FiREFLY Fundamentals

Fundamental Conversations About Faith and Work

8-Week Small Group ***Content Guide***

Session 1 - The Main Thing

Missio Dei + All God's People

Today we're going to start by contemplating some questions.

- What's your main thing?
- Why have you made the choices you have?
- Why do you work where you work, live where you live?

Now I want to invite you to ask those same questions **about God.**

What would you say is God's main thing, His number one driving force in His relationship with humanity? Well, I'm going to offer you an answer to that question.

I'm going to say that God's main thing throughout the entirety of human history is **to make His name known to all people of all nations.**

To see this, we're going to look at an overview of the entire Bible, Genesis to Revelation, through the lens of Scripture's three main themes:

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Redemption

The Main Thing

Envision your paper Bible. Where does the theme of creation happen? Genesis 1 and 2. Where does it move to the second theme of the fall? Genesis 3.
So if we look at a paper Bible, we might have the front and back of page 1 out of 1000+ pages yet we're already through the first two themes.

That tells me that that third theme of **redemption is the main theme** of the entirety of Scripture.

Summarizing the rest of Genesis quickly, we see Noah and the flood, God choosing Abraham to be a father through which to bless the nations, his grandson Jacob being renamed Israel and, his 12 sons set apart to be God's chosen nation of priests to the world.

And then we get a crazy story of Jacob and his family of 70 people moving to Egypt. Then 400 years later, they come out of slavery and they're in the millions.

God has used that time to create the nation of Israel, setting them apart to be a blessing to the nations.

But how exactly does God plan to bless the nations?

The Old Testament law calls all Israelites to be priests to those outside of their 12 tribes. By living in uniquely specific ways—do things, don't do things, eat things, don't eat things, work on certain days, rest on others—so that they became **innately curious** to the people around them.

Continuing with our summary of the Bible, they then come out of Egypt with Moses and all the miracles that happened. After wandering the desert for 40 years, God settles them in a strategic land.

If you think about the geographic location of Israel, you'll notice it's situated between a desert to the East and the Mediterranean Sea to the West. During that time, there were two trade superpowers: Assyria to the North and Egypt to the South. That makes the safest way for merchants to travel between them on the King's Highway right through the little strip of land known as Israel!

And in a culture where hospitality is everything, you can imagine the shock on year 7, the year of Sabbath when the Israelites were to let the farmland rest, when an Egyptian merchant sees empty fields?

This gives the Israelites an opportunity to say something like:

"Well, you see our God's name is Yahweh. He told us to live this way.
If we obey him, he will bless us in these ways and, and wow, he's been faithful."

How strange and yet how curious. What an amazing opportunity to tell them about their God.

Fast forwarding in Scripture, we see David become king, then Solomon after him. And eventually the nation of Israel splits into two and we see disobedience run rampant throughout Israel and Judah. So, the prophets come in and they start yelling at the Israelites to obey Yahweh because if you continue to disobey, God's going to take you into exile just like it says in the end of Deuteronomy.

And exactly that happens.

They continued to disobey and they were taken into exile. After 400 years of waiting, the culmination of time comes for God to send His Son to be made in human likeness.

Go look at **Philippians 2:**
"He became like us, humbled Himself, taking the very nature of a servant."

He lived a sinless life, died for us to take on the sins of the world, overcame the curse of sin and death, and said one day God is going to remake all of this and we'll be reunited with his creation as a new humanity.

He dies, he rises again, and the apostles continue to spread this message of salvation throughout the New Testament.

We see a new way of interpreting the Judaic law to be a unique, different kind of person from the cultures around us. We're given that same mandate to live in a different way than everybody else so that those around us will say you're different.

And then the scriptures end in the Book of Revelation.

There's a lot of things in the Book of Revelation that we don't understand exactly how it's going to work.

But the very end of that last chapter brings us full circle:

- God has made all things new because of the victory of his Son over the powers of darkness.
- We're living in a new creation.
- We’re back in the garden pre-fall where we have the city of God.
- We have light that is emanating from the throne of God himself.
- We have the river of life, and we have the tree of life there for the healing of the nations.
- There's no more crying, no more sadness.
- We get to live in eternity with our Creator.

That's the message of Scripture. **That is God's main thing.**

A New Mission

Let me invite you: If that’s God’s main thing, shouldn’t we be participants in that mission?

The Lausanne Congress conference is an annual gathering of 5,000+ evangelical Christian leaders from throughout the globe. In 2024, an entire day out of that five-day gathering was devoted to marketplace ministry.

One statistic shared at that meeting was that around the world, only 1% of global Christians are in what we would call “full time ministry”. This includes:

- Pastors
- Evangelists
- Church Planters
- Missionaries
- Youth Pastors

Well, if 1% of global Christians are in full time ministry, that means that 99% are not; they are in the “marketplace”

Between the 1% and the 99%, where do you find yourself?

