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GOOD MORNING – Bobby Schuller (BS) and Hannah Schuller (HS)

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

HS: And welcome church family. You are so loved today and always by the living God, and by this church. And you know the enemy loves to convince us that small acts of kindness are not a big deal because He knows how powerful they can be. God can use our small acts of kindness to overwhelm and transform the world with His goodness.

BS: Amen. Let's begin with a word of prayer: Father, we thank you so much that you've called us, and Lord we pray for everyone in this room and everyone watching on television and online, pray your blessing, Father, especially this week we're talking about work. Lord, we pray that you'd bless our jobs, bless the work that we do, help us to feel joy in everything that we do. Pray that you'd give us life in our parenting, our grand parenting, our caring for others, and our service. And Lord, most of all, today this is for one person and that's you. Worship. We are the performers, you are the audience and this is for you, Lord. We love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen. Turn around and shake the hand of the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

SCRIPTURE – Genesis 4:2-8 – Hannah Schuller

In preparation for Bobby's message, the words of our Lord found in Genesis 4:2: Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord, and Abel also brought an offering: fat portions from some of the first born of his flock.

The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, He did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it.

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field. While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

We are striving as a church family to give God our very best because He is worthy and it's the path to the fullest life possible. Amen.

INTERVIEW – Devon Still(DS) – Bobby Schuller (BS)

BS: With us today is Devon Still. He's a former defensive end for the Cincinnati Bengals, whose career took a dramatic turn when his daughter, Leah, was diagnosed with cancer. Through these trials, Devon's faith has made him incredibly known and is chronicled in his new book, Still in the Game. Would you please welcome with me, Devon Still. Hi Devon! So great to have you here. By the way, Hannah said after I interviewed you in the last service, she said I've never seen you look small before.

DS: That's why I'm trying to look small. I'm trying to get down to your height.

BS: Just for people watching on TV, I'm 6' 3, 200 pounds. So I guess that's what happens when you stand next to an NFL defensive end.

But wow, what a joy to have you here. Tell me, first of all, what an amazing thing that you got to play professional football. What was that like and it must have been a dream come true.

DS: Yes, my first time I ever thought about going to the NFL was when I was 13. I did everything I could to put myself in the best position in order to make it to the NFL, and the day that that happened, it just showed me what's really possible when you put God first and really dedicate your life to doing something you want to do.

Give God Your Best

BS: What did it feel like the first time in the NFL you got like a quarterback, or probably let's be more realistic, a punter, somebody that looked like me and you just took them down to the ground. It must have been great.

DS: You know what's interesting is when I grew up, I grew up a Steelers fan because my dad was a big Steelers fan and actually my first sack in the NFL, I sacked Ben Roethlisberger, which is the quarterback for the Steelers. Which was pretty cool.

BS: Yes! That must have felt great.

DS: It did.

BS: It would have felt so good. So there you were, you're playing in the NFL, and just living this amazing dream that's just, I mean, once in a lifetime, only really a handful percentage of people get to do this, and this horrible thing happens to your daughter. Tell us about that, Leah.

DS: Yes, so in 2014, my daughter got diagnosed with stage four neuroblastoma, and she was given a 50% chance of surviving. And it really just split my world upside down. It showed me what was really important in life, that although I was living the dream, I had to sacrifice my dream so that one day my daughter can grow up and live hers.

BS: And so that's happening and like people don't understand, I think people don't understand when you're a parent, what it's like. I mean you can imagine how horrible it would be, but there's so much of this like God, why don't you give me cancer, and all these weird things that come into your mind. Like why her, why not me? Did you have those thoughts when you were going through that?

DS: I did. I struggled with that a lot in the beginning because I think all of us as parents, we all make that promise to our kids when they come into this world that we're going to do everything we can to protect them. And I felt like when Leah got diagnosed with cancer, I broke that promise. I prayed day in and day out for God to give me this battle with cancer instead of Leah, but that didn't happen so I had to do whatever I could do to support her.

BS: Were you a Christian your whole life?

DS: I was, but I didn't really have a strong foundation in the church. And I actually got baptized two months before Leah was diagnosed with cancer so it really tested my newfound faith.

