**Christians in the Workplace**

**Class #7: Balance: Christians Are *Not* Balanced People**

**Introduction**

“Balance” is one of the buzz words of our time. Good people are supposed to be balanced. You balance your job with your marriage with your kids with their sports with your health, with a social life—and if you’re really good it all looks easy. On the flip side, we all know the punch in the gut that you feel when life feels *un*balanced. [Insert personal example. Something like: when I need to choose between a date with my wife and preparing well for teaching on Sunday because something urgent came up at work.]

Sometimes as Christians, the number of things we need to keep afloat in life feels overwhelming. We’re supposed to be faithful church members *and* faithful employees *and* faithful friends *and* faithful spouses *and* faithful parents *and* faithful neighbors. And don’t forget the importance of evangelism and discipling and personal spiritual disciplines…and by the way, do you think this is a good time to go back to school on the side?

That’s our topic for this morning. But “balance” isn’t actually what we’re going for. As you can see from the top of your handout, the title of today’s class is “Christians are not ‘balanced’ people.” We have one boss across every calling in life—the Lord Jesus. We’re sold out for him. We don’t “balance” Jesus with *anything* else in life. That should be hugely reassuring, because as the sovereign God of the universe, he will make sure that we can always do what we need to do. Which means that by being decidedly *un*balanced for Jesus, we can live in a way that this world would describe as…well, balanced.

So let me highlight where I intend to take you this morning. We’ll start by going back to the doctrine of vocation—where we started the class a few weeks ago. Then, once we’ve laid that foundation, I’m going to walk through a few major callings that many of us have. And finally, some advice for managing tradeoffs in your life. My prayer in all of this is that you will learn to be a joyful and decidedly unbalanced person as you walk through your life with Jesus.

**The doctrine of vocation, re-visited**

So first, let me take you back to the doctrine of vocation, or calling. A “calling” is something God’s told us to do. As Christians we all share the same primary calling. A calling by Christ, to Christ, that we might do good work for Christ. “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” That’s our primary calling. And that’s why “balance” is a bad goal for Christians. We aren’t to “balance” our discipleship of Christ with other things in life. We’re to be sold out for Christ. That’s our primary calling.

How do we express that? Ephesians 2: “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Those are our secondary callings. The work we do that shows off God’s work in us. Colossians 3: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.” We do our secondary callings to bring glory to God as disciples of Jesus Christ. What are your secondary callings? They’re the places God has called you to by virtue of his commands in Scripture or his providential working of your circumstances. Are you studying to be a lawyer? God’s called you to be a student, and may one day call you to be a lawyer. Are you in prison? That’s God’s calling for you now, which you can do to his glory. God’s called you to provide for your family, if you have one. And he’s called you to be a member of a local church. Normal secondary callings are things like mom, church member, husband, neighbor, employee, and so forth.

We know three things about your secondary callings. First, that they all support your primary calling. In other words, each of your secondary callings is an assignment from King Jesus. Second, your primary calling is primary. Without faithful execution of our primary calling to discipleship, excellence in secondary callings is ultimately fruitless. That may not be apparent now: the guy who gives in to selfish ambition and builds a financial empire *looks* like he’s doing well. But from the perspective of heaven, anything in your life that did not precede from faith—anything that did not bring glory to God—will have been time wasted. And third, we are to use our secondary callings to the glory of God. Think of the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. To the extent that you don’t use your secondary callings for God’s kingdom, you have good cause to wonder if you’ve ever been forgiven by Jesus. Are you a husband? Maximize the talents the Lord has given you in that calling for his glory and the good of your wife. Are you a mother? Maximize the talents the Lord has given you in that calling for his glory and the good of your children. An employee? Unemployed? Retired? Same deal.

**Balancing Multiple Callings**

OK—it’s time to put this doctrine of vocation to work for us. How does this help us deal with the balancing act that so many of us find ourselves in? Let me give you five applications of what I’ve just said.

