



# IDOLS

REPLACEMENTS FOR GOD

*BUSYNESS, WORK, AND LEISURE*

# OCCUPATIONAL IDOLS

Approximately 60% of legally aged Americans work at a job at least part time. This could be as an employee, a self run business, as an employer, or any number of different. When you take out Americans who are either in college or are disabled, the percentage of working Americans rises to 78%. This is not an invitation to discuss unemployment figures, it is rather an opportunity to show that most of us have to deal with a thing that we call “work,” at some level. Even if we are not at “work,” we often find ourselves more busy than people that we know who are working. Surely, some of how we’re dealing with this may not be that healthy.

# BUSY-NESS

Increasingly the response to the greeting-question, “how are you doing?” is no longer an absentminded “fine” or “well,” but rather, “busy.” We increasingly describe our days as full or busy, essentially trading a qualitative description for a quantitative description. I do this in my own life, when Liz asks me “how was your day?” I may briefly go into a qualitative description like “it was fine,” or “it was stressful,” but most of the time I will tell her what I spent my time doing.

Of course, we complain about our busy lives, but perhaps our constant protestations against being busy is a little too much to be believed. Would we really rather be less busy? It would seem that we don’t. Increasingly studies and anecdotal information is showing that as a culture, Americans are bad at not doing anything. Some people blame our technology for this, with its ability to ping us with to-do list items when we are otherwise trapped in a grocery store line. But whatever the cause, as a culture, we are somewhat afraid of being busy, of being engaged, of doing \*something\*.

We are filling up our “enoughness” box with busy-ness, even if that busy-ness isn’t really \*accomplishing\* anything and even if it is pushing out other things that might be important (i.e. health).

**Read Luke 10:38-42. What does Jesus point out in this classic “busy-ness” text? How do “fear, love, and trust” work into the worship of this “god”?**

# WORK

In 2005, American television viewers were given a show that in many ways was going to be the first of its kind. It was a situational comedy that was not set in a home (i.e. *Roseanne*, *the Jeffersons*, *All in the Family*, etc) but was rather set in an office building. The name of the show was simply, *The Office*, and was a blatant Americanization of an already popular BBC show. The wild popularity of *The Office* brought two other popular situational comedies set in work environments *Parks and Recreation* and *30 Rock*. Why did this happen? It could have been a fluke, or it could have been a cultural response to growing work hours in the United States.

Labor statistics have shown that the average American reports currently working approximately 44 to 50 hours per week. While the 1940 Labor Standards Act still stands, decreeing that workers should only be working 40 hours a week, it is largely toothless especially in the face of workers who are not being forced to work extra time, but feel that they have to in order to be competitive. In addition to long days, there are more days. Americans boast the smallest amount of paid days off of any developed country AND the most sick and vacation days not used.

Of course this all could be good. Or it could be a god. Occupations have a side benefit of not really being “our lives,” at least on one level. Most occupations have clear rules of engagement, advancement, and direction, which you can’t say the same about when you’re raising a toddler or trying to be a good husband or wife. It is likely that we are escaping our homes for the relative safety of work. It may also be the case that work is being equated with “vitality” and that ceasing to work feels more “powerless” for many, especially many who retire from jobs that used to provide those feelings. Lastly, it is possible that we’re just working out of guilt over procrastination, with just at 20% of employed Americans dealing with “chronic procrastination”.

**Read Matthew 20:1-16. How does Jesus’ parable fly in the face of some of what may be causing our worship of work? Where do you see “fear, love, and trust” working in this area?**

# LEISURE

It may seem counterintuitive to include the worship of “leisure” in with “busyness” and “work”, that is, until you see what is happening in our cultural notions of what “leisure” is. Classically “leisure” is what fills up the “third space” in our lives – time that is not engaged with home life (running of the home) or work life.

SoulCycle is an indoor cycling fitness company that appeals to the spiritual aspirations of their customers. While offering a work out, they also offer information on the meaning of life, a liturgy of sorts in the rhythmic pacing of the workout, and not to be ignored – a congregation of fellow soulcyclists who are ostensibly seeking the same thing that you are. In short, SoulCycle is a church plant of sorts. And why wouldn't it be, given the workout that some churches ask of their members. Members are literally encouraged to “evangelize” their friends to come to a workout, and of course, there is a very fixed system of tithes and offerings.

Of course you don't need to be interested in fitness to worship at the altars of the god of leisure. One of the clearest examples of the idolatry of leisure comes in the simple phrase “work—life-balance”. Of course, balance is hard to arrive at, but the striving for this kind of nirvanic balance is the aim of many. And so we commoditize and count our “balances” from the number of hours that we are spending on our work, to the number of minutes we are spending being mindful in our “Calm” meditation app on our phones, to even the number of hours that we are logging into our Fitbits and Oura rings.

The problem with our leisure is that most of the times it isn't. Instead of leisure, our leisure is very directed and counted and we make sure that we are filling up the “enoughness” boxes that will justify our lives in some way.

**Read Luke 6:36-37. Here Jesus is not talking about a “quid pro quo” arrangement with those whom we forgive, but a resistance to our “counts”. Where do we see “fear, love, and trust” at work in this?**