BS: See that's interesting, since very often a baptism, like even if you've been a Christian your whole life, usually when you get baptized as an adult, this is you saying to God and your community I'm serious about this. This is something I really want to devote my life to. You did that and then literally a matter of weeks later, the worst thing you can imagine happens.

DS: Right.

BS: Did you struggle with that as a believer?

DS: Right, but I also understood when I got baptized, the pastor had told me that this is probably the time where the enemy attacks you the most because he doesn't like to see that relationship you're building with God. But then I realized that because my daughter has stage four cancer, she had it for a long time so maybe this wasn't God allowing this to happen to my daughter, but He was revealing this to us so that we had a chance to save her life.

BS: Wow, that's a positive way of looking at it. That's terrific. So what's interesting is this horrible thing happened, but then you kind of began to share your story on Instagram, you've garnered this huge following, and actually ended up giving a lot of people hope, didn't you.

DS: Yes.

BS: Ended up being this big story that almost is become kind of almost your new message in life.

DS: Right, for me, I just felt like God gave me a playbook during that time throughout my struggles, and I talk about it a lot in my book, that I use in order to overcome Leah's battle with cancer. I use to overcome the struggles I faced in my life. I thought it was important to share my testimony and put the things that God had taught me into this book so that people have a playbook to get off the sidelines and get back into the game of life.

BS: This book really is so good. It's called Still in the Game and it tells this whole story of what God did in your life, and how you and your family worked through this difficult struggle. And it has a picture of your gorgeous daughter, Leah, she is so cute. And how's she doing, by the way?

DS: She's doing really well. Next month she turns four years in remission, so we're fighting to get to that five year mark so she can be cancer free.

BS: Yes. Great to hear. Great to hear. Just one last thought, Devon, I mean you're really an encourager and a motivator. What do you say to people that are here that have some life threatening illness, or a parent or grandparent who has a loved one, a kid or grandkid who is struggling with some kind of illness? What encouragement would you give?

Give God Your Best

DS: I would tell them the same thing I told my daughter, that sometimes we can be going through some dark times in our life, and we feel like that we're never going to make it through the storm, so we sit on the sidelines and we wait for somebody to come save our lives.

But we have power, right? There's power in your tongue. And I believe that you have to take action in life; that you have to get up and get back into the game because no matter what you're going through, as long as you're alive, as long as you have breath going through your body, you're still in the game. And I told my daughter that all the time when she was battling cancer, regardless of the odds, and because we kept fighting, she's now four years in remission.

BS: Keep fighting, you're still in the game. It's not over till it's over. And I remember you said something, too, that when the enemy sends something to break you, God says something to heal you.

DS: Yes, definitely.

BS: What a good word. Thank you so much. The book is Still in the Game. Check it out. Thank you so much for being here, sir.

DS: Thank you for having me.

BS: Appreciate you.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Friends, would you hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving and we're going to say this creed together. Let's say this: I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world.

MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "Give God Your Best"

Well today we're beginning a new series called Avodah. We're going to learn some Hebrew. And we're talking over the next four weeks about finding joy in our work. Literally, many of us hate our jobs. I think it's something like 65% of Americans really dislike their jobs and like 15% hate their jobs, and when you think about at least eight hours of five days a week being devoted to your job, this is a problem. This is not God's best life for you to be at a job you hate, hating your life, and we're going to talk about this and how there's an easy answer within, especially the Jewish Old Testament, but it's also in the New Testament, this idea of how we can find joy in all the things we do, not just in our nine to five work, but in parenting, in volunteering, in our service, in our retirement, and we're going to talk about those things.

First, let me ask you a question. When you think about your favorite job you've ever had, what was it? Do you have some job, maybe even when you were a kid that was so joyful, fun, maybe it was hard work, but you just felt so alive. And when you look back you think man that was a great job, I was doing great stuff, or I was working with great people, or I was making good money or something like that, oh, that was a good time. I want you to just think about that, hold that in one hand.

