

Making Much of Christ from 8 to 5

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life that magnifies Christ, contrasting wasted lives focused on worldly gain with lives dedicated to Christ and the Gospel. It highlights the need to work in fellowship with Christ, creatively and industriously, to adorn the doctrine of the Gospel through secular work, and to earn money with a focus on serving others and giving generously.

Scripture: Matthew 16:26, Philippians 1:20, Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Corinthians 7:17, Acts 20:35

Topics: "Living for Christ", "Generosity in Service"

Description

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Transcript

Let me pray with you one more time. Could I do that and just ask for God's guidance? Lord, every time we stand before a group, it's different and this one feels significantly different to me, and I ask that I would be given a very special grace and anointing and helpfulness for this group so that what is said here is uniquely tailored by the Holy Spirit for their present challenges in home life, work life, personal heart life. So come and help me and them so that we connect in a way that would make the ripple effect of this event go out for a long time and for your glory.

In Jesus name, amen. I live close here, so I got up this morning about 6 and put on my cut-off Dockers. You don't have to buy athletic clothes, just in your worn-out clothes and cut them off, and a t-shirt, and I ran downtown and I'm gonna run by here praying for all of you.

Say, God, give me a message. God, I didn't even start preparing till this morning. I knew I had a book to speak from, so but that's a lot to say, so I just said, God, please, I want to say something helpful to these folks, and so I'm running by in front of the Marriott here, and I passed five clustered teenagers, probably 18, 19, something like that, all kind of grungy, dressed, and ran by, and I thought, hmm, maybe they've got the answer.

So I turned around down here, Hempen or wherever I was, and came running back and said, Lord, if they're still there, I'm gonna do this little survey. So I stopped, and I said, can I, so I'm sweating like crazy.

I'm 64 years old.

I've got cut-offs, and I'm outside a hotel where you're supposed to have on a suit, and this is weird. I say, in about three hours, I'm gonna speak to 300 businessmen in here, and I want to do a survey. Would you answer this question? I'm supposed to tell them how not to waste their lives.

What would you say? Well, one of them walked away like, this is weird. You know, this is not reliable. But the others hung out, and I just want to tell you one of their answers.

First answer out of one guy's mouth is, tell them to stand on their own two feet. Well, that's not the message I'm going to give you, and so I mention it just to put in stark relief how different will be what I have to say, because that's the message of the world. In business, in life, be strong, be competent, be able, and stand on your two feet, and of course, that's better than standing on somebody else's two feet, but it's not the message of the Bible, and it's not the way to make much of Christ.

You can make much of yourself that way, big time, and get in all the lists, but not make much of Christ. So I want to talk about what is a wasted life for a minute, and what is a non-wasted life, and then we'll turn specifically to the business world. What's a wasted life? I preached on it three days ago.

Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, for anyone who will save his life will lose it. That's wasted. And anyone who loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it, and that's not wasted.

What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his life? For what can man give in exchange for his life? So Jesus is crystal clear. You want to waste your life? Gain it! Live for gain, and gain the whole world, and then watch how it feels on your deathbed, and then forever. But if you want to not waste your life, come on after.

So that's pretty clear, I think. Gain the whole world, don't make much of Christ, don't make much of the Gospel, live for yourself, follow the advice of the teenagers, and Wall Street, and every magazine you read probably on your desk, and lose your soul, and waste your life by helping other people lose theirs, and get rich in the process. What would Paul say over against this? He's in prison.

We're in Philippians. He's in prison, and it looks like he's wasting his time, and he writes to the Philippians, and he says to them, I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel. That's chapter 1 verse 12.

So I'm not wasting my time here. I am totally engaged in what I live for here. And then he explains how the Gospel is going to be preached one way or the other by these emboldened people, and these rascals who want to make my suffering worse, and then he says, and I rejoice, and I ask you to rejoice with me.

And then he adds this key phrase in chapter 1 verse 19. It is my eager expectation and hope. Oh, I hope you can speak these words.

I preached this text, my candidating sermon at Bethlehem 30 years ago. This is my life. I want to be this way.

It is my eager expectation and hope that I might not at all be ashamed, but that now, as always, in prison and out, Christ might be magnified. The language we were using was made much of. That Christ might be

made much of in my life, whether by life or by death.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. To live is Christ. So you jump over to chapter 3, and you pick up what he means where he says, account everything is lost for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

In other words, the way that Christ is life to me, and life is Christ to me, is that I value him at every moment over what I'm doing. I value him at every moment over what I'm having. I value him at every moment over who I'm talking to.

