

a biblical perspective on
work,
vocation
and calling



God's calling and your vocation:
an initiative of the navigators

A Biblical Perspective on Work, Vocation and Calling
By Ronni Bernardy, Dean Storelli and John Teten
Copyright © 2016. The Navigators. All rights reserved.

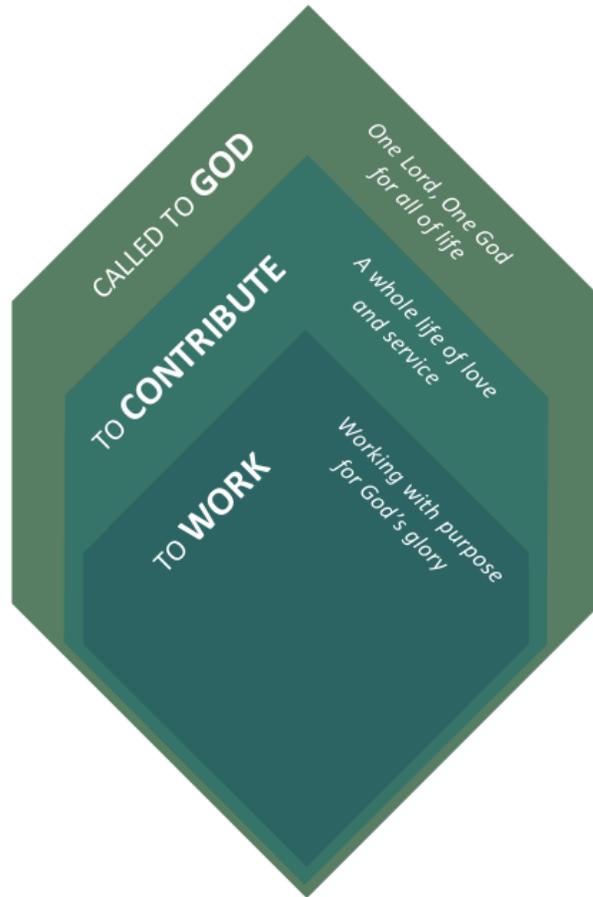


CONTENTS

Getting Started	1
Section One: Called to Work	
The Origin of Work Is the Garden	6
Work, Fall and the Gospel	11
Good Work, Good Rest	16
Character in the Workplace	21
Section Two: Called to Contribute	
Vocation: It's More Than Your Work	29
Purposes of God	36
The Gospel "in Word and Deed"	43
Section Three: Called to God	
The Lord of Work	50
<i>Tips for Discussion Leaders</i>	56
<i>Other Resources</i>	57
<i>About the Authors</i>	57

GETTING STARTED

Work is a significant part of our relationship with God. Work is not everything, but it is critical. In this study, you will find that the significance of our work comes from God's broad, definitive claim on our lives. A life of love and service to others is grounded, ultimately, in our relationship with Him.



SKILLS NEEDED

This study uses several different types of Bible study questions: detail questions, word-study questions, questions that focus on the storyline and others. One set of skills you will need for all types is *observe–interpret–apply*.

Observe means to pay attention to the details that are stated in the passage. The focus is on the objective facts and the plain meanings of the words.

Interpret means to think about the ideas these observations stir up and the principles that the facts point to.

Apply means to take these interpretations and applying them to our own lives. Sometimes, the impact is immediate: we read, and suddenly, conviction, courage and hope come flooding in. Other times, you will have to do some work to see what God is asking you to think, do, believe or feel about what you have just read.

Observe—Interpret—Apply: Example

A common mistake in Bible study is to jump to conclusions about interpretation and application before making enough observations. For example, Genesis 1:26–28 does not simply say that “God created human beings and put them in charge.” Yes, that is the general idea, but there are important details about *how* God made us (“in our image, after our likeness”) and details about *our part* in the process (“be fruitful,” “multiply,” “fill,” “subdue,” “have dominion”). Paying attention to these details adds clarity to our understanding of the passage and, therefore, to

We expect each study to take roughly 60-90 minutes of preparation. If you have more time, some studies include additional topics and passages to pursue.

If you are doing this study with others, one other skill you will need is the ability to *have good conversations*. A small group works best when everyone in the group is committed to listening well, asking each other questions, sharing authentically and learning from each other. (Leaders: Please read the “Tips for Leaders” on p. 57.)

DISCUSS: Do you have any questions about observing, interpreting and applying or about how to have a good conversation?

WRITING A LIFE PURPOSE STATEMENT

Before diving into the study, take some time to examine your own sense of calling—even if it is not very clear yet. Here are a few questions to help get you started. (You will have several chances during the study to revise what you write here.)

1. In terms of the “big picture,” what outcomes most inspire you? For example, do you hope to *inspire, create, empower* or *help*? List the energizing action verbs that best describe your motivations. (If you are more of a detail person, you might want to start with question 3 and work your way back to question 1.)
2. What group or groups of people do you most want to serve? For example, *the poor, those without Christ, coworkers, customers, family, those from a specific ethnic group or culture*, etc.
3. What words describe your spiritual gifts, unique talents or special abilities that help you serve others? For example, *giving, designing, building, serving, teaching, interceding*, etc.

4. Looking at your answers to the above, write a first draft of your life purpose statement. This statement should be more than a job title. Here are a few examples:

“To educate and inspire disadvantaged children through teaching.”

“To protect people and our world by designing aircraft that are safer and use fewer resources.”

“To be a good parent and raise my children well.”

When you are done writing, step back and reflect (and if you have a friend around to talk with about it, even better) and ask yourself:

- Is your purpose consistent with how God has designed you?
- Do people agree that this statement describes your best contribution?
- Is your purpose statement something to be lived out in the workplace, in your neighborhood, through volunteer work?

STUDY

“Prepared to Work”

Ephesians 2:8-10 says much about the tie between being made by God, being redeemed by God and being called to do good work.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (ESV)

Discuss/reflect: What does this passage tell us about the interplay between God’s design and our work?

What do you observe about the connection between salvation and “good works”?

Here is Ephesians 2:10 in several different versions of the Bible:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (ESV)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (NLT)

He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing. (MSG)

What do the different translations highlight?

How might the idea that “good works” are prepared “ahead of time” impact your approach to work? To other activities?

SECTION ONE: CALLED TO WORK

The studies in this section explore the biblical foundation for the meaning and purposes of work. Like so many of the most important doctrines of the Bible, the biblical basis for work begins with Genesis and an examination of God's character. God is a worker, and He invites us to join Him.



THE ORIGIN OF WORK IS THE GARDEN

WARMUP

It doesn't take long for work to show up in the Bible. In fact, the opening sentence is about work! And the entire first chapter is a glimpse of God at work. Before sin is ever on the scene, work is in full effect.

Discuss/reflect: When you think about work, do you think about it as “a necessary evil”? A curse? A blessing? Something else?

STUDY

Start at the Beginning

Study Genesis 1 with a lens of **work**. What can we learn about the God who works, the value of work and the commissioning of workers?

Follow the steps below to “mark up” Genesis 1 (the text is provided below), then answer the questions that follow.

Repetition

- Read the passage quickly and look for repeated words
- Mark repeated (or similar words) in the same color (e.g., highlight each use of “God” in yellow)
- You can color, underline or otherwise annotate repetition you find (e.g., “God saw that it was good”)

Paragraph Titles

- Give each paragraph a one-to-three-word title
- Use words from the text that capture the key content of that day (e.g., “Light” for day one)

Genesis 1-2:3 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was

so.⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so.¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so.¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars.¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth,¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.”²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so.²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The God Who Works

Genesis begins with a world that is empty, formless and dark, and shows how God works to make it full, shaped and light. God's work is purposeful and specific – He is cultivating something! – and it is this task that He eventually invites us into. The following questions first explore His work and then examine how God invites us into ours.