And then I want you to think about the opposite. Maybe not everybody's had a job they love like that, but everybody has had a job they've hated. Anybody here had a job you hated? Don't raise your hand. Don't do it. You're like, it's my job now, something like this. Maybe you had a job you just thought oh I don't want to go to work, I don't want to do this anymore, I need another job but I can't make money doing anything else, so I hate this, I feel stuck, I feel trapped, I've got to pay my bills, my mortgage.

And I just want to talk about this because I think many Americans are living every single day at their jobs with this feeling of being trapped, this feeling of insufficiency, this feeling like I don't have a choice, this feeling like I hate going to work on Monday, and I want you to know that in many cases, in fact probably most cases, you don't have to change your job to love your job. Let me talk about this more.

We live in a world where most people are in one of three categories. The first is this: it's the always waiting crowd. Always waiting for something to be over. I think this makes up a majority of Americans, the nine to fiver. There's a comedy, I forget what network it's on, it's called The Good Place. And it's this TV show, of course, about how a girl who was supposed to go to hell accidentally gets in heaven and everything's going wrong. It's very funny. But one of the scenes is there's this arc angel who observes humans. He just thinks humans are so interesting. And he says one of the weirdest things about human beings is in general they're just always waiting for stuff to be over. Many of us feel that way, don't we, in our jobs.

Give God Your Best

For many of us, we go to work on Monday morning, and just getting up in the morning is like oh my gosh, I got to do this again, I got to get dressed, take a shower, you're on your way, trying to be positive but you just kind of hate the experience and every day you're counting down and just waiting for the weekend, right? (SINGS – Everybody's working for the..) nobody? Anybody grew up in the 80's? Everybody's working for the weekend? We even call Wednesday hump day because we got over the hump of the week where we're getting halfway to being done.

So what happens is our existence feels something like nine to five Monday through Friday is hell, and then Saturday and Sunday is this heaven, this reward. But it doesn't work out that way, does it, because when we get to Saturday, we're not really sure what to do, maybe we haven't made plans, we feel disappointed that we didn't make plans, now it's too late, or we don't have enough money to do anything fun. And then, of course, Sunday rolls around, around Sunday at one or two in the afternoon this dread begins to sink back in that tomorrow morning I got to go back to school, I got to go back to work, I got to go do this thing that I hate.

And that is not God's best for our lives. There's nothing wrong with working nine to five, but there's something wrong with always looking forward to the weekend, always looking forward to the vacation, and just assuming that the majority of your existence is going to be a bummer. That's not the way to live life, is it? And there's an answer. There's an answer to that.

There's also another problem. This the second type of person. The workaholic: the one who's identity is totally based in what they do, right? This feeling that they don't worry about going to work on Monday because they were at work on Sunday. They work Monday to Monday. They work every single day. They work late into night and in the morning, and time just flies by for the workaholic. I mean it goes by so fast and before you know it, their kids are grown up, they don't have good friendships. Some of the friendships they have are with people with whom they work, but they fired some of those people, or had a fall out with those people and they're not friends anymore, and so the workaholic has this weird struggle where their identity is totally wrapped in in what they do.

For some of us, actually, it's a way that we escape despair, depression, addiction. I know one guy who struggled with drugs and alcohol for like 15 years and the way that he got out of it was by, like starting this business and pouring himself into it, which is certainly better than drugs and alcohol, but in many ways, he keeps running from his demons. He keeps running away from whatever it is causing him to feel this worthlessness, angst, worry. And of course that's the person who finds their identity in what they do and we reject that every Sunday, don't we. We're not what we do. We're God's beloved whether we're doing anything or nothing, we're loved.

And then finally, there's the third person, the person who wants to work but can't, or won't, right? This can happen to young people when they get laid off or fired, or have an injury and can't go back to work, and this happens to older folks when they worked really hard and lived a great life, but now it's time to retire, and they play golf for a couple of months, and then they're bored. And there's this despair. It happens to parents who have poured their selves into their kids, and now they move out of the house.

And there's this what do I do now? I've been a mom, I've been a dad for 20 years and my kids are gone. How do I find meaning and purpose in my life? And so this loss of work also creates a sort of restlessness and despair, and even hopelessness in our lives, doesn't it.

