

# PERSPECTIVE

JANUARY 2024

INTRODUCING

Work AND  
Leisure

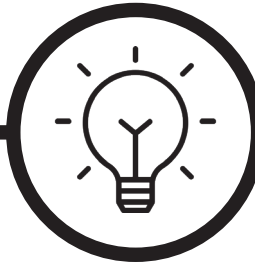
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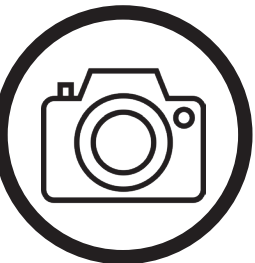
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## Introducing Work & Leisure

A pastor is more than an evangelist. Take Billy Graham, for example. He devoted his life to preaching the gospel in city after city, nation after nation. He invited dozens and then hundreds and then thousands to hear him preach the message of a crucified and risen Savior. According to his ministry, Graham preached to over a million people in Seoul, Korea, in 1973. I wonder how many men, women, and children God gave new life to through the preaching of Graham that summer of '73. Billy Graham was an evangelist.

Pastors, however, are more than evangelists. We typically stay in the same place for many years, preaching the same gospel to roughly the same people. Sure, people come and go. Kids grow up in the church, graduate, go off to college—never to return. Someone may find a job in another city and have to move. Others may get disgruntled for this reason or that and head to a church across town. But many people stay. They are saints who have been saved by the blood of the Lamb and are committed to growing in Christ day after day and year after year. They've been saved. Maybe salvation came through the faithful witness of a parent, the careful teaching of a Sunday school teacher, or the bold evangelism of a classmate. They know the Lord and are now committed to growing in their knowledge of the Lord for the rest of their lives.

Do you see now why I say a pastor is *more than* an evangelist? He ought to share the gospel week in and week out. He ought to be aware there are visitors in the congregation who have never come to saving faith. He ought to recognize the gospel is shallow enough for a toddler to wade in and deep enough for an adult to swim in. In other words, a pastor cannot outgrow the gospel. Nonetheless, his primary duty is not “getting people saved”—so to speak—but helping the saints grow in Christian maturity.

### HELP FROM EPHESIANS 4

The key text making this point is Ephesians 4:11–14:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful

schemes.

The apostles and prophets had a unique ministry in the first century; God used them to deliver his Word to his people. The evangelists remained especially committed to sharing and applying the *evangel*—the Good News. Shepherds (pastors) and teachers explained and applied the apostolic Word to God's people. This is true in the first century and today.

If you are a Christian, God has saved you, but he is not finished with you. Paul drives this point home with a sledgehammer in these verses:

- You are to be equipped “for the work of ministry.” Pastors are not the only ones devoted to gospel ministry. It's the work of all of us, of every member of his church.
- Your work, in particular, is the “building up the body of Christ.” The church is to be stronger and better because of your participation in her.
- Your aim is the “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” In other words, you are to know more about our Savior because our Savior is the unifying principle of our life together. He is what we share. This is why “mature manhood” is measured by the extent to which we all exhibit “the fullness of Christ” in our lives.
- You cannot be childish in your faith—that is not allowed! A childish Christian is prone to be toppled over by false teaching, by foolish fads, and even by the Evil One who wants you to make a shipwreck of your faith.

Now is it clear why I'm saying a pastor is *more than* an evangelist? It's not enough to “get saved”—you must “get growing.” Dead fish float downstream, and fake Christians follow the whims of our culture.

What does this have to do with pastors? They have the duty of equipping you with all the tools you need to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. It is their job not merely to tell you Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead for your justification. They are also to help you connect the dots between the gospel that saved you and the Christian maturity you aspire to.

### A YEAR ABOUT WORK & LEISURE

Every year at Mount Vernon, we try to take a topic we can dig into a bit more deeply. Last year, we took a stab at the topic of corporate worship. The year before that, 2022, we

emphasized prayer. We devoted 2021 to thinking about serving other churches. This year, 2024, we want to focus on the topic of work and leisure. If corporate worship is what we do when we are the church *gathered*, work and leisure have our attention when we are the church *scattered*.

