

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT

WORK



Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian Church
ashfieldpresbyterian.org.au

STUDY 1. GOD'S DESIGN FOR WORK



*"We dig up diamonds by the score,
a thousand rubies, sometimes more;
we don't know what we dig them for...
Hi ho, hi ho, it's home from work we go"*

The seven dwarves in *Snow White & the Seven Dwarves*

Most of us spent at least half our waking hours at work. But, like the seven dwarves, we are often a little confused about why, as Christians, we work. Is there more to work than simply making money to survive? What difference should being Christian make to our work? Are those who aren't in "full-time ministry" performing a second-class type of work?

These studies will look at what God, in the Bible, has to say to us about work. What we'll discover is that far from work merely being a way to put food on the table, to work and create is part of our God-created human identity. God's good world, even though tainted by sin, is improved and developed by our work. And, although this present world will one day be transformed into a new heaven and earth, our work now, both in its nature and its products, bears witness to that future.

1. How would you define work? What is the point of work?

Do you consider the following activities as work? Why/ why not?

- Unpaid work/Volunteering
- Family and house work – raising children
- Study – formally and informally - reading
- Recreational work ie gardening
- Retirement – what is it?

2. **Read Genesis 1:26-28.** What task does God give mankind to do? What does this involve?

3. **Read Genesis 2:4-17.** What particular job does God give Adam to do? How is this part of his God-given task?

How do God's work and man's work go together?

List some examples of jobs that involve working and taking care of God's world. We can call this category of work **creation work**.

4. How does knowing that you are created in the image of God change the way you view work?
5. How does knowing that you are created in the image of **a God who works** change the way you view work?

How does this help us understand why being unemployed can be so hard?

6. **Read Genesis 2:18-25.** What does God say is not good? How does he solve the problem?

What does Gen 1:28 say is one purpose of marriage? How does this help humanity rule over the earth?

7. What do people in our culture think of the work of bearing children, raising a family and running a home compared to 'pursuing a career'? How does this compare to the message of Gen 1-2?
8. In Gen 3 Adam and Eve rebel against God's rule. As a result, God's judgment fell on them, and on the whole world. Everything, including work, was affected. **Read Genesis 3:16-19.** In what ways did the woman's world become painful?

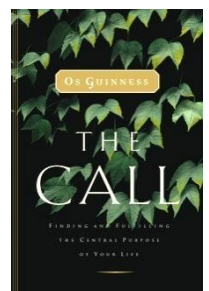
In what ways did the man's world become painful?

9. How does your work bear the effects of the fall?
10. Another category of work involves jobs that minimise the effects of the fall. List some examples of this type of **fall work**.

11. Os Guinness writes, "We now worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship." (*The Call*, 152). How do people make an idol out of work?

What distortion of work (as identity, laziness or workaholism) is most apparent in your workplace?

Which are you most tempted to fall into?



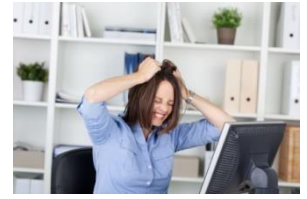
PRAYER POINTS:

Thank God for the gift of work and the wonderful variety of jobs there is. Thank him for the privilege of ruling the world under him. Pray for a thankful spirit at work. Pray for strength for those who are finding work especially difficult at the moment. Pray that you will be godly when under pressure at work

STUDY 2. THE GOOD OF WORK

Since the fall, work is often frustrating and difficult (Gen 3:17-19). However, many of us experience that work can be good; it can be creative, satisfying, stimulating and fruitful, and it can benefit people in all sorts of ways.

1. Consider the cup of coffee you bought during the week. Spend some time listing all the workers who contributed to making the coffee you enjoyed.



2. When a craftsman runs his hand over a finished piece of furniture, he shares the joy of the Creator at the creation of the world. The satisfied customer, the balanced books, the clean house, the delicious meal, the on-time delivery. When do you share the joy of the Creator?



3. **Read Ecclesiastes 2:4-11.** In what ways is his work beneficial to the writer of Ecclesiastes? What is his conclusion? Is it wrong to take delight in work and its benefits? Why/ why not?
4. **Read Luke 3:7-14.** What commands does John the Baptist give to various people for how they should work? How are God's purposes being fulfilled as these people work? Are there general principles here for us?
5. **Read Exodus 31:1-11.** What work were these men given to do? What gifts did God give them to do the work? How did their work benefit the people of God?

How does your work benefit others? How might God use your work to fulfil his purposes?

