

WORK THAT WORSHIPS

Genesis 1-2

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. September 6, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

STUDY GUIDE

As you came in this morning, you should have received a bulletin. Inside, you'll find a simple study guide you can use in a few different ways: to follow along with today's teaching, to reflect on during your personal devotions this week, or to spark conversation in your small group.

More resources are available online. The link is in your study guide.

Let's get started on today's teaching ...

IT'S SCIENCE: WE NEED PURPOSE

A happy life is a purpose-full life. That's what science tells us.^{1 2}

God wired us with a need to feel like our life has meaning, that we're not just taking up space, but we're making a difference.

Research shows that we feel better, live longer, and are less depressed when we have something meaningful to do.

DEFINING WORK

The Bible word for purposeful and meaningful activity is “work.” So, in today's teaching, I'd like us to double down on work - the what, the how, and the why.

Let's begin with a definition:

Work is anything we do for God's glory. Work does not have to be paid. This concept of work covers much more than employment; it is everything we do that we intend to bring honor and praise to God.

Work has three dimensions. They are all found in the early chapters of Genesis, which were written to give the people of Israel an alternative worldview as they came out of Egypt's polytheistic religion. It's a new way to understand God, themselves, and the world.

¹ For example: Kim ES, Chen Y, Nakamura JS, Ryff CD, VanderWeele TJ. *Sense of Purpose in Life and Subsequent Physical, Behavioral, and Psychosocial Health: An Outcome-Wide Approach*. Am J Health Promot. 2022 Jan;36(1):137-147.

² For example: Xiao-Xin He, Xin-qiang Wang, Michael F. Steger, Li-Jun Ji, Kai Jing, Ming-fan Liu, Bao-juan Ye, *Meaning in life and psychological distress: A meta-analysis*, Journal of Research in Personality, Volume 104, 2023, 104381,

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF WORK

Let's take a closer look at the three dimensions of work:

1. WORK IS A GOOD GIFT.

Genesis describes God as the worker who created the world. This tells us that work has value and dignity - even God works. The Bible says:

*Genesis 2:1-3 (CSB) So the heavens and the earth and everything in them were completed. 2 On the seventh day God had completed **his work** that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all **his work** that he had done. 3 God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it he rested from all **his work** of creation.*

God the worker also gave humans their own work to do. Genesis tells us:

*Genesis 1:26 (CSB) Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will **rule** the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."*

*Genesis 1:28 (CSB) God **blessed** them, and God said to them, "Be **fruitful**, multiply, fill the earth, and **subdue** it. **Rule** the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."*

God created humans in his image to oversee the world; he blessed them and, as part of that blessing, he gave them a job: to **rule** and **subdue**. We are the kings and queens who rule over and take care of the world with God.

God gave us work; it's a gift, AND it is good. It's part of God's original plan and blessing for all of us, not a result of the fall or sin. So, whatever you do for God's honor - operating a machine or doing laundry - it is a good work.

2. WORK IS FOR GOD'S GLORY.

Work is worship. We believe this because Genesis 1-3 are saturated with temple imagery, meaning that our work is like priestly service. For example:³

- God "**walked**" in the garden (Genesis 3:8). That is the same verb used for God's presence in Israel's tabernacle (2 Samuel 7:6-7).
- Adam's commission "**to work and watch over**" the garden (Genesis 2:15) uses the same words that refer to the Levites and priests' work in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:7-8).
- The cherubim posted to guard Eden after the Fall (Genesis 3:24) mirror the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-22).
- The **river flowing** from Eden (Genesis 2:10) matches the river described in Ezekiel and Revelation flowing from the new creation temple (Exodus 47:1-12; Revelation 21:1-2).

The New Testament also ties work to worship. Colossians 3:23 refers to work and says:

*Colossians 3:23 (CSB) **Whatever** you do, do it from the heart, as something done **for the Lord** and not for people...*

Work is worship if it's "for the Lord."

So, whether it's paid or unpaid, glamorous or mundane, seen or unseen, we can honor God. One way to ensure that work is worship is to pray as we begin: "*Lord, this is for you. Use it for your glory. Amen.*"

³ For example: <https://tonyreinke.com/2009/10/12/eden-as-temple-garden-g-k-beale/>

3. WORK IS A GRIND

You might be thinking, “If my work is a gift from God and it’s for the glory of God, it should feel a lot easier. But my work is hard, frustrating, and exhausting.”

I hear you. And it doesn’t matter if it’s paid or unpaid, or if it’s something we love doing; there will be days that make us want to quit.

So, what’s the deal? Why is work a grind? The answer is: Genesis 3. Adam and Eve’s rebellion. God’s response.

Listen to what God said in Genesis 3:16-19 after Adam’s fateful decision:

God said that the work of giving birth would be hard:

He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort.

He said that the work of being a family would be hard:

Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.

He said that the work of farming (and by implication, everything we work at) would be hard:

And he said to the man, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘Do not eat from it’: The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow...

Then, he said, no matter how hard you work, in the end, you will die:

... until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust.”

Work is hard, and then we die. That’s grim. But wait! That might actually be a good thing. What? Why? Because if it were all joy and roses every day,

- We would make work an idol and worship it instead of God.
- We would find our identity in work instead of in God.
- We would become workaholics and neglect rest and family time.
- We would become self-sufficient and forget to depend on God and his grace.

Work is a blessing because it’s what we’re wired for. BUT ... we can make it into a curse by letting it turn us away from God, family, church, and friends. Don’t do that.

So, let’s wrap this up ...

FINDING PURPOSE AND HAPPINESS IN WORK

God designed us to work.

So, whatever we do for God's glory, from changing diapers to leading a company to teaching third graders or participating in a worship service - the list is endless - it is work according to God and the Bible.

When we accept what we are - co-workers with God - we discover meaning and purpose in everything we do.

Here's the last word, and it is so important: We are not only **born** to work, but we are also **reborn** to work. Ephesians 2 tells us this:

*Ephesians 2:8-10 (CSB) For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is **God's gift** — 9 not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his **workmanship, created** in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.*

God's work is to **create** us new in Christ so that we can do **“good works.”** Not just “religious” things, but everything we do for the glory of God.

Let's stay busy doing “good works”; it's what God saved us for.

Consider doing this: as you begin each day, offer yourself to God and pray: *“Lord, whatever I work at today, may it be work that worships you. Amen.”*

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Use any or all of the following questions to guide your group's conversation about Sunday's sermon.

Icebreaker

If you could instantly become a world-class expert at any job or skill for one day, what would you pick and why?

Observation

In Genesis 1:26-28, what specific instructions does God give humans about their role in the world?

What does Colossians 3:23 say should shape the way we do our work?

Interpretation

Work was part of God's plan before anything went wrong, and only became painful after Genesis 3. Why do you think God built work into a perfect world instead of just rest or leisure?

Colossians 3:17 says to do "whatever you do... in the name of the Lord Jesus." What do you think it actually means for an ordinary task, like doing laundry or answering emails, to be done "in his name" rather than just getting finished?

Application

Think about one task on your calendar this week that feels tedious or unimportant - maybe because it's hard or unpaid. What would change if you treated it as work done "for the Lord"?

The sermon suggests praying, "Lord, this is for you," before starting work each day. What's one specific moment in your daily routine- a commute, a meeting, a chore- where a small pause like that could actually shift your attitude?