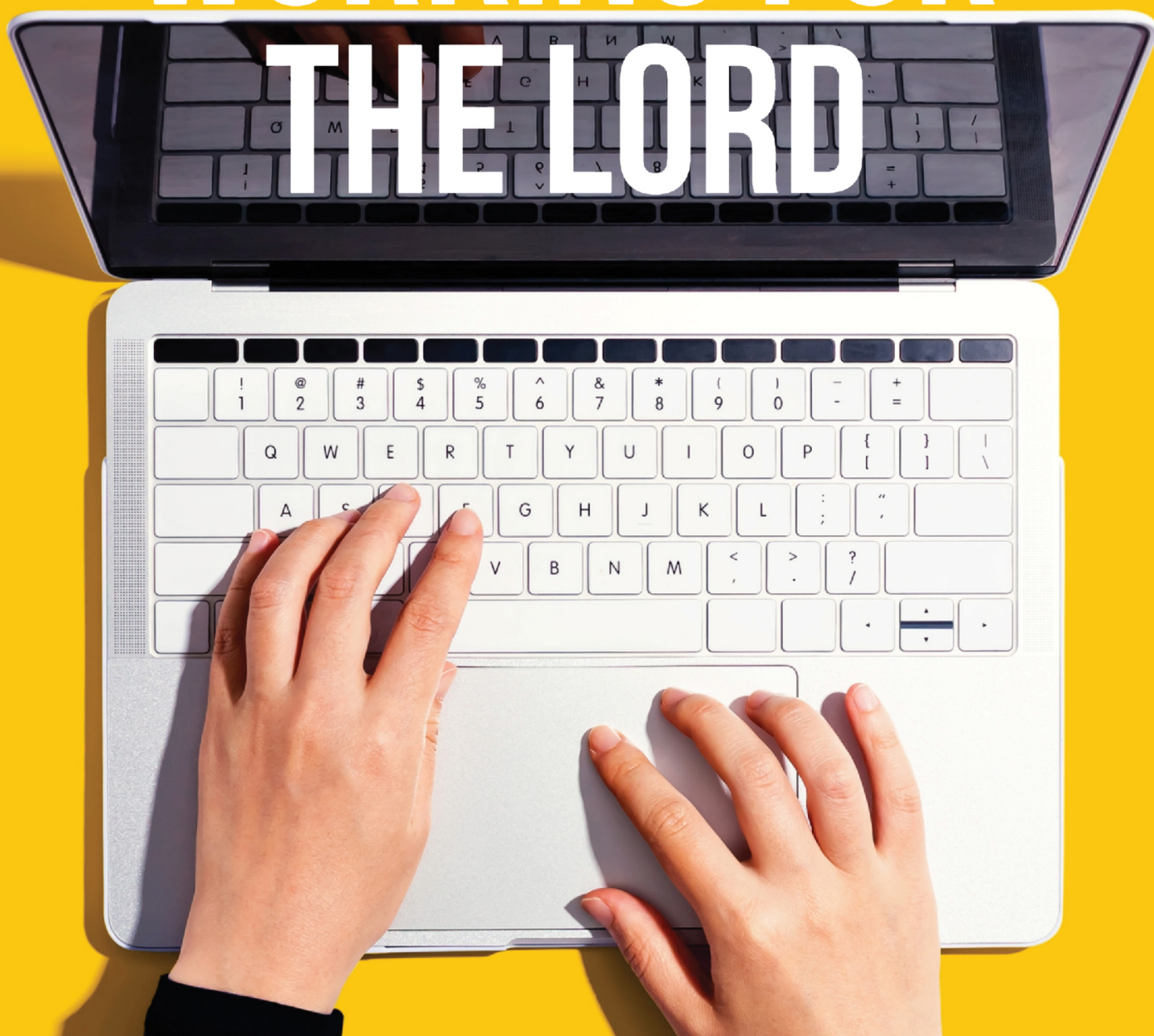


PERSPECTIVE

APRIL 2024

WORKING FOR

THE LORD



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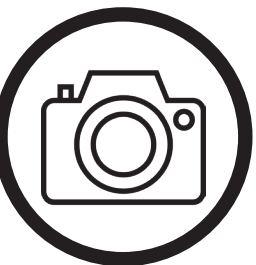
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Working for the Lord

Do you get the Sunday evening blues? You start the weekend with pep in your step, but as Sunday afternoon rolls around, you begin to feel anxious or depressed. You feel trapped by the weekly rhythm of work and long desperately for rest as an escape.

