

“Work as Worship” // Genesis 2:15–17; Colossians 3:23–24 // *God and the Rest of the Week* #2

Prayer for Ryan

Welcome to all campuses...

Introduction:

Big idea behind this series: Most Christians think of worship as something they do inside the **church**.

- And getting really committed to Jesus means getting **busy** at the church: volunteering at the **church nursery**, attending **small group**; going on a **mission trip**, serving at the **soup kitchen**...
- Three to thrive: too busy to sin

Our jobs (your jobs—secular jobs: Me, I’m a PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN), this kind of thinking believes, **are necessities** that must be endured to put bread on the table. If God has any interest in our jobs, it’s just that we don’t cheat and tithe off of our salaries.

And **when we think about people** who try to bring God into the workplace, all kinds of disturbing images come to mind:

- Opening a coffee shop called **“He Brews”** or “holy grounds.”
ADAM AND EVE STORE
- **Defiantly saying “Merry Christmas”** rather than “Happy Holidays” in the checkout line or **sneaking a “Have a blessed day”** into a salutation.
- **Forcing awkward moments into sales calls:**

- Now that I’ve sold you **life insurance**... how about **insurance for life** after death?
- **I’ve got your name on our mailing list**, but the more important question is, “Is your name in the Lamb’s Book of Life?”

Giving away Jesus-themed gifts at Christmas like your pastor’s books...

That’s not me... Is that what it means serve God in your work?

Well, believe it or not, the Bible actually has **a lot to say about our work**... **In fact, in Genesis 2**, at the first mention of work in the Bible, the Hebrew word God uses for it is **“abad,”** which shares the same root word as worship.¹

- **Adam worshipped God in the Garden** not just by reading the **Bible** and **praying** and staying away from a **few bad apples**; he worshipped God by doing the work God put him in the garden to do, too.
- And I told you this last week, but surely it cannot be coincidental that the **majority of the parables** that Jesus told had a workplace context.
- And of the **forty miracles** recorded in the book of Acts, thirty-nine of them occurred *outside* of a church setting.
 - It is apparent that the **God of the Bible is as concerned with displaying his power outside the walls of the church as he is within it.**

¹ Sailhamer’s position comes from Deuteronomy 30:15–18, in which the same two Hebrew verbs from Genesis 2:15 are translated as “worship” and “keep” (in the sense of “obey” God’s spoken commandment). Adam and Eve were to cultivate the garden of Eden, but their primary purposes were to worship the Lord and obey His word, purposes that have been passed down to us. [John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 100-101.]

- Kuyper: not one square inch of the entire cosmos over which Jesus not emphatically declare “mine.”

So I want to suggest **five ways you worship God while you work.**

- **Part 1 of a 2 part message**, but I’m not going to be preaching **next week; GOSPEL AT WORK** conference...
- Bob Dahl; Al Mohler... local Christian business leaders...

(Unusual: NO ONE CENTRAL TEXT: Genesis 2; Colossians 3 (other verses along the way)

- BTW, I taught something like this for the first time 3 years ago, and I was shocked at how many people said, “I have never heard anything like that before.” That year, the 1 sermon I preached on it was the **most downloaded sermon that year.** (More than the ones on SEX!))

I. 'WORSHIPFUL' WORK FULFILLS GOD'S PURPOSES IN CREATION

Gen. 2:15: God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, with the assignment **“to work the ground and keep it.”**

- This was **before the curse**—so work was not a punishment inflicted on Adam for his sin. It was a part of God’s original design.

The **word for work literally means** “to prepare” or “to develop.”

- God made Adam to be a **gardener**. A gardener is not a park ranger who just guards the garden.
- God put Adam there to develop it. He was to take **the raw materials** of the earth and develop them for the glory of God and the benefit of humans.
- He **made man in his image**, and as God was a creator,² he put Adam in the Garden to be a **co-creator**...
- Do you remember the word God used for his creation? **“Good.”** Good is good, but good is not perfect.

- Perfect means cannot be improved upon. God created the world **raw, in a “good” state**, so that we could develop it and cultivate it for his glory and others’ good.
 - Here’s a way to understand it: **when you see my wife, she’s perfect.** Her dress; her make-up, her hair. **She cannot be improved upon.**
 - When she first wakes up in the morning and gets out of bed, she’s good.
- We’re not **park rangers, we’re gardeners:** We take the raw materials of the earth and develop them for God’s glory and the benefit of humans.
 - **Contractors** take the raw materials of sand and cement and use them to create buildings.
 - **Artists** take the raw materials of color or music and arrange them into art.
 - **Lawyers** take principles of justice and codify them into laws that benefit society.

