

WORK AS WORSHIP

Series: Created to Worship

Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19; Colossians 3:22-4:1

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How many of you can't wait for Monday morning? You cannot wait, not for the weekend, but for the weekdays? To go back to work? Basically nobody. For many of us our attitude towards work is like that of Johnny Paycheck. He had one song that made him famous and it's a little crass for Sunday morning but it's called, "Take This Job and Shove It." I grew up listening to this. The lyrics read, "Take this job and shove it. I ain't workin' here no more. My woman done left and took all the reasons I was working for. Ya better not try to stand in my way as I'm walkin' out the door." He goes on to complain about his boss and how he can't wait to walk out that door someday. While the song is a little crude, it's also a very real expression of how most people feel about their job.

That's a sad way to feel about something that you spend 1/3 of your day doing; 8 of the 24 hours in our day. We spend 13+ years of our lives at work; over 90,000 hours on average. That's a lot of time! It's the reason we define one another by what we do for a living. But that being the case, do you really want to spend 1/3 of your daily life feeling like Johnny Paycheck does? As if work is something negative and to be despised? I think the current workforce situation proves there's a lot of Johnny Paycheck's in our country. Everyone's hiring, but people don't want to work. I have Christian business owners that I regularly pray for. When I ask them what I can pray for they say, "Good employees. I always need more help." When they do hire someone, they often find that people want the paycheck but not the work. Just this week there was six of us in line at the grocery store but there was no one else to help. The cashier said, "Sorry I'm all there is at the moment." I had an experience a few years ago where we hired a company to install carpet. The older gentleman had to send the young new hire home because he simply didn't want to work. The lottery is another example of the state of things. The jackpot is in the billions because there's so many people buying the tickets who want to win so they don't have to work another day in their life.

Why is this? Why is work such a negative thing? And what can we as Christians do to find joy and satisfaction in our work? How can we take that job and *love it* (as I was informed one Berean pastor, Curt Lehman, used to say)? And see God use us at work? We're going to answer that today from God's Word as we develop a biblical theology of work. My prayer is that your view of work will be transformed and as a result, your life—or at least 1/3 of it.

I. THE GIFT OF WORK. (Gen. 2:15)

Genesis is the book of beginnings. Genesis means "origin" or "beginnings." It's in Genesis that we find the origins of man and work. Genesis 2 zooms in on day 6 of creation where God creates the first man (Adam) and places him in a garden God planted. Genesis 2:15 says,

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it.”

So right off the bat—before Adam named all the animals, before Eve was created, before man ever fell into sin—God gave man work to do. Adam was to **cultivate** and **tend** the garden. In that utopia, the ground was so fertile and the plant cover so luxuriant that its growth needed to be channeled and controlled. So, in Paul’s Harvey’s words, “God made a farmer.” But take note that even in a perfect, ideal world, work was necessary. Work was good. It was a gift from God to man. A stewardship man exercised for God (Gen. 1:26-28), giving man God-glorifying purpose.

Work was created by God as a good thing.

Henry Morris commented, *“The ideal world is not idleness and frolic, but one with activity and service.”*¹ I think we learned that lesson well during the covid shutdowns. Being home and doing nothing and/or living off the government caused a lot of personal and social problems, some of which we’re still dealing with. Sin issues were intensified. When did King David commit his great sin? When he should have been out to war and not at home relaxing (2 Sam. 11). It’s good for man to work, especially a sinful man. In a real sense it keeps him out of trouble and out of despair and out of unnecessary self-inflicted hardships (2 Thess. 3:10-12). Just yesterday I learned of a gentleman trying to find work to do in the evening to keep him out of trouble and addiction.

But if work is good, then why does man or society have such a negative experience with it? Much of the reason, no doubt, comes from rejection of God and His Word. We don’t see it as a good thing because our culture isn’t biblically literate anymore. But that doesn’t totally explain it either because even those of us who understand work is a good thing still struggle with the work. There must be another reason and that is that paradise was lost.