Let’s shift analogies for a second.

Let's say a country is going to war with another country. Their main objective is to win this war.

What’s the likelihood that country sends only their most highly trained Special Forces to fight while leaving the remaining 99% of their trained army behind, cleaning the cafeteria and occasionally sending the Special Forces care packages?

No military commander would utilize their forces like that!

As God’s kingdom on earth, why do we treat God’s main objective this same way?

If you’re anything not considered “full time ministry”, let me plead with you that God wants **100% of His people to be 100% in participation** with His main thing: making His name known to all people of all nations.

I'm not asking you to go back to seminary and be in the 1%. In fact, the Scripture specifically speaks against that.

I think our perspective is wrong because we love to quote **Ephesians 4:11-12**:

> “He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the Saints for the work of ministry, for building up of the body of Christ.”

But gang, I think we miss what he said all the way back in **Exodus 31**. The first time in the whole of the Scriptures where the Holy Spirit of God empowered a human being to do something:

> “…I filled him with the Spirit of God with ability and intelligence, **with knowledge and all craftsmanship** to devise artistic designs to work in gold, silver and bronze, in cutting stones for the setting and carving wood for every craft.””

The first time God empowered a human, it was to create, not to teach and preach.

Marketplace gifts are just as much given by Yahweh as the Ephesians 4 gifts of preaching and teaching because you're part of the 100% participating in God’s main thing.

So what does that mean for you?

That's what I'm going to invite you to think about and talk about today and hopefully every day for the rest of your life.

Because God's main thing, and therefore our main thing, is to **make His name known to all people of all nations.**

Session 2 - The Gospel at Work

Last time we asked, "*What is God's main thing?*"

We said that God is on mission, making His name known to all peoples, and that He invites **all of His people** into that mission — including the 99% of us in our everyday work.

Today we want to ask a different but related question:
What is the gospel? And what does it have to do with my work?

The Gospel

In 1 Corinthians 15:1–5, Paul gives a simple summary of the gospel:
that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day, and that this all happened "according to the Scriptures."

We're going to explore a few gospel truths. Here's the list we're working from today, but you may have other things you'd add to this list, and we'd encourage you to ask the same kinds of questions about those as well. Here's our list:

- God is good
- We're not
- He came
- He died
- He rose
- He gave His Spirit

Sometimes we treat the gospel like it is only the door into Christianity, or only something to be believed. Something like:

"I started believing this years ago, and I try to be a good Christian."

But we believe by leaning further into some of these very simple truths – they will reshape our whole life - including how we see ourselves, other people, and our work.

Walking through the gospel truths

Let's walk through out list of gospel truths and briefly connect them to work. Before we look at each of these, I want you to think of a difficult situation you are facing at work. It could be:

- A choice
- A conflict
- A person
- A task or goal
- Or anything else

I'm guessing it didn't take you very long to think of one. Now hold that in mind as we explore our list. Which of these points do you need to trust even more in your situation?

a. God is good
For me, I find that almost every sin and frustration in my own life can trace back to doubting this truth. But if God is really truly good, then I can trust him. In everything.

At work, this means: The situation you are living in is not random. You might feel powerless but God doesn't, and if he's good you can trust him to work out a better story than you ever could. A good God doesn't leave you alone. You are living in God's world, under God's care, in the middle of God's story, and with his presence.

b. We're not
I am more sinful than I know.

I often hide, self-justify, and try to save myself by performance, success, or reputation. I realize more every day that this is rebellion against God, and my rebellion is worse than I think it is.

This is actually good news! The truth is already "worse" than what others could say — we have rebelled against the living God. Others may say something untrue about me, which isn't right, but it is also not even close to the real truth of my depravity. I've rebelled against the living God. And if that is forgiven by the blood of Christ, what else do I have to fear?

I also love that God, in His mercy, doesn't show us the full depth of our sin all at once — that would crush us. He's so good!

At work, this means:

- We can admit mistakes instead of hiding them, because our hope isn't in our performance.
- We do not have to build our identity around our job or image.
- We can take hard feedback with hope, because we've already been convicted of far worse things.

c. He came to us
Jesus did not stand up there in heaven and say, “Hey, come on up here!” He knew we would never make it on our own. So he came to us. He stepped into our world, into a normal job, into ordinary human life so we could know him.

At work, this means:
- We might ask who God has asked us to move toward, so they could know him.
- Jesus understands pressure, injustice, misunderstanding, and human limits, even better than we do.
- He is still moving toward us today, even and especially when we screw up.

d. He died for us
On the cross, Jesus took our punishment. He paid the price we could not pay. Do you remember the last time this truth brought you to your knees or made you weep with repentance and joy? It’s such a powerful gesture that it’s hard to comprehend.

At work, this means:
- You are not defined by your own behavior but by his.
- You can come right back to him, even after the worst mistakes.
- You can forgive others because you have been deeply forgiven.
- You can even take someone else’s punishment, not because you have to (he didn’t have to), but because of the joy set before you.

e. He rose from the dead
Jesus did not stay in the tomb. He rose. He is alive.