This is key: **as we do this, in a way, God is himself** at work creating through us.

The Reformer Martin Luther took **Psalm 147:13**, which says, **“For God strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. 14 He makes peace in your borders; he fills you with the finest of the wheat.”** and he asked: *How exactly does God do those things?*

- How does he **strengthen the bars** of the city? By **city planners** and **architects**; by **politicians** who pass good laws to protect the city.
- How does he **bless our children within our midst**? Through the work of **teachers** and **pediatricians**.
- How does he **make peace in our borders**? By means of **good lawyers** and **policeman**.
- How does he **fill us with the finest of wheat**? By **farmers** and **factory workers** and **restaurant owners**.
- Our professions, Luther said, are like the **“masks”** God wears in caring for the world.

² 12 times in Genesis 1–2 we are told God made something)

- **He said this:** “When we pray the Lord’s Prayer we ask God to ‘give us this day our daily bread.’ And he does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal.” All these are in play when God answers our prayer for daily bread.

You see, some of you, in your work, feel this almost divine satisfaction (maybe not even a Christian)... but a sense of satisfaction. Like you are doing what you were born to do!

- The word “**vocation**” comes from the Latin word “voca,” which means “to call.” It’s how God designed you and *called* you to serve in the world.
- In fact, there are two Old Testament figures in Exodus 31, **Bezalel and Oholiab**, whom Moses says were filled with the Spirit. **How did they express that?** By being expert craftsmen. Their expression of being filled with the Spirit was doing excellent work.
- It reminds me of that scene in *Chariots of Fire*, where the Christian Olympic star, Eric Liddell, in his preparation for the 1924 Olympics, is confronted by his sister who thinks he should be a missionary to China. Liddell responds, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.”
- Many businesspeople feel that. They are doing something they love and feel like, “***This is what I was made for.***” When I do it, I **feel God’s pleasure**. It’s like I feel, even, the **Spirit of God at work** in me in this.

Now, one word of clarification: **one of the curses of the fall** was that work became toilsome. God **cursed the ground** and said that thorns and thistles would frustrate our efforts. Work at that point became a compulsory act of survival.

For many of you, maybe your work is **partially fulfilling**, but it also toilsome and draining.

For others of you, maybe you **hate your job** entirely and you only do it to survive.

Those effects are part of the **sad result of the curse**. And you may **have to work for a while** in that kind of condition...

- One guy I was reading said: “Our generation insists that work be fulfilling and fruitful. That it fully fit our talents and our dreams... and that we be paid exorbitantly for it.”³
- This sounds great, but this is *not the world we live in*. It’s the world Adam and Eve *used to live in*.

So what do you do if you are in that type of job?

- You can **still do it faithfully as an act of service**... it is still helping someone and there can be a certain pleasure in that. And wait for heaven to be fully fulfilled.
- And consider that **there might be a distinction between your job** and the pursuit of the calling God has placed in you.
 - **The Apostle Paul’s calling**, for example, was to be an apostle to the Gentiles, but he also made tents. Making tents was a part of Paul’s calling, but not the heart of his calling.⁴
 - Some people do other things to free them to do the main thing.
 - **My dad** certainly enjoyed managing people at a textile plant, but he loved mentoring college students and teenagers
- **If you are one of those rare people** that finds a career that fits your calling from the beginning—that is a blessing and not a right

II. ‘WORSHIPFUL’ WORK PURSUES THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

³ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*

⁴ Inspired by Os Guinness’ talk at Gospel at Work, Washington, DC, 2013.

If our work is done “unto God,” it should be done according to the **highest standards of excellence**: as an offering to God!

Paul says, *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.” (Colossians 3:23–24)*

You have a **higher boss than our employer**; we work for a **greater reward than our salary**.

In everything we do, Paul says, we do it unto God, which means we do it as a statement about the **worthiness of our God**.

- **C. S. Lewis once noted** how valleys undiscovered by human eyes are still filled with beautiful flowers. **For whom did God create that beauty, if no human eyes would ever see it?** Lewis’ answer was that God does some things only for his own pleasure. He sees even when no one else does.
- **Christians make beautiful things for God—often** even when no one else notices.

Someone says, *“Well, my boss is terrible. He doesn’t reward me properly; he doesn’t ever give me the recognition.”*

- Listen: **that’s hard!** I know. It causes a loss of motivation.
- But you’re **not really doing it for him**. You’re doing it for God.
- Interestingly, many of the people to whom Paul is writing had the **worst possible boss situation**. Paul says, “Slaves, obey your masters.”
 - Someone says today, “Man, my boss **totally owns me.**” For them, it was literal.
- Even there, however, when they were in the worst, least rewarding circumstance, they were to do their work unto God as a statement of his worthiness.