Why this topic? Let's assume for the moment that you gather with Mount Vernon whenever a public meeting is available. On Sundays, we meet from roughly 9:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and again from roughly 5:00 to 6:15 p.m. On Wednesdays, we gather for Bible study from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Let's assume it takes you 30 minutes to get to the church building for these meetings, that you stick around for 30 minutes after each meeting, and that you join us for dinner on Wednesday nights. This means about ten hours of your week are devoted to corporate worship in some form or fashion. What are you doing with the rest of your time?

- You are sleeping (I hope). Does the Bible have anything to say about getting rest?
- You are working (I hope). Since retirement isn't a biblical concept, you are finding ways to employ yourself for the good of your family, friends, church, and community.
- You are playing (I hope). Recreation is the good gift of a loving God designed for our well-being, both socially and personally. Does the Bible address our play? Can you live a radical life for the Lord and enjoy creation?
- You are sharing (I hope). In other words, you are with people, inviting them into your work and your play.

At Mount Vernon, I want us to get the gospel right. We should know the contours of the gospel inside and out. If someone asks us to give a reason for the hope we have, we need to be able to help them understand the reality, goodness, beauty, and power of our Savior (1 Pet. 3:15). But life is about more than sharing the gospel that others might get saved. Life is about living out the gospel so that the world might know what a Christian looks like—in the workplace and at the beach, in school and in the nursing home. To put it simply, Christianity is for life.

## PRESSING ISSUES

One of the reasons the topic of work & leisure is so important is because our culture is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith. I don't mean to be alarmist—we are still living in a country with tremendous Christian freedom. Praise God! Not only are we commanded by the Lord to exercise our faith publicly, but we have the legal

right in this country to make much of our Savior in front of others.

One pressing issue is our changing culture. More and more, we are witnessing cultural pressures to shut our mouths about our Savior in the workplace and shelve our convictions in order to keep the social peace. Examples are legion. You may tell your boss that you can't work on Sunday, only to find out your hours have been greatly reduced. You may tell your co-worker you can't use his preferred feminine pronouns only to find yourself sitting in front of an HR officer. You may refuse to attend gender-diversity training only to find yourself out of a job. In other words, simply practicing the ethics of the King in the world today can make your day-to-day work quite difficult and impact the bottom line, your paycheck.

The Bible may not always have clear-cut guidance on how the Christian ought to jump over every hurdle in the workplace, but certainly, the Spirit has given us principles to help us navigate a world that is inhospitable to the Christian faith. I'm mindful that God gave us the Scriptures in an era when the prevailing religions and kingdoms of the world wanted Christianity snuffed out like a candle. Indeed, there is much to glean in the Bible about living for Christ in the workplace.

A second pressing issue is the amount of time we have to work. Americans live, on average, around 76 years, and they are working for most of them. By some accounts, we will spend 90,000 hours of our lives at work. What does it mean to be a good steward of these seconds and minutes and hours and days and weeks and months and years and decades? Our time is as valuable to us—or should be as valuable to us—as our money. How can we truly serve the Lord, recognizing he isn't just King of Sunday morning; he's King of all of our time.

A final pressing issue is the amount of leisure we have. Though Americans are working more years than they ever have, we are working less hours a day than we ever have before! We can be thankful for technology that has made us more productive and left us with more time—time we have to fill with something. Will we fill it with video games? Will we watch movies on our phones? Will we scroll through social media? You don't need me to tell you we are in the midst of a cultural revolution led by Artificial Intelligence, which will undoubtedly modify the options for how we spend our spare time. Long story short, if we don't have a sound theology of leisure for ourselves and our children, we will find ourselves conformed by the culture instead of shaping the culture for the glory of God.



## DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SPEAK TO THIS?

As you know, the Bible does not read as a systematic theology. In other words, you can't open up your Bible and find a chapter on "Retirement," or "Work-Life Balance," or "Vacations for the Glory of God." It is up to us to comb through the Bible and ask the Scriptures the questions whose answers will help us live faithfully in a fallen world.

Even if the Bible doesn't speak directly to all the issues that concern us, we can take heart from the fact that the Bible is a divinely inspired book written by real men who lived earthy lives in the world just like we do.

- Jesus recruited fishermen—experts at feeding their families and running a small business by building nets, sailing vessels, and catching fish (Matt. 4:18).
- Our Lord came from a carpenter's family and undoubtedly knew the ins and outs of the trade (Mark 6:3).
- Tax collectors with a bad reputation in the first century came into the crosshairs of Jesus' ministry (Matt. 9:9).
- Paul worked as a tent-maker to supplement the income he received from churches eager to support him in ministry (Acts 18:3).
- It's impossible to read the Bible without appreciating the many lessons afforded us by the trades of farming (Luke 8:5) and shepherding (Luke 2:8).

It's helpful to stop and realize that the Scriptures are filled with and even written by people who had to roll up their sleeves and work to provide for themselves and their families. They lived in a world hostile to the gospel and had to navigate that dynamic just as we do.

Not only that, we can be grateful for the many passages that speak directly to our work. This includes calls to be faithful to our employers (Eph. 6:5–9) and commands to provide for ourselves (2 Thess. 3:8) and our families (1 Tim. 5:8). Clearly, the Bible has a lot to say about work!

And what about leisure? Does Scripture in any way address this topic? Of course! Consider the fact that Jesus called his disciples to get rest (Mark 6:31). Jesus even told Mary that she chose the better portion by sitting at his feet instead of clamoring about in the kitchen (Luke 10:38–42). Our Lord took time to enjoy a wedding feast (John 2:1–11), and he didn't hesitate to spend time with people who enjoy good food and drink (Matt. 9:10–13; Mark 2:15–17). Finally, it personally struck me as I studied Ecclesiastes years ago how much the Preacher exhorted his readers to enjoy the

work and the life God gave them: "Everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man" (Ecc. 3:13).

God has given us work, and he has given us rest. These topics come up in the Bible, and we ought to devote ourselves to a careful study of these themes.

## A FINAL APPEAL

I have loved thinking about corporate worship in 2023. What we do when we gather is of the utmost importance. Our God is with us in a unique way when we come together to sit under his Word and sing his praises. Recently, as one of our pastoral interns described his time with us in the fall of '23, he mentioned how he noticed the sense of anticipation that fills the room before the Word is preached on Sunday morning. May we always be known as a congregation that takes our public meetings seriously.

However, if those public meetings comprise but a fraction of our lives, isn't it crucial that we approach our work & leisure from a Christian worldview? I'm convinced it is! Would you join me in thinking through this topic in 2024? What might this look like for you?

- Pray for your vocation every day. If you are a stay-at-home mom, ask God to give you wisdom about how to care for the home for his glory. If you run a company, plead with God to make you a wise and tender manager.
- Think carefully about your downtime. What does it look like for you to not work? Do you find ways to serve your spouse, kids, and friends with those precious moments of your day?
- Read a book or two on the topic. We will be making recommendations every month in the Perspective. Grab a book yourself to read with a brother or sister in Christ.

Most of our life is spent outside the four walls of our church building. May God be pleased with each and every moment of that time!

