



Work with Your Hands
Serving God in Secular Employment



STUDENT'S WORKBOOK

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SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Work with Your Hands: Serving God in Secular Employment is a six-week course advancing the truth that Christians ought to intentionally and joyfully glorify God in “secular” employment. The course will assert that work is a good gift from God (though impacted by the Fall), and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for a God-centered perspective on work. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining the key biblical passages regarding the issue of work, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper and other theologians.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the self-giving God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in his or her heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially the passages pertaining to the issue of work—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans” (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five sermons (from John Piper and others) on the

- topic of work. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to or watch.
- ▷ set forth a basic defense for a God-centered perspective on work, emphasizing how work relates to the glory of God.
 - ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God-glorifying work and make appropriate application.

🔗 REQUIRED BOOK (TEXTBOOK)

- ▷ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)

Please note that in addition to inductive study of the Bible, students will be required to listen to five sermons by John Piper and others. This will require Internet access to the *desiringGod* website (www.desiringgod.org) and other Christian websites. See each lesson for more specific instructions.

(NOTE: *desiringGod* permits the reproduction and distribution of any of its material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of production. If you lack internet access, talk to your instructor about the possibility of receiving a CD with the sermons copied onto it.)

🔗 REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2–6 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction and the Lesson Objectives first, then read the remainder of the lesson, answer the three questions contained therein, and listen to the assigned sermon. As the student listens to the sermon, they should take notes on the corresponding sheet included in each lesson. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question.

 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		Glorifying God from 9 to 5
2		Made to Work
3		Pain and Thorns, Thistles and Sweat
4		“Behold, I Have Given You”
5		A God-Centered Work Ethic
6		Working, Giving, and the Gospel

Glorifying God from 9 to 5

1

📖 INTRODUCTION

There is an urgent need in our day to recapture a biblical vision of work and vocation. When God converts a person, this does not imply that the believer must leave their job behind to pursue “full-time ministry.” In fact, God most often intends believers to remain in their secular jobs, as John Piper explains:

The call to be a Christian was not a call to leave your secular vocation. That’s the clear point of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. Paul sums up his teaching there with these words: “So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God” (verse 24). Paul had a high view of the providence of God—that God had sovereignly “assigned” or “called” unbelievers to positions in life where their conversion would have significant impact for this glory. . . . Paul does not mean that changing jobs is wrong in the Christian life What Paul does mean is that when we are converted we should not jump to the conclusion, my job must change. Rather our thought should be, God has put me here, and I should now display his worth in this job. As verse 24 says, “there let him remain with God.”

This entire course will focus on how a believer can “remain with God” in the secular vocation they have been called to. God has put most of his people into secular vocations, and he means to display his worth through these jobs.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain what this curriculum means by the phrase “secular employment”
- state the biblical principles that this course will assume
- perceive the need for a God-centered perspective on work

¹ Taken from *Don’t Waste Your Life* by John Piper, © 2003 by Desiring God Foundation, Text updated 2009, pp. 135 Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.



IS A CHRISTIAN'S EMPLOYMENT EVER "SECULAR"?

The sacred-secular dichotomy is fixed in modern, American culture. One's "faith" is often thought to be a private matter that should have little or no impact on how one operates in wider society. In the workplace, evangelicals can even fall into this way of thinking by assuming that their faith only has to do with sharing the gospel occasionally or not stealing from their employer. The biblical doctrine of work, however, is in fact much broader and richer than this.

"Secular" is defined as "of or relating to the worldly or temporal" or "not overtly or specifically religious."² The dictionary defines "sacred" as "dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity."³

1. Given these definitions for "secular" and "sacred," do you think that Christians should think of their jobs as either sacred or secular? Explain your answer. If so, what distinguishes a sacred job from a secular one? If not, then is it appropriate for this course to have "Serving Christ in Secular Employment" as its subtitle?

The Bible teaches that Christians should view all of life as worship. All of life should be lived to the glory of God. God demands our obedience in every aspect of life.

² "Secular." Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secular>. Accessed 21 June 2018.

³ "Sacred." Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacred>. Accessed 21 June 2018.

1 Corinthians 10:31

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Colossians 3:17

¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Therefore, this curriculum rejects any view of Christian work that supposes an absolute distinction between sacred and secular realms. If the phrase “secular employment” necessarily implied that God was not interested in the workplace or that Christian faith had little or nothing to do with work, then the phrase could not be used. There is another way in which the word “secular” can be used, however. In his book *Don't Waste Your Life* Piper writes the following in a section entitled, “Secular Is Not Bad, but Strategic”:

Please don't hear in the phrase “secular vocation” any unspiritual or inferior comparison to “church vocation” or “mission vocation” or “spiritual vocation.” I simply mean the vocations that are not structurally connected to the church.⁴

This course will adopt the same meaning for the word “secular” when referring to secular jobs, secular employment, or the secular workplace. Our aim in this course is to provide biblical teaching on work and vocations that are not structurally connected to the church.

God has an interest in all our nonreligious life. All our business transactions are his concern. God is not so distant or even so “religious” that he only cares about what happens at church and during devotions. Every square inch of this earth is his and every minute of our lives is a loan from his breath. He is much more secular than we often think.⁵

⁴ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 132.

⁵ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (revised edition; Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2000), 253.

PRIVATE PROPERTY AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

This course will not focus on a Christian view of society, government, or economics. We will simply assume a number of things related to these areas, while referring the student to what has already been written by others.

First, we will assume that private property is a good and God-ordained concept that is meant to regulate society in this fallen world. Second, we will assume that private enterprise is a good thing and that Christians can and should hold jobs in the so-called private sector. Third, this course will assume that it is right for workers to earn an income in the form of money for the work they do. Money in itself is not a bad thing.

See Wayne Grudem's important book *Business for the Glory of God* for a more detailed defense of these concepts. Grudem demonstrates that ownership, productivity, employment, commercial transactions, profit, money, inequality of possessions, competition, and borrowing and lending are fundamentally good things that provide many opportunities to glorify God, but also many temptations to sin. This book is an expanded version of an essay entitled "How Business in Itself Can Glorify God," in the book *On Kingdom Business*.

2. Do you agree with each of the assumptions that this course will make? If so, why? If not, what assumption or assumptions do you find problematic and why?

THE NEED FOR A GOD-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE ON WORK

Work and business is an important part of each of our lives. Assuming a 40-hour work week (which is probably much lower than the average!) and 7 hours of sleep a night, a person spends more than one third of their waking hours each week at work! If the Bible instructs us to eat and drink to the glory of God, which takes up a much smaller part of our lives than work, then certainly God means for us to use our work hours for his glory as well.

Since most Christians are not called to “vocational ministry” or “ministry jobs,” understanding what the Bible teaches about secular work becomes important and urgent for the majority of Christians.

The burning question for most Christians should be: How can my life count for the glory of God in my secular vocation? I’m assuming . . . that the aim of life is the same, whether in a secular vocation or in a church or mission vocation. Our aim is to joyfully magnify Christ—to make him look great by all we do.⁶

This becomes all the more important and urgent when it is realized that Christians in secular employment are often on the “front lines” of a church’s ministry.

The secular vocations of Christians are a war zone. There are spiritual adversaries to be defeated (that is, evil spirits and sins, not people); and there is beautiful moral high ground to be gained for the glory of God. You don’t waste your life by where you work, but how and why.⁷

Therefore, clearly, Christians need to view their jobs and work in general from a biblical and God-centered perspective. The central question which this course will pose and attempt to answer is “How can a Christian glorify God in their work?”

3. Is the central question of this course an important one to ask in your opinion? What biblical teaching have you encountered on work and vocation? Is the Christian church doing a good job of addressing this topic?

6 John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 135.

7 *Ibid*, 132.

 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▷ Wayne Grudem, *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible's Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2003)
- ▷ Wayne Grudem, "How Business in Itself Can Bring Glory to God", in *On Kingdom Business: Transforming Missions through Entrepreneurial Strategies* (eds. Tetsunao Yamamori and Kenneth A. Eldred; Wheaton, Illinois: 2003)
- ▷ Jay Richards, *Money, Greed, and God: Why Capitalism Is the Solution and Not the Problem* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009)
- ▷ John Schneider, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002)
- ▷ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), chapters 1-3

Open Eyes Open Hands

2

§ INTRODUCTION

The goodness of work perhaps receives its strongest affirmation in the life of Jesus, who probably worked in a “secular job” for more than 20 years—most of his life! Though Jesus is almost universally regarded as a carpenter, it is probably more accurate to say that Jesus was a builder, engaged in all kinds of construction work.