At work, this means:
- There is real hope in situations that feel dead: broken relationships, stalled careers, toxic cultures. If anyone can do it, he can!
- There is nothing wrong that you experience today that won’t one day be put right in him.

f. He gave us His Spirit
God has not left us to live this out alone. The Holy Spirit lives in us.

At work, this means:
- You are not just bringing your skills to your job. You are bringing the presence of God.
- You can ask him for help – with everything! I love to pray simple “breath” prayers in the middle of the workday: “Help me,” “Guide me,” “Give me love for this person.”
- He can show you things to do that will have better outcomes than anything you would think of yourself.

Today, I'm not asking you to "try harder to be a better Christian at work."
Instead, I want to ask you to name what we truly need from Jesus in the places where work presses on us.

If we trust Him more, I believe our lives, our relationships, and our impact at work will change, in ways that point back to Him.

In a moment, we'll talk together about:

- what you would add to this gospel summary,
- which gospel truth you need most at work right now,
- and what worries might hold you back from trusting Jesus more fully in that situation?

Session 3 - Transforming Presence

Seek the Good Where You Are

Last time, we focused on the gospel and how trusting it can reshape everything, including how we see our work.

Today we are going to zoom in on **where** God has placed us. Most of us spend many of our waking hours in workplaces: offices, schools, clinics, shops, construction sites, factories, online teams.

The key idea for today is simple:
God has sent us into ordinary places - often the workplace - to live out the gospel by seeking the good of the people and places around us.

In many cases, those are places our pastors will never be. But we are there.

The surprise of Jeremiah 29

Our key passage is Jeremiah 29:4–7.

God's people have been taken into exile in Babylon. They are not at home. They are living under a foreign power. They are surrounded by people who do not share their faith or their values.

If I were in that situation, my first prayer would probably be:
"God, get me out. Bring me home."

But listen to what God says:

"Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:5–7, ESV)

This is a surprising command.

God does not say, “Hide until this is over.” or “Run away.” or “Start a guerrilla campaign.”

He says, **“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you.”**
Even though it is not your true home.
Even though the culture is different.
Even though there is real pain and real injustice.

What does “seek the good” mean?

In this passage we see that to seek the good includes:

- Praying for the people and systems around you
- Working for their good, which is also for your good

The Bible is full of stories that demonstrate that working for someone’s good doesn’t mean just doing what they tell you or what they like. It’s more complicated than that.

How might you seek the good of the workplace God has placed you in?

Where might you be holding back, because the people or systems in your workplace don’t share your faith or values? How might this passage inform that decision?

Feeling like an outsider

Many of us feel like **outsiders** at work.

The exiles in Babylon understood that feeling.

People like **Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach,** and **Abednego** served in a foreign court. They had to learn a new language. They worked inside a system that did not worship their God. Still, they served faithfully. They did good work. They became trusted leaders. And yet, they kept clear boundaries: there were lines they would not cross, even when it cost them.

The same pattern appears with Isaac in **Genesis 26**. He lives among people who are not his own, but as God blesses him, that blessing overflows to those around him.

Paul shows another example in **1 Corinthians 9:19–23**: he becomes “all things to all people” that he might save some. He adapts to the culture without compromising his loyalty to Jesus.

For us, “seek the good” does not remove the feeling of being an outsider.

Sometimes it **increases** the tension.

We may think:

- “If I really live out my faith here, will I lose respect?”
- “If I serve this place, am I supporting its broken parts?”
- “If I push for change, will I be rejected or misunderstood?”

That tension is real. Jeremiah 29 does not deny it.

But it does give us a posture:
“God, You have sent me here. I will seek the good of this place, as far as I can, with Your wisdom and Your courage.”

“He came to us”: the gospel lived out

In Session 2 we said: “He came to us.”

Jesus entered a specific place, at a specific time, in a specific culture. He learned a trade. He lived in a town that people looked down on. He sat at tables with people others avoided.

Jesus shows us what it looks like to move toward people, not away.

So when we talk about Transforming Presence, we are not saying:

- “Go impress everyone.”
- Or, “Go fix your workplace by yourself.”

We are saying:

- “Go toward the people God has placed around you.”
- “Show up with open eyes, open ears, and an open heart.”
- “Ask: where is the good that God wants to bring here, and how can I help that?

Sometimes that good will look very ordinary, and sometimes it may involve more visible courage.

A simple prayer

I invite you to pray with me:

“Lord, show me one small way to seek the good of this place this week.”

As we move into discussion, keep this in mind:

God has sent you, as you are, into a specific place, with specific people, at this time. Seeking the good there is part of how you live out the gospel.

