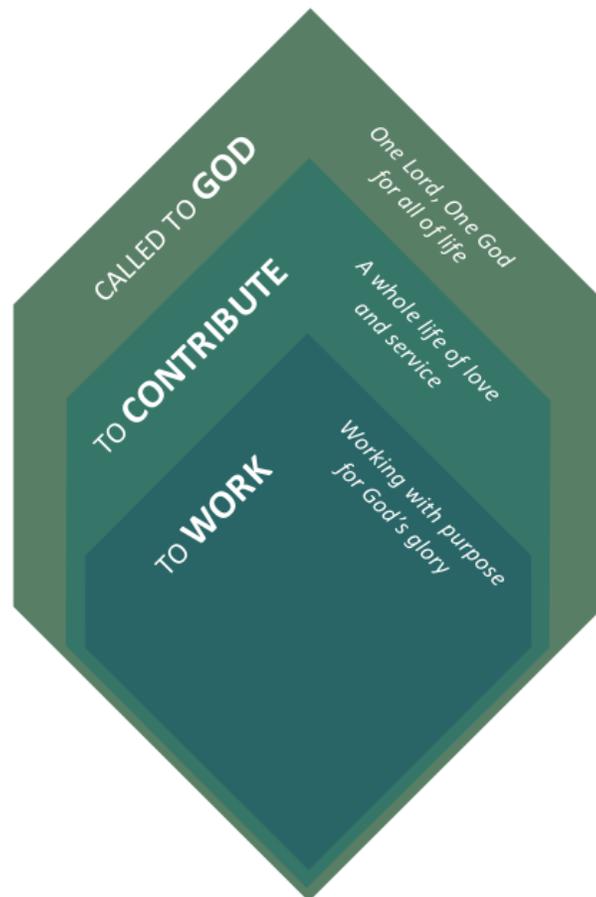


THE ROLE OF WORK

Work is not the “center of the bull’s eye.” It is, though, a significant part of why God created and redeemed us.



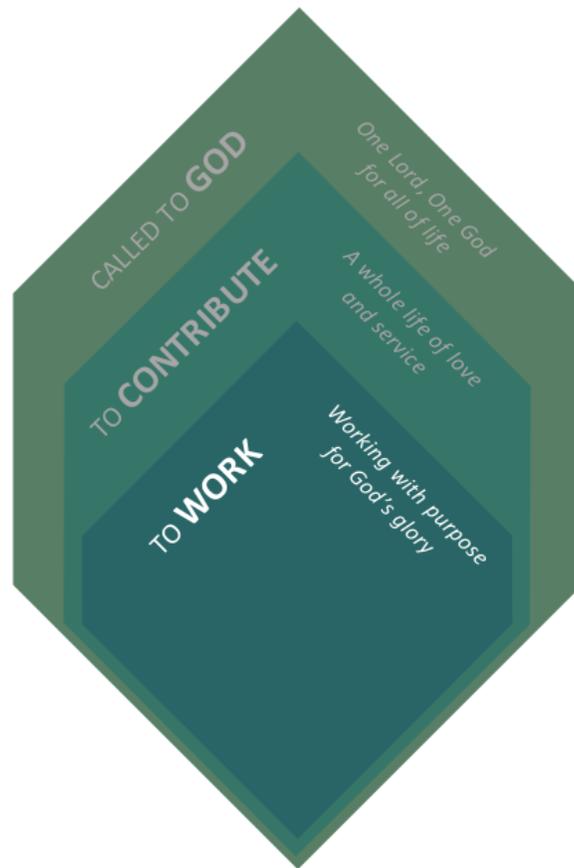
Called to God: First and foremost, God calls us to Himself. As Os Guinness writes, “everything we are, everything we do, everything we have” is God’s. All of life is based on God’s authoritative call on our lives. He wants all of us, all the time.

Called to Contribute: Inside this call to God, God asks us to join Him in His work of restoring and rebuilding our world. We are called to contribute through love and service to others in every aspect of life. This contribution includes work but also other areas: being a good neighbor, volunteering and other types of formal and informal contributions.

Called to Work: The Bible teaches that it is not just *how* we relate to people at work that makes a difference. Very often, it is *the work itself* that provides a way for us to do good (for example, the farmer who grows food, the doctor who helps people get healthy or the engineer who helps design safer vehicles). Work is not the only way we contribute, but it can be a significant place for us to do our part to change the world and make it a better place.