Paul says that this is one of the things that should **set Christians apart**: they do their work for the glory of God.

- Whether we **eat or drink or mop floors or write contracts**, they do all to the glory of God.
- In everything they do they say, “The way I do this is a statement about your worthiness! I do it for you!”
- COLLEGE STUDENTS: **Many Christian college students** think the only way they serve God at college is to be involved in campus ministry. Yes, but how well you do your schoolwork is a statement about the glory of God (**booed**)
- We’re not all straight-A students, but for all Christians, what they do they do as unto the Lord.

In the same way...

III. ‘WORSHIPFUL’ WORK REFLECTS THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF ETHICS

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who worked in British government, once played a practical joke on 12 respected and well-known men in Great Britain. He sent out them each an anonymous telegram from inside the government that said, “Flee at once. All is discovered.” He checked back in 6 hours and all 12 were making plans to leave.

Lack of integrity is nothing new in the workplace, but work that worships God will conform to the highest standards of ethics, because it seeks to **demonstrate the justice and integrity** of God.

Business ethics really matter to the believer because our work is **done unto God** and our **ethical practices reflect on God**.

God says in **Proverbs 11:1**, *“A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.”*

- A “false balance” means: a **fudging mileage** reports, padded **business expenses**, skimmed **time cards**, **calling in sick** when we’re not, commandeering **office supplies** for personal use, **unreported income**, and so on—are an “abomination” to him.

To worship God in your work means having standards higher than even the world! It means going beyond even the world's standards.

I can't tell you how many Christians I've heard say that they don't like to do business with "other Christians." These are not people in the world, but Christians talking about themselves.

- I saw an interview in a Christian publication with the CEO of one of the largest consulting groups for Microsoft software. He is an industry veteran and a solid believer. In the interview, he said he **got burned doing business with professing Christian companies (fish)**. The interviewer asked why, and he said that once the other business finds out he's also a Christian, they take what he called "**extensions of grace.**" That may take the form of not **paying on time**, not **delivering work** when promised, or asking for **fee or labor reductions** without cause.⁵
- "Ministry discount"
- Waitresses

Psalm 15:1-3 (THE MESSAGE): "God, who gets invited to dinner at your place? How do we get on your guest list?"

God says: "Walk straight, act right, tell the truth. Don't hurt your friend, don't blame your neighbor for things you did... Keep your word even when it costs you, make an honest living, and never take a bribe."

IV. 'WORSHIPFUL' WORK MAKES BLESSING OTHERS ITS BOTTOM LINE

To follow Jesus means that you think about your life the way he thought about his: as an offering to serve others.

Paul said: 2 Cor 8:9...

- He leveraged his assets. He leveraged his position of strength.

⁵ <http://www.blogos.org/compellingtruth/Arguments-4-Bad-Church-Business.php>

That's what you do when you follow Jesus. You begin to leverage our places of strength to bless and serve others, like Jesus leveraged his for us.

Parable I think of in this context: Luke 14:12-14: for whom are you throwing the party?

You say: What does that look like?

- It may just be your attitude: The joy of service.
- Forgiving somebody.
 - I recently heard a story about a young college graduate who landed a job on **Madison Avenue** in one of the advertising world's most prestigious firms. Shortly after she got there, she made a mistake that cost the company nearly \$25,000. Madison Avenue is not a world defined by grace, and she expected to be fired by the end of the day. Her boss, however went before his board of directors and convinced them to allow the blame for her mistake to fall on him instead. When this young woman heard what her boss had done, she came to him in tears. She asked him why, in that cutthroat atmosphere, he would choose to cut his own throat for her. He answered by sharing how Jesus had done a very similar thing for him, stepping in the way of the wrath that he deserved. Because of the great grace that Jesus had shown him, he wanted to display a similar mercy to others when he could.

For you who own businesses:

- It means you **think about more than merely personal profit in your bottom line.**
 - You'll start to ask questions like, "**I know we can make a profit** from this, but is it genuinely helpful to people?"
 - Or, **how can I use this business** not just to enrich myself, but to bless others?