That's how my life is Christ. And to die is gain. Why? Because to die is to go and be with Christ, which is far better.

So that if you put your ledger out there, and the assets are Christ, and everything else is lost because you're dying, and you add it up, he says gain. That's how he magnifies him in his dying. So you're on your deathbed.

You're leaving everything. You're leaving family. You'll never see your grandkids, maybe.

Never get the retirement. Wife goes. Family goes.

Successful business goes. Dreams go. And all you get is Jesus.

What are you gonna say? Well, Paul said, gain. And if you were watching him at that moment, and we do get to watch him, you would say, at least in his life, Christ is being made much of. That's how you do it.

You treasure him above business. You treasure him above wife. You treasure him above money.

You treasure him above the dreamed of. Attention from the world, the guild. So there's the, there's the not wasted life.

So Jesus portrays the wasted life. The teenager portrays the wasted life. And Paul portrays the, the unwasted life.

Now before I turn to business, your eight to five experience, let me refine what it means a little bit more about making much of Christ. Because God, God does not leave us in the dark about what he wants, what he wants you to think and feel about this. And he thought it up in eternity.

Ephesians chapter 1 says that we were chosen before the foundation of the world in Christ and predestined to adoption as sons according to his will unto the praise of the glory of his grace. So what I'm adding with that text is this, making much of Christ or making much of God from eight to five means getting in line with this eternal purpose unto the praise of the glory of his grace. Grace is the apex of the glory of God.

He's glorious in every way. Glorious in his justice, glorious in his wisdom, glorious in his wrath, glorious in his patience, and he is supremely and most admirably and stunningly and unspeakably and unmanlike glorious, and I mean on human-like glorious in his grace. That's what that verse means, Ephesians 1:6. This idea of God to be magnified for his grace originated in eternity.

So listen to this. This is 2nd Timothy 1 9. God saved us and called us to a holy calling not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ before the ages. That's amazing.

Do you see what it implies? What is grace? Grace was given to you, believer, before the world was created. There hadn't been any sin yet. There wasn't any need for grace before the world was.

In fact, there was no grace being shown in the Trinity. In order for God to display grace, what had to happen? First, a world had to be created. Human beings in the image of God with moral life and accountability had to be created.

Satan had to fall, tempt Adam and Eve, and they had to fall so that now there could be grace. Because in saving undeserving sinners at the... I don't want to go there yet. Saving undeserving sinners by grace could not have happened without sin.

And he said, I plan grace before the ages. I just think it's good to lose your breath every now and then. I just think it's good to be shut up by the Bible every now and then.

To read things that are just, whoa, I don't think I can even go there. And then just go to bed and get up and go to bed and get up and say, okay, I'm either bailing on this Bible Christian stuff, or I'm going to submit to that. Now here, here's just one more refinement of this grace piece.

I almost said, he did it through the cross. Revelation 13 8, All who dwell on the earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world. Now, what's the name of the book in which they are written before the world is created? What's the name of the book? Anybody remember? Here's the name of the book.

The book of the life of the Lamb who was slain. That's the plan, because God knows what the apex of glory looks like. Namely, it looks like grace, and he knows that the apex of grace is God dying for enemies.

So now we're a little clearer on what we're making much of. So it's like this hazy notion of Christ or God. It's a certain kind of God.

It's a certain Christ. It's a certain history of redemption. It's a certain fall and rescue process, and it's a certain climactic moment happens this week, day after tomorrow, when the Son of God, the God-man, second person of the Trinity, incarnate, virgin-born, living without sin, setting his face like flint to go to Jerusalem and be spit upon and crowned and stabbed and killed and mocked.

That's how I'm going to fulfill my purpose to get glory from my grace everywhere on the planet. So when I turn now to making much of Christ eight to five, I mean this Christ. I mean this grace.

I mean this grace most supremely manifest in this moment in history, namely the Son of God paying a ransom for people like me with a long track record of failure. Almost, no, scratch that word, everywhere in my life. So I love the gospel.

I love grace. I love the cross. I love the God who conceived it.

I'm happy to let him be sovereign, and I just want to help you if I can make him look good at work. Okay. Secular work.

I don't know, that may not be a good phrase, but you know I'm talking about. It's a good thing, and I just want to underline that first. It's a really good thing.

To work not in the church is a really good thing. It is absolutely essential. God created the universe in order that you might be salt and light everywhere and not leave the world.

John 17 15. I do not, this is Jesus praying to his father, I do not ask that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. They're not of the world just as I am not of the world.