DISCUSS: How is this view of work different from the way you have thought about it before? What are the advantages seeing work as a part of God’s “bigger” call to himself and to a life of loving and serving others? What does this view of work say about the dignity and purpose of our “everyday” work?

1) THE ORIGIN OF WORK IS THE GARDEN



This study is not designed to cover everything that could be said about work. Instead, the goal is to outline a broad, Biblical perspective on work and calling. The focus is on why we work, how we work and how the workplace impacts our relationship with God.

WARMUP

It doesn't take long for work to show up in the Bible. In fact, the opening sentence is about work! And the entire first chapter is a glimpse of God at work. Before sin is ever on the scene, work is in full effect.

When you think about work, do you think about it as "a necessary evil"? A curse? A blessing? Something else?

STUDY

START AT THE BEGINNING

Study Genesis 1 with a lens of **work**. What can we learn about the God who works, the value of work and the commissioning of workers?

The Origin of Work Is the Garden

Follow the steps below to “mark up” Genesis 1 (the text is provided below), then answer the questions that follow.

Repetition

- Read the passage quickly and look for repeated words
- Mark repeated (or similar words) in the same color (e.g., highlight each use of “God” in yellow)
- You can color, underline or otherwise annotate repetition you find (e.g., [God saw that it was good])

Paragraph Titles

- Give each paragraph a 1-3 word title
- Use words from the text that capture the key content of that day (e.g., “Light” for day one)

Genesis 1-2:3 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the

The Origin of Work Is the Garden

beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

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."

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1} 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.

THE GOD WHO WORKS

Genesis begins with a world that is empty, formless and dark and shows how God works to make it full, shaped and light. God's work is purposeful and specific – He is cultivating something! – and it is this task that He eventually invites us into. The following questions first explore His work and then examine how God invites us into ours.

What observations do you have about God and His work in the following areas?

OBSERVATIONS	IMPLICATIONS about GOD	IMPLICATIONS for WORK
Diversity of the work (vv. 11,16, 21, 25)		
God's emotion/attitude		
The length of God's work (why not just do it on one day?)		
Characteristics of God		
Rest		

The Origin of Work Is the Garden

Describe God's work in your own words.

COMMISSIONING OTHERS TO WORK

What are some of the key repeated words on day six (v. 24-31)?

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? (esp. in regards to work)

God plants a garden (see Gen. 2:8) and makes people to care for it (2:15). What does this reveal about the design of work?

The first workers are in the role of gardeners. What things are true of good gardeners?

The Origin of Work Is the Garden

How might some of those characteristics apply to work in general? To any work you do now or the work you see yourself doing in the future?

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

Review your notes above and, if you are in a group, think about any of the comments you or others made that seem important. What conclusions can you make about the value of work? Why God calls us to work?

How do the conclusions you wrote above impact how you think about work? Has your view of work changed? How do they impact how you want to approach work and the workplace differently in the future?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

DOES GOD CALL PEOPLE TO A SPECIFIC JOB, TASK OR WORK?

While some people report that God has *called* them to a particular career, it is more common (and perhaps in most cases, more accurate) to say that God *guides* us into our work. This guidance can take many forms: the doors He clearly and miraculously opens, the skills and interests He has built into us, the guidance of trusted friends and mentors and, of course, His own voice as we seek Him in prayer and in the Word.

When we look through the Bible, we find many people who are a part of God's work but very few examples of a specific call to a particular task. While God clearly called Moses and Aaron to lead His

The Origin of Work Is the Garden

people (Ex. 3:4; 28:1), Samuel to be a prophet (I Sam. 3:10) and Bezalel and Oholiab as craftsmen for the tabernacle (Ex. 31:1-6), most of the time, it would be more accurate to say that God *guided* people to the places He wanted them to go.

The classic example is Abraham. God told him to “leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.” (Gen. 12:1) God then guided him along the way—with Abraham and Sarah not knowing their final destination until they arrived in Canaan and God confirmed it. Another example is Joseph, who was guided first by a dream and then by a series of misfortunes and jobs.

