

The Gift of Work

Dean Storelli

I. **Intro** – “Gift”!? Isn’t work a result of the fall? Isn’t work a curse? In this Bible study, you will explore why work is a blessing and not a curse and why it is okay to be very excited about your job and career.

II. **Brainstorm** - Let’s say you’ve been working for a few years. Jesus, because he loves you, decides to drop by and asks you, "How’s it going?" What would you be excited to tell him about your job? What things do you think he’d be interested in hearing about? Write down as many things as you can. If you are in a group or have a friend available, tell them about these reasons for being thankful for your work.

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

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

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

Genesis 1:26

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

Genesis 2:18

Colossians 3:22-25

Here are my own conclusions about work.

1) Work is a great place to grow spiritually: patience, grace, honesty, commitment - these are the kinds of things that work draws out of us. In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus says it is better to live among the world than apart from it. If we were to be pulled away from “the world,” damage would happen. Ephesians 6:5-6 describes some of the character issues that work requires us to deal with: sincerity, respect and a focus on Christ as our Lord.

2) Work is a great place for the natural, relational spread of the gospel. Throughout history, the gospel has spread primarily not through great evangelists but through family and work networks. This spread includes...

- introducing others to Christ (or preparing the soil for others to do so)
- finding people of like heart to grow with
- finding someone who can mentor us, especially in terms of what it means to walk with Christ on the job
- finding someone to help, train or mentor

1 Peter 2:12 describe the influence of our lives in terms of our being a “priesthood” to the world. Titus 2:9-10 says our actions are an “adorning” piece of jewelry, and 2 Corinthians 2:14-15 says that we are “a sweet aroma.” The Titus and 2 Corinthians passages, like much of the NT, was written specifically with the workplace in mind.

3) Work fits with how God designed us. Genesis 1:26 says that God created in his image not primarily for relationship but “so that” we could work. Within one verse, God affirms that it is his own image that we carry and that we were made this way specifically for the work roles we will play in his creation.

4) On a practical level, we work so that we can eat. Notice the pattern in Psalm 104. God feeds animals directly, but with human beings, he expects us to work! Work is not an afterthought, added because of sin, but part of God’s original plan for humanity. The Apostle Paul says that work is exactly what we should be doing to provide for ourselves and others and goes so far as to say that people who do not work should not eat! (See 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 3:10.)

5) There is nothing quite like a common task or common hardship to draw people together. In Genesis 2:18, God says that it is “not good” to be alone, and then makes Adam a wife...to work with! The solution to loneliness is very often *doing something* with somebody. Close relationships do indeed often develop at work – and God has designed it to be so.

6) A job “well done” gives a certain sense of pleasure. We worship God when we acknowledge we are working for him in our work. As Colossians 3:23 reminds us, this kind of worship can be done “in all things.”

IV. **Take a minute to think, write and/or talk about these ideas.** What is new? What is confusing? Is there anything here that gets you really excited? Can you think of some other purposes that are not covered here?

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

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

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

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

- VI. **The Physical World is God’s World** - This idea that our work itself is good and that our work serves God in many ways is found throughout the Bible. It is the backdrop of history. Exodus 35:30-34, for example, shows the Holy Spirit working inside very material skills. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (which Jesus affirms as the greatest commandment) proclaims that there is only one God, one Lord, over all of life – and that includes the world of work. A quick peek at Rev. 21:1-4 shows that the "end of the world" is not really the end. It is the joining of heaven and earth for a new chapter of life. (Jesus calls this "the age to come.")

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

Genesis 1 and 2 talk very specifically about work.

- 1) Look at the highlighted verbs in the verses on the next page. What do these commands tell us about the kinds of work God has in mind for us? Taken altogether – the command to fill the earth, steward its resources and to do it all in an orderly way – what kinds of jobs are required? What jobs, if any, wouldn't be included? What about jobs, for example, in the entertainment industry?
- 2) Finally, think about your own job. How does it fit into this picture of how human beings are to care for the world and for each other?

Why Are We Here?

“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be **fruitful** and **increase** in number; **fill** the earth...

...and **subdue** it....

Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” (Genesis 1:28)

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work** (tend) it...

...and take **care** (keep) of it.” (Genesis 2:15)

“I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18)

Note: After the fall, a new work was added - redemption - that makes all of the above much more difficult, but the fall does not replace the original commands. (See Genesis 9:1 and 22:17. Notice how God’s call to work was reaffirmed to Noah and implied in the promises to Abraham.)

Your part...