Or perhaps you love your job; no Sunday evening blues for you! But maybe you love your job so much that it's hard to stop working. Your rhythm of work is crowding out rest and causing strain in other areas of life.

Or maybe you are retired, and the challenge is that there is no regular rhythm of work. No vocation places expectations on your schedule, so rest and leisure become the predominant pattern, and the days tend to blend into one another.

Whatever situation or season of life you are in, we are called to glorify God in our work (and in our rest). And God has graciously given us a pattern of work (and rest) to follow.

PAUL'S WORK WISDOM

To help us follow God's pattern and think about how to glorify God in our work, let's consider Colossians 3:22–4:1:

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven.

Take a peek at what Paul writes earlier in chapter 3, and you'll see he exhorts those raised with Christ to set their minds on things above rather than the things on earth. He then instructs the Christian to put what is earthly and sinful to death and put on the fruit of the Spirit. Having done this, Christians are to allow the peace of Christ to rule in their hearts, to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, and to give thanks. Paul then presses in by describing *how* they are to apply these instructions in *all* areas of life, not just at church but in the home and workplace.

So, let's zoom in on Colossians 3:22–4:1. First, we see a clear *command* to work. Second, we see that God cares about our *attitude* when working. Third, we see that God cares about our *motivations* for working. Fourth, we see that God wants us to be mindful of the *accountability* of work.

As we unpack this passage, consider how God would have you work more, less, or simply differently.

A CLEAR COMMAND TO WORK

In Colossians 3:22, Paul instructs bondservants to "obey in everything those who are your earthly masters." Does this New Testament command to continue doing earthly work strike you as strange? Why doesn't Paul point to the Great Commission and tell everyone to quit their jobs and become missionaries? Why does it matter that your boss wants the TPS report on his desk by 5:00 p.m.? Your work matters because it matters to God. Your work has mattered to Him from the very beginning.

God is the one who designed work and rest. As we see in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, God reveals Himself as a God who works, and man is made in His image (Gen. 1:27). Before sin entered the world, God commanded man to work and be productive (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). When mankind sinned, our work was cursed (Gen. 3:17–19). Because of sin, we face obstacles, opposition, and fruitlessness in our work. Even after the Fall, we still see God instructing us to follow the creation pattern of work and rest (Exod. 20:9–10). God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. Note the ratio of work to rest. A significant percentage (dare I say the majority!) of our lives is intended for work.

Going further, I want to clarify two things about the command to "work." First, the command applies to all areas of life. Work encompasses more than what you do at your primary vocation. A stay-at-home mom works when she prepares a meal for her family and when she prays through the membership directory. Second, the command makes no distinction between "sacred" and "secular" work. God assigns some to be pastors for a time, and he assigns others to be accountants for a time. What we often label "secular" work can and should be done for the glory of God. This is why Paul instructs bondservants to keep going with their earthly work. Faithful work happens whenever and wherever we expend our time, energy, and resources to serve God and our neighbor.

How can you apply this command to work?

FIRST, BE ON GUARD AGAINST LAZINESS. Laziness has severe consequences for the individual. It can lead to poverty (Prov. 10:4). Notice that no one is obligated to bail you out of this poverty (2 Thess. 3:10). Furthermore, laziness ruins relationships. Proverbs 10:5 says that the son who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame. Shame to whom? Maybe to his parents or the farmer who employed him.