What observations do you have about God and His work in the following areas?

OBSERVATIONS	IMPLICATIONS about GOD	IMPLICATIONS for WORK
Diversity of the work (vv. 11,16, 21, 25)		
God's emotion/attitude		
The length of God's work (why not just do it on one day?)		
Characteristics of God		
Rest		

Describe God's work in your own words.

Commissioning Others to Work

What are some of the key repeated words on day six (v. 24-31)?

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? (esp. in regards to work)

God plants a garden (see Genesis 2:8) and makes people to care for it (2:15). What does this reveal about the design of work?

The first workers are gardeners. What things are true of good gardeners?

How might some of those characteristics apply to work in general? To any work you do now or the work you see yourself doing in the future?

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

Review your notes above and, if you are in a group, think about any of the comments you or others made that seem important. What conclusions can you make about the value of work? Why God calls us to work?

How do the conclusions you wrote above impact how you think about work? Has your view of work changed? How do these conclusions impact the way you want to approach work and the workplace in the future?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

Does God Call People to a Specific Job, Task or Work?

While some people report that God has *called* them to a particular career, it is more common (and perhaps in most cases, more accurate) to say that God *guides* us into our work. This guidance can take many forms: doors He clearly and miraculously opens, skills and interests He has built into us, advice from trusted friends and mentors and, of course, God's own voice as we seek Him in prayer and in the Word.

When we look through the Bible, we find many people who are a part of God's work but very few examples of a specific call to a particular task. While God clearly called Moses and Aaron to lead His people (Exodus 3:4; 28:1), Samuel to be a prophet (I Samuel 3:10) and Bezalel and Oholiab as craftsmen for the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-6), most of the time, it would be more accurate to say that God *guided* people to the places He wanted them to go.

The classic example is Abraham. God told him to "leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." (Genesis 12:1) God then guided him along the way—with Abraham and Sarah not knowing their final destination until they arrived in Canaan and God confirmed the land as their new home. Another example is Joseph, who was guided first by a dream and then by a series of misfortunes and jobs.

Even today, God does on occasion call specific people to particular tasks, but it is not His usual method. More often, God guides people to the places, tasks, contexts and work where He wants them and then helps them find meaning and purpose there. This guidance often comes through events and "open doors" but also through other prayer, godly counsel, meditation on Scripture and community feedback. "The truth is not that God is finding a place for our gifts but that God has created us and our gifts for a place of his choosing" (*The Call* by Os Guinness, p. 47). He will lead us to that place.

How did you get to where you are today? How did God guide you? After working on this study, is there anything new you think He might be nudging you towards?

WORK, FALL AND THE GOSPEL

WARMUP

God designed us to work. It is part of our makeup. And yet...work is hard! The beauty of work was deeply affected by Adam and Eve's sin. Like all of life, the original design for work has been marred.

For you personally, what work challenges are the hardest to deal with?

STUDY

Challenges to Work

Read Genesis 3:17-19 and make observations in the margins on the effect of the curse. What, exactly, changes about work, and what stays the same? Is "work" cursed or is it something else?

And to Adam {God} said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Compare the state of work in Genesis 1 to the picture here in Genesis 3.

What "thorns and thistles" (problems) come to your mind when you consider any work you are doing now or see yourself doing in the future?

Fill out the chart below. Consider how the challenges mentioned could affect your work. Read more of the context around the verses if you find it helpful.

VERSE	CHALLENGES	AFFECT ON WORK
Jer. 9:23		
1 Tim. 6:9-10		
Ecc. 2:17-19		
Gen. 11:2-4		
Luke 6:27-29		

The Gospel and Work

Note below the changes that come through Jesus. What affect do they have on work?

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2, ESV)

“And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:24, ESV)

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

Choose at least three of the following six areas and make observations about how God changes a worker’s approach to different situations.

Attitude	The Career I Choose/Have Chosen	How I View Money
Ephesians 6:5-8	Psalm 139:13-16	Hebrews 13:5-6

How I Rest	How I Relate to Coworkers	Moral Dilemmas
Matthew 11:28-30	Colossians 4:5-6	1 Peter 2:12

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

What changes to the work environment were caused by the fall and what remedies does Jesus offer to the worker? (List as many changes and remedies as you can think of.)

From the list above, which two or three ideas stand out the most to you today? Why?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

How Do I Know What Kind of Job I Will Love?

The Fall means that there is no job that will ever be perfect, not because work is “wrong” but because sin taints all good things, including work. Nevertheless, there are some things that make some jobs a better fit than others.

Finding a job that you love is not exactly “hit or miss,” but it will require some self-reflection and investigation. As a student or someone early in their career, it may be difficult to know exactly what job you will love. In general, though, the job you choose should connect with your sense of calling from God and your broader sense of purpose

in life, align with your design and abilities and give you an opportunity to do work you feel is meaningful.

Here are some questions that might be helpful in finding a job you will love or evaluating the job you currently have.

- Is the job in my strongest area of interest?
- Does it require my specific skills and abilities?
- Does it fit my teaming preferences (working alone, on a team, or in a big organization)?
- Is the work itself meaningful to me? Does it fit with what I value the most?
- Can I explain how this job relates to my life-purpose? My calling from God?
- Do people who know me well think this job is a good fit for me?
- Does my personality resonate with others in similar jobs?

For another perspective on finding happiness in your career, try [“What Parents Should Tell Their Kids About Finding a Career”](#) (from the Harvard Business Review).

GOOD WORK, GOOD REST

WARMUP

Have you ever been around a good worker? Do you work today with someone who is good at their work? What makes them stand out?

Going into this study, are there questions you have about work you'd like to see answered? List two or three.

STUDY

Reasons for Work

Here are five reasons people work—reasons God has built into the fabric of work. We work....

- In partnership with God to care for the world (Genesis 1:28)
- In partnership God to provide our “daily bread” (Psalm 104:14-15)
- For the sheer joy of working (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19)
- To provide for others, especially family (1 Timothy 5:8)
- As an example of caring for others (Acts 20:35)

Are any of these reasons surprising to you? Why?

Which reasons are motivating to you? Why?

Can you think of any other passages or reasons to work?

In what ways is the work you do now or might do in the future a part of God's call to care for His world and the people in it? (NOTE: This is not an easy question! Take time to

think about how your contribution (or your company's or industry's contribution) is a part of providing for the daily needs of people, the environment or society in general.)

How to Work

What do the following verses say about the way we should work?

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

“I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,³¹ and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down.³² Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction.³³ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,³⁴ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.” (Proverbs 24:30-34, ESV)

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

“Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.² Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.” (1 Timothy 6:1-2, ESV)

“And to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, ESV)

Do these verses reflect your approach to work? Why, why not?

Work and Rest

Jesus is Lord every minute, every hour, every day. The call to join Him and work with Him demands all that we have—but not burnout! God is a worker and is constantly at work, but even God rested on the seventh day. We are called to do the same, not so that we can “take a break” from serving, but so that we can have the energy to serve.

Before you begin, jot down your initial thoughts on rest. Is rest for the weak? Do you think you rest too much? Are you pretty high energy and have trouble slowing down? (Don’t go for the “right answer” just yet. Write down the way you really do think about rest, right or wrong.)

What do the following teach us about the importance of rest? About the relationship between work and rest?

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. ¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” (Genesis 1:31-2:3, ESV)

“The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.” (Mark 6:30-32, ESV)

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30, ESV)

Sabbath

Read Hebrews 4:1-11. Make as many observations as you can about the Sabbath rest. In the Old Testament the Sabbath rest was one of the Ten Commandments. What does this passage instruct us about the Sabbath rest?

A pastor articulated this Sabbath principle: “I don’t do anything on the Sabbath that I *have to do*,” that is, things that are part of his *required* work.” In light of the above Scriptures, what do you think of this principle? How might you apply it to your life?

