

The Balanced Life:  
Work  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is a time for every purpose under heaven. The wisdom of this passage from Ecclesiastes is that it recognizes that what might be right for one time is absolutely wrong for another time. I am certain we would all agree that work is a good thing. But we have to add that work is a good thing at the right time. There are times when work is the wrong thing to do.

Bonnie started us out last week with a description of the balanced life. Our goal, over the course of a lifetime is to spend an equal amount of time working, sleeping and in recreation or restoration.

We need to be clear that there is one (and only one) area where our lives should not be balanced. We should not be balanced in our commitment to Christ. We should be one hundred per cent, absolutely, totally sold out in our commitment to Christ. It is Christ who calls us to a balanced life. Christ wants us to be as effective as possible in accomplishing the mission to which he has called us. And Christ knows that most of us will do more good over the course of our lifetimes if we live balanced lives.

A balanced life is equal parts work, sleep and recreation. Over the course of our lifetimes, we will do the most good for the Kingdom of God if we spend a third of our time working, a third of our lives sleeping, and a third of our time in recreation or restoration.

This morning I am talking about work. Work is a gift, a joy, when done properly.

When it comes to work, there are two extremes. There are the workaholics and there are the workavoiders.

It should be pretty obvious what the problem with the workavoiders is. People who avoid work will never have the joy of seeing people who are happier, healthier and stronger because of what they have done for them. Lifting people up, making life better for others is work. Workavoiders have never discovered that joy of work.

And it is a discovery. We don't come into the world knowing what a joy it is to give to others. We come into the world as takers. Our first pleasures in life are when others take care of us. And some people never outgrow that stage of their lives. They remain infants their whole lives long, wanting others to take care of them. They are sad people who don't understand why their lives are empty and unfulfilled.

The best thing we can do for a workavoider is not to enable them to continue their irresponsible lifestyle. Paul said, "Those who do not work will not eat." Workavoiders depend on others to take care of them. Don't do it. If a person is healthy and able to work, don't do for them what they can and should do for themselves. They need the self-respect that comes with becoming a responsible adult.

Workavoiders see work as taking away the joy of life. Workaholics, on the other hand, are not happy unless they are working. They work themselves to exhaustion, and then they keep working. Why do they do it? There are both positive and negative reasons workaholics work so hard.

Some workaholics enjoy the admiration and respect they gain for working so hard. I understand these folks. Until my late thirties, I was a workaholic. From the time I was in junior

high until I was about forty, I was studying or working between seventy and eighty hours a week.

The reason I worked so hard was to win approval. I wanted God's approval, and I wanted people's approval. I just knew that if God and people saw how hard I worked, they would think more highly of me. It wasn't until I saw people who didn't work as hard as I did and accomplished more because they were constantly exhausted that I realized the error of my ways.

Another type of workaholic are those who are absolutely certain that if they ever stopped working, absolute chaos and confusion will result. They believe that they are the ones who are holding everything together. They have to learn to quit trying to be God and let God be God.

Those are a couple of common negative reasons people are workaholics—a desire to win approval and an overdeveloped sense of responsibility. Here are a couple of positive motivations for workaholics.

There are those people who are workaholics because they enjoy what they are doing so much. They love their work. It's fun and exciting and fulfilling for them.

And there are others who work so hard because they do love people so much that they can't stop taking care of them.

So, what's wrong with being a workaholic? Simply this: Working too much, either for positive or negative reasons, destroys your health—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

It also destroys your relationships. Workaholics have little time for spouses, children, parents, friends, or even God. They are too busy working.

You have to take time to take care of yourself and to be with people. Otherwise, you burn up, burn out and burn bridges.

If you literally spend one-third of your week working, that is 56 hours each week. Now, I know that you are saying, "What happened to the 40 hour work week?" Well, for most of us working 40 hours a week at our paid job is reasonable and healthy. But work is more than your job. It also includes working around the house, taking care of your family. It includes school work. It includes your volunteer work in the community and the church. Whatever you do to make life better is work.

Except for the very young, the elderly and people with failing health, a healthy lifestyle is to work fifty to sixty hours a week. If you work less than fifty hours a week, you are in danger of being a workavoider, even if you have a job. You can't say, "Hey, I put my forty hours in. When I get off work, the rest of my time is mine to do with as I please." You are a workavoider, doing what you have to do to get a paycheck and then reverting to being a baby. That is not a balanced life. It is not a healthy life.

If you consistently work more than sixty hours a week, you need to take a good look at your life and see what areas you are neglecting. I'll guarantee you that if you keep that up for too long, something in your life will break.

Workaholics need to develop faith. They need to learn to trust God to hold the world together. They need to realize that others can do the work. They are not indispensable. The world will carry on while they take time for rest and recreation.

They also need to understand that they can actually get more done in fifty to sixty hours than they can do in 80 hours, because when you are exhausted, you don't think clearly, you don't work effectively, and you don't last long. Those people who take care of themselves and are

able to continue working into their 70's, 80's and 90's accomplish more over their lifetimes than those people who burn out in their 40's and 50's from overwork.

There are exceptions, of course. Christ himself did not live a balanced life. There are several stories in the gospels of Christ praying all night. That's not a balanced life. There are stories of people coming to Jesus when he was exhausted, and he put off getting the rest he needed to minister to them. That's not a balanced life. There is the story of the Woman at the Well. Jesus sent the disciples into a nearby town to get food. He and the disciples were hungry. It was time to eat. Yet, when Jesus entered into a conversation with a woman who came out to the well and she responded by recognizing that he was the promised Messiah, he knew this would result in him missing a meal. The woman ran into the village to tell the other villages she thought she had found the Messiah. The village would soon be arriving to see him. When the disciples came back with the food, Jesus refused it, saying, "It is meat and drink for me to do the will of my heavenly Father." What Jesus was saying was, "I haven't got time to eat right now. I've got work to do." That's not a balanced life.

What we have to remember is that Jesus had no need for a balanced life, because he never intended to have a long ministry. His entire ministry lasted no more than three years. I've been here longer than Jesus' entire ministry. I have been in ministry ten times longer than Jesus.

Jesus' earthly ministry ended when he was in his early 30's. He knew he would be gone before the effects of an unbalanced life had caught up with him.

If you think that Christ has called you to work fast and die young, don't worry about a balanced life. Work until you drop. Then get up and work some more.

But the reality is that the great majority of us will live long lives. And if you are living unbalanced lives, you may find yourself saying, like Mickey Mantle said on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, "If I had known I would live this long, I would have taken better care of myself."

I encourage you to keep track of the hours you work for a couple of weeks. Do you have a balanced work week? Are you a workaholic or a workavoider?

You'll serve Christ most effectively if you have a balanced life.