II. THE GRIEF OF WORK. (Gen. 3:17-19)

“17 Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; With hard labor you shall eat from it All the days of your life.18 Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; Yet you shall eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Until you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.”

Adam was to rule over creation (Gen. 1:26-28), but instead, he listened to it (to the serpent and his wife’s poor advice). Let that be a warning to the husbands here (j/k). He didn’t do his job. He didn’t lead. Thus, after sin entered the world, work became more difficult.

Work is more difficult because of the Fall into sin.

It affected man and the creation itself. The ground wasn’t as fertile. It was harder to cultivate. While weeds and **thistles** would naturally flourish, the good and fruitful plants would now require

tremendous effort to grow—**sweat** from the brow. But this isn't just for farmers. Sin affects everyone's work. For some of you, your work exists in great part because of sin's effect on the world (i.e., healthcare, policeman). Sin has permeated the workplace. It's more difficult.

So now what? How should we respond to work, knowing that it is good but that it's often difficult? How do we work in paradise lost? When our sin nature doesn't want to *love it*? For that we turn to Colossians 3 as we continue to develop a biblical theology of work.

III. THE GLORY OF WORK. (3:22-4:1)

In this part of Colossians, Paul is telling us how to live in Christ now that we are rooted in Him. We are new people in Christ and that means living in a way that honors God in our personal **conduct** (3:1-12), in our **speech** (4:5-6), in the **church** (3:12-17), in the **home** between husband and wife and parents and children (3:18-21), and in the **workplace** (3:22-4:1).

“22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”

At first glance, it doesn't look like these verses apply to us because we don't relate well to the **slave/master relationship** (thanks much to the influence of Christianity). But there was blatant slavery in the Romans Empire in Paul's day and it's a complex issue to study and discuss. Upwards of 40% of the population were slaves. They were as dependent upon slaves as modern society is on machinery. We know that in many ways the slavery was different than we think of in American history. In the warring of empires back then, when one empire took over another, rather than killing everyone off they would enslave them. However, many of them continued to serve with their skills as doctors, lawyers, librarians, architects, et cetera. Some had a great life with much freedom, but some didn't. It depended upon your master. Dr. Thomas Constable writes, “Slaves in the Roman Empire were sometimes similar to domestic servants in Victorian Britain. That is, they were often honored members of a household. However in other families slaves were treated no better than tools.”² In the Old Testament in Jewish culture, contractual slavery existed to pay off debts. If you couldn't pay off the debt, you became their indentured servant until you paid off your debt to them. If you liked working for someone, you could voluntarily choose to be their servant/slave.

So slavery was complex, but the point is, it was part of the normal social fabric. And there were both slaves and masters sitting in the church audience when this letter was read, including Onesimus and Philemon from the letter of Philemon in your Bible. And while none of us are slaves or masters, there are principles here that carry over into the **employee/employer relationship** or any relationship with authority and submission.

First, we see some admonitions from Paul for the **slave/employee**:

1. Be obedient.

Verse 22 says, “*Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth.*” So simply, do what you’re told. Insofar as your master’s instruction doesn’t cause you to go against God’s will, do what they tell you. Some people want to balk at everything their boss tells them to do, and it’s not helpful for them or their boss. Many of the Christian slaves at this time were probably feeling elevated and liberated for the first time. They’re thinking, “I’m a Christian. I’m a child of God. I’m going to rule and reign with Christ in His kingdom. Why should I listen to this guy?” Or maybe, “I feel like the Lord is leading to do something different than the boss asked me to do. He’s calling me to do something else!” Can’t you see some super spiritual slave saying that? So Paul is saying to that slave, “God’s will is right where He has you in this moment and you need to obey your master out of reverence for Christ.” To not obey your boss, in that culture or ours, would ruin your testimony because you’re there to work and being a hard worker is part of your witness.

