

Sermon Series: Productive: Finding Joy In What We Do

To be used with: Session One: Good Work

Sermon Title Possibilities:

The Gift of Work

The Worth of Our Work

Scripture: Genesis 1:28; 2:8-9, 15-17

Connection To Unit Theme: *Productive: Finding Joy in What We Do* is a six session study on developing a Christian work ethic. These text-based sermon outlines will cover the same Scripture passages and topics as are being studied in the small groups, but with a different perspective. This will allow you as the pastor to reinforce what small group leaders are talking about, without “stealing their thunder.”

For many, work is merely a necessary evil. The often celebrated slogan “Thank God It’s Friday” paints a bleak picture of how our culture understands work. Work is a curse. But the Bible offers a very different perspective on work. Far from being a curse, work is a good gift from God.

Introduction:

[Read Genesis 1:28; 2:8-9, 15-17]

God made us with an innate desire to work. Work is central to our creatureliness. Tim Keller shares a story that reveals this truth about us. He writes, “Our friends Jay and Barbara Belding, entrepreneurs in suburban Philadelphia, recognized this need even among developmentally disabled adults. While working as a special education teacher, Jay was disconcerted by the vocational prospects of his students once they completed school. Traditional vocational training and employment programs often had insufficient work and therefore extensive downtime with no wages. In 1977 Jay and Barbara established Associated Production Services, an enterprise providing quality training and employment for this population. Today the company trains 480 people who are engaged in a variety of labor-intensive packaging and assembly work for a number of consumer products companies at four facilities. Jay focuses on providing tools and systems that ensure quality and increase efficiencies and output; this helps create a culture of success for the company and the people they serve. The Beldings are thrilled and grateful to have found a practical, sustainable way to meet their employees’ intrinsic need to be productive: ‘Our people want to participate in the ‘work-a-day’ world; to feel positive about themselves; and to help pay their own way.’” (Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work*, 37).

Despite our culture’s warped view of work, we must admit that it is central to our lives. The first two chapters of Genesis make it clear that God intended work to be a gift for man to enjoy, rather than a curse to endure. We learn three important truths about work in these passages. Let’s walk through them together.

1 Work Reflects God’s Character (Gen. 1:28)

Theologians refer to Genesis 1:28 as the cultural mandate. God essentially commanded man to go and make culture and to exercise dominion over it. Bruce Waltke says, “All human beings are—by nature of their reproducing of themselves and in the shape of what they are—culture makers” (*An Old Testament Theology*, 220). But what is often overlooked is the reason behind this mandate. The previous 27 verses in Genesis 1 describe how God created the heavens and the earth. The first Person to work was God (Gen. 1:3)! The mandate to create and manage culture reflects the good and glorious work of the Creator.

This means that one of the primary ways we glorify God is in our work. We work because God worked. Therefore if anyone should work with passion, creativity, and energy it should be Christians. When we work, we are aligning ourselves with the heart of the God who looked over

His creation and saw that it was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God enjoyed His work and was pleased with what He made. This should galvanize us to move through our jobs—even on rough days—with joy and faithfulness. We should stop dividing work into *sacred* or *secular* categories. Whether you are preparing a sermon or teaching fifth graders, all work, for the Christian, is sacred work.

Application: The word vocation comes from the Latin *vocatio* meaning calling. All our work is a calling from God. Many of us quickly forget that our work reflects God. Have you forgotten about this important truth? Or perhaps you have grown weary with your current employment. Will you let this reminder motivate you to lean into the difficulties you are facing?

2 Work Rests in God’s Care (Gen. 2:8-9)

In chapter 2 of Genesis we see in more detail what God intended man to do. 2:8 says, “And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.” This is important because we see that God is the one who 1) planted the garden, 2) placed the man in it, and 3) “made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (v.9). God was (and is) sovereign over all the work He intended for man to accomplish.

God does not leave us to ourselves when it comes to work. He goes before us and remains with us. We can trust Him with our work. He is more concerned with your business or company than you are. He upholds and guides all things pertaining to your job and your career. He created us. He gave us the skills and passions needed for our job. He put us in our current place of employment, and He intends to guide our steps along the way. We must rest in this truth. Proverbs reminds us this: “Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (Prov. 16:3). God is sovereign over our work and we must rest in His good care.

Application: Many of us feel like God is absent when it comes to work. How can He possibly be present amid so much dishonesty, greed, and chaos? But the Bible is clear that He cares for us and that we can cast all our anxiety—especially our work anxiety—on Him. Will you do this?

3 Work Reveres God’s Commands (Gen. 2:15-17)

When God placed the man in the garden He gave him a blessing and a warning. The blessing was the freedom that as he worked, he would be able to eat of any tree in the garden (2:15-16). The warning was to abstain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17). This is important for two reasons regarding work. First, work is meant to be a blessing from God. Think of all the tastes and smells and sights the man could enjoy as he worked the garden of Eden! Work, as noted in your lesson this week, was to be done *before* the Fall. It was part of God’s good creation.

Second, God demands obedience at work. Theologians debate the purpose of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. At the very least, it reminded the man that he was not God. Though endowed with authority and power, he was still a vice-regent. He was free; not autonomous. As Christians we do not get a free pass to sin at work. Integrity, humility, honesty, and compassion must be present. For many Christians, lowering our standards of holiness is most tempting—even inviting—at work. Most of our jobs take place in settings where a biblical worldview is not embraced. We must be fight to remain holy and godly regardless of our setting.

Application: What particular temptations are you facing at work? In what areas have you compromised your integrity? Are you being truthful in your business practices? Let us revere God’s commands to us, especially at work.

Conclusion Idea:

While we've been in the book of Genesis today, we must look further into history. While God's work in creation was finished (Gen. 2:1-3), God's redemptive work was yet to begin. We know from Genesis 3 that sin entered the world fractured and marred all that God made. And while God's anger was aroused, He promised to intervene and rescue His creation (3:15), and He would do so through the death and resurrection of His Son. We should note that Jesus, on the cross, cried "It is finished." God first used that language after He created everything (Gen. 2:2). Jesus used it to indicate that He had accomplished all redemption required. All our work therefore must be seen in light of His work on our behalf.

Greg Breazeale (M.Div. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, D.Min. student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) is senior pastor at Metro East Baptist Church in Wichita, KS. He and his wife Heather have two sons, Cross and Rhyse, and are expecting their third child in August. He blogs at yearnforgod.org. Twitter: @pastorbraz.