Are you tempted toward laziness in your vocation? Fight sin daily and be faithful in the little things. Some of you are paid by the hour. If this is you, don't steal time from your employer. A couple of years ago, my company realized that employees at a big factory were fudging time sheets to beef up their take-home checks. That factory has since closed. They stole time, and their conduct hurt numerous other employees. Laziness can hurt others.

Of course, some of you work jobs that aren't as strict on time-keeping. Even so, remember that your employer expects you to be productive, implicitly or explicitly. If you work remotely, don't slack off when no one is watching. Even if you have righteous reasons for not working during regular hours (e.g., meeting a brother or sister for lunch), make sure you have agreement from your boss first.

SECOND, BE ON GUARD AGAINST OVERWORKING. If you are tempted to overwork, consider why. Is your identity and sense of self-worth wrapped up in what you accomplish? If so, remember, your identity and worth are secure in Christ. Yes, there is always much work to be done, but you are not the solution for it all. Be thankful for God-given limitations, obey the command to rest, and trust our sovereign God.

We must all make practical decisions about how to spend our time best. There are situations or seasons when you may have to invest more time and energy in a particular area of your work. Do be mindful of the trade-offs. In their book *The Gospel at Work*, Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert write, "For every assignment in life, you will find in the Bible both a minimum standard for faithfulness and principles for pursuing further fruitfulness . . . pursue faithfulness, then fruitfulness, but not idolatry."ⁱ

If you are presented with an exciting opportunity to be more fruitful in a particular area (for example, you may be offered a promotion), pray and seek counsel before simply accepting it. Maybe being more fruitful will cost you time that you don't really have to spare. Seek counsel and pray before simply saying "Yes!"

GOD CARES ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE WHEN WORKING

Unsurprisingly, the God who commands us to work cares about the heart behind our work.

In Colossians 3:22, we see that workers are not to obey "by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord."

Working with sincerity of heart means engaging your whole heart in what you're doing because of the Lord, not just going through the motions with your hands to be seen and approved of by men. Colossians 3:23 also instructs us to "work heartily." Working heartily means laboring cheerfully and joyfully.

Why does our attitude matter? Because God wants to use our attitude to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Consider Titus 2:9–10, "Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." A modern employee is a lot like an ancient bondservant, and a modern employer is a lot like an ancient master. How a Christian employee works for a boss communicates something about the God he or she worships. To work well is to "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior"—it's to present Christ as beautiful, worthwhile, and deserving of praise. When a Christian works hard, especially in difficult circumstances, Jesus gets the credit.

To be clear, working with a good attitude is not the same as sharing the gospel with our lips. But after speaking, faithful hands and a right attitude testify to the truth and beauty of the gospel and the God we proclaim.

What does this mean for you?

FIRST, BE FULLY ENGAGED WHEN YOU ARE WORKING. If you are talented or experienced in your vocation, you might be able to produce enough to meet your boss' minimum expectations. However, is meeting minimum expectations pleasing to the Lord? Maybe, but maybe not. It depends if you are trying your best and working out of fear of the Lord. Remember, when you are fully engaged in your work, you are adorning the doctrine of God our Savior. You are showing the world that Jesus is wonderful.

SECOND, LOVE YOUR DIFFICULT BOSS. Perhaps you have a demanding boss who is hard to get along with. Do you grumble or gossip about him or her? Should you simply flee to another job? Consider that the Lord may have you

where you are for a reason. Maybe you should take the hard road: endure, pray for your boss, and forgive.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:18–21,

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Whether you stay or go (and there is Christian freedom to go), don't ignore the opportunities your circumstances have given you to love your difficult boss. You can love him or her by working hard, by not complaining, by showing up on time, by going the extra mile, and, yes, even by pointing him to Christ.

GOD CARES ABOUT OUR MOTIVATIONS FOR WORKING

Why do we work? What keeps our engine running? Colossians 3:23–24 should buoy the heart of every Christian worker. No matter how unimportant or unfruitful your labor may seem, you have the privilege of working "...as for the Lord and not for men...You are serving the Lord Christ." Furthermore, Paul shares a huge motivational carrot in verse 24: "Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward." What is this inheritance? Eternal life with Christ!