We are going to talk about:

- What is unique about the place God has placed you to work
- What might “seeking the good” look like there
- Where it might get complicated, like it did for Daniel and his friends
- And who God might have placed around you to join you in this

We are not trying to solve everything tonight.

We are simply asking Jesus to help us see our workplaces with new eyes—and to take one small step toward seeking the good where we are.

Session 4 - Authentic Wholeness

Growth at the Edges

In the last sessions, we have talked about:

God's main thing and our part in His mission, how trusting the gospel reshapes everything, and how God sends us to seek the good of the communities we find ourselves in.

Today we're going to get personal.

We're going to talk about what happens when your faith and parts of your life do not match. The key idea is this: God is big enough for your whole life and for your whole mess.

He invites you into authentic wholeness — not perfection, but a growing consistency between who you are with Him and who you are everywhere else.

"Whatever you do..." — the call to whole-life faith

Our key passage is **Colossians 3:12–17**. Paul describes what it looks like to live as God's chosen people:

- compassion,
- kindness,
- humility,
- gentleness,
- patience,
- forgiveness,
- love.

Then he says: "And **whatever you do**, in word or deed, **do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Col 3:17)

"Whatever you do" is very big.

It includes:

- what you say at home
- what you do at church
- how you treat your friends
- how you act in meetings, write emails, make decisions, and handle conflict at work.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus" does not mean we say "in Jesus' name" after every sentence.

It means:

- we remember who we represent,
- we act in ways that fit His character,
- and we rely on His grace and His Spirit, not on our own strength.

Whole-life faith means there is one Jesus and one you—not a “church version” and a “work version.”

Where faith is strong and where it is thin

If we are honest, we know that our faith is not equally strong in every area of our lives.

For many people, faith is most visible:

- in church services,
- in small groups,
- or at home with family,
- or in our devotional time.

But at work, something different can happen. Work can push our weak spots to the surface:

- fear of people
- a need to control
- hurry and impatience
- irritation or defensiveness
- pride or a desire to look impressive

We may find ourselves thinking:

- “I would never speak this way at church.”
- “I would never treat my family this way.”
- “I pray about many things, but not really about work decisions.”

It is not that we intend to be fake.

Instead, pressure at work often hits places in us that are still growing.

The good news is:

God is not surprised by this. He already knows every weak spot. And He is not running away.

He meets us at the edges, where our faith feels thin.

Growth at the edges

Think for a moment about **where your faith is strongest**:

- Maybe you are patient with your children.
- Maybe you are quick to forgive your spouse.
- Maybe you are generous with your friends.
- Maybe you are faithful in prayer for your church.

These are **real strengths** in your walk with God.

They are not accidents. The Holy Spirit has already been working there.

Now think about **where your faith is weakest**:

- Maybe in tense meetings, you become sharp or cold.
- Maybe when your boss is unhappy, you become anxious and defensive.
- Maybe when deadlines are tight, you ignore people and only focus on tasks.
- Maybe around certain colleagues, you hide your true values.

These are **edges**. Places where pressure reveals what you really trust:

- your own control
- your image
- your comfort
- the approval of others

God often chooses to grow us **right there**, at those edges.

Instead of saying, “I am a terrible Christian because of this,” we can say, “This is where Jesus is inviting me to grow.”

I also want to allow for the possibility that for you work might be the place your faith shows up the strongest, and the weakest areas are with your loved ones or in the times when you are along. You may need to turn this process the other way around.

Bringing strong areas into weak areas

Here is a simple, hopeful question:
What do you do well with God in one area of life, that you could bring into a weaker area of your life?

We are not starting from zero. God has already been forming Christ-like character in parts of your life.

- Authentic wholeness means asking: “Lord, how can I **transfer** that grace into this harder area?”

God is big enough for your whole mess

Many of us carry quiet shame about our weak spots:

- "If people knew who I really am, they wouldn't like or love me."
- "The only thing worse than having these weak spots is having others know about them!"
- "If I don't feel (or even cultivate) a sense of shame about this, I'll never change."

I just want to challenge you that those might be incorrect assumptions. It's just possible that:

- Many people already know about your weaknesses, and some of them love you anyway, and others don't love you and might not love you no matter how good you are.
- Having your weakness out in the light might be the thing that breaks the hold it has on you.
- Conviction is important, but by cultivating a sense of shame, you may be cultivating the negative feelings that are powering your weakness.

Remember Session 2:
We said **we're more sinful than we know**, and God in His mercy does not show us everything at once.

But in Christ:

- our sin is fully known
- and fully paid for

This means we can bring **our whole mess** to Him: the good we want to do, the failures we regret, the fears we hate to admit.

God is not just big enough for your church life.
He is big enough for your **email inbox**,
your **calendar**,
your **anger**,
your **burnout**,
your **desires**,
and your **habits**.

Authentic wholeness starts when we stop pretending and start saying:

"Jesus, here is what I am really like (at work or somewhere else?).

Here is where I do well.

Here is where I fail.

