

## A Theology of Work

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Various

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**Without a clear understanding of God's design for work, we will inevitably find ourselves frustrated and unhappy.**

### **I. God ordained man to work for a living from the very beginning. (Gen. 2:4-15)**

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. *(11-14 names and describes the four rivers that flowed from the headwaters in Eden)*

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

### **II. Because of Adam and Eve's sinful disobedience to one simple command of God, work (that should have been rewarding) became difficult and unpleasant. (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:17-19)**

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat food from it  
all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow  
you will eat your food

until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are  
and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:17-19)

### **III. God ordains that those who are capable work, not just expect a handout.**

Lazy hands make for poverty,  
but diligent hands bring wealth. (Proverbs 10:4)

The desire of the sluggard kills him,  
for his hands refuse to labor. (Proverbs 21:25)

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22)

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”

We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-11)

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)

### **IV. God also ordained Sabbath rests into his creation. (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 23:10-11)**

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:2-3)

“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed. (Exodus 23:10-12)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

“‘Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death; those who do any work on that day must be cut off from their people. For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’”

When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant law, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God. (Exodus 31:13-18)

“‘If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over... I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it. (Leviticus 26:27-28, 33-35)

He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah. (2 Chronicles 36:20-21)

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

**V. Christians are to be good workers because ultimately, we are serving and glorifying the Lord. (Colossians 3:22-24)**

Do you see someone skilled in their work?

They will serve before kings;

they will not serve before officials of low rank. (Proverbs 22:29)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:22-24)

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

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

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

**VI. We should find appropriate satisfaction in a job well done, not attempt to find our life’s meaning in work.**

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man’s heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;

I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my labor,

and this was the reward for all my toil.

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done

and what I had toiled to achieve,

everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;

nothing was gained under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11)

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet<sup>[a]</sup> no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him. (Ecclesiastes 3:9-14)

**VII. To find fulfillment discover how God has uniquely formed you and find work to do with eternal significance.**

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.  
My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.  
How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them! (Psalm 139:13-17)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you... (Exodus 31:1-6)

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)