That Jesus should be regarded not as a carpenter, but as a “builder,” is an argument that is made persuasively by Ken Campbell. Campbell notes that only Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55 refer to Jesus’ occupation before his public ministry of preaching and healing. In these verses Jesus is called a *tektōn* (in Greek) and the son of a *tektōn*. In a thorough study of this Greek word, Campbell concludes that “the word does not mean ‘carpenter’ as the word is understood today. In the context of first-century Israel, the [*tektōn*] was a general craftsman who worked with stone, wood, and sometimes metal in large and small building projects.”⁸ This is confirmed by a study of Jesus’ vocabulary in the Gospels, in which there are allusions to a variety of building structures and construction activities. Campbell points out that the only two clear references to wood in Jesus’ teaching (Matthew 7:3-5 and Luke 23:31) do not indicate the activity of a highly skilled and specialized woodworker. Rather, in both instances, construction timber is in view.⁹

Therefore, we should probably think of Jesus as a manual laborer and builder.

In a land of omnipresent stone and few trees, a craftsman worked primarily in stone, and much less in wood or metal. Such a craftsman is called “a builder,”

8 Ken Campbell, “What Was Jesus’ Occupation?” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, volume 48, no. 3 (September 2005), 512.

9 *Ibid.* 518

and he worked on all the structures mentioned by Jesus in his parables [such as clay ovens, kilns, toilets, tombs, millstones, barricades, fences, animal stalls, wells, entrances, gates, threshing floors, wine presses, and wine troughs], as well as . . . olive press stones, tomb stones, cisterns, farm terraces, vineyards, watch towers, house extensions, etc.”¹⁰

Our Savior, who lived a sinless life that was pleasing to God in every respect, profoundly dignified human work by sweating and straining in an ordinary, physical job for most of his life.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ affirm the goodness of work as a gift from God
- ▷ understand why God created work and what its purpose is
- ▷ argue for the place of work in the new creation

¹⁰ Ken Campbell, “What Was Jesus’ Occupation?” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, volume 48, no. 3 (September 2005), 519.



THE GOODNESS OF WORK

Whether we would admit it or not, most of us probably view work primarily as a burden. One of the first tasks, then, in forming a God-centered and biblical perspective on work is to appreciate the goodness of work. *God* created work and gave it to mankind. God's intention behind work gives our work meaning and purpose.

The following two passages in Genesis are at the foundation of a Christian perspective on work:

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 2:5, 8, 15

⁵ . . . There was no man to work the ground . . . ⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. . . ¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Here are John Piper's comments on these fundamental passages:

Our creation in God's image leads directly to our privilege and duty to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. In other words, we should be busy understanding and shaping and designing and using God's creation in a way that calls attention to his worth and wakens worship.

Being in the image of God means at least that we should image forth God. We should reflect what he is really like. And we should do that not to make ourselves look great (as imagers) but to make him look great (as Creator). People make

images of famous people to honor them. God made man in his own image so that he would be seen and enjoyed and honored through what man does.

Then he said, first of all, that what man does is work. He subdues and takes dominion over the earth. This implies that part of what it means to be human is to exercise lordship over creation and give the world shape and order and design that reflects the truth and beauty of God. God makes man, so to speak, his ruling deputy and endows him with God-like rights and capacities to subdue the world—to use it and shape it for good purposes, especially the purpose of magnifying the Creator. ”

1. According to Piper, how does being created in the image of God relate to the nature and purpose of human work? Support your answer from Genesis 1:26-28.

Psalm 104 is a psalm celebrating the works of God. Notice in verses 14 and 15 below that God makes the plants to grow *so that* man might cultivate them and bring forth food, drink, and oil. And immediately after considering the rhythm of daily life, including man’s labor (verse 23), the psalmist praises the LORD for his wise works (verse 24). Our daily work manifests the wisdom, creativity, sovereignty, and glory of God.

Psalm 104:14-15, 19-24

¹⁴ *You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth* ¹⁵ *and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart. . . .* ¹⁹ *[The LORD] made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.* ²⁰ *You make darkness, and it is night, when all the beasts of the forest creep about.* ²¹ *The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.* ²² *When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens.* ²³ *Man goes*

¹¹ John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 139.

*out to his work and to his labor until the evening.*²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Thus, as we've already asserted in the first lesson, for the Christian there can be no absolute distinction between sacred and secular realms, between "personal piety" and "secular duties."

John Piper quotes Jonathan Edwards, who asserts "worldly business" may be found "as good as prayer."

Jonathan Edwards made it a rule that personal piety to the neglect of secular duties is hypocritical. He described his own wife ("the person") to illustrate the opposite:

"Oh how good," said the person once, "it is to work for God in the daytime, and at night to lie down under his smiles!" High experiences and religious affections in this person have not been attended with any disposition at all to neglect the necessary business of a secular calling, to spend time in reading and prayer, and other exercises of devotion; but worldly business has been attended with great alacrity, as part of the service of God; the person declaring that it being done thus, 'tis found to be as good as prayer."

True personal piety feeds the purposeful work of secular vocations rather than undermining it. Idleness does not grow in the soil of fellowship with God.¹²

IMITATING GOD IN WORK

Our reading of Genesis 1 and our understanding of work receives support from Psalm 8. This psalm begins and ends with a declaration of God's majesty even though verses 3-8 are a reflection on the dominion of *man* in God's creation. This confirms the idea that men and women, who are created in the image of God, reflect God's glory as they rule the earth as God's representatives.

Psalm 8:1-9

¹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ² Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the

¹² John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 141-142.

avenger.³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

What does it mean, then, to imitate God in his work? Proverbs 8:22-31 narrate the wisdom with which God created the things that are.

Proverbs 8:22-31

²² The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth,²⁶ before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.

Although we are to imitate God in our work, note the important qualification John Piper makes:

If you are God, your work is to create out of nothing. If you are not God, but like God—that is, if you are human—your work is to take what God has made and shape it and use it to make him look great.¹³

Here is another interesting passage about the work of the Father:

John 5:15-17

¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

¹³ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 139.

¹⁶ *And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.* ¹⁷ *But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”*

Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as an extremely active worker. In itself, this affects how we view human work. If God works, work is good and necessary. It is as simple as that. God’s work is a model for human work, showing us that human work in the world is worth doing in a purposive, enjoyable, and fulfilling manner.¹⁴

2. Think of ways in which Christians *can* imitate God in how he works (similarities) and ways in which Christians *cannot* imitate God in how he works (differences). List your ideas below.

Similarities	Differences
.	

Here are some thoughts from Dorothy Sayers’ important essay on work:

[Work] should be looked upon—not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfil itself to the glory of God. That it should, in fact, be thought of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of the work itself; and that man, made in God’s image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing.

God is not served by technical incompetence; and incompetence and untruth

¹⁴ Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995), 165.

always result when the secular vocation is treated as a thing alien to religion.¹⁵

A Christian view of work recognizes that God is “hidden” in all that we do: he is present with us throughout our workday, he provides the strength we need to do our work, he waits to bless us in our work, and he is the recipient of our work, even when we do things to help other people. By consciously striving to imitate God in our work, we make the hidden God visible in our daily lives.

WORK AND THE NEW CREATION

Should the Christian view work, however, as only a temporary reality that is part of a fallen world?

We’ve already stated that work, assigned to Adam and Eve before the Fall, is intrinsically good and has the potential to glorify God. This would suggest that work might have a place that stretches from this life into the next. Furthermore, consider these Old Testament passages which describe the renewal of life that God is promising:

Deuteronomy 30:9-10

⁹ The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, ¹⁰ when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Isaiah 65:21-23

²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³ They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them.

¹⁵ “Creed or Chaos?” taken from *Letters to a Diminished Church*, pp. 46, 59, by Dorothy Sayers. Copyright © 2004 by W Publishing Group, a division of Thomas Nelson. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson.

Amos 9:13-15

¹³ “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. ¹⁴ I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the LORD your God.

3. Using these passages above, respond to the following statement: “There will be no work in the new earth. Rather, God’s people will simply relax and enjoy his provisions.”

This course has a devotional, and not merely academic, orientation. It is our hope that students in this course will ask and answer the question of how they can glorify God in their specific and current mode of employment. To that end we’ve included a running list of application at the end of each lesson. This list summarizes the teaching that has been put forward at each point in the course.

