think that you are sometimes witnessing sometimes not witnessing you're always witnessing always it's just sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not good and I've seen that in my own life at times and that's that's a challenge for us it's something we have to reckon with and I'm going to say something that is maybe very challenging it's very likely that there's a Christian in here or a Christian watching at home and the first thing that you need to do tomorrow morning at work is to go and apologise to somebody for something that you've said or done last week and that's not an easy thing to do but it's a really brave thing to do and do you know what you'll get if you do that you will get respect because right now that person thinks you're a hypocrite because you said that you were you've said that you're a Christian and yet you had a pain in the backside last week and if you apologise you're not going to lose their respect you're going to gain their respect and that's just the

[ 64 : 09 ] Christian life the life of discipleship showing itself in that's the way that's what the gospel is all about acknowledging our mistakes saying that we're sorry and moving on in repentance and in healing the test of being a Christian in the workplace is not never getting it wrong we're always going to get it wrong the test is saying sorry when we do so all of this is reminding us that God wants you in your workplace in your home in your involvement in the community to be a model of Christian conduct one very final thing to say on that is that at times that might involve suffering and Peter captures that really powerfully in chapter 2 from verse 19 let me just read these words because Peter says it way better than I could this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrow while suffering unjustly for what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure but if when you do good and suffer for it you endure this is a gracious thing in the sight of God if you have a tough day at work or at school even though you've done nothing wrong you can go home and God is saying you've done a gracious thing

I've seen it and I value it from verse 21 for to this you've been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps he committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were staying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseers of your soul that means something amazing you might go to work this week and you might have an opportunity to speak about Jesus you might give one of these cards to someone and they might actually come to church and you might have a really positive day where you've shown this kind of characteristics born the fruit of the spirit and that's brilliant and you can come home that day and say you know I am so thankful to God that I was able to be Christ like today and that is Christ like but you might also go to work and you might get a ton of grief you might have a really difficult customer and you might have a colleague who's awful to you and it might be an absolutely awful day even though you went in trying to do your best do you know that on that day you are also being Christ like because that's exactly what he endured and that is why Jesus meets us in the highs of a day that's gone well and in the lows of a day that's gone badly every single day we are following him all of this is reminding us that although going to work and school on a Monday morning can be really hard as a Christian your work is such a precious thing in the sight of God it's an opportunity for Christian conduct and your friends and colleagues and classmates need you there and it's an opportunity did I say conduct contact my words are too similar an opportunity for Christian contact and it's an opportunity for Christian conduct and that's what lies at the heart of our witness and if anyone here is not yet a Christian or not sure or thinking about things I just want you to see what a

massive difference it makes to know and follow Jesus and maybe you're going through life and you're thinking what is the point every week is just the same  
I'm tired and disillusioned and struggling and I wish things were different and I don't really know what to do if you go chasing another job or higher salary or more success or a better car or whatever you're going to end up feeling the same but if you follow Jesus it transforms everything with Jesus Sundays are brilliant so are Mondays and so is every other day let's follow him together let's pray Lord Jesus we thank you thank you for the difference that you make to every single part of our lives and as we go into Monday morning again and as we're getting back to routine after all the school holidays as the young ones are going back to school as we're going back to work and as the responsibilities of life just return after the holiday period oh we pray that you would use us in all of that that we would have Christian contact with the people who so desperately need you and that our lives would be a model of Christ like conduct we can't do that on our own but you promise to be with us by your spirit may this week and every week of our lives be lived to the glory of your precious and amazing name amen we're going to conclude with Psalm 116 in the Scottish Psalter page 154 Psalm 116 page 154 these words express just beautiful expression of praise and thanksgiving to God but I want to just highlight verses 7 to 9 that will be the last answer we sing we rest in the Lord because he's been so good for us but we also live for him and so that verse 9 that I may live for you while I have breath oh that's our prayer as we go into a new week together so Psalm 116 1 to 9 four stans we can we can sing and sing our hearts out to God's praise I love the Lord because he heard my voice he listened when I cry to him for it  
[ 70 : 11 ] I'll call him as long as long as I shall live he was he turned to hear me when I wait the courts of death kept and entangled me of what we carry and wish of the grave with grief and trouble I was overcome then on the name of God I call Lord save the Lord our God is kind and full of grace both righteous and compassionate is he the  
Lord protects all those of childlike faith when I know significant he rescued me rest o'er my soul God has been good good to you for you O Lord has saved my soul from death I feed from stumbling and my eyes from tears that I live for you while I have breath as you go into a new week together may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all and all God's people say  
Amenou a after me Thank you.  
Thank you.