— Aaron Menikoff

## Grace at Work

### *Redeeming the Grind and Glory of Your Job*

Written by Bryan Chapell

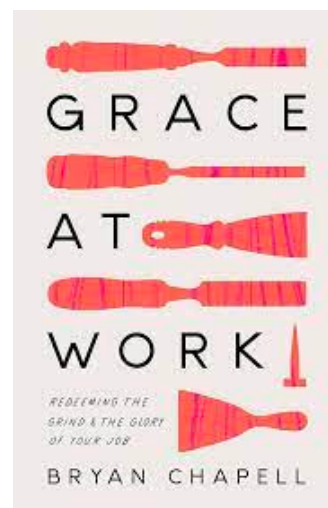
Is there any purpose to my work? How can I glorify God in the mundaneness of my “nine-to-five” job? Bryan Chapell wants to help working Christians answer such questions. Chapell believes that secular work can and ought to honor God in numerous ways. The eleven chapters of the book make up separate areas in which Christians can redeem their work and glorify God. His topics include dignity, purpose, integrity, money, success, humility, glory, evil, leadership, balance, and witness. In these areas, Chapell wants the reader to reflect on his or her work environment and practices. He aims to encourage Christians that their work does matter. Your job is not any less dignified by God than the staff jobs at your local church.

Out of numerous potential lessons from *Grace at Work*, I want to consider two. First, Chapell employs the word *vocation* to help us think about the dignity of secular work. “Vocation” is typically used synonymously with “occupation,” but the former has the added element of *calling* attached to it. Your vocation is what God has called you to do. Chapell is not suggesting that you go and search for some mystical experience to confirm your call. Instead, he suggests that if God has placed you in an occupation, then he has called you to serve him in it. If you are called to serve in it, then your job is your vocation. Chapell says that your work is your mission field. While I would caution against that use of language—since it is unhelpful to view everything as missions—there is an element of truth. There is a God-given dignity to your work.

Second, Chapell helps his readers think about work-life balance—a term being used with increasing frequency. He points out that workaholicism, driven by faithlessness, is not the only way we can have an imbalance. He also identifies those who are “anxiety addicts.” Such individuals let their anxiety drive them to complete their work. However, Christians must continually assess how they are balancing work and family. Work and family are not equally important, but if either is being neglected, it might be worth considering a change.

Chapell offers helpful thoughts and considerations on work, which is profoundly helpful since many, if not most, people in the church work in the secular sphere. Aside from an ill-advised quote—which Chapell used to make a helpful point regarding past ethnic injustices—I recommend this book. It is an approachable and applicable book.

— Recommended by Austin Puckett



### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

Ultimately, we do not serve a company or a boss or even our family's needs, but our Lord, who smiles upon our labors, values our sweat, and dries our tears with the grace of knowing he will use every effort that honors him

— "Introduction" p. 13

## 2

The Great Commission will never be fulfilled by those straining for personal recognition, driven by pride, and focused on their own gain or glory. The gospel can only be honestly proclaimed by those who humble themselves, selflessly expressing the courage, determination, and compassion that is needed to make plain the gospel priorities of a Savior who would put the needs of others above his own interests—who would die to self so that others might live.

— "Humility" p. 120

## 3

The world may not recognize the significance of our labors, but believers have assurance that our jobs matter to God and make a difference in the lives of those he loves. Because we are image bearers of our Lord, our labor brings God to our workplace...Christ is present in us as we work, he is present with us as we work, and he is made present to others by our work.

— "Glory" p. 131

## ***Finishing Our Course with Joy***

### *Guide from God for Engaging Our Aging*

Written by J.I. Packer

After many years, when careers have peaked and IRAs have matured, most people hope to have achieved a state of leisure and financial freedom. The late theologian J.I. Packer argues that Christ calls believers entering their final chapter to a more worthy purpose. In his short book *Finishing Our Course with Joy*, Packer presents a gentle but compelling encouragement to elderly Christians to spend the harvest of their remaining years for God's kingdom.