Jesus' last thought was that everybody should leave his job. He didn't ever think such a thing. And I'll show you some more texts on that, but let me give you a quote from Martin Luther.

I love Luther. I love him because he's a sinner. He's got a mouth that always needs repenting of, and he repents well.

And he loves Christ and leans on grace. So let him talk. Here it is.

It is pure invention that the Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are to be called the spiritual estate. Princes, lords, artisans, farmers, the temporal estate. That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy.

All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is among them no difference at all but that of office. To make it still clearer, if a little group of pious Christians, laymen, were taken captive and sat down in a wilderness and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if there in the wilderness they were to agree choosing one of themselves, married or unmarried, and were to charge him with the office of baptizing, saying mass, absolving, and preaching, such a man would be as truly a priest as though all bishops and popes had consecrated him. There is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, spirituals and temporals, as they call them, except that of office and work.

A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests. Is that okay with you? Your priest, bishop, everyone by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other. That in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.

So far, Luther saying yes to work. You know, work was God's idea before the fall. It's not a curse.

It became sweaty and futile and frustrating and hard after the fall, and we're in the business of reclaiming things biblically from that curse as much as we can in the fallen age that won't be fully made right until Jesus comes. I do not regard it as one of my high callings, main callings to tell businessmen to live their lives for Jesus. So I'm doing it here and I'm loving it.

I feel mainly driven when I'm outside my pulpit to talk to younger people and tell them to die for Jesus. Somewhere, somehow. Really get radical.

Come on. Dream a different dream than the American dream. And I know that I'm talking a different language than the 8-to-5 job language, and I do that, and I'm okay with that because I believe in what you do so much, but I just see the unreached peoples of the world out there, thousands of people, groups with no gospel witness, and so I'm on a recruitment mission.

But here's the catch. You do that in your local church, you can create a lot of trouble because there's mainly lay people out there who are working to make a living from 8-to-5. You can't preach that way Sunday after Sunday and help the vast majority of the people.

And it became clear a few, let's just say like 27 years ago, 1983 and 1984, that the church was dividing among the really sold-out overseas people and those who really believed in it and gave their life to it. And here, work on the ground, make a name for Jesus here and now in the workplace, and tensions were emerging. And so I developed messages about that.

And just one of the points I made to pull the working people, the people that support all the rest of them, back into significance at the church was to preach from this text, from Romans 15, where Paul said to the Romans, he's going to go, he's going to spend some time with them, and then he's going to go to Spain. And he writes to them, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain. So he's writing to a church in Rome, made up mainly probably of slaves, artisans, business people, just whatever they did to make the world work.

I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. In other words, don't go with me. And I just stress this, don't go with me.

Send me, support me. So just at that level alone, Paul is endorsing not being pastors and missionaries. Now, here's a more, I think, penetrating text on this point.

In 1 Corinthians 7, 17 to 24, Paul is talking about callings. There's a Christian calling out of darkness into light, and everybody who's a Christian has experienced that. God called us.

Then there's this vocational calling, and both terms are used in this passage. And here's what he says about the condition in which we were called, the calling in which we were called to be Christians. He says this.

So, brothers, this is verse 24 of 1 Corinthians 7. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, let him remain with God. I love that phrase. Remain there with God.

That's the new reality. You might be taken loose from your job and brought full-time into CBMC. Or you might, in the last 30 years of your life, serve a mission agency or whatever.

But for now, stay there with God. Verse 24 of 1 Corinthians 7. So, here we are. Question.

What ways, what are the ways that you make much of God, much of Christ, much of grace, much of the cross by staying there? And I'll just work through these quickly. I'm supposed to be done about 15 or 20 minutes from now. Number one.

By coming to work, going to work in fellowship with Christ. Enjoying him and his fellowship all day long. That's your first task.

How do I make much of him? Get up in the morning. Do what you have to do to get reacquainted with him. Listen to him.

Become thankful to him. Get a promise from him. Strengthen your heart in him.

Treat the family well from his strength. Get in your car and enjoy him all day long. And draw strength out of that fellowship and enjoyment.

And I'll just mention two pieces of that. One piece is all day long, you are aware, because God's taught you this, you're aware, everything I have and every thought I think and every feeling I have, every word I speak, every gift I have for organization and management, all the movement of my hands and feet, all my eyesight and my ears are an undeserved gift of grace. And I'm going to be thanking him in my heart all day long that I'm alive and have these gifts.

This is just the demeanor of humility. So that's the first way you fellowship with Jesus. You just say it all day long, thank you, thank you, thank you for helping me, thank you that I can breathe, thank you that I've got a job or don't have a job, thank you.