Rest and Leisure

There are many demands on our time:

- Work (on the job or at school)
- The daily chores of life

In addition to these required tasks, in today’s world, we can also be quite busy playing and resting. List what you do in your “leisure time” and then evaluate: are these things truly restful? Do they help you recuperate? (Note: these answers will vary widely between individuals: for some people, working out is a great way to rest. For others, it is just another chore.)

What do you see as the difference between biblical rest and modern day leisure?

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

From this study and the previous studies on work (*Getting Started; The Origin of Work is the Garden; Work, Fall and the Gospel*), what do you see about how God approaches work? The purpose of work? What did you learn about rest? Did you find any answers to the questions you had before you started this study? Do you have new questions? Are there things you need to change in your view of work or how you rest?

Among the ideas listed above, what one or two things would you like to start thinking, doing or feeling immediately?

Summarize your personal understanding or theology of work.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

Four Perspectives on Work

People can “do good” on a number of different levels. What kind of good will often depend on our perspective. In his book *Anointed for Business*, Ed Siloso describes four common approaches believers have towards work:

- *Survivor*: “Work is hard, but I can survive it.”
- *Live by biblical principles*: “The Bible tells me how to live all of life, even at work. I just need to seek out and obey His principles.”
- *Live by the power of the Holy Spirit*: “The Spirit will lead, guide and empower me all through the day, even at work.”
- *Transform the workplace for Christ*: “I have been placed by Christ in this place to be a ‘change agent’ for the Kingdom. I may not have a lot of influence, but what I have I will put to use to see this place changed.”

Which best describes your perspective?

Are any of these perspectives better than the others? Why?

CHARACTER IN THE WORKPLACE

WARMUP

“The most important thing about you is not the things that you achieve; it is the person that you become.” (Dallas Willard as quoted in *Soul Keeping* by John Ortberg)

Our character is the outward reflection of what God has done in us. It is the result of change. We have been called by the Father and are learning to follow His Son. The Spirit whispers and guides. Knowing the Lord and developing an intimate relationship with Him shows up in the character we display to the world around us. Our true character is revealed when we think we are alone and no one is looking.

Discuss/reflect: What character qualities do you think employers are most interested in? What qualities do your current supervisor(s) and co-workers (or current teachers and classmates) most value?

STUDY

Two Essential Character Qualities: Integrity and Humility

There are many, many characteristics of God—and characteristics that God calls us into—that are essential at work: justice, righteousness, mercy, truth, grace, love and many more. Here are two that many have found to be foundational: integrity and humility.

Integrity

Before you look at the verses below, describe what you think it means to be a person of integrity in the workplace.

Read the following Scripture and record anything you see about:

- The importance of integrity
- Principles for growing in integrity
- Results of living with integrity *or* lacking integrity
- Opportunities for growth in integrity in your life (especially opportunities in your current occupation, whether it is as a student or in the workplace)

“And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules,⁵ then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’” (1 Kings 9:4-5, ESV)

“I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.” (1 Chronicles 29:17, ESV)

“As long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, ⁴ my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. ⁵ Far be it from me to say that you are right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. ⁶ I hold fast my righteousness and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days.” (Job 27:3-6, ESV)

“O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.” (Psalm 15:1-3, ESV)

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalm 24:3-4, ESV)

“With upright heart he shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand.” (Psalm 78:72, ESV)

“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.” (Proverbs 10:9, ESV)

“The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.” (Proverbs 11:3, 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. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Luke 16:10-13, ESV)

“So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.” (Acts 24:16, ESV)

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17, ESV)

Summary: From what you have read, write a definition of integrity. Use a dictionary to further define integrity. If you'd like, try writing a definition that applies specifically to the workplace. For example, “A worker who has integrity....”

How does what you have studied relate to “white lies,” exaggeration, or misrepresenting facts to make a case for something?

Why do you think integrity would be important as an employee? How does integrity make your experience at work better? How does it make you a better worker? How does your integrity help your employer or supervisor?

Humility

Explain what it looks like to live in humility in the workplace.

Read the following Scripture and record anything you see about:

- The importance of humility
- Principles for growing in humility
- Results of living with humility *or* lacking humility
- Opportunities for growth in your own humility

“The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.”
(Proverbs 15:33, ESV)

“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.”
(Proverbs 27:2, ESV)

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, ESV)

“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 18:4, ESV)

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11, ESV)

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Romans 12:3, ESV)

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant.” (1 Corinthians 13:4, ESV)

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-4, ESV)

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” (Colossians 3:12, ESV)

“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble....” ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:6, 10, ESV)

“Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the

humble.”⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:5-7, ESV)

Summary: From what you have read, write a definition of humility. Use a dictionary to further define humility. If you’d like, try writing a definition that applies specifically to the workplace. For example, “A humble worker....”

How does what you have studied relate to contentment, leadership, or pride in accomplishments?

Why do you think humility would be important as an employee? How does it make you a better worker or improve your experience at work? Why would it be important to an employer or supervisor?

Other Characteristics

Every workplace will make demands on your character: ethical questions that will need to be sorted out, fears that will need to be addressed, hard decisions that will need to be made when there are too many (or too few) good options to choose between. Choose one (or more) of the following character areas to study further and develop in your life

courage
faithfulness
gentleness
justice
kindness

love
mercy
patience
purity
righteousness

self-control
servanthood
teachability
truthfulness
peace-making

Next, explain what you think life at work would look like if this character area was prominent in your life.

Gather 5-10 verses/passages of Scripture on this topic and record anything you see about:

- The importance of the chosen character area
- Principles for growing in this character area
- Results of living with this character area *or* when it is lacking
- Opportunities for growth in this area in your life in the workplace

From what you have read, write a definition of the character area you studied. Use a dictionary to further define the character trait. If you'd like, try writing a definition that applies specifically to the workplace.

Why do you think this aspect of character would be important as an employee? To an employer or supervisor?

Discuss/reflect: What do you believe to be true about the character areas you have studied in this chapter? Why would you want your life to be characterized by these things? Include convictions you think will be particularly helpful in the workplace.

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

Review what you have studied here and write down any highlights. How do/should these truths change the way you approach God and relate to others, in general, and at work?

If you truly believed what you've read and studied in this chapter, how would your life at work look different?

Work can both "ask for" and challenge godly character. From your experience (or from what you imagine doing in the future) how might your specific work help or hinder your growth in godly character?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

Character Counts

By Tom Yeakley

Some time ago I found myself in a conversation with a man who was the chief headhunter for a Fortune 100 company. He and his team hire 2,000 new graduates each year. I thought this was a great opportunity to gain insight into university students from a new perspective, so I began to ask him some questions.

“What are you finding when you recruit these graduates?” I asked.

“Tom, we can hire those with top GPA’s, work experience and internships, and resumes’ that are outstanding. We offer them top salaries and benefits and place them in stimulating, cutting edge job situations.”

“Well, sounds interesting. How’s that working for you?” I inquired.

“It’s a disaster!” he replied. “All they want to know is when the next holiday is or how much vacation they get. They don’t put in a day’s work for a day’s pay. They have conflicts with their co-workers and supervisors. They steal from the company. They take the great salaries we give them and spend it on addictive behaviors, then we end up paying for counselors for them.”

“That sounds pretty depressing. What are you doing about this?” I said.

“Well, I will tell you what I tell my recruiting team. We can’t put it in writing for we would be charged with hiring bias or discrimination. But here’s what I tell the team. When interviewing on campus, look for students who are leaders in The Navigators and other campus ministries.”

“Really? Why?” I said.

“We hire these people because they have character. As we’ve looked at our successful hires, those who do well had this common background. We can train new hires to do any job that we want them to do in this company. But we can’t train them in character. They either have it or they don’t. Leaders in these campus ministries have what we want, so we look to hire qualified people who were leaders in these campus ministries. They have character!”

[Note: This chief headhunter was *not* a believer!]