How Can I Glorify God in My Work?

1. Affirm that work is a good gift from God and an opportunity to glorify him.
2. Reflect the character of God in your work.
 - Do your work with creativity, skillfulness, and wisdom.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▷ Dorothy Sayers, “Why Work?” in *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949)
- ▷ Justin Taylor, “Working Out a Theology of Work,” an online article at <http://www.boundless.org/adulthood/2012/working-out-a-theology-of-work>
- ▷ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2002)
- ▷ Ed Silvano, *Anointed for Business* (Ventura, California: Regal, 2002), Ch. 2-3
- ▷ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), Ch. 4-6

Tangible Expressions of Glory

DAVID KIM, 2015

“Work is the expression of our _____. Yet because of sin, work becomes the source of our _____ instead of the expression of it.”

Isaiah 6:1-5: The call of Isaiah to his prophetic ministry.

What is the purpose for which God created the world?

Jonathan Edwards – “To communicate of his own infinite fullness of good”
John 17 - “That the world would know our glory”

God’s ultimate purpose in creation would be to share the triune glory with others.

Isaiah 6:3 “...the whole earth is full of his glory!” OR “...the fullness of the earth is his glory!”

1. The holiness of God reflects his _____.
2. The glory of God is the external manifestation of his _____.

Ant farm illustration.

The glory of God is still being communicated through broken people.

Genesis 1

First three days, God creates structures that allows for _____.
When human beings construct things, we create spheres that allow for _____.

Five primary spheres: Family, Economy, Government, Art, Religion

Each one of these spheres has an “essence” without which that sphere would cease to exist.
_____ is the essence of family.
_____ is the essence of economics.
_____ is the essence of government.
_____ is the essence of the arts.

Each of these essences is a tangible expression of God’s invisible qualities.

“Our society is in many real ways a physical representation of the God’s manifold glory.”

Pain and Thorns, Thistles and Sweat

3

🔗 INTRODUCTION

Any Christian theology of work that does not take Genesis 3 into account is incomplete. Though all people experience the toil and frustration of earthly work to some degree, only Christians have a true understanding of why this world has been subjected to futility in hope. John Piper sets forth an understanding of the Fall that directly pertains to our understanding of work:

The futility and corruption and groaning of the creation are judicial, not just natural. They are a divine, judicial decree, not just a natural consequence of material events. God decreed the futility and corruption and groaning of the world in response to sin. It is a judicial act, not just a natural consequence. . . .

Therefore, the meaning of all the misery in the world is that sin is horrific. All natural evil is a statement about the horror of moral evil. If you see a suffering in the world that is unspeakably horrible, let it make you shudder at how unspeakably horrible sin is against an infinitely holy God. The meaning of futility and the meaning of corruption and the meaning of our groaning is that sin—falling short of the glory of God—is ghastly, hideous, repulsive beyond imagination.

Unless you have some sense of the infinite holiness of God and the unspeakable outrage of sin against this God, you will inevitably see the futility and suffering of the universe as an overreaction. But in fact the point of our miseries, our futility, our corruption, our groaning is to teach us the horror of sin. And the preciousness of redemption and hope.¹⁶

¹⁶ John Piper, “Subjected to Futility in Hope, Part 1,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website (www.desiringgod.org). Throughout this curriculum we will only provide titles (not full web addresses) for sermons and articles at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website. Use the Title Index of the Resource Library to locate these resources.

This lesson will explore God's curse and redemption of work.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ describe the impact of the Fall on human work
- ▷ explain how Christ has begun the redemption of work and the reversal of the curse
- ▷ relate the biblical concept of rest to a theology of work



FROM THE GARDEN OF HAPPY WORK TO THE GROUND OF ANXIOUS TOIL

As we learned from the previous lesson, God created the first man and woman to work in the garden. Under the benevolent kingship of God, their work would have been pleasant and productive. When the man and the woman chose to disobey God, however, God cursed the ground and made Adam's work painful, difficult, and wearisome. Moreover, death entered the world through their sin. Read God's pronouncement of judgment, which still falls on the world today:

Genesis 3:16-19

¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Now read comments from John Piper on this passage:

In this all-supplying paradise God said, at first, "there was no man to work the ground." Then he made man from the ground, and, in his creation, Adam became a son working with his Father in the stewardship of creation. The essence of work was not sustenance of life. God gave himself as the sustainer. Man was free, not from work, but in work, to be creative without the anxiety of providing food and clothing.

What changed with the entrance of sin into the world was not that man had to work, but that work became hard with the futility and frustration of the fallen creation. . . .

When man and woman chose to be self-reliant and rejected God's fatherly guidance and provision, God subjected them to the very thing they chose: self-reliance. From

now on, he says, if you eat, it will be because you toil and sweat. So they were driven from the garden of happy work to the ground of anxious toil. The curse is that, in our work, we struggle with weariness and frustration and calamities and anxiety. And all this is doubly burdensome because now by this very toil we must keep ourselves alive.¹⁷

1. Is Christian's work still impacted by the effects of the curse? Explain.

In determining what was good for themselves, Adam and Eve rejected the kingship of God. This did not result in freedom, but in slavery, as the history of Israel demonstrates.

As you read the following passages, notice the connection between fallen, human kingship and the oppressiveness of work:

Exodus 1:8-14

⁸ Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." ¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. ¹³ So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

1 Samuel 8:10-18

¹⁰ So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. ¹¹ He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be

¹⁷ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 145-146.

his horsemen and to run before his chariots. ¹² And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. ¹⁵ He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶ He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

1 Kings 12:1-15

¹ Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ² And as soon as Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), then Jeroboam returned from Egypt. ³ And they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, ⁴ “Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.” ⁵ He said to them, “Go away for three days, then come again to me.” So the people went away. ⁶ Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, “How do you advise me to answer this people?” ⁷ And they said to him, “If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever.” ⁸ But he abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him. ⁹ And he said to them, “What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, ‘Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?’” ¹⁰ And the young men who had grown up with him said to him, “Thus shall you speak to this people who said to you, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, but you lighten it for us,’ thus shall you say to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s thighs. ¹¹ And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.’” ¹² So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king said, “Come to me again the third day.” ¹³ And the king answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel that the old men had given him, ¹⁴ he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men, saying, “My

father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.”¹⁵ So the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the LORD that he might fulfill his word, which the LORD spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

Again, as we learned in the previous lesson, God did not utterly abandon his people to harsh labor and slavery. Rather he promised to bring a restoration of his people in which their work would be freed from human tyranny and again set under the benevolent kingship of God.

Notice how the hope for rest that is expressed by Lamech is promised to Israel through Isaiah and accomplished in Jesus:

Genesis 5:28-29

²⁸ When Lamech had lived ¹⁸² years, he fathered a son ²⁹ and called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”

Isaiah 62:8-9

⁸ The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: “I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have labored; ⁹ but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather it shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary.”

Matthew 11:28-29

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

God does not want his children to be burdened with the frustration and futility and depressing weariness of work. That much of the curse he aims to lift from us even in this age.

But just as death will be a reality to the end of this age, so must we work in this fallen age against many obstacles that often make work hard.¹⁸

18 John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 146-147.

WORK CANNOT BRING SATISFACTION

One of the key theological tensions in a biblical perspective on work is the tension between the goodness of work—as intended in creation and partially realized in the first coming of Christ—and the toil of work under the curse. It is our conviction that much Christian thinking and writing on the subject of work overemphasizes the goodness of work even while many working Christians, influenced by the world, focus on the toil and frustration of work. This course will attempt to maintain a balance between the two.

In the next lesson, we will assert that Christians should find their work as satisfying, meaningful, and rewarding. The balancing point to make in this lesson, however, is that work in itself can never be an ultimate source of true and lasting satisfaction. The “Preacher” in the book of Ecclesiastes witnesses to the futility of human work apart from Christ:

Ecclesiastes 2:4-11

⁴ I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. ⁵ I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶ I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. ⁸ I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the children of man. ⁹ So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰ And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. ¹¹ Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23

¹⁸ I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, ¹⁹ and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, ²¹ because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity

and a great evil.²² What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?²³ For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-4

¹ Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.² And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.⁴ Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

2. What might a Christian who is informed by the biblical perspective on work say to a “workaholic”?

In a culture that prizes self-reliance and largely believes that “you get what you earn,” Christians must constantly remember that God’s salvation does not operate on a human economy. The offer of eternal life is free of charge. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s acceptance.