And so what I want to tell you today is this, is that the scriptures have an answer to this, and it is not have a horrible existence for five days to get some reward, it is not always work all the time, it is not never work, it is let everything you do, let everything you do, whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as though you're working for the Lord and not for man, as Colossians says. That everything you do is an act of worship, an act of service that your work is your worship; your worship is your work, and that you find in the little things and the big things that everything I do, Lord, is for you. That the noble stroke of a hammer, that the sweeping of a floor, that the changing of a poopy diaper. Some of you men who were dads, you thought diaper changing was over once your last kid was out of diapers. You didn't think about grandkids, did you? Didn't think about that. Here you are, you're a grandpa and you're changing diapers again. Great grandpa and you're changing diapers again.

That no matter what it is we do, no matter how we ply our trade, no matter where we are, that everything we do is worship. Its worship. Lord, I'm doing this for you. And I want to convince you today that our whole existence, our circumstances, everything, it begins here in our thinking. Very often we hate the things that we're doing, we hate our life, we hate our experiences, but we nurture the thoughts that got us there. When we begin to change our thinking, everything else will change in time. Nearly everything is the result of our habits of thinking.

Give God Your Best

And as Dallas Willard said, the human being is a mind with a will. It's a thinker. That's what people are. And so how we think about our work can change our whole experience and our whole quality of our work, and that is simply to say, Lord, whatever it is I'm going to do, you care about all things big and small, let my work be worship.

Martin Luther talked about this a lot. He talked about how God accepts the work of people, not because we put little crosses on shoes. I'll bring the quote next week or the week after, or because we make things look Christian, but He just loves clean houses, loves good work, loves craftsmanship. And that no matter what we do, whether it's quote unquote Christian or not, is worship to God, as long as we do it rightly and with all our hearts.

This idea was later branded and sort of engrained into the American culture as what is a very good thing, the Protestant work ethic. But Protestant is actually a misnomer because even though Protestants are very hard workers, this idea doesn't originate with Martin Luther and the performers, it actually originates with the Jews. You see it most clearly in this word – Avodah. Everybody say it like this: Ah-vo-dah. (AUDIENCE: Avodah) Avodah. It means three things and the only way to properly interpret is its context. Avodah is the same word for work, it's the same word for worship, and it's the same word for service. Avodah. Avodah. My work is my worship, my service is my worship, my service is my work, and that's the idea that everything I do, every time I ply my trade, all the work that I do, little or big, no matter what, God sees it, it matters to God, He's thankful for it and He blesses us for it as long as we do it with the right heart. And that no matter what we do, whether we're singing in the choir, or building pews, or preaching, or cleaning toilets, that we do it for the Lord. And you watch how this little change in your life will make all the difference.

It's interesting to think that Jesus Himself, most of His life, was not spent doing today what we call ministry or vocational ministry. Jesus was crucified, raised from the dead, and ascended when He was around 33, but didn't begin ministry till about three years before that. So what did He do that whole time? Well as many of us know, most of His life He was probably a carpenter. That's what tradition says. In the Bible it calls Him a technoy. Technoy means a builder or a maker, so it doesn't necessarily mean carpenter, although He probably worked with wood a lot. He also maybe worked with metal, or stone, or something like that. And He did that for most of the years of His adult life. He just obediently and patiently worked with His hands and built things. Isn't that sweet? That God, even as a human is a creator, a maker and a builder.

I remember once when I was in Israel, we were in this archeological site not far from Nazareth, and it was interesting how one of the guides there kind of rubbed his hand sort of across this stone on this theater and just sort of looked at this longingly and said imagine we're so close to Nazareth, aren't we? Jesus Himself might have helped build this theater. He might have laid these stones. He might have put in the wooden brackets that went in-between these columns. He might have put down the metal work that held the stage. And He would have just done it joyfully as unto the Lord. Isn't it interesting to think of Jesus through all those years not preaching, not teaching, but listening, learning and working as unto the Lord.

I want you to know that that work that He did honored God just as much as His preaching and teaching did. That's why God did not consider it a waste of time that most of His adult life Jesus was merely a carpenter. And God does not consider it a waste of your time that maybe what you're doing now may in the world's eyes or society's eyes seem mundane. God looks at the heart! He loves humility. He loves hard work. And He especially loves it when women and men do what they're doing as though they're doing it as worship to Him. Can I get an amen from all of those who have a little bit of that Protestant work ethic or Jewish work ethic in their hearts.