SECTION ONE SUMMARY—CALLED TO WORK

Look back over the previous four Bible studies (*The Origin of Work Is the Garden; Work, Fall and the Gospel; Good Work, Good Rest; Character in the Workplace*). Are there one or two new ideas that really stand out? Are there one or two things you believe God is asking you to act on? If you need help summarizing, try using a highlighter to mark the “cream of the cream” from your studies. Then, for each of these highlights, write out

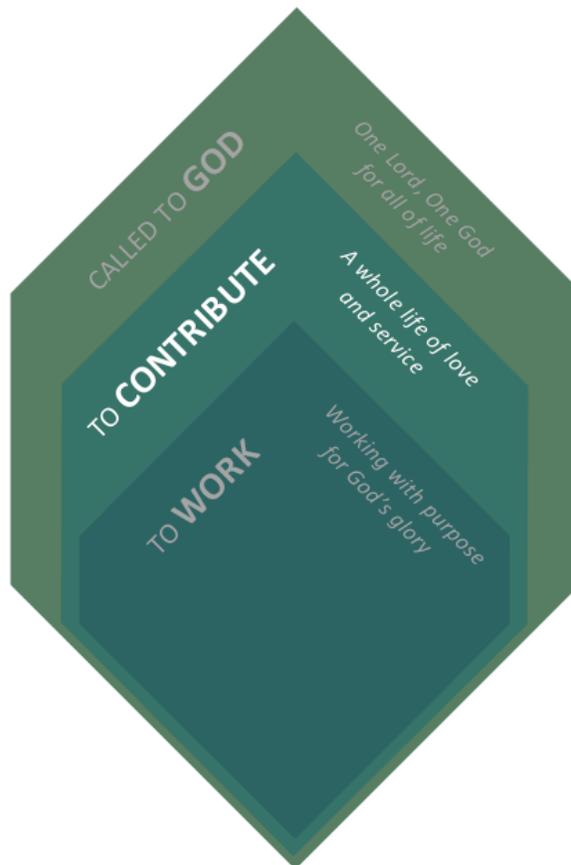
one or two possible action steps. Don't aim for a long list of things to do. Instead, create a short list that you can begin to pray about and explore.

Look back at the life purpose statement you wrote at the beginning of this study (pp. 2-3). After doing the studies in this section, is there anything you want to add or something you want to delete or change about this statement? Is there anything specific you want to add about how your life purpose connects with God's view of work? Edit or rewrite your life purpose statement here.

SECTION TWO: CALLED TO CONTRIBUTE

As the studies in Section One demonstrate, human beings were made to work. But what is “work”? Does work only include our paid occupations? What about volunteer work or parenting? What about discipleship or simple kindness? How do these things fit into our design and a meaningful life?

The next three studies focus on the middle layer of our call to God, the call to contribute.



Historically, this invitation to engage with the world in partnership with God was called *vocation*.

*The Reformers saw a difference between **vocation** and **occupation**. Occupation was seen as an opportunity (God's providence) for service presented to all believers that enabled them to fulfill their vocations/callings through what we would call everyday work. (Hugh Whelche, *How Then Should We Work? Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work*, p. 9)*

In other words, occupation is just one way to fulfill our vocation. Occupations can (and in our times, often do) change, but God's call to contribute remains stable.

VOCATION: IT'S MORE THAN YOUR WORK

WARMUP

We want to serve God with all our hearts, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength. What God invites us into—our vocation—is a whole life of service to God. God's call includes paid work but also touches volunteer work and even how we live with our neighbors. While some of our purposes will be worked out in the workplace, it is unusual for any job to touch on all the elements of our vocation.

Before you begin this study, review the life purpose statement you worked on earlier (pp. 3-4). Is it focused only on work and career? Are there things outside your career that are important to your calling or life purpose? Write down your initial ideas about areas of contribution you believe are important but are outside your current work or the work you think you will do in the future. (At the end of this section, you will have a chance to review and refine these ideas.)

STUDY

Called to a Way of Life

The New Testament is filled with practical instructions for everyday life. Throughout history, the Body of Christ has focused on different points of emphasis, sometimes forgetting the wider picture of the many contributions God wants us to make. Skim through the passages below (from the ESV), looking for answers to the following questions:

- What *actions* or *ways of life* are being encouraged for followers of Christ?
- What kind of *impact* are these actions or these ways of living expected to have on the world around us?

Acts 2:46-47—“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Romans 12:14-21—“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is

mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

2 Corinthians 9:8-12—“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency^[a] in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.⁹ As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.”

Ephesians 4:29—“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12—“And to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”

Titus 3:8—“The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”

Hebrews 13:1-3—“Let brotherly love continue.² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”

Discuss/reflect: If you are in a group, share your observations. Otherwise, use these questions as a way to reflect on your observations from the passages above.

- Are any of these contributions new to you? Are you surprised to see them on God's "list"?
- Which of these contributions do you see playing out in your current or future workplace? Are there things that would most likely need to be pursued outside your everyday work?
- Looking at the overall picture that these verses describe, write a brief summary of the kind of life that God calls people to live.

Called to Do Good Deeds

The idea of living a life full of good deeds runs from Genesis to Revelation, but what is the purpose of "doing good"? Are we just "being nice"? Read through the following verses quickly, just trying to get a sense of the main ideas. Use a highlighter or circle key words to capture anything that jumps out at you. Pay particular attention to "why"—what is the outcome or purpose of doing good?¹

Psalms 34:14—"Depart from evil and *do good*; Seek peace and pursue it."

Psalms 37:3—"Trust in the LORD and *do good*; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness."

Psalms 37:27—"Depart from evil and *do good*, So you will abide forever."

Ecclesiastes 3:12—"I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to *do good* in one's lifetime."

Isaiah 1:17—"Learn to *do good*; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow."

Micah 6:8—"He has told you, O man, what is *good*; And what does the LORD require of you but to *do justice*, to *love kindness*, and to *walk humbly* with your God?"

Matthew 5:16—"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your *good works*, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 7:12—"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

¹ These passages are from the NASB. Emphasis added.

Matthew 12:12—“How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to *do good* on the Sabbath.”

Mark 7:37—“They were utterly astonished, saying, ‘*He has done all things well*; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’”

Mark 12:30-31—“‘And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Luke 6:27—“‘But I say to you who hear, *love your enemies, do good* to those who hate you.’”

Luke 6:33-35—“‘If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same...*but love your enemies, and do good*, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.’”

Acts 10:38—“‘You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how *He went about doing good* and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.’”

Romans 2:7—“...to those who by perseverance in *doing good* seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.”

Romans 13:8—“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law... if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself.”

Galatians 5:14—“For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself.”

Galatians 6:9-10—“Let us not lose heart in *doing good*, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us *do good* to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Ephesians 2:10—“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

2 Thessalonians 3:13—“But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of *doing good*.”

1 Timothy 6:18—“Instruct them to *do good, to be rich in good works*, to be generous and ready to share.”

2 Timothy 2:21—“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, *prepared for every good work*.”

2 Timothy 3:17—“So that the man of God may be adequate, *equipped for every good work*.”

Titus 2:7—“In all things show yourself to be an example of *good deeds*, with purity in doctrine, dignified.”

Titus 2:14—“Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, *zealous for good deeds*.”

Titus 3:1—“Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be *ready for every good deed*.”

Titus 3:8—“This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in *good deeds*. These things are good and profitable for men.”

Titus 3:14—“Our people *must also learn to engage in good deeds* to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.”

Hebrews 10:24—“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and *good deeds*.”

Hebrews 13:16—“And do not neglect *doing good* and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

James 2:8—“If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall *love your neighbor* as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

1 Peter 2:12—“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your *good deeds*, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

1 Peter 3:8-11—“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, ‘The one who desires life, to love and see good days, Must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; He must seek peace and pursue it. He must turn away from evil and *do good*; He must seek peace and pursue it.’”