1. Scripture gives us a minimum standard of faithfulness for each of our callings. You’ll remember from a few weeks ago that our goal across all of our callings is to be counted as faithful. Where our lives have pointed to the excellence and trustworthiness of our promise-keeping God. Now, it can be difficult to know the *most* faithful way to live—should I work for Harris Teeter or Giant: which would be more faithful? But I can know if I’m being *un*faithful—if I’m disobeying commands God’s given me about my callings. For example, if I’m not providing for my kids, I’m disobeying Scripture and I need to double-down there before I do anything else in life. If I’m being faith*less* then I can’t possibly be considered faith*ful*.
2. Beyond that minimum standard, Scripture gives us responsibility to glorify God across all of our callings. Again, go back to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The two faithful servants were counted faithful because they used all they had for the glory of their master. The fact that one had 5 talents and the other only 2 was beside the point. What mattered is that they were all in. Or, quoting Paul in Ephesians 5, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” That can feel overwhelming—like life is one giant optimization puzzle and our job is to maximize every opportunity for a lifetime. Thank God we serve a gracious and forgiving master. But this can also be freeing—because it means we don’t need to maximize any one particular calling. Let’s say I’m trying to figure out what to do about schooling my kids. I’m obsessing about the fact that I’ve got them at the neighborhood school instead of a better school across town. But that school would mean 2 hours in the car each day and $20,000 each year in tuition. Of course, doing the school across town could bring glory to God. It’s arguably better stewardship of my kids’ minds and abilities as they mature, and it’s a display of God’s generosity. But keep in mind that my goal is to figure out what will be most faithful across *all* of my callings. And my calling as a parent—though important—is not all that I am as a person. Every option that doesn’t disobey Scripture is legitimate, and we use wisdom to determine how to be most faithful.
3. We have one boss. Again, hugely freeing. You will never—absolutely never—be in a place where you cannot obey Jesus in the different callings he’s given you. Will you face constraints? Of course. Will those be frustrating? To be sure. But you need to view those constraints as carefully designed by an all-powerful and loving God rather than as unfortunate acts of blind chance. Sometimes faithfulness will mean seeing a way to break free from a constraint so you can serve God better. Sometimes faithfulness will mean accepting a constraint as part of God’s care for you so that you stop obsessing over it.
4. Some callings are fixed; some are not. Sometimes we use the word “calling” to suggest that God has miraculously revealed to us a particular choice we are to make. As in, “God called me to be a missionary” or “God called me to be a lawyer.” But unless he’s actually spoken audibly, it’s probably better to say something like “I have a strong sense that I should be a lawyer” or, better yet, “I really want to be a lawyer.” Because what you do for a job can always be changed. On the other hand, some callings are not within your control to change. If you have a child, for example, you’re called to be a parent. Perhaps even more fundamentally, if you’re a Christian, you’re called to be a church member. Sometimes we end up being faithless in a calling that is clear (such as being a church member) because we’re unwilling to change a calling that’s not clear (such as being a lawyer).

Our goal in all of our callings is to be counted as faithful. That means that we strive to ensure that we’re not faith*less* or disobedient in any one area—and across all of them, we strive to be faithful with whatever opportunities God’s given us. Having this mindset can really help when we’re making difficult tradeoffs in life. For example, someone might come to me and say, “is it OK for me to skip church for the next three weeks to work on a school project?” The way that question’s worded, I suppose the answer would have to be yes. There’s no standard in Scripture for how often we need to assemble together—just that it be regular. But that binary, right/wrong way of thinking about the decision doesn’t comport with all we’ve just talked about. What you’ve got here is a tradeoff between two callings. A calling as a student, a calling as a church member. Both are important. The question you *should* be asking is this: “Will I be more *faithful* to miss three weeks of church to work on a school project?” Which opens up into a whole range of other questions. How are you doing spiritually? How, exactly, will that project make you a more faithful student in Jesus’ eyes? What is the value to Christ of the next-best alternative? And so forth. Of course, if that three weeks turns into three years, now the decision is clear—because you’re now being faith*less* in your calling as a church member and that’s something you’ve got to change.

***Questions?***

**Observations about various secondary callings**

One thing that we need to understand is that our secondary callings are all different from each other. What Jesus expects, and how we can honor him will vary from calling to calling. So let me walk through a number of common callings now.

*Your calling in the church*. Every Christian has a secondary calling in the church. Now, you may be puzzled that I placed our calling in the church as a secondary calling and not our primary calling. Let me clarify. Our *primary* calling is to individual salvation and discipleship. And the Lord has organized those who are called into his church. We all have the same standard of faithfulness in the local church. It’s summed up in our church covenant, since our covenant is simply a summary of the Biblical commands about relationships within the church. But I hope for all of us, faithfulness in the church will involve more than simply avoiding the disobedience of commands. What that additional opportunity looks like is going to differ from person to person. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, the body is made of many members—and it needs us all. “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.”