Even today, God does on occasion call specific people to particular tasks, but it is not His usual method. More often, God guides people to the places, tasks, contexts and work where He wants them and then helps them find meaning and purpose there. This guidance often comes through events and “open doors” but also through other prayer, godly counsel, meditation on Scripture and community feedback. “The truth is not that God is finding a place for our gifts but that God has created us and our gifts for a place of his choosing” (*The Call* by Os Guinness, p. 47) He will lead us to that place.

How did you get to where you are today? How did God guide you? After working on this study, is there anything new you think He might be nudging you towards?

2) WORK, FALL AND THE GOSPEL

WARMUP

God designed work. It is part of our makeup. It has such great purpose in the world, and yet...work is hard! The beauty of work was deeply affected by Adam and Eve's sin. Like all of life, the original design is marred.

For you personally, what are some of the challenges about work that are the hardest to deal with?

STUDY

CHALLENGES TO WORK

Read Gen. 3:17-19 and make observations in the margins on the effect of the curse. What, exactly, changes about work, and what stays the same? Is "work" cursed or is it something else?

And to Adam {God} 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."

Compare the state of work in Genesis 1 to the picture here in Genesis 3.

What "thorns and thistles" (problems) come to your mind when you consider any work you are doing now or see yourself doing in the future?

Work, Fall and the Gospel

Fill out the chart below. Consider how the challenges mentioned could affect your work. Read more of the context around the verses if you find it helpful.

VERSE	CHALLENGES	AFFECT ON WORK
Jer. 9:23		
1 Tim. 6:9-10		
Ecc. 2:17-19		
Gen. 11:2-4		
Luke 6:27-29		

THE GOSPEL AND WORK

Note below the changes that come through Jesus. What affect do they have on work?

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2, ESV)

“And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”
(Ephesians 4:24, ESV)

“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.” (Colossians 3:23-24, ESV)

Choose at least 3 of the following areas and make observations about how God changes a worker’s approach to different situations.

Work, Fall and the Gospel

<p>Attitude: Ephesians 6:5-8</p>	<p>The Career I Choose/Have Chosen: Psalm 139:13-16</p>	<p>How I View Money: Hebrews 13:5-6</p>
<p>How I Rest: Matthew 11:28-30</p>	<p>How I Relate to Coworkers: Colossians 4:5-6</p>	<p>Moral Dilemmas: 1 Peter 2:12</p>

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

What changes to the work environment were caused by the fall and what remedies does Jesus offer to the worker? (List as many changes and as many remedies as you can think of.)

From the list above, which 2-3 ideas stand out the most to you today? Why?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT KIND OF JOB I WILL LOVE?

The Fall means that there is no job that will ever be perfect, not because work is “wrong” but because sin taints all good things, including work. Nevertheless, there are some things that make some jobs a better fit than others.

Finding a job that you love is not exactly “hit or miss,” but it will require some self-reflection and investigation. As a student or someone early in their career, it may be difficult to know exactly what job you will love. In general, though, the job you choose should connect with your sense of calling from God and your broader sense of purpose in life, align with your design and abilities and give you an opportunity to do work you feel is meaningful.

Here are some questions that might be helpful in finding a job you will love or evaluating the job you currently have.

- Is the job in my strongest area of interest?
- Does it require my specific skills and abilities?
- Does it fit my teaming preferences (working alone, on a team, or in a big organization)?
- Is the work itself meaningful to me? Does it fit with what I value the most?
- Can I explain how this job relates to my life-purpose? My calling from God?
- Do people who know me well think this job is a good fit for me?
- Does my personality resonate with others in similar jobs?

For another perspective on finding happiness in your career, try [“What Parents Should Tell Their Kids About Finding a Career”](#) (from the Harvard Business Review).

3) GOOD WORK, GOOD REST

WARMUP

Have you ever been around a good worker? Do you work today with any good workers? What makes them stand out?

Going into this study, are there questions you have about work you'd like to see answered? List 2-3.

STUDY

REASONS TO WORK

Here are 5 reasons people work—reasons God has built into the fabric of work. We work....

- In partnership with God to care for the world (Genesis 1:28)
- In partnership God to provide our “daily bread” (Psalm 104:14-15)
- For the sheer joy of working (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19)
- To provide for others, especially family (1 Timothy 5:8)
- As an example of caring for others (Acts 20:35)

Are any of these reasons surprising to you? Why?

Which reasons are motivating to you? Why?

