

# Called To Work

We look at things in an odd way. Many years ago, shortly after I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I struggled with the idea of leaving my profession, going to seminary, and becoming a Pastor. At the time, circumstances weighed against that and I stayed working in the secular world and instead served in multiple roles, both official and unofficial, at my church, Idlewild Baptist Church. Later I did retire from my secular profession and became a volunteer in a ministry organization, The Idlewild Foundation. My role was vocational even though I am a volunteer as I am the Executive Director. One thought I could have had is:

---

*So, I used to work in the real world, but now I have retired from that world and job. Now I am blessed with the opportunity to serve God fully in a more spiritual role.*

---

Some would think those two highlighted sentences make sense and sound spiritual, but they don't! Those two sentences have several layers of mental errors and poor choices of words. Once you see the mistakes, you understand the starting point for a Biblical theology of work.

## **Mistake 1 – “The real world”**

It is not more spiritual to work in a church or church ministry. Doing so does not make you more spiritual. Every job is a calling from God and everything you do is an opportunity to serve Him. It is all the real world, whether inside, alongside or outside the church. Anyone who has watched a church dispute or a church split knows that the church can, at times, be embroiled in some of the same struggles as are seen in the secular business world. The church is filled with people working, serving and living in relationship and, quite frankly, people are not always really good at relationships.

## **Mistake 2 – “Volunteer role”**

No, I am not paid money for the work I do. Yes, I do it as a volunteer. But it is still “work” and it is still a “job” and nowhere does the Bible suggest that you should work harder, better or smarter because you are paid for the work, or that you have to check your brains or your energy at the door to be a Christian. So, calling it a “role” instead of a job insults the position, what I do, and the service I give to God as Executive Director of the Idlewild Foundation.

### **Mistake 3 – “Ministry organization”**

The Idlewild Foundation is a “ministry organization.” But more accurately, we serve outside and alongside Idlewild Baptist Church, for the same Lord and seeking to fulfil the call of the same Gospel. In the sense that we, the members of Idlewild, are the church, then so are the ministries that support and labor along with Idlewild in this great mission.

### **Mistake 4 – “A more spiritual role”**

The hat I wear does not determine my “spirituality.” That is a function of my relationship with God. If my job determines my spirituality, then for many years I was in serious trouble. Paul never thought the young could not set an example for the more senior church members. 1 Timothy 4:12. Similarly, nothing in the Bible suggests there is a vocation that is disqualified from serving the Lord.

---

1 Timothy 4:12

12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but **set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.**

---

### **Mistake 5 – “Serve God fully”**

Here is one of the thoughts that make an understanding of the theology of work so important. I serve God as much and as fully as I want wherever I work, whatever I do and however I chose to do it. Wherever you work, there is nothing holding you back from going to work each and every day with a renewed sense of Christ-exalting joy.

The vast majority of believers aren't in a church job or in a ministry in a vocational role. Instead, they are serving God as they work in “the real world” and the opportunities they have in that world are a blessing. Their opportunities include:

- Inviting co-workers to worship or Bible study
- Demonstrating Christ in their work
- Demonstrating Christ in their attitude.

The old saying “if Christ isn't the Lord of all of your life, He isn't the Lord of any of your life” has a strong element of truth to it. Is Christ only Lord of your Sundays (and only a few of them and only a small part at that)? That is a question that should have an obvious answer; No! But the more difficult

question is “what does it mean to say Christ is Lord of my work and all of my week?” Your answer to that question is your theology of work (and your theology of life).

### **What is a Theology of Work?**

You need to start from a point that you see that work is not evil, secular or even bad. Actually, work is good and a blessing. It is something we have been given by God and can do to His glory. Just a few of many passages showing this include:

Genesis 1:27-28

27 So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and  
increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule  
over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over  
every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Genesis 2:15, 19-20

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

...

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the  
wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them  
to the man to see what he would name them; and  
whatever the man called each living creature, that was its  
name.

20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in  
the sky and all the wild animals.  
But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

Exodus 20:9

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Colossians 3:23-24

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working  
for the Lord, not for human masters,

24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from  
the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule:  
“The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”

Isaiah 65:21-22

- 21 They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
- 22 No longer will they build houses and others live in them,  
or plant and others eat.  
For as the days of a tree,  
so will be the days of my people;  
my chosen ones will long enjoy  
the work of their hands.

Exodus 31

- 1 Then the LORD said to Moses,  
2 "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of  
the tribe of Judah,  
3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom,  
with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of  
skills—  
4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and  
bronze,  
5 to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in  
all kinds of crafts.