You see every man, woman and child, as we all know, we can't hear it enough, was created with a purpose. And many purposes, by the way. I think one of the things that robs our life of so much joy is the narrative that we have only one calling, only one purpose, and that sort of our goal in life is to find that one purpose or that one calling. But in truth, we go from calling to calling, purpose to purpose, and each one matters. And it's not a build up for one thing. In fact I believe that every purpose and calling we have when we finish or fail those callings, is just a set up for the next calling after that. So that each thing sort of levels us up, develops us, trains us and makes us better.

Many of you, you think I've never found my calling. I've never found my purpose. And there's this despair and anxiousness about trying to find that one thing. Or some of us, we say I already lived my purpose, I already did the thing, it's all downhill from here! But that's not the way God thinks. God is always giving us purposes that matter, that have eternal value and all we have to do is say speak Lord, your servant listens. And be obedient to do the big things and the small things.

Give God Your Best

Can I get amen from those of us who are looking for our purpose, there isn't a purpose. There are many purposes and many callings for all of us. And in each one, we grow and we honor the Lord and we bless our lives with our work.

We are created for a purpose and we are created for Avodah. Not backbreaking work, not the cursed labor that God puts on Adam after He casts them out of the garden, but the pre-fall kind of work: Avodah, where our work is life-giving, wonderful, its meaningful, it gives us joy, we're excited to do it, it's difficult and challenging, but that's part of what makes it great.

When I was a kid, when I was asking that question – what job did you love and what job did you hate, I remember one of the jobs I loved the most, of course I love this job the most, right. But one of the jobs I truly loved the most was actually when I was at the end of high school and early college, I was a handyman at a ranch, at my dad's ranch. And I worked with a guy named Tim, I earned minimum wage. At the time it was, I think, six dollars an hour. And I had to be there at six in the morning and I went home at two in the afternoon, and I had to get up really early which for a 17/18 year old guy, it was a lot of work. But I just remember out there working with my hands and building a staircase, and making a master key because Tim was a locksmith and he trained me in that. It was just so life giving and it paid nothing! And yet every day I woke up with joy and I looked forward to that job.

And then the job I hated was the one I had when I had to go back to college in Oklahoma when I worked at Barnes and Noble. And it was there at Barnes and Noble I would be bored out of my mind and this was before Starbucks made its way to Oklahoma, so I would make this beautiful Italian cappuccino and serve it to someone, and they'd come and they'd say 'excuse me.' You know some guy in his truck, like all my friends were this way, he'd be like 'this does not taste like the cappuccino from Quick Trip.' Quick Trip is 7/Eleven. This does not taste like the cappuccino from 7/Eleven. So everybody hated my cappuccinos, I was there by myself a lot. I almost got fired for singing Frank Sinatra. That's a true story. I'm there sweeping, it's like Tuesday at 10 in the morning, I'm like (SINGING – I got the world on a string sitting on a rainbow. Got that string around my finger. What a world, what a life, I'm in love.) The choir clapped last time so I decided to keep going. Tonight when I'm praying and thinking about today, I'll be like that was dumb. You got to stop doing that. It's not a show, it's a sermon. Be reformed! (SINGING – I got a song that I sing I can make the rain go.)

So there I am and I'm singing like that, and my boss comes over and he's like shhhhhh what are you doing? What are you doing? This is a bookstore! I'm like there's nobody here. I hated that job so much. And it was actually in that job I heard the sermon about this idea that what if even in the jobs we hate, they can be worship. And I just decided that even when my boss is being mean to me, and even when there's nobody around and there's nothing to do and I'm sweeping, I'm just going to do this for the Lord. I'm going to do it for the Lord. I'm going to honor God in all my work. And can I tell you, I am a walking testimony that this is the best thing you can do in any job you have, especially the jobs you hate. Do it for the Lord. Do it for the Lord.