Discuss/reflect

- When most people think about “good deeds,” what kinds of activities do you think they have in mind? How do most people see good deeds? Are they critically important, neutral, not important?
- From what you have read above, how does God see good deeds? What are some of His purposes for our deeds?
- List some of the different ways of doing good you noticed in the passages above.
- What does “doing good” mean to you? How might you put this into practice, especially at work or among the people you work with?

The Impact of Life's Changing Landscape

Today, it is increasingly rare to find one job in one place that you can expect to do for the rest of your life. Companies, economies and technology are constantly changing, and—perhaps more importantly—our own expectations, needs and priorities shift over time.

The traditional and biblical view of calling and vocation suggests that while our jobs and roles may change, God's definitive call into a relationship with Himself and to a whole life of love and service to others never changes. We serve one God for all of life (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), and we are called—in all of life—to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31).

Even so, the decision to change jobs or an extended period without paid work is not easy. Here are three scenarios for you to consider.

- Three weeks after graduation and one week before your first “real” job starts, your Mom calls and tells you Dad has broken his leg badly and is likely to be out of work for at least six months. Your mom works part-time, plus is the primary caregiver for another relative in town. In your conversation, she suggests she “might need some help” and wonders if you wouldn't be “too busy” to come and help her “for just a little while.” What she is really asking is for you to move in with her. With Dad in the hospital, neither she nor you have the money to pay for the help she needs cooking, cleaning, driving and caring for your other relative, and no other family members or friends are available. The next day, your future boss (who is a believer) calls to talk over some last-minute details about your work. When you tell her about your family situation, she is sympathetic to your trouble and offers you the option of working from home but not on the same, exciting projects you signed up for. What will you tell her? How does what you have learned about work and contribution impact your decision?
- Your work life has never been “normal.” You have traveled often (not always for work) and have been to three different job training programs (and finished two of them). You have had four jobs in the last five years, all in different fields. In spite of these changes, you are happy and feel you have learned much. You don't know where it is all going, but you do feel it is going somewhere. At lunch, a friend asks, “You're not exactly on the ‘fast track,’ are you?” Your friend is not a believer, but he is open to talking about faith. (You have talked with him about God in the past.) In light of what you have been learning in this Bible study, how would you explain your sense of purpose and contribution? How you see your work? Because you are being honest, include the mistakes you have made along the way.
- In college, you once heard the president of your university say, “You can ‘do it all,’ just not all at once.” After graduation, you got a great job. Six months before your first annual review, you got your first promotion. Five years later, you have started to travel and have become the “go-to” person for all kinds of problems at work. Last

night, your spouse gently asked (again) what you are thinking about in terms of having a family. After a long walk in the morning (it's a Saturday), you realize you do want to have kids...but you wonder how you and your spouse will manage your careers *and* nurturing your children. In terms of his or her own career, what do you want to ask your spouse to do? What are you willing to offer in terms of sharing the load, both in the home and in your career? How does vocation and calling fit into your thoughts about what it will take to raise a family?

(OPTIONAL) ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE

Pick two or three of the scenarios above and act them out. Assign the various roles described in the scenario, talk about a simple plot (for example, your character picks up the phone, mom answers....) and then present the scene to your group. (If are doing this study on your own, invite some friends to join you or write out the dialogue on your own.)

- After you play the scene, ask the audience what they saw. If you were in the scene, share what you learned about work and calling as you were playing your part. Looking back, are there things any of the characters could have said differently?

- What did you learn from these scenarios about work and calling, especially how it impacts your thoughts on significant life changes?

- As people take on the task of raising children or caring for elderly parents, how might their careers and families be affected? For example, might more people be faced with choosing lower paying jobs that offer more flexibility? Would such a change be a good thing? Neutral? Bad?

THE PURPOSES OF GOD

WARMUP

When God created the world, He declared it “very good.” It was created with unity, harmony and order. When sin entered the world, everything was broken. As a result of sin, human beings are now alienated from themselves, from God, from each other and from the created order. Jesus came into the world to bridge this alienation, and today, God is working to redeem, reconcile, renew, restore and rebuild. He invites us into intimacy and worship with Him, and—as a part of this union with Himself—into a life of engagement in the world around us. We are adopted into His family and invited to play our part in this family’s work.

Discuss/reflect: As you think about all the parts of the world that are broken—relationships, politics, economics, poverty, injustice, flawed products and flawed systems, inefficiency and others—what problems are you most drawn to? For which problems do you most hope to be a part of the solution?

STUDY

The Gospel—In Four Parts

E. Stanley Jones described the gospel as “God’s total solution for man’s total problem, both individually and collectively.” Of course, a central piece of this solution is God’s redemption of individuals.

However, if we are only familiar with a simple, “executive summary” of the gospel—the part that only touches on individuals—then we are missing the grand breadth of the gospel and the many ways God is inviting us to partner with Him.

To more fully understand our part, we need to more fully understand God’s broad purposes. We need a fuller and longer view of salvation, going all the way back to creation. This story can be divided into four chapters.

Creation: In the beginning, God created the cosmos in beauty, harmony and peace. In Hebrew, this idea is called *shalom*. The word God created was perfect and unmarred (Genesis 1-2).

Fall: When sin entered the world, our covenant with God was broken. The unity of our relationship with God was damaged, and the harmony of the cosmos was disrupted. As a result, mankind was **lost** and **alienated**, and our world was **broken** (Genesis 3).

Salvation: Salvation is what Jesus purchased for us on the cross. It is not something that happened long ago. It is the “chapter” in the story we find ourselves in today. What is God doing right now? He is changing everything! We can see this happening in three ways:

- **REDEMPTION**—What is **lost** is being found and bought back. Jesus paid the price for us on the cross. We are saved, healed and delivered. Redemption is the core of God’s work.
- **RECONCILIATION**—What had become **alienated** is being reconciled. Jesus paved the way for us to be reconciled to God, to one another, to ourselves and to all creation.
- **RESTORATION**—What is **broken** is in the process of being restored in Christ. The present reality of the Kingdom of God is like leaven that penetrates society and transforms it. Doing justice and righteousness is a big part of setting broken things right.

Shalom: In the end, everything will be put back together, made right again, reconciled and restored to its proper place and original design (Colossians 1:20). There will be a fullness of beauty, unity and harmony. God’s peace is the ultimate hope of our broken, bruised and wounded world (Revelation 21-22).

Discuss/reflect

- How might your worship, your relationship with God, your relationships with others and your work in the world be enhanced by keeping all of these aspects of the gospel in mind?

- How might your worship, relationships and work be hindered by focusing too much on just one aspect of God’s work and forgetting others? For example, how might your understanding of God be hindered if you *only* thought of God as a creator or *only* as a redeemer or if you *only* thought about what happens after we die? How might your understanding of God’s order be hindered if you *never* thought about the world as fallen or *never* thought about God’s desire to reconcile and restore *all things*?

God’s Purposes for Our World

A “word search” is one way to broaden our understanding of biblical concepts. In the following groups of verses, note the specific areas God is interested in. For example, in Romans 8:1-2, who is being set free? What are they being set free from? (NOTE: The passages below are all from the ESV. Other translations may use slightly different words to translate the same ideas.)