And then the other piece is you're going to be facing challenges all day long that are way beyond your ability, at least if you want something significant to happen. If you can manage it, it's probably not significant. But if you want something significant, I mean ripple effects for God, ripple effects for eternity, ripple effects that are huge and that are way beyond your ability to think through or make happen, then you need to be trusting promises moment by moment.

So you get up in the morning and you don't just vaguely read the Bible. You ransack the Bible for a promise. I've got to have a promise, I've got to know something to lean on today.

So this morning, I finished Deuteronomy, just in time to start Joshua tomorrow. I mean, that's the way my reading plan works. I finish one month.

So I finished Deuteronomy, last two chapters I read this morning. Here's the verse. I'm going with this all day.

This is my life, walking up here, doing this right now. It's verse 26 of chapter 33, and it says, There is none like God, O Jeshurun. I had to look that up.

Jeshurun. It's another name for Israel, so I'm just going to use Israel. There is none like God, O Israel, who rides through the heavens to your help and through the skies in his majesty.

Okay, that's it. That's all I need for today. I'm going with that all day long.

He is riding through the skies to the Marriott. I totally believe that. Right now, God is here.

There are reasons I should not be doing this and can't be doing this. God is here. But what makes that verse so amazing to me is that you've got two things happening as he rides through the skies.

To my help and in his majesty. And isn't it awesome to have the kind of God who exalts his majesty in helping the weak? That's my life. That's my theology.

God makes much of his majesty by helping dependent, weak sinners like me. So my point, number one, is you go to work. I'm at work right now, right? This is my work.

I do this all the time and I am desperate all the time that more happen than I can make happen. I can talk, but I can't save your soul. I can't strengthen your heart.

I can't save your marriage. I can't put Christ in your work. God can.

Therefore, I'm desperate for God every time I stand up like this. So, enjoy his fellowship in thanking him and trusting the promises all day long. That's number one.

Here's number two. Make much of Christ in your secular work by the joyful, trusting, consciously God-exalting design of your creativity and industry. That's a long sentence.

Take the words creativity and industry. By industry, I mean work hard. I'm saying every Christian in business should be creative and there's a zillion ways to be that in your spheres, right? And hard-working.

But I'm real uncomfortable with that because beavers are hard-working and spiders produce a beauty more beautiful than anything you will ever produce. If you don't know spider webs, get to know them. They do it in a night.

They're very efficient, but mainly they're beautiful. Spiders aren't beautiful, but spider webs are beautiful with dew on them as the sun rises. And then they vanish, which is also a parable.

But if spiders and hummingbirds and ants and beavers work their tails off, you're just animals when you do that. So I can't state that as one of your goals. So I put in front of it joyful, trusting, consciously God-exalting design in it.

Get it? I'm saying you're different from a beaver. You're not a hummingbird. You're not an ant.

And you're not a spider. You are in the image of God Almighty. He created you absolutely unique among all the beings of the world.

And the difference is this. Not that you can work hard. Animals work hard.

Not that you can create beautiful things. They create beautiful things. But that you can think about it.

You can plan it. You can dedicate it. You can trust Him for it.

You can praise Him in it. You can put it all in a God context and render praise back to Him in and through it. It can be conscious and not just instinctive like with the animals.

It's a huge, huge thing. The rivers do clap their hands. The hills sing for joy.

The heavens declare the glory of God. So I'm not saying spiders don't glorify God. That's why they're in the world.

Everything glorifies God. But they don't glorify God consciously. So when you go to work, consciously think and say, I'm going to work hard today.

And I am going to ask for as much creativity as God would give me. And then I'm going to create things. And I'm going to do it hard.

They're going to be excellent and creative. And I'm going to work hard. And I'm going to do it in total reliance on Him.

And I'm going to dedicate it all to Him. I'm going to honor Him in it. I'm going to shape it by what I know of Him so that you're not like a beaver.

That's number two. The design of your industry and creativity. The design of it meaning God work.

Number three. We make much of Christ in our secular work when it confirms and enhances the portrait of Christ's glory that people hear in the spoken gospel. When our work confirms and enhances the picture that we are speaking of Christ when we have occasion to speak.

One of the reasons I'm going at these this way for just a few more minutes is that I don't want the answer to be that the meaning of your work is mainly you get opportunities to witness that way. That is absolutely true. In fact, I'll put that here as number three or four, whatever it is.

Working in the world creates a web of relationships that you wouldn't have any other way. That web of relationships is designed by God for life and word to put the gospel out there. Absolutely, amen.

