

Overwork, Underwork, and Rest

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[0 : 0 0] All right, so we're working through a series, as all of you know, on work, faith. What does our faith have to do with work? And last time, Derek talked about the problem of sin and our rebellion against God and how that matters for the corruption of our work life.

And so we're going to carry on that on and focus it a little bit tonight. One of the ways we might could focus it is to say because of our sin, because of the sin of Adam and Eve and our sin, our work is always going to be self-centered to some degree.

And we will find ourselves in throughout life focused not on the common good, seeking the good of others in the way we work. We'll focus not on glorifying God and all that we do, whether we're eating, drinking or working.

We'll focus not on witnessing to the goodness of God's intentions for work from Genesis and Ford, but we'll take work and we'll do it with selfish ambition. So that's the language that Paul uses, the language of selfish ambition when it comes to our work, not ambition, but selfish ambition, self-centeredness when it comes to the ways we work.

And so we could talk about all sorts of specific examples in different, every one of you could tell stories about the way selfishness has worked out for you in the workplace, how you've seen it, how you felt the temptation of it.

[1 : 2 7] But I want to focus and study tonight on two general problems that come up because of sin as it relates to work. And that's the problem of overwork and the problem of underwork.

So the problem of working too much and the problem of not working enough. And so every one of us, because of our personalities and our tendencies, will tend towards one or the other in life.

Will tend either to be people who overwork or underwork and probably more often than not for the folk that we have at St. Columbus, our tendency will likely be to overwork rather than underwork.

And one pastor puts it like this, he says, in the modern work environment, because you can work anywhere, you're prone to work everywhere.

And interrupting ceaseless strivings takes a surprisingly enormous force of your will. It's hard to rest, it's easier just to work all the time.

[2 : 3 1] It's actually more difficult for us in modernity to rest. So that's the problem of overwork. Some of us are prone to working constantly. But John Piper points out both sides of this, he says, there's the real possibility that a person may work too much because he or she is in bondage to work because of ego, because of finances, because of building wealth in a bank account is the greatest end of life, the problem of overwork, because he's escaping his home every day.

Or it may be that a person wants to work as little as possible because he or she is lazy and just simply hates work. And so that would make lack of work or the manner of working in a slothful way, a sin.

So in either case, there's self-centeredness. So you can underwork because you're not motivated by God's glory to work in the ways you've been created for. Underwork means that we're struggling with not being driven by the glory of God to be the image of God in the ways that he's created us to be, which includes working.

Underwork would mean something like we're not motivated by God's glory to work for the reasons we've been created to work. So in the one instance, we're not motivated by God's glory to do what we've been created to do.

In the other, we're not motivated by God's glory to work for the reasons God's given us to work in this life. So it's two ways of being turned in on ourselves, as Santa Guston put it.

[4 : 04] So all I want to do for the next few minutes is think about the biblical, what I think is the main biblical antidote, which is the thing that can stop the poison.

And it's the same thing for both problems, whether you struggle with overwork or underwork. There's the same thing that God says to us. There's more than one thing, but let's just talk about one tonight because we don't have a lot of time.

And that's the pattern that we're given in the Bible, six days, one day. So there's a biblical pattern from Genesis to Revelation of six days and one day.

So it's the concept of Sabbath. It's actually Sabbath that orients us. And it tells us not to overwork and it tells us not to underwork. It gives us both.

So I want to read with you from Luke chapter six. So I'm going to read Luke chapter six, verses one to 11. So if you have a Bible, great.

[5 : 05] And if not, that's okay. Just try to try to listen. So this is God's word, Luke six. On a Sabbath, while he was going through the cornfields, Jesus's disciples plucked and ate some of the ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands.

But some of the Pharisees said, why are you doing this? Not lawful to do on the Sabbath day. And Jesus answered them, have you not read what David did when he was hungry?

He and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God, he took and ate the bread of presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat. And he gave it to those who were with him.

And he said to them, the son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching and a man was there. His right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him.

But he knew their thoughts and he said to the man with the withered hand, come and stand here. And he rose and he stood there. And Jesus said to them, I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to destroy it?

[6 : 13] And after looking around at them, all he said to them, after looking around at them, all he said to him, I think I still read that wrong. Let me try one more time.