Isaiah 55:1-2

¹ Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

John 6:26-29

²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.²⁷ Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life,

which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.”²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

Consider also the following passages:

Matthew 20:1-16

¹ For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, “You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.” ⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, “Why do you stand here idle all day?” ⁷ They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You go into the vineyard too.” ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.” ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” ¹³ But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?” ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?” ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last.

Romans 4:4-5

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness . . .

WORK AND REST

In order to comprehend fully a biblical and God-centered perspective on work,

we must comprehend the corresponding biblical concept of rest. The human rhythm of work and rest was first established by God's own example in creation and later included in God's Law.

Genesis 2:1-3

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Exodus 20:8-11

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

In fact, the weekly Sabbath was not the only period of rest prescribed by the Law. Israel was commanded to keep a number of annual festivals in which they were to rest, remember, and celebrate God's faithfulness.

Here are some comments made by Leland Ryken on work and rest:

The fourth commandment also suggests that God's pattern for human life is a rhythm between work and rest. Neither work nor leisure is complete in itself. Each takes its meaning from the other. In prescribing a day of rest, the fourth commandment also commands us to work. Here is the integration of work and rest in a harmonious cycle that is essential to a Christian view of leisure. . . .

Because God calls us to leisure we have a responsibility to heed that call. To do so is only to live in accord with the kind of people we are—people whose physical and emotional make-up require them to rest, whose desire is to enjoy the rewards of toil, and who are fully human only when they fulfill themselves in leisure and solitude. God would not have called us to leisure without equipping us to benefit from it.¹⁹

19 Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 178, 210-211.

And here is a provocative statement made by Dorothy Sayers:

We should no longer think of work as something that we hastened to get through in order to enjoy our leisure; we should look on our leisure as the period of changed rhythm that refreshed us for the delightful purpose of getting on with our work.²⁰

3. What is the role of rest and leisure in a Christian theology of work?

Here is our summary of application thus far in the course:

How Can I Glorify God in My Work?

1. Affirm that work is a good gift from God and an opportunity to glorify him.
2. Reflect the character of God in your work.
 - Do your work with creativity, skillfulness, and wisdom.
3. Recognize that God has subjected human work to the curse, but has begun the redemption of our work in Christ.
 - Acknowledge that apart from God work will never bring true or lasting satisfaction.
 - Take adequate rest from your work.

²⁰ Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?" 55.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Why is it so important to affirm both the goodness and the toil of human work in this age? What is lost if one or the other is neglected?

2. Would you consider yourself a “workaholic”? How does the biblical understanding of rest address you in your job?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

A SERMON ABOUT SERVING CHRIST IN “SECULAR” EMPLOYMENT

Listen to the sermon “**Work and Rest**” by Tim Keller and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found at the Gospel in Life website (<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/work-and-rest-5314/>).

 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995)
- ▷ John Piper, “Don’t Eat the Bread of Anxious Toil,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, “In Quest of Rest,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website

Work and Rest

TIM KELLER, 2003

Luke 6:1-11

The problem of Sabbath rest

1. Why do we need it?

“Bring Back the Sabbath” article

Our modern situation: four trends

An abiding human problem

“There is a deep need for deep _____ rest, without which physical rest is not going to help you. So we need Sabbath rest.”

2. Where do we get it?

The Lord of rest

Genesis 1:31-2:2

Hebrews 4:9-10

3. How do we do this?

Inner disciplines

Outer disciplines

Behold, I Have Given You

4

🔗 INTRODUCTION

We have already examined the fundamental text of Genesis 1:26-28. This passage is one of the bedrock texts on which a theology of work is built. Notice, however, the verse that immediately follows God's mandate to fill the earth and subdue it:

And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food."

Genesis 1:29 is God's provision for the mandate he gives in Genesis 1:26-28. God calls us to work, but he has provided what we need in order to work. As John Piper writes, work was designed to "unite beautifully with God's abundant provision."

God intended from the beginning that satisfying work would provide for our needs. God worked at the beginning, and the humans he created in his image would work. Before sin entered the world, that work would be without futility and frustration. It would unite beautifully with God's abundant provision to meet every need.²¹

Work unites with abundant provision in the sovereignty of God. This lesson will explore the provisions that God has made for the work we do.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain how God's provisions enable our work
- state ways in which we can honor God for his provisions
- describe the basic material and existential needs that God has ordained that work meet

²¹ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 144.



GOD PROVIDES WHAT WE NEED TO WORK

In the first section of this lesson we will survey a number of biblical texts which describe the provisions God has made for our work. Since the beginning, God has supplied for what he has demanded. Then, after bringing his people out of the land of Egypt, God commands them to remember how it is that they will prosper and acquire wealth.

Deuteronomy 8:11-18

¹¹ Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, ¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, ¹⁶ who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. ¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth." ¹⁸ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Psalm 127 makes a similar theological point: God's work does not invalidate our work and neither does our work make God's work unnecessary. Rather it is God who gives us the power to work and his work ensures that our work is not in vain.

Psalm 127:1-2

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. ² It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Consider also the following comments John Piper makes on the last phrase of Psalm 127:2, commonly translated “he gives to his beloved sleep”:

The second reason is given in verse 2: Don't eat the bread of anxious toil because “God gives to his beloved in his sleep.” Some translations say, “He gives his beloved sleep.” Either is a possible translation from the Hebrew. One implies that God helps a person rest at night, the other implies that while a person is resting God is busily at work in the world to bless him. Which fits the context better?

The first half of verse 2 says that it is vain to rise early and go late to rest, but how would the simple statement that God gives sleep discourage a person from rising early and going to bed late? He is not interested in his sleep; he's worried and wants to be about his work. But if Solomon meant, as I think he did, “God gives to his beloved in his sleep,” then there is a tremendously strong incentive to stop being anxious and cutting our sleep short. The incentive is this: God can perform more good for those who trust him while they sleep than they can perform with anxious labor for themselves while awake. Can you think of a better reason not to rise early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil?²²

Joseph is described in the Bible as highly successful in his “secular employment.” Notice the reasons why Joseph prospered in what he did:

Genesis 39:1-6

¹ Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. . . .

²² John Piper, “Don't Eat the Bread of Anxious Toil,” an online sermon at the desiringGod website. Underlining added.

1. Underline all the reasons described in this passage for why Joseph prospered in his job. How might this passage be applied rightly to our vocations today? How might this passage be misapplied?

God's work behind human work is also seen in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple after the exile:

Nehemiah 6:15-16

¹⁵ So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Haggai 2:4-5

⁴ Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, ⁵ according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.

One way to enjoy God's presence and fellowship [at work] is through thankful awareness that your ability to do any work at all, including this work, is owing to his grace. . . . All your faculties of sight and hearing and touch, all your motor skills with hands and legs, all your mental acts of observing and organizing and assessing, all your skills that make you good at this particular job—all these things are God's gifts. To know this can fill you with a sense of continual thankfulness offered up to God in prayer.²³

23 John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 136-137.

Another truth to recognize is that God’s provision of grace to do the work to which he has called us is a varied or “manifold” grace (1 Peter 4:10). God has not given all of us the same abilities, skills, and desires to be utilized in our secular vocations.

Notice how the LORD equipped Bezalel and Oholiab for the construction of the tabernacle:

Exodus 35:30-35

³⁰ Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; ³¹ and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, ³² to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, ³³ in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. ³⁴ And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. ³⁵ He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer.”

Throughout the Old Testament we perceive a pattern of God gifting different people with different skills and abilities:

1 Chronicles 22:15-16

¹⁵ You have an abundance of workmen: stonecutters, masons, carpenters, and all kinds of craftsmen without number, skilled in working ¹⁶ gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Arise and work! The LORD be with you!

1 Chronicles 28:20-21

²⁰ Then David said to Solomon his son, “Be strong and courageous and do it. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the LORD God, even my God, is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished. ²¹ And behold the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God; and with you in all the work will be every willing man who has skill for any kind of service; also the officers and all the people will be wholly at your command.”

The reality of God’s manifold grace becomes important in discerning to what kind of work each Christian should be devoted in this life. The Christian’s first question should not be, “In which job can I make the most money?” but “In

which job can I employ my God-given abilities with joy so that I might reflect God's glory and benefit other people?"

