



The “Fall” divided love from work. Before the “Fall,” Adam was connected with God and, in that profound connection, engaged the tasks God had given to him. After the “Fall,” he worked amid the toil of a broken humanity and world. Understanding boundaries can help resolve many work-related problems, as well as how to be happier and more fulfilled in the work we do.

Genesis 1:27-31

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Reflections

Years ago, whenever I experienced anxiety or anger at work, I thought that the common denominator was the work itself. Today, my spiritual path has led me to understand that I am the common denominator. Change me and things change. Still, it’s not so easy do. Some of the boundary-based reactions that follow me into the office I developed throughout my life, and they are tough to jettison. Plus, boundary problems are often so well camouflaged in a work setting that I frequently don’t recognize them.

One way to track down boundary problems is to start with reactions, like anxiety and resentment. For example, I may be anxious because I need to take an action at work that someone won’t like. Or, I may be resentful because I have too much to do. It’s not too hard to see that in these instances the desire for approval and feeling over-burdened are fueling my reactions. Both reactions point to the boundary problems of letting others to define who I am (approval-seeking) and not saying “no” when I should—which is merely another variation of approval-seeking.

Work is a prime environment to activate these reactions. Rutgers University historian, John Gillis, says “the work ethic and identifying ourselves through work is not only alive and well but more present now than at any time in history.”

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If I identify myself largely through my work, I’m likely to feel reactions to boundary problems intensely. Furthermore, we are encouraged to be conscientious and savvy about organizational politics. I can easily convince myself that these factors justify my reactions. But, the justification is merely camouflage, and it brings me little peace.

But what if I saw work as part of my spiritual journey? After all, work can be spiritual when I am mindful of God’s

purposes and His presence in my life. Jesus appears to his disciples shortly after his resurrection and announces, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). St. Paul enjoins us to “lead a life worthy of the calling which you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the body of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3). We are all called to do God’s work in a myriad of ways in our daily lives. Recognizing the source of my reactions and integrating my work with my spiritual life can help me tackle the boundary problems. As I come to understand that my reactions come from fear and that I can be an instrument of God’s peace, I may choose to respond better. Then I can face conflict with more grace or say “no” when I should a bit more often.

— Sylvia Karman

Reference:

Andrew Curry. *Why We Work*. February 16, 2003. U.S. News & World Report. See www.usnews.com.

Readings

Don't have a Bible handy? Access the readings at biblegateway.com.

Sunday, October 14

Genesis 1:27-31

How does Genesis help you appreciate the nature and work of Christ? How does it relate to the work you do?

Monday, October 15

Proverbs 19:6; Proverbs 24:26

How do manipulation and approval-seeking affect others and us in the workplace? Discuss the role of honesty in our boundary-setting at work.

Tuesday, October 16

2 Peter 1:3-11

How are your work and spiritual lives entwined? How do our boundaries help us and hinder us in our spiritual journey in the workplace?

Wednesday, October 17

Genesis 2:15

Discuss what Genesis presents as God's apparent intention and design for us to have work to occupy our mortal lives. What does this verse from Genesis say to you about your work and your spiritual path?

Thursday, October 18

Proverbs 3:5; Proverbs 12:15

There are a number verses throughout the Bible, particularly in Proverbs, that counsel us regarding conceit and arrogance. Why do you think that is? When was the last time you observed someone's need to be right (including possibly your own) colliding with others at work?

Friday, October 19

Proverbs 23:4

What boundary issue(s) is addressed in this reading from Proverbs? Why are we being cautioned against this sort of striving?

Saturday, October 20

John 20:19-23

God wants us to have peace and to be peaceful—with others and inside our own skin. How do you think you "are sent" as God sent Jesus into this world? Jesus tells us "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." What boundary guidance are we given about anger and resentment? How can this help us at work?

Great Resources

Boundaries: When to say yes, how to say no, to take control of your life. Henry Cloud & John Townsend. Zondervan, 1992.

Videos:

"Boundaries Require Action"

<http://www.cloudtownsend.com/videoserver/video.php?clip=CCNT2059>

"How to Set Boundaries with Your Boss"

<http://www.cloudtownsend.com/videoserver/video.php?cloudA1438>