*Your calling in the workplace*. Except in unusual situations or in temporary exceptions, someone in your family has a call to paid employment. What does it look like to be faithful there? 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12 puts it like this: “We urge you, brothers…to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.” Your main goal in the workplace is to provide for your needs—and your family’s, if you have one—so that you will not be dependent on anyone. And ideally, as Paul adds in Ephesians 4:28, that you might be generous with others. Now there’s huge opportunity for faithfulness beyond this but it’s important to remember that paying the bills is where it all starts.

*Your calling in marriage.* There’s one important thing to note about the calling of marriage. That’s that the calling of marriage acts differently than all others. Think back to God’s creation of marriage in Genesis 2. Why was marriage created? [wait for answer] Yes: another way to put that is that Adam couldn’t accomplish his secondary callings by himself. He was called to nurture and protect the garden and to do that he needed Eve as a helper fit for him. That’s not something she does some of the time; that’s who she *is*. What that means is that marriage is a calling that undergirds all other callings. If you’re a wife, marriage is the lens through which you see all your callings. In every calling you are your husband’s helper. If you’re a husband, marriage is something that should apply to all your callings. In every calling you are incomplete without your wife as your helper.

Here’s how the marriage core seminar describes this: “Marriage is not just one area of life to be balanced with others. Marriage is the context in which you live all of life. You approach work, church, etc. as a married man. It is not the same to say you approach marriage as a lawyer, etc. Married people are not to balance career with marriage, but to approach career as a married person.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

We’ll talk about this more in the class on gender. Marriage was never meant to “balance” with anything else in life. It is a calling that’s designed to support and shape all of our callings.

***Questions***

**Advice on putting all our callings together**

Let’s take some time to put all this together at a practical level. How can we be faithful across all that God’s called us to? I’ll finish with five pieces of advice.

**1. Know When to Say No**

Let’s think about the life of a busy, working parent in DC. Work consumes a lot of time. Add on that school activities, after-school activities, social obligations, and you’ve got a packed and crazy life. Now make that person a Christian. Even more stuff to do. How can you keep it all together?

Well, you could decide you can live well on four hours of sleep each night. You could figure out how to break the laws of physics. But most likely, you’re going to have to say no to something. As you mature in life, it becomes impossible to say “yes” to all the things your non-Christian peers say “yes” to and still live faithfully as a Christian. You cannot simply run harder. And in this church a lot of heart-ache comes from figuring that out the hard way. If you don’t say “no” to something, you’ll run yourself into exhaustion. If you say “no” to the wrong things, you risk being faithless and ineffective in some of the callings Jesus’ given you.

You can’t take on the commitments of your non-Christian peers, throw Christ on top, and hope it all balances. Instead, you need to consider what, according to Christ, you need to do to be faithful—and what you can stop doing.

One of the most helpful things you can do is to consider Jesus’ job description for you in each of your callings. Let’s take your calling in the workplace, for example. You’ve got a job description most likely. For example, “prepare patients for MRI tests,” or “maintain the company’s computer servers,” or “pillory the opposing party with hysterical memes that go viral on the internet.” Or something like that. Well, that may be what your boss wants from you—but that’s not Jesus’ job description for you. His is more like, “make money to provide and be generous; use your work to vindicate the truth of biblical principles; reflect God’s authority by using yours to serve others.” You can also write out Jesus’ job description for your calling as a parent, as a friend, as a spouse, and so forth.

The commitments that align with Jesus’ job description get to stay; those that are superfluous need to go. That’s how we get our lives under control as those who work for Jesus. [personal example??]

Here’s another way to look at this. What *have* you thrown overboard in your life because you’re a Christian? What’s the thing that your non-Christian peers value that you don’t? And what have you done about that? Again, if you’re trying to do all the things they are *and* follow Jesus, you’re headed for disaster.