And if it isn't spoken, you won't glorify God. But the reason you're working building a company, creating a product, offering a service is to use the words of Paul to adorn the doctrine. The woman in the analogy of the adornment the woman is the gospel.

The necklace is your work. She's there and she's gorgeous. Namely, the cross.

Christ. That needs to be spoken. No amount of good work is going to make that plain.

That has to be spoken or written. You have to get that into people's heads somehow. A book, a tract, a conversation, an invitation to church.

They've got to get the information about the woman. But then your work can either make her look horrible like, this guy's a jerk. I wouldn't want to sign a contract with him in a thousand years or buy a car from him.

Then she's just muddy. She's just muddy. You just drug her through the dirt.

But if you put a magnificent necklace on her and people say, whoa, now she's even more attractive than you've done for the gospel or what your work is supposed to do. There is a kind of work. You all know this.

I have a friend, and some of you are going to know who I'm talking about. He was in pharmaceutical sales. So he traveled around selling drugs.

I don't know how he does it. He got really rich. He was really effective.

And he quit at about age, I don't know what age he was, 55. And now he's serving at Twin Cities Church. So you know who this is if you go to that church probably.

And he's radically, totally into missions and risked his life all over the world. I said to him one day, how did you get so good at selling drugs, pharmaceutical stuff? And he said one word, trust. Trust.

People trusted me. No sham, no artificiality. What you see is what you get.

Every word is kept. Every appointment's on time. There's total follow-through.

I'm with you all the way. I don't need to listen to anybody else's sales pitch. I'm with you.

Now that's an adornment, big time, of the gospel. Two more quick. Number four, we make much of Christ in our secular work by earning enough money to keep us from depending on others while focusing on the helpfulness of our work and our product, not the financial rewards.

A tricky one. A tricky one. The whole money thing, right? Business is about money.

Business is about profits. So what I'm saying is it's right and good to make a living. This is totally, totally biblical.

I could read you texts. I probably should pass over them. If anyone will not work, let him not eat and so on.

You know these texts. Okay, you believe in work. That's why you're doing it.

So God calls you to work. He calls you to make a living. You should make a living.

You should make money. Your businesses should prosper. And you should not make that your primary focus.

You've got a product or you've got a service. You should be thinking this product should really benefit people. This service should really benefit people.

And I don't like the best product. If you do that, you're probably going to beat your competitor and you're going to prosper. But your goal is I'm serving people with my product and I'm serving people with my service.

If you get off of that goal, if you get off the love goal onto the profit motive as your bottom line, you will cease to make much of Christ and you will make much of dollars for the rest of your days. And the Bible is real clear that we should not work for the bread that perishes, which doesn't mean don't work for a living. It means don't focus on it.

Work with an eye mainly not to money but to usefulness, which means some of you might have to change your job. I mean, this is tricky. And I wish there were time to talk more about that.

If you're in an industry, you're not the guy who runs the company. You're somewhere in the middle and you think they're making some bad choices. I don't think you're immediately a sinner to stay there.

The trickle-down effect of accountability in a company like how about the janitor who cleans up at night, paid by the company, and the company's selling stuff he wouldn't buy. Is that OK for the janitor to keep his wife and family alive? I think probably so. God may open another door, but as you move up in responsibility, the crisis increases.

The crisis of conscience increases as to whether this business is good for people. Last one, and then I'll hand it off. Make much of Christ in our secular work, in your secular work, by earning money with a desire to use the money for others.

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, especially for his own family, he's disowned the faith. In all things, I have shown you that by toiling, one should help. Help the weak.

Paul writes in Acts 20, 35. Don't steal work. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather labor, doing honest work with his hands so that he may have to give to him who is in need.

You can either steal to get, work to get, or work to get to give. You got that? So I'm saying at the profit level, at the money level, make your business creative, industrious, need meeting, the successful probably, and then dream. Like Wesley said, make as much as you can and give as much as you can.

The problem with wealth in our country is not that people make it, but that they keep it. You should live on a relatively simple life. You don't need to have all the symbols of making \$300,000 a year.

Have the symbols of 80 or 90. It's a really comfortable one. And then dream a dream for that capital in your business or for that foundation or giving or whatever.

Dream a dream. It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when the world sees that inasmuch as they can see that, Christ will be made much of.

So back to the text. My earnest desire is that Christ might be magnified in my body whether by life or by death or by my job from 8 to 5. We pray. Father, take these brief words and make Christ supreme for us, I pray.

Multiply the effectiveness now in this room of these men and women in their jobs for your glory. Through Christ, I pray. Amen.

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