Numbers 11

- 16 The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's  
elders who are known to you as leaders and officials  
among the people. Have them come to the tent of  
meeting, that they may stand there with you.
- 17 I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take  
some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on  
them. They will share the burden of the people with you so  
that you will not have to carry it alone.

One thing is clear, glorifying God in the "real world" goes far beyond witnessing to your coworkers or hosting a lunchtime Bible study. Doing your job well, with the Spirit of God and "with all of you heart," is the beginning of fulfilling God's design regardless of the nature of your work.

The root of the English word vocation is the Latin verb *vocō* which means "to call or summon." In the Bible, the word "call" is most commonly used to refer to God bringing people to salvation in Christ. We are also called to serve in God's redemptive work throughout the world. One clear example is:

Romans 8:30

- 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called,  
he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

But that is not the only use of calling. The word is also used to address our conduct and even what we do.

1 Corinthians 7:17

17 Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.

See also 1 Timothy 1:9 and 1 Peter 1:15. So, are some called by God to a secular job in the same sense that some are called to the ministry? Historically, the answer appears to be yes. Historically, people thought of all kinds of work was a calling. In our more modern use of the word "calling" we have gotten away from that meaning. We need to return to the historical broader meaning. We are called to our work, even to secular work.

### **Start with the premise that work is good**

From Genesis 1:3 to Genesis 1:24, God saw what He had created and it was good. Granted, Adam saw something more that he wanted, but creation was still good. That goodness did not end when man fell and sin entered the world. However, man was put into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it (Genesis 2:7-9, 15) long before the Fall. The first work was not a result of sin; it is part of God's original design!

That the root and start of work was good hasn't changed, although work has gotten more difficult because of our fallen nature and confused direction. For Christians, work is still meant to be a calling. You do work to pay the bills, but there is a deeper and more important reason than that. Work may be satisfying and fulfilling, and it should be. However, the main purpose of work has to be what the purpose of life has always been; to glorify God. This idea is directly from God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Romans 11:36

36 For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

These verses, and many others, tell us that God is to be glorified in everything we do and in every aspect of our lives; work, home and play. Christ is to be the source of our strength and focus and He is to be our life's goal. All we do and all we are is to display the glory of God and the supremacy of Christ. It is good to worship on Sundays and Wednesdays. But what about the other days of the week? He is worthy to be worshiped those days too – all days and every day.

What is wrong with thinking that work is just work – a way to earn money and support yourself and your family, and to prepare for the future? Everything! It's not enough that we witness occasionally at work, have a Bible study at work or even that we may try to honor God in how we do our work, be Christlike to people at work, or support God's kingdom with the money we make from work. Those are all good, but they are a small part of an even bigger picture.

Placing God on His throne and giving Him the glory in our lives must infuse and even transform our work as well as our home and personal lives. Most non-believers view work as a means to an end, work provides money to pay the bills, put food on the table and otherwise provide for family. The problem is that if a believer approaches work in the same fashion, the believer's behavior at work, and the believer's testimony at work begins to look no different than anyone else's. In theory, the believer has a holy long-term goal or view, but the daily life begins to look ordinary.

But there was nothing ordinary about the daily life of Christ, in whose image we were made and who we are to imitate (Ephesians 5:1). To think otherwise gives you a non-transformative theology of work. Work remains as a means to an earthly end. Work is what gets us the stuff we want and delivers to us the life we so richly have earned and deserve due to our hard work. We may glorify God on Sundays, but He vanishes from the rest of our life.

Instead, our view of work, our theology of work, has to be that we were created by a loving God from the dust of the earth and we were made to cultivate the garden.

We were created for work. God created us to work. But there is so much more to the life God wants for us than just work. We know that because we were created in God's own image, nothing less. We were also created for relationships since God gave Eve to Adam and Adam and Eve were instructed to be fruitful and multiply.

Genesis 2:18

18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Genesis 1:28

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Adam and Eve were created to live, be together and work. And as the progeny of Adam and Eve, we are called to live, relate and work as well. Christian community, church and even society flow immediately from

creation and Genesis 3. One thing we know is that community and society require work; all life requires work in one fashion or another.

Part of that society arises from God's mandate that we are to rule over God's creation.

Genesis 1:26

26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

We were created to rule, to exercise dominion, over God's creation. Why? To show God's glory in our work. The way we care for His creation reflects Him living in us and reflects our relationship with Him, and it is all to display God in us.

