

**Ask: Why do you work? What's the significance of your work?** For many, their passion is their job, and they work to make a name for themselves, to bring themselves glory and status. Others work for the comfort and privilege their employment can provide: security, identity, and pleasure. Others work to make a difference in the world, giving them purpose and hope. Our motivations for work come from the story and promises we assign to it.

The world tells many tales about work, but God tells the true story in the Bible. It begins in Eden and continues in the New Heavens and the New Earth. In between, work suffers a tragic crisis but experiences a glorious redemption. **What is the purpose of our work? Our work is an act of worship and one significant way we love the Lord and our neighbors. This purpose means you can work with joy and freedom because, as one author writes, “who you work for is more important than what you do.”**<sup>1</sup>

### **1<sup>st</sup>. God's Work Explains Our Work.**

Our experience of the curse upon our work may make us think that work originated because of the Fall and ends at Jesus' return. But the story of work does not begin with humans but with God. **God's work is the key to understanding our work.**

**Scene one of God's story begins at creation.** The Bible opens with God at work. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* (Gen. 1:1). In the first two chapters of Genesis tell us God “created” or “made” nineteen times. And, *“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”* (Gen. 2:2).

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert & Traeger, *The Gospel at Work*, 16.

**On the sixth day, as the crown of his creation, he made male and female in his image.** Whatever else the “image of God” may mean, it is clear that humans reflect and represent God in the world he made. Genesis 1:28 says, “*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.’*” **He gave them work that reflected the very nature of God.** As God creates, sustains, and rules, he made human beings rule over the world as his representative image bearer. **God declared his work very good only after he created and commissioned man.**

**In Genesis 2, God rules and orders all he made and places man in paradise:** “*The Lord God took than man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it*” (2:15). Adam and Eve were to “*work*” and “*guard*” the garden,” and as it flourished, they flourished. **God tasked them to grow and expand that garden, which was their home, temple for worship, and place of work all in one, until the garden and image bearers covered the entire world.** Their job was to fill the earth with the glory of God. **Lesson 1: We work for the glory and praise of God, and work is itself an act of worship.**

**Scene two introduces the Fall.** God entrusted Adam and Eve to guard the garden, and they failed. **They have a conversation with the serpent instead of crushing its head.** They rebel along with Satan, and God expels them from the Garden. They must still represent God by working, but their work is now cursed because of sin. God says in Gen. 3:17, “***Through painful toil you will eat... all the days of your life.***” Work becomes tedious. The cursed ground “***will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field***” (Gen. 3:18). **Work becomes futile and can never produce paradise.**

These curses immediately demolish the assumptions of society. As Tim Keller observes, “[*Our generation*] insists that work be fulfilling and fruitful, that it fully fit [*our*] talents and [*our*] dreams, and that it ‘does something amazing for the world,’ as one Google executive described his company’s mission.”<sup>2</sup> However, we don’t live in nor are we progressing this world toward paradise. We must work to survive and preserve. Gen. 3:19 says, “*By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken.*”

After the Fall, work becomes an idol we use to build a name for ourselves. Genesis 11:1-4 gives us a prime example: ‘*Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly...*’ Then they said, ‘*Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.*’” (Gen 11:1-4). We build a name for ourselves and make work the ultimate source of security and satisfaction.

We either sense our jobs are unfulfilling or sense a deep-seated pride in what we have accomplished. But work cannot sustain our identities this way. It’s like when we drive our cars; we are happy when we make good travel time. But when you hit traffic, imagine getting out of your car and kicking it angrily because it doesn’t fly! We develop excessive expectations of our jobs that our work cannot possibly carry. So, work frequently disappoints. Some define themselves directly *by their work*, others by their recreation *outside of work*. Now, we worship work or ourselves through work.

**Christ redeems our work in scene three.** Jesus says in John 17, “*I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.*” Then, in John 19:30, he says, “***It is***

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<sup>2</sup> Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 93

*finished!*” Christ redeemed all *people* who trust in him from the law's curse. However, Christians still live in the fallen world, and work remains challenging.