And after looking around at them all, there it is, he said to him, stretch out your hand. And he did so. And his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Okay, so a couple of things very quickly. We won't take long on this. First, Jesus tells us something here, I think, about just the simple fact of the Sabbath. So the issue here is that the Pharisees had developed rules.

There's a book that was developed after this called the Hakkala in Hebrew. And it is a book that was first developed as oral tradition, which would have been very much present at the time of Christ.

And it's part of what we call the Mishnah, which was written and recorded later. But these are basically the traditional rules in Judaism. So they developed way after the giving of the law, the Torah, and they're very prominent in Christ's day.

[7 : 23] Because there's a chapter in the Hakkala, which just means the way you should walk in Hebrew, rules to live by, chapter 7.2. And it says this, that the chief categories of the acts of labor prohibited on the Sabbath are 40 minus one.

So 39 rules that you have to obey on the Sabbath day. And this is what they are. You must not sow, plow, reap, bind, thresh, winnow, select, produce, or crops, grind, sift, need, bake.

You must not shear wool, wash it, beat it, dye it, spin it, weave it, make two loops, weave two threads, separate two threads, tie anything, untie anything, sow two stitches, tear in order to sow again.

You must not trap a deer, slaughter it, flay it, salt it, cure it, scrape it, cut it up. You must not write two letters. You must not erase two letters in order to write two more letters.

You must not build. You must not tear down. You must not put out a fire, kindle a fire. You must not hit with a hammer or transport an object from one domain to another.

[8 : 41] So these are the 39 rules for the Sabbath, how you obey it. Now here, Jesus disciples pluck, grain, and grind it with their hands.

So clearly they've broken at least two of the Haka'la commands about the Shabbat, the Sabbath. And both Matthew and Mark's account, you can't see it here in Luke's account quite clearly because it's not as obvious in the English, but they actually, the Pharisees actually direct their accusation against Jesus, not the disciples.

It doesn't say Jesus, cluck, grain, the disciples do. But when the Pharisees come, they say, why do you, your disciples do this?

And so they're saying to Jesus, you are the guilty one. You've broken the Sabbath. And the reason for that is because anytime in the first century, when there's a rabbi and a group of disciples, which was normative, there are many rabbis and disciples, it was the rabbi that's responsible for the disciples' behavior, even legally sometimes.

And so they're giving the accusation to Christ that he's guilty of breaking God's law. He's guilty of violating the Sabbath. Now very simple, all of us want to look at that and say, hopefully, I think you do probably, want to say how legalistic.

[10 : 02] You listen to these 39 rules and you say, this is legalism. This is trying to create rules in order to get into God's favor, to think that following these rules, not grinding grain on the Sabbath day with your fingers, is going to get you into the holy presence of the living God.

That's going to be the means of God's acceptance for you. And we look at that and we say, how legalistic? Now, it is legalistic, but Jesus does not respond that way.

Jesus does not say, you are a bunch of legalists. Instead, he actually affirms the fact of the Sabbath.

And we see that implicitly because instead of condemning them, he starts to interpret the Sabbath for them. He starts to say, no, I'm not here to say the Sabbath law is nothing.

Instead I'm here to show you what it really means. I'm here to show you how to interpret it. And we see language like that, for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, when he says that not a jot or tittle of the law will pass away until it's fulfilled.

[11 : 07] I'm deadly serious about the law. And I'm deadly serious. Jesus was very serious about the Sabbath. He was not diminishing it. He was maximizing it actually. We're going to see something very similar, by the way, on Sunday morning from the Haka'la as well, another in Kelinor that Jesus has with the Pharisees, where he does the same thing.

He maximizes the law. He doesn't minimize it. And so Jesus does not come to get rid of the Sabbath, but to fulfill it and to teach us about it. That's what he's doing here.

The mistake that we might make as modern people, and here's how it relates to work, in an environment where we would tend towards overwork very easily because of smartphones and email and remote work and all sorts of things, we would be tempted, I think, to look at what the Pharisees do here and to say, look, we don't want to be legalists.

And so we might suppose the Sabbath. We might suppose rest, a six in one paradigm from the Old Testament as some over-religious ancient restraint.