Even if the faithful, hard work of our hands seems to amount to nothing in this life, we have the sure hope of being welcomed into heaven by our Savior. In other words, we can be motivated to work hard today because of the sure and certain hope of an eternal reward tomorrow.

It takes discipline to keep your eyes on eternity. We are often tempted to work for selfish reasons (like greed, power, or fame) and to please others because we fear man more than God. Fighting these temptations may be a daily struggle for you. Maybe you consistently exceed every performance goal at your job and yet are constantly overlooked. You must remind yourself daily that you work for the Lord, that your future is secure, and that eternal life with Christ is the greatest reward—the greatest unmerited salary we could ever receive.

Let's apply this truth to our work.

FIRST, EMBRACE THE MANY GOOD MOTIVATIONS FOR WORK. The Bible points to other good, motivational carrots for working. It's not just about the future. I won't name them all, but here are a few more reasons Scripture gives us to work hard:

- We can work because we enjoy it (Eccl. 5:18–19).
- We can work to uphold justice and goodness in a fallen world (Micah 6:8; Matt. 23:23).
- We can work to earn money to provide for ourselves and our families and to be generous with the church and those in need (Eph. 4:28).
- Last but not least, we can work to build relationships with unbelievers to share and adorn the gospel.

As you review this list, please don't fixate on one particular motivation to the exclusion of the others. For example, don't get so tunnel-visioned about earning money that you neglect opportunities to build gospel relationships with coworkers.

SECOND, KEEP A LOOSE GRIP ON THE EARTHLY REWARDS OF WORK. Be generous with the money entrusted to you (1 Tim. 6:18). Beware the sin and danger of falling in love with money (1 Tim. 6:9–10). When you aren't a slave to money, you are willing to risk your reputation and position if God so calls. In Esther 4:13–14, Mordecai warns a hesitant Esther:

Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Whether you have a tight grip or a loose grip on wealth reveals whom you are really serving.

THIRD, DON'T BE QUICK TO HOP FROM JOB TO JOB. As a young man, I was taught that the fastest way to increase my salary would be to change jobs and expand my relational network. In practice, this means that very soon after you start a job, you begin searching for the next one.

I think there is a better way. Consider that your current work assignment has been given to you by God for a purpose (1 Cor. 7:17). To be clear, God may want to change up your work assignment, and there is freedom to

seek a job change (1 Cor. 7:21). Please note I'm not saying it's always wrong to look for another job! I am concerned about those who don't start a job without conspiring to get a better job.

If your primary orientation is always to be looking for a better opportunity, consider also the opportunity to set down roots and build a lasting ministry where you are. If your job is difficult and you want an escape, first consider what the Lord may be teaching you through this trial and humbly commit to being sanctified where you are before you move on. In short, examine your motivations, pray, and seek counsel before hopping to another job.

FOURTH, BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR WORK IN DISCIPLING RELATIONSHIPS. Heart motivations are tricky and can change over time. It is easy to present oneself as a faithful worker who provides for the family when you have actually allowed selfish ambition to creep into your heart. Discipling relationships are the perfect opportunity to share how the gospel and our work intertwine.

We spend so much time working, we should let our brothers and sisters see into that part of our lives. If you meet with another believer, you may want to ask him why he is looking for another job. The point is not to rebuke but to probe the heart to ensure we think in a Christian way about our work. We can also exhort one another to be faithful in difficult work situations. Please invite a discipler to ask you tough questions, like whether you should consider modifying your spending or lifestyle instead of pursuing a higher-paying job. Consider inviting someone to ask you if you are being faithful at your work.

GOD WANTS US TO BE MINDFUL OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF WORK

Paul writes in Colossians 3:25, "For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality." This verse is a warning to those under authority. If you are lazy and have a poor attitude, there are real-world repercussions. You may lose your job, and those depending on you may be left wanting. Don't assume that the Lord will shield you from the consequences of sin. Most importantly and ultimately, you will answer to God.