Another slave might say, “You don’t know my boss. He’s harsh and unreasonable.” Peter says I’m glad you mentioned that. 1 Peter 2:18 says, “*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor; if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.*” So if the situation you’re in is unjust, it’s important to remember that God takes notice. He also goes on to mention how Christlike it is to suffer injustice without retaliating. You might even win your boss to Christ by your Christlikeness (1 Pet. 3:1-2). And isn’t that more important? We’re about people coming to know Jesus Christ and through our work and unjust suffering we have the opportunity to be lights in this world.

2. Be diligent.

Paul says to “please them all the time, not just when they are watching you” (NLT). If you’re a Christian, your boss shouldn’t have to keep an eye on you, checking in on you to make sure you’re working. You should be his most trusted employee, putting in a full day’s work. We’ll all been at work and someone says, “Quick! The boss ain’t looking,” or “The boss ain’t looking, take a break!” How do you respond? In a recent poll, employees admitted to taking longer breaks than needed or allowed, wasting more than 2 hours daily while at work by playing games or checking messages and social media, resulting in a *decrease* in productivity and an *increase* of injuries.

Instead, Paul says, “*Whatever you do, do your work heartily*” and “*with sincerity of heart.*” Work hard and put your heart into it. More literally in the Greek, *put some soul into it*. Care about what you’re doing and not just do it for the paycheck. Do it with some excellence, some enthusiasm. You don’t have to be an expert or have the best college degree. But in order to model Christ well, you need to show up, well rested, and show some enthusiasm. One of my managers used to say, “There shouldn’t be any flies on you.” Be diligent. For Christians, I would say do a little more than what’s required or expected. Learn ways to improve something or be more efficient. An employee

like that is refreshing in a world like we're living in. I'll let J. Vernon McGee do the heavy lifting for me this morning. He said, "If you are lazy on the job, you are not dedicated to Jesus Christ."

The next quality is mainly for the **masters/managers/employers**:

3. **Be fair.**

Paul says, "*Masters, grant your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.*" In other words, employers need to realize the buck doesn't stop with them. As a Christian employer, knowing you have a **Master** (capital "M") in heaven, should affect the way you treat your employees, namely, with **justice** and **fairness**. We just looked at this in Romans 2. God doesn't show **partiality**. The CEO and the janitor are both going to stand before God and he won't show favoritism. We're at different levels in an earthly society, but equal before God.

So Christian employers need to treat employees like they're a person, not just a number on the payroll. In Paul's day, that probably included providing decent living quarters and time to rest, if not releasing them altogether from forced labor and giving them the option. It means paying them what they deserve to be paid and to pay them on time. I'm reminded of James 5:4, "*Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty*" (NIV). Employees have bills to pay and they're relying on your faithfulness in paying them. When they don't get paid, they cry out to the Lord of armies and He hears them. God is aware of those things.

The fourth quality of a Christian worker answers the ultimate question we have today: *How can a Christian overcome the negative attitude towards work and instead, find joy and satisfaction at work? How can they take that job and love it?*

4. ***Be worshipful.**

Verse 23 says, "*Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.*"

Verse 24 says, "*It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.*"

That's it. That's the answer. That ultimately, no matter what job you do and no matter what boss you **serve**, you are to do it ultimately **for the Lord**—not for your master and not for yourself, but to treat every job like it's **for the Lord**. Imagine Him as your all-seeing supervisor and Master—and He is! Understanding that concept right there can make even the most menial tasks like washing dishes or mopping floors, and turn it into a God glorifying, purpose-giving, eternally rewarding task. Even the most servile work can become a ministry and an act of worship.³ King Solomon, the wise man of the Old Testament, understood this. He said that "life under the sun" *without God* in your life is vanity. Work is nothing but a burdensome toil. But—*with God* in it and eternity in mind—even though work is still hard because of sin, it's something **good** and **rewarding**. He said, "*18 Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink, and enjoy*

oneself in all one's labor in which he labors under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward" (Eccl. 5:18).