“Set Free”

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has **set you free** in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2)

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be **set free** from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (Romans 8:19-21)

“For freedom Christ has **set us free**; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.² Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.... ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:1-4, 6)

“Redeem”

“Christ **redeemed** us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:13-14)

“In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephesians 1:7)

“Reconcile”

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be **reconciled** to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24)

“For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” (Romans 5:10)

“To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (But if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be **reconciled** to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

“All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation**. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be **reconciled** to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

“By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might **reconcile** us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” (Ephesians 2:15-16)

“And through him to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now **reconciled** in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,” (Colossians 1:20-22)

“Restore” (Renew, Rebuild, Make Whole)

“And your ancient ruins shall be **rebuilt**; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.” (Isaiah 58:12)

“Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³ Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was **restored**, healthy like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.” (Matthew 12:12-14)

“And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him.²³ And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?”²⁴ And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.”²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was **restored**, and he saw everything clearly.²⁶ And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.” (Mark 8:22-26)

“But that is not the way you learned Christ!—²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be **renewed** in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:20-24)

“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being **renewed** in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3:8-11)

Discuss/reflect

- Are any of the things God is interested in, as demonstrated in these passages, new to you?
- When God invites us to work with Him in presenting the gospel to another person, there is a clear “division of labor”—we may do the speaking, but it is God who is offering forgiveness, arranging circumstances and moving hearts. If you apply this model to the other work God is doing (to put the world “back together” and make things right), what might be our part in this work? What might be your part?
- How does this picture of the partnership God is inviting us into change your understanding of the work you are doing now or the work you see yourself doing in the future?

- When a person is reconciled to God, they are “made new” (2 Corinthians 5:17) and begin to change. Even so, the full fruit of this change is something we must wait for (Galatians 5:5)—we work with God to grow and change even as we wait for the fullness of this change. How does this tension between working with God now and waiting for the future fulfillment of His promises apply to issues such as restoring relationships, making the world a just place and making the world a better place?

Shalom

From a biblical perspective, the hallmarks of human flourishing are community, dignity, intimacy with God, justice, beauty, peace, wholeness, economic flourishing and joy. The biblical word for this idea is *shalom* (peace, prosperity, security, wholeness—everything ordered the way God designed it and the way it will be in the end). In the following verses, note the many different ideas that are tied to *shalom*. (NOTE: All words in bold are translations of the Hebrew word *shalom*.)

“Pray for the **peace** of Jerusalem! ‘May they be secure who love you! ⁷ **Peace** be within your walls and security within your towers!’ ⁸ For my brothers and companions’ sake I will say, ‘**Peace** be within you!’ ⁹ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.” (Ps. 122:6-9)

“But seek the **welfare** of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its **welfare** you will find your **welfare**.” (Jeremiah 29:7)

“Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and **security**. ⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. ⁹ And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.” (Jeremiah 33:6-9)

Discuss/reflect: How does the biblical perspective of shalom relate to the products and services offered by businesses? To the efforts made inside the home or a neighborhood? To the many kinds of work that can be done through volunteer work or working for a non-profit organization? To the work done by ministry organizations (including individual participation in evangelism and discipleship)?

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATION

As Eugene Peterson (translator of *The Message*) explains...

Salvation is God's determination to rescue his creation; it is his activity in recovering the world. It is personal and impersonal, it deals with souls and cities, it touches sin and sickness. There is a reckless indiscriminateness about salvation.

In partnering with God, it is important to connect your interests with God's heart. At the beginning of this study (p. 14), you reflected on the broken parts of the world that you feel drawn to. From what you have learned in this study about God's purposes, can you see how your interests are connected to the work God is doing in the world today? Write a statement that expresses your area of interest and how it connects to one or more of God's passions. For example, you might write something like "I believe my work/pursuit of _____ connects to God's heart for _____."

Which, if any, of these interests are tied to the work you are preparing for or are currently doing? Which are tied to things outside of the workplace?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

As Doug Sherman and William Hendricks outline in their book, *Your Work Matters to God*, There are three prominent views of work that fall short of the clear teaching of Scripture.

The first is the **humanistic view** of work. In this view, work is magnified, God is minimized and career is reduced to a pathway to personal fulfillment. In this view, *vocation*, which is a whole life of service to God, gets reduced to occupation.

The second is a **two-story view** of work. People who hold this view believe that the only part of life that really counts to God is the part committed to religious activities such as Bible study, prayer, church activity, religious work and the like. Day-to-day work has no inherent worth (beyond meeting survival needs) and contributes nothing to the work God is doing.

The **platform view** of work argues that Christians participate in the mainstream of culture only to set up strategic opportunities to share the gospel message and disciple friends and associates.

While each of these views of work has some value, each is missing the bigger picture of God's perspective. Based on your understanding of work, how would you refute each of these three sub-biblical views of work?

THE GOSPEL “IN WORD AND DEED”

In the Bible studies above, we focused on the way of life God calls His people to and the many ways we can do good in the world. But how do these actions fit with the advance of the gospel?

WARMUP

When people talk about “advancing the gospel,” do you mostly think about *presenting* or do you mostly think about *modeling*? Do you think advancing the gospel mostly means *influencing and changing* how the world operates? Do you ever feel guilty about your lack of involvement (or poor skills) in any of these ways?

Why might it be helpful to think about these different aspects of the gospel as interlinked? Are there ways that thinking about them as linked that might not be helpful?

Do you think focusing on any one of these approaches (presenting the gospel, modeling the gospel or seeking to change the world around us) might be dangerous?

STUDY

Good Deeds <—> Good News

One way to better understand our part is better understand how God combines His own **care for us** and His **call to us**. In the passages below, we will look closely at how God treats us and how He encourages us to treat others. Here are two ways to approach these passages. (Try one or the other, or both!)

- Try having a quiet time in each of these passages below.² Before you begin, ask God, “What are you saying to me? What should I be learning about You?”
- Study and dig deeply into the passages by making observations and connecting ideas: what doctrines/principles do these passages teach?

Either way, pay attention to the interplay between...

² From the ESV translation of the Bible.

- God's grace
- Doing good to others
- Honoring God
- Pointing people towards Christ

Titus 2:6-14

Notes

Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. ⁷ Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. ⁹ Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Titus 3:1-9

Notes

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not

because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸ The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

1 Peter 2:9-17

Notes

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Discuss/reflect

- In a few sentences, describe how you see these ideas fitting together: redemption, good deeds, God’s grace, influencing others. What, if anything, is God asking you to think or do differently in the future, in general, or specifically in the workplace?

- God is already transforming your life into the image of His beloved Son (Romans 8:29) and is already drawing us into the footsteps of Jesus (I John 2:6). Think back on your day and on your week and note any “good deeds” that you were able to perform. Take a minute to thank God for the opportunity to be a blessing to others. Is there anything you have done recently that you now see in a different light as a result of this study? Any small deed that perhaps was more important to God than you previously thought?

- Also, think back to any missed opportunities. Are there times today or this past week when you clearly could have done something for another person and didn’t, especially someone you were studying with or working with? Do you know why you didn’t? Maybe, you truly did not have time: God had other things in store for you! But if you feel you should have done a little more, get your heart right before God and then ask for the wisdom, courage and strength to do better next time. As you grow into caring for others, know that God will continue to care for you (Isaiah 40:11).

- Look back at your answers to the warmup questions at the beginning of this study. Is there anything you would change, based on this study? What about anything you mentioned you feel guilty about? Is there anything God is asking you to do differently? Think differently about? Feel differently about?

SECTION TWO SUMMARY—CALLED TO CONTRIBUTE

As you look back over the last three Bible studies, are there one or two new ideas that really stand out? Are there one or two things you believe God is asking you to act on? If you need help summarizing, try using a highlighter to mark the “cream of the cream” from your studies. Then, for each of these highlights, write out one or two possible action steps. Don’t aim for a long list of things to do. Instead, create a short list that you can begin to pray about and explore.

In today’s world, we have access to all kinds of ways to help. As you think about how God has put together *your* heart and *your* mind and *your* desires, what parts of His work are you most interested in? For example, do you love serving people? Listening to people? Do you find yourself regularly in conversations with people about the gospel and God’s desires for their lives? Do you have a technical mind? Do you often think about redesigning broken systems or broken products? Do you love to teach? Do you have a heart for the marginalized? List all of the contributions you regularly make and/or would like to make.