And so there's two bad ways to go here. You can go the legalist way, the Pharisees, but you can also go the Antinomian way, which is say we're against the law together. Jesus got rid of the law.

[12 : 28] And actually the gospels don't do either of those things. So we have to say no to the Pharisees' legalism, and we have to at the same time say no to our culture's tendency towards Antinomianism of saying anytime there's a law, there's an idea that God's given us, that's an imposition of crazy religiosity.

And that's neither of those things is what Jesus does. All right, so second of three things, very brief as well.

Instead what Jesus does is he teaches us about the nature of the Sabbath. And when you look at the nature of the Sabbath, you realize what it means for our work lives, our work life balance. And so he tells us here that the Sabbath law is good, but it has to be understood rightly.

Tim Keller, the late Tim Keller's book, Every Good Endeavor, which is about work, we're basing some of our reflections about work from it. He talks about why modern people tend to frustrate the rhythm of work and rest that the Bible offers us.

We tend to ignore it, we tend to frustrate it. And there's a few reasons, a couple reasons I'll give you. One is technology. So all of us are very aware of this, but because you can work anywhere, we have a tendency to work everywhere.

[13 : 44] So if you're prone to overwork, technology really enables you to overwork. But if you're prone to underwork, technology really enables you to underwork.

You can work everywhere, so you'll work anywhere. You can play everywhere, so you'll play anywhere. You can pull out your phone and do social media and games anytime you want, or you can work on your phone anytime you want.

And so if you're prone to either, it's going to get maximized actually in the modern landscape that we live in. Second reason, I'll just do two. We've transitioned from a traditional society, a pre-modern society, through the industrial age of the 19th century into modernity.

And when you transition from a pre-modern society to a modern society, one of the basic differences is that in pre-modern societies and traditional societies, you get your meaning and life through your family's social role.

So you exist for the community more than for yourself. And there's even problems with that, but that's the way pre-modern life is set. And modern life, we're individualist.

[14 : 52] And so it's not that family's not important to us, but nevertheless, we have much more an emphasis in modern life that every single individual gets to decide what they want to be when they grow up.

So if you've ever asked a child, what do you want to be when you grow up? That's a very modernist question. Nobody in the 18th century could have ever asked somebody something like that. But we ask those kinds of questions because you can decide what you want to be when you grow up.

And when you live in a culture like that, personal identity is tied incredibly closely to career choice and to work success and to building a name.

And when you have that type of culture, that means you're very prone to overwork because it's on you to build the name for yourself because you're an individual.

Or if you have a tendency to underwork, you might come to a place in this modern individualist world where you just simply say, I'm OK with the unexamined life.

[15 : 49] I'm OK with not being successful. I just want to relax. I just want to have fun. I just want Netflix. And so either tendency, individualism brings it out.

It doesn't stamp down overwork or underwork. It actually maximizes both technology and individualism, maximizing both problems. And both problems ignore the biblical paradigm of six and one.

If you pick up, go to Blackwells, go to Waterstones right now and pick up success books, productivity books. I love a good productivity book.

I read a few a year every year. But it's never without fail that you open up a productivity book. And one of the things you're definitely going to read about is a whole chapter devoted to something like deep rest.

And it's because people recognize in the productivity world that modern people have missed the Sabbath concept and how important it is for both being productive and a healthy human being.

[16 : 52] And you have in the nature of the concept of deep rest or Sabbath itself, one of these magnetic points of human existence where we're drawn to it. We know we're empty without it.

It's a natural theology in itself, if you will, a part of general revelation where people are driven toward it no matter what they believe in, knowing they need it desperately. And it's exactly the way God's designed the world.

Let me just say two things about what Jesus says here about it. And then I'll apply it in the last bit, a few ways to work specifically, how it can help us with our overwork or our underwork problem.

So here's one of the two. He tells us here that the Sabbath is about food. That's how he talks to us about it.

So what does he say? He says that, well, the Pharisees are charging the disciples with eating on the Sabbath day and grinding in order to eat.

[17 : 49] So they were truly hungry and they're being charged with a violation of God's law because they chose to grind in order to eat. Jesus then turns to a food example.

