

New Life @ WORK

David Kim is the director for the Center on Work and Faith in New York. Work and Faith, as a core ministry for the Redeemer Lutheran Church, seeks to help believers put faith to work, at work. Apparently there is global interest in the topic as work consumes more of our time, for less money, and makes fewer promises of meaning, security, and identity in the classic sense. People are just happy to have a job.

MESSAGE: If you're trying to be that whole person, what does that mean? honesty with your time? Sharing your faith? What does it mean to blend these lives?

KIM: One, it's examining your motivations for work. A lot of people go to work just to make a living, and that's fine, but when you look at Genesis, work was created to be much more than how we make our living. [It] was to be an expression of our identity as people created in the image of God. And so [for us] work, instead of being the expression of our identity, is the source of our identity. We're so affected by our workplace because so many of us derive our worth, our value, from our work. The gospel is able to reorient our values, so we can see that work was created to be a good expression of the divine image.

Second, also changing the way we interact with our coworkers.

Unfortunately, we don't see our colleagues as people created in the image of God. We see them kind of as a means to an end, away to get our work done, move up the work ladder. The gospel is able to change our view in how we relate to our coworkers. A concrete way we can see this is in the way we give feedback.

We're always giving and receiving feedback. We want to teach people what it means to give redemptive feedback, and how you receive feedback redemptively. So when you're receiving your progress report, how do you respond to critical feedback? The gospel informs how we can receive critical feedback graciously, and be grateful for an opportunity to grow instead of being negative at the negative feedback we can receive. So that's a concrete way in which we can show God's work in our own lives.

Third, the purpose of our work. What is the purpose of our work? What is its impact on our company, our city, our country? our world? And how does it bring glory to God? Every profession has a way to answer those questions. We have seen in the past couple of years that people weren't asking these questions. They were just doing the jobs they were told, instead of asking the larger questions of what's the purpose of my work and, to that purpose, what kind of work glorifies God?

MESSAGE: Anything else?

KIM: Yes, perseverance is such a keyword when it comes to work and faith. In the book of Hebrews it's an important theme. When it comes to work—not to say that we should stay in our work without purpose and meaning, but—a lot of times God is calling us to persevere. he will provide a particular measure of grace to enable us to be an agent of change. A lot of times I think the younger generation doesn't like to move on to the next job. That's a little concerning, because there's such a desire for meaning that when the younger generation sees obstacles and hurdles, it's a lot easier for them to jump ship.

I wonder if this idea of perseverance is being properly taught and

cultivated? Sometimes God does call us to jump ship, change jobs. Other times, God calls us to persevere. If we are not equipping people to say "No, perseverance is part of what it means to me to be God's child," then I don't know who will be left in these companies that need that Christian witness to bring about change and redemption and healing.

MESSAGE: So many people really want to do something that means something. So many jobs that we get into, especially starting out, don't seem like they mean any- thing. So how do you find that meaning and satisfaction to keep going?

KIM: For the millennials, a lot of the satisfaction is driven by social good, with the explosion of social media as an example. Meaning is found in relational connectivity, but also relational connectivity that has a social good, whether it's micro financing or connecting people through social media with something like Kick starter. So I think "meaningful" for the millennials is really found in social good and upon relationship building.

MESSAGE: Can you talk to me a little bit about calling? I'm hearing you redefine the way in which we think of work and interact with it. And so it seems as though wherever you are you can find fulfillment in who you are as an expression of him. So does that take away a sense of a specific calling that utilizes your talents and gifts?

KIM: Yeah, that's a big question here. I think people focus on calling in terms of What jobs should I have? What profession should I work toward? I tell people, If you don't know how to hear the Caller, it doesn't matter what job you take, at least from a Christian perspective. That if you end up going into finance or farming, if you don't know how to hear the voice of the Caller, it doesn't make much difference because, you know, how are you going to know what it means to be faithful in what you're doing if you're not attentive to the leading of God through his Word and through his Spirit? I think that's really a big challenge for Christians to say, "Am I willing to surrender all that I am to God to allow him to lead me?" And sometimes he's going to lead me into places that I don't want to go, but I have to trust that that's part of his whole plan for my life and that's going to equip me in my life and in areas that I need to grow in so that I'll be faithful in the particular occupational calling that he might bring to me. When you're in a relationship with God and trying to obey him, Scripture gives us the promise that he leads us. he's our shepherd. We can take comfort in God's promises, the doors we will go through, and the people we will meet.

MESSAGE: Say I'm in a job and for whatever reason it's particularly frustrating. I'm frustrated in my purpose, my motivation. It was different for Adam and Eve in the garden. They dressed the garden, and everything worked properly. They were effectual. But this, now, this is not what God designed.

KIM: I think it helps to look at the larger story. If you enter the story part- way through, you might not understand what's going on. And I think that's the same when we experience pain and brokenness in our workplaces and frustration, which can mean you're in the wrong job, or that you're in the right place and God is letting you see the brokenness so that it helps you to under- stand why he put you there.

If you think about the vision in Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones, God takes Ezekiel to a mass grave and says, What do you see here? he leads Ezekiel to see the bones of his people, and that's extremely disheartening,

to say the least. he asks Ezekiel, "Can these dry bones live?" [When you are] experiencing the particular brokenness and heartache in a certain field, then you have the ability to change it. When we don't see that larger narrative, when we don't see the brokenness of our world, it just leads to complaining, and God certainly does not appreciate complaining and grumbling. But when we see that larger narrative, that Jesus came to our broken world, that he was tempted in every way possible, so that he could become our great high priest, so that he c o u l d become our source of grace in times of need, I think that changes the story a little bit so that when you go through the pain of frustration at work, instead of just frustration, it's part of a larger story of how is God's grace at work here and can it change my workplace?

Going back to the Ezekiel narrative, God says to Ezekiel, son of man, I want you to prophesy. he could have made the dry bones come to life himself, but he had Ezekiel preach, the human agent, in order to bring about that life, that restoration. That's God calling every Christian. When we began to see the brokenness that we experience— whether it's a broken water cooler or evil bosses—that's part of the experience. how is God at work to redeem and to restore things that have become fallen and broken?