6. Consider the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50). Give a point-summary of his working career from the following chapters:
 - Gen 37:2
 - Gen 39:1-18
 - Gen 39:19-23
 - Gen 41:9-32

7. **Read Genesis 41:33-57.** What work did Joseph do in this section? How did his previous work help prepare him for this work? How did this work benefit people?
8. Joseph experienced much injustice and disappointment through his life, but God was working out his purposes. What do we learn about God's purposes in Joseph's work from these verses?
- Gen 45:4-11
 - Gen 46:3-4
 - Gen 50:18-21
9. God uses work to shape us. We saw this in the life of Joseph. Think about the working life of Moses. Read **Exodus 2:1-11a**. What was his first role? How might that have prepared him for God's task of leading his people out of Egypt?

However, Moses was still a long way from ready. **Read Exodus 2:11b—15.** How did this first role come to an end?

10. What was Moses' next role? **Read Exodus 3:1.** How might this job have prepared him for God's task of leading his people out of Egypt?
11. How is God using your work life to shape you?
12. Acts 7:23 tells us Moses was forty when he left Egypt. Exodus 7:7 tells us he was eighty when he left Midian to appear before Pharaoh. That's a long time preparing for your main role in life! Are you impatient about God's timing for your career path? What areas might God be wanting to work on in your character and competencies?

PRAYER POINTS:

Give thanks for the good aspects of your work
Pray that God would be at work through you to benefit others
Pray that God would be shaping you through your work

STUDY 3. THE GOOD WORKER

Jesus is the big king over everything, and he calls for a big response. He deserves our allegiance in every area of our life, including our work. He calls us to represent him, and resemble him, as we work.

In 1861, George Cadbury and his brother, Richard, took over their father's ailing food business in Birmingham, England. Through hard work, good business sense and exemplary treatment of employees, they built up the Cadbury chocolate empire, now part of the multi-national company, Cadbury-Schweppes. What is not so well known is that the Cadbury family were devout Quakers, a small Christian denomination founded in the seventeenth century. George had a practice of breakfasting with his employees and leading them in morning prayer. In 1866, when their Birmingham factory had about 70 employees, he formalised this into a daily service of prayer, Bible reading and singing.



George Cadbury in 1861, aged twenty-one, at the time that he took over the failing factory at Bridge Street.

When the staff grew to 200 in 1870, there was an attempt to stop the daily service, but instead workers signed a petition to continue it. The entire workforce met together for the daily service for the next thirty years. By 1900, the workforce had grown to 3000 and the largest hall in the premises could only accommodate 1000. So the service was held three times per week, with one-third of the workforce present each time.



Richard Cadbury in 1861, aged twenty-six.

What is striking about the Cadbury story is that George Cadbury maintained a strong personal commitment to his faith while simultaneously expanding his chocolate business. He saw no conflict between markets and morality. The working life and Christian principles are not necessarily antithetical. It is possible to live according to kingdom values and still be actively engaged in the business affairs of the world.

1. When we meet someone for the first time, one of the first questions we ask is, "What do you do?" The assumption in the world of work is that you ARE what you DO.

Activity (what we do) → identity (who we are)

Eg I'm a successful business person if I succeed at business. I'm a good mother if I have lovely children. I earn more money than you, or I'm your boss, or I'm better qualified, so I'm more important than you.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10. What is the order of identity and activity here?

How does this perspective influence our approach to work?

2. **Read Micah 6.** What sins of Israel is God offended by (10-12)?

Is her religious practice enough to satisfy God? (6-7)

What behaviour does he want to see instead? (8-9)

Does God see a division between your religious life and your work life?

In what sense might our behaviour at work be guided by this chapter?

3. **Read Colossians 3:22-4:1.** Paul is giving instructions to Christian slaves and masters. In the first-century world, slavery was very widespread. In Italy around a third of the population were slaves, working in businesses and shops, as cooks and cleaners, teachers and doctors, in mines and on farms. In some respects, being a slave back then wasn't so different from working life today, and so we can apply this teaching to the workplace.

How should the Christian behave at work?

How do you think this behaviour might contrast with how others behave at work?

4. What is the Christian's motivation for how she behaves at work? How might this make a difference?
5. **Read Titus 2:9-10.** What is the motivation for the slave's behaviour here?
6. Is it appropriate for the Christian to be a perfectionist or workaholic? Do these passages encourage us toward these ends?
7. **Read Colossians 4:2-6.** Is this a new topic, or is it still connected to the theme of work? How can the following qualities help us at work:

Prayerfulness?

Watchfulness

Thankfulness?

Wisdom?

8. What sort of opportunities might you find at work to make the most of?

What advice does Col 4:6 give for our conversations?

Is it right to talk about Jesus at work?

PRAYER POINTS:

Thank God that he notices everything you do at work, even when others don't.

Ask that God would motivate you in your work with the knowledge that you're working for him

Ask that God would give you courage to live and speak as a Christian, and that he would give you an opportunity to speak to specific co-workers this week.