All of this really puts an end to the sacred/secular debate, doesn't it? Whatever you do, it is sacred. It is something you're doing for Jesus out of worship. And it's funny, sometimes you can tell when someone is doing their job for the Lord or not. Some people just have a different attitude. It isn't even that they "love" their job. Some jobs I don't know how anybody could love. But it's that they *choose* to love it for God's glory. They choose to worship through it.

Back in the day when I was on the railroad cleaning locomotives as a laborer, you were required to sweep, take out the trash, dump the toilet if needed, and clean the windshield (you can see why I liked being a fuel truck driver more). Everyone hated dumping toilets. Most people wouldn't unless they were required to because it's gross and time consuming. No one wanted to clean windshields because you had to wear an awkward harness and climb up on top of the nose of the locomotive. You're 16 feet off the ground on your knees, on top of a locomotive, leaning over the edge to clean them. That's no fun, especially in the bitter winds of winter. But I tell you what, once I became a born again Christian while working on the railroad, I dumped a lot more toilets and cleaned a lot more windshields than in my BC (Before Christ) days. I started to clean those filthy locomotives for the Lord, as if He were going to be the engineer. People appreciated it. I had people tell me who had worked there for years that they've never seen anyone clean their cab like that. To which I would think, "Praise the Lord." Christ made a difference in their life and mine. It blessed them and me. It was rewarding.

5. **Be patient.**

There are eternal rewards for being a faithful slave/master. To the slaves he says, "*from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.*" Imagine that: a slave receiving an inheritance! God will **reward** us for faithfulness. So when you feel overworked and underpaid, remember that your ultimate promotion or compensation doesn't come in this life. It comes in glory. Work is something we'll do forever. I firmly believe that this life is preparation for service in Christ's Millennial Kingdom (1,000 year reign; Rev.20) and in the Eternal State of things on the New Heaven and Earth. Some of the last verses in the Bible, Revelation 22:3 says, "His servants shall serve [i.e. worship] Him." I don't know about you, but I'm going farm that New Earth like Adam did in Eden, and I won't have to spray thistle! I can't wait. We are going to work hard and do things we love forever—with greater creativity and passion and soul—for God's glory. So let's take that job and love it *now* for God's glory and so that people will see the difference Christ makes in our lives (see 1 Thess. 4:11-12)

¹ Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1976), 92.

² Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Colossians*, 2023 edition, <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/colossians.pdf>, 91.

³ Ibid.



FALL 2023 // Connect Group Questions

Series: Created to Worship // September 27, 2023

Work as Worship, Gen. 2:15, 3:17-19; Col. 3:22-4:1

Introduction

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. However, due to your leader's preference or the natural flow of discussion in your group, it should not be expected to cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 10-15 min)*

Since this is the first time your group is meeting, please take some time to introduce yourselves and share one fun or interesting fact about yourself.

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion:

1. Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth.
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives unto the glory of God.
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what God's Word is teaching you.
2. Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group or read together as each person takes a couple of verses.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Question 1:

In our intermittent study of worship this year, we have learned that worship is not something that we only do for 3 hours on Sunday. Worship is a lifestyle of obedience lived in response to God. It is "an engaging response to God." How have you grown in your understanding of worship this year? Have you ever thought of work as worship?

Question 2:

How does understanding work as worship bring purpose to your everyday life?

Question 3:

Being a Christian comes with tremendous social responsibility and influence. What would happen if every Christian worked as if working for the Lord in worship?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10-15 min)*

A significant part of coming together and “connecting” in Christian fellowship is being open and honest with our lives. Praying with a group of people may be new or it may be familiar to you. While we encourage everyone to pray out loud, please do not feel obligated to do so.

Take a few moments to share any prayer requests. Consider praying about what God teaching you through His Word and the recent discussion that seems the most applicable. Consider what you notice about your own relationship with Jesus. Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?