Can you think of any other passages or reasons to work?

In what ways is the work you do now or might do in the future a part of God's call to care for His world and the people in it? (NOTE: This is not an easy question! Take time to think about how your contribution (or your company's or industry's contribution) is a part of providing for the daily needs of people, the environment or society in general.)

HOW TO WORK

What do the following verses say about the way we should work?

“Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.” (Proverbs 22:29, ESV)

“I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, ³¹ and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. ³² Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. ³³ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, ³⁴ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.” (Proverbs 24:30-34, ESV)

“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.” (Colossians 3:23-24, ESV)

“Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. ² Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.” (1 Timothy 6:1-2, ESV)

“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.” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, ESV)

Do these verses reflect your approach to work? Why, why not?

SERVING, ABIDING, BEARING FRUIT

When Jesus calls people to follow Him, He calls them to an entire new way of life. How might the principles captured in the following verses apply to work?

“But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45, ESV)

Good Work, Good Rest

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31, ESV)

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (John 15:5-8, ESV)

What ideas from these verses are most exciting for you? Most challenging?

WORK AND REST

Jesus is Lord every minute, every hour, every day. The call to join Him and work with Him demands all that we have – but not burnout! God is a worker and is constantly at work, but even God rested on the seventh day. We are called to do the same, not so that we can “take a break” from serving, but so that we can have the energy to serve.

Before you begin, jot down your initial thoughts on rest. Is rest for the weak? Do you think you rest too much? Are you pretty high energy and have trouble slowing down? (Don’t go for the “right answer” just yet. Write down the way you really do think about rest, right or wrong.)

What do the following teach us about the importance of rest? About the relationship between work and rest?

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.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.” (Genesis 1:31-2:3, ESV)

Good Work, Good Rest

“The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.” (Mark 6:30-32, ESV)

“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.” (Matthew 11:28-30, ESV)

SABBATH

Read Hebrews 4:1-11. Make as many observations as you can about the Sabbath rest. In the Old Testament the Sabbath rest was one of the Ten Commandments. What does this passage instruct us about the Sabbath rest?

A pastor articulated this Sabbath principle: “I don’t do anything on the Sabbath that I *have* to do,” that is, things that are part of his *required* work.” In light of the above Scriptures, what do you think of this principle? How might you apply it to your life?

REST AND LEISURE

There are many demands on our time:

- Work (on the job or at school)
- The daily chores of life

In addition to these required tasks, in today’s world, we can also be quite busy playing and resting. List what you do in your “leisure time” and then evaluate: are these things truly restful? Do they help you recuperate? (Note: these answers will vary widely between individuals: for some people, working out is a great way to rest. For others, it is just another chore.)

What do you see as the difference between Biblical rest and modern day leisure?

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

From this study and the previous studies on work (*Getting Started; The Origin of Work is the Garden; Work, Fall and the Gospel*), what do you see about how God approaches work? The purpose of work? What did you learn about rest? Did you find any answers to any questions you had before you started this study? Do you have new questions? Are there things you need to change in your view of work or how you rest?

Among the ideas listed above, what one or two things would you like to start thinking, doing or feeling immediately?

Summarize your personal understanding or theology of work.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON WORK

People can “do good” on a number of different levels. What kind of good will often depend on our perspective. In his book *Anointed for Business*, Ed Siloso describes four common approaches believers have towards work:

- *Survivor*: “Work is hard, but I can survive it.”

Good Work, Good Rest

- *Live by Biblical principles:* “The Bible tells me how to live all of life, even at work. I just need to seek out and obey His principles.”
- *Live by the power of the Holy Spirit:* “The Spirit will lead, guide and empower me all through the day, even at work.”
- *Transform the workplace for Christ:* “I have been placed by Christ in this place to be ‘change agent’ for the Kingdom. I may not have a lot of influence, but what I have I will put to use to see this place changed.”

Which best describes your perspective?

Are any of these perspectives better than the others? Why?

4) CHARACTER IN THE WORKPLACE

WARMUP

“The most important thing about you is not the things that you achieve; it is the person that you become.” (Dallas Willard as quoted in *Soul Keeping* by John Ortberg)

Our character is the outward reflection of what God has done in us. It is the result of change. We have been called by the Father and are learning to follow His Son. The Spirit whispers and guides. Knowing the Lord and developing an intimate relationship with Him shows up in the character we display to the world around us. Our true character is revealed when we think we are alone and no one is looking.

