

I'm Fine, Just Busy Lesson 3

The theological definition of work

Hello everyone, and welcome to week three of our Small Groups series. I'm fine, just busy. Last week, Pastor Derek walked us through the history of speed in our culture and shined a light on the fact that true rest has been sacrificed for efficiency in everything that we do, and it is killing us moment by moment. Today, I want to shift and really dig into the Biblical definition of work. Our culture has many opinions on work, but all of them seem to fall into two ditches. The first is that work is bad and something to be avoided at all costs. The second is that work, or working hard, is a virtue of the highest order, and that hard work and performance are the only real metrics of success. What I want to do in this study is find what the Bible teaches us on work and root out any bad ideas or philosophies that we may hold in our minds and in our hearts so that "whatsoever we do, we do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;"¹

Biblically, how should we look at work?

- Going back to the very beginning, man was created for work.

Gen 1:26-31

" 26 And 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 fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. 29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so."

¹ Colossians 3:23 (words added for flow)

- God's created purpose for man was for us to be image bearers and rulers over the things of this world. Mankind was to multiply through raising families and manage the plants and animals of God's creation. God even gave mankind dominion over the plants and animals of this world to accomplish their mission. That is work. God gave Adam and Eve a job. The purpose of their work was to worship and bring glory to God, the creator. The purpose of our work is the same. To worship and bring glory to God.
- As image bearers of the Creator God who cares for the things of this world, we were created with the capacity, creativity, and opportunity to show our faith in God. Working hard can be an act of worship to God. Creating something beautiful with God's creation and giving the glory to God is using work as an act of worship. Stewarding God's creation well, growing gardens, raising animals, and treating them as gifts from God to be managed well can glorify God. Caring for and serving the people in our lives is work that expresses our love for God and His creation. Working excellently at your job and providing for your family is work that can honor God.

- Mankind is given a purpose and authority that is tied to work at creation. It is inseparable from who we are. God even says that mankind, created to work and represent God, is *very good* in verse 31.
- So work itself is not bad, in fact, it is very good. If someone is not working, they are missing out on an opportunity to glorify God. Now, work in this context doesn't have to be a paid job, but it certainly can be.
- From creation, there was not just work, but also the example and command to rest (Gen 2:2-3). God rested on the seventh day, then God sanctified the seventh day as a day of rest for His people. We were not just commanded to work, we were also commanded to rest as a part of our worship of God.

The problem is, work was tainted by the curse of sin.

In Gen 3:16-19, we read that the curse of sin will cause sorrow and struggle to accompany work.

"16 Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. 17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife,

and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; 18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; 19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

- The curse will now cause pain and sorrow in the two primary purposes that God gave man at creation. Multiplying and filling the earth through childbirth will be painful, and the ground is cursed, meaning that work will now become frustrating, sorrowful, and never-ending.
- Our purpose as image bearers has not changed, but the mission has become much more difficult. The command to work has not been removed, but now there is pain and sorrow in our work. As we struggle day after day after day, we are reminded of the cost of sin.

There is hope beyond the curse.

Though we now struggle in our work due to the curse of sin, we still have hope.

- We have the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ, given freely and not based upon our work,

but upon the work of God. What an encouragement it is to know that our salvation and relationship with God are not based upon our ability to work or earn God’s favor- a task we could never accomplish (Eph 2:8-9).

- The fact that our work does not earn our salvation frees us to look at work not as a means of salvation, but as an opportunity to worship. We do not need to worry and fret about whether our work is “good enough” for God to save us. Our work becomes an offering of gratitude, given to God in response to His love for us.
- We have hope that the struggle and sorrow of work will end. The work of Jesus has saved us, and one day we will be glorified with Him. There will be a new Heaven and a new Earth, untouched by sin. There will be no more death, sorrow, or pain. We will once more work without the curse of sin. Living with God and glorifying Him forever (Rev 21).

This is what work looks like Biblically- We were created to work as a means to glorify God. Work has been tainted by sin, but even in the midst of that curse, there

is hope through the perfect work of Jesus Christ for our salvation and the glorification that is to come.

- **Work is something to be avoided.**

Some in our culture see work as something that should be avoided. Some avoid work at all costs and live unemployed and in poverty, feeling entitled to basic needs and desires. But even more numerous than the “lazy” are those who endure work with the hope that one day they will never need to work again. “One day, I will be able to retire on the beach with the boat.” “One day, I’ll travel the world with no worries or responsibilities.” “One day I will be able to spend all my time with friends and family, and never have to clock in again.”

These dreams and desires in and of themselves are not bad, but they point to a faulty perspective on what work is. If we look back at Genesis, we will see that work is good. Work is a gift from God that gives us purpose and an opportunity to praise and glorify God through obedience and creativity. Work is not something to avoid or endure; instead, it is a challenge to embrace and seek excellence in. Every one of us has

the capacity to give honor and glory to God through our work. So the question becomes How can you be a nurse that shows the love and care of God through your job? How can you be the engineer who shows the love and care of God through your job? How can you be the stay-at-home mom who shows the love and care of God through your work? Or the business owner, the executive, or the janitor? Your job is an opportunity to bring honor to God in unique and amazing ways. One pastor says, “Everything done in the name of Jesus, from the washing of the bathroom to the running of the boardroom, will be rewarded forever.”² The work that we are doing now is not a waste of time. It is an opportunity to serve and worship God. Don’t let this opportunity go to waste.

- **My work defines me**

While some may seek to avoid work, many in our culture fall on the other side of the ditch and idolize work. For some, it is a means of identity, for others, it is a means of independence.