STUDY 4. WORK & WEALTH

Warren Buffet is one of the world's richest men. In 2010 he pledged to give away 99% of his wealth. He writes;

My wealth has come from a combination of living in America, some lucky genes, and compound interest. Both my children and I won what I call the ovarian lottery. (For starters, the odds against my 1930 birth taking place in the U.S. were at least 30 to 1. My being male and white also removed huge obstacles that a majority of Americans then faced.)

My luck was accentuated by my living in a market system that sometimes produces distorted results, though overall it serves our country well. I've worked in an economy that rewards someone who saves the lives of others on a battlefield with a medal, rewards a great teacher with thank-you notes from parents, but rewards those who can detect the mispricing of securities with sums reaching into the billions. In short, fate's distribution of long straws is wildly capricious.

The reaction of my family and me to our extraordinary good fortune is not guilt, but rather gratitude. Were we to use more than 1% of my claim checks on ourselves, neither our happiness nor our well-being would be enhanced. In contrast, that remaining 99% can have a huge effect on the health and welfare of others. That reality sets an obvious course for me and my family: Keep all we can conceivably need and distribute the rest to society, for its needs.



1. What do you think motivates Buffett to use his wealth to help others?

What good can wealth do?

Do you think God approves of a Christian who makes a lot of money? Why/ why not? What about the related concepts of humility and pride, worry, greed, abuse of power, and idolatry? (See James 5:1-6; Lk 18:24; 1 Tim 6:10)

2. **Read Luke 16:1-16.** Is Jesus encouraging dishonesty?

What lesson is he teaching?

What lessons can Christians learn from the people of this world so that we are more shrewd in using worldly wealth?

3. What positive things does Proverbs teach about wealth?
10:22:

19:4, 6-7

Is it good or bad that wealth brings friends, or is it just an observation?

10:15:

How does 18:11 add a note of uncertainty to the security of riches?

4. What is a wise approach to wealth?

12:9, 13:7

13:11

15:16-17; 17:1

16:8

21:17

28:11

5. Proverbs also has much to say that corrects the view that having riches is always good. What do these proverbs teach?

18:23

23:1-5

28:8

6. What is God's attitude to the poor? What does this mean for how we should use our wealth?

14:31

22:2

29:13

7. What is God's attitude to those rich who oppress the poor?

15:25

17:5

21:13

22:16

22:22-23

8. How does a wise use of wealth produce benefits?

19:17

22:4

22:9

28:25

28:27

PRAYER POINTS:

STUDY 5. WORK & WISDOM

WARMING UP

What are the characteristics of someone who is wise in regard to money and work?



WORK & LAZINESS

9. What lessons for work can we learn from the ant (6:6-8)?
10. What are the results of laziness
6:9-11
10:26
12:27
19:24
20:4
24:30-34
11. Can you think of modern examples of the foolishness of the approaches to work described in:
12:11
12:27
15:19
12. What temptations are there for the fool in his work?
14:23
22:13
26:13-16

WISE WORK

Proverbs doesn't say there is anything inherently wrong with wealth. In fact, it gives lots of advice about shrewd business – how to be successful wisely.

13. When deciding which business opportunity to take up, what advice does 22:29 give?
14. What advice does 14:4 give about the importance of capital investment when setting up your business?
15. What type of products are the wise ones to focus on according to 24:27 and 27:23-27?
16. What business practices will generally lead to success according to 11:26 and 3:27-28?

17. What practices will generally lead to trouble? 15:27; 17:23; 20:17

What about 17:8; 20:14 and 21:14? Are these practices being encouraged or discouraged?

18. What business ethics does God approve of? (11:1; 16:11, 20:10) What might this principle look like today?

19. What business principle is being encouraged in these proverbs? 11:15 and 17:18

What reason is given in 22:26-27?

20. **Read Luke 12:13-21.** How does this parable strike you after all we've been reading? What is the same and what is different from the advice of Proverbs? What, according to Jesus, is the great danger with wealth?

21. Christians, traditionally, are not often very entrepreneurial when it comes to taking business risks. Perhaps we are not greedy enough. **Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-4.** What advice is the teacher giving us?

22. **Read Proverbs 3:9-10.** How can we be people who "honour the Lord with the first fruits of all our produce?"

PRAYER POINTS:

STUDY 6. WORK & REST

WARMING UP

How fast does your body clock run?

- a. When someone takes too long to get to the point, do you feel the urge to hurry them along?
- b. When walking along a street, do you feel frustrated because you are stuck behind others?
- c. Would you get annoyed if you had to sit for an hour with nothing to do?
- d. What are you willing to queue for?