Please help me with all of it."

We are not expecting perfection.

We are aiming for connection - inviting Jesus into the places we might normally keep separate.

As you move into discussion, keep these questions in mind:

- Where is it easiest for you to live like a disciple?
- Where is it hardest?
- What makes it hard?
- And what strength from your walk with God could you bring into that hard spot this week?

Remember:

God is big enough for your whole life and for your whole mess.

He is not asking you to fix yourself before you come to Him.

He is inviting you to walk with Him, and he has plans to help you grow at the edges where you feel the most weak.

Session 5 - Dependence

Five loaves, two fish, and abiding

Most of us in this group are probably good at our jobs.

We were trained to be capable, to solve problems, to get things done.

Competence is a gift. It is part of how we serve others and reflect God's image.

But if we are honest, competence can quietly turn into something else.

It can turn into **self-reliance**. I catch myself thinking I can handle things, until something happens that reminds me that I can't.

Today's key idea is this:
Our primary dependence is on Christ, and as we abide in Him, that will change how we experience life and interact with others.

Primary dependence: "Apart from Me you can do nothing"

In John 15, Jesus uses a simple picture:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

A branch cannot give life to itself.

It does not say, "Vine, thank you, I can take it from here."

Its job is to **stay connected** to the vine. The life and the fruit come from the vine. The orientation is toward the vine, not toward the fruit.

Jesus invites us to trust that real fruit comes from connection to Him, not from our own effort.

Abiding is not passivity.

It is not quitting or doing nothing.

Abiding is staying connected to Jesus **in real life**:

- in the middle of deadlines
- in the middle of email
- in the middle of conflict
- in the middle of tiredness

When pressure rises at work, self-reliance says: “Try harder, push more, hold tighter, don’t show weakness.”

Dependence says: “Jesus, I need You.”

This short, simple prayer can happen in your car, in the elevator, walking between meetings, or staring at your screen.

Abiding can be as simple as:

- turning your attention toward Jesus during the day
- letting His words shape how you see this moment
- asking for His help before you act

I once had a mentor who constantly reminded me that what Jesus really wants from me is to look at Him. And when I look at him, I find him to be good.

Five loaves and two fish: Whatever you’ve got, Jesus has more

The feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:13–21) gives us another picture of dependence.

The situation is impossible:

- Thousands of people
- Evening is coming
- The disciples say, “Send them away.”
- Jesus says, “You give them something to eat.”

They look at what they have:

- Just five loaves and two fish.
- And even that little bit came from a boy. It was not originally theirs.

From a human view, it is not enough.

Not even close.

But instead of pretending they have more than they do, they **bring what they have** to Jesus.

Jesus takes what they offer, blesses it, breaks it, and multiplies it.

Everyone eats. There are even leftovers.

This story reminds us:

- Sometimes God calls us into situations where we do not have enough: not enough time, not enough wisdom, not enough emotional energy, not enough skill.
- The answer is not to deny reality, or to pretend we are fine.
- The answer is to bring our "five loaves and two fish" to Jesus and say:

"This is all I've got.
It feels small.
But I bring it to You.
Do what You want with it."

Dependence on Christ looks like:

- Recognizing our limits
- Naming them honestly
- And trusting that He has more—more grace, more wisdom, more power, more creativity—than we can see

I can't tell you what God will do any more than the disciples could have predicted the baskets of leftover food. But I can tell you that you can trust him that it will be good.

Secondary dependence: we need people, too

Our primary dependence is always on **Christ**.

But in His kindness, Christ often provides through **other people**.

In real life, we already depend on others every day:

- teams
- colleagues
- support staff
- mentors
- friends
- spouses
- church communities

We need people's skills, time, ideas, and encouragement.

We need their corrections and their perspective.

The problem is: we do not always **act** like we depend on others.

We say with our mouths, “We are one body,” but in practice we often try to carry everything alone.

Why?
- We may be afraid of looking weak
- We may feel safer doing it ourselves
- We may not want to “bother” people
- Or we may want the credit

But God’s design is the body, not individual parts trying to make it away from the body.

There is another side to this, one of the best things you can do to build a deeper relationship with someone is to put yourself in a position where you need their help.

This doesn’t mean demanding their help or being lazy. It means being authentic about the value they have to offer and the need you have for the help of others.

You might be someone who takes this too far – the Bible has some things to say about this, about being lazy for instance.

Many more of you may not go far enough, trying to make it on your own, robbing others of the chance to bless you.

Bringing it together

Let’s put this into a simple picture.