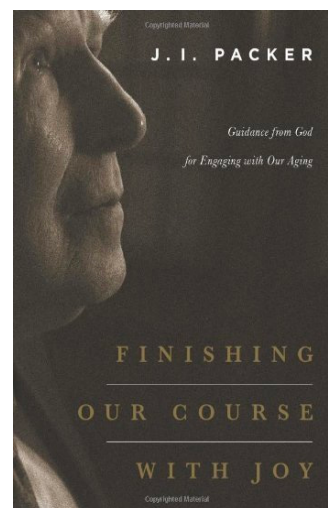
*Aging presents unique challenges.* Growing old is hard. Our bodies were created for experience, expression, and enjoyment. As we age, our ability to engage these functions diminishes. Our temptation is to ignore that this is happening for as long as possible. Packer encourages us to instead face head-on the challenges that come with aging as reminders to live for God more fiercely every moment, ready to meet Him.

*Aging offers an opportunity to reap.* For elderly Christians who have walked with the Lord for much of their lives, old age is the harvest season after years of sowing. These believers have followed Christ and sought holiness, giving them rich wisdom and experience. Our culture (and even some in the church) urge them to "go with the flow," gazing from the sidelines as younger believers do the heavy work of ministry. Packer emphasizes that this advice squanders the very best years of a Christian's earthly walk. He extols aging believers to sprint with zeal in the final "leg" of their race.

*Aging highlights our hope.* As death approaches, the gospel truths of our life after death become far clearer. Death not only involves the ending of our suffering in this world but also the donning of new bodies fully equipped for the enjoyment of eternity. We will be with Jesus, the one for whom we long, and our only purpose will be to please Him, unencumbered by the distractions that compete with that purpose here.

Packer wrote this book for Christian seniors, and this audience will especially feel encouraged by his words. However, as a 30-something-year-old, I learned much from reading Packer's reflections. He wrote this book a few years before his death in 2020, and his faithful life adds weight to what he says. His encouragements—to face suffering, live with zeal, and meditate on the hope Jesus gives—are true and relevant for Christians in any stage of life.

— Recommended by Jake Darlington



### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

The Bible's view is that aging, under God and by grace, will bring wisdom, that is, an enlarged capacity for discerning, choosing, and encouraging.

— "We Grow Old" p. 19

## 2

It seems clear that God gave us bodies to live in and through for two reasons: first, to fit us for managing the material world of which we are made his trustees and stewards; and, second, to enrich our lives here and now.

— "Soul and Body" p. 41

## 3

As seniors' powers of body, memory, and creativity grow less, so their conscious focus on their hope of glory should grow sharper and their meditations on it grow more joyful and sustained. As this happens, passion to continue being of use to God and his people... will intensify, to the very end

— "We Look Forward" p. 96



## Rethinking Retirement

### *Finishing Life for the Glory of Christ*

Written by John Piper

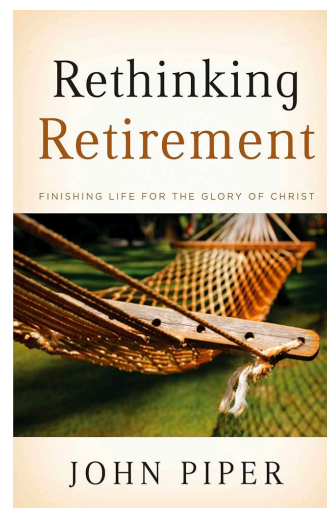
In his short book *Rethinking Retirement*, John Piper aims to dissuade Christians from buying into the “American dream” vision of retirement. He points to a better way. He argues that Christians should live out their final days in such a way that reveals their ultimate treasure and final satisfaction are found in eternity with Christ, not in earthly comforts.

