

Work is Sacred

1. God works

- He worked at creation
 - Gen 2:2 “finished the work”
 - Gen 2:7 “formed the man” (God got his hands dirty)
 - Gen 2:8 “planted the garden”
 - He works for humanity (Ps 107:8,15,21,31) “his wonderful deeds for man”
 - Christ was the son of a carpenter (Matt 13:35), which almost surely made him one too
 - Jesus considered God a worker and his own ministry work
 - John 5:17 “My Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working”
 - John 4:34 “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work”
 - John 9:4 “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me”
- ❖ The fact that God works lends dignity to work is important; It means it is not a dirty necessity. It is what God does volitionally. God is righteous in both process and product and our work can also be good and acceptable to him in both process and product.

2. God has created us to work and has set up creation for us to work it. Work is not a curse. It is a God-given *creative means by which we live out the image of God.*

- Gen 1:26-29 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground..."
 - Gen 2:5, 15 “and there was no man to work the ground...The Lord God took the man and put him in the ground to work it and take care of it.”
 - Gen 2:19-20 “He brought them to the man to see what he would name them...” God may at times tell us just what our work should like (Noah), but he also allows for creativity.
 - Exodus 20:9 “Six days you shall labor...For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth.” As those in his image, we are called to a pattern of work similar to that of God.
- ❖ Just as we cannot be what God intended us to be apart from relationship, so we cannot be what we are intended to be without work. Work is a part of the natural law ([Ps 104:19-24](#)) which is the reason we are commanded to work...
- Ephesians 4:28 “He who has been stealing...must work, doing something useful with his hands”
 - 1 Thes 4:11 “Make it your ambition...to work”
 - 2 Thes 3:10 “If a man shall not work, he shall not eat”.
- We are not commanded to work as some sort of curse, but because not to work is to belie the very way God made us to fulfill our purpose on earth.

3. God sees a vast array of occupations as acceptable and good

- Farmer (Adam & Eve, Boaz)
- Artists, craftsmen, textile workers, builders (Ex 35:30-36:1)
- Designers, Architects (1 Chron 28:11-12)
- Child Care (Care of Moses as baby, Ex 2:5-10)
- Public Relations (Aaron)
- Ruler (Joseph, Samuel -- Judg 3:10; David -- 1 Sam 16:13)
- Secret Service (Nehemiah)
- Governor (Daniel)

- Experts in knowledge, professors (Dan 1:17)
 - Security Personnel (1 Chr 9:22-27)
 - Supply Managers (1 Chr 9:29)
 - Bakers (1 Chr 9:31-32)
 - Musicians (1 Chr 9:33)
 - Fisherman (Jesus went fishing with the disciples)
 - Shepherd (God reveals the incarnation to shepherds and even likens himself to a shepherd)
 - Tentmaker (Paul)
 - Merchant, Retailer (Prov 31:18, 24)
 - Household Manager (Prov 31:27)
 - Home Decorator (Prov 31:22a)
 - Clothes Designer (Prov 31:22b)
 - Tax Collector (Luke 3:12-13)
 - Soldier (Luke 3:14; Matt 8:5-13)
 - Tennis Player (Psalm 100:4). This is a joke, of course!
- ❖ Therefore, every occupation (other than those that are inherently sinful) is sacred. We ordain ministers and commission missionaries and while there is some Scriptural precedent for this (Matt 28:18; Acts 13:1-3; 1 Tim 4:18), the whole of Scripture calls us to consider that each and every person is commissioned by God to perform their work.

Dorothy Sayers:

Let the Church remember this: that every maker and worker is called to serve God in his profession or trade – not outside it. The Apostles complained rightly when they said it was not meet [proper] they should leave the word of God and serve tables; their vocation was to preach the word. But the person whose vocation it is to prepare the meals beautifully might with equal justice protest: It is not meet for us to leave the service of our tables to preach the word.

The official Church wastes time and energy, and moreover, commits sacrilege, in demanding that secular workers should neglect their proper vocation in order to do Christian work – by which She means ecclesiastical work. The only Christian work is good work well done. Let the Church see to it that the workers are Christian people and do their work well, as to God: then all the work will be Christian work... (“Why Work,” pp. 8-9)

As Sayer indicated, we should consider all work sacred and not give greater value to people based on their vocation (James 2:1-7). If we think higher of people solely based on their occupation, we are making a judgment call that God doesn’t make. We should honor people for their diligent and faithful work regardless of their occupation.

4. God has created “laws” which govern successful work

- Certainly there are general laws like diligence and honest gain
 - Prov 12:24 “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.”
 - Prov 14:23 “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.”
 - Prov 13:11 “Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.”
- But there are specific “laws” for each profession which we must learn and discover
 - Laws for the farmer (Isaiah 28:23-29) *...Some of the God’s laws for work are provided by special revelation, others must be discovered by looking at the general revelation of creation...best practices*
 - Laws for a king (Prov 31:1-9; Deut 17:14-20)
 - Laws for judicial proceedings (Deut 19:15...multiple witnesses; Deut 17:17...no contempt of court; Deut 191:1-14...protective custody in cities of refuge; Ex 23:8...no bribery)

5. The effect of the fall is that work is not always rewarding. It will at times be frustrating, unfruitful, and involve suffering

It will be that way because:

- God has made it that way (Gen 3:18-19)
- Because the sun and the rain (and calamity) fall on both the righteous and the wicked (Matt 5:45; Luke 13:1-5...tower fell and killed 18)
- Because Satan is in the picture (Job)
- Because men are sometimes evil (Judg 6:4 "They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys."; 1 Peter 4:12 "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.")
- Because we have things to learn (Judges, Job; Heb 12:7 "Endure hardship as discipline")

Our response must be to:

- Accept work that does not have a successful end as from God just as we would accept "successful" work (Job 2:10 "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble.")
- Cry out to God for mercy (Joel 1:19 "To you, O LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the open pastures and flames have burned up all the trees of the field.")
- Submit ourselves to rightful authorities and keep working in a respectful way (1 Peter 2:18-19 "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God")

6. We should work for the benefit of others

- Physical Benefit: As Acts of Mercy and Provision
 - Acts 20:34-35 "You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive.""
 - 1 Tim 5:8 "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."
 - Eph 4:28 "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, *that he may have something to share with those in need.*"
 - Jas 1:27 "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."
- Spiritual Benefit: As a Testimony to the Worthiness of God
 - Titus 2:9-10 "Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, *so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.*" (NAS: that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.)
 - 1 Thes 4:11-12 "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, *so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders* and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."

7. We should seek work based on how we are fitted

- Psalm 139:13-14...God has fitted us perfectly for that which he has ordained us
- Proverbs 25:14...If we try to force gifts we don't have, we will be like clouds without rain
- Romans 12:6-8 "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let

him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”

- 1 Cor 12:4-31 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord....But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”
- Psalm 25:12 “Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.”
- There are situations that prevent us from doing what we are gifted to do, but if we can gain our freedom to do, we ought. 1 Cor 7:21: “Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.”
- “Understand that you are God’s idea. You will be held accountable for using what he gave you to work with, not for pursuing someone else’s agenda” (Arthur Miller, 111)
- “Get the “right” job—one that makes good use of your giftedness—and stay in it. Many people start out in suitable jobs and callings, but yield to the temptation of climbing to a higher position when one is offered. Sometimes, they keep accepting promotions until finally end up in a position that doesn’t match their giftedness...it is wrong to, it is sin to accept or remain in a position that you know is a mismatch for you. Perhaps that’s a form of sin you’ve never even considered—the sin of staying in the wrong job. But God did not place you on this earth to waste away your years in labor that does not employ his design or purpose for your life, no matter how much you may be getting paid for it.” (Miller, 114-5)
- There is no sense in asking [God] to empower us for a task he has not called us to” (Miller, 117)

8. All work is to be done for the glory of God and in cooperation with God

- For the glory of God
 - 1 Cor 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”
 - Col 3:23 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men”
 - Eph 6:7 “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men”
 - Matt 6:33 “**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**”
- In cooperation with God
 - Psalm 90: 17 “May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.”
 - Examples of cooperation with God for the glory of God (Nehemiah, see 6:3,9,16; Joshua, see Haggai 1:12-15)
- Even if we are doing work for others, using our gifts, and finding success if we are not working as unto the Lord and seeking to act in cooperation with him, we will not find our work fulfilling
 - Discontent when seeking self in work
 - Ecclesiastes 2:4-11 “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...My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. 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.”
 - Haggai 1:4-6 “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but

never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

- Psalm 127:1 "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."
- Hab 2:9-13 "'Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?"
- Joy when seeking God in work
 - Ecclesiastes 2:24-5 "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?"
 - Phil 4:11-13 "...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."
 - With thoughts rested fully on God, "the millions at looms and lathes could make the hours glorious. Some hour spent by some night watchman might be the most glorious ever lived on earth. (Frank Labauch, *Letters by a Modern Mystic* (1955), p. 16 quoted in Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*, p. 150)

9. Work is not to be pursued for the sake of accumulation; we are to trust God for provision

- Luke 12:15-21 (Parable of the Rich Fool..."This is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.")
- 1 Timothy 6:6-10 "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
- Matthew 6:25-33 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear....For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
- Proverbs 23:4 "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint."

10. Work should be done with an eschatological perspective

- Matthew 25 (Parable of Talents)
- John 6:27 "Do not work for food that spoils, but *for food that endures to eternal life*, which the Son of Man will give you"
- Col 3:23-24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that *you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward*. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."
- 1 Tim 6:17-19 "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. *In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age*, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

- 2 Cor 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (see also Rom 14:12)

11. Our acceptance is based on Christ’s work, not on our work

- 1 Cor 1:26-31 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”
- Col 3:10-11 “...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, *slave or free*, but Christ is all, and is in all.”
- Eph 6:8 “because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, *whether he is slave or free.*”
- Luke 10:18-20 “...rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”