

# Working for Jesus

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Victory Life Church, Durant MDWK — Wednesdays, February 19, 2025

## Review

Humans made in God's image means "representation" and "rule" in *partnership* (Genesis 1:26-28)

How do we glorify God? We "work" as an extension of being made in the image of God. According to Genesis 1:26-28 in the creation of mankind, the image of God is expressed through "representation" and "rule," and this is exercised through partnership.

To *rule* is to *work*. Work is intrinsic to what it means to be human.

God's **design** for work is to transform the "wild and waste" into "order and beauty."

## Introduction

**Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)** 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.

Who do you work for if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus? We may work within a particular company or industry or economy, and we may work under a boss or a board, but who do we actually work *for*? We work for the Lord Jesus.

Our work for the Lord is not just "church and non-profit" work, but any work we engage in that we view Jesus as the one we work for. Our labor in Christ is not in vain. So how do we rethink our jobs in the light of Christ and this biblical story? We first have to see Jesus as the complete center of our whole lives. This is what discipleship means.

How do we know if we are doing work that is working for Jesus? Jesus recognizes that work and life are difficult.

We live in an age of radical (and extreme) individualism where we have redefined work with "self" at the center. We have been conditioned by the culture of the world to a very self-centered and isolated perspective about life in general, and work in specific.

There are two polarized effects of this self-centered and isolated perspective: 1. A "workaholic" who worships work as the means to get what they want (more); or 2. A "sluggard" whose desire is to work as little as possible in order to be as free as possible. Both sides still have "self" (my wants, my needs, my desires) at the center. Neither "self" nor our work should be the center of our lives; Christ should hold that position for us. But work is still a Biblical command as well as a gift. So, though it should not be at the center of our lives, it should constitute part of the circumference. We work for God's glory as His covenant partners.

## Scripture Criteria for Work

### 1. The **NECESSITY** of our work: Does it **PROVIDE**?

**2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 (ESV)** For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is **not willing to work**, let him **not eat**. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we **command** and **encourage** in the Lord Jesus Christ to **do their work quietly** and to **earn their own living**.

Paul commands those in the church to work in such a way that it provides. He even goes so far as to say that if you are unwilling to work, you should not eat. He is not referring here to those who are not ABLE to work, but those who are able to work, yet are unwilling. Being an able mind and bodied person who chooses not to work, yet is free-loading on other people's work to provide is against scriptural mandate.

The most dignified reality of work is the strenuous exertion to secure the goods necessary for living. It should be hard and something we give ourselves to. We might not think of work primarily as what provides for our existence, but what satisfies our inmost being.

Example: pursuing personal dreams at others' expense (Hobby vs Work)

**Proverbs 26:14 (ESV)** *As a door swings back and forth on its hinges, so the lazy person turns over in bed.*

Freedom does not lie in not having to work but in being and doing what God created you to be and do.

**1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (NLT)** Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and **working with your hands**, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will **respect the way you live**, and **you will not need to depend on others**.

The first criterion for work is directly connected to the petition in the Lord's Prayer - "give us this day our daily bread." How does God provide our sustenance? Does He drop bread from heaven? Mostly, how God provides for us is by making us able (mind and body) to work to provide food for ourselves and those within our care. Sometimes, this can mean miraculous provision, especially if you cannot work. As a community of faith, we are called to provide for even more than ourselves and take care of those who cannot work. The prayer moves us out of our self-centeredness, into God's purposes and actions and how those reshape how we live and how we work.

Example: Story of Noah — God says he will save him, but commanded Noah to build an ark — this is covenant partnership.

### 2. The **SELECTION** of our work: Is it **HONEST**?

What does God want us to do for work? Something. Anything that is honest.

**Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)** 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.

This reminds us that our work is for more than just survival but also for sharing. Work is to be an “others-centered” activity in our lives.

Much about our work and economy is outside of our control (we work for businesses that make decisions that are out of our control). And due to sin, there are many of those decisions in our commerce that are not scriptural but dehumanize people and deface creation.

Two clarifying questions about the honesty of our work:

1. Is what I am doing being done to the best of my ability?
2. Is what I am doing worthy of being done?

1. Is what I am doing being done to the best of my ability?

Is what I am doing being done to the best of my ability for the glory of God? If your work is primarily about personal fulfillment, then you will mostly not work to the best of your ability until you get your “dream job.” Let me give you some reality: your dream job isn’t what you think, and doing a poor job at any other job is not Scriptural either.

**Luke 16:10 (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.”

If you cannot work to the best of your ability in your current job and your current tasks, however menial or boring or unfulfilling they may be, you will never learn how to be faithful at a higher level of work. Not all work is fun; much of it is toil. You may not love what you are doing, but are you doing it to the best of your ability for God’s glory? We can bring Christ into our work - bringing meaning and purpose to the most menial tasks.

Brother Lawrence was a little monk that was crippled. A book was written about him entitled, “The Practice of the Presence of God.” Brother Lawrence was a dishwasher, cleaning dishes and sweeping floors unto Jesus, and experienced a vibrant and inspiring relationship with Jesus, whose witness has lasted hundreds of years. And he was a dishwasher.

What is our witness at work? Is it that we are lazy, apathetic, disengaged, and critical just because it is not our “dream job”?