Piper does not venture into specifics of what formal retirement ought to look like. Instead, he offers an extended meditation on finishing life to the glory of God. The world understands retirement to be the climax of the good life, often making it out to be one’s greatest reward and final destination. But a Christian who sets his or her gaze finally on the golden years of retirement—with its potential for travel, leisure, and play—ultimately tells a lie about the passing nature of this present world. Piper calls for a life spent running to the finish line that longs to say with Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Piper is not arguing for an endless career but rather a longing for Christ that shows itself in zeal for the lost, service to the church, and pouring oneself out for the sake of the gospel to the very end. He says, “The life that flows from the soul that lives on Jesus is a life of love and service.” What do our retirement plans reveal to the world about our soul’s treasure? Piper pleads with his baby-boomer readers to persevere to the end, fixing their eyes on Christ and seeking to delight in him supremely. As their delight in Christ grows, their longing for his return will grow. With these eyes of faith, Piper is sure that, as the old hymn goes, the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Piper levies his charge on older saints considering retirement, but this book is helpful for young and old alike. His exhortation to persevere in the faith and keep one’s eyes fixed on eternity is needed at every age. However, it will be particularly impactful for those nearing retirement age and asking, “What should my days look like now?” Piper points readers to the return of the King and challenges them to live each of their days wholly in service to him.

— Recommended by Jack Schutt



### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

Finishing life to the glory of Christ means finishing life in such a way that makes Christ look glorious. It means living and dying in a way that shows Christ to be the all-satisfying Treasure that he is.

— *Rethinking Retirement* p. 5

## 2

Knowing that we have an infinitely satisfying and everlasting inheritance in God just over the horizon of life makes us zealous in our few remaining years here to spend ourselves in the sacrifices of love, not the accumulations of comfort.

— *Rethinking Retirement* p. 6

## 3

When you don’t believe in heaven to come and you are not content in the glory of Christ now, you will seek the kind of retirement that the world seeks. But what a strange reward for a Christian to set his sights on! Twenty years of leisure (!) while living in the midst of the Last Days of infinite consequence for millions of people who need Christ. What a tragic way to finish the last mile before entering into the presence of the King who finished his last mile so differently!

— *Rethinking Retirement* p. 27



# JANUARY

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

January 1	Ps 36	January 17	Rom 4:1-15; Eph 3:14-21
January 2	Rom 1:1-17; Eph 1:1-10	January 18	Mat 5:33-37; Rom 4:16-25
January 3	Mat 5:1-6; Rom 1:18-32	January 19	Isa 28:14-29
January 4	Eph 1:11-14; Mat 5:7-12	January 20	Eph 4:1-16; Mat 5:38-42
January 5	Acts 26:12-23	<b>January 21</b>	<b>Rom 9:30-33</b>
January 6	Rom 2:1-16; Eph 1:15-23	January 22	Rom 10:1-4
<b>January 7</b>	<b>Ps 36</b>	January 23	Rom 5:1-11; Eph 4:17-24
January 8	Acts 12:20-13:12	January 24	Mat 5:43-48; Rom 5:12-21
January 9	Mat 5:13-16; Rom 2:17-29	January 25	Eph 4:25-32; Mat 6:1-15
January 10	Eph 2:1-10; Mat 5:17-20	January 26	Deut 11:13-28
January 11	Rom 3:1-20; Eph 2:11-22	January 27	Mat 6:16-24; Rom 6:1-11
January 12	Phil 4	<b>January 28</b>	<b>Rom 10:1-4</b>
January 13	Mat 5:21-26; Rom 3:21-31	January 29	Ps 55
<b>January 14</b>	<b>Acts 12:20-13:12</b>	January 30	Eph 5:1-6; Mat 6:25-34
January 15	Rom 9:30-33	January 31	Rom 6:12-23; Eph 5:7-14
January 16	Eph 3:1-13; Mat 5:27-32		

**\*Sermons in bold**

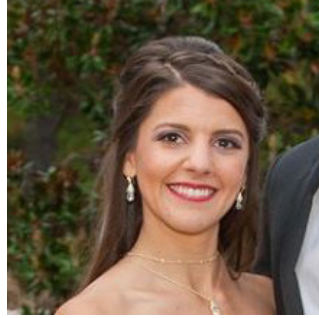
# TAKE UP & READ

# NEW MEMBERS

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**Mat  
Hunt**



**Adrienne  
Hunt**



**Marcela  
Soares**



**Evan  
Taylor**



**Emmy  
Taylor**



**Maggie  
Yankovich**



**Keegan  
Zimmermann**



*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH