

**Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well." So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me." One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him." Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul. And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.**

Does my work have meaning? Does the manner in which I go about my work matter? How does my relationship with God express itself in my work? How does the Spirit guide my interactions and decision making at work?

These questions are near to all of us because we spend a lot of time at or jobs—some of us spend too much time at our jobs. Our jobs can be a source of great satisfaction; they can also be our greatest headache—somehow they also have the capacity to be both at the same time. The average American will spend over 90,000 hours at work. Making the question, "How is God leading me here?" one of the most important questions we will face over a lifetime.

Work can either be the natural outpouring of our God anointed purpose and or it can be like this (picture). Work can be God revealing in you his purpose and partnership with you in deeply satisfying ways, or work can be just be another god. Jesus plays as important a role in our working life as our resume, or our bosses, or our strategic plans. When he is part of that equation, our work can be deeply purpose-filled and kingdom building.

I read this week: "During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music. I feel this has been granted through His grace. ALL PRAISE TO GOD... This Album is a humble offering to Him. An attempt to say 'Thank You God' through our work, even as we do in our hearts and with our tongues. May He help and strengthen all men in every good endeavor."

This is an excerpt from the liner notes to John Coltrane's iconic album *Love Supreme* in which God was a part of process.

This morning's passage is a point where two stories converge: Saul, the seated King who struggled to trust God's guidance, and David, the freshly anointed King who is beginning his journey towards leadership. One is a story of integration of Spirit-led participation with God. The other is a story of dis-integration, and a life in which work and faith are two disconnected spheres, that lead to a fractured life.

First, the story of dis-integration:

Saul's reign seemed to have the makings of effective leadership. Saul looked the part, he was successful in foreign campaigns. Saul's progress reports revealed a leader who could get the job done efficiently and effectively.

The problem though, like many of us, as Saul became more confident in his job, he was tempted to put God on the bench and be his own manager. Rather than listening to the voice of Samuel, who told him what God wanted, Saul decided that he knew better. In one campaign against the Amalekites who had plundered Israel for so long, God told Saul, "When you defeat them, don't take any of their stuff—in fact, destroy it all." But Saul, being the opportunist, and wanting to be the benevolent king thought, "My people need this, so I'll just keep a few of the choicest animals. But we'll offer one as a sacrifice to make sure we're on the up and up with God."

In reality, Saul didn't think he really needed God. As he gained success, Saul became more and more consumed by the work. Rather than obeying God's will, Saul decided that "At work, I call the shots." Saul's working life and his spiritual life were increasingly disconnected, they were dis-integrating.

The Scriptures reveal to us that God created us to work (not for work). Genesis 1-2 tell the story of a God who crafts the cosmos and then when it's finished, he rests. It then tells the story of God placing man and woman in the garden to work together with God to cultivate the earth. Work is not punishment, as some would suggest; it's not a necessary evil. Work is our opportunity to discover God's unique gifts and our most satisfying life with God. God put man and woman in the garden to help cultivate and care for Eden. Work is paradise.

This morning, we meet a man who is in the grips of what might have been a nervous breakdown—he's been doing it all on his own and maybe the hours and the stress is finally catching up to him. What began as anointed, faithful leadership soon became one man's quest for greatness apart from God.

Saul saw his gifts for leadership as his opportunity to say, "No, no, God, I got this, I'll take it from here." Saul separated his call to be a child of God with his call to be King of Israel. When this happened, Saul's life dis-integrated.

Eugene Peterson tells the story of growing up in Montana, in his father's small town butcher shop.

“My father was a butcher and we lived within walking distance of the shop. I can’t remember a time when I wasn’t part of that workplace. Our place of worship never seemed that much different from our place of work. The same kind of people. The same easygoing camaraderie. I always thought of my father as a priest. He wore a white butcher’s apron as he presided over the work of slaughtering heifers and pigs, dressing them out, cutting them up. There were always two or three meat cutters working with him—I just assumed they were part of our family.

We worked hard in that place. Year after year I was taught and given tasks that suited my developing strength. I learned the dignity and satisfaction of work.

Our (church) was a storytelling church, and for a few years we had a pastor who specialized in the tabernacle, the temple, and the whole Hebrew sacrificial system. From the beginning I was an insider to exactly that sort of world of worship: I grew up experiencing the sight and sound of animals killed and offered up, the smell of flesh and blood and the buzz of flies. A bull on the altar at Shiloh couldn’t have looked or smelled much different than one on the butcher block in our shop on main street.”

Coming to worship is important, but how will we ever fully understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ, how would we get the feel for the Bethlehem Manger, the Galilean Fishing boats, Peter’s curses or Mary’s tears, if the only place we ever hear them is in this sanctuary. The place where God is shaping and sending us is not back into church, but out into the world. The world, our workplaces, are where we encounter the Spirit.

Second: A Story of Integrated Work and Worship.

Did you see the progression of David’s life? God anoints him as King, then the first thing he does is serve another King. David’s introduction to his role as King of Israel is service.

Saul said, **“Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.” One of the young men answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him.” So David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly and he became his armor-bearer.**

For 20 years David, the newly anointed king, would serve the formerly anointed king. He was a king without looking like a king. But this wasn’t an example of the President’s son starting in the mailroom. This was the King who became a servant. David was a King serving a king. David was ruling, and the way he was doing it was by serving.

When Jesus stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth, in Luke chapter 4, to announce that he was going to work, he told them how he was going to do it: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me.” Jesus was the King who left the throne room of heaven and descended to earth, and for 33 years ruled by serving.

Having the right job doesn't mean we'll do it the right way. Saul had a great position, but he failed in his calling. He failed because he saw his job as the thing that brought him glory. Both David and Saul were anointed by God. The difference is, David saw God as the one who defined his life, and because of it was able to do his King-ing with that anointment.

Another author put it this way: The key to having a successful vocational life is this: being called, spirit-anointed isn't getting the right job, but doing kingdom work in whatever God places you. For David, it was playing music for a distraught man.

Finally: Working to the Glory of God

There is a poignant difference between the attitudes of Saul and David. For Saul, the work he did became a way to serve himself and look good before his people. But for David, the purpose of his work was something beyond himself—it was God's presence, joy, and pleasure flowing through David's natural abilities. David was given a great task and the way he carried it out was by letting God's Spirit empower his service.

If we believe that our success in this world is dependent upon our skill and ability. Then we, like Saul, will be doomed to a dis-integrated life. We will be consumed with worry, with fear, with uncertainty. But if we will trust God and allow the Spirit to flow through us, strengthen us, empower us, send us, our work can be the joyful out pouring of God's glory in the world and purpose in our lives.

Did you notice this morning during the Pentecost reading from Acts 2 where the disciples were that day? Locked away in an upper room. You see, they thought that the job Jesus had given them was up to them, and it terrified them. But when the Spirit came and the presence of the risen Christ began to fill them, it displaced all those old fears and worries. And the Spirit became so palpable and so powerful that it ejected them from their uncertainties and propelled them forward with the strength and courage they needed to love and serve and work in Jesus' name. Amen.