2. Is what I am doing worthy of being done?

Is it worth doing? Where areas of biblical morality are being violated, you need to ask this in order to know whether you should leave or not. If your work is considered sin, please prayerfully consider God’s direction in what to do about it.

If it is not sin, trust that God can be at work in you doing your job to the best of your ability for God’s glory, trusting that he can lead you on the proper career path He has for you.

3. The **MOTIVATION** of our work: Does it **CONTRIBUTE**?

**1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (ESV)** “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, **but the good of his neighbor**.

Society demands you seek your own good (or the good of your own tribe). No biblical precedent gives us the right to pursue our work for our own fulfillment and good only. God is our end and our goal; we serve in obedience to Him for our fellow man. Our work is to be self-giving (for sharing, not just survival).

**Mark 10:42–45 (ESV)**<sup>42</sup> And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Are you doing what you are doing for your own good, or are you concerned about how it can be used for God’s Kingdom work? Many are tyrannized by the desire to possess the right to your own life and your own satisfaction, but it leaves us restless in our pursuit. For the “workaholic” - you will work harder to possess more; for the “sluggard” - you will do whatever it takes just to maintain. Our motivation for work is a heart issue - we work so that we can give ourselves away.

Example: Rich young ruler (Luke 18) - give up what is at the center

Our motivation is key — what motivates us? Is Jesus truly the foundation of our whole lives - our work and our motivations for work? When the motivation is for the good of others, it brings satisfaction in work even if the work itself is not satisfying. No verse gives us a promise from God that your work will be fun.

“Work jumped from being a 'material production' to being much more about 'identity production.' In other words, work used to be about making things. Then all of a sudden, work was about making *us*.” “When our work becomes who we are, and we derive our ultimate value and meaning from it, it runs the risk of becoming our God. The thing we worship. Bow down to. Become slaves.”<sup>1</sup> ~ Jefferson Bethke

**Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)** 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.

“The task may appear unimportant or trivial, but the person doing it is never that, and he or she has the opportunity to turn the job into an act of worship.” ~ N.T. Wright

What kind of work qualifies as working for Jesus? “Whatever you do.” If you are working for the Lord Jesus, serving at your job in whatever capacity, but as unto the Lord, then whatever your

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<sup>1</sup> Jefferson Bethke. *To Hell With the Hustle*. p. Xiv-xv

job, it is work that is considered working “as for the Lord.” There is no such thing as certain work glorifying Jesus or being more pleasing to Him than any other. If it is work for the Lord, there is no difference between a pastor, a barista, a teller, an Uber driver, a trash truck driver, a stay-at-home mom, a real estate agent, or an accountant, or a receptionist. If you are serving the Lord Jesus in your work, then that job is pleasing to the Lord.

**Revelation 22:1-5 (ESV)** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

We work **for Jesus** and for the Inheritance in Resurrection

**1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in **the work of the Lord**, knowing that **in the Lord your labor is not in vain**.

4. The **INTEGRITY** of our work: Is it **THOUGHTFUL**?

**Romans 12:2 (ESV)** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

What does the world say about your work? For much of society, it is a self-centered endeavor. What is the Kingdom alternative to our work? Work cannot be done well for God’s glory if Christ is not the center of our focus and attention. Our concentration and reflection on life in Christ enable us to infuse even the menial tasks with the divine. Even “meaningless jobs” can become meaningful in Christ, with our thoughts and prayers. Creativity is not just the ability to imagine things in our minds but to bring that imagination to life in the world through our work for the glory of God.

**Deuteronomy 8:17-18 (ESV)** Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

5. The **LIMITATIONS** of our work: Is it balanced with **REST**?

Americans “work longer hours, have shorter vacations, get less in unemployment, disability, and retirement benefits, and retire later, than people in comparably rich societies.”<sup>2</sup> ~ Samuel P. Huntington

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in Derek Thompson. “Workism Is Making Americans Miserable”. *The Atlantic*. February 24, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/>. Accessed 02-04-25.

**Exodus 20:8-11 (ESV)** “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord **blessed** the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

The commandment is not just to take a day off, but sanctify a day of rest and work for 6 days. It is a 6:1 ratio of work: rest. The one holy day provided the holiness for the other 6 days. It wasn't a day primarily of leisure but a day of restful communion with God.

The key to this principle is that we need rest, we have limitations, and we cannot lie to ourselves and think we have none. Man was made for work, but we need rest (not just one day a week), stilling ourselves for the purpose of preparing ourselves for engaging in more work. The Sabbath is not relief from our vocations, but it is the end which finds satisfaction in the work that has been done and refilling for the work that shall be done. Stillness without action is nothing; action without stillness is inhuman.

The Sabbath was a day to be reminded that their life is not defined by their work, it's not their center, but to define their life by their Creator, and work is an outworking of obedience to him, He is the end of their work, He is their goal.

## Conclusion

Jesus disrupts the practices of the Pharisees, reminding us that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Because of the cross and resurrection he can say “Come to me...” Jesus was the perfect balance of continual work and continual rest.

**Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG)** “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

The holy day became a holy person (Lord of the Sabbath), available to us 24/7. He calls us to come to Him to find rest and the proper way to work. It's all about Jesus...

**Matthew 6:9–10 (ESV)**<sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.