Hi… my name is Steve and I’m a workaholic. Anyone who has ever been to a recovery group or seen one on TV will recognize that opening sentence. For me, those are not just words, and if not an addiction certainly a bad habit I developed and have struggled with most of my life. For the past decade or more I feel like I’m living a more balanced life and yet it is still a struggle for me. For those of you who are our guests we are in week 4 of a 5-week series called Creatures of Habit. Guys if there’s an area of our life that we haven’t surrendered to the Lord it can quickly become a bad habit. And a bad habit can then turn into a spiritual stronghold or an addiction that keeps us from experiencing all that God has for us. And that’s why it’s so important for us to acknowledge these issues and decide to deal with them. Gal. 5:16NLT. So one way to get rid of these bad habits is to replace them with good habits or spiritual disciplines. Now Spiritual disciplines are **basically those regular practices that produce spiritual fruit. So today we are going to talk about the bad habit or addiction of** Workaholism. This is when you are addicted to work in much the same way an alcoholic is addicted to alcohol. As you know addictions can come in many forms from drug & alcohol to Gambling or Porn. Addictions are divided into two broad categories; substance addiction and behavioral addiction. Substance addiction is when you are addicted to a substance like alcohol or drugs. Behavioral addictions consist of compulsive behaviors that if not dealt with can take over someone’s life. For me… I love to work, and at times in the past it has almost been a compulsion. A big part of it is that I love what I do. It’s not just a job for me but a calling from God. And yet… I cannot use my calling as an excuse to justify my need to overwork. In fact if I’m being honest I’ve struggled with this long before I was ever in ministry. There are certainly a lot of things that drive this in my life, some good and some not so good, but regardless of the cause I have this strong desire to accomplish big things for God. So in that sense you could say I took my first drink of accomplishment when I was in my early 20’s and opened my first business, a restaurant. We opened the same week our first child was born. I was working 80hrs a week and yet still trying to be there for Sandy. The restaurant was a success which was exciting and made me want to drink more of this accomplishment. So, I continued to open more new businesses, all the time running from God’s calling in my life. Then at 29 years old through a series of events, God got my attention and I stopped running and went into ministry. Instead of working less… I started working even more. I became Senior Pastor of my home church. The church elected me as their pastor by 1 vote! So, I felt this overwhelming need to prove my worth or to prove my value. It was a much smaller church of about 300 people, so I didn’t have a lot of staff and had to do most things myself. My first year as their pastor I would go in Monday through Thursday at 5:45 because we had a 6:00am prayer meeting every morning. I would then go into my office and start working on 3 different sermons I preached each week. I did all the hospital visitation as well as all weddings and funerals. And Monday evening through Thursday evening I ran and led most ministries in our church. I would get home between 9 & 10 every night, of course the kids were already in bed and Sandy was ready to go to bed. So Monday through Thursday I didn’t see the kids at all. I would take Friday off which gave Sandy and I some time together and then Friday after school we would pick the kids up from school and do a family night. Of course I studied on Saturday morning and then preached one sermon Sunday morning and a completely different sermon on Sunday night. This kind of schedule went on for a little over a year. I had taken no vacation time so Sandy convinced me to take a few days so we could drive down to see her sister’s family. I was so physically exhausted I literally slept the entire time we were down there. Even when I would try to do something with them, I would fall asleep in the car. Needless to say, Sandy was frustrated. When we got home from that trip, she said Steve if this is ministry, I don’t want any part of it. That was a huge wakeup call for me, I knew I had to do something about this out of balance lifestyle. In my mind I had convinced myself that this was for God, but I will promise you God was not pleased with the way I was managing my life and family. Things got better… and have continued to improve over the years but it is still a struggle in my life. For instance if Sandy is leaving town on a trip, she doesn’t say please don’t go to a bar while I am gone Steve… no, she says please don’t work the entire time I’m gone. So again even though things have greatly improved I still work about 50-60 hours a week. And here is the problem with being a workaholic… most addictions have a stigma that goes along with it… and therefore no one wants to be known as an addict. But workaholism is the most respectable sin in the Christian community and is very common today among senior pastors. For me, instead of being embarrassed about it, I’ve often been guilty of wearing it like a badge of honor. I want people to know I work a lot of hours. As most workaholics, I have struggled with insecurity and thought working long hours would cause people to look up to me or admire me. Therefore, the more I’ve worked, the better I felt about myself. Now please don’t get me wrong, I’m not suggesting that you refrain from working hard – far from it! I believe God wants us to be hard workers with a strong work ethic. In fact I think Christians should be the best workers on the job. They ought to have the best attitudes, they should be the most dependable and they should be men and women of integrity. That’s what Paul is saying in Colossians 3:23NIV. Do your work as if you are doing it for the Lord. In fact, I believe God has you in your place of employment for more than a paycheck. Your primary responsibility is to live life on mission and to influence those you work with for Christ. Okay, so then what’s the difference between a hard worker that blesses the Lord and a workaholic that is unhealthy and grieves the Lord? Well it has a lot to do with our attitude towards work or in other words what it is that’s driving us. For instance, a hard worker who is emotionally present for all family members, co-workers and friends, and who manages to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal responsibility is not a workaholic. In fact, that’s the healthy place we should all aspire to. In a Harvard Business Review podcast, Nancy Rothbard who is a professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, draws a distinction between workaholism and working long hours. Here’s how she puts it. “Basically, long hours are 50 hours a week or more. So, there are some people who work a lot, but they can turn it off. They might even work once they get home, but if something is demanding their attention at home or if they, you know, need to go to the gym or they want to hang out with friends, they’re able to do that without ruminating on their work.” In another article, titled How Being a Workaholic Differs from Working Long Hours – and Why That Matters for Your Health. Rothbard talks about the medical research that was done with over 700 employees. And what they found is that it was not the work hours that caused the health issues… it was the workaholism that caused the problems. Again guys, they are not one in the same. In fact, employees who worked more than 40 hours a week but did not obsess about work, reported fewer health complaints than employees who demonstrated workaholism. She said they found “that workaholics, whether or not they worked long hours, reported more health complaints and had increased metabolic syndrome; had more sleep problems, more cynicism, more emotional exhaustion, and more depressive feelings than employees who merely worked long hours but did not have workaholic tendencies. **Rothbard then gives seven statements and says if four or more of these apply to you, then you should be concerned.**

**1. You think of how you can free up more time to work.**
**2. You spend much more time working than initially intended.**
**3. You work in order to reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety, helplessness, and depression.**
**4. You have been told by others to cut down on work without listening to them.**
**5. You become stressed if you are prohibited from working.**
**6. You deprioritize hobbies, leisure activities, and exercise because of your work.**
**7. You work so much that it has negatively influenced your health.**

So what about you… do 4 or more apply? Then what are you going to do to break this bad habit or addiction of workaholism and put some balance back in your life? Again workaholism has more to do with our heart. Has your work become an idol in your life? Has it become more important to you than your relationship with God? If so then you need to take some steps to eliminate it from your life. Let me give you seven things you can do to break this bad habit in your life and move you towards a healthy life. **1. Acknowledge it.** Like addiction or bad behavior in our life the first step is to acknowledge when a relationship to work is unhealthy and is undermining other important relationships in our life. Once you have done that the next step is 2.**Change your mindset.** Most workaholics believe that our work must take priority in our life. Well you need to change that way of thinking. While the workplace should certainly be important to us it should in no way be as important to us as our relationship with God or with our family. Workaholics often find their significance or identity in their job or what they do. Friends if you are a believer then you need to change that mindset, you are a child of God, a Christian, that’s who you are. Ask yourself, “who am I?” and if you come up with anything other than, “I am a Christian” then you have a false identity and you need to change that mindset. **3. Set healthy boundaries**. That’s hard and I’m still not great at it, but try to establish a work schedule for how many hours you will work each day and then work to stick to it. If you need to include a few late evenings or weekend hours, that’s all right but just make a decision that they must be scheduled meetings on your calendar rather than to decide at the last minute to stay late. Make a commitment to go home at fixed time each day. In other words, learn to say no and walk away. 4. **Keep a Sabbath.** In other words, make sure you schedule at least one day a week off for rest and relaxation. I work Saturday through Thursday and take Fridays off. Since Friday is my day off, Sandy and I treat Thursday night as our date night. 30 years ago, I made a commitment that Fridays belonged to my family. If someone asks me for a Friday appointment, I don’t need to explain it’s my day off or what I’m doing, I simply say I’m sorry, but I’m already scheduled on Friday. I have zero responsibilities on that day other than to rest, have fun, and be with my wife. **5. Schedule family holidays.** If you don’t schedule family vacation time with your kids then busy schedules will never allow for it. At the beginning of the year I pencil in which weekends I will take off and which weeks I will vacation with my family. When I first started doing it years ago I thought, “How pathetic that I have to schedule it.” But what I now realize, if you don’t control your calendar your calendar will control you. Make sure you block out time for the people that are the most important to you. In fact I would say if you are going to waste time… waste it with the people you care the most about. Does that make sense? In other words if I only have so much time to waste, I’m not going to waste it around the watercooler with the guys at work, I am going to waste it with my wife and family. 6**. Make time for a hobby.** Sandy and I try to find things we like to do together. We both like to go to movies, we like to play pickle ball, we love to read, we are both food snobs, and we love to travel. You will be surprised how a couple of hours of doing something you enjoy together will not only recharge your batteries but will also strengthen your relationship. So whatever it is you like to do… just find time for it. And then **7. Confront your fears and insecurities.** I can tell you from experience there are a lot of different reasons for being a workaholic, but one of those is the fear of loss. In other words, a fear of what might happen if we don’t work long hours. Fear that I won’t make enough money or fear that I won’t be liked or looked up to. Insecurity is another reason people become a workaholic. It’s a need for self-acceptance that we think will come from our work instead of from who we are in Christ. Listen guys ask yourself, why is work a priority for you? Are you working hard and striving for success so people will esteem, like, or respect you? Listen guys, true self-worth or satisfaction can only be fulfilled by our heavenly Father. God’s love and acceptance of us is not based upon what we do and achieve but it’s based upon what Jesus Christ has already accomplished for us. Of course, anytime you are trying to break an addiction or bad habit, accountability is huge. So, I would encourage you to share your struggle with an accountability partner, or a friend, or a spouse, and give that person permission to hold you accountable and to speak into your life concerning this area. The health of your relationship with God as well as your relationships with your family are worth it. Listen guys you will find workaholics in every imaginable occupation and unfortunately, they are usually successful. I say unfortunately because success only increases their hunger for more. In sales, they are always at the top. In school, they are always in the books. In sports, they are always in the lead. For them there is only one thing in life that drives them – WORK. So guys again…I’m not suggesting you refrain from working hard, I’m just suggesting that you consider whether your work has become an idol in your life. In other words, has your work or your profession become more important to you than your relationship with God. For instance, when you wake up in the morning what’s the first thing that comes to your mind. Do you think about work… or do you think about your relationship with God? I’ve told you before but 35 years ago I started a habit that I’ve continued all these years, every single morning when I put my feet on the floor the first thing I say, Lord this is the day you have made, I will rejoice and be glad in it, use me today God to make a difference in someone’s life. That helps to set my focus on God instead of on my job. So if you are struggling with workaholism, decide you are going to take the necessary steps to break this bad habit in your life. Prayer