2 Corinthians 4:6

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Despite the fall and the curse of work – it became hard and filled with conflict, work is still good. If all we see is the curse, the toil, the sweat and the difficulty, we have missed our calling and our future.

### **A God's-eye view of work**

All people and all of creation await the return of Christ and the redemption that comes with it. Paul made it clear to us that the struggles of our lives and our world are merely temporary and that the goal is reconciliation and restoration:



Romans 8:18-21

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

When we look forward to His coming and our restoration, we tend to focus on ourselves. After all, through creation, God said His work was good until He created Adam and Eve in His own image. At that moment, God said His work was very good. It wasn't just mankind that was very good, it was all of God's work together ("all that he had made ...") that was very good.

Genesis 3:31

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

As a result, when the redemption comes, it would be incomplete if it was only us; redemption involves all of creation. God will renew all of creation. When we are redeemed in Christ, we will also have our view of the world and all of creation, including work, restored. Work will no longer be a curse, instead it will be our mandate from God, our calling.

### **What about right now?**

In the meantime, we are left with work that still holds the curse of the fall. That doesn't change the fact, and it is a fact, that work, even cursed work, is a calling. We are called, summoned by God, to work, at least to the extent and manner God has made us able.

Colossians 3:17

17 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.



"Whatever"! That means everything. So, when you show up "work," you are there working for Jesus Christ and for His glory. Every day! It is your calling to honor God is your work, your effort, your attitude, your words and your work product. What you do and how you do it matters because you are doing it in the image of God.

But what about a particularly bad and demeaning job? Am I called to work there and stay there? Not necessarily. *Everyone* is "called" to work, in the

sense that “called” means “created” and/or “commanded” to work. We were each created to work, we are commanded by God to work, but that does not require us to work in a job where the work conditions are degrading, demeaning or sinful. Your sense of morality may be a calling from the Spirit that it is time to find a job where such conditions do not exist. It can be hard to know whether God has called you to a particular job or position at a job. But while you are at a job, you are to be the worker God made you with the heart and attitude you are called to have, a holy heart and attitude.

1 Peter 1:15

15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

How can we do that? Even more importantly, how should all this change what you do tomorrow? Here are a few of many possible scripturally based approaches:

- Glorify God through prayer about work and life – about everything. (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- Glorify God by respecting your boss(es) at work. It may be hard, but we are called to submit to their authority. (Romans 13:7; 1 Timothy 6:1).
- Glorify God if you are a boss, a supervisor over others, by how you treat and speak to those serving under you. Colossians 4:1.
- Glorify God in your treatment of co-workers. They may not earn it, but you can still show them respect (Romans 13:7, Luke 6:31; Romans 12:18).
- Glorify God by giving thanks for work, for your job, and for your life. We have all been around grumbling ungrateful workers. That is not the Christ you want others around you to see. (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- Glorify God by how you work, your approach to problems at work and the heart and spirit you show. That means you show up on time – always. That means you work without slacking off. (Colossians 3:23-24, 1 Corinthians 10:31).
- Glorify God with your choice of words, your speech and through your honesty. (Genesis 39; Psalm 15, Philippians 2:14-15, James 3:1-12).
- Glorify God by how you act and react during difficult times. There will be times of trial; there always are. How you respond in word, deed and attitude speaks far louder than your words alone. (1 Thessalonians 5:15).
- Glorify God by displaying trust in Him. He has promised to provide and He is faithful – always. (Matthew 6:11).

- Glorify God through your recognition that work is a calling, not a life. Refuse to make work and money an idol. (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12; Matthew 6:24).
- Glorify God by living for Him. Give generously, even radically. (Proverbs 22:9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19, 2 Corinthians 9:11,13).
- Glorify God by serving Him outside of “work.” Yes, you are serving God as you work at your secular job, but there are opportunities to further glorify God by serving Him. Reach out to those less financially fortunate than you, to those suffering in poor health, to those who are less physically able than you. (Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 12:9).
- Glorify God by resting from your work and by worshiping Him. (Deuteronomy 5:13-15; Psalm 46:10, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 12:28).

This is what a theology of work is all about; it makes work and life manageable. Work, work honestly, work hard and work to the glory of God.

This concept of calling and of a theology of work requires that we see our work as nothing less than a part of our walk with Christ. Our work is an extension of our walk! We are creative because He was creative first. (Genesis 1 and John 1:1-3). God’s work of redemption is not limited to the church, it can and should occur in every workplace. We do that because of the new creation we have become:

Colossians 3:12

12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

We walk hand-in-hand with God as He works to redeem a fallen world. This is our mission and our joy.