One of the first questions we ask when meeting someone new is “What do you do?” I mean, I can’t

² Desiring God. (2020, August 12). *How does Christ change how I work?* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EubgsqFsAoM>

imagine trying to hold a conversation with a stranger and not pulling that one out! Our jobs become such a large part of who we are. We spend lots of time at our job, put forth lots of effort, rely upon them for money and benefits, and build relationships with coworkers based upon our shared job. "According to the 2023 Pew Research study, 39% of all employed Americans say their career is extremely or very important to their sense of identity."³

When your job becomes your identity, your sense of self-worth and value become dependent upon your job performance. When you are doing well at work, then you can confidently claim "I am valuable and worthy," but when things go poorly at your job, you begin to doubt your worth, "I am lazy, or stupid, or not good enough." Placing your identity in your job, or really any kind of work or performed feat, will ultimately leave your identity and self-worth in constant flux. You will be a victim of your circumstances. When you fail at a task (as we all do), your very being will be attacked. The ups and downs and pain alone are enough to highlight that this is a problem, but even worse is that if your identity is tied to work, then your entire life will be subject to your work.

Is it worth it to work 100 hours a week, abandoning your family and your church? Absolutely not! But what if that is what your boss is asking you to do, and disappointing him means that you have no value? Should you work yourself ragged day after day, coming home on edge and exhausted? No! But what if you pride yourself on being "a hard worker" who shows up first and leaves last? See, when your identity is tied to your job, it becomes lord of your life, even if you claim that Christ is. You will only ever really be able to serve God when your job allows you to. You will only ever really be home with your family when your job allows you to. And the root of the control likely isn't the unreasonable demands of your boss, or the constant calls from your customers- those happen. Most jobs want more and more and more. That is our culture. Going over the history of speed, we see that efficiency is king. But the demands of this world are not what is going to force you outside of the will of God. The root of the problem is that your identity and definition of success are tied to your job performance. Our identity is to be in Christ and Him alone. When we misplace that we are missing the point at a foundational level.

³ Zack Duncan, *My performance-based identity*, Medium, February 14, 2025, <https://medium.com/@zduncan/my-performance-based-identity-7355652bc7a1>.

- **I can become independent if I work hard enough.**

Others think that they can become independent if they work hard enough. In this mindset, work is elevated as the only thing needed for provision.

Now, biblically, we see that work is tied to provision:

- Gen 3:19 says, "In the sweat of our face we will eat bread." We will have to work hard for food or provisions.

In the New Testament, Paul even says that those who don't work will not eat.

- 2 Thess 3:10 "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

While it is necessary to work to provide for yourself and your family, we must also recognize that it is ultimately God who provides all things. Without God's provision, the food you need to eat wouldn't grow. Without God's provision, you would not be able to work to earn that food. God is the Creator and sustainer of all things, so while we in a lesser sense must work to meet our needs, in a much greater sense we must rely upon God for provision in all things.

Deuteronomy 8:3, talking to the Israelites coming out of the wilderness says, "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

The Israelites in the wilderness were dependent upon God to provide them with manna. But even more than that, God was teaching them to rely on God in all things and to live by the word of God, rather than living according to their own desires, wants, and even needs. Jesus in the wilderness has fasted for 40 days when Satan comes to Him and tempts Him to turn stones into bread. Jesus responds by repeating this verse. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

In Western Culture, and especially in America, Independence is of the utmost importance. Dependence on anyone or anything is to be avoided at all costs because dependence can become control, and those whom I am dependent on can "tell me what to do."

This idea is antithetical to a relationship with God where you are dependent upon Him for all things. We

deceive ourselves into thinking that we can live free from God's control, or anyone else's, if we just work hard enough. If I can cover my expenses, meet all my needs, and afford anything I want, then I don't need God. This is living by bread alone. This is putting all the ownership on yourself and rejecting God and His design for your life, and His design for work. We have taken work, a good thing, and made it an ultimate thing that can replace our need for God. Not only have we replaced God with the idol of work, but we have deceived ourselves into thinking that we can truly live independently from God, as if He couldn't decide to stop the rain in the sky, the food in the ground, or the breath in your lungs. Even in our rebellious pursuit of independence, we are reliant upon God to keep this world and our lives in order.

And the thing is, you still aren't satisfied! Even if you convince yourself that you do not need God, you find yourself chasing after pleasure, happiness, meaning, and satisfaction endlessly. Some find themselves wanting just a little bit more, then a little bit more, then a little bit more- always chasing and never satisfied. Others work hard to get to a place where they never need to work again, but they find themselves searching for purpose when the purpose given to us by God is the

work that they are avoiding! There is no satisfaction in independence because man cannot live by bread alone. We need God. We need a relationship with Him, purpose from Him, salvation through Him, and transformation from Him.

Psalm 37:3-4 says, "3 Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. 4 Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

When we are dependent upon God, following after God, and delighting ourselves in God and the things of God, we will be provided for and satisfied. This is living by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. This is the goal worth pursuing. The goal that will last for eternity.

Conclusion

Biblically, we can see that work is a gift from God, given to us at creation so that we can glorify God through service, obedience, and creativity. Work became difficult and sorrowful through the curse of sin, but the value and purpose of work remain unchanged. Our culture has a multitude of perspectives on work that run counter to the clear commands of Scripture, and so we must guard our hearts and minds from the lies that say work is to be

avoided, work is to become my identity, and work can bring independence. In your small groups this week, I want to challenge you to confess where you have held wrong ideas towards work. Where have you made work an idol, or made work an enemy to be avoided or endured? Where are you seeking independence from God, and using work as a means to live how you want rather than how God commands? Then, in your homework, I want you to think through and write down how you can glorify God in the work that you do and share your thoughts next week. How can you glorify God in your job? In your schooling? In your role as a father, mother, child, or sibling? I pray that this can be a challenge and encouragement for you as we walk through this series!