Here's Samuel 21, he says, well, remember David was hungry in the Old Testament and his men were really hungry and he took them straight into the temple, into the holy place, and they ate the bread of presence, the holy bread of the temple that they could not eat.

They were not allowed to eat. And yeah, his point, it's implicit. He doesn't say it out loud, but this point is that God did not strike them. So they were starving.

They were desperately hungry. They went in and ate bread that was not okay for them to eat. Yet God did not kill them for it. And there are examples in the Old Testament where God certainly struck down people, judged people for treating the temple in the wrong way, but that wasn't one of them.

So he's trying to get them to think why. And it's partly because he's saying the Sabbath is about food. Well, that's a pithy way of saying it.

[18 : 57] Think about the next little section. He says in the next section, in the next story, he healed a man with a withered hand in the second story on the Sabbath day. And they said, what are you doing?

You can't do that. You can't heal a man with a withered hand because it's the Sabbath. That's work. Now, you see, the first instance, it's about food.

The second instance, it's about healing the body. And if you open up the Westminster Confession of Faith and the larger Catechism, you'll see how they understood this because they said that one of the things we can understand about the Sabbath is the Sabbath is for the restoration of the body.

So he uses a food example and a healing of the body example to say, first, you need to understand the nature of the Sabbath. The Sabbath exists in God's commanding you to give your body a chance.

Let your body rest. Put down your strivings. Put down, stop making bricks in Egypt. You've got to have a day where your body is allowed to recover because God cares about the body.

[20 : 01] That's a real aspect to the Sabbath day. Jesus chooses commands, examples, and does actions that tell us it's about that. But it's also as well about mercy.

So he says, is there a way to work, quote unquote, on the Sabbath and it'd be good? Absolutely. And that's when you serve people who have real need. So if somebody's starving and you feed them.

If you're starving and you feed yourself and you have to work to do that on the Sabbath day, that's okay. And if you help heal someone, if you help show mercy to someone on the Sabbath, if you get out and spend the Sabbath day doing good works and that's tiring even, that's okay.

And that's been the reform traditions view for centuries all the way back to Augustine and through Calvin and in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It's written exactly like that.

And one of the things that means is that we have to see the Sabbath first serves the purpose of restoration of the physical self.

[21 : 03] It's for the physical healing of the self and the physical healing of others. And that means it can't be over programmed. That's one of the very clear aspects of this passage. You can never treat the Sabbath like the Pharisees did with something like a Haka'la, a casualistic 39 commandments about the way you must not work.

And Jesus is saying that's not the way instead think about it like this. The Sabbath is God's command to you to put the bricks down and to first let your physical body rest, show mercy.

These are good things you can do on the Sabbath. But all right, that's not the biggest thing. The biggest thing is the second thing. And in the second thing he says, verse five, I am the Lord of the Sabbath.

I believe that was verse five, wasn't it? I am the Lord of the Sabbath. Now immediately they know what he's doing. He of course knows what he's doing.

He's saying here. He's connecting himself to the moment that the Sabbath came into existence. The Lord of the Sabbath, the king of the Sabbath.

[22 : 11] That's the idea. And where do we find the king of the Sabbath? We find the king of the Sabbath in Genesis chapter one. The moment that the king of the universe, the creator enters into Sabbath to come alongside Adam and Eve to be in their presence.

He enters Sabbath. He enters into his rest. He created the Sabbath on the seventh day. And Jesus is saying, that's me. So he's shocking them because he's saying the reason I can tell you how to do the Sabbath is because I'm the one who made it.

That's what he means when he says the Lord of the Sabbath. And immediately when he says that, we're seeing something. He's saying, I can tell you about how to rest from your work because I'm the one who created rest from work.

And that means that immediately we have to remember God showed us what it means to live a normal week and that normal week is six days of work, one day of rest.

And God enters Sabbath and he's not a physical being. God does not have a body. We confess. And that means that the Sabbath is more about physicality. So it's about the whole person.

[23 : 25] First we need physical rest, but we also need spiritual rest. And so Jesus immediately is saying here, you need spiritual rest and I'm the one who can give it.

I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. I can give you spiritual rest. And that means that much of our problem when it comes to work, overwork, underwork is actually a failure, a lack in us, a struggle to have true spiritual rest.