Have you considered that a lack of faithfulness in your work may actually lead sinners to revile the name of God? First Timothy 6:1 says, "Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled." A lack of faithfulness is the opposite of

adorning the doctrine of Christ with our work. It can and often does revile the name and teaching of God.

In Colossians 4:1, Paul addresses those in authority, "Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." If you don't treat those under your care justly and fairly, consider that your Master in Heaven may give you a taste of the same treatment. Remember that God loved you and was gracious to you even when you were his enemy. Clearly, the Bible speaks of workers as men and women who are accountable.

How should we apply this to our work?

FIRST, WORK HARD TO BLESS YOUR CHRISTIAN BOSS. As Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:2, "Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved." If you work for a Christian, don't assume you will receive special treatment. Work all the harder to bless your brother or sister.

SECOND, EXERCISE GOOD AUTHORITY. In your interactions, don't use fear to motivate people. Ephesians 6:9 tells masters to "stop your threatening." In your pay decisions, don't be stingy to beef up the bottom line. James 5:4 says, "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts."

If you are a manager or an employer, be mindful that how you wield authority teaches others about the character of God. In his book *Authority*, Jonathan Leeman writes, "exercising authority teaches people what God is like . . . every time we use our authority correctly, we both teach theology and affirm that good and true things exist in this universe . . . When we rule like he rules, we teach. When we pervert his rule, we teach. But we're always teaching."ⁱⁱ Brothers and sisters, what is your use of authority teaching others about the character of God?

CONCLUSION

Are you spiritually struggling with your work? Perhaps you complain more often than you give thanks. Perhaps anxiety is more often present than peace. Or perhaps you're ashamed because you've messed up in a very visible way and are wondering what the way back might look like.

Dear brother or sister, don't lose heart. Every Christian is loved by God, not because of what he can accomplish for

God through work, but because of what God has done for you in Christ.

You will sin in your work. When this happens, confess your sins to the Lord and repent. The Lord is gracious. He doesn't use picture-perfect workers; he uses sinners saved by grace! You may also need to seek forgiveness from those you have sinned against. God might even use an apology to a coworker to open up a door to a gospel conversation.

The key to persevering in your work is to fix your eyes on Jesus day by day. If you remember what Christ has done for you, your work failures and the many responsibilities of work will not lead you to anxiety. Instead, the love of Christ and the sure hope of your eternal inheritance will fill you with peace and thankfulness as you walk in the good works that he has prepared for you.

— James Chiang

ⁱ Greg Gilbert and Sebastian Traeger, *The Gospel at Work* (Zondervan, 2013), 87–88.

ⁱⁱ Jonathan Leeman, *Authority* (Crossway, 2023), 27–28.

Redeeming the Time

A Christian Approach to Work & Leisure

Written by Leland Ryken

Every December, Reggie and I read Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* aloud to each other. So, Ebenezer Scrooge's excess-industry and anti-leisurely ways were fresh in my mind as I launched into this month's book review of Leland Ryken's *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure*.

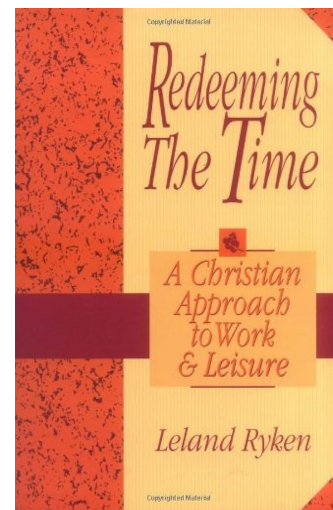
Ryken opens by defining work (whether paid or unpaid) and leisure. Sections of the book include: troubles with the concepts of work and leisure, views throughout history, secular "solutions," and biblical answers. He laments Christians' drift from biblical beliefs on work and leisure and upbraids the church for lack of teaching. Many of us struggle with the imbalance of hours spent on work or leisure and the associated conviction, or lack thereof, in not devoting moderation to either. "Time famine" is discussed throughout. Ryken cautions that the advent of fax machines and voice mail (the book was written in 1995) and other supposed time-saving devices may indeed have the opposite effect. I had to laugh and think, "Just you wait!" (Looking at you, iPhone!)