Think of one area where you feel strong pressure to be competent and self-sufficient:
- a project at work
- a team you lead
- a difficult relationship
- financial responsibility
- a decision you are carrying

Now ask:
- **Where am I acting as if everything depends on me?**
- **What are my “five loaves and two fish” in this situation?**
  - My limited time
  - My current skills
  - My partial understanding
  - My tired heart

Then imagine two moves:

1. **Toward Christ:**
   a. "Jesus, this is what I have. This is what I do not have. I bring it to You."
   b. "Apart from You I can do nothing. Please give me what I need to love well and act wisely here and make something more from this than I could do on my own."
2. **Toward people:**
   a. "Who have You placed around me that I can ask for help, input, prayer, or partnership?"
   b. "What small step can I take to act to show others how much they mean to me?"

Please don't try to work on dependence on people unless you are already reflecting on dependence on God and practicing that. Everything should start there.

This week, we are not trying to become less competent.

We are asking Jesus to help us re-center our competence on Him. And we're even dependent on him to accomplish that!

We want to practice dependence as an expression of faith:

- bringing our limits honestly to Christ
- from that place of trust, beginning to receive and give help in new ways with the people God has placed around us.

As we move into discussion, reflect on these questions:

- Where do you feel the most pressure to be able to handle everything?
- What makes it hard to truly abide in Christ there?
- What are your "five loaves and two fish" right now?
- What could greater dependence on Christ - and on others - look like for you this week?

Session 6 - Pursuit of Excellence

Sanctification from Security

Here is our key idea for today:

We pursue excellence as love and worship from a place of security and hope, not as a way to earn worth.

In other words:

We do not work with excellence to make God love us.

We have the hope of more excellent work because He already does.

And we don't run away from opportunities to grow, because the pursuit of excellence is an opportunity to know him.

1. What is excellence, really?

In Christianity, there is no definition of excellence better than the standard of Christ. This is a gift to us, because we can't obtain it. One look at Christ and I know that I need him to save me.

The good news is that he did save me! So now what?

Our key passage is **Colossians 3:22–24**.

Paul tells believers to work "with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord,"

and then he says:

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." (Col 3:23–24)

This gives us a simple picture of **excellence, that starts with who we're being excellent for!**

Excellence is **not for others or ourselves. Some examples of this would be:**

- Perfectionism: "I can never make a mistake."
- Ego: "I need to show how great I am."
- People-pleasing: "I have to keep everyone happy."

Biblical excellence asks:

- "How can I do this in a way that **honors Jesus**?" and
- "Out of his love for me, what would Jesus like to change in me so I can better connect with him and reflect his glory?"

Biblical excellence assumes connection, an inheritance, and an identity already given.

2. Security in the gospel: success and failure

One of the biggest reasons people (not just Christians!) struggle to change in some areas of their lives is because they are trying very hard to avoid failure, and to preserve a record of success (in their own minds or in the eyes of others). Robert Keegan phrases this idea as a second job we're all doing at work but not getting paid for – managing our own appearance.

Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). As his people, we don't need to be afraid of the truth. In fact, we can joyfully pursue it because at the end of all truth we find HIM!

So how does this change the way we handle **failure** at work?

Without the gospel, when we fail we often:

- hide,
- blame others,
- replay it in our heads and spiral,
- or shrug and say, "Whatever, it doesn't matter," to protect ourselves.

Inside we may be thinking:

- "I am exposed."
- "I am less."
- "I must cover this up or it will destroy me."

With the gospel, we can say:

- "My deepest identity is not my performance."
- "Jesus has already seen the worst of me and died for me anyway."
- "I can confess this honestly before God (and often others!). I can ask forgiveness. He can help me repair things. And I can grow."

So instead of hiding or hardening, we can pray something like:

- "Lord, I see where I fell short. Please forgive me. Teach me how to walk differently next time. And help me to know you better in this journey."

Two wonderful things happen when we fail:

1. We have a real need to lean on Him, to turn our faces toward Him.

2. Others see! They never thought we were perfect anyway. In failure we have an opportunity to demonstrate our faith in the Gospel - “See, I’m not good or good enough. And this is why I need Jesus. And when I have him, I can face failure.”

That is excellence **from security** — growing because we are loved, not in order to be loved.

How does this change the way we handle **success** at work?

Without the gospel, success easily becomes:

- “Now I have worth.”
- “Now I’m better than them.”
- “If I don’t keep this up, I’ll lose everything.”

With the gospel, we can see success differently:

- “This success is a gift, not my identity.”
- “Christ loved me before this happened, and He will love me after it fades.”
- “I can thank God, enjoy the good, and ask how this can serve others.”

Success becomes another chance to:

- practice gratitude instead of pride,
- celebrate others instead of competing with them,
- and remember that the true reward is our inheritance in Christ, not our latest performance review.

So as you think about your own role:

- Where do you look at yourselves or others too much in how you approach excellence?
- How could your failures be a greater chance for connection with Christ?
- How could your successes be a greater chance for connection with Christ?
- How might the excellence of your work change, if you genuinely believed and acted on the fact that your worth and future are secure in Christ?

Session 7 - Healthy Rhythms

Rhythm is Love, Not Legalism

Most of us live with a lot of pressure. Work demands. Family needs. Church or community roles.