Do it as worship and watch as doors just fly open for you, blessing just gets poured out from heaven into your life, more people want to work for you, more opportunity comes your way because everything you're going to do, you do with joy, with lightheartedness, with a sense of peace, and you go home maybe a little tired, but with a smile on your face.

People were created for purpose. People were created to do things with their hands and with their minds. And this is good; this is what the Lord has for us. In fact, part of the blessing at the Garden of Eden was a job. Did you know that? Adam and Eve, before the fall, were given work to do, and everybody always says it was naming the animals. I don't know what that's about; that's not true. The job they were given was to abad and shamar. They were farmers. They were called to work, this is the first time this word abad – abad is a form of Avodah. Avod – it can be spelled with a V, as well; its inner changeable. You translate from Hebrew. So Abad and Shamar. So the work, the work or serve the garden was also worship.

And then the other word, shamar was to protect. So I don't have time to talk about what they were protecting the garden from – it's an interesting class I could teach, but they were called to protect this garden, and to till the ground and care for it, and farm and keep it. It was their job. And to them, it was what they were made for, they were given authority, a sort of kingly authority, and a queenly authority over that garden, and that authority plus work plus care plus love for the garden gave them life. That was their calling before they sinned, before the fall. Let me give some of you some hope. We often think heaven we're just going to be like sitting around eating Yolo all the time.. not Yolo. What is a frozen.. fro yo. I got it mixed up.

Give God Your Best

We very often think we're just going to be sitting around heaven just relaxing, eating ice cream, breathing under water and flying, none of this stuff is real. When we get to heaven, and in the new heaven and new earth, we're going to have work to do. There's going to be work to do. For some of us that's a bummer, but for some of us, that's very hopeful because I think many of us who think seriously about heaven and the afterlife, it sounds boring. Can we just be honest? It sounds a little boring. But this is the nature that God, when we get to heaven, and then when heaven comes back to earth and is under the reign of Christ, that we will have stuff to do. We'll have buildings to build, songs to sing, paintings to paint, right? We're going to have stuff that we're going to do and we're going to make and we're going to have our own will and our own ability to do these things, and it's going to be very fun and life-giving and purposeful.

For some of us, that gives us hope. You know why? Because we want a purpose. We don't want our purpose to go away when we get to heaven. And guess what: it doesn't. This is part of God's blessing. And the reason I point this out is there's this idea within the modern world that non work is the ideal. It's not. Non work is not the ideal. Some of us can't work in the ways that we used to, but ideally all of us want to be doing something that matters, either with our minds or our hands or both and this is Avodah.

So after Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden, and I'll just finish with this very dark story from Cain and Abel, Cain and Abel now have their own jobs. Cain is a farmer, and Abel is a shepherd of some kind. And you see this story that Abel brings the fatted portions of his flock or whatever it is, before the Lord as an act of worship and sacrifice. And Cain brings some portion of his groves or trees before the Lord, and it says that the Lord accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's offering. And there's a lot of questions about this story, but the one that just really sticks out is why did God accept Abel's offering and not Cain's? And there are some clues.

The first is that, again, it points out that Abel's offering was the fatted portions. That's the most expensive part. That's the like when you cut up the cow, you take the filet mignons and you bring those before the Lord. You bring the most expensive, sellable, worthwhile, delicious parts and in this case, you're probably going to burn it on a pyre as an act of worship, which to the world looks like waste, right? You're not going to cook it and eat it, you're going to destroy it, essentially, as a sacrifice to God as an act of worship.

So for Abel, I always think, and I'm putting this on the scripture, it doesn't actually say this, but I like to think that for Abel it was a joyful.. it was take the best I have, God. Take the very best portions of my labor. But for Cain, it doesn't say that he took the best parts of his fruit, right? The best apples, the sweetest cherries. It just merely says he brought something, and he offers it before the Lord. And you get this idea that it's just kind of like I'll just take some of these ones. I don't think it was his worst, but I also don't think it was his best. And later, when God begins to speak to Cain, he says if you only do what is right, will I not accept you? In other words, there was something wrong about Cain's offering.