1. **Read Genesis 1:31-2:3.** God works, and God rests. Why does God rest?
2. **Read Luke 6:12 and 9:10.** Why did Jesus rest?
3. God commands us to rest from our work too, one day in seven. What reasons does God give in Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17; Deuteronomy 5:12-15?
4. What does Jesus say about what we are to do on the Sabbath in Mark 2:23-3:6?
5. What does Jesus say about rest in Matthew 11:28-29?

Does this have anything to do with our jobs?

6. Not only did God create us to rest from work, but also to sleep. **Read Psalm 3:4-6 & 127:2.** Two things happen while we sleep: While we are powerless, God looks after us and he provides for us. How is sleep an expression of our relationship with God?
7. A major temptation for many people is overwork. For the Christian, behind this tendency are various sins - pride, greed, self-identity, people-pleasing, being a control-freak. Which of these sins are a temptation for you?
8. **Read Hebrews 3:7-4:11.** There's (at least) two different types of 'rest' described here. What 'rest' is being described in 3:11, 16-18?

What lessons can we learn from what happened to that generation (3:12-14; 4:1-3, 11)?

Hebrews 4:1-3, 8-11 mention another 'rest'. What 'rest' is being described here?

Is that something we can experience now, or is it future? Or both?

9. Is it a contradiction (4:11) to work hard to enter rest? How do you work hard to enter rest?
10. We sometimes imagine that eternity is about resting on fluffy, white clouds in heaven, with nothing to do. The Bible, however, is full of promises that eternity will not simply be heaven (separated from earth), but a new heavens and a new earth that we'll enjoy with resurrected bodies. **Read Luke 19:11-27**. How does this parable guide the decisions we make about working in this life?

What does this parable suggest that we will be doing in eternity?

Read Isa 65:21-23; Rev 21:22-27; Rev 22:3. In what sense is this future reality *work*? In what sense is it *rest*?

SOME CONCLUSIONS

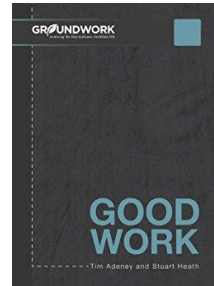
So what have we learned about our work? Is so-called "secular" work only good for earning money to pay for gospel work, and providing us workmates to witness to? No, God has designed us for creation work (as well as redemption work), by which we can bless others and fulfil his creation mandate. Our work, performed in service to Jesus, brings God joy (Col 3:22-4:1).

We need to work, as we do everything, with one eye on God's future kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Peter 3:10-14). We live rightly in this creation, knowing that there's more to come. We fight against injustice now, knowing that one day God will put an end to all oppression. As we do this, we can make the mistake of under-emphasising work, ignoring the world now, and only pursuing redemption work. We can't live on bread alone, but we can't live without bread (1 Tim 5:8; 2 Thess 3:6-15). We can also over-emphasise work, seeking to create a utopian Kingdom of God on earth. The reality is that people who receive earthly justice and mercy will still face God's judgment, unless someone does the redemption work of telling them the gospel.

A better way to draw the relationship between this world (and its work) and the world to come is this: the way we live (and work) as part of Jesus' kingdom now *bears witness to* and *anticipates* what that kingdom will look like when it comes in its fullness, as we work with joy, compassion and acceptance to work the earth, and undo the effects of the fall. This can serve to awaken a hunger in people for the realities of the Kingdom of God, and give us the opportunity to share with them what we know (Col 4:6)

“When the Christian community does both creation work and redemption work well, we build a great witness to what God has done in Christ Jesus. We’re able to both show and tell how good it is to belong to and follow Jesus. And we can provide a glimpse of God’s future kingdom. By this we don’t mean that we provide the building-blocks of a new creation – that the road we build today will necessarily persist into eternity. Rather, the work we do today is more like an architect’s model of a future building. The model isn’t the foundation of the final building, but it really does provide some sense of what the building will be like. And yet, it’s an incomplete picture, an impression. We show that the world is real and good, and also fallen... At the same time, we’re able to show a glimpse of that good future... The life of our Christian community today should have at least some resemblance to the life of God’s people in the new creation... If we don’t do creation work well, then we’ll fail to be a blessing to other and we’ll tend towards hypocrisy... If we don’t do redemption work well, then we’ll have lost what’s distinctively Christian about us, any good we do will go unexplained. ”

Tim Adeney and Stuart Heath, *Good Work*, 130-31.



PRAYER POINTS:

Praise God for the eternal rest he has prepared for us, and the rest we can experience now as we bear Jesus’ easy yoke.

Pray for a good balance between working hard and resting appropriately. Pray that you won’t make work an idol.

RECOMMENDED READING

Good Work, Tim Adeney and Stuart Heath

Gospel Centred Work, Tim Chester

Every Good Endeavour, Tim Keller

Work Matters, Tom Nelson

God on Monday, Benny Tabalujan

Making Work Work, Marcus Nodder

