

Work is an activity that makes manifest covenant by bringing two things together into something new. A vinedresser working in a vineyard prunes his vines to be more productive, yielding something new that is not just the vinedresser or the vine, but a bringing together of both. The vine could not be as productive without the vinedresser, and the vinedresser also needs the vine. The pruned vine represents both vine and vinedresser, because both are contained in it. Work is therefore a creative activity, but in this creation we do not create something out of nothing, as God did, but we combine ourselves with something that already exists. The process of creativity in itself takes disparate things and brings them together, as we will see this week.

Day 1

Confident & Humble

In order to be creative, we must be both confident and humble. While these two things seem to be almost opposite of each other, their combination is indispensable to the creative process. In many Christian circles, confidence is seen as something almost un-spiritual, being often associated with pride. However, confidence is akin to faith, to have utmost trust in something. The whole creative act is dependent on confidence, that the effort and sacrifice necessary to create something will be worth the effort, that fruitfulness in the endeavor is possible, and that combining two things into one will leave both things better off than they were before. At the same time, humility is also indispensable. As we enter into the creative process, we will do so as imperfect creatures who do not know all we need to know to be successful in our creativity. The ability to learn from your mistakes, to look for weakness in your creation, to see the areas where you lack what is necessary to create something fruitful and to be able to make corrections to your efforts is the difference between a successful creation and failure. Our work will yield fruit only if we can combine this confidence in taking on the task with the humility necessary to learn along the way.

Verses: Titus 3:1-2, Psalm 25:9, James 3:13, Proverbs 3:26, Isaiah 41:10, 1 John 3:19-24

Prayer Topics: Meekness, Obedience, Self-Awareness, Poise, Certainty, Courage

Day 2

Playful & Disciplined

The work we are called to in life requires the combining of a joyfully playful attitude and spirit with a dedicated discipline that can overcome all setbacks and obstacles. The problem with our efforts at discipline is that they are usually an attempt to continue to move in a direction that we are double-minded about. When I try to exercise, as an example, most of me is not interested, and is in fact in open rebellion to the smaller part of me that desires to be fit. My inclination is to “be more disciplined” and to force the rebellious, slovenly, lazy part of myself into submission. In contrast to this, I can have a playful attitude toward something only when all of me is on board. When I have no real concerns, when I do not feel I should or would like to be doing something else, when I am wholly present in the task, I find that I am playful and the task I am engaged in is a joy. When this occurs, I do not experience what I would call discipline, but a whole-hearted embrace of the task at hand. Most of the time, in our work, we rely on discipline much more than playfulness. We can find ourselves in the position of cheerfully playing like we work at a store as a child, and dreading going to work at a store as an adult, only keeping our job through sheer discipline. So how do we combine the two? We must discipline ourselves in the word, prayer, and meditation, so that we are completely aligned with truth, seeing through the lies of Satan, who would like us to dread the great and merciful calling of God to work. Then we can enter into our work wholeheartedly. Every time we are tempted with thoughts that

the work we are engaged in is beneath us, or tiresome, or not worth our effort, we must fight the thought with thoughts of the love and graciousness of the God who has called us to this work. We must engage in our work joyfully and wholeheartedly, seeing the glory of serving one another in love.

Verses: Genesis 2:15, Ecclesiastes 5:18-20, Colossians 3:23, Proverbs 16:3

Prayer Topics: Truth, Delight, Effort, Strength, Development, Strive, Aim, Satisfaction

Day 3

Individual & Collaborative

In any creative endeavor, there is a tension between the creative vision of the individual and the contributions of the group. If you have been a fan of movies, you will undoubtedly have had the experience of seeing a great film by a new director and being excited to see what the director will come up with in their next piece. The months or years roll by, and then the day arrives to view their next film, only to end with disappointment as the movie is a complete letdown. What happened? They got a bigger budget, more control, and yet the new movie is a disaster. This happens often in Hollywood, as well as in life. Staying true to our original, creative vision and taking the advice and ideas of those we are collaborating with seem to contradict one another, but over and over again the need to balance these things could not be clearer. So how do we do this? We need to communicate our vision very clearly and effectively, be excited and passionate about the vision of a better future where we have unified ourselves with our endeavor. As others catch the vision and become excited about it, we must be open to the input of others as they also need to combine themselves with the project. What we are engaged in is a unity of all of us with the work, so micromanagement and an unyielding devotion to our vision that doesn't allow others to contribute will kill the collaboration. We must learn to be excited when others see an aspect of the work that we didn't, because when they do they become part of the work as well. When we get the buy-in of the group, everyone is better off, and the project becomes more fruitful for us all.

Verses: Matthew 28:16-19, Romans 12:3-8, Psalm 34:3

Prayer Topics: Imagination, Cleverness, Mission, Purpose, Meaning, Partnership, Combination, Unity

Day 4

Courageous & Cautious

We find, in our work, the necessity of being courageous and cautious at the same time. When I was younger and had more time, I loved to study great battles of history, finding the human drama endlessly fascinating. One aspect of these battles that really got my interest was the tension between being bold and courageous, with the need to be cautious and careful. So many times, through greater boldness a general might have gained a decisive victory when his cautiousness robbed him of it. Other times, drunk with earlier success, a general suffered a great defeat because he lacked caution. How should a general know when he should be bold, and when he should be cautious? In any creative endeavor the same conundrum applies. In telling a joke, for example, playing it safe is boring and being too courageous is insulting. The key, I believe, in knowing which characteristic to exercise, is to lose yourself in the creative endeavor. We are usually too cautious because we are thinking too much of ourselves, and not enough of our creation. What does the creation need for success? What would make the work fruitful? What is best for the new creation made from the two things that have become one? When I think of marriage, I think not of my wife, or of myself, but of us. Any creative, covenantal entity is the same in this way. The vinedresser thinks not of the vine, or of himself, but of the vineyard. In this way he is able to balance

being courageous and cautious, treating the covenant with the proper weight of value, neither placing too much or too little on its shoulders.

Verses: Hebrews 10:14, Romans 12:2, Hebrews 2:10, Matthew 5:48

Prayer Topics: Harmony, Tension, Firmness, Balance, Unity, Exchange, Wholeness

Day 5

Passionate & Reflective

In our work and in any creative endeavor, we must learn to combine our passion with reflection. We must desire to see something through with enough force to overcome the obstacles in the way of completion, but we must also be thoughtful and reflective enough to hear what those obstacles may be saying to us. All of us have surely met the person that pursues their goals with complete abandon to their detriment. I once was talking to a friend who had been in a counseling situation with a man who found a rock that looked like Jesus, and was passionate to tell the world of his discovery. This passion had ruined his marriage and lost him his job, and was on its way to the complete ruination of his life. At the same time, we can all look around our house and find projects that are not complete because we lack the passion to overcome an obstacle that brought their progress to a halt. When we face obstacles in our work, we must be passionate about completing them while keeping our eyes open to the lessons that we can learn in the obstacles we face. Is someone quitting your team at work? You must still get the work done, but what does their leaving tell you about your endeavor? Is there something wrong with the culture you have created? Are you having trouble getting that stuck bolt off your car? You must persevere and get it done, but have you really assessed the situation to see what you need? A new tool? New knowledge or skill? New information? Being reflective does not have to kill passion, but can make it much more effective.

Verses: 2 Corinthians 3:18, Proverbs 27:19, 1 Corinthians 13:12

Prayer Topics: Pondering, Curiosity, Thoughtfulness, Endurance, Fortitude, Zeal