At present we have no clear grasp of the principle that every man should do the work for which he is fitted by nature. The employer is obsessed by the notion that he must find cheap labour, and the worker by the notion that the best-paid job is the job for him. Only feebly, inadequately, and spasmodically do we ever attempt to tackle the problem from the other end, and inquire: What type of worker is suited to this type of work?²⁴

John Piper gives us a good summary of some of what we have learned thus far:

The essence of our work as humans must be that it is done in conscious reliance on God's power, and in conscious quest of God's pattern of excellence, and in deliberate aim to reflect God's glory.²⁵

WORK MEETS OUR BASIC MATERIAL NEEDS

Again, as John Piper has said, God intends that satisfying work that is united beautifully with "God's abundant provision to meet every need" would provide for our needs—that is, God ordains that his provision for our needs come through our own work, which is enabled by his grace.

In the introduction to Lesson 2, we considered Jesus' example of working with his hands. At this point we consider the example left by the Apostle Paul, who made tents:

Acts 18:1-3

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

²⁴ Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?" 54.

²⁵ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 141.

1 Corinthians 4:11-13

¹¹ To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹² and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

⁹ For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.

After reading the above passages, someone might object that the Apostle Paul's tent-making was unrelated to his ministry and unimportant. Maybe he only worked with his hands in order to enable his travel and preaching. With this objection in mind, read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12:

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

2. Why would Paul give the Thessalonians a command as harsh as "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat"? Doesn't this command contradict Christian charity?

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 demonstrates that even the Apostle Paul saw significance in the work that he did with his hands. Work is a good gift from God, and through it God means to provide for our basic needs.

How then do Christians make much of Christ in working “to earn their own living”? First, by conforming willingly to God’s design for this age. It is an act of obedience that honors his authority. Second, by removing stumbling blocks from unbelievers who would regard the lazy dependence of Christians on others as an evidence that our God is not worthy of following. . . . Aimless, unproductive Christians contradict the creative, purposeful, powerful, merciful God we love. They waste their lives.²⁶

God’s design for this age is written in his word but also is taught by reflection on common human experience. As the book of Proverbs says,

Proverbs 16:26

²⁶ A worker’s appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on.

This is how God has created us to be. Our work is meant to provide for our own basic material needs.

WORK MEETS EXISTENTIAL NEEDS

Work, however, does not just provide us with food to eat, clothes to wear, or a place to sleep at night. Work meets deeper human needs for meaning and satisfaction. Examine the following biblical passages:

Deuteronomy 16:13-15

¹³ You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress. ¹⁴ You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns. ¹⁵ For seven days you shall keep the feast to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will

²⁶ John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 147.

be altogether joyful.

Ecclesiastes 5:12

¹² *Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.*

Here is the testimony of George Mueller:

[My wife and I] had the blessing of having an abundance of work to do, and we did that work; by God's grace we gave ourselves to it; and this abundance of work greatly tended, instrumentally, to the increase of our happiness . . . Many, even true Christians, make the mistake of aiming after a position in which they may be free from work, and have all their time on hand. They know not that they wish for some very great evil, instead of some very great blessing.²⁷

The Christian will find great joy in their work and in contemplating what results from their work. Christians may even joy in contemplating the work of others, as Wayne Grudem muses:

As we look at any manufactured item, no matter how common, can we not also discover hundreds of wonders of God's creation in the things that we have been able to make from the earth? Such richness and variety has not been found on any of the other planets known to us. "The whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3).²⁸

One minute's reflection on everything that goes into the production of a refrigerator, for example, should excite awe and worship.

Therefore, a Christian's work should meet existential needs as well as basic material ones. Dorothy Sayers puts it well:

Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental, and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers

²⁷ George Mueller as quoted by John Piper, "For Your Labor Day Weekend Meditation," an online article at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.

²⁸ Wayne Grudem, "How Business in Itself Can Bring Glory to God" in *On Kingdom Business: Transforming Missions through Entrepreneurial Strategies* (ed. Tetsunao Yamamori and Kenneth A. Eldred; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2003), 132-133.

himself to God.²⁹

3. Do you agree with Dorothy Sayers that one ought to “live to work” instead of “work to live”? Explain. Is the mindset that Sayers is advocating a mindset that you share? Is it a mindset that is taught by the church or the society? Explain.

Here is our continuing list of application:

How Can I Glorify God in My Work?

1. Affirm that work is a good gift from God and an opportunity to glorify him.
2. Reflect the character of God in your work.
 - Do your work with creativity, skillfulness, and wisdom.
3. Recognize that God has subjected human work to the curse, but has begun the redemption of our work in Christ.
 - Acknowledge that apart from God work will never bring true or lasting satisfaction.
 - Take adequate rest from your work.
4. Rely on God’s promised future provisions for everything you need at work; thank him for his past provisions.
5. Find a job that is suited to your God-given abilities and desires.
6. Provide for your (and your family’s) basic needs through your work.
7. Delight in the work that you do and enjoy the fruit of your labors.

29 Dorothy Sayers, “Why Work?” 53.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Should a Christian receive welfare payments from the government? Why or why not?

2. Why might forced, meaningless work (such as moving a pile of rocks from one place to another) be considered a cruel and debasing form of punishment?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

A SERMON ABOUT SERVING CHRIST IN “SECULAR” EMPLOYMENT

Listen to the sermon “**Why God Wills Work**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website (www.desiringgod.org).

 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ Dorothy Sayers, “Why Work?” in *Creed or Chaos?*
- ▷ John Piper, “Do Not Labor for the Food Which Perishes,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, “Some Questions to Ask When Considering a Job,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website

Why God Wills Work

JOHN PIPER, 1983

Reasons why God wills work

1. “God wills work because when we work in reliance upon his power and in accordance with his pattern of excellence, his _____ is manifested and our _____ is increased.”

Genesis 1:27-28

What’s the difference between a beaver at work and a human at work?

“God made human beings in his own image with impulses and powers to do creative, _____, purposeful work. . . . Unemployment is not, first of all, an economic problem. It is first of all a _____ problem.”

2. “The second reason why God wills work is that by working we provide for our legitimate _____.”

Genesis 3:17-19

Jesus Christ and the curse of labor

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

3. “God wills work that by working we may provide for the _____ of those who cannot provide for their own _____.”

1 Timothy 5:8; Acts 20:35; Ephesians 4:28

4. “God wills that we work because in our work we build bridges for the _____.”

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

A God-Centered Work Ethic

5

§ INTRODUCTION

The so-called Protestant work ethic is often reduced to a belief in the value and necessity of hard work. Though this course will argue that Christians should work hard, and that investing and accumulating wealth is fundamentally good, a Christian's work ethic must be much broader. John Piper, borrowing from Abraham Kuyper's discussion of Calvin's impact, places the Christian work ethic under the sovereignty of God:

It is the personal pervasiveness of God's sovereignty that makes all the difference. This means that "the whole of a man's life is to be lived as in the Divine Presence." This "fundamental thought of Calvinism" shaped all of life. "It is from this mother-thought that the all-embracing life system of Calvinism sprang."

For example, Calvin's doctrine of "vocation" follows from the fact that every person, great and small, lives "in the Divine Presence." God's sovereign purposes govern the simplest occupation. He attends to everyone's work. This yielded the Protestant work ethic. Huge benefits flow from a cultural shift in which all work is done earnestly and honestly with an eye to God.³⁰

Since the phrase "Protestant work ethic" is understood in different ways, this lesson will seek to construct a "God-centered work ethic"—that is, an ethic in which "all work is done earnestly and honestly with an eye to God." It is important not to sever the Bible's teaching on integrity and industriousness from the larger vision it presents of the sovereign God.

³⁰ John Piper, "America's Debt to John Calvin," an online blog post at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ provide biblical support for the Christian values of integrity and industriousness in the workplace
- ▷ explain the way in which a Christian must work for others and the way in which they must not work for others
- ▷ describe what a healthy, biblical dynamic between employers and employees would look like



INTEGRITY

One of the most dense and pointed passages related to a Christian’s “secular employment” is Colossians 3:22-25. Although in its original context it was written to slaves, the passage legitimately applies to those who work for any earthly “master” or “boss” today.

The popular homiletical decision to apply Paul’s exhortations in vv. 22-25 to workers in general is probably justified. To be sure, historical and cultural accuracy requires that we carefully distinguish “slaves” and “employees.” It is true that ancient slavery differed in some important ways from the slavery practiced, for instance, in nineteenth-century America. But it is also true that ancient and modern slavery, in its various forms, has in common the basic fact that one human owns and has virtually unlimited control over another. Some forms of employment in the ancient world and in history might come close to this situation (e.g., the “indentured servant”), but most employees do not work in this kind of legally binding framework. We must, then, take into account this basic difference before we apply what Paul says here about slaves to workers in general. Having said that, however, it is also true that Paul’s advice to slaves here enunciates some basic principles about how Christians should “serve” someone else that are broadly applicable.³¹

Look for those broadly applicable, basic principles as you carefully study this passage:

Colossians 3:22-25

²² Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

³¹ Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2008), 308. For an extended description of the differences between ancient and modern slavery, and how ancient slavery was viewed, see pages 371-373.

1. List at least five principles enunciated in this passage which could be legitimately applied to Christians in the realm of secular employment today:

Colossians 3:22-25 calls for Christians to maintain the highest level of integrity as they serve in their vocations, since Christians know that the Lord deserves their best work. A fine biblical example of integrity in the “workplace” is Daniel. This is what was said of Daniel in his job:

Daniel 6:1-5

¹ It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom ¹²⁰ satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. ³ Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.”

It should be noted, however, that pursuing faithfulness and integrity at work will often bring persecution and hardship, as it did for Daniel. Notice also Joseph’s example and how he responds to a temptation at work:

Genesis 39:6-12

⁶ So [Potiphar] left all that he had in Joseph’s charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome

in form and appearance. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me."⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.¹¹ But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house,¹² she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

Joseph, like Daniel, pleased God by maintaining his integrity in his job. And not only should Christians fight for their own personal integrity at work, but they should also work for the integrity of the business or industry of which they are a part.

Proverbs 16:11 speaks of the delight that the Lord takes in public justice. We will consider this passage in more depth as we listen to the sermon assigned to this lesson. At this point, simply note that God is concerned with both private and public integrity and honesty.

Proverbs 16:11

¹¹ *A just balance and scales are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are his work.*

We should fight tooth and nail, not for mere employment, but for the quality of the work that we had to do. We should clamour to be engaged on work that was worth doing, and in which we could take a pride. The worker would demand that the stuff he helped to turn out should be good stuff. . . . There would be protests and strikes—not only about pay and conditions, but about the quality of the work demanded and the honesty, beauty, and usefulness of the goods produced. The greatest insult which a commercial age has offered to the worker has been to rob him of all interest in the end-product of the work and to force him to dedicate his life to making badly things which were not worth making.³²

32 Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?" 55-56.

INDUSTRIOUSNESS

A second characteristic highlighted in a biblical work ethic is industriousness. A Christian who is concerned to glorify God in their employment should work with focus, diligence, and creative energy. The book of Proverbs is an excellent source of reflection on the necessity and virtue of hard work:

Proverbs 6:6-11

⁶ *Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.* ⁷ *Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,* ⁸ *she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.* ⁹ *How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?* ¹⁰ *A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,* ¹¹ *and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.*

Proverbs 12:11, 14, 24

¹¹ *Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense. . . .* ¹⁴ *From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man's hand comes back to him. . . .* ²⁴ *The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.*

Proverbs 18:9

⁹ *Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.*

Proverbs 21:25

²⁵ *The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.*

Proverbs 28:19

¹⁹ *Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.*

Perhaps the best known passage in the book of Proverbs on the topic of industriousness, however, is the description of the excellent wife.

Hard work is a virtue within and outside of the home:

Proverbs 31:10-31

¹⁰ *An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.* ¹¹ *The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.* ¹² *She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.* ¹³ *She seeks wool and*

flax, and works with willing hands.¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.¹⁵ She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.¹⁷ She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.²¹ She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.²² She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.²³ Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:²⁹ “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Good, honest work is not the saving Gospel of God, but a crooked Christian car salesman is a blemish on the Gospel and puts a roadblock in the way of seeing the beauty of Christ. And sloth may be a greater stumbling block than crime. Should Christians be known in their offices as the ones you go to if you have a problem, but not the ones to go to with a complex professional issue? It doesn't have to be either-or. The biblical mandate is: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”³³

2. How might industriousness and hard work glorify God? Conversely, how might laziness dishonor God?

33 John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 143-144.

Wayne Grudem explains that the desires to work hard, increase business, and make a profit are good desires that a Christian should cultivate:

Human desires to increase the production of goods and services are not in themselves greedy or materialistic or evil, but they represent God-given desires to accomplish and achieve and solve problems, desires to exercise dominion over the earth and exercise significant stewardship so that we and others may enjoy the resources of the earth that God made for our use and for our enjoyment³⁴.

EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

There are very few jobs in which a Christian worker is involved with a product but not people. In fact, interpersonal relationships at work offer innumerable opportunities to glorify God. A God-centered perspective on work recognizes the importance of human relationships (whether with bosses, employees, suppliers, or customers) and strives to demonstrate God's love within those relationships.

The Bible contains repeated warnings to employers to treat their employees fairly:

Isaiah 58:3

³ *“Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?” Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.*

Malachi 3:5

⁵ *Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.*

James 5:4

⁴ *Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.*

³⁴ Wayne Grudem, “How Business in Itself Can Bring Glory to God”, 133.

Ephesians 6:5-9, parallel in many ways to Colossians 3:22-25, can be applied both to employees and employers:

Ephesians 6:5-9

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

John Piper composed five meditations on Ephesians 6:7-8, reproduced below.

1. A call to radically Lord-centered living.

It is astonishing compared to the way we usually live. Paul says that all our work should be done as work for Christ, not for any human supervisor. “With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men.” This means that we will think of the Lord in what we are doing at work. We will ask, Why would the Lord like this done? How would the Lord like this done? When would the Lord like this done? Will the Lord help me do this? What affect will this have for the Lord’s honor? In other words, being a Christian means radically Lord-centered living. What you are asked to do by a supervisor should generally be viewed as an appeal from the Lord.

2. A call to be a good person.

Lord-centered living means being a good person and doing good things. Paul says, “With good will render service . . . whatever good thing each one does . . .” Jesus said that when we let our light shine men will see our “good deeds” and give glory to our Father in heaven. Lord-centered living does good deeds for the glory of the Lord.

3. Power to do a good job for inconsiderate earthly employers.

Paul’s aim is to empower Christians with Lord-centered motives to go on doing good for supervisors who are not considerate. How do you keep on doing good in a job when your boss ignores you or even criticizes you? Paul’s answer is: stop

thinking about your boss as your main supervisor, and start working for the Lord. Do this in the very duties given to you by your earthly supervisor. Look through the supervisor to the sovereign Lord, and don't worry about the supervisor's thoughtlessness. Think about the Lord's reward.

4. Encouragement that nothing good is done in vain.

Perhaps the most amazing sentence of all is this: "Whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord." This is amazing. Everything. Every little thing you do that is good is seen and valued by the Lord. And he will pay you back for it. Not in the sense that you have earned anything by putting him in your debt. He owns you and everything in the universe. He owes us nothing. But he freely, graciously chooses to reward good things done in faith. Nothing we do. Nothing. Not one thing is done in vain. "Whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord." Astounding!

5. Encouragement that insignificant status on earth is no hindrance to great reward in heaven.

The Lord will reward every good thing you do—"whether slave or free." Your supervisor may think you are a nobody. Or he may not even know you exist. That doesn't matter. The Lord knows you exist. And he is going to reward you on the same terms as the most famous Christian. There is no partiality with God (1 Peter 1:17). "Whether slave or free" your good is recorded and rewarded.³⁵

3. Compose your own meditation on Isaiah 58:3, Malachi 3:5, James 5:4, or Ephesians 6:5-9 that addresses the way in which employers and employees should relate. If you cannot come up with your own meditation, give your thoughts on one of Piper's meditations.

³⁵ John Piper, "Lord-Focused Living at Work," an online article at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.

Employer/employee relationships provide many opportunities for glorifying God. On both sides of the transaction, we can imitate God and he will take pleasure in us when he sees us showing honesty, fairness, trustworthiness, kindness, wisdom, and skill, and keeping our word regarding how much we promised to pay or what work we agreed to do. The employer/employee relationship also gives opportunity to demonstrate proper exercise of authority and proper responses to authority, in imitation of the authority that has eternally existed between the Father and Son in the Trinity.³⁶

Wayne Grudem once again helps us, this time to see that “employment” is not an inherently evil concept:

In contrast to Marxist theory, the Bible does not view it as evil for one person to hire another person and gain profit from that person’s work. It is not necessarily “exploiting” the employee. Rather, Jesus said, “the laborer deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7), implicitly approving the idea of paying wages to employees. In fact, Jesus’ parables often speak of servants and masters, and of people paying others for their work, with no hint that hiring people to work for wages is evil or wrong.³⁷

Gene Veith expands the Christian vision of interpersonal relationships at work from a particular business to the vast “social order”:

In God’s design, each person is to love his or her neighbors and to serve them with the gifts appropriate to each vocation. This means that I serve you with my talents, and you serve me with your talents. The result is a divine division of labor in which everyone is constantly giving and receiving in a vast interchange, a unity of diverse people in a social order whose substance and energy is love.³⁸

By way of summary and application, the following points have been added to the way in which Christians may reflect the character of God in their jobs.

36 Wayne Grudem, “How Business in Itself Can Bring Glory to God”, 135.

37 Ibid. 134.

38 Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2002), 40.

How Can I Glorify God in My Work?

1. Affirm that work is a good gift from God and an opportunity to glorify him.
2. Reflect the character of God in your work.
 - Do your work with creativity, skillfulness, and wisdom.
 - Maintain integrity and industriousness in your work.
 - Treat your co-workers and customers with respect. Serve them in love.
3. Recognize that God has subjected human work to the curse, but has begun the redemption of our work in Christ.
 - Acknowledge that apart from God work will never bring true or lasting satisfaction.
 - Take adequate rest from your work.
4. Rely on God's promised future provisions for everything you need at work; thank him for his past provisions.
5. Find a job that is suited to your God-given abilities and desires.
6. Provide for your (and your family's) basic needs through your work.
7. Delight in the work that you do and enjoy the fruit of your labors.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. How might you work toward the greater integrity of the business or industry of which you are a part? Think of realistic and specific steps that you can take.

2. Are there any aspects of your job in which you are not working hard? If so, why might that be? What is the root source of your laziness or sluggishness?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

A SERMON ABOUT SERVING CHRIST IN “SECULAR” EMPLOYMENT

Listen to the sermon “**The Pleasure of God in Public Justice**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website (www.desiringgod.org). sermon.

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, “The Sluggard Says, There Is a Lion Outside! I Shall Be Slain,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1997)
- ▷ John Piper, “This Is Dedicated to You,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website

The Pleasure of God in Public Justice

JOHN PIPER, 1987

Proverbs 11:1-11

From the inside to the outside

What's included in Proverbs 11:1?

An Old Testament merchant

Four contemporary categories

1.

2.

3.

4.

“God does have an interest in your non-religious life. All our business transactions are his concern. Every square inch of this earth is God's. . . . He is far more ‘_____’ than we often think.”

Why is a just weight a delight to God in the hand of believers?

Leviticus 19:35-37

Proverbs 20:17

What about unbelievers?

Rebellious teenage sons illustration

Proverbs 16:11

Seashell illustration

William Wilberforce illustration

Work, Giving, and the Gospel

6

§ INTRODUCTION

It is admirable for a Christian to desire to earn as much as they can in order to give away as much as they can. Commenting on 1 Timothy 6:5-10, John Piper says,

Working to earn money for the cause of Christ is not the same as desiring to be rich. What Paul is warning against is not the desire to earn money to meet our needs and the needs of others; he is warning against the desire to have more and more money and the ego boost and material luxuries it can provide.³⁹

However, as John Piper explains, a Christian should not primarily focus on profitability, even if they intend to use that profit for charitable giving:

We make much of God by earning our own living when we focus not on financial profit but on the benefit our product or service brings to society. This is paradoxical. I am saying, yes, we should earn enough money to meet our needs. But, no, we should not make that the primary focus of why we work. . . .

Don't focus on mere material things in your work. Don't labor merely with a view to the perishable things you can buy with your earnings. Work with an eye not mainly to your money, but your usefulness. Work with a view to benefiting people with what you make or do. . . . Labor to love people and honor God. Think of new ways that your work can bless people. Stop thinking mainly of profitability, and think mainly of how helpful your product or service can become.⁴⁰

39 John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah, 2003), 188.

40 John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 147-148.

Therefore, as we study the good Christian impulses for giving and witness, remember that even these good desires cannot be used to justify a job that does not benefit people or honor God.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ understand the relationship between working and giving generously
- ▷ see a secular vocation as a vehicle for gospel witness
- ▷ consider how a secular vocation might be fulfilled in the context of frontier missions



WORK TO GIVE

The Bible upholds generosity and giving to the needy as one way in which believers can glorify God. A Christian will work in order to give.

Deuteronomy 15:9-10

⁹ Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, “The seventh year, the year of release is near,” and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. ¹⁰ You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

Acts 20:33-35

³³ I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. ³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Ephesians 4:20-24, 28

²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. . . . ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

1. Underline all the words and phrases in the passages above that address work and giving. Then summarize the teaching of these passages below.

As we work, we should dream of how to use our excess money to make others glad in God. Of course, we should use all our money to make others glad in God, in the sense that our whole life has this aim. But the point here is that our secular work can become a great God-exalting blessing to the world if we aim to take the earnings we don't need for ourselves (and we need far less than we think) and meet the needs of others in the name of Jesus.⁴¹

This course has examined the examples of Jesus, Paul, Joseph, and Daniel, as biblical characters who illustrate aspects of a God-centered perspective on work. Now consider the example of Ruth, who was a hard worker and generously provided for her mother-in-law's needs:

Ruth 2:5-7, 11-12

⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶ And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest." . . . ¹¹ But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹² The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"

God clearly tells us that we should work to provide the needs of those who can't meet their own needs. It's true that everyone should work if he can . . . but God, in his mercy, wills that the work of the able-bodied supply the needs of the helpless, especially in hard times. . . .

You can steal to have. Or you can work to have. Or you can work to have to give. When the third option comes from joy in God's goodness, it makes him look great in the world.⁴²

41 John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 150.

42 *Ibid.* 150, 151.

WORK AS WITNESS

Throughout the course, we've implied that reflecting God's character in our work takes place in the context of the watching world. This next passage from 1 Thessalonians makes this explicit. Our daily work should be a witness to those outside the community of faith.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

⁹ Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

The teaching of this passage is put in historical relief once we understand that Paul's command to "work with your hands" was somewhat bold and shocking to those who despised manual labor.

Manual labor was generally despised by those of the Greek aristocracy and by those who aspired to a higher social status. To work with your hands was something that slaves and artisans did, but those of high social rank and wealth lived "knowing nothing of labor," according to Philo.⁴³

Nevertheless, the biblical vision of work shared by Jesus and Paul dignifies the ordinary, daily tasks of manual labor or any kind of vocation. As John Piper explains, it is God's will for Christians to work in the world as a witness:

The Bible makes it plain that God's will is for his people to be scattered like salt and light among the whole range of secular vocations. Enclaves of Christians living only with Christians and working only with Christians would not accomplish God's whole purpose in the world. That does not mean Christian orders or ministries or mission outposts are wrong. It means they are exceptional. The vast majority of Christians are meant to live in the world and work among unbelievers. This is their

⁴³ Gene Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), 211.

“office,” their “calling,” as Luther would say.⁴⁴

What is the relationship, however, between the gospel and our work? Again, John Piper offers some provocative thoughts:

There is no point in overstating the case for the value of secular work. It is not the Gospel. By itself, it does not save anyone. In fact, with no spoken words about Jesus Christ, our secular work will not awaken wonder for the glory of Christ. That is why the New Testament modestly calls our work an adornment of the Gospel [compare Titus 2:9-10]. . . .

So one crucial meaning of our secular work is that the way we do it will increase or decrease the attractiveness of the Gospel we profess before unbelievers. Of course, the great assumption is that they know we are Christians. The whole point of the text breaks down if there is nothing for our work to “adorn.” Thinking that our work will glorify God when people do not know we are Christians is like admiring an effective ad on TV that never mentions the product. People may be impressed but won’t know what to buy. . . .

Personal evangelism is so important that it is easy to think of it as the only important thing in life. But we have seen that the Bible puts a lot of emphasis on adorning the Gospel, not merely saying the Gospel. But now I want to say that speaking the good news of Christ is part of why God put you in your job. He has woven you into the fabric of others’ lives so that you will tell them the Gospel. Without this, all our adorning behavior may lack the one thing that could make it life-giving.⁴⁵

2. Respond to the following statement: “At work, preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.”

44 John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 133-134.

45 *Ibid.*, 142-143, 151-152.

WORKING ON THE FRONTIERS OF THE GOSPEL

The final section of this lesson is a radical call to consider doing your job or conducting your business in the context of world missions.

The gospel is going forth to all languages, peoples, and nations. Although God has promised that the gospel will triumph, and Jesus has promised that he will build his church, the expansion of God's kingdom is not without opposition. The rapid changes in the modern world are calling for fresh thought about the most strategic, effective, and God-exalting ways for the gospel to be preached among all the peoples of the world.

One of the most exciting ways in which God is spreading the gospel is through business. John Piper calls Christians in the “secular” workforce to consider the role they might have in missions:

For many of you the move toward missions and deeds of mercy will not be a move away from your work but with your work to another, more needy, less-reached part of the world. Christians should seriously ask not only what their vocation is, but where it should be lived out. We should not assume that teachers and carpenters and computer programmers and managers and CPAs and doctors and pilots should do their work in America. That very vocation may be better used in a country that is otherwise hard to get into, or in a place where poverty makes access to the Gospel difficult. In this way the web of relationships created by our work is not only strategic but intentional.⁴⁶

Michael Baer is issuing a similar call:

I am hoping to challenge Christian business leaders to think and to pray—to seek God and to have fellowship with other believers—about the enormous potential within business to impact society for Christ and his kingdom.

We are living in the Business Age. Many Christian and secular historians would agree that the historic role of nation-states is rapidly passing from the scene and is being replaced by the corporation. Companies, and not countries, will have the greatest impact in our world in the future. Shouldn't the Christian business community see this as a great opportunity? Shouldn't we seek to capitalize on the doors that are open before us? Shouldn't we view this as the ultimate chance for business to play a role in societal transformation and in the spread of the gospel?

46 John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 153-154.

To do so requires that we think differently about God, about his kingdom, about his purposes in the world, and about business.⁴⁷

One way for Christians to become engaged in frontier missions is to become tentmakers, as we will hear in the sermon corresponding to this lesson. Another way is to become a “kingdom entrepreneurs.” Tetsunao Yamamori explains the difference:

In contrast to regular tentmakers, kingdom entrepreneurs are job makers, starting small to large for-profit businesses. These businesses are not fronts to get into closed countries, but real enterprises that meet real human needs. As the former leader of a relief and development agency, I know that many restricted-access countries are seeking economic growth. They welcome entrepreneurs warmly, even when they shut their doors tightly to others.

Moreover, in churches worldwide there are increasing numbers of talented entrepreneurs who sense God’s call to missions. These people want to use their unique skills and backgrounds for the kingdom. More and more are doing so, employing their business acumen as a means of ministry to the nations. Their goal is to share the gospel and make disciples across cultural divides while starting and maintaining for-profit businesses that produce tangible goods and services.⁴⁸

Likewise, Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen have written a book introducing the concept of a “Great Commission Company” (GCC). They define a GCC as follows:

...a socially responsible, income-producing business managed by kingdom professionals and created for the specific purpose of glorifying God and promoting the growth and multiplication of local churches in the least-evangelized and least-

47 Michael R. Baer, *Business as Mission: The Power of Business in the Kingdom of God* (Seattle, Washington: YWAM Publishing, 2006), 155. In this book, Baer promotes what he calls “kingdom businesses” which he describes as having the four traits of “a high and holy calling, a discovered and executed purpose, a valued set of vital relationships, and a demand for operational excellence” (22).

48 This excerpt is from the preface to *On Kingdom Business*, page 8, written by Tetsunao Yamamori.

*developed parts of the world.*⁴⁹

Wayne Grudem also adds these reflections about world poverty and business:

*I believe the only long-term solution to world poverty is business. That is because businesses produce goods, and businesses produce jobs. And businesses continue producing goods year after year, and continue providing jobs and paying wages year after year. Therefore if we are ever going to see long-term solutions to world poverty, I believe it will come through starting and maintaining productive, profitable businesses.*⁵⁰

3. In light of these quotations above, is there any way in which your job or business could be used directly in the service of frontier missions? Brainstorm possible ways in which your job or business could reflect God's character, alleviate poverty, and spread the gospel in the most needy parts of the world.

49 Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen, *Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Missions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 41.

50 Wayne Grudem, "How Business in Itself Can Bring Glory to God", 151.

This final lesson adds the last three points of summary and application to our list.

How Can I Glorify God in My Work?

1. Affirm that work is a good gift from God and an opportunity to glorify him.
2. Reflect the character of God in your work.
 - Do your work with creativity, skillfulness, and wisdom.
 - Maintain integrity and industriousness in your work.
 - Treat your co-workers and customers with respect. Serve them in love.
3. Recognize that God has subjected human work to the curse, but has begun the redemption of our work in Christ.
 - Acknowledge that apart from God work will never bring true or lasting satisfaction.
 - Take adequate rest from your work.
4. Rely on God's promised future provisions for everything you need at work; thank him for his past provisions.
5. Find a job that is suited to your God-given abilities and desires.
6. Provide for your (and your family's) basic needs through your work.
7. Delight in the work that you do and enjoy the fruit of your labors.
8. Plan to be generous with what you earn from your work. Meet the needs of others.
9. Consider doing your work in the context of frontier missions.
10. Do all your work with the goal of commending the gospel in word and deed.



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

Piper asks how we can make much of Christ in our secular vocation and comes up with the following answers:

1. *We can make much of God in our secular job through the fellowship that we enjoy with him throughout the day in all our work.*
2. *We make much of Christ in our secular work by the joyful, trusting, God-exalting design of our creativity and industry.*
3. *We make much of Christ in our secular work when it confirms and enhances the portrait of Christ's glory that people hear in the spoken Gospel.*
4. *We make much of Christ in our secular work by earning enough money to keep us from depending on others, while focusing on the helpfulness of our work rather than financial rewards.*
5. *We make much of Christ in our secular work by earning money with the desire to use our money to make others glad in God.*
6. *We make much of Christ in our secular work by treating the web of relationships it creates as a gift of God to be loved by sharing the Gospel and by practical deeds of help.*

This course has set forth a ten point list titled “How Can I Glorify God in My Work” (located on page 78).

1. What observations and comments do you have as you compare the list above with the list on page 78?

2. Of the 16 points listed, which are you doing well by God's grace? Which points challenge you in areas in which you are not doing well? What are three practical steps that you can take to bring greater glory to God in your job?

🔗 YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

🔗 A SERMON ABOUT SERVING CHRIST IN “SECULAR” EMPLOYMENT

Listen to the sermon “**Tentmakers in Minneapolis**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org). sermon.

🔗 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ John Piper, “Don’t Steal, Work and Give!” an online sermon at the desiringGod website
- ▶ John Piper, “Your Job as Ministry,” an online sermon at the desiringGod website
- ▶ Jonathan Dodson, “How Should We Then Work?” an online article at <http://www.boundless.org/adulthood/2007/how-should-we-then-work>
- ▶ Center for Faith and Work website, <http://www.faithandwork.org>
- ▶ Michael R. Baer, *Business as Mission: The Power of Business in the Kingdom of God* (Seattle, Washington: YWAM Publishing, 2006)
- ▶ Ken Eldred, *God Is at Work* (Ventura, California: Regal, 2005)
- ▶ Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen, *Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Missions* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003)
- ▶ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), chapters 7-9

“Tentmakers” in Minneapolis

JOHN PIPER, 1988

1 Peter 2:11-17

What is a “tentmaker”?

Openings in Oman

Four reasons for overseas tentmakers:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Tentmaking in Minneapolis

Ways to make God known at work:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

“But short of having God as your goal, of wanting to make God known, display God’s character—then you just live like the _____, and have no difference at all.”

Three foundation stones for tentmaking:

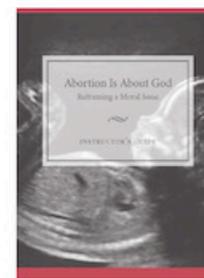
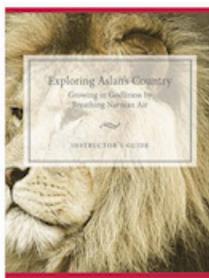
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Work with Your Hands

Serving God in Secular Employment

Work with Your Hands: Serving Christ in "Secular" Employment is a six-week course advancing the truth that Christians ought to intentionally and joyfully glorify God in "secular" employment. The course will assert that work is a good gift from God (though impacted by the Fall), and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for a God-centered perspective on work. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining the key biblical passages regarding the issue of work, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper and other theologians.

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