- Now, I'm not trying to say there is any dichotomy between those two. People often think "profit" and "business" is bad.
 - **Good, profitable business** is one of the greatest benefits to the poor.
 - Good business makes the **water in the harbor rise** so all the boats will rise—not ZERO SUM.
- But it means that **you think not just about personal profits** in your business, but the blessing of everyone involved.
 - **Medical professionals** may see that some practice is legal and makes money but doesn't add benefit to people's lives.
 - **Certain kinds of development may be good** for few, but harmful for the community.
- And it will probably mean you **give away a lot** of the personal profits you make from business.
 - **2 Cor 8:9... Because that's what Jesus did for you. Those who experience the gospel become like it.**

Before I go on to our last one, let me point something out: **Many people wonder how to be an effective witness** for Jesus in the workplace. Just doing these 4 things will set you off as a **completely different community**.

Peter said, "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." (1 Peter 3:15 ESV)

- Peter's context like ours...
- **We were to live in such a way...** that people had to ask about our motives.
- **Honoring Christ first**—in the business place, means doing business according to **these 4 things**—fulfilling the creation; with excellence, integrity, and to bless others.
- **That will make others ask: why?** Tell me about...
 - **The motives** that you have.

- **Why you have the joy you possess that I don't.**
- **How you respond to persecution... grace.**

Q: Is that happening to you, in your business?

- Do you work so hard, with such excellence, integrity, and grace—that people sense the reality of a hope and an **invisible kingdom that they just have to ask about?**

Lastly, then I have one word of warning for you...

V. 'WORSHIPFUL' WORK SEEKS TO ADVANCE JESUS' MISSION WHERE IT CAN

Work done by disciples of Jesus should be done with a view toward the Great Commission (because that is our marching orders!)

Billy Graham says the next Great Awakening will likely take place in the workplace.

- **You say, "Well, how can I be an effective witness in the marketplace?" COME TO THE CONFERENCE AND I'LL TELL YOU HOW**

And, another thing I'll tell you there, is that I believe the next wave of missions will be on the **wings of business**.

- You see, most of the countries in the world in **most need of a gospel presence** are also those in the **greatest need of business development**.
- If you lay a **map of world poverty** out and overlay it with one showing the places in the world that are the most unevangelized, you'll see an incredible amount of overlap.
- That means you have an incredible amount of opportunity!
- **"10-40 WINDOW": for you it's a door!**

Maybe **God made you good at that skill** so you could take it to places where he is not known.

Message: “For Just Such a Time as This”: *What if God made you good at that skill to open up a **whole nation** to the gospel and give you an inheritance in an eternal kingdom?*

- **Sports marketing guy**—great degree; worked for a big firm; (found out his firm had a branch in a place in the Middle East where we had a team; asks to be transferred—missionary that didn’t cost us a dime; now he is going back with his own company)

Not every Christian, of course, will be led to perform their business in an unreached people group. But I want to challenge you to ask the question.

- **When I was in college,** I was waiting on God to call me... **burning bush; Virgin Mary** to appear in the foam of my skinny caramel macchiato; the question is not whether you are called, but **where and how...**

What we say to our graduates: *“Do what you do well for the glory of God; do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.”*

- **Whatever you do...** Not all to be pastors... VOCATION
- **Do it somewhere strategic...** why **do the only factors** behind where you choose to live and work have to be where you make the most money, or where you want to live? **Why do they have to be the main ones?**
 - Why **not choose the city** you pursue employment in based on where you can be effective for the mission?

“Do what you do well for the glory of God; do it somewhere strategic for the mission of God.”

- Isn’t that a missional vision **we all** should adopt?

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

- Do your work well... and then stand before the lost kings of the earth so that the nations will worship!

A word of warning: WORSHIP GOD, NOT YOUR WORK

When Adam and Eve fell, our relationship to work changed. Instead of being something we pursued to glorify God and serve others, work became one of our primary sources of **identity** and **idolatry**.⁶

- We define our worth by the status of our job—or maybe even by the **fact that we don’t have to work**.
- We depend on the security of our job to take care of us in the future.

You see this change in relationship to work in the descendants of Adam and Eve (Gen 4). Two lines descended from Adam and Eve

- **Cain—who killed Abel** and was driven out by God into the wilderness—his descendants developed agriculture, music and metal—**great workers**, like they were supposed to be, but the thing to notice is that they were defined by their jobs
 - This **culminated in Gen 11**, at the tower of Babel, in which they built this magnificent tower... a great achievement, but it was to make a great name for themselves.
 - What God gave to us as a means of saying, **“Look at God and worship him,”** has now become a means of saying “Look at me, and be impressed.”
- In contrast to the descendants of Cain, the **descendants of Seth (godly line)**, were not defined by work, but were defined instead as **“those who began to call upon the name of the Lord.”** (Gen 4:25)
 - The **point is not, of course, that they didn’t work**, or work less. The point is that worshippers of God are not defined by their work.
 - Instead, they are **defined by the name of the Lord** whom they worship.