Some of us are close to burnout. Others feel stuck in patterns of avoidance or distraction.

Into that world, Jesus says:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28–30)

Our key idea today is this:

Healthy rhythms are a gift. Keeping them is an act of faith in God’s Goodness.

Healthy rhythms say, “God is God, not me. I can trust Him with my time and my limits.”

Rest in the story of Scripture

Rest is not a new idea from productivity books.

It begins in **creation**.

In Genesis 2:1–3, God finishes His work of creation and rests on the seventh day.
God is not tired. He is modeling a rhythm:

- work,
- then stop,
- delight,
- and bless.

Later, God gives Israel the **Sabbath**. Rest is not just a good suggestion. It is a command for God’s people, for them, for their children, for their servants, for even their animals and land.

Jesus also lives with rhythms. In **Mark 6**, after intense ministry, He tells the disciples:

“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

There were still needs. There were still crowds. But Jesus says “pause.”

We also see Jesus:

- getting up early to pray,
- withdrawing to lonely places,
- and sometimes saying “no” to more demands.

So from creation to Jesus, we see this pattern:
- God works, and God rests.
- God commands rest, and Jesus models withdrawing to a quite place with God.
- Jesus calls us to come to Him, to take His yoke, to find rest for our souls.

Just like the Pursuit of Excellence, Healthy Rhythms are not about earning His love.

They start from the truth that He already loves us.

What rhythms are not

Before we talk about practice, it may help to say what rhythms do not mean.

Jesus’ “easy yoke” does not mean:

- “You will never be tired.”
- “Life will always be balanced and quiet.”
- “You must follow a strict, detailed schedule or you are a bad Christian.”

Healthy rhythms do not mean:

- You must copy someone else’s life exactly.
- You are failing if your week does not look “ideal.”
- You escape from responsibility and call it “rest.”

Instead, rhythms are simple, repeatable patterns that:

- make space for God,
- respect your limits,
- trust Him to make more out of your life than you ever could on your own
- and help you sustain love and faith over time.

For some of us, this will mean **slowing down** and resting more.

For others, it might actually mean **showing up** more consistently and letting Jesus give meaning and strength to our work.

In both cases, we are saying:

"I trust that God is good. I trust that I am not the Savior. I want to walk with Jesus in a sustainable way."

A simple framework: daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, multi-year

Here's a framework that can be helpful for thinking about healthy rhythms. We aren't suggesting you try to change everything at once, so maybe just one of these is worth some experimentation from you this week.

Daily

Small, simple practices that fit a high-stress week:

- **2–10 minutes** of Scripture and prayer.
  - Read a short passage.
  - Ask, "What does this show me about Jesus?"
  - Pray one simple prayer for the day.
- **One micro-sabbath pause.**
  - 30–60 seconds to stop, breathe, and say, "Lord, You are God. I belong to You. Help me in this next thing."

These small daily moments can become "anchors" in a busy day.

Weekly

A Sabbath-like block of time. We strongly recommend a whole day. But don't let that stop you from doing something.

The heart of this block:

- **Worship** (together, with others if possible).
- **Rest** (physical, mental, and emotional).
- **Relationships** (time with God and people, not just screens).

This is not a rule to feel guilty about. It is a gift to protect:

"Once a week, I will live as if God is God and the world will not fall apart if I stop to rest in Him."

Monthly

God gave the Israelites a series of festivals throughout the year, times to rest, connect, celebrate, and enjoy. Maybe you get weekends off, but if you're anything like me, there are always more things to get done one a weekend than I have time for. I set those things aside easily for holidays like Christmas and Easter, but what might God be giving me in the other months – to rest, connect, celebrate, and enjoy?

Once a month, you might:

- Throw (or attend) a party or feast
- Sit in a chair with a close friend for a couple of hours with no devices, you don't even have to talk!
- Get into nature, and leave your step counter behind
- Visit someone or somewhere meaningful to you – an old friend, and old family home, a historical site or work of art

Use your imagination, but ask yourself – will this be a time of rest, connection, celebration, or enjoyment?

Yearly

Take time off. One of my mentors said, "The first week is for recovery, the second week is for building up." When I've taken 2 weeks off, I've seen the truth of that.

Creation used to force some of these rhythms. Now you may need to choose it. And you may not have the freedom to choose 2 weeks at a time, or to be fully "off", but what would a healthy rhythm be that allows you to sustain the good work you are doing for the Lord?

Multi-year

Multi-year rhythms might include:

- years of study,
- years in a particular role or location,
- sabbatical seasons,
- or intentional periods of reduced load.

You may not control all of that.

But you can ask God: "What kind of season am I in? What kind of rhythms fit this season?"

Why rhythms require faith

Rhythms sound simple, but they are not always easy.