What is true spiritual rest? True spiritual rest is soul rest. It's when you can say, like God, things are good. That's what God said in Genesis one, he looked out, he said, it's good.

Now I can rest. Well, things are not good in the world. We know that the world is so broken. We're struggling. We struggle with temptation and so we struggle with suffering.

But he's saying you need a day every week where you are able to lay down your identity before God the Father and say because of Jesus Christ, I'm okay.

[24 : 40] I can rest. In other words, he's talking about justification. He's saying, you know, if you've really experienced justification that you are saved by faith through grace, not of yourself.

It's a gift of God all the way. You can come to Sunday and lay down your strivings, your attempts to earn God's favor and truly say, no matter what the problems are in my life, I'm justified.

I'm okay. Jesus has me. He's got me in his grips. In other words, it's the command to be assured of the Lord of the Sabbath's work for you.

And he's saying the Sabbath is about physical rest, but it's more than that. It's about spiritual rest, about laying your strivings down and saying, I don't need performance before God.

Jesus did it for me. I can truly rest. And that of course means worship. That means worship. That's a fundamental activity that we engage in to exercise total spiritual rest.

[25 : 40] It's coming into a space and saying, I'm willing to put my work away and to completely rest and abide in the presence of the living God on Sundays.

That's ultimately Jesus is saying the Sabbath, in other words, is about treating the whole person. So Jesus is going to later say, come unto me if you're weary, if you're burdened, if you're burdened by the commands of the Pharisees, burdened by legalism, but also burdened by antinomianism under a work.

You know that you're not enough, that you can't do it, that you don't have the motivation. You're not productive enough. All sorts of failings in your life. On the Sabbath day, you come and say, but I've Christ, I'm justified by faith.

I can truly rest and who I am and where I am. And I can let that be a springboard for treating these problems in my life. So Sabbath becomes an antidote in every direction.

The reason we can Sabbath is because on the day of crucifixion, he did not get that. First Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, experienced the exact opposite of Sabbath.

[26 : 51] He became ultimately restless. If the Sabbath is about rest, he had no rest on the cross. He was forsaken. He writhed in pain. He cried out in agony.

And he did that so that we could read Hebrews 4. Hebrews 4 says there is a Sabbath rest that ultimately remains for the people of God, truly one day. And so the cross tells us everything we need in order to rest.

Now, let me close by very quickly by now saying, OK, let's let's apply this a little more precisely to work for a few few minutes, just three or four minutes and say a few things.

These are kind of collated from different books. I've looked at over the past on work on faith and work. So I've tried to draw together seven or eight of the main theses about how our faith and things like Sabbath can help us with our problems of work or overworked under work.

Here they are. I'll just rattle them off. First thing, remember, Sabbath is an act of liberation. Exodus 34. God said to the slaves in Egypt, you were once a slave.

[28 : 05] Now you're free. So observe the Sabbath day. So he's telling us God, God said, listen, understand the Sabbath command and it is a command is ultimately a command unto liberation.

It's saying, don't be a slave. You're free and so rest. Take a day. Take Sunday if you can and rest. It's a day of liberation. OK, secondly, Sabbath then is a discipline of trust.

So if you're prone to overwork, you've got to be able to say on the Sabbath, I'm not God. I'm not in control. So I can rest and try today to stop controlling my life by checking email every 15 minutes.

You've got to be willing to give away the control and say, no, today is the day of the Lord. I'm not in control. He is. So actually, Sabbath becomes an act of giving over in trust that God's got you.

Your email is not going to save you. God's actually the one that's going to do that. Or if you're prone to underwork, Sabbath tells you this, today is the day of the Lord and the Lord commissions you to work six days.

[29 : 19] So it actually gives you your marching orders. It says to you, give today to the Lord. And now the Lord is sending you out to glorify him by being the Genesis one person because of Jesus, the image of God who takes dominion, who works, who's fruitful, who multiplies.

So it does both things. It gives both overwork and underwork answers, reasons. It's the beginning of how to do life, not the end point.

It's the starting block, if you will, of how to do life well. So if you are a person today, some of you, this is me. I know this.