⁶ Much help here taken from Michael Lawrence’ talk at *The Gospel and Work* conference at Covenant Life Church in Washington, DC, 2013.

Because of the fall, many of us worship our work in that we make it our **identity**—the second question we ask!

We also make it our **security**.

Work is a terrible God; God is a great God.

- He's the one you can **depend on**.
- He's the one who has taken care of your **ultimate problem**—not lack of money or status, but death.
 - He died to **reconcile you** to God
 - If he took care of you in that, won't he care for your day to day needs?

If you give your soul to him and then you can enjoy your work, because you are not depending on it for life. Or, you could say it like this: **When Jesus is your life, you can enjoy the rest of your life.**

Conclusion:

Summit:

I don't want us to ignore your work life!

- It's where you spend 85% of your week!
- **Work matters to God; God matters to work**

Two things I want to give you:

- **gospelatwork.com** (promo code: gospelatwork) gives you \$10 off through Monday!)
- Right Now Media

How I want to end—

Commissioning:

Robert Briner, *Roaring Lambs*: "There should be no less support or attention for an earnest Christian young person who has been

*accepted to the Juilliard School of Music than for one going off to a theological seminary. The church needs writers, performers, artists, speakers, politicians, businessmen, businesswomen, and workers in every craft and trade. In God's eyes there should be no hierarchy, there certainly should not be in ours."*⁷

- Artists, Musicians, Creatives, Advertising, Marketing, Film, Television, Web or Print Design (**they all stand alone—no one understands them**)
- Entrepreneurs, Business Owners
- Healthcare, Pharmaceutical, BioTech, Medical, or in some facet of the field of science (**lot of drug dealers in RDU**)
- Education, Athletics, Coaching
- Government, state, local, federal, including our military (**if you gave me a ticket, sit back down**)
- Law, Finance, Accounting, Tax
- Social Services or the Non-profit sector (**Christian ministry**)
- Real Estate, Construction, Architecture, Transportation or in a trade such as plumbers, electricians, painters, mechanics or carpenters
- Service industry, such as Retail, Food Service, Hair Stylist, Chefs
- Business, Technology, Consulting, Professional Services, Engineering, Manufacturing
- **Other**

⁷ Robert Briner, *Roaring Lambs: A Gentle Plan to Radically Change Your World*

Bullpen:

Work is worship when you fulfill God's purpose for creation: you prepare and develop the earth for the benefit of humans and the glory of God. You are God's mask, and he is working through you.

QUESTION: Where would you be if Jesus had leveraged his position entirely for self-benefit? If Jesus **had approached his potential**, and **his assets**, the ways you are approaching yours...?

If Christians were to act in their jobs with equity and fairness, that alone would set them apart. But the gospel takes us even farther.

- **Scott L:** needed vs. irreplaceable.
- "Twenty percent of the world's population lives in Muslim countries, yet only four percent of world trade comes from these countries... We are living at a point in world history of unprecedented opportunities for the expansion of the Christian faith. No country is closed to business. In no country is it illegal to love people. There are huge doors of opportunity wide open before us, if we are willing to equip ourselves adequately and walk through them. Countries considered "closed" to missionaries welcome Christians who come as tentmakers."⁸
- Stealthy evangelism moments:
 - Leaving tracts on the toilets
 - Giving out copies of your pastors' book *Gospel or SAJIYH* as Christmas gifts (a great idea)
 - Or perhaps you remember the **2004 incident of an American Airlines** pilot who, in his pre-flight announcements, asked all the Christians on board the plane to raise their hands. He then suggested that during the flight the other passengers talk to those people about their faith. He also told passengers he'd also be happy to talk to anyone who had questions. Understandably, it freaked a lot of people out: the pilot of your airplane

talking to you about whether or not you're ready to meet Jesus?⁹

- ~~While they might admire the guy's zeal, many Christian businesspeople think, "I just don't think I could do that and keep my job."~~

The **book of 1 Peter** is written to a group of Christians trying to live and witness in a **very hostile environment**. Peter tells them to live as a **holy nation**, as God's peculiar people. He says:

⁸ *Discovering the Mission of God: Best Practices for the 21st Century*, Mike Barnett

⁹ <http://www.travelkb.com/Uwe/Forum.aspx/air/2002/American-Airlines-Preaching-Pilot>. Found in John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission* (Zondervan, 2010), 172-173.