To choose healthy rhythms, you may have to face fears like:

- “If I slow down, I will fall behind.”
- “If I take a real rest, people will think I am lazy.”
- “If I stop working, I will have to feel things I am avoiding.”
- “If I start showing up more faithfully, I might have to care again—and that feels risky.”

For some of you, the act of faith is to **rest** when you are tempted to overwork.
For others, the act of faith is to limit rest to certain rhythms and **lean in** to the work God has given you, instead of seeking escape.

Either way, healthy rhythms say:

“God, I trust that You are good. I trust that my life is in Your hands. I want to arrange my time in a way that keeps me close to You and fit to do the good works you’ve prepared for me to do.”

As we move into discussion, remember:

Healthy rhythms are a gift. Keeping them is an act of faith in God’s Goodness.

Ask Jesus to show you **one simple step** that will grow your trust in His goodness.

Session 8 - Transformed Minds

Renewing our minds about work and what's next

I want you to think of a time when you really changed, in a bigger way than you thought possible.

I hope it's a positive change, but even if it's a negative change, that's ok too. What led to that change? I would guess that for most of you, something happened that changed your mind about how the world worked.

Something that you thought was true – that governed your old way of doing things – was found to be untrue. Or something you thought was untrue, was found to be true.

As we said in session 6, Jesus tells his followers,

"You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

The followers respond that they are people of Israel and have never been slave to anyone, which is interesting given the Old Testament history of Israel. But, Jesus makes a different point - that they are **slaves to sin**.

As Christians, we don't need to be afraid of the truth. Rather we should **pursue it**, because at the end of all truth we'll find Jesus. And the pursuit of truth will change us. It will transform our minds, allowing us to test and approve what God's will is.

I hope you're well practiced at pursuing Christ (the Truth). But if that's a new idea to you, I'd encourage you to talk to someone in your group that you trust and ask them to help you take next steps on that.

Today we're going to explore a process for discovering truth that will help us make some of the harder changes we want to make after our discussions in this group.

Since we just talked about Healthy Rhythms last time, I'll use that as an example for our process today:

Let's say I want to get better at resting on a weekly basis, practicing the Sabbath. And let's call that my Goal.

What worries me about resting like that? Now, of course, the idea of a day of rest sounds really good, but if I imagine myself basking in the sun reading a book for a whole day (this is a beautiful picture of rest for me), I start to get uncomfortable.

I start worrying about my **to-do list,**

- I wonder **what my wife will say,**
- I wonder if I'll be a **bad father or friend,**
- I even worry about my **weight.**

Let's call these my Worries.

Normally, this is where I'd make a plan. If I don't think too hard, I might just make a simple **brute force plan** – just do it…with predictable results (probably all my fears come true).

Or maybe I make a **sophisticated plan** – only resting when my wife is out of the house, after I've done 3 to-do list items and a workout. Phew! I'm tired just thinking about that. And hiding my rest from my wife doesn't feel very much like a pursuit of truth.

So let's do **something different**. What assumptions do you see that I'm making that are driving my worries – about my to-do list, about my wife, kids, friends, or weight?

Here are some I can think of:

- I assume that if I don't rest, I'll get more done
- I assume that getting more done is the most important thing
- I assume that my wife doesn't want me to rest, or even values the to-do list more than she values me
- I assume that good fathers or friends don't rest well
- I assume that workouts and healthy eating have to be painful and counter to my rest

Now you're probably already seeing ways that some of my assumptions might be untrue.

We're already starting to test whether these assumptions are true or not.

Assumptions that drive worry and hold back change can be:

- True - yes, sometimes they are true and that barrier should be there!
- Part true - are they true in every situation, all the time, with everyone?
- Almost entirely untrue

In each case, we believe that **discovering the truth is the key** to greater freedom and connection with Christ.

So how do I do that in my situation? I create little experiments to test my assumptions.

Let's work on the assumption that my wife doesn't want me to rest. I may have a lot of data that has led me to think that, but is that the full story? How could I begin to find out in a simple and safe way?

Here are some of my ideas:

- Ask her, “Hi sweetie, I was thinking about finding some regular time to really rest and practice healthy rhythms as an act of trust in God but I’m a little worried about the impact it would have on you, and honestly, how you might respond if you see me sitting in a chair all day. Is more healthy rest rhythms something you could help me work on?” In my case that feels like a safe conversation, but maybe it wouldn’t feel that way for you.
- Invite her to rest with me. See how she responds. Maybe she has some worries about resting and some assumptions I can help her with.
- Pay attention to other situations where I rest, or take a shorter rest – how does she respond to those?

Once I’ve completed my experiment, I can consider what I’ve learned and how I want to proceed to continue to discover more of the truth.

Ultimately, **this process is about seeking Christ.**

What does he want to show me:
- about **Himself**,
- about **myself**,
- and about **the people he has put around me**?

The answers may not be what I expect, but if I’m seeking the truth in them, I’m seeking him.

I hope you’ll treat this process like that, like you are pursuing the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Happy experimenting!