Our vocation can and should be worked out in multiple areas of our lives. Which of the desires and contributions listed above can be met through your work? Which contributions will mostly likely happen outside your work?

Review and revise the life purpose statement you wrote on p. 3 (and revised on p. 27). As the studies in this section emphasize, a life purpose is much bigger than a job. In light of these studies, is there anything you want to add to your life purpose statement? Delete? Is there anything that you wrote that has gained more or less importance? At this point, you may want to write a two-part statement, with one part that reflects God’s purpose within your occupation and another that you feel strongly about no matter what setting you are in. For example...

“At work, I hope to build and restore communities in the light of the Kingdom of God through the design and service of city infrastructure. In all of life, I want to ‘love the person in front of me’ through acts of kindness and ‘going the extra mile.’”

“In my job, I want to serve God through helping destigmatize mental health and providing care and support for our military members. Outside of work, I also want to coach disadvantaged kids and model Christ. I would love to start a kids’ Bible study!”

“As a teacher, I want to educate and inspire disadvantaged children in my community. I also want to rescue and restore women who have been sexually exploited through sex trafficking and abuse.”

“In the workplace, my purpose is to protect people and our world by designing aircraft that are safer and make better use of the resources God has given us. At work and at home, my purpose is to awaken hearts to the heart of God and help others fulfill their role in God’s global mission.”

Discuss/reflect: When you are done writing, step back and reflect (and if you have a friend around to talk with about it, even better) and ask yourself:

- Is your purpose consistent with how God has designed you?
- Do people agree that this statement describes your best contribution?
- Is your purpose statement something to be lived out in the workplace, in your neighborhood, through volunteer work?
- Is your purpose compelling and significant to you?
- Does it inspire others?
- Do you sense that your life purpose is truly meaningful? Could you be happy pursuing this purpose?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION (OPTIONAL)

“Always Only Add”

Before starting her first “real job,” a young woman decided that no matter what, she wanted to always—and only—be a positive influence:

I determined to “always only add.” I decided I was going to use my hands to build, not tear down, and that no matter who I worked with, I only wanted to add—no matter what.

(You can read the whole story on the Nav20s website, nav20s.org, in the blog section: [“Always Only Add” April 16, 2014.](#))

Her phrase, “always only add” captures well the kind of life this Bible study has tried to explore, the kind of life Jesus modeled for us and is helping us grow into. Does this seem like a do-able approach to life?

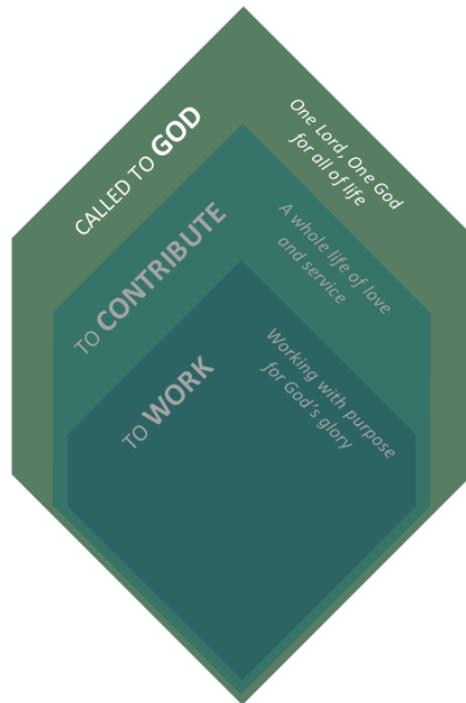
The Lord’s Prayer

End your study by praying through the Lord’s Prayer. As you pray, concentrate on each word, each phrase and think about the focus of each request: what areas of life does this prayer focus on? As you feel lead by God, mention some specific requests of your own.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 5:9-13, ESV)

SECTION THREE: CALLED TO GOD

God has created each person for a lifetime of love and service. For many, a significant part of this contribution will occur in the workplace. But the foundation—the most important aspect of a biblical perspective on work and vocation—is our calling to God Himself. As Os Guinness writes, “calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service” (*The Call*).



Therefore, it is critical to remember that there is a single, primary Caller:

*First and foremost, we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia)... These and other things are always the secondary, never the primary calling. They are “callings” rather than the “calling.” They are our personal answer to God’s address, our response to God’s summons. Secondary callings matter, but only because our primary calling matters most. (Os Guinness, *The Call*)*

THE LORD OF WORK

WARMUP

The ultimate reason for a high view of work is simple: we belong to God. Everything we do – and all our work – falls under His Lordship.

The “hard” side of this reality is that there are things our Lord will ask us to abandon: selfish thoughts, self-centered ways, all lying, all deception, all laziness and all drivenness. We must learn to say “no” to ourselves.

But perhaps the even more difficult part of lordship is learning to accept God’s “yes” – “Yes, I am with you.” “Yes, I can help.” “Yes, your work is important to Me.” Blessing and companionship, especially when we know we do not deserve it, takes humility to accept, and humility is not easy.

Discuss/reflect

- From your experience with work so far (work in your home, at school or in other workplaces), what are some of the things God has asked you to say “no” to as part of learning what it means to work for Him (no matter who your earthly boss might be)?

- Can you think of times when God has clearly said “yes” to you – and has brought you His help – in your work?

STUDY

Lordship

These three passages highlight God’s claim over all of life in three areas of Scripture: the Law, prophecy and the end of history. What do you notice in each about God’s claims, and God’s aims, for all of life?

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Daniel 7:9-14

Revelation 21:1-2

Work and Worship

Closeness with God clearly grows through time spent reflecting on and praising God, both on our own and in fellowship with others. As we reflect *on God*, we become closer *to God* and become more *like God*. But closeness with God also develops—as it does in all relationships—as we spend time working *with God*, pursuing the tasks and contributions He has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

In *Every Job a Parable*, John Van Sloten explains it this way:

Jesus taught that there are basically two laws we need to keep in order to flourish as human beings: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

Love God first and foremost, with all you’ve got; then, out of that love, work for the common good.

These two laws are not mutually exclusive. They are symbiotic—mutually fulfilling and interdependent. Love of God shapes and informs love of neighbor...

The reverse is true as well: Only by loving your neighbor (working for the common good) will you be able to fully love God. Work concretizes your faith; it puts God’s words into action. We need to be doing both at the same time—loving God and loving our neighbor—to be fully alive.

And it all starts with a loving, knowing experience of God.

This section looks at the life of David to see how his work with God became a part of his devotion to God.

Discuss/reflect

- Before diving into the Scriptures, make a list of times when you have felt particularly close to God. What were you doing during those times? Were you alone or with others? Does your list include times when you were working?

- What do most people seem to mean when they talk about “intimacy with God”? Do you agree with this description? By not including “work” in their view of intimacy, what might people be missing in their relationship with God?

David

In David's life, we see moments of deep reflection and courageous action. In some places, we have records of both his reflections and the life experiences that inspired them. Read the following passages and record observations about...

- David's heart for God
- How work, calling and serving others was a part of David's experience with God
- Actions and attitudes that could help you to grow in your relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Psalms 34 and 1 Samuel 21:10-15 ("Abimelech" is another name for the king named in 1 Samuel.)

Psalms 7 and 1 Samuel 24 (Most scholars believe that this Psalm was written during the events recorded in 1 Samuel 24.)

Psalms 63 and 2 Samuel 17:16-29 (For the full story, see 2 Samuel 15-19.)

Discuss/reflect: Write two to three statements about devotion to God from your study of David's experience.

CONCLUSIONS/APPLICATIONS

Van Sloten writes about "experiences of God when 'out of the blue' inspiration hits you, when a huge challenge confronts you and you find another physical or cognitive gear, or when you are so caught up in the flow of what you are doing that you lose all sense of time and space." Have you had experiences like this one? Would it be fair to call such experiences "worship"? Why or why not?

