



Work



Purpose of Work

1. Considering both human experience and the Bible's teaching concerning our special role in God's creation, what would you say are the purposes of our work (whether paid occupations, volunteer efforts, study/research, etc.)? Consider the following verses.¹

- 📖 "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (*2 Thessalonians 3:10b, NIV*).
- 📖 "A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God" (*Ecclesiastes 2:24, NIV*). "So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot." (*3:22a*).²
- 📖 "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (*Ephesians 4:28, NIV*).³
- 📖 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (*Colossians 3:23, NIV*).⁴

2. What negative attitudes corrupt our motivations?⁵

The Limits of Work

After God created the heavens and the earth, he "rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating he had done" (*Genesis 2:2-3*). This was the basis given for the "Sabbath day" (*Exodus 20:8-11*). In the Old Testament, God's people were commanded to observe the weekly Sabbath – a day for rest and worship (*Isaiah 58:13-14*). The Sabbath is a reminder that work is not the sum and purpose of human life. True meaning, purpose, and fulfillment are found only in relationship with God.

God's Work

Though God created the universe long ago, he is still working (*John 5:17*). God's continuing work is called "providence," which refers to his guidance and care over his creation.

¹ Purposes include sustenance (provision of food, nourishment, physical needs), fulfillment, service, and worship.

² God has stamped on human nature the desire to create, succeed, and improve. The person who acknowledges God as the Creator and Giver finds special satisfaction.

³ Some are motivated by the idea of serving the common good. Someone doing cancer research is hoping to help find a cure of cancer – that's certainly a good thing. But it does not have to be something that obvious. In almost every occupation there is an element of service. At the very least, we can take the money earned and use it to help others. When we are motivated by service, the power, prestige and pay is less important. People may work for less money; people may volunteer and receive no payment.

⁴ For the Christian, the opportunity to work, and the abilities and resources needed to perform the work are seen as gifts of God. We honor God by doing our work with excellence and gratitude. It is part of our service to God. Worship is not merely something we do on Sundays. We worship God with our whole lives, on a daily basis.

⁵ Negative attitudes that corrupt our motivations include selfishness and pride. We tend to seek fulfillment in power, position, recognition, money and other material gain, etc. But such things cannot ultimately satisfy. Our work (or its results) can become our god, thus displacing the one true God.

God's present work includes his "redemptive work" necessary to restore the harmonious order and relationships broken in the Fall. When Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34), he was referring primarily to God's redemptive work.

Our Work

As stewards of God's creation, our work is related to God's providential work. As redeemed creatures (if we are Christians) we have a role in God's redemptive work. Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (John 6:27). In what ways can we be sure we are truly coworkers with God?

- Acknowledge that the "boss" is God. (Colossians 3:23-24) God is in charge of the universe. He has established the vision statement and core values for humanity. He has given us principles to work by. He has revealed these things in his Word – the Bible.
- Be sensitive to how God is working. How does our occupation fit into God's work in the broad sense? God is the source of every good thing. How is our work contributing to the good purposes of God? Are the motivations, methods, and goals of our work in violation of biblical principles? Does our work lead us away from God?
- Consider the spiritual & eternal. Jesus said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life" (John 6:27).⁶ There is more to life than the physical and material! We may do many good things in the world but are we investing in eternity?
- Devote yourself to God's work, including communication of the gospel.⁷

The Attitude of Work

3. Read Colossians 3:1-2, 15-17, 23-24.⁸ What attitude should the Christian have in his/her work? Why might it be difficult to have the right attitude? What things can the Christian do to maintain the right attitude?



Reflection & Application

- Is your purpose in life defined by your work? What brings you the greatest satisfaction and fulfillment? The Bible teaches that ultimate fulfillment is *not* found in human effort and achievement (even if it results in much good). Ultimate fulfillment is found in relationship with God through faith in Jesus. And the most fulfilling work is related to the work of God.
- As a Christian, what is your attitude toward work? Do you separate your work from your service to God? Review this lesson and the related Bible passages, and commit to making your work part of your service to God (without allowing your work to become your god). Pray for wisdom in how to do *God's work* in the workplace.

⁶ Right after Jesus said that, the people asked, "What must we do to do the works God requires? Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent (i.e. Jesus)" (John 6:28-29). Ultimately, it's not about *our* efforts to achieve earthly success. It's about God's *gift* of eternal life received through faith in Jesus Christ.

⁷ In general, communicating the gospel *in* the workplace must be done with sensitivity, discernment, and care. Especially when working for an employer, it is usually more appropriate to build relationships and trust, and communicate the gospel outside normal work times and/or places. But Christians should always be ready to be a witness for Christ, maintaining sensitivity to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Verses 23-24 are in the context of instruction to 'slaves.' Because the slave/master relationship involves 1) one who has authority, provides work and controls; and 2) one who is under that authority, and serves or works for the authority; the principles are often applied to the modern employer/employee relationship. It should be noted that Paul neither condones slavery nor encourages revolt (1 Cor. 7:17-24). Rather he instructs both slaves and masters to relate to others according to Christian principles, with the aim of changing the institution of slavery from within.