**2. Take Things Day by Day—But Evaluate Periodically**

Take things day by day. That is, always be ready to seize opportunities to do good. If there’s a call in the evening to serve a brother or sister or neighbor and you’ve got the time, consider doing it. If your roommate is ill and you can, take the day off to help. If your wife is at the end of her rope with the kids and you’re able, come home early from work. Sometimes we get so “efficient” in using our time that we have no margin to run after unique and wonderful opportunities that God throws at us. We may think we’re being good stewards of our time, but in actual fact we’ve simply become slaves to our own schedule. So take things day by day and seize opportunities for good.

Yet evaluate periodically. I talked about Jesus’ job description for your various callings a few minutes ago. You might find it useful once a year—perhaps with a friend or two—to look through these job descriptions and consider how you’re doing. Is something out of whack? Is something consuming a ton of time that’s relatively unimportant from Jesus’ perspective?

Be on guard against “seasons” of unsustainability that become *lifetimes* of unsustainability. Or a life where those “seasons” are the rule instead of the exception. Some of us need to hear Proverbs 23:4, “Do not wear yourself out to get rich.” An annual review time can help us avoid that.

On the other hand, an annual review might be a good kick in the pants for those of us who are more inclined to waste the time rather than overschedule it. For some of us, today’s season always feels unsustainable and we think, “well, once I get my life under control I’ll do something useful for Jesus.” But that day never comes. Remember, it’s not how much you do that matters; it’s whether your life shows God to be worth living for. Reviewing your callings periodically can be of great help in living a life that’s faithful.

**3. Look for Opportunities that Reinforce Your Callings**

[Ideally, start with an example from your own life.] Let’s say you’re a high-school English teacher. You’ve got two teenagers at home. At church, you teach the class on parenting. In your neighborhood, you’ve got a little posse of pre-teen boys who hang out at your house and look up to you as a father-figure. Very different assignments—father, employee, neighbor, church member. But do you see how each assignment is helping you prosper with the others? There’s a wonderful feeling of unity in life when we see how our various assignments overlap—and that’s something we should pursue. Is there opportunity for your job or church involvement to overlap with the skills you’ll need as a parent? Does your job have interest in developing your teaching skills? Becoming a good teacher will help in all sorts of assignments for Jesus, from discipling to parenting to teaching at church.

Some of this is going to be as simple as focusing on things you’re good at in all your callings. But some of your callings (as a parent, for example) aren’t really dependent at all on what you’re good at. So sometimes getting your callings to reinforce each other is useful because it builds you in places where you would otherwise be *deficient*—as a parent, for example.

So many of us go through life assembling various callings without any regard for how they might helpfully reinforce each other. Don’t do that. Think carefully about how your callings can contribute to each other rather than simply competing for your time and attention.

**4. Sell Your Skill Not Your Soul**

OK. I’m being a little tongue-in-cheek there. But here’s what I’m getting at. Some people in this city are paid a wage because of what they can get done—regardless of how much time and energy it takes. They sell their skill. Others are paid simply for their time. They sell their soul. The more you can be in the first category instead of the second, the more ability you’ll have to follow through faithfully on all the callings Jesus has given you.

Selling your skill *can* be a very high-end job. For example, you’re the one guy in the world who can get that bill through congress. Nobody cares how much time it takes you, so long as it gets done—and that puts you in a very good position. Sometimes selling your skill can be more mundane—but no less powerful. You’re the best around at figuring out where water is seeping into a house. Again, it doesn’t matter how much time it takes you; the world will reward you just the same. Consider how Proverbs 22:29 lauds the value of a real skill, “Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.”

So make it your ambition to build a skill that others need. And beware the myriad DC career tracks that chew you up and spit you out without building any real skill. Building a skill will go a long way toward helping you be faithful in all God’s asked of you.

**5. Keep Your Eye on Long-Term Faithfulness**

One last piece of advice. Jesus may come back tomorrow. But most likely, your life is a marathon and not a sprint. “Balance”—to use the term our world uses—isn’t something you just wake up and discover one day. An ability to be faithful in multiple callings is generally something that was built slowly and carefully over time. The career that allows a man to spend the time he needs with his church and family. The wisdom that fuels a healthy marriage. The skill in discipling in the church and in the family. All these things are built with time. Be patient, have your eye on faithfulness in all your callings, and pray that God will give you the abilities you need to be faithful.

**Conclusion**

Well, there you have it. Christians are not balanced people. We are to be sold out for Jesus—and that means doing everything we possibly can to maximize the eternal value of each of the calling’s he’s given us.

1. Class #2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)