Gilbert and Traeger list four ways the gospel of Jesus’ work changes your work (This includes stay at home mom!). **First, you have a new master:** “*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.... You are serving the Lord Christ*” (Col. 3:23-24). **Working for Christ frees you to worship God in your work. You please God with every task you faithfully perform, and it frees you to pursue skill in your craft.** **Second, you have a new assignment.** Your overarching mission is to love God and your neighbor through your work. Love frees you to serve others wholeheartedly. **Third, you have a new confidence.** Knowing you are loved by God and finding security in him means you don’t need work to boost your esteem. This confidence helps you trust God’s sovereignty and fight the worry and anxiety that comes from needs. **Fourth, you have new rewards:** “*rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free*” (Eph. 6:7-8). **No salary, or what your salary can buy, can compete with the everlasting rewards from Christ. These rewards free you to find joy in work and to rest from your work. The gospel changes your heart, not your job. Our work should showcase God’s work in us.**

**The fourth and final scene of the story is consummation.** Romans 8:19: “*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*” **God will make everything new and recreate our world and a Garden paradise without curse.**

**Work will be satisfying and fruitful. We will have abundant energy for and joy in our task.** Isaiah 65:17-23: *“Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind....They will build houses and dwell in them, they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit... my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. They will not toil in vain, or bear children doomed to misfortune, for they will be a people blessed by the Lord...”*

## 2<sup>nd</sup>. The King’s Purposes.

Why Does God want us to work? **First, we work for God's glory and worship him through our work.** We love God with all our strength when working wholeheartedly for his glory because we *“are serving the Lord, not man”* (Eph. 6:7).

**Second, We work to reflect God’s character** (Gen. 1:26, 28; 2:15). He made us in his image, and like him, our work brings blessings to society. It brings order to chaos. With God, we form a full God’s creation as he did.

**Third, we work for money.** The love of money is *“the root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Tim 6:10), but we can also glorify God with our use of it. Paul says, *“For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat”* (1 Thess. 3:10). And, *“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need”* (Eph. 4:28). We must work to eat and provide for others. **We love others in our work.** God answers our prayer through work to *“give us our daily bread”* (Matt. 6). Work is God’s means to provide for others and sustain society.

**Fourth, work for enjoyment.** Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 says, “Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.”<sup>19</sup> Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.” God has designed work so that we may find some enjoyment in it. Gilbert writes, “You don’t have to enjoy the mechanics of what you do in order to find a measure of enjoyment and satisfaction in your work.” You can find a measure of satisfaction in doing your job well for the glory of a King who cares about anything you do.

**Fifth, adorn the gospel with your work.** Paul says in Titus 2:9-10, “Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” The excellence of your work and your character adorn the gospel that we proclaim with our words. May you be the aroma of Christ in your workplace. But how?

### 3<sup>rd</sup>. Sharing the Gospel in the Workplace.

Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:18-19, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” You are an ambassador of Christ from 9-5, 24/7.

**First, do good work as a Christian, not being idle or making work an idol.** Phil. 2:14-16 “Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine

*as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life...*” Be distinct. Respond to situations like a Christian, opposite of how a worldly person would world. Go out of your way to be salt and light, return good for evil, help others with their work, and cheer for their success.

**Second, put God on the table early and find natural ways of sharing spiritual activity.**

Identifying as a Christian early will help interactions be less awkward later. Share your testimony, tell them about your church, or share what you learned in a Bible study. Paul says, *“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person”* (Col. 4:4-5). *Be winsome and bold.*

**Third, Build relationships beyond the office.** Spend lunches with people. Grab a coffee after work and get to know them. Host them in your house sometime. Invite them to church, where they can see the love of Christ on display.

**Fourth, have a mission field mindset.** How many Christians are in your field or your workplace? There may be hardly any true Christians in the field. Go and make disciples.

**God will supply the courage and fruit; he only expects you to sow and water.** Paul says, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth”* (1 Cor. 3:5-6).

*What is the purpose of our work? Our work is an act of worship so that you can work with joy and freedom.*