My favorite portion of the book was exploring the pendulum swing of views over the course of history. Cicero thought work was "sordid." Benjamin Franklin believed in self-reliance that "industry pays debt." It was Martin Luther that first blurred the distinction of sacred and secular work that had been entrenched for centuries. Ryken is clearly a big fan of the Protestant work ethic and goes to great lengths to set the record straight on many fallacies that have maligned its original concept. Reformers and Puritans are oft quoted, and he also favorably cites John Paul II and educator Dorothy Sayers as key authorities. But the authority of the Bible prevails, and we see that work is a dignified, divinely appointed, pre-fall calling to honor and glorify God, steward our gifts, and not for mere economic gain or advancement in the world's definition of success. God himself is our preeminent example, as he worked as Creator and then rested. The Sabbath and annual Jewish festivals set the stage for our rhythms of work and leisure. We can look to Christ as he rested his body and soul. Proverbs brims with blessings for the diligent and warnings to the sluggard.

Some personal application: Am I overtly or covertly signaling career over calling to my high school senior as she contemplates college and vocation? Have I been a good steward and exhibited excellence in the use of my leisure time? While I don't want to say that reading this book was under the umbrella of work, it is an exhaustive academic treatise replete with enough footnotes and cross references to satisfy anyone who wants to take a very deep dive on the topic.

Unlike Scrooge's reliance on the intervention of nocturnal specters, let us lean on the living and active Word of God to transform our views on work and leisure.

— Recommended by Tricia Claus



Excerpts from the Book

1

It looks like a small thing when a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework. But because God's command is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service to God far surpassing the holiness and asceticism of all monks and nuns.

– "We All Know That the Puritans... The Original Protestant Ethic" p. 104

2

Recreation is one of God's mercies to the human race—evidence of his desire that we have not only life but abundant life: "The merciful God is pleased, out of his bounty, not only to allow his creatures what is for necessity but also what is for delight."

– "We All Know That the Puritans... The Original Protestant Ethic" p. 119

3

The foundational principle is that both work and leisure are good. God created both of them for the benefit of the human race. This means that we must reject one of the most common tendencies of the human race through the centuries...to regard either work or leisure as good and the other as bad.

– "Conclusion: The Divine Harmony—Work, Leisure, & Christian Living" p. 285

Called to Cultivate

A Gospel Vision for Women and Work

Written by Chelsea P. Sobolik

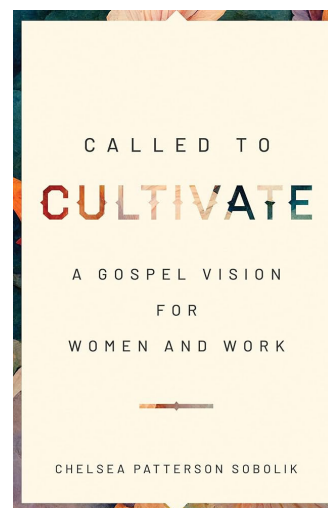
“Mom, what do you want to be when you grow up?” My five-year-old asked me this question as I was reading *Called to Cultivate: A Gospel Vision for Women and Work*. Aimed at Christian women, it is both a theological and practical guide on the subject of work and womanhood. Chelsea Sobolik’s goal is to encourage women in all their work. Wherever the Lord has placed them, the “calling to cultivate is a call to faithfulness.”

I was pleasantly surprised to be encouraged and challenged by this book, given my very brief and limited experience working outside the home. In the chapter, “A Season for Everything,” Sobolik addresses the seasons of a woman’s life and the importance of finding contentment in the assignments He has given us. She helpfully explains the difference between calling and assignment, and that my calling is to follow Christ in whatever assignment He has given. It’s a simple truth, but as one whose primary work is in the home, it was a timely encouragement. In the chapter, “Can Women Have It All?,” Sobolik provided many helpful tools for decision-making according to the season, desires, and gifts God has given me.