If you are prone to overwork, maybe the idea tonight is you need to actually take more Sabbath time. You need to be more serious about the Sabbath. If you're prone to underwork, you need to actually lessen your rest times, perhaps reevaluate whether they are truly rest times and take the Sabbath so seriously that you hear God's command six and one.

And of course, that doesn't mean that you're going to work six days, nine to five, six days, because if you're off on a Saturday, for example, you're gardening, you're probably cleaning, you're probably tending to the things that you can't get to the days that you're in the office, if you're in the office, right?

[30 : 38] This is all work. It's all comes under that domain. Number four, just a few more, four or six, or four or seven, maybe take your Sabbath on the Sabbath day, if you can.

So if it's possible at all for you, take your Sabbath on the Lord's Day. Now the reason we have to say that is because for some people, we call these works of necessity, larger catechism and our confession, both acknowledges this.

You can't do that. A pastor does not take Sabbath on the Sabbath day. A medical professional that has to work on a Sunday does not take the Sabbath on the Sabbath day. And so if you can, if you're a person who cannot do that, then you've got to find another day that you can truly Sabbath.

You've got to do what you can on the Lord's Day, of course, worship on the Lord's Day if at all possible, and then you've got to find another day that you can really take a serious Sabbath. Now what is a serious Sabbath?

Here's a way to think about it. A serious Sabbath, of course, is worship, works of mercy. These two things are given very, very clearly in Scripture.

[31 : 43] But here's another frame in addition to that. Think about the Sabbath as a day that's all vocational. So whatever your vocation is, the kind of things you normally do, make the Sabbath different.

Make it a day of all vocational schedule, contemplation, and of course worship. So do what you don't do at work. Do something contemplative.

So meditate on Scripture, read books that help you set your mind on the Lord. Have special times of prayer.

Have times of just thinking. Wrap yourself in beauty. So put yourself in a place where you can see beauty on the Sabbath day. These are all good ideas. Enjoy it. Eat. Drink and be merry.

Eat, drink and be merry with Christian friends. Glorify in God. Show hospitality. Do good works, works of restoration. And of course, of course, worship. These are all things I think the Bible gives us either explicitly or implicitly.

[32 : 46] All right, five of six, almost there. Number five, get some accountability. So all of us need somebody in our life to say, put your phone down.

It's the Sabbath day. We need that. And if you have a spouse that makes it easier, because that person's probably the one that can help say that to you.

If you don't, you need to probably spend time with Christian friends more as much as you can, if you can on a Sabbath and do things like cut the phone off.

It's a great, great option. So some type of accountability in our lives that can help us really observe the Sabbath. Lastly, six, we're also given, I think here, the concept of a missional Sabbath.

So take this, let's take this to the workplace. If you, many of you I see on the call, some of you are retired, some of you are still working.

[33 : 55] But no matter what sphere you're in, if you are a boss of some sort, if you have authority in your life over people, how do you work the Christian Sabbath mindset into your business, into your home, into your profession, into your environment?

How do you make sure that your employees, for example, know you're serious about the Sabbath and you want that for them? So are you making sure that you're implementing an environment where people can actually achieve deep rest and not be bombarded by your emails and not be feeling like they're never measuring up and so they always have to be working?

So these are the kinds of questions I think that bosses, people in authority, even authority over a home need to think about. Are you truly creating a space where the people in your life can find rest around you or because of the authority you have with them and over them?

All right, so that means last words, Sabbath is something that we have to work out. It's not something that comes naturally to us as sinners. You've got to have actually a plan on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is something that you get better at, I think, over time. It requires intentionality. And as it comes to our work, it is the paradigm for the Christian life, for the human life, for how to beat back the problems of selfish ambition, of overwork and of underwork.

[35 : 35] All right, let me pray and then we will then pray. Lord, we thank you for this teaching and Luke 6.

And we just do ask now that you would help us to obey the Sabbath command and the work of the Lord, and all of the other commands that you've given us all to your glory and all because this is actually the pathway to joy in this life, in this life of the curse.

And so we want to beat back the curse. We want to push it away and we can do that with true rest, true worship, spiritual rest, physical rest, and then the strength that that gives us to truly work well.

And so we ask for these things.