Looking at your past successes and failures in keeping commitments, are there any conclusions (things you mentally agree with) that need to become convictions (strongly held beliefs that you are willing to sacrifice for)? Explain. What steps can you take or what help can you get to help deepen and follow through on these convictions?

We all need a supportive community. Because the context of work is different from the context of campus, the benefits and responsibilities of being a part of such a community often look different. What will you most likely have to give up once you graduate? Or if you have already graduated, what have you already had to give up? What new things (opportunities and challenges) are available in the workplace?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

In his book *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah describes three orientations toward work.

- The first is to treat your work as a **job**. The focus is on making money to pay the bills.
- A second is to approach your work as a **career**. The focus is on advancement and prestige.
- The third orientation is to see your work as **central** to God’s purposes. Work is part of His plan... for you and for His world.

The problem with the first two approaches is that they are never enough: you will never make enough money to be satisfied, you will never advance far enough or receive enough praise and recognition to feel (at least not for very long) that you can rest.

How do the passages in this study on Lordship and worship prepare you for a better approach to work?

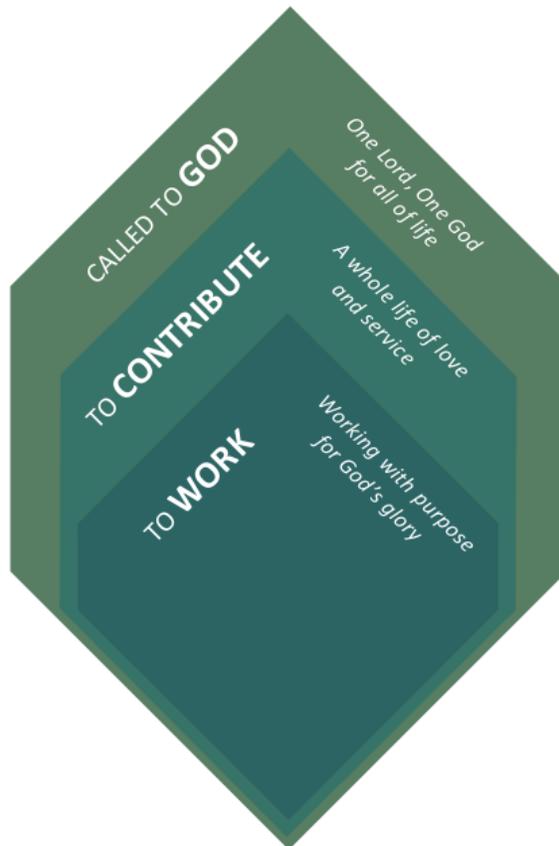
SUMMARY: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WORK, VOCATION AND CALLING

In this study we have tried to tap into two deep heart motivations—responding to the call of God to Himself and pursuing the work He gives us to do. In order to capture what you have learned, go back through your notes and pick out the ideas from this study that have had the biggest impact on you. For each of these ideas, write a few concrete action steps. For some of these ideas, the “action” might be as simple as a new understanding: “Though I usually think..., what I see here is that....” For example:

“In the past, I always thought ‘sharing the gospel’ at work was the only thing that mattered. Now I see that many things about work matter to God.”

What path have you imagined your career taking? What contributions have you seen as most valuable? How does this study impact these plans or hopes?

At the beginning of this study, we introduced this picture to help explain the connection between work and our impact on the world around us.



Now that you have done this study, how would you describe the relationship between God’s call to Himself and His call to a lifetime of serving others? How would you describe the relationship between God’s call to serving others and your career? Is this sense of calling different from the way you have thought about it before? What are the advantages of seeing some aspects of calling “inside” of others? Do you think this way of understanding work and calling makes things easier...or more difficult?

CONGRATULATIONS!

Research has shown that those who have participated in exploration programs such as this Bible study “demonstrated—one year after graduation from college—greater intentionality, more resilience, and broader life satisfaction than those who did not participate in such programs. Analysis of alumni surveys reveal that the benefits of

purpose exploration grow stronger with time as life decisions accumulate.” (Tim Clydesdale, *The Purposeful Graduate*, p. 211)

If you are interested in delving deeper into understanding how God has designed you and the life purpose He has called you to, we recommend the workbook *Exploring Your Life Purpose*, created by The Navigators People Resource Team. It explores these five perspectives on your life and life purpose:

- **Inward:** what our God-given design reveals within us
- **Outward:** our unique contribution to God’s broad kingdom purposes in the world
- **Backward:** how God has purposely prepared us through our life experiences
- **Forward:** motivations, passions, and dreams that draw us to our future destiny
- **Upward:** confirmation by God (and affirmation by others)

TIPS FOR GROUP LEADERS

TIMELINE

This study is divided into nine sessions. The first, “Getting Started,” lays important groundwork that will help make the rest of the study flow more smoothly and includes an exercise on calling that will be referred to in later studies. Each session should take 60-90 minutes. Prior preparation is strongly recommended.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The central goal of this study is to build convictions. Good leadership will require high attention to facilitating good discussion. Sometimes, you will find that the best questions are not the ones on the page but the ones that are raised in the discussion itself.

Many of the questions in the study are designed to encourage participants to process their convictions in the context of their vocations. Although we have tried to make the questions as practical as possible, because the focus is on personal application, it may take people a while to see how the principles they are studying apply to their own lives. As you lead the discussion, do not worry if there is some initial ambiguity. Ambiguity at the beginning often leads to more thoughtful and deeper convictions as time passes.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

This study intentionally uses several different types of Bible study approaches, including word searches, verse analysis (observe–interpret–apply) and character studies. The goal, in addition to covering a biblical perspective on work and calling, is to help deepen participants’ skill in these various approaches.

EXPERT OR FACILITATOR?

You do not have to be an expert leader or a teacher with all the answers to facilitate and guide these discussion sessions. Rather, consider yourself a fellow journeyer in the group. The goal is not to teach but to explore and discover together.

Jesus often guided a conversation through asking questions. A primary skill of a good facilitator is the ability to listen to other people’s responses and ask follow-up questions. This skill requires the discipline of listening well. On the other hand, do not be afraid of being part of the discussion yourself. From time to time, you should also share your thoughts.

DIVERSITY

Work, vocation and calling will be experienced differently by different people. Race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, culture and personal history all make a difference. Because every group is different, instead of adding questions that bring up the topic of diversity in each study, we are asking facilitators to raise the issue of

diversity and ask questions that make the most sense for their group. Here are a few guidelines to consider:

1. If you have a diverse group and are worried about how to lead it, you may want to ask someone who is familiar with your group to help observe where more perspectives may need to be addressed and/or discussed.
2. In the discussion of “workers” in the last chapter, some people might have difficulty with Paul’s use of the word “slaves” (some translations). We have tried to give some additional resources, but often, the best approach will be to simply name the awkwardness and ask people how they experience those words. People from different cultural groups—as well as people within different groups—have different backgrounds that affect how they experience certain words and ideas. Naming the tension and asking questions often leads to very good conversations.
3. For most people, there are “layers” to questions. The first layer will likely be similar to what all people as believers experience, and the other layers will be shaped by personal experience. For some people, this personal layer can include strong feelings or very diverse perspectives that come from their experience of being part of another race, ethnicity or culture. No leader or facilitator can know all of these layers ahead of time, but they can learn how to pay attention and ask questions that give people the opportunity to share their experiences.

OTHER RESOURCES

Other resources from The Navigators *God’s Calling and Your Vocation* series:

Nehemiah: When God’s Call Comes Calling at Work by Wayne Kuna

Daniel: Thriving at Work as an Exile by Ralph Ennis

Exploring Your Life Purpose by The Navigators People Resource Team

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ronni Bernardy is on Collegiate Navs staff at Kansas State University.

Dean Storelli works with the Nav20s in Durham, North Carolina.

John Teten is the Collegiate Navs Regional Leader of Florida.