Called to Cultivate will benefit Christian women of all ages. Sobolik covers many spheres of work (inside and outside the home), and transparently shares personal struggles during seasons of her life. She addresses challenges faced by women in the workplace today, but also the many opportunities to share and live out the gospel. This book is a great resource for discipling with included discussion questions, further reading, and Scripture. It provides numerous connection points for sisters of different ages and stages.

No, I did not discover what I want to be when I grow up, but *Called to Cultivate* did provide many theological treasures to spur me on in the work God has assigned and gems to pass on to other sisters along the way.

— Recommended by Jenny Ireland



Excerpts from the Book

1

The Lord doesn’t say well done, good and faithful CEO, manager, or employee. He says, “Well done, good and faithful *servant*.” As we work, may we remember that being a faithful servant of our Master is the main aim and goal of our lives, and may everything we do come from an overflow of His great love for us.

– “Approaching Our Work as Christians” p. 52

2

Instead of asking, “What is my calling?” a better question to ask yourself is, “What is my current assignment?” God’s assignments for your life belong to you and not your neighbor. It’s tempting to look at someone else’s life and feel like we’re behind and we need to catch up. Or to feel envious about what someone’s current assignments are and wish they were ours. But consider the assignments you’ve been entrusted with and seek to honor those assignments.

– “A Season for Everything” p. 59

3

We are freed from relentlessly pursuing fame, finances, and fun. Our stories don’t end when we die—we have been promised eternity with our King. This good news means that we don’t have to cram as much as possible into our lives on Earth because our stories will continue. We can now joyfully steward our time, talent, and treasure for the glory of God and our neighbor.

– “Can Women Have It All?” p. 140

APRIL

-revised schedule-

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

April 1	Rom 11:7–10	April 17	Matt 19:1-15; Rom 8:12-25
April 2	Eph 4; Matt 14:22-36	April 18	Rom 8:26-39; Matt 19:16-30
April 3	Rom 6:1-11; Matt 15:1-20	April 19	Jer 11:11-20
April 4	Matt 15:21-39; Rom 6:12-23	April 20	Matt 20:1-16; Rom 9:1-18
April 5	Ps 69:14–36	April 21	Rom 11:13-24
April 6	Matt 16:1-12; Rom 7:1-13	April 22	Rom 11:25-27
April 7	Rom 11:7–10	April 23	Matt 20:17-34; Rom 9:19-33
April 8	Rom 11:11-12	April 24	Eph 1:1-14; Matt 21:1-22
April 9	Eph 5; Matt 16:13-28	April 25	Rom 10; Matt 21:23-46
April 10	Rom 7:14-25; Matt 17:1-13	April 26	Isa 59:14-21
April 11	Matt 17:14-27; Eph 6:1-9	April 27	Matt 22:1-22; Eph 1:15-23
April 12	Isa 49:1-7	April 28	Rom 11:25-27
April 13	Matt 18:1-20; Rom 8:1-11	April 29	2 Cor 12:1-10
April 14	Rom 11:11-12	April 30	Rom 11:1-24; Matt 22:23-46
April 15	Rom 11:13-24		*Sermons in bold
April 16	Matt 18:21-35; Eph 6:10-24		

TAKE UP & READ

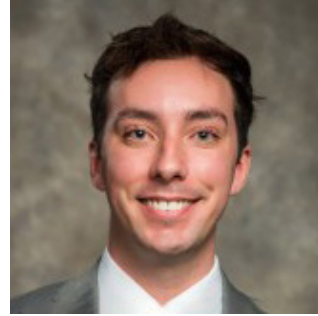
NEW MEMBERS



**Nathalie
Acosta**



**Ismael
Alcantara**



**Luke
Dean**



**Christie
Ewald**



**Jocelyn
Heath**



**Lou
Lavender**



**Cheryl
Lavender**



**Sebastian
Parra-Diaz**



**Hellen
Parra-Diaz**



**Gabi
Priolo**



MOUNT VERNON

BAPTIST CHURCH