

# The Gift of Work

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- I. **Intro** – “Gift”!? Isn’t work a result of the fall? Isn’t work a curse? In this Bible study, you will explore why work is a blessing and not a curse and why it is okay to be very excited about your job and career.
- II. **Warmup** – Let’s say you’ve been working for a few years. Jesus, because He loves you, decides to drop by and asks you, "How’s it going?" What would you be excited to tell him about your job? What things do you think He’d be interested in hearing about? What are you thankful for about the job? Write down as many things as you can. If you are in a group or have a friend available, tell them about these reasons for being thankful for your work.

- III. **Reasons for Work** – Look at the following verses. Note the purpose for work in each.

Ephesians 6:5-6, Matthew 13:24-30

1 Peter 2:12, Titus 2:9-10, 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

Genesis 1:26

Psalms 104:13-14, 21-24, 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Genesis 2:18

Colossians 3:22-24, Ecclesiastes 2:24-25, 5:18-20

Here are my own conclusions about work.

- 1) Work is a great place to grow spiritually: patience, grace, honesty, commitment – these are the kinds of things that work draws out of us. In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus says it is better to live among the world than apart from it. If we were to be pulled away from “the world,” damage would happen. Ephesians 6:5-6 describes some of the character issues that work requires us to deal with: sincerity, respect and a focus on Christ as our Lord.
  - 2) Work is a great place for the natural, relational spread of the gospel. Throughout history, the gospel has spread primarily not through great evangelists but through family and work networks. This spread includes...
    - Introducing others to Christ (or preparing the soil for others to do so)
    - Finding people of like heart to grow with
    - Finding someone who can mentor us, especially in terms of what it means to walk with Christ on the job
    - Finding someone to help, train or mentor

1 Peter 2:12 describe the influence of our lives in terms of our being a “priesthood” to the world. Titus 2:9-10 says our actions are an “adorning” piece of jewelry, and 2 Corinthians 2:14-15 says that we are “a sweet aroma.” The Titus and 2 Corinthians passages, like much of the NT, was written specifically with the workplace in mind.
  - 3) Work fits with how God designed us. Genesis 1:26 says that God created us in His image not primarily for relationship but “so that” we could work. Within one verse, God affirms that it is His own image that we carry and that we were made this way specifically for the work roles we will play in His creation. The value of relationships are affirmed in many, many places in the Bible, but in this verse, the focus is on work.
  - 4) On a practical level, we work so that we can eat. Notice the pattern in Psalm 104. God feeds animals directly, but with human beings, He expects us to work. Work is not an afterthought, added because of sin, but part of God’s original plan for humanity. The Apostle Paul says that work is exactly what we should be doing to provide for ourselves and others. In fact, he goes so far as to say that people who do not work should not eat (See 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 3:10).
  - 5) There is nothing quite like a common task or common hardship to draw people together. In Genesis 2:18, God says that it is “not good” to be alone and then makes Adam a partner...to work with. The solution to loneliness is very often *doing something* with somebody. Close relationships do indeed often develop at work – and God has designed it to be so.
  - 6) A job “well done” gives a certain sense of pleasure. We worship God when we acknowledge we are working for him in our work. As Colossians 3:23 reminds us, this kind of worship can be done “in all things.” According to Ecclesiastes, this enjoyment comes from – and can only come from – the Lord.
- **Take a minute to think, write and/or talk about these ideas.** What is new? What is confusing? Is there anything here that gets you really excited? Can you think of some other purposes for work that are not covered here?

IV. **One More Reason** – Here is one more thing. Have you thought much about the value of *the work itself*? In your imagined conversation with Jesus, did you say anything like, “Thank you for the good I did today. Thank you for allowing me to work with you for a better world through my work.” Have you ever thought about thanking God for the *intrinsic good* of the work you do?

Really, we should. Tim Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian Church) says that one of the main purposes of work is **love**. In fact, he says that “unless you are working you’re not loving. Work *is* the way you love.”

To see how this works, think about some physical object you are thankful for today (for example, your car, your phone, a good pen, chocolate chip scones....) And now think about how that object got into your hands. If you are thankful today, for example, for your car (or your bike or the subway or whatever), God didn't just drop this thing out of the sky, did He? Somebody had to design, build and deliver this thing to you. So, it is not too much to say that God – in some way – used all these people to show His love to you and to provide for you. You do the same thing when your work benefits others.

- **Make a list** of all the people God used to love you through the creation and delivery of some object that you are thankful for today.

V. **The Physical World is God’s World** – This idea that our work itself is good and that our work serves God is found throughout the Bible. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (which Jesus affirms as the greatest commandment) proclaims that there is only one God, one Lord, over all of life – and His lordship includes the world of work. This idea is repeated often in the New Testament (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 8:6), and a quick peek at Rev. 21:1-4 shows that the "end of the world" is not really the end. His lordship continues as heaven is joined to earth for a new chapter of life, which Jesus calls this "the age to come."

God’s plan for a “joined-up” new heaven and a new earth is not an add-on. It is not God’s Plan B, added in response to the fall. It was and is God’s original plan (though complicated by sin and the fall), and He will complete it.

- **Take a minute to think, write and/or talk about these ideas.** What are the dangers of seeing the world as divided between the “holy” (that God cares about) and things that God does not care about? How does this divided view of life contradict the high view of work that you have been studying here?

VI. **God's plan for *your* work.** Genesis 1 and 2 talk very specifically about work. Look at the highlighted verbs in the verses below.

Genesis 1:28

*God blessed them and said to them, "Be **fruitful** and **increase** in number; **fill** the earth and **subdue** it. **Rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

- If we were to follow these commands completely, how many people would there be on earth? What would society look like? (Remember, these commands were given before the fall, so imagine this society does not have sin.)
- The words that are translated here as "subdue" and "rule" imply care and stewardship (not abuse.) If you take all these commands together –to fill the earth, to steward its resources and to do so in an orderly way – what kinds of jobs are required? What jobs, if any, wouldn't be included? What about jobs, for example, in the entertainment industry?

Genesis 2:15, 18

*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work** {tend} it and take **care** {keep} of it.*

*"I will make a **helper** suitable for him."*

- What do these added details about work tell us about *how* we are to work? For example, what does the word "care" imply about how we should work? The standards we should hold to? What does it mean that God wanted Adam to have a partner?

- After the fall, sin entered society – making all of life much more difficult – and a new work was added: redemption. But the fall does not replace the original commands. (See Genesis 9:1 and 22:17. Notice how God’s call to work was reaffirmed to Noah and implied in the promises to Abraham.) After doing this study, how do you see these two tasks (filling and caring for the world and working with God in His work of redemption) complementing each other?
  
- Finally, **think about your job**. In what ways does your work (the work you are doing now or the work you are preparing to do in the future) contribute to fulfilling God’s commands to fill the earth, to provide for its people and to do so in an orderly way?