

WORK

Week 1: Introduction¹

“When we ask for daily bread, God grants it through farmers, bakers, and grocers. When we pray for clothing and shelter, he gives it through shepherds, cotton farmers, and construction workers” (20).

Food for Thought:

What examples did your parents, bosses, mentors, friends, or peers set that have deeply affected how you view how you should or should not work?

Do you tend to think you work too hard or not hard enough? What would your friends or spouses say about you?

How has your work shaped you? Do you like who you have become?

Do you believe all work is equal? What do you mean?

How does God’s work shape you as a worker?

From Daniel Doriani, author of *Work*:

“I earned my first legal paycheck in 1970, when I lived on the coast in North Carolina and worked at the improbably named but immensely popular Sanitary Restaurant. . . . I was a lowly kitchen hand, slopping plates and loading the dishwasher in a steamy, undersized space...When the overburdened garbage disposal chocked on discarded food, it made an ominous ‘wub-wub-wub’ sound, and then belched, spraying fragments of fish, French fries, and hush puppies onto our aprons, faces, and hair. . . . The experience gave ample food for thought. Why did we like the explosions of fish debris? Why were those terrible nights so exhilarating? Why did we feel like conquerors afterward? Why didn’t the restaurant raise its prices marginally and improve the kitchen?” (xiii).

Share one of your worst work stories. What is it about work—particularly *hard* work—that makes us feel this complex mix of frustration, weariness, and accomplishment?

This study is meant to speak to two kinds of workers:

- The Doubters: “I Just...”
- The Dreamers: “I Dare...”

A proper understanding of work begins with a proper understanding of God—a God who himself works and made us to work. “We are creative because God is creative. We long to fix what is broken because he planned to heal this aching world. We love to finish a task, even if it requires suffering, because Jesus finished the task of redemption. So the character of God shapes the character of our work” (xv).

¹ This study is a distillation of Daniel Doriani’s *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity and Transformation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019). It is meant to be taught in conjunction with the book, not as a replacement.

Why is work so personal? Many of us pursue our dreams at work. We provide food, shelter, and necessities for ourselves through our work. We learn, grow, and hone skills and talents at work. We also face sin in a very real way at work.

“Our work shapes and defines us. Europeans laugh at the American tendency to ask people about their occupation, but it makes sense since work both forms and reveals the spirit” (4). Consider that the Bible often identifies people by their occupation:

- Matthew 27:2—Pilate
- John 3:10—Nicodemus
- Acts 16:14—Lydia
- Mark 6:3—Jesus
- Colossians 4:14—Luke
- 1 Chronicles 29:9—David

What dangers lie in limiting personal identity to our occupation?

Jobs are not merely personal; they are social, too. As the needs of a society shift and change, various jobs, trades, and occupations may become more necessary. Others may be eliminated all together. A society’s value of certain goods and services will wax and wane.

- Think of at least three occupations that were essential in past eras but have been completely eliminated in modern society.
- What shifts are occurring in today’s economy, your stage of life, or ability that may affect your work in the future?

David Miller defines work in this way: “A sustained exercise of strength and skill that overcomes obstacles to produce or accomplish something” (7). **How would you define work? Is it enough to simply work—or does the nature and quality of that work matter?**

According to Doriani, good work has five elements: (1) meets real needs, (2) cultivates talent, (3) requires disciplined effort, (4) has proper direction, and (5) has the right social appraisal.

“Too much Christian instruction on work urges disciples to be faithful in the work assigned to them. Not enough consider, ‘Should we do this work?’ . . . To do good work, we need more than skill, persistence, and good motives; we must do good to ‘the other,’ who receives our efforts” (12).

At its root, good work is a reflection of God’s work. If we work like God, we will know we are doing good work:

- God works and ordains that humans work (Gen. 2:2,15; Col. 3:23)
- The Lord worked six days and rested one, setting a pattern and a limit for humanity (Exodus 20:9-10)

“He corrects both workaholics and sluggards. He says ‘Mankind must work’ and also ‘People must stop working’” (17).

- By working with his hands, Jesus showed that all honest labor is noble (Matt. 13:55; Eph. 4:28)
- Mankind’s rebellion led God to curse the ground (Gen. 3:17-18)
- Labor is mandatory for survival (2 Thess. 3:10)

“The earth does not dispense food or clothing to those who put forth no effort. . . . Many individuals, especially the sick, the young, and the old, may not work. Collectively, we must toil. This reminds us that work has individual and corporate aspects. . . . People must work together to survive, and collaboration changes us” (18).

- Work shapes human identity—through our work we shape the world, but our work also shapes us (Luke 5:27)
- Work and vocation are not identical (Acts 18:1-4)
- The Lord assigns places of work, yet believers can move (1 Cor. 7:20-21)
- Human abilities vary, and God respects them all (Mt. 25:14-30)
- Many human tasks are a result of the fall and yet are good (John 5:17)
- God calls every disciple to full-time service (Rom. 12:1-2)

“We deny that some work is sacred and some secular. Faithful farmers, manufacturers, engineers, teachers, homemakers, and drivers please God as surely as faithful pastors do” (20).

- In our work, we come become the hands of God (Gen. 41:56-57)