Discuss/reflect: What character qualities do you think employers are most interested in? What qualities do your current supervisor(s) and co-workers (or current teachers and classmates) most value?

STUDY

TWO ESSENTIAL CHARACTER QUALITIES: INTEGRITY AND HUMILITY

There are many, many characteristics of God—and characteristics that God calls us into—that are essential at work: justice, righteousness, mercy, truth, grace, love and many more. Here, are two that many have found to be foundational: integrity and humility.

Integrity

Before you look at the verses below, describe what you think it means to be a person of integrity in the workplace.

Read the following Scripture and record anything you see about:

- The importance of integrity
- Principles in growing in integrity
- Results of living with integrity *or* lacking integrity
- Opportunities for growth in integrity in your life (especially opportunities in your current occupation, whether it is as a student or in the workplace)

“And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules,⁵ then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’” (1 Kings 9:4-5, ESV)

“I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.” (1 Chronicles 29:17, ESV)

Character in the Workplace

“As long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, ⁴ my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. ⁵ Far be it from me to say that you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. ⁶ I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.” (Job 27:3-6, ESV)

“O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.” (Psalm 15:1-3, ESV)

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalm 24:3-4, ESV)

“With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.” (Psalm 78:72, ESV)

“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.” (Proverbs 10:9, ESV)

“The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.” (Proverbs 11:3, ESV)

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Luke 16:10-13, ESV)

“So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.” (Acts 24:16, ESV)

“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.” (Colossians 3:17, ESV)

From what you have read, write a definition of integrity. Use a (online) dictionary to further define integrity. If you'd like, try writing a definition that applies specifically to the workplace. For example, “A worker who has integrity....”

How does what you have studied relate to “white lies,” exaggeration, or misrepresenting facts to make a case for something?

Why do you think integrity would be important as an employee? How does integrity make your experience at work better? How does it make you a better worker? How does your integrity help your employer or supervisor?

Humility

Character in the Workplace

Explain what it looks like to live in humility in the workplace.

Read the following Scripture and record anything you see about:

- The importance of humility
- Principles in growing in humility
- Results of living with humility *or* lacking humility
- Opportunities for growth in your own humility

“The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.” (Proverbs 15:33, ESV)

“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.” (Proverbs 27:2, ESV)

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, ESV)

“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:4, ESV)

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11, ESV)

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Romans 12:3, ESV)

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant.” (1 Corinthians 13:4, ESV)

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-4, ESV)

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” (Colossians 3:12, ESV)

“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble....” ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:6, 10, ESV)

“Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:5-7, ESV)

From what you have read, write a definition of humility. Use a (online) dictionary to further define humility. If you'd like, try writing a definition that applies specifically to the workplace. For example, “A humble worker....”

How does what you have studied relate to contentment, leadership, or pride in accomplishments?

Character in the Workplace

Why do you think humility would be important as an employee? How does it make you a better worker or improve your experience at work? Why would it be important to an employer or supervisor?

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

Every workplace will make demands on your character: ethical questions that will need to be sorted out, fears that will need to be addressed, hard decisions that will need to be made when there are too many (or too few) good options to choose between. Choose one (or more) of the following character areas to study further and develop in your life:

courage

faithfulness

gentleness

justice

kindness

love

mercy

patience

purity

righteousness

self-control

servanthood

teachability

truthfulness

Character in the Workplace

Before you begin, explain what you think life at work would look like if this character area was prominent in your life.

Gather 5-10 verses/passages of Scripture on this topic and record anything you see about:

- The importance of the chosen character area
- Principles in growing in this character area
- Results of living with this character area *or* when it is lacking
- Opportunities for growth in this area in your life in the workplace

From what you have read, write a definition of the character area you studied. Use a (online) dictionary to further define the character trait. If you'd like, try writing a definition that applies specifically to the workplace.

Why do you think this aspect of character would be important as an employee? To an employer or supervisor?

Discuss/reflect: What do you believe to be true about the character areas you have studied in this chapter? Why would you want your life to be characterized by these things? Include convictions you think will be particularly helpful in the workplace.

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

Review what you have studied here and write down any highlights. How do/should these truths change the way you approach God and relate to others, in general, and at work?

If you truly believed what you've read and studied in this chapter, how would your life at work look different?

Work can both “ask for” and challenge godly character. From your experience (or from what you imagine doing in the future) how might your specific work help or hinder your growth in godly character?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

CHARACTER COUNTS (BY TOM YEAKLEY)

Some time ago I found myself in a conversation with a man who was the chief headhunter for a Fortune 100 company. He and his team hire 2000 new graduates each year. I thought this was a great opportunity to gain some insights into university students from a new perspective, so I began to ask him some questions.

“What are you finding when you recruit these graduates?” I asked.

“Tom, we can hire those with top GPA’s, work experience and internships, and resumes’ that are outstanding. We offer them top salaries and benefits and place them in stimulating, cutting edge job situations.”

“Well, sounds interesting. How’s that working for you?” I inquired.

“It’s a disaster!” he replied. “All they want to know is when is the next holiday or how much vacation they get. They don’t put in a day’s work for a day’s pay. They have conflicts with their co-workers and supervisors. They steal from the company. They take the great salaries we give them and spend it on addictive behaviors, then we end up paying for counselors for them.

“That sounds pretty depressing. What are you doing about this?” I said.

“Well, I will tell you what I tell my recruiting team. We can’t put it in writing for we would be charged with hiring bias or discrimination. But here’s what I tell the team. When interviewing on campus, look for students who are leaders in The Navigators and other campus ministries.”

“Really? Why?” I said.

“We hire these people because they have character. As we’ve looked at our successful hires, those who do well had this common background. We can train new hires to do any job that we want them to do in this company. But we can’t train them in character. They either have it or they don’t. Leaders in these campus ministries have what we want, so we look to hire qualified people who were leaders in these campus ministries. They have character!”

[Note: This chief headhunter was not a believer!]

5) WORK VS WORSHIP

WARMUP

God has called you to a life of devotion to Him – even at work. He has also called you to contribute to others, both in the workplace and outside of it. Though the call to worship and the call to work can feel like they are in tension, they are really “two sides of the same coin.”

Closeness with God clearly grows through time spent quietly in His presence. As we reflect *on God*, we become closer *to God* and become more *like God*. But closeness with God also develops—as it does in all relationships—as we spend time working *with God*, pursuing the tasks and contributions He has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

In *Every Job a Parable*, John Van Sloten explains it this way:

Jesus taught that there are basically two laws we need to keep in order to flourish as human beings: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

Love God first and foremost, with all you’ve got; then, out of that love, work for the common good.

These two laws are not mutually exclusive. They are symbiotic—mutually fulfilling and interdependent. Love of God shapes and informs love of neighbor. You can’t fully love your neighbor (or yourself) unless you are in a loving relationship with God. You won’t know why and when and how to work for the common good unless you are doing it out of a “right then and there” working love of God, out of his “just in time” ethical, wise, creative, and mindful presence.

The reverse is true as well: Only by loving your neighbor (working for the common good) will you be able to fully love God. Work concretizes your faith; it puts God’s words into action. We need to be doing both at the same time—loving God and loving our neighbor—to be fully alive.

And it all starts with a loving, knowing experience of God.

This study looks at several Biblical characters to see how their devotion to God and their contribution to others worked together to contribute to a growing relationship with God. Work, approached well, can deepen—not distract from—our devotion to God.

Discuss/reflect

- Make a list of times when you have felt particularly close to God. What were you doing during those times? Does your list include times when you were working?

- What do most people seem to mean when they talk about “intimacy with God”? Do you agree with this description? By not including “work” in their view of intimacy, what might people be missing in their relationship with God?

STUDY

JOSHUA

The book of Joshua opens with a clear call to Joshua to trust God. Read **Joshua 1:5-9** and record observations on the passage. Pay particular attention to...

- What God says about His own knowledge, presence and power
- The types of responses God was looking for from Joshua

Discuss/reflect: From what you know about the rest of the story (Joshua was indeed successful in leading the people of Israel into the Promised Land), when do you think Joshua came to believe these truths about God and His trustworthiness? If you are in a group, share your observations. Otherwise, spend some time writing about your answer to this question.

DAVID

The life of David is full of both deep reflection and courageous action. In some places, we have records of his reflections and the life experiences that inspired these reflections. Read the following passages and record observations about...

- David's heart for God
- How work, calling and serving others was a part of David's experience with God
- Actions and attitudes that could help you to grow in your relationship with your Heavenly Father.

Psalm 34 and **Samuel 21:10-15** ("Abimelech" is another name for the king named in 1 Samuel.)

Work vs Worship

Psalm 7 and **1 Samuel 24** (Most scholars agree that this Psalm was likely written during the events recorded in 1 Samuel 24.)

Psalm 63 and **2 Samuel 17:16-29** (For the full story, see 2 Samuel 15-19.)

Discuss/reflect: Write 2-3 statements about devotion to God from your study of these Psalms. If you are in a group, share your conclusions and the observations that have led you to these conclusions.

WORKERS AND BOSSES

In the New Testament, the Bible gives specific advice for workers and how worship lies at the foundation of good work and good relationships at work.

Record observations from the passages below. Pay particular attention to...

- Character issues
- Motivations of the heart
- The connection between work and worship

Ephesians 6:5-9

Colossians 3:22-24

Discuss/reflect

- *Slaves* and *masters* are not exactly the same as *employees* and *bosses*,¹ but there are lessons to be learned. How would you summarize the lessons from this passage? How would you put them into practice in your context as a student or worker?
- “With fear and trembling” and “with a sincere heart” are the kinds of attitudes we might expect the Apostle Paul to ask believers to show towards God or to spiritual leaders. Why does he ask people to treat “earthly masters” this way? Thinking about some of the bosses and teachers you have had, how easy is it to have this kind of attitude? What would you need to change in order to treat *all* your bosses this way?
- In your experience, what comes first: intimacy with God or changes in attitudes?

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATIONS

- Based on what you have studied here, what conclusions have you drawn about how work and the challenges of the workplace can positively affect the *quality* of your relationship with God?
- Which of these conclusions imply actions you can take on your own? Which require the help of others?

¹ For further study on “workers” and the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire, see [Paul on Work](#) (p. 2) by Navigator staff Dean Storelli, available in the resource section of [human365.org](#).

Work vs Worship

- Looking at your past successes and failures in keeping commitments, are there any conclusions (things you mentally agree with) that need to become convictions (strongly held beliefs that you are willing to sacrifice for)? Explain. What steps can you take or what help can you get to help deepen and follow through on these convictions?
- John Van Sloten writes about “experiences of God when ‘out of the blue’ inspiration hits you, when a huge challenge confronts you and you find another physical or cognitive gear, or when you are so caught up in the flow of what you are doing that you lose all sense of time and space.” Have you had experience like this one? Would it be fair to call such experiences “worship”? Why or why not?
- We all need a supportive community. Because the context of work is different from the context of campus, the benefits and responsibilities of being a part of such a community often look different. What will you most likely have to give up once you graduate? Or if you have already graduated, what have you already had to give up? What new things (opportunities and challenges) are available in the workplace?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

While there is no “one way” to stay focused on God in the workplace, there are some principles.

- Balancing the pursuit of excellent and the need for rest.
- Identifying as a Christian without being immediately discounted.
- Submitting to a boss, even when you do not like what he or she is asking you to do.

What do the passages about Noah, Joshua, David and the others say about excellence?

What do you think about practices such as keeping a Bible on your desk, bringing a scriptural plaque (or wearing a shirt with scripture on it) to your workplace? What might you gain, what might you lose by doing these things?

Being respectful to a boss you like is easier than being respectful when there is tension. What does Ephesians 6:5-9 (or Titus 2:7-14, Titus 3:1-2 or 1 Per 2:11-12) say about how we should communicate with a boss when our assignments or our work environment do not match what we think is right?

WRAPPING UP – THE ROLE OF WORK

REVIEW

Look back over the previous four Bible studies (*The Origin of Work Is the Garden; Work, Fall and the Gospel; Good Work, Good Rest; Character in the Workplace*). Are there one or two new ideas that really stand out? Are there one or two things you believe God is asking you to act on? If you need help summarizing, try using a highlighter to mark the “cream of the cream” from your studies. Then, for each of these highlights, write out one or two possible action steps. Don’t aim for a long list of things to do. Instead, create a short list that you can begin to pray about and explore.

CALLING

After doing these studies, do you have a clearer sense God of what God is calling you to? Do you have a different sense of the importance of the work you are doing?

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