Tradition teaches us that basically Abel brought the best and Cain brought the leftovers. Abel brought the best, and Cain brought the leftovers. I mean they're going to be wasted, why would you waste the good stuff? And God gives, and has mercy on Cain. He encourages him to reject sin and to do better, to do it right, to bring what's right before the Lord, but instead, Cain begins to blame Abel for his excellence! He begins to feel envy and bitterness towards his brother, and anger towards God, and God sees Cain's heart and challenges him on it, and ultimately Cain murders Abel because of Abel's excellence and because of Cain's lack.

Now it's so easy for us to look at others and say they're victims, they're entitled, but when do we look at our own hearts and say are we feeling envy, are we coveting, are we getting embittered because maybe we haven't done our best. Are we looking for excuses for why we haven't brought the best instead of really saying Lord, I'm sorry, I'm going to turn it around, I'm going to do the best thing I can with my work. It's not just going to be work for me. It's going to be worship. I'm going to give you the fatted portions. I'm going to give you the best stuff I have.

And friends, let me tell you. This is the road to life in your work is that your work.. that you don't blame others, you don't get upset at your job, you don't blame your boss, even when they're unfair. But you simply say this isn't even for my boss – this is for you, Lord. Everything I do – my parenting, my writing, in all my labor that I do with my hands, it's for you. May it bring glory to your name.

This is what this Jewish word Avodah means – within the language itself a philosophy that my work is my worship, my service is my worship, and that all I do, I do it for the Lord. Isn't that great? That's actually the word that's used when Joshua says "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Give God Your Best

You can actually translate that word as work for or worship. It's all three. We will Avodah the Lord. We will Abad the Lord.

And this is what Paul talks about in Colossians and we're going to preach on this later, but whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as though you're working for the Lord and not for men. I want to tell you, when you make this change in your mind, Lord this is for you, it makes all the difference.

I remember once, and I'll just finish with this story. When I was a kid, not when I was a kid, this was like six years ago. It was on my birthday and we'd decided to have my birthday on like a week later or something, and the house was a mess. And it just had to be cleaned. It was all my kids fault, and I'm always angry at them for just throwing Cheerios, two-year-olds, and this is again, six years, anyway.

And here I am, I'm like cleaning up the house, it's my birthday, there's not going to be any celebration or any cake, and I'm feeling a bit sour and grumpy about it and I'm making sure Hannah sees the grimace on my face as I'm sweeping the floor. And I had this thought that came to my mind, I remembered what happened to me at Barnes and Nobel and I thought what if cleaning this house is not just to clean the house, but what if I made sweeping the floor an act of worship to the Lord. And so I just did that, in just everything I did that day cleaning, and it was amazing that when I finished cleaning the house, we both finished cleaning the house, I should say, that I cleaned in a way that was relaxed, peaceful, joyful, and I imagine that it was a lot cleaner than it would have been had I not made that change.

See that's the thing. When we talk about giving a hundred percent in our work, we hear that sometimes as try harder when in fact it's not try harder, its change the way you think. Do it for the Lord and you're going to do way better than you would if you just tried harder because you're going to do it with joy in your heart.

Friends, I want you to know that no matter what you're doing, the little things in your life and the big things, they matter to God. I want you to be encouraged today and many times we feel like our lack of work, or the little things that we do for our church and charities, or the things we do, many of us are sort of stuck caring for people, a lot of those things, they go unnoticed, and un-thanked, and unappreciated, and I want you to know that the fewer people thank you, the more God thanks you. I truly believe that God is so glad for you. That your work really matters. Your parenting matters, your grand parenting matters, your service matters, and I'm thankful for you and so is the Lord, and whether or not you thought of it as an act of worship, it's received by God as worship. All the work you've done has mattered to the Lord and that's a good thing, and what you've done is truly good, and I'm thankful for you.

Lord, we love you. We ask in Jesus' name you'd give us that reminder when we're having a rough day at work, or parenting or grand parenting, or the stuff that we do in our charities and churches, and we feel ignored or our work isn't appreciated, Lord we want all of our work to be worship to you. We're not doing it for the approval of men or women we're doing it for your approval, Lord.

Would you accept our offering